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## Business and Industry Perceptions of the Soft Skills of Industrial Internship Participants from Vocational High School

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**Abstract:** This study aims to determine the Perceptions of the Business and Industry World regarding the Soft Skills of Industrial Internship Participants from Vocational High Schools (SMK). The obtained perceptions will provide a picture of the readiness of prospective vocational education graduates to face the demands of the workforce. This study apply a descriptive qualitative approach, following with data collection techniques by interviews and supporting documents. The results indicate that, in general, the industry's perspective on the soft skills of Industrial Internship participants is positive, particularly in aspects of discipline, teamwork, responsibility, etiquette, work ethic, and enthusiasm and motivation. However, there are still aspects that need to be developed, such as initiative, communication confidence, and the ability to adapt to digital work systems. Industrial Internship activities play a crucial role in providing experience and providing an overview of students' soft skills. Formal educational institutions should pay more attention to these aspects that need to be developed so that graduates are better prepared for the workforce.

**Keyword:** Soft Skills, Industry Perception, Industrial Internship.

### INTRODUCTION

According to the Head of the Labor Market Center at the Ministry of Manpower, companies tend to be more selective in recruiting young workers (Generation Z) because they are considered to lack adequate non-technical competencies (Zhafira, 2025). Although young workers possess high technical competencies, if they lack essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, a gap arises between them and industry expectations. (Mohammed & Ozdamli, 2024)

Increased attention to the development of soft skills among graduates of formal educational institutions is crucial. Mastery of these soft skills needs to be properly managed through character development programs throughout students' education. This development is expected to foster discipline, responsibility, communication skills, and good teamwork valuable assets for facing an increasingly competitive workforce. The success of this character development can be reflected in the implementation of Industrial Work Practices (Prakerin) in vocational education settings. During the internship program, students are not only tested on their technical skills but are also assessed by company on their adaptability to the work culture,

work ethic, and interpersonal skills in the internship setting. This emphasizes that the competence of vocational education graduates is not solely measured by their mastery of technical skills (hard skills), but also by their ability to demonstrate soft skills that support productivity and performance in the industrial world.

Vocational High Schools (SMK) play a crucial role in preparing students for work through Industrial Internship (Prakerin). This program provides opportunities for students to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in school in a real-world work environment. However, problems often arise in the business and industrial world, including low discipline, lack of initiative, poor interpersonal communication, and a lack of responsibility for assigned tasks (Arif et al., 2021). This phenomenon also occurs in South Cikarang, one of the largest industrial areas in Bekasi Regency. State Vocational School 1 South Cikarang, one of the vocational schools partnered with industry in the region, has many students undertaking internships at various companies. However, there are differing views from industry stakeholders regarding the quality of students' soft skills during their internships. This is important to understand. The question is whether the soft skills of the internship participants at the industry partners have met the expectations, or whether there are areas where improvement is still needed.

This situation needs to be researched to determine the true perceptions of the business and industrial worlds regarding the soft skills of SMKN 1 South Cikarang participants. This research aims to obtain a comprehensive picture of the soft skills aspects considered important by industry and the extent to which students have met these expectations. The results of this study can serve as evaluation material for educational institutions to develop the quality of character development for students in general, thus better preparing them for the real world of work.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand in depth the perceptions of the Business World and the Industrial World (DUDI) towards the soft skills of Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) participants from Vocational High School (SMK). Through this approach, researchers can explore the meaning, views, and direct experiences of industry parties regarding the behavior and non-technical competencies of students during Prakerin at three different companies in October 2025, namely PT Narumi Indonesia, PT Softpren Industries Indonesia, and PT Chao Long Motor Parts Indonesia. The stages that used were interviews with industrial supervisors of Prakerin participants at the company, the Industrial Relations department at the school and the work assessment of industrial work practice (Prakerin) participants by the company.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to acquire the industry's perception of the vocational high school internship participants, the internship was conducted at three different companies. The aspects assessed included work discipline, initiative, teamwork, adaptation to work culture, interpersonal communication, ethics, and manner.

### **1. Work Discipline**

The internship participants were able to adapt to the company's working hours, demonstrating adherence to the work schedule and applicable regulations. They arrived early and actively participated in routine company activities such as roll call and morning exercises. Furthermore, compliance with the smoking ban in the work area was implemented after participants received instructions from their supervisors upon arrival. These findings align with the view (Robbins, S. P., & Judge, 2017) that compliance with organizational rules is expected

behavior. Good discipline reflects a responsible attitude and commitment to professional values in the workplace.

However, it was also found that Industrial Internship (Prakerin) participants were absent from work for two days without providing prior notification to their supervisors. Therefore, the company has implemented a policy that internship participants who are absent for three working days without explanation will be sent back to their home school. This demonstrates that the mental readiness of internship participants still requires attention, considering that internship can develop the skills of vocational high school students as future graduates needed by the industrial world. (Zamzam Z.F., 2012)

## **2. Work Initiative**

Regarding initiative, there are differing views. Some internship participants still need to be encouraged and reminded, or given direct examples of how to take initiative. For example, in the office administration area, some still use their cell phones outside of work hours after completing a work order, even though they could report that their work has been completed and discuss what else can be done. However, some participants have demonstrated positive initiative, recognizing the importance of workplace safety by removing objects that block the path of workers without being asked by colleagues or internship supervisors. Internship participants also lack initiative, particularly in office areas or administrative workspaces. Participants often do nothing after completing a work order, which should prompt them to ask what needs to be done next. This is crucial in office administration areas in all companies, both local and foreign, especially in Japanese companies, where there are no partitions or dividers between employees and managers, making them easily monitored and observed by Japanese leaders. Despite this lack of initiative, internship participants can still be developed, as emotional competence is not an innate ability, it can be trained and developed (Goleman, 2000)

## **3. Responsibility**

The workload assigned by companies to internship participants differs from that of permanent employees. However, in terms of responsibility, observations by work supervisors during internship participants' work and the behavior demonstrated by internship participants on the job yield different perceptions from each company. In general, internship participants have performed their duties as expected. However, there are areas that need improvement, particularly for those working in office administration. This includes the participants' self-awareness that they are in the real world of work.

Supervisors need to remind them of the tasks to be completed after a project is completed. They should avoid tasks that do not contribute to the work outcome. Responsibility is a crucial factor in work, as responsibility significantly impacts productivity (Fatimah et al., 2022)

## **4. Communication and Interpersonal Relations**

In terms of interpersonal communication, internship participants have not yet demonstrated positive results. There were findings of a lack of confidence in asking questions or expressing opinions to colleagues or internship supervisors. According to the supervisor at the company, upon first arriving in the meeting room, participants displayed body language lacking in confidence, such as swaying their legs, minimal eye contact, and a tendency toward passivity. This situation indicates that students' communication skills still need to be improved, as communication and interpersonal relations are crucial in the workplace and can strengthen teamwork, thus contributing to work productivity (Sri Sundari, Verry Albert Jekson Mardame Silalahi, 2024)

## 5. Teamwork

In terms of teamwork, internship participants were able to collaborate well with fellow students from different schools and with operators in the production area, especially with colleagues from the same school. The ability to collaborate demonstrates that internship participants not only focus on individual tasks but also possess strong social and cooperation skills when working with others. These findings indicate that internship participants' teamwork is well-developed, and this collaboration will impact team performance (Rizki Reinaldi, 2024). Therefore, the teamwork skills possessed by internship participants not only support the achievement of individual and team goals but also strengthen team synergy and productivity in the broader workplace.

## 6. Adaptation to the Work Environment

In adapting to the industrial environment, internship participants require sufficient time, given the differences between school habits and the industrial environment, particularly with the digital work system. Almost all company activities, from attendance and door access to food, are digitally based (RFID). Therefore, students need to strengthen their digital literacy skills to effectively follow company policies. The digital systems implemented in the workplace for both employees and internship participants are crucial because they are part of employability skills and a necessary aspect for internship participants to adapt to new work technologies (Siva Indah Purnama, Cicilia Indrawati, 2025). For all industrial sectors, digital literacy is a necessity for workers in companies facing the demands of an increasingly modern and automated workplace.

## 7. Work Spirit and Motivation

Work spirit and enthusiasm for work are demonstrated through active participation in company activities, such as counting during morning exercise. This enthusiasm comes early and reflects mental readiness and intrinsic motivation in participating in this internship. Furthermore, one participant working in office administration was highly commended for her enthusiasm from start to finish, compared to other fellow internship participants at the company. Motivation is essential for an individual because humans fundamentally need encouragement to perform better (Widodo & Yandi, 2022).

The experience gained by the internship participants from vocational schools fosters internal motivation (Wijaya, 2025), making them feel more prepared and motivated to demonstrate their best performance in the workplace, thus supporting their readiness for the real world of work.

## 8. Ethics and Manners

The company where the internship participants are placed has a culture of Smile, Greet, and Say Hello (3S). These ethics and manners are implemented by the internship participants. It is the obligation of every employee to greet guests or customers when inspecting the work area in a high-pitched voice. These customers display a sense of satisfaction because they appear energetic, enthusiastic, and enthusiastic about their work. This attitude is positive because it fosters stronger relationships between the company and customers, which in turn gradually increases customer satisfaction. The supervisors at the company also experienced this observation of ethics and manners directly and were highly appreciated. Thus, the implementation of internship plays an important role in instilling and testing the application of character values in a professional environment (Rupa et al., 2024) so that this good attitude becomes input for educational units in preparing internship participants in the following year.



Documentation Photo: Interview at PT NI (left) and PT CLPMI (right) during the internship visitation

## CONCLUSION

While the overall perception of industry soft skills among vocational high school (SMK) internship participants is positive, there are still areas that need improvement. Businesses and industry fundamentally expect graduates who are not only skilled at work but also capable of adapting, communicating effectively, and demonstrating responsibility. Therefore, the success of partnerships between schools and industry is determined by the extent to which both can synergize in instilling a work culture in vocational high school students participating in industrial internships (prakerin). To address these aspects that need improvement and the demands of the workplace, educational institutions need to provide adequate knowledge of work culture to internship participants before they depart and are placed in the workforce.

Despite the research findings, a limitation of this study lies in the number of company informants interviewed. Interviewing more informants from companies would have provided more data and information and provided a more comprehensive picture of the business world's perceptions of these industrial internship participants.

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