

Prospective Workers' Self Responsibility and Confidence:

A post-industrial work practice reflective study

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Abstract—Self-responsibility and confidence have been believed as two of many soft skills significant for workforce success and human capital development. Considered as important qualities of professionals, demands for these intangible personal attributes have increased significantly around the world and, thus, quality sustainable development and improvement for such qualities through various educations and trainings are necessary. This article put forwards 114 Indonesian vocational high school students' mental impression of how industrial work practice had developed their self-responsibilities and confidence to compete for a job, to retain it and grow with it both personally and professionally. Employing descriptive statistics as a tool for data analysis and presentation, this study concluded that well-designed industrial work practice was indeed a necessity for preparing vocational high school students' self-responsible and confident qualities, to survive at their future workplaces.

Keywords—soft skill; workforce; workplaces; industrial work practice; vocational high school; self responsibility; confidence

I. INTRODUCTION

Rapid global information and industrial technologies innovation have led us to industrial revolution 4.0 era where multiple technologies are set together for the creation of more effective and efficient work completion. Aside from the conveniences this era may provide, this revolution has brought many challenges for the workforce around the world. Workers in this era are required to be technically and socially more skillful and emotionally more intelligence. They should have both high quality of hard and soft skills to get and to retain a position in a job. Success in the labor market depends on these two kinds of skills [1].

Nevertheless, although hard and soft skills always go side by side as compulsory skills for every worker, demands for job candidates who possess quality soft skills have increased significantly within the past several decades [2]. As personal traits, soft skills are considered central for human capital development and workforce success [3]. Among other outcomes, these personal qualities have been empirically proven to rival hard skills in their ability to foresee employment and earnings [4]. Many studies have shown strong

positive associations between these non-cognitive skills and economic success and wellbeing [5], that they causally produce success in life [6], they determine the workers' behavior in the workplace environment [7], and that although it is undeniable that certain hard skills are necessary for any position, employers increasingly look for job applicants with particular soft skills [8].

However, many employers around the world reported the shortage of workers with particular soft skills needed to feel available positions [9] and the trainability of these skills has been identified as one of the reasons for this scarcity. Unlike hard skills that can be learned through instructions in the classroom, through books, through actual or virtual materials and trainings, or on the job, soft skills are more difficult to teach [8] training new employees to use a certain computer program is easier than training them to be patience, more confident and be responsible. Soft skills are different with hard skills as they have limited connection with qualification and missing credentials, difficult to be trained for and measured no diploma confirming the level of individual's soft skills [1]. Nonetheless, softskills can be learned [6]. They are passed down through families' education, at schools and through interactions in social environments [10].

Following the world's trends in teaching and learning, in Indonesia, soft skills are taught within the framework of character education in all stages of education. At vocational high schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK*), the emphasis of these character teaching and learning includes instructions and trainings on some soft/behavioral skills that are significant at work places. These soft skills include perseverance, self-discipline, and self-confidence. These skills are considered important for and by Indonesian workforce, especially for service sectors, both the managers and the skilled workers—the professionals [11].

Mainly developed to prepare their graduates to be able to work at a particular field of work, able to adapt with their future work environments, able to see available work opportunities, and develop professionally in their future life (National Education System of the Republic of Indonesia year 2003, Law No. 20, Article No. 15), vocational high schools in Indonesia have been designed to provide young people with the

basic cognitive and behavioral skills and experiences that make them effective in the work place. Instructions and trainings of these skills are not only delivered in the classrooms but also through organized industrial work practice (*Praktek Kerja Industri/PRAKERIN*). Almost similar with interenship, during industrial work practice, vocational high school students are given direct experience on how to deal with different jobs in actual workplace context, learning to solve real problems at work, interacting with different employees and also the authority. Throughout this program, the students are provided with real life experience to explore their particular interests, developing and fostering their skills and competencies to become professionals in a particular field of work. This kind of program benefits the participants future career in terms of, e.g., gaining more knowledge and experience, having the opportunity to learn from failure and get exposed to workforce culture, learning professional behavior and developing personal skills at the same time, learning how to manage time, and enhancing the resume [12].

At the end of industrial work practise program, comprehensive evaluation on the participants work attitudes and performance are usually carried out to determine their achievement as well as the success of the program itself. However, evaluation on what these students feel and think of the programs is quite rare. Considering the significance of industrial work practice program, it is instrumental to evaluate the program from the perspectives of the students. The student's internship perceptions were perceived-values that students apply for. These traits were important elements to reach the ultimate goal of the program—to clarify the future career of the participants [13]. In other words, asking the students as the participants of the industrial work practice program is significant. As a matter of fact, it is undeniable to say that in general such program is perceived successful if the participants of the program consider the program has successfully improved their quality and achievement.

This paper reports on vocational students' perceptions about the impact of industrial work practice on their self-responsibility and confidence. It is part of a bigger study, where six interrelated work attitudes (consisting of self-disciplines, honesty, politeness, self-responsible, tolerance, and self-confidence) together with work performance and learning achievement and their impact on work readiness were analyzed. Self-responsibility and confidence were particularly chosen for the purpose of this paper as these two qualities had been identified through studies as the soft skills required by industry in Indonesia since a decade ago [14]. As a construct, responsibility has been identified as a multidimensional construct with six manifestations such as accountability, commitment, concern for others, dependability, initiative, and receptivity [15]. Workers who have this quality had been identified to have a positive mentality towards work—more involved and determined to assume the work [16]. In the same light, confidence had also been recognized as a fundamental dimension for the transition of the students' role as students to professionals [17]. As a personal attribute, confidence has been acknowledged to correlate with career aspirations and thwart advancement in different types of careers [18]. It influences the process of making judgment, an indicator of metacognitive

monitoring in complex problem solving [19] and add to the variance in outcomes [20].

II. METHOD

In order to find out how industrial work practice influence vocational high school students self-responsibility and confidence, a study was conducted at one of state vocational high schools in West Java province of Indonesia. A set of close-ended questionnaires was administered to 144 randomly sampled students who had finished taking the industrial work practice organized by their school.

The ability to carry out individual work activities well, to take the risk for any mistakes, and to take personal responsibility on every decision and action were the focus of inquiry on self-responsibility. Meanwhile, on self-confidence, the emphasis was on the ability to be optimistic in doing every work task, to make fast and precise decision making, to confidently do what are required to do at the workplace, and to step up and share opinions and ideas about the issues of concern.

The collected data were analyzed by employing descriptive statistics analyses i.e. frequency and percentages, and were inferred and presented accordingly.

III. RESULTS

A. *Self-Responsibility*

1) *The ability to carry out individual work activities well:* Every employee had been assigned since the first day of recruitment to do particular duties. Different with group work activities, these responsibilities were tightly related to their position at a workplace and most of them should be done on individual basis. Considered this ability as important, the majority of the respondents reported that they had been facilitated well during the industrial work practice to develop this particular ability. Result of data analysis on this issue showed that 71 respondents out of 144 (49.3%) agreed with the statement and 69 others (47.9%) strongly agreed with it. Thus, it could be concluded that to the majority of the respondents the industrial work practice had successfully facilitated them to be responsible in doing their individual duties that were given to them at the workplace.

2) *The ability to take the risk for any mistakes:* Risk taking is a significant characteristic that every employee should have. The ability to take risk is significant as risks exist within every decision the employee makes. In the case of making mistakes, every employee should be able to take the risks for any mistake he/she performs—be able to identify the mistake, learn how to overcome it, take any advantage that is left when possible, and make a better move for further improvement and development. On this matter, the majority of the respondents (98.6%) reported that the industrial work practice program had taught them how to take the responsibility for any mistake that they had made. With a precisely similar amount of respondents (71-71, 49.3%-49.3%) confirming their answer as

strongly agreed and agreed, it could be concluded that the program had definitely given positive experience that improve students' ability to take risk for any mistake they performed.

3) *The ability to take personal responsibility on every decision and conduct:* Moving towards a more holistic stance of being responsible, all the respondents in this study reported that the industrial work practice had given them experience that impacted on their ability to take personal responsibility on every decision they made and on every conduct they carried out. Analysis results on the respondents' confession concerning this matter, 85 of them (59%) reported that they strongly agreed and the other 59 respondents (41%) agreed with the statement. Thus, it is safe to say that the respondents had been well assisted during the program in developing the ability to take personal responsibility on every decision and conduct.

B. Self-Confidence

1) *The ability to be optimistic in doing every work task:* Being optimistic in doing daily professional jobs has been acknowledged in many literature to be the energy that boost work performance and work-life balance, increase success, and prevent as well as manage work-stress and depression. Concerning how well the industrial work program had facilitated the respondents to be optimistic in completing every job, the majority of the respondents reported that the program had facilitated them well to develop this particular ability. Results of data analysis showed that there were 76 respondents (52.8%) who said that they strongly agreed with the statement, and the other 63 respondents (43.8%) confirmed it by stating that they agreed with it. Thus, it could be inferred that in general the program had successfully develop the respondents' optimist attitude in performing their daily jobs as interns.

2) *The ability to make fast and precise decision making:* Another manifestation of being confidence at workplace could be seen from the ability to make fast and precise decision making. The ability to make decision making is significant considering that it is made nearly in every minutes, with different degrees of urgency, impact and importance. On this particular ability, 84 respondents (58.3%) reported that the industrial work practice that they participated in had facilitated them with this ability. This positive tone was also confirmed by a group of 45 respondents (31.3%) who chose agree with the statement.

3) *The ability to confidently do what are required to do at the workplace:* Being confident in completing what are required to do at a workplace context has been proven to significantly open up ways to a success career. People around employee with this personal quality, in general, would not only mesmerized by this personality but also put great trust on this particular employee to handle types of projects. Related to this, the majority of the respondents confessed that they were facilitated through the industrial work practice to be confident in doing what were required in the workplace where they were

assigned as the interns. There were 73 respondents (50.7%) of the respondents agreed with this statements and the other 62 respondents (43.1%) strongly agreed with it.

4) *The ability to step up and share opinions and ideas about the issues of concern:* Stepping up and sharing opinions and ideas about issues of concern at a workplace is another indicator of how confident an employee is. As a personal trait, this quality is especially significant to be possessed by every employee as it could make knowledge sharing among the employees within and across management levels of a workplace possible, facilitating and stimulating the employees to grow and achieve success together. On this item, the majority of the respondents reported that, according to their assessment, the industrial work practice they had participated had facilitated them to develop the ability to step up and share opinions and ideas about the issue of concern in front of other employees at workplace context. There were 80 respondents (55.6%) chose to agree with the statement concerning this issue and 44 others (30.6%) strongly agreed with it.

IV. DISCUSSION

On the bases of the results of data analyses presented above, it is safe to say that in the assessment of the majority of the vocational high school students involved in the study, the industrial work practice had facilitated them with knowledge and experience that develop their self-responsibility and confidence. This internship-like program had given the students direct exposure on how to work with responsibility and confidence. Nevertheless, the voice of the minority of the overall group was also necessary to take into consideration. As has been put forward earlier, vocational high schools in Indonesia were deliberately developed to prepare all the students to ready to work after graduation. Thus, all requirements concerning hard and soft skills should be prepared and covered well during their study.

Related to self-responsibility, four respondents (2.8%) reported that the program had not facilitated them to develop their ability to carry out individual work activities and two others (1.4%) reported that the program had not facilitated them well in terms of having the ability to take the risk for any mistake they performed at the workplace. Meanwhile, on self-confidence, the number of respondents who stated less than agree with each of the items of statement provided in the questionnaires were more obvious than on self-responsibility. This showed empirically that in compare with self-responsible quality, more number of students in the study felt that the industrial work program they participated in had not successfully boosted up their confidence to work in real workplace. There were five respondents (3.47%) who reported that the program had not successfully develop their ability to be optimistic to complete their daily work task, 15 respondents (10.4%) reported they still could not make fast and precise decision during internship, nine respondents (6.25%) also reported that they felt they still less confident to do what were required to do at the workplace, and the other 20 respondents (13.9%) reported that after taking the program, they still did

not have the confidence to step up and share opinions and ideas about the issues of concern.

Therefore, on the bases of the results of data analyses, this study suggests that the students of vocational high schools should be provided with an experience to take industrial work practice in a variety of workplaces. Different business core and rank of the companies as well as different kinds of job to handle by students would give various direct experience that could enrich students' knowledge and ability to do real-jobs in real workplace with real demands. Students' self-reflective reports on how well the program had facilitated them in terms of knowledge gain and ability improvement should also be carried out to justify the success of the program itself and to further develop the quality of the program. Balance assessments from the sides of the schools, the companies and the students would lead to the development of a well-designed industrial work practice program.

V. CONCLUSION

Industrial work practice had been proven to facilitate vocational high school students' soft skills development, especially on self-responsibility and confidence. A well-designed program that in accordance with current workforce demands is necessary to be completed with voices from the students as the stakeholders in school system. All the stakeholders' point of views should be taken into consideration in developing sustainable industrial work practice program that educate and train the students to be quality prospective workers who can win global workforce competition, to get a job and to develop personally and professionally with their professions.

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