



The Effect of Work Motivation and Interpersonal Skills on Students' Work Readiness

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: December, 2026 Revised: March, 2026 Published: June, 2026	This study was aimed to determine: (1) the effect of work motivation on students' work readiness, and (2) the effect of interpersonal skills on students' work readiness. Descriptive quantitative research is used as the research approach. The population of this study was all 12th grade students at one of the State Vocational High Schools in Central Java, totaling 357 students. The sampling technique used proportionate random sampling and a sample of 189 respondents was selected. Data collection was in the form of a questionnaire instrument to measure the variables of work motivation, interpersonal skills, and work readiness. The data analysis technique was in the form of descriptive statistical analysis and hypothesis testing in the form of a t-test. The results of the study showed (1) work motivation had a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness with a significance value of 0.002, and (2) interpersonal skills had a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness with a significance value of 0.000.
Keywords: Work Motivation, Interpersonal Skills, Students' Work Readiness	
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INTRODUCTION

Vocational High Schools (VHS) are designed as formal education with a specialized curriculum to prepare graduates with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The concept of VHS refers to Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 15 concerning the National Education System, which states, "Vocational education is secondary education that prepares students primarily for work in specific fields." This article mandates that VHS students be equipped with various competencies in knowledge, skills, and attitudes that demonstrate readiness for work and entrepreneurship (Yustina, 2020). VHS students are expected to be prepared to learn and be educated professionally in their fields of expertise.

Work readiness plays a crucial role in the success of VHS graduates in actualizing their skills. Generally, readiness is defined as the state of an individual, system, or organization in carrying out a series of planned and unplanned activities (Abuhussain et al., 2021). Borg & Scott-Young (2020) work readiness is defined as a set of attributes possessed by an individual that enable them to make a positive transition from their previously studied field to their role in the workplace. This is influenced by several factors, including personal motivation, intrinsic factors, and extrinsic factors (Peersia et al., 2024). Work readiness essentially indicates a person's level of readiness to enter the workforce. This encompasses several personal attributes, particularly the ability to relate to others and an understanding of organizational dynamics (Masso et al., 2022). Thus, work readiness can be defined as the potential abilities that enable an individual to contribute significantly and build positive relationships with others in the workplace.

The vocational high school curriculum is designed to prepare graduates who are ready to work according to industry needs. However, the success rate of graduates entering the workforce remains a challenge. Data reported by the Central Statistics Agency (CSA) In February 2025, the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) for vocational high school graduates reached the highest level at 8%, exceeding the 6.35% for high school graduates. Furthermore, the OUR for higher education graduates (Diploma IV, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral) was the third highest at 6.23%. This indicates that vocational high school graduates' work readiness is not optimal, despite having received an industrial curriculum. Based on interviews with Mediana (2025) according to the Executive Director of the *Center*

of Reform on Economics (CORE), workforce growth has not kept pace with job availability, creating an imbalance in the job market. Another challenge is that higher education graduates must compete with those with a minimum high school diploma or equivalent. An education observer in Surakarta quoted by Wibowo (2024) stated that the problems facing vocational schools are related to their vision and learning orientation. Advances in 21st-century technology demand the development of graduate competencies that cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence.

The situation in Central Java also aligns with the interview results. The Head of the VHS Section of the Education Office's Regional VII Branch of Central Java stated that one factor contributing to the under-absorption of vocational high school graduates is that not all graduates possess the necessary skills (Bram, 2023). In addition, interviews have been conducted by Darwiyono (2023) with the Deputy Head of Public Relations and Business and Industry at a VHS in Klaten Regency stated that despite curriculum synchronization with industry, the graduate absorption rate is still only 30%, with a three-month waiting period. Therefore, this issue requires full attention.

Various factors influencing student job readiness need to be carefully considered to minimize the emergence of new problems. Siburian et al. (2022) states that factors that influence work readiness consist of internal and external factors, among the internal factors there is work motivation. Basalamah & As'ad (2021) work motivation is defined as a condition that drives someone to achieve what they desire. Students with good work motivation have an inner drive to study hard and are ready to work in their chosen field (Febrian et al., 2024). Student activities in learning driven by this motivation will encourage students to take the initiative to develop themselves. Therefore, building student work motivation is crucial for becoming competent and qualified graduates. Research conducted by Wulandari & Dian (2017) and Febrian et al. (2024) stated that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness. However, on the other hand, research conducted by Rifaldy et al. (2025) shows that work motivation does not have a significant effect on students' work readiness, whereas research by Mutoharoh & Rahmaningtyas (2019) shows that work motivation has a positive and insignificant effect on students' work readiness.

Students' work readiness is also influenced by other variables. Inderanata & Sukardi (2023) stated that in addition to technical skills and knowledge, interpersonal communication skills are also needed in the workplace. Canary et al. in Tentama et al. (2019) interpersonal communication is defined as the ability to listen and influence through different ways of delivering and receiving messages to achieve interpersonal goals. Suryana & Permana (2025) stated that interpersonal skills play an important role in social life, particularly in establishing relationships. Interpersonal skills can develop according to the habitual patterns that arise from social life. Oktary et al. (2019) states that possessing interpersonal skills is essential for survival. Interpersonal skills are not just a means of exchanging information, but also a means of building deep relationships. Research by Indrawati et al. (2023) and Tentama et al. (2019) revealed that interpersonal skills have a very significant influence on students' work readiness.

Based on a review of previous studies reported, there appears to be a gap in results and varying views regarding work motivation and interpersonal skills and their influence on students' work readiness. Research by Febrian et al. (2024) with class XII students of the Electrical Power Installation Engineering Expertise Program at a VHS in Central Java revealed a positive and significant relationship between work motivation and students' work readiness, while other research by Rifaldy et al. (2025) with students in the Accounting Expertise Program at four public VHS in East Jakarta showed that work motivation did not have a significant effect on work readiness. This needs to be explored further, and this study was aimed to determine in detail: 1) the effect of work motivation on students' work readiness, and 2) the effect of interpersonal skills on students' work readiness.

METHODS

This research is a quantitative descriptive study. The population of the study was all 12th grade students at a State Vocational High School in Central Java, with a total of 357 students. The population selection was based on the consideration of learning experiences in the form of theory during 10th grade, having undertaken industrial work practices in 11th grade, and 12th grade students who were preparing to enter the workforce. The research sample was 189 students obtained using proportionate random sampling technique to obtain a representative sample according to the number of students in each

concentration of expertise, starting from Computer Network Engineering and Telecommunications, Marketing, Office Management and Business Services, and Accounting and Institutional Finance. The data collection technique was a questionnaire with a research instrument compiled using indicators from several sources. The work motivation variable modified the instrument Gagné et al. (2015), interpersonal skills variables modify the instrument Buhrmester et al. (1988), and work readiness variables modify the instrument Abuhussain et al. (2021). Not all of the modified instruments were suitable for the characteristics of this study, so adjustments were needed to suit the context of vocational high school students and industrial work practices. The instrument was pilot tested with 30 respondents. The instrument validation technique used Correct Item-Total Correlation and reliability testing using Cronbach Alpha with the help of SPSS 25. Data were analyzed using prerequisite tests and hypothesis tests in the form of multiple linear regression analysis, t-tests, and coefficient of determination tests. Thus, the stages of this research consist of the planning stage, instrument preparation stage, data collection stage, and data analysis stage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

Validity and Reliability Test

The validity test in this study was conducted with 30 respondents at a significance level of 5%. The analysis results showed that all statement items measuring the variables of work motivation, interpersonal skills, and work readiness had values. Thus, all items were declared valid for use as data collection instruments in this study. The reliability test showed that the Cronbach Alpha of each variable was > 0.6 , so all instrument items were reliable. The reliability test results are as follows:

Table 1. Reliability Test Result

Research Variables	Amount of Statement	Reliability Limits	Cronbach Alpha	Criteria
Work Motivation	18	0,6	0,854	Reliable
Interpersonal Skills	15	0,6	0,857	Reliable
Work Readiness	12	0,6	0,877	Reliable

Prerequisite Test Analysis

a. Normality Test

The normality test is a test to determine whether the independent and dependent variables in the regression model have a normal distribution or not. The study used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method with the Monte Carlo exact test and a confidence level of 99%. If Monte Carlo Sig (2-tailed) > 0.05 , then the residual data is normally distributed. Based on the normality test results table, the Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed) value is $0.227 > 0.05$, and the data is normally distributed and meets the requirements for hypothesis testing. Normality test results:

Table 2. Normality Test Result

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	
Unstandardized Residual	
N	189
Test Statistic	0,075
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig. 0,227 ^d

b. Linearity Test

The linearity test is a test to analyze the linear relationship between independent and dependent variables. This study examines the test of linearity by comparing the results of sig. linearity. If sig. linearity < 0.05 , it can be concluded that the two variables have a linear relationship. Based on the linearity test results table, the sig. linearity value of X1 against Y is $0.000 < 0.05$, so it can be concluded that the work motivation variable (X1) is linear against work readiness (Y). The sig. linearity value of X2 against Y is $0.000 < 0.05$, so it can be concluded that the interpersonal skills variable (X2) is linear to work readiness (Y). Linearity test results:

Table 3. Linearity Test Result

Variable	Sig. Linearity	Description
Work Readiness * Work Motivation	0,000	Linear
Work Readiness * Interpersonal Skills	0,000	Linear

c. Multikolinearity Test

The multicollinearity test is a test to determine whether a regression model has correlations between independent variables or not. This study uses Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The study is considered good if tolerance > 0.1 and VIF < 10. Based on the multicollinearity test results table, it is known that work motivation has a tolerance of 0.725 > 0.1 and a VIF of 1.379 < 10, so there is no multicollinearity. The interpersonal skills variable has a tolerance of 0.725 > 0.1 and a VIF of 1.379 < 10, so there is no multicollinearity. Multicollinearity test results:

Table 4. Multikolinearity Test Result

Variable	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
1 Work Motivation	0,725	1,379
Interpersonal Skills	0,725	1,379
a. Dependent Variable: Work Readiness		

d. Heteroskedasticity Test

The heteroscedasticity test is a test to examine whether there is similarity in variance and residuals from one observation to another. This study uses the Glejser Model. If the significance value is > 0.05, then there is no heteroscedasticity. Based on the heteroscedasticity test results table, it is known that work motivation has a significance value of 0.079 > 0.05, so there is no heteroscedasticity. Interpersonal skills have a significance value of 0.301 > 0.05, so there is no heteroscedasticity. Multicollinearity test results:

Table 5. Heteroskedasticity Test Result

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-3,18	0,158		-2,008	0,046
Work Motivation	0,127	0,047	0,222	2,687	0,079
Interpersonal Skills	0,039	0,038	0,086	1,037	0,301
a. Dependent Variable: ABS_RES					

Hypothesis Test

a. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Test

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis is used to explain the relationship between more than one independent variable and a dependent variable. The results are as follows:

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Test Result

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	1,213	0,241	
Work Motivation	0,227	0,072	0,200
Interpersonal Skills	0,500	0,057	0,552

Based on the table of multiple linear regression analysis results, the regression equation is obtained and can be concluded as follows:

$$\gamma = 1,213 + 0,227X_1 \text{ and } \gamma = 1,213 + 0,500X_2$$

- 1) A constant value of 1.213 indicates that when the independent variable is 0, the student's work readiness value is 1.213.
- 2) The regression coefficient of the work motivation variable of 0.227 indicates that every 1-unit increase in work motivation will increase student work motivation by 0.227, assuming other

variables remain constant, that work motivation has a positive effect on student work readiness.

- 3) The regression coefficient for the interpersonal skills variable is 0.500, indicating that every 1-unit increase in interpersonal skills will increase students' interpersonal skills by 0.500, assuming other variables are constant, that interpersonal skills have a positive effect on students' work readiness.

b. Partial Significance Test (t-test)

The t-test is a test to determine the partial effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. If the calculated value is > t table and the significance value (Sig.) is < 0.05, then H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted. If the t table value is 1.653, then based on table 4.8, the t-test results are as follows:

- 1) Work motivation has a t-value of 3.160 > t-table 1.653 with a Sig. value of 0.002 < 0.05, so it can be concluded that H1 is accepted, namely that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.
- 2) Interpersonal skills have a t-value of 8.724 > t-table 1.653 with a Sig. value of 0.000 < 0.05, so it can be concluded that H1 is accepted, namely that interpersonal skills have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.

Table 7. The t-test Result

Variabel	t	Sig.
Work Motivation	3,160	0,002
Interpersonal Skills	8,724	0,000

c. Coefficient Determination Test (R²)

The coefficient of determination test aims to determine the simultaneous effect of independent variables on dependent variables. This study examines the R-Square value in the model summary with an R2 value range between $0 \leq R^2 \leq 1$. The calculation results are as follows:

Table 8. Coefficient Determination Test Result

Model	R	R Square
1	0,678 ^a	0,460

Based on the table of the coefficient of determination test results, it is known that the R-Square value is 0.460, which means that student work readiness is influenced by work motivation and interpersonal skills by 46%, while the remaining 54% is influenced by other factors outside the study. Siburian et al. (2022) identified other factors that influence the work readiness of vocational school students, consisting of factors within the students themselves and factors outside themselves. Factors within themselves include talent, work motivation, soft skills, intelligence, interests, and work experience, while factors outside themselves include the role and guidance of parents, the surrounding community, and peers.

B. Discussion

1. The Effect of Work Motivation on Students' Work Readiness

This study proves that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on student work readiness. This is evidenced by the calculated t-value (3.160) > t-table (1.653) with a Sig. (0.002) < 0.05, thus concluding that H1 is accepted. This finding indicates that the higher a student's work motivation, the higher their work readiness.

This is also supported by conditions in the field. Work motivation develops along with student involvement in classroom learning and during internships. Based on the research results, students' amotivation levels are quite high, with students seeing little benefit from internships because they feel the effort and results are not commensurate and do not understand the purpose of internships. Extrinsic regulation – social – indicates that social factors related to external recognition are not the primary motivator for students to participate in internships. Extrinsic regulation – material – students are characterized by the drive to obtain job offers and maintain access to internships.

Introjected regulation is very strong, with students driven by internal motivations for self-validation, self-pride, and avoiding negative feelings. Identified regulation indicates that students' work motivation is related to their personal recognition of the meaning and purpose of the internship, which aligns with their values. Intrinsic motivation indicates that students undertake the internship with a sense of happiness, challenge, enthusiasm, and personal interest.

The active role of schools and the Business and Industry is crucial in preparing students for work. Schools play a crucial role in providing a conducive learning environment and fostering work motivation through career development and guidance. Business and Industry acts as a strategic partner, providing real-world work experiences through internships, enabling students to experience the benefits and relevance of school learning to the real world of work. Collaboration between schools and Business and Industry creates an effective synergy in fostering work motivation, equipping students with competencies, real-world experiences, and mental readiness to face the world of work. The results of this study also support previous research conducted by Wulandari & Dian (2017) and Febrian et al. (2024) that work motivation can improve students' work readiness through an inner drive to seek opportunities and work in their field. Thus, the results of this study demonstrate the influence of work motivation on students' work readiness.

2. The Effect of Interpersonal Skills on Students' Work Readiness

This study provides evidence that interpersonal skills have a positive and significant impact on students' work readiness. This is evident from the calculated t-value (8.724) > t-table (1.653) and the Sig. (0.000) < 0.05, thus concluding that H1 is accepted. This finding indicates that the higher a student's interpersonal skills, the higher their work readiness.

This is also reflected in the actual implementation of classroom learning and internships undertaken by students. Through internships, students have the opportunity to improve practical skills in their fields of expertise. Initiation indicates doubts in students' abilities to find and propose ideas, but students' courage to initiate interaction and communication is relatively strong. Negative assertion indicates that the majority of students feel hesitant to express discomfort or disagreement, which can make them uncomfortable or angry. Self-disclosure indicates that most students have the ability to share personal experiences with fellow internship participants, but this does not lead them to open up about personal matters in depth. Furthermore, the majority of students understand how to direct conversations. Emotional support reflects students' hesitation in explaining problems, but their ability to provide empathetic support and be good listeners is quite strong. Conflict management demonstrates students' ability to admit mistakes, listen effectively, and control themselves to avoid conflict.

The school's collaboration with the Business and Industry enables students to understand the dynamics of the workplace and hone their interpersonal skills, which in turn can improve their job readiness. The school's active role in facilitating a learning environment through group work, discussions, and collaboration with Business and Industry develops students' interpersonal skills. Furthermore, Business and Industry's role in providing internship opportunities allows students to gain real-world experience interacting and collaborating in the workplace. The findings of this study also support previous research by Indrawati et al. (2023) and Tentama et al. (2019) which revealed that interpersonal skills can improve students' work readiness, including social sensitivity, the ability to build positive relationships, and teamwork. Thus, the results of this study demonstrate the influence of interpersonal skills on students' work readiness.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusion

Based on the data processing that has been carried out, the following conclusions are reported:

1. There is a positive and significant influence of work motivation on students' work readiness as seen from the calculated t (3.160) > t table (1.653) with a Sig. value (0.002) < (0.05). This shows that motivation in the form of social support, financial rewards, psychological pressure, work and personal values, and intrinsic motivation are very important in increasing students' work readiness so that they are encouraged to achieve more optimal work readiness.

2. There is a positive and significant influence of interpersonal skills on students' work readiness as seen from the results of the t-test with a calculated t value (8.724) > t table (1.653) with a Sig. value (0.000) < (0.05). This shows that the interpersonal skills possessed by students are very important in communicating effectively, as well as resolving conflicts so that graduates can adapt and face social challenges in the world of work.

B. Suggestion

Work motivation which has been proven to influence job readiness, has consequences for vocational high school students to: 1) maximize the development of competencies and skills according to the needs of the world of work, 2) take the initiative to seek job opportunities and adapt to the demands of the world of work in their fields, and 3) prepare attitudes and mentality in facing job competition through integrated career guidance between the school and the business world and the industrial world through industrial work practice. Related to interpersonal skills that influence job readiness, it is expected that vocational high school students will be able to: 1) improve effective communication skills and self-confidence in interactions, 2) develop conflict management skills and provide emotional support, and 3) understand organizational dynamics by adapting to the challenges of the professional world. In addition, the results of this study also have consequences for teachers of productive subjects to: 1) create a collaborative and interactive learning environment, and 2) actively collaborate with the business world and the industrial world to provide career guidance. Future researchers are advised to expand the scope of research by exploring other factors that influence student job readiness. In addition, researchers can use methods with other approaches or conduct interventions such as holding training programs.

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