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SELF-EFFICACY AND INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE AS PREDICTORS OF WORK READINESS AMONG VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

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Abstract

Vocational high schools play an important role in preparing graduates to enter the workforce. However, vocational high school graduates continue to experience relatively high unemployment rates in Indonesia. This study aims to examine the effect of self-efficacy and internship experience on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban. This study employed a quantitative causal approach. The population consisted of 65 graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban in 2025 who had not yet worked, with 63 usable respondents obtained through a saturated sampling technique. Primary data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The results indicate that self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on work readiness, with a path coefficient of 0.468, a T-statistic of 4.151, and a P-value of 0.000. Internship experience also has a positive and significant effect on work readiness, with a path coefficient of 0.465, a T-statistic of 3.891, and a P-value of 0.000. The R-square value of 0.743 indicates that self-efficacy and internship experience jointly explain 74.3% of the variance in work readiness, while the remaining 25.7% is explained by other factors outside the research model. These findings indicate that strengthening graduates' confidence in their abilities and improving the quality of internship experiences can contribute to higher work readiness among vocational high school graduates.

Keywords: Internship Experience; Self-Efficacy; Vocational High School Graduates; Work Readiness

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education has a strategic role in preparing graduates to enter the workforce because its success is not only measured by graduation rates but also by the extent to which graduates are able to meet the needs of the business and industrial sectors. Nevertheless, vocational high school graduates continue to record relatively high open unemployment rates compared with graduates from other educational levels in Indonesia. This condition indicates that graduating from a vocational high school does not automatically guarantee that graduates are fully prepared to enter the workforce.

This issue is also relevant in Tuban Regency. Graduates of vocational high schools remain an important group among job seekers, indicating that there is still a gap between the expected outcomes of vocational education and the actual employment conditions of graduates. At SMK Negeri 2 Tuban, the 2025 tracer study recorded 65 graduates who had not yet entered employment. A preliminary survey involving 30 graduates also indicated variations in work-related understanding, competence, and adaptability. These conditions suggest that work readiness remains an important issue requiring further investigation.

Work readiness refers to an individual's ability to enter and perform effectively in the workplace through the possession of relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and adaptability. Pool and Sewell (2007), through the CareerEDGE model, explain that employability is developed through a combination of career development learning, experience, degree subject knowledge, generic skills, and emotional intelligence. Therefore, work readiness is not determined solely by technical competence but is also influenced by individual and experiential factors.

One individual factor that may influence work readiness is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to organize and perform the actions required to achieve particular goals.

Individuals with stronger self-efficacy tend to demonstrate greater confidence in facing challenges, overcoming obstacles, and completing tasks. In the context of vocational graduates, confidence in their abilities may support their readiness to deal with workplace demands and adapt to various work situations.

Another factor is internship experience. Internship activities provide

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students with direct exposure to real workplace situations and opportunities to apply knowledge and skills acquired during education. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes that direct experience can become a source of learning through reflection and application. Through internship activities, students can gain practical knowledge, develop work-related skills, understand workplace culture, and become more familiar with actual work environments.

Previous studies have generally reported positive relationships between self-efficacy and work readiness, although some studies have produced inconsistent findings. Similarly, previous research has indicated that internship experience may contribute to students' work readiness by providing opportunities for direct learning and workplace adaptation. However, empirical evidence regarding the combined influence of self-efficacy and internship experience remains relevant, particularly among vocational high school graduates who have not yet entered employment.

The novelty of this study lies in examining self-efficacy and internship experience as factors influencing work readiness among 2025 graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban who had not yet entered employment. This specific context provides empirical evidence regarding the factors associated with work readiness among vocational graduates who are in the transition period from education to employment.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine and analyze the effect of self-efficacy and internship experience on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Readiness.

Work readiness refers to an individual's condition that demonstrates the ability to enter the workforce through the possession of knowledge, skills, work attitudes, and adaptability to workplace demands. Pool and Sewell (2007) proposed the CareerEDGE model as a practical model of graduate employability, emphasizing the importance of knowledge, skills, experience, and personal attributes in supporting successful entry into employment. In this study, work readiness is measured using work knowledge, competence and work skills, and adaptability.

Self-Efficacy.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform

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tasks, overcome difficulties, face challenges, and achieve desired goals. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy consists of three dimensions: level, strength, and generality. Level refers to the degree of task difficulty that an individual believes they can handle. Strength refers to the degree of confidence an individual has in their ability. Generality refers to the extent to which confidence in one's ability can be applied across different situations.

Internship Experience

Internship experience is a learning process obtained through direct involvement in a workplace environment. It allows students to apply knowledge and skills acquired in school while developing an understanding of workplace practices and expectations. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory explains that learning occurs through direct experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. In this study, internship experience is measured through direct work experience, task suitability with the field of expertise, and understanding of workplace culture and work attitudes.

The Effect of Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness

Self-efficacy influences how individuals perceive their ability to perform tasks and overcome challenges. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to demonstrate stronger confidence when facing difficult tasks and adapting to new situations. Previous studies by Itryah and Anggraini (2022), Audrey, Marsofiyati, and Wahono (2025), and Diniarti et al. (2025) found that self-efficacy has a positive and significant relationship with work readiness among vocational students. Therefore: H1: Self-efficacy has a positive effect on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban.

The Effect of Internship Experience on Work Readiness.

Internship activities provide students with direct experience in real workplace environments. Through these activities, students have the opportunity to apply knowledge, develop practical skills, understand workplace culture, and improve their ability to adapt to work situations. Previous studies by Pratiwi and Atidira (2025) and Mulyani, Tazliqoh, and Ekawaty (2025) found that practical work or internship experience has a positive relationship with work readiness. Therefore, H2: Internship experience has a positive effect on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal research

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design. The study examined the effect of two independent variables, namely self-efficacy (X1) and internship experience (X2), on the dependent variable, namely work readiness (Y).

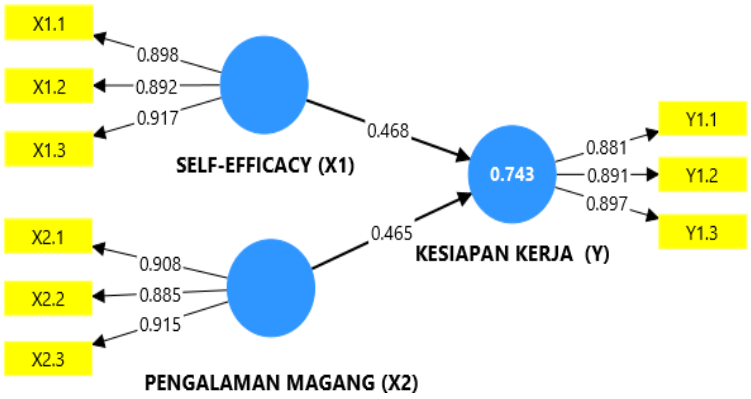
The population consisted of 65 graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban in 2025 who had not yet entered employment based on the school's tracer study data. Because the population was relatively small, a saturated sampling technique was applied. Of the questionnaires collected, 63 respondents provided usable data for analysis.

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms from July 16 to July 21, 2026. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Secondary data were obtained from SMK Negeri 2 Tuban, the Central Statistics Agency, and relevant scientific literature.

The research variables consisted of self-efficacy, internship experience, and work readiness. Self-efficacy was measured using the dimensions of level, strength, and generality based on Bandura (1997). Internship experience was measured using direct work experience, task suitability with the field of expertise, and understanding of workplace culture and work attitudes. Work readiness was measured using work knowledge, competence and work skills, and adaptability.

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The analysis included evaluation of the measurement model, evaluation of the structural model, and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping. Hypotheses were considered supported when the T-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the P-value was below 0.05 at a 5% significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



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Figure 1. Outer Model

Figure 1 illustrates the structural model resulting from the SmartPLS analysis, presenting the factor loading values for each indicator, the path coefficients between variables, and the R-square value of the endogenous variable. The factor loading values indicate the relationship between the indicators and the constructs being measured, while the path coefficients represent the effects between variables in the research model.

The structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R-square) and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping. In accordance with the research focus, the results are presented using the R-square and path coefficient values.

Table 1. R-Square

Endogenous Variable	R Square
Work Readiness (Y)	0.743

Source: SmartPLS data processing, 2026.

Based on Table 1, the R-square value for the Work Readiness variable is 0.743. This indicates that Self-Efficacy and Internship Experience jointly explain 74.3% of the variance in Work Readiness, while the remaining 25.7% is explained by other variables outside the research model. Furthermore, the results of the hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping procedure are presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2.

Path Coefficients (Mean, STDEV, T-Values)

Relationship	Original Sample	T-Statistics	P-Values
Self-Efficacy (X1) → Work Readiness (Y)	0,468	4,151	0,000
Internship Experience (X2) → Work Readiness (Y)	0,465	3,891	0,000

Source: SmartPLS data processing, 2026.

The T-statistics values for both paths are greater than the critical value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level, while the P-values are less than 0.05. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1) and the second hypothesis (H2) are accepted.

The Effect of Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness.

The results indicate that self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban. The path coefficient of 0.468 indicates that an increase in self-efficacy is associated

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with an increase in work readiness. The T-statistic of 4.151 and P-value of 0.000 confirm that the effect is statistically significant. Therefore, H1 is supported. This finding indicates that graduates who have stronger beliefs in their ability to perform tasks, overcome obstacles, and deal with different work situations tend to demonstrate higher levels of work readiness. The generality dimension was the strongest indicator of self-efficacy in the research model, indicating that the ability to apply confidence across different situations is particularly relevant to work readiness. The finding supports Bandura's (1997) concept and is consistent with previous research by Itryah and Anggraini (2022), Audrey, Marsofiyati, and Wahono (2025), and Diniarti et al. (2025).

The Effect of Internship Experience on Work Readiness.

The results also show that internship experience has a positive and significant effect on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban. The path coefficient of 0.465 indicates a positive relationship. The T-statistic of 3.891 and P-value of 0.000 indicate that the effect is statistically significant. Therefore, H2 is supported.

This finding demonstrates that direct experience in a workplace environment can contribute to graduates' readiness to enter employment. Internship activities allow students to apply knowledge acquired during education, develop practical skills, become familiar with workplace expectations, and understand the attitudes required in professional environments. Understanding of workplace culture was the strongest indicator of internship experience in the research model. The finding is consistent with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory and previous studies by Pratiwi and Atidira (2025) and Mulyani, Tazliqoh, and Ekawaty (2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban. This finding indicates that graduates who have stronger confidence in their ability to perform tasks, overcome challenges, and adapt to different work situations tend to demonstrate higher levels of work readiness.

Internship experience also has a positive and significant effect on the work readiness of graduates of SMK Negeri 2 Tuban. Direct work experience, task suitability, and understanding of workplace culture provide graduates with practical learning that can support their ability to adapt to actual

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workplace demands.

The R-square value of 0.743 indicates that self-efficacy and internship experience jointly explain 74.3% of the variance in work readiness, while 25.7% is explained by other factors outside the research model. Therefore, strengthening graduates' self-efficacy and improving the quality of internship experiences can be considered important aspects in supporting the work readiness of vocational high school graduates.

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