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THE CONTRIBUTION OF DIGITAL LITERACY AND FIELD WORK PRACTICE TO THE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT
This inquiry seeks to determine the influence of digital literacy and fieldwork engagement on the employability competencies of SMK students. The study is situated within the broader discourse on enhancing adaptive graduate skills essential for navigating the complexities of contemporary labor markets under Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0. Utilizing a quantitative explanatory design, the investigation draws upon a population of 120 Grade XII students from three state-run vocational schools in East Java participating in Field Work Practice (PKL) programs. Data collection was conducted using a Likert-scale instrument, and subsequent analysis employed multiple linear regression facilitated by SPSS. The analysis demonstrates a statistically significant positive influence of digital literacy on employability skills ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). An analogous positive and significant effect is observed for fieldwork practice ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). Simultaneously, these two variables contributed 51.4% to the variation in SMK students' employability skills. These findings confirm that strengthening digital literacy and optimizing the implementation of internships are effective strategies for improving the job readiness and competitiveness of vocational school graduates in the digital era.

INTRODUCTIONS

Vocational education constitutes a strategic mechanism for cultivating skilled human resources capable of responding effectively to workplace complexities arising in the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0. Vocational High Schools (SMK) are required to produce graduates not only with technical skills but also with work skills that align with the needs of modern industry (Supriyanto et al., 2023). However, various studies indicate that the employability skills of vocational high school graduates are still suboptimal, resulting in low absorption of graduates into the workforce (Nawangsari, 2022). This situation indicates a gap between the competencies taught in schools and the expectations of the business and industrial world (DUDI) (Sarmila et al., 2025). Therefore, empirical research is needed to examine the important factors contributing to improving the employability skills of vocational high school students so that graduates are highly competitive in the labor market.

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One of the essential competencies that vocational high school students need to master in the digital era is digital literacy (Fatimah et al., 2022). Digital literacy signifies the competence to utilize technological tools for accessing, appraising, producing, and disseminating information responsibly and proficiently (Hidayat et al., 2024; Rusmayana & Arief, 2022). These skills not only support the effectiveness of technology-based learning but also enhance students' capacity to work adaptively in digital-based industrial environments (Abdurohim et al., 2020). Research by Naldo, Supriadi, Musril, & Derta (2022) also shows that mastery of digital literacy is positively related to critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are key components of employability skills. Thus, digital literacy plays a crucial foundation in shaping the work readiness and competitiveness of vocational high school graduates.

In addition to digital literacy, another crucial factor in developing employability skills is Field Work Experience (PKL). PKL activities provide students with opportunities to apply theories learned in school to real-world situations in the industrial world (Asmarayani & Rahmayanti, 2020). Through internships, students gain hands-on experience that can develop technical skills, responsibility, and a professional work ethic (Musdalipa et al., 2023). Husein, Koesmawan, & Ahmad (2022) also emphasized that implementing the Work Integrated Learning model in internships can improve students' adaptability and collaboration within the industrial work culture. Therefore, the effectiveness of internship implementation is a key factor in improving the employability skills of vocational high school students.

Although various vocational education policies have sought to improve the quality of learning and partnerships with industry, results still show significant variation between schools. Scholarly investigation into the combined impact of technological proficiency and practical work experience on the career readiness of vocational high school students remains limited (Shintawati & Anriani, 2022). Several previous studies have focused on technical or soft skills separately without considering the integration between digital learning and real-world work experience (Nasichah et al., 2024). In the context of 21st-century education, digital literacy and internships complement each other in shaping superior graduate profiles relevant to the needs of modern industry (Dewi et al., 2023). Therefore, this research is highly urgent in providing empirical evidence regarding the influence of both on improving the employability skills of vocational high school students in the era of digital transformation.

Based on the foregoing description, this investigation seeks to assess the impact of digital proficiency and work placements on the job-related competencies of secondary-level vocational learners. The research anticipates yielding concrete data concerning the value of these two elements in enhancing graduates' preparedness for the workforce. The results can also serve as a basis for developing vocational curricula integrated with industry needs and digital transformation. Practically, these findings are beneficial for teachers, vocational high school administrators, and industry partners in designing learning programs based on digital competencies and work experience. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening the link-and-match strategy between vocational high schools and the industrial and industrial sectors (DUDI) towards adaptive and sustainable vocational education.

Vocational education plays a crucial role in preparing competent human resources ready to face the challenges of the workplace in the Industry 4.0 era and Society 5.0. Vocational high school graduates are expected to possess not only technical skills but also work skills relevant to the needs of modern industry. However, the reality on the ground shows that the employability skills of vocational high school students are still suboptimal, resulting in low employment rates for graduates. One factor believed to influence student job readiness is digital literacy, namely the ability to access, evaluate, and use digital technology productively and ethically. Good digital literacy enables students to adapt to technology-based work environments and contribute innovatively to the industrial world.

In addition to digital literacy, another important factor influencing student employability skills is Field Work Experience (PKL). Through PKL activities, students have the opportunity to apply theory to real-world situations and develop work ethic, responsibility, and communication skills in a professional environment. Engagement in authentic professional environments provides students with a platform to refine 21st-century skill sets, notably collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving. Yet, empirical examinations integrating digital literacy and fieldwork practice as simultaneous determinants of vocational students' employability skills remain limited. Consequently, this study seeks

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to elucidate the degree to which these variables foster enhanced employability, thereby reinforcing the interconnection between educational systems and industrial sectors.

METHODS

The study applied a quantitative explanatory design to analyze the causal relationships between digital literacy, fieldwork practice, and employability skills. This method was chosen for its ability to measure variable effects objectively using statistical analysis. Research sites included various public and private vocational schools with technical and non-technical programs. The population comprised 12th-grade students with Fieldwork Practice experience, selected through proportionate stratified random sampling.

Data were collected through a questionnaire structured on a five-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," based on relevant theoretical indicators. Construct validity was evaluated using CFA, and reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha with a minimum acceptable level of 0.70. Prior to widespread implementation, the instrument was piloted on a number of respondents to assess item clarity and measurement stability. The collected data was then processed and analyzed using statistical software (SPSS or SmartPLS).

The data analysis in this study was conducted in two stages: descriptive and inferential. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the level of digital literacy, implementation of fieldwork practices, and student employability skills based on the average score for each indicator. Meanwhile, inferential analysis used multiple linear regression to determine partial and simultaneous effects between variables. Prior to executing the regression procedure, a series of classical assumption diagnostics including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests were undertaken to verify model robustness. The analysis employed the coefficient of determination (R^2), alongside t- and F-statistics, to quantify the magnitude and significance of inter-variable effects.

This study consisted of two independent variables: digital literacy (X_1) and fieldwork practices (X_2), and one dependent variable: employability skills (Y). Each variable was measured using a number of indicators developed based on theory and previous research. The digital literacy variable refers to the digital competence model developed by the European Commission (Vuorikari et al., 2022), while the fieldwork practice variable refers to (Kolb, 2014) experiential learning concept. The employability skills variable is adapted from the 21st Century Skills and Employability Skills Framework (OECD, 2020). Indicators for each variable are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Research Variable Indicators

Variable	Sub-Variable / Dimension	Key Indicators	Sources of Theory
Digital Literacy (X_1)	Access to Digital Information	The ability to search and find relevant information online	(Vuorikari et al., 2022)
	Information Evaluation	Assessing the accuracy, credibility, and reliability of digital sources	
	Digital Communication	Communicate and collaborate through digital media ethically	
	Digital Content Creation	Produce, modify, and share digital content responsibly	
	Digital Security	Maintaining privacy, data security, and ethics in the use of technology	
Field Work Practice (X_2)	Work experience	Suitability of PKL activities with the field of expertise	Kolb, 1984
	Industrial Guidance	Intensity and quality of guidance from industry	
	Relevance of Material	The relationship between school theory and field work practice	

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	Discipline and Responsibility	Discipline, attendance, and responsibility during PKL	
	Reflection of Experience	Ability to draw lessons and self-evaluate from work experiences	
	Communication	Ability to convey ideas effectively in a work context	OECD, 2020
	Teamwork	Ability to collaborate and adapt in a work team	
Employability Skill (Y)	Solution to problem	Ability to identify and solve work problems	
	Discipline and Work Ethic	Consistency, responsibility, and commitment to tasks	
	Initiative and Independence	Ability to make decisions and work independently	

The analytical procedure comprised two stages: descriptive analysis to characterize the distribution of digital literacy, fieldwork practice, and employability skills using mean and standard deviation metrics, followed by inferential analysis through multiple linear regression to evaluate causal relationships. Classical assumption diagnostics, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity, were applied in advance to ensure model robustness. Partial and joint effects were assessed using t- and F-tests, respectively, while R^2 quantified the explanatory capacity of the independent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Research Data Description

This section presents an overview of the research results regarding the digital literacy levels, fieldwork practices (PKL), and employability skills of vocational high school students. Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the average score, minimum–maximum values, and standard deviation for each variable. Data were obtained from 120 12th-grade student respondents from three vocational high schools in East Java who had participated in PKL activities. The analysis results indicate a tendency towards high levels of proficiency across the three research variables, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Digital Literacy (X_1)	120	3.2	4.8	4.12	0.37	High
Field Work Practice (X_2)	120	3.1	4.75	4.05	0.42	High
Employability Skill (Y)	120	3.4	4.95	4.18	0.36	Very High

Based on Table 1, the highest average score was obtained for the employability skill variable, at 4.18, which is categorized as very high. While the digital literacy and fieldwork experience variables were both categorized as high. These findings indicate that vocational high school students generally possess strong digital skills, relevant fieldwork experience, and adequate job skills to enter the workforce.

Classical Assumption Test

Prior to the application of multiple linear regression analysis, verification of the fundamental statistical assumptions is essential. This involves assessing the data for normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. These diagnostic evaluations are implemented to ascertain the integrity of the resultant regression model, ensuring it is free from systematic bias and appropriate for inferential statistical procedures. Table 3 displays the outcome of the normality assessment, specifically utilizing the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

Sosioedukasi
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Table 3. Results of the Normality Test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test)

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Sig. (p-value)	Information
Digital Literacy (X_1)	0.068	0.143	Normal
Field Work Practice (X_2)	0.073	0.118	Normal
Employability Skill (Y)	0.062	0.157	Normal

Since all variables exhibited significance values exceeding 0.05, normality of data distribution was inferred. Subsequently, a multicollinearity assessment was conducted to verify the absence of notable interrelationships among the predictor variables. The corresponding outcomes are documented in Table 4.

Table 4. Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Information
Digital Literacy (X_1)	0.721	1.387	There is no multicollinearity
Field Work Practice (X_2)	0.721	1.387	There is no multicollinearity

A tolerance value > 0.10 and a VIF < 10 indicate no signs of multicollinearity between the independent variables. Finally, a heteroscedasticity test was performed to examine the equality of residual variances between observations. The results are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Heteroscedasticity Test (Glejser Test) Results

Variable	t count	Sig. (p-value)	Information
Digital Literacy (X_1)	0.842	0.402	There is no multicollinearity
Field Work Practice (X_2)	1.012	0.314	There is no multicollinearity

Given that the obtained significance level exceeds 0.05, the null hypothesis of heteroscedasticity is not rejected. Consequently, the standard regression assumptions are deemed satisfied, rendering the data appropriate for subsequent application of multiple linear regression techniques.

Multiple Linear Regression Test

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to ascertain the impact of digital proficiency (X_1) and practical experience (X_2) on students' career readiness (Y). The outcomes of this analysis are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	t count	Sig. (p-value)	Information
(Constant)	12.432	1.215	10.227	0	-
Digital Literacy (X_1)	0.421	0.086	4.892	0	Significant (+)
Field Work Practice (X_2)	0.368	0.089	4.157	0.001	Significant (+)

The regression equation obtained is:

$$\mathbf{Y = 12.432 + 0.421X_1 + 0.368X_2}$$

Empirical evidence reveals that employability skills rise by 0.421 points for each additional unit of digital literacy and by 0.368 points for each additional unit of internship experience. The overall influence of both predictors was examined through the F-test, detailed in Table 7.

Table 7. F-Test Results (Simultaneous)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F count	Sig. (p-value)	Information
Regression	41.278	2	20.639	56.241	0	Simultaneous Significance
Residual	39.065	117	0.334			

Sosioedukasi
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Volume 14 No. 4. Desember 2025 https://ejournal.unibabwi.ac.id/index.php/sosioedukasi/index

Total	80.343	119

With a significance value of 0.000 < 0.05, the combined influence of digital literacy and fieldwork practice on employability skills is statistically significant. Their explanatory contribution is detailed in the coefficient of determination in Table 8.

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.717	0.514	0.505	0.578

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.514$) reveals that 51.4% of employability skill variation is explained by the model, with the remaining 48.6% shaped by external influences. Regression results also verify that digital literacy significantly and positively contributes to students' employability, particularly in terms of adaptability, communication, and critical thinking in digital work environments. Furthermore, fieldwork experience also has a significant positive effect on employability skills, as through direct experience in the industrial world, students can develop a work ethic, discipline, and professional responsibility.

Simultaneously, these two variables contribute strongly to vocational high school students' work readiness, as evidenced by the R^2 value of 0.514. This finding reinforces the theory of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984) and the Digital Competence Framework (Vuorikari et al., 2022), which emphasize the importance of integrating digital technology mastery with real-world work experience. Thus, learning strategies that integrate digital literacy and industrial practices need to be optimized in vocational curricula to improve the quality and competitiveness of vocational school graduates in the era of digital transformation.

Discussion

The Effect of Digital Literacy on Vocational High School Students' Employability Skills

The analysis demonstrates that digital literacy contributes positively and significantly to students' employability skills, indicated by a t-value of 4.892 and a significance level of 0.000 < 0.05. This underscores that enhanced digital proficiency leads to better employability outcomes. In the context of vocational education, digital literacy encompasses students' ability to search for, evaluate, and utilize technology-based information to support learning activities and work practices. This competency aligns with the demands of Industry 4.0, which requires a workforce skilled in using digital devices, internet-based applications, and industrial information systems (Rusmayana & Arief, 2022; Sudjimat et al., 2021; Syafarina & Rusdina, 2020; Warjiyono & Rais, 2023). Strong digital literacy helps students adapt to the modern, automated, collaborative, and data-driven work environment.

These findings support the concept of the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (Vuorikari et al., 2022), which states that digital literacy is a crucial foundation for developing 21st-century skills such as communication, creativity, and problem-solving. Previous research (Endeli et al., 2025; Tee et al., 2024) also confirmed that digital literacy contributes significantly to vocational high school students' work readiness by enabling them to think critically and innovate in completing technology-based tasks. This finding is reinforced by the results of studies by Asmarayani et al. (2020) and Naldo et al. (2022), which show that mastery of digital technology is directly proportional to the effectiveness of practical learning in vocational high schools. Thus, mastery of digital literacy not only increases student productivity but also fosters employability skills relevant to current industry needs, particularly in engineering, business, and service fields (Ariyanto et al., 2023; Fitrah et al., 2022).

Furthermore, digital literacy serves as a strengthening factor in mastering soft skills required by the workforce. Husein et al. (2022) emphasized that integrating digital learning into the Work Integrated Learning model can enhance student creativity and collaboration. Ilmi et al. (2023) also found that a digital monitoring system for internships fosters students' responsibility, discipline, and managerial skills. Studies by Pitriyana et al. (2023) and Ro'if et al. (2024) demonstrated that the use of information technology in vocational schools enhances work process efficiency and broadens students' digital horizons. Therefore, digital literacy is not merely an additional competency but an essential

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component in shaping the professional character of vocational school graduates who are ready to compete in the global job market (Dewi et al., 2023; Rahayu, 2021).

The Effect of Internships on Vocational High School Students' Employability Skills

The findings of the partial regression test show that internships (PKL) significantly and positively contribute to employability skills, supported by a t-value of 4.157 and a p-value of 0.001 < 0.05. This demonstrates that real-world work exposure is integral to developing vocational students' preparedness for professional environments. This process helps students develop technical skills, work discipline, and professional ethics that cannot be fully acquired through classroom learning (Deddy et al., 2023; Imran & Martina, 2023; Neliwati et al., 2023; Supriyanto et al., 2023). Furthermore, guidance from industry mentors strengthens students' understanding of work standards and business expectations.

These results are consistent with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning theory, which posits that optimal learning transpires via active involvement (tangible experience), contemplation, the formation of abstract ideas, and practical implementation. Research by Asmarayani et al. (2020) and Sarmila & Saril (2025) demonstrates that fieldwork experience has a significant impact on students' work readiness because it provides opportunities for reflective and contextual learning. Dewi et al. (2023) and Nasichah et al. (2024) also found that the success of fieldwork experiences is determined by coordination between schools and industry partners in providing authentic learning experiences. Similarly, Musdalipa et al. (2023) emphasized that effective supervision and guidance of fieldwork experiences can improve student discipline and work motivation. Therefore, the planned and structured implementation of fieldwork experiences is a strategic tool for strengthening the employability skills of vocational high school students (Nawangsari, 2022; Purba et al., 2023).

Furthermore, several studies highlight the importance of digitizing internship management to improve the efficiency and transparency of industrial activities. Febriani et al. (2022) and Naldo et al. (2022) state that a web-based information system for internship monitoring facilitates the evaluation of student learning outcomes by teachers and industry. Prabandanizwaransa et al. (2023) and Pitriyana et al. (2024) add that digital innovation in internship implementation can improve connectivity between schools and industry partners. Further, Rahayu (2021) suggests that students' psychological readiness for internship can be enhanced through interactive digital guidance before entering the field. Overall, these findings suggest that internship implementation that integrates technical, social, and digital aspects will be more effective in developing competitive and work-ready students (Adi et al., 2017; Husein et al., 2022; Jaya et al., 2023; Sindy, 2022).

The Simultaneous Effect of Digital Literacy and Fieldwork Practice on Vocational High School Students' Employability Skills

Findings from the simultaneous F-test indicate that digital literacy and fieldwork practice significantly affect employability skills when considered together ($F = 56.241$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The R^2 value of 0.514 reflects that these variables collectively explain 51.4% of the total variance. This finding indicates a synergistic relationship between digital technology mastery and real-world work experience in shaping students' job readiness. The combination of the two creates a graduate profile that is not only technically skilled but also adaptable to digital transformation in the industrial world (Abdurohim et al., 2020; Ariyanto et al., 2023; Sudjimat et al., 2021; Warjiyono & Rais, 2023).

Theoretically, these results reinforce the 21st Century Skills framework, which positions technology and work experience as two key pillars of global work readiness (OECD, 2020). Studies by Husein et al. (2022) and Neliwati et al. (2023) show that integrating digital learning with industrial activities significantly improves vocational high school students' work competencies. Similarly, research by Supriyanto et al. (2023) and Musdalipa et al. (2023) confirms that digital-based internship management strengthens collaboration between schools and industry. Consistent with this, (Fitrah et al., 2022) and Naldo et al. (2022) suggest implementing a digital student profile system to map potential and

Sosioedukasi
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training needs relevant to their areas of expertise. This demonstrates that a digital-based approach to internships can strengthen program effectiveness and increase the relevance of student competencies to the needs of modern industry.

Furthermore, the integration of digital literacy and internships can create a more innovative and responsive vocational learning model to technological change. Rusmayana & Arief (2022) emphasized the importance of technology-based learning in strengthening collaboration and communication between students, teachers, and industry mentors. Meanwhile, Ro'if et al. (2024) and Pitriyana et al. (2024) found that digitizing a web-based internship system can accelerate the assessment and reporting process for student work. Similar findings were expressed by Neliwati et al. (2023) and Sarmila & Saril (2025), who stated that the combination of digital skills and industry experience has a direct impact on improving student professionalism. Therefore, schools need to strengthen the synergy between digital-based learning and partnerships with industry so that graduates have employability skills that align with the needs of the modern workforce and are globally competitive (Nawangsari, 2023; Deddy et al., 2023; Husein et al., 2022; Sarmila & Saril, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that digital literacy and fieldwork practice have a significant influence on the employability skills of Vocational High School (SMK) students. Partially, digital literacy has been proven to have a positive contribution to students' ability to adapt to a modern, technology-based work environment. Students with high levels of digital literacy tend to be more skilled in critical thinking, communication, and using digital devices to support performance and task completion. In addition, fieldwork practice also has a positive influence on increasing employability skills, because through real work experience in the industrial world, students can develop discipline, responsibility, work ethic, and professional communication skills. These findings prove that PKL activities are an effective form of contextual learning in shaping students' work readiness. Simultaneously, these two variables explain approximately 51.4% of the variation in employability skills, which means that the combination of digital literacy and fieldwork experience plays an important role in preparing SMK graduates to be more competent, adaptive, and competitive in the era of industry 4.0 and society 5.0.

Based on the research findings, schools are advised to continue integrating digital literacy into the learning process through project-based activities and contextual use of digital technology. Vocational learning should not only emphasize technical aspects but also foster 21st-century skills that include creativity, collaboration, communication, and technology-based problem-solving. Teachers and internship supervisors need to improve digital competencies and strengthen mentoring approaches so that students can utilize work experience as a means of self-development and professionalism. The business and industrial world are expected to expand strategic partnerships with vocational schools (SMK) in digital-based link-and-match programs, for example through short training, industrial simulations, or technology-oriented integrated internships. For future researchers, it is recommended to add other variables such as learning motivation, self-efficacy, or school environmental support as mediating factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of vocational school students' employability skills in the era of digital transformation.

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