

WORK READINESS OF VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AFTER INDUSTRIAL WORK PRACTICE: A SEQUENTIAL EXPLANATORY MIXED METHODS STUDY

Nur Syafutri Hidayat¹, Andi Dwi Resqi Pramana², Yayuk Astuti³

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng

Rappang, Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

E-mail: nursyahfutrihidayat@email.com

Abstract

Industrial Work Practice (IWP) provides vocational students with authentic workplace experiences that may support their transition from school to employment. However, limited research has examined how different dimensions of work readiness are experienced and developed during IWP. This study examined vocational students' work readiness after completing IWP at Donut Lylo Pinrang using a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 47 vocational students using a Work Readiness Scale adapted from Caballero et al. (2011) and analysed descriptively. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with six students representing different levels of work readiness and one industrial supervisor. Interview data were analysed thematically, and quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through a joint display and meta-inference. Quantitative findings indicated high work readiness across six dimensions: hard skills (80.94%), soft skills (81.28%), work motivation (80.85%), work maturity (80.17%), adaptability (80.26%), and resilience (78.47%). Qualitative findings identified three themes: authentic workplace experience enhanced professional competence; workplace interaction fostered soft skills; and workplace challenges supported resilience and adaptability. Integrated findings suggest that authentic workplace participation, industrial supervision, and collaborative interaction were important experiences supporting students' work readiness. The findings highlight the value of structured workplace learning and mentoring in vocational education.

Keywords: *Industrial Work Practice, Work Readiness, Vocational Education, Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods, Work-Integrated Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education plays a strategic role in preparing graduates to meet the changing demands of the labour market. In Indonesia, Vocational High Schools (SMK) are expected to equip students with occupational knowledge, practical competence, and professional attitudes that facilitate the transition from school to employment. However, technological advancement and changing workplace expectations increasingly require graduates to demonstrate not only technical competence but also communication, teamwork, adaptability, resilience, and professional responsibility. Consequently, work readiness has become an important indicator of vocational education

effectiveness. Work readiness is a multidimensional construct encompassing resilience, work maturity, work motivation, hard skills, soft skills, and adaptability (Caballero et al., 2011). These dimensions reflect graduates' capacity to perform occupational tasks while responding appropriately to workplace demands and changes.

Industrial Work Practice (IWP), or Praktik Kerja Industri (Prakerin), provides an important bridge between school-based learning and authentic workplace experience. Through direct participation in industrial settings, students can apply classroom knowledge, practise occupational skills, experience workplace

culture, and develop professional behaviours through interaction with supervisors, co-workers, and customers. Previous studies have shown that workplace learning can strengthen vocational students' employability, technical competence, self-efficacy, motivation, and interpersonal skills (Alanazi, 2022; Bennett & Ferns, 2023; Cicilia et al., 2023; Fauzan et al., 2023; Fenech et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2022). Nevertheless, internship participation does not automatically guarantee work readiness. The quality of supervision, opportunities for authentic participation, and the extent of school–industry collaboration may shape the learning value of workplace experiences.

Despite this growing evidence, three gaps remain. First, much previous research has relied predominantly on quantitative approaches to establish relationships between internship participation and work readiness, providing limited insight into how students' workplace experiences explain the patterns found in quantitative results. Second, work readiness is frequently treated as a general outcome rather than as a multidimensional construct whose dimensions may be experienced differently during workplace learning. This leaves insufficient explanation of why some dimensions may appear stronger than others. Third, empirical evidence from small-scale culinary workplaces remains limited, although such environments require students to combine technical production, customer service, teamwork, discipline, and rapid responses to changing operational demands. Moreover, previous findings are not entirely consistent: while many studies report positive outcomes of workplace learning, some indicate that internships may be less effective when workplace learning opportunities and supervision are inadequate. These gaps point to the need for research that moves beyond asking whether Industrial Work Practice is associated with work readiness to examining how students

experience and interpret the development of its different dimensions.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, in which quantitative evidence on six dimensions of work readiness is followed by qualitative inquiry to explain and contextualise the quantitative patterns. The study is guided by the multidimensional conception of work readiness proposed by Caballero et al. (2011) and informed by work-integrated learning principles, which emphasise authentic participation in workplace activities and learning through practice (Bennett & Ferns, 2023). The originality of this study lies in integrating students' measured work-readiness profiles with their reported workplace experiences and an industrial supervisor's perspective, rather than treating work readiness as a single quantitative outcome. The study further focuses on a culinary workplace context, where technical production, interpersonal interaction, workplace discipline, adaptability, and coping with operational pressure occur simultaneously.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine vocational students' work readiness after completing Industrial Work Practice at Donut Lylo Pinrang. Specifically, it examines the level of work readiness across six dimensions, explores the workplace experiences that help explain the quantitative patterns, and integrates the two forms of evidence to develop a more comprehensive interpretation of work readiness within vocational education. By connecting what level of readiness students demonstrate with how workplace experiences are perceived to support that readiness, the study seeks to contribute empirical and practical insight into the design of more meaningful, supervised, and development-oriented Industrial Work Practice programmes.

METHODS

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design (QUAN → QUAL) to examine vocational students'

work readiness following Industrial Work Practice (IWP). The design was selected because quantitative evidence could identify the level and patterns of work readiness, while subsequent qualitative inquiry could explain and contextualise those findings through students' workplace experiences and an industrial supervisor's perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, the qualitative phase was not conducted as a separate inquiry but was intentionally connected to the quantitative results.

The study was conducted at Donut Lylo Pinrang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, a workplace where vocational students participated in authentic bakery production, customer service, teamwork, and workplace problem-solving under industrial supervision. The setting was selected because it provided direct exposure to workplace routines and responsibilities relevant to vocational learning.

The quantitative phase involved 47 vocational high school students who had completed IWP at the study site. Because all eligible students within the research setting were included, total sampling was employed. Following the quantitative phase, six students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews based on their quantitative work-readiness profiles. Three represented the high category and three represented the moderate-low category, allowing the qualitative phase to capture diverse workplace experiences. One industrial supervisor was also included as a supporting informant to provide a professional perspective on students' workplace performance, learning processes, and development.

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Work Readiness Scale (WRS) developed by Caballero et al. (2011) and adjusted to the context of Indonesian vocational education. The instrument assessed six dimensions of work readiness: hard skills, soft skills, work motivation, work maturity,

resilience, and adaptability. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency of the adapted questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha in IBM SPSS Statistics and yielded a coefficient of 0.979, indicating excellent internal consistency.

The qualitative phase used semi-structured interviews with the six selected students and one industrial supervisor. The interview guide focused on students' experiences during IWP, competency development, workplace adaptation, communication, teamwork, work discipline, and challenges encountered during workplace participation. The interviews were intended to explain the quantitative patterns rather than simply reproduce the questionnaire findings.

Data collection followed the sequential structure of the research design. First, questionnaires were administered to the 47 students after they had completed IWP. The quantitative results were then examined to identify patterns of work readiness and to inform the selection of interview participants. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected students and industrial supervisor to obtain contextual explanations of the quantitative findings.

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics through descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, minimum and maximum scores, and standard deviations. Descriptive analysis was selected because the quantitative phase was intended to describe the level of students' work readiness rather than test causal relationships among variables. The scores were subsequently interpreted according to the predetermined categories used in the study.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis following the procedures of Miles et al. (2020). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed repeatedly to establish familiarity with the

data. Meaningful statements concerning workplace experiences, competency development, professional attitudes, and workplace adaptation were identified through initial coding. Related codes were then grouped into broader categories, which were refined into themes and subthemes representing recurring patterns in participants' experiences. The themes were subsequently compared with the quantitative findings to explain, expand, and contextualise the observed work-readiness patterns.

Integration occurred at three connected stages. First, the quantitative findings informed the purposive selection of students for the qualitative phase, ensuring that participants represented contrasting levels of work readiness. Second, the qualitative findings were used to explain and contextualise the quantitative patterns identified across the six dimensions. Third, the two strands were integrated through a joint display and meta-inference, enabling the study to connect numerical patterns with participants' workplace experiences and the industrial supervisor's observations. This procedure followed the sequential explanatory mixed methods logic described by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Participation was voluntary. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and agreed to participate. They were also informed that the data would be used solely for academic purposes. Participant identities were protected through coding and anonymisation, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed in reporting the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative findings indicated that vocational students demonstrated a high level of work readiness following Industrial Work Practice (IWP) at Donut Lylo Pinrang. As shown in Table 1, all six dimensions were classified as high, with soft skills recording the highest score (81.28%) and resilience the lowest

(78.47%). Work motivation (80.85%), hard skills (80.94%), work maturity (80.17%), and adaptability (80.26%) also fell within the high category.

Table 1. Quantitative Findings on Students' Work Readiness

Work-readiness dimension	Percentage (%)	Category
Hard skills	80.94	High
Soft skills	81.28	Very High
Work motivation	80.85	High
Work maturity	80.17	High
Adaptability	80.26	High
Resilience	78.47	High

The quantitative pattern shows that students' perceived readiness was relatively consistent across the six dimensions, with a difference of less than three percentage points between the highest and lowest scores. The particularly high score for soft skills suggests that interpersonal and collaborative competencies were prominent aspects of students' workplace readiness, whereas the comparatively lower resilience score indicates an area requiring further attention in workplace preparation. These quantitative patterns were subsequently examined through qualitative interviews to understand the workplace experiences that may help explain them.

The qualitative analysis generated three themes that provided contextual explanations for the quantitative patterns: (1) authentic workplace experience and professional competence, (2) workplace interaction and social learning, and (3) workplace challenges, adaptability, and resilience. The themes were derived from interviews with six students representing different work-readiness profiles and one industrial supervisor.

Participants described direct involvement in production activities as an important learning experience. Students reported applying school-based knowledge to bakery production, following standard operating procedures, maintaining hygiene, meeting production targets, and assuming responsibility for assigned tasks. These experiences provided opportunities to practise occupational skills repeatedly in an

authentic workplace context. One student explained: “During the internship, I learned what the real working environment in industry is like. I learned to arrive on time, work according to SOPs, maintain cleanliness, and take responsibility for my tasks.” (P1)

Another participant described the range of occupational tasks undertaken during the internship, including preparing doughnuts, sweet bread, brownies, cakes, pies, pudding desserts, and birthday cakes. The industrial supervisor similarly reported that students who actively participated in production activities demonstrated enthusiasm for learning, complied with workplace rules, and were willing to perform different production tasks. These experiences provide qualitative explanations for the relatively high scores in hard skills (80.94%) and work maturity (80.17%), suggesting that authentic participation exposed students not only to technical procedures but also to workplace routines, responsibility, and professional expectations.

The second theme concerned students' interactions with customers, supervisors, and co-workers. Participants explained that workplace participation required them to communicate, coordinate production tasks, cooperate with colleagues, respond to customers, and seek guidance when they encountered difficulties. One participant stated: “When there are many orders, we divide the tasks so that they can be completed quickly. With customers, I try to be friendly, smile, and explain the products clearly.” (P1)

Another participant explained that when a task was unclear, the student asked the supervisor or other employees for clarification to avoid mistakes in product preparation. The industrial supervisor similarly observed that students who actively communicated with supervisors and co-workers adapted more easily to workplace routines and demonstrated stronger teamwork. These experiences help explain why soft skills recorded the highest

quantitative score (81.28%). Repeated communication, collaborative production, and customer interaction created authentic opportunities for students to practise interpersonal competencies in situations that could not be fully reproduced through classroom instruction.

The third theme concerned students' experiences in dealing with unfamiliar tasks, workplace pressure, customer demands, and busy production periods. Although students generally viewed IWP positively, some reported anxiety, hesitation, and uncertainty during the early stages of workplace participation. One participant stated: “Usually, when there are many orders, I become confused and somewhat panicked. Sometimes I am afraid of putting the wrong topping on a product or entering an order incorrectly.” (P4). Another participant explained: “I was afraid of saying something wrong or doing the wrong task. Because of that, I often hesitated before taking action.” (P6)

The industrial supervisor also observed that some students initially lacked confidence and hesitated to ask questions when they encountered difficulties. However, participants reported becoming more confident as they received constructive feedback, observed experienced workers, and repeatedly performed workplace tasks. These experiences help explain the quantitative pattern in which adaptability reached 80.26% while resilience recorded the lowest score (78.47%), despite both remaining in the high category. The findings suggest that adaptation and coping with workplace pressure require sustained exposure, practice, and supportive supervision.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through a joint display to identify how workplace experiences helped explain the observed patterns across the six dimensions. Rather than treating the six dimensions as isolated outcomes, the integration revealed three broader workplace-learning patterns. The

resulting interpretation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Integrated Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Integrated workplace experience	Quantitative dimensions	Quantitative evidence	Qualitative explanation
Authentic workplace participation	Hard skills; Work maturity	80.94%; 80.17%	Direct production practice, workplace routines, responsibility, SOP compliance, and supervisor feedback supported occupational competence and professional responsibility.
Workplace interaction and social learning	Soft skills; Work motivation	81.28%; 80.85%	Communication with customers, co-workers, and supervisors, together with meaningful responsibilities, supported communication, teamwork, confidence, and engagement.
Workplace challenges and supervision	Adaptability; Resilience	80.26%; 78.47%	Exposure to unfamiliar tasks, workplace pressure, repeated practice, and constructive mentoring supported students' adjustment and coping with workplace demands.

The integrated findings demonstrate convergence between the quantitative and qualitative strands. The quantitative data showed high levels of readiness across all six dimensions, while the qualitative findings provided contextual explanations for these patterns. Authentic participation was particularly relevant to occupational competence and professional maturity; workplace interaction was closely associated with interpersonal and motivational readiness; and workplace challenges, when accompanied by supervision and feedback, were relevant to adaptability and resilience.

The high scores for hard skills (80.94%) and work maturity (80.17%), together with the qualitative evidence, suggest that authentic workplace participation provided students with opportunities to connect vocational knowledge with actual occupational practice. Students were not limited to observing workplace activities; they participated in production, product preparation, equipment operation, quality control, hygiene procedures, and compliance with standard operating procedures. Such participation enabled students to practise technical tasks repeatedly while receiving feedback from workplace personnel.

This finding is consistent with Caballero et al. (2011), who conceptualised work readiness as extending beyond academic knowledge to include the capacity to apply occupational competencies effectively in workplace contexts. It also aligns with Bennett and Smith (2023), who emphasised the value of meaningful workplace participation in providing authentic learning experiences. Similarly, Ng et al. (2022) reported that work-integrated learning can enhance perceived employability through exposure to authentic work environments, while Fauzan et al. (2023) found that internship experiences provide opportunities for vocational students to apply technical knowledge while developing professional behaviour and confidence.

The present findings add an important contextual explanation to this literature. The quantitative results alone show that students reported high levels of hard skills and work maturity, but the qualitative evidence indicates that these outcomes were closely associated with active participation in real workplace routines, rather than internship participation understood merely as physical presence at an industrial site. Students repeatedly performed occupational tasks, followed workplace standards, and assumed responsibility for real production activities.

The supervisor's observation that students who actively participated tended to demonstrate stronger competence further supports the importance of meaningful participation.

The findings therefore suggest that the learning value of IWP depends not simply on whether students enter the workplace, but on what they are allowed and expected to do there. Authentic responsibilities provide opportunities for students to translate theoretical knowledge into practical performance while simultaneously becoming familiar with professional expectations. In this sense, workplace participation serves as a bridge between school-based vocational learning and occupational practice.

Soft skills obtained the highest score (81.28%), followed by work motivation (80.85%). The qualitative findings provide a plausible explanation for this pattern: students participated in a social workplace environment that required continuous communication, teamwork, customer interaction, and consultation with supervisors. These interactions exposed students to interpersonal demands that are difficult to reproduce through classroom-based instruction alone.

This interpretation is consistent with Caballero et al. (2011), whose conceptualisation of work readiness includes interpersonal attributes, communication, and professional behaviour. It also corresponds with Brown et al. (2006), who emphasised transferable competencies such as teamwork, communication, and self-management in employability. Bennett and Ferns (2023) similarly highlighted the role of authentic workplace experiences in students' professional and interpersonal development, while Alanazi (2022) reported positive effects of work-integrated learning on employability skills, including self-efficacy and communication. Cicilia et al. (2023) further identified interpersonal skills as an important component of vocational students' work readiness.

The qualitative evidence extends these findings by showing where and how these interpersonal competencies were practised. Students had to communicate with customers, coordinate tasks with co-workers, seek clarification from supervisors, and cooperate during busy production periods. One participant's description of dividing tasks during periods of high demand illustrates that teamwork was not an abstract competency but a practical requirement for completing workplace responsibilities.

The same workplace experiences also provide insight into the relatively high score for work motivation. Students reported becoming more engaged when they were entrusted with meaningful responsibilities and could see the direct outcomes of their work. This interpretation is consistent with Caballero et al. (2011) and Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), who emphasised motivational and personal attributes as important components of employability and work readiness. Supriyanto et al. (2022) and Ma'arif et al. (2025) likewise reported positive relationships between internship experience, motivation, and work readiness.

Taken together, these findings suggest that workplace interaction should be understood not merely as a context in which students practise soft skills, but as a social learning environment in which communication, collaboration, responsibility, and engagement are developed simultaneously. This provides a more nuanced explanation of why soft skills emerged as the strongest dimension in the present study.

Adaptability (80.26%) and resilience (78.47%) were both classified as high, although resilience was the lowest-scoring dimension. The qualitative findings indicate that these dimensions were closely connected to students' encounters with unfamiliar tasks, changing production demands, customer interactions, mistakes, and periods of workplace pressure.

Students initially reported uncertainty and hesitation but described becoming increasingly familiar with workplace routines through repeated participation and guidance.

The finding is consistent with Koen et al. (2012), who conceptualised career adaptability as an important resource for managing transitions from education to employment. It also corresponds with Caballero et al. (2011), who included adaptability and resilience among the dimensions associated with work readiness. Bennett and Ferns (2023) similarly emphasised authentic participation as an important feature of work-integrated learning because it exposes students to organisational practices and professional expectations. Supriyanto et al. (2022) and Fauzan et al. (2023) also reported positive associations between internship experience and students' preparedness for workplace demands.

The qualitative findings provide additional insight into the process underlying the quantitative pattern. Students did not describe workplace adaptation as immediate. Instead, they reported becoming more comfortable after repeated exposure to production routines, customer-service procedures, organisational rules, and supervisor feedback. The industrial supervisor similarly observed that students who actively sought guidance and remained open to learning adapted more readily to workplace expectations.

Resilience requires a somewhat different interpretation. Although resilience obtained the lowest score, it remained within the high category. Participants' accounts suggest that coping with uncertainty, fear of mistakes, and workplace pressure was more challenging than learning specific technical procedures. This interpretation is compatible with Fugate et al. (2004), who conceptualised employability as a psychosocial construct involving adaptability and the capacity to respond effectively to changing work

demands. Alanazi (2022) similarly reported that work-integrated learning can support students' confidence in managing workplace responsibilities, while Ma'arif et al. (2025) and Sabrina et al. (2024) reported positive associations between internship-related experiences, confidence, and work readiness.

The distinctive contribution of the present findings is therefore not that resilience was “developed more slowly”—a claim that would require longitudinal evidence—but that resilience emerged as the lowest-scoring dimension and was described by participants as requiring sustained exposure to workplace challenges and supportive supervision. Repeated practice, observation of experienced workers, constructive feedback, and opportunities to perform tasks again appeared to help students become more confident in dealing with workplace difficulties.

This finding has an important implication for the design of IWP. If students are protected from all workplace challenges or assigned only observational roles, they may have fewer opportunities to practise coping, adjustment, and problem-solving. At the same time, exposure to difficulty should be accompanied by appropriate mentoring. The findings therefore point to the importance of balancing authentic workplace challenge with structured supervision and constructive feedback.

Taken together, the findings support a multidimensional understanding of work readiness. Consistent with Caballero et al. (2011), readiness cannot be reduced to technical competence alone; it encompasses interpersonal, motivational, behavioural, adaptive, and psychological dimensions. The contribution of the present study lies in showing how these dimensions can be understood in relation to different types of workplace experience.

Three integrated patterns emerge. First, authentic workplace participation was particularly relevant to hard skills and work

maturity because students applied vocational knowledge while assuming real workplace responsibilities. Second, workplace interaction provided a social learning environment supporting soft skills and work motivation through communication, teamwork, customer interaction, and meaningful responsibility. Third, workplace challenges supported by supervision were particularly relevant to adaptability and resilience as students encountered unfamiliar situations, pressure, and mistakes and gradually became more familiar with workplace expectations.

This interpretation extends the work-integrated learning perspective of Bennett and Ferns (2023) by emphasising that the educational value of workplace learning is shaped by the quality and nature of participation, not merely by placement in an industrial setting. Methodologically, the sequential explanatory design also demonstrates the value of using qualitative evidence to contextualise quantitative patterns. The joint display allowed the study to move beyond reporting that students had “high” readiness toward identifying the workplace experiences that may help explain why different dimensions were comparatively stronger or weaker.

Practically, vocational schools should design IWP programmes that provide students with meaningful workplace responsibilities rather than observation alone. Stronger school–industry collaboration is needed to ensure that students participate in authentic production and service activities. Industrial partners should provide supervisors who can offer regular guidance, constructive feedback, and appropriately challenging tasks. At the policy level, evaluation of IWP should consider broader dimensions of work readiness rather than focusing exclusively on technical skill acquisition.

Conclusion

This study examined vocational students' work readiness following Industrial Work Practice at Donut Lylo Pinrang using a sequential explanatory

mixed methods design. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrated that students achieved a high level of work readiness across six dimensions: hard skills, soft skills, work motivation, work maturity, adaptability, and resilience. The qualitative findings further explained that these dimensions developed through authentic workplace participation, continuous industrial supervision, collaborative interaction, and reflective learning experiences. Beyond confirming the positive contribution of Industrial Work Practice, this study explains the mechanisms through which workplace learning fosters vocational students' professional development. The findings indicate that work readiness should be understood as a multidimensional and developmental construct, with each dimension evolving through different workplace experiences. In particular, resilience was found to require a longer developmental process than the other dimensions because it depends on repeated exposure to workplace challenges and supportive mentoring. The study contributes theoretically by strengthening the understanding of work readiness within the context of vocational education and work-integrated learning, while practically highlighting the importance of authentic workplace experiences and effective industrial mentoring in preparing students for employment. These findings provide useful insights for vocational schools, industry partners, and policymakers in improving the quality and effectiveness of Industrial Work Practice programmes.

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