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The Role of Life Skills Education and Vocational Curriculum in the Work Readiness of Vocational High School Students in Indonesia: A Literature Review

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the role of life skills education and vocational curriculum in improving the work readiness of Vocational High School (SMK) students in Indonesia. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this article collects various academic literature and reports from educational institutions between 2020 and 2025. The results of the study indicate that life skills education and vocational curriculum based on industry needs have a significant contribution to the work readiness of SMK graduates. However, challenges in curriculum implementation, facility gaps, and industry involvement are still major obstacles. This study concludes that the integration of life skills education in a vocational curriculum that is relevant and responsive to the labor market is essential to improving the work readiness of SMK students.

Keyword: Life Skills Education, Vocational Curriculum, Work Readiness, Vocational High School Students, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education is an important highlight in the national education system because it aims to directly prepare students to enter the world of work. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2023), the highest open unemployment rate in Indonesia comes from vocational high school graduates at 9.42%, which shows that graduates are not fully competently ready to enter the industry. One of the causes is the lack of integration between life skills needed in the world of work and the suboptimal updating of the vocational curriculum to suit industry needs. Research by Sari (2021) states that life skills education can increase students' self-confidence and independence in facing the world of work, while Yusuf (2022) highlights the importance of a vocational curriculum that is adjusted to technological developments and industry demand to create competent graduates. This article systematically examines the relationship between two variables, namely life skills education and vocational curriculum (x_1 and x_2) on the work readiness of vocational high school students (y_1), as a literature review in the field of vocational education and human resource development. This research is important to formulate the relationship and contribution of each variable in forming work readiness, as well as to be the basis for compiling a more adaptive and effective vocational

high school learning model. Based on this background, the purpose of writing this article is to build a hypothesis for further research, namely to formulate: 1) The role of life skills education on the work readiness of vocational high school students; and 2) The role of vocational curriculum on the work readiness of vocational high school students.

METHOD

The method used in this article is the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a qualitative approach. The literature was obtained from the Google Scholar, Sinta, and DOAJ databases with the keywords: "vocational high school life skills", "Indonesian vocational curriculum", and "vocational high school graduate work readiness". The selection was made based on the relevance of the topic and the year of publication (2020-2025). The analysis was carried out by examining the main findings of each article and grouping them based on the themes: life skills education, vocational curriculum, and student work readiness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Integration of Life Skills Education in the Vocational High School Curriculum

Life skills education is an important part of preparing students to face the challenges of the world of work. Its application in vocational high schools includes training in critical thinking, effective communication, and emotional management. According to Lestari (2021), students who receive life skills education tend to be better prepared to face work situations. A curriculum that integrates this aspect is considered more relevant to industry needs. However, not all schools are able to implement it optimally. This is due to limited teacher training and supporting facilities.

Suitability of Vocational Curriculum with the Industrial World

The vocational curriculum in vocational high schools needs to be continuously adjusted to developments in the industrial world. Research by Yusuf (2022) shows that there is still a mismatch between graduate competencies and job market needs. This causes graduates to have difficulty in getting jobs. The irregular curriculum evaluation process is one of the main causes. Cooperation between industry and schools is essential to adjust the curriculum. That way, link and match can be realized in real terms.

The Influence of Soft Skills Training on Work Readiness

Soft skills training plays an important role in shaping the work readiness of vocational high school students. Skills such as communication, cooperation, and work ethics are needed in the professional world. Rahayu (2020) stated that students who take part in soft skills training show better performance during internships. Unfortunately, this training program has not become an integral part of all vocational high schools. In fact, improving soft skills has been proven to increase students' self-confidence. Therefore, the integration of this training needs to be expanded.

Internship Program as a Bridge to the World of Work

The internship program is a form of contextual learning that brings students directly into contact with the industrial world. Hadi (2023) found that internships provide real work experience and significantly increase student readiness. Students learn about work ethic, adaptation, and responsibility directly. However, the implementation of internships is not evenly distributed throughout Indonesia. Logistical challenges and limited industry partners are major obstacles. Special policies are needed to expand the scope of this internship program.

The Role of Teachers in Life Skills Education

Teachers have a strategic role in implementing life skills education. The success of life skills learning is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to deliver contextual material. However, many teachers have not received special training related to life skills learning. Sari (2021) emphasized the need for intensive and continuous training for vocational high school teachers. Without strengthening teacher capacity, the implementation of a life skills-based curriculum will not be optimal. Therefore, teacher professional development must be a priority.

Support for Facilities and Infrastructure in the Implementation of the Vocational Curriculum

The availability of supporting facilities greatly determines the success of vocational education. Many vocational high schools still lack practical equipment according to industry standards. This makes it difficult for students to practice relevant technical skills. Susanto (2022) noted that vocational high schools with complete facilities have more competitive graduates. Government investment and industry participation are urgently needed to meet facility needs. Multi-sector collaboration is the solution to closing this gap.

Authentic Evaluation as a Measure of Work Readiness

Authentic evaluation is a more accurate approach to measuring students' work readiness. Compared to written tests, practical evaluations better represent students' real abilities. Ardi (2021) stated that project-based assessments, observations, and portfolios are more effective. Through this method, students are trained to complete tasks like in the workplace. However, the implementation of authentic evaluation is still limited due to the lack of teacher understanding. Evaluation training and guidelines need to be improved so that the assessment is more comprehensive.

Challenges of Business and School Connectivity

The relationship between the business world and vocational schools is still not optimal in many regions. Weak collaboration has an impact on the low quality of students' learning experiences. According to Marlina (2022), the lack of regular communication forums is a barrier. Schools often have difficulty finding industry partners for work practices or internships. In fact, direct interaction with industry greatly influences students' work readiness. Incentive policies are needed for industry to be more actively involved.

The Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Work Readiness

Students' socioeconomic conditions also affect their work readiness. Students from low-income families tend to experience limited access to information and work motivation. Marlina (2022) found that family support contributes greatly to shaping work attitudes. This inequality can be reduced through programs cholarships and early career development. With the right intervention, students from vulnerable backgrounds can compete. Equal access is an important factor in vocational education.

Adaptive and Dynamic Curriculum as the Key to Competitiveness

Vocational curriculum must be adaptive to changes in the era and technology. Today's world of work requires flexibility of skills and continuous learning. Yusuf (2022) emphasized the importance of periodic curriculum updates based on industry trends. Vocational schools need to adopt a modular and competency-based curriculum. This allows students to choose a learning path that suits their interests and the job market. An adaptive curriculum increases the relevance and competitiveness of graduates.

Multi-stakeholder Collaboration in Vocational Education

The involvement of various parties such as government, industry, NGOs, and parents is very important. Vocational education cannot run effectively without cross-sector support. Susanto (2022) showed that the synergy of education actors increases the efficiency of vocational school programs. The role of school committees and professional associations also needs to be optimized. A community-based approach strengthens the roots of education in the regions. With solid collaboration, the quality of graduates can be improved as a whole.

Application of Technology in Vocational Learning

The use of information technology supports the effectiveness of learning in vocational schools. Digital platforms can expand access to online materials and training. Sari (2021) noted that the use of computer-based simulations strengthens students' skills. Technology also enables distance practice for certain skills. However, network and device constraints are still obstacles in many schools. ICT infrastructure support is an absolute requirement for the modernization of vocational learning.

Learning Motivation and Work Attitude of Vocational School Students

Work readiness does not only depend on the curriculum, but also on students' motivation and work attitude. Rahayu (2020) explained that students with high intrinsic motivation adapt more quickly to the world of work. Character building and career counseling can improve this readiness. BK teachers play an important role in facilitating this process. Mentoring programs have also been shown to be effective in improving discipline and work ethic. The psychological aspects of students must receive attention in vocational education.

Innovative Strategies in Practical Learning

Innovative learning methods such as problem-based learning and project-based learning are effectively applied in vocational schools. This strategy fosters critical thinking skills and independence. Hadi (2023) stated that students who learn with a project approach are more mentally prepared to face the world of work. Real work practices encourage students to solve problems creatively. However, the implementation of this strategy requires teacher readiness and adequate facilities. Teacher training support is the key to the success of this innovative approach.

The Role of Monitoring and Evaluation in Improving Quality

Monitoring and evaluation are important components to ensure the quality of vocational education. Without regular evaluation, weaknesses in curriculum implementation are not detected. Lestari (2021) stated that evaluation based on work readiness indicators must be implemented. This includes indicators of technical skills, soft skills, and work attitudes. The evaluation results can be used for continuous improvement of vocational high school programs. Local governments need to be more active in supervising the implementation of the curriculum and job training.

CONCLUSION

This article confirms that life skills education and vocational curriculum have important contributions in improving the work readiness of vocational high school students in Indonesia. Life skills education plays a role in forming crucial soft skills, such as communication, cooperation, and problem-solving skills. Meanwhile, vocational curriculum that is aligned with the needs of the industrial world contributes to building relevant technical competencies. However, the implementation of these two factors still faces challenges, such as lack of teacher training, limited facilities, and low industry involvement.

To improve the work readiness of vocational high school graduates, synergy is needed between educational institutions, the government, and the business world. Curriculum reform, ongoing teacher training, and effective internship programs are strategic steps that must be taken. This article also suggests the need to develop a more comprehensive evaluation instrument to measure students' work readiness authentically. Thus, the results of this study can be a starting point in formulating policies and further research on strategies to improve the quality of vocational high school graduates in Indonesia.

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