

## Work readiness among vocational high school students: Learning agility and perceived social support

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### ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, the highest percentage of the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) comes from graduates of Vocational High Schools (SMK), reaching 9.01%. One of the main causes is the lack of work readiness. To address this issue, exploring factors that can contribute to improving students' readiness to enter the workforce is crucial. Therefore, this study investigated the role of learning agility and perceived social support in work readiness among Vocational High School students. The participants were 93 grade XI students majoring in office management of vocational high school in Surakarta selected using simple random sampling technique. The scales used were the Work Readiness Scale ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ), the Learning Agility Scale ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ). Data were analysed using the Multiple Regression Model. The results showed that learning agility can partially predict students' work readiness, but perceived social support does not significantly predict students' work readiness. Meanwhile, combined, learning agility and perceived social support contribute 33.7% to work readiness. These findings suggest a need for schools to design learning programs that not only focus on technical skills but also train students to become resilient, flexible, and adaptive learners.

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### Introduction

Vocational High School (SMK) in its capacity as one of the components of the National Education System has a priority in developing students' abilities. These abilities, such as being able to work in certain fields through the provision of relevant provisions and specific skills ([Andrianus, 2020](#)), make SMK the right institutions to prepare individuals who are ready to enter the world of work. This is because the learning process in SMK involves increasing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies that are useful for students to maintain competitiveness among the many individuals seeking employment. However, graduates from SMKs are not fully able to keep up with the demands of the world of work ([Santika et al., 2023](#)).

Data obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) shows that the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) for SMK graduates has consistently been the highest in Indonesia compared to other education levels in the last three years. Although there is a

downward trend in the TPT for SMK graduates from 9.42% in August 2022 to 9.01% in August 2024, and the latest data as of February 2025 is recorded at 8%, SMK graduates still account for the highest unemployment rate. In fact, the SMK education system is supposed to prepare students through the provision of skills and experience related to the field of work that is expected to be entered directly after graduation ([Istiqamah & Jalal, 2020](#); [Tentama et al., 2024](#)).

Having a job should provide social status, allow individuals to socialize, and create a sense of purpose and meaning in life ([Jabbar & Fatima, 2024](#)). These components will play an important role in psychological growth, as well as the improvement of an individual's psychological well-being ([Jabbar & Fatima, 2024](#)). Therefore, the high unemployment rate needs to be an important concern because it endangers the mental health of individuals, which includes depression, anxiety, mood disorders, suicidal behavior, and various other psychological disorders ([Jabbar & Fatima, 2024](#); [Virgolino et al., 2022](#)). In addition, the impact of unemployment is not only felt by the individual concerned, but also affects the economic stability and welfare of society as a whole ([Mitra & Attiq, 2024](#)). Various factors can cause the high unemployment rate among SMK graduates, one of which is the lack of work readiness in students ([Ridwan & Dwiyantri, 2024](#); [Sudarsono, 2022](#)).

Employability is a key issue affecting graduate unemployment in developing or developed countries, as employability leads to graduates' abilities and skills that are continuously trained before entering the industrial world ([Boat et al., 2021](#); [Indrawati et al., 2023](#); [Priksat et al., 2020](#)). Work readiness impacts the growth of students' career identity ([Doederlein, 2024](#)), increases their confidence in decision making ([Makki et al., 2023](#)), and serves as a predictor of performance in the workplace ([Aryani & Widodo, 2020](#); [Gyanwali et al., 2023](#); [Jiang et al., 2024](#); [Rodzalan & Jasman, 2022](#)).

Work readiness is defined as the extent to which individuals are perceived to have attitudes or attributes that make them ready for success in the work environment ([Caballero & Walker, 2010](#)). Students are considered to have work readiness if they have abilities that include attitudes, knowledge, and skills in their fields ([Fitriany et al., 2023](#)). Work readiness is needed because it is used to predict individual potential regarding future performance and careers ([Caballero & Walker, 2010](#)). In addition, work readiness is also important for individuals to enter the work environment. This is because industries or organizations need individuals who are competent and have the ability to follow the culture and rhythm of organizational work ([Qomariyah et al., 2022](#)).

Work readiness can be influenced by internal and external factors ([Peersia et al., 2024](#)). Several variables can affect students' work readiness, including quality knowledge, interpersonal communication skills, and the ability to process one's personality and make the right decisions ([Indrawati et al., 2023](#)). In addition, research has also found that work practice or internship experience ([Azky & Mulyana, 2024](#); [Ihsan, 2018](#); [Istiqamah & Jalal, 2020](#)), information individuals have about the field of work ([Ihsan, 2018](#)), learning agility ([Qomariyah et al., 2022](#)), self-potential ([Ihsan, 2018](#); [Istiqamah & Jalal, 2020](#)), talents and interests ([Ihsan, 2018](#)), and perceived social support ([Ma et al., 2024](#)) are able to influence individual work readiness.

Work readiness is a key outcome of successful career development. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is the dominant theoretical framework for guiding career interventions and helping students navigate the career exploration stage. In its theory, SCCT aims to explain how professional and academic interests are formed, how career choices are implemented, and how career performance outcomes are obtained ([Zola et al., 2022](#)). In this study, the authors use the SCCT theoretical framework to explain what determinants are able

to influence the work readiness of vocational students. In the SCCT concept, internal factors and external factors can influence how students have work readiness.

How students have the readiness to respond to, and apply the understanding and knowledge they have ([Indirasari & Mulyana, 2024](#)) can be shaped by their willingness and ability to learn from experience and then apply that learning to perform successfully in new situations and conditions ([Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000](#)). This willingness is often referred to as learning agility. Previous studies conducted by Qomariyah et al. ([2022](#)) showed that learning agility training is effective in improving work readiness in individuals who have graduated from vocational high schools (SMK) and undergraduate. Furthermore, Qomariyah et al. ([2022](#)) explained that learning agility is an ability that can predict individual potential, such as how they can adjust quickly, communicate, and make difficult decisions. People who have learning agility not only have competencies related to thinking skills, but also more broadly related to the ability to think, adapt, and act in unstable situations that are useful in work readiness. The existence of learning agility will also make individuals have a high sense of curiosity and have a good tolerance for ambiguity, and good vision and innovation ([Gravett & Caldwell, 2018](#)).

In addition to internal factors such as learning agility, external factors such as social support are also factors that influence individual work readiness ([Azky & Mulyana, 2024](#); [Tentama & Riskiyana, 2020](#)). Social support refers to an individual's belief about the existence of support from family, friends, and other people who are important in their life ([Wu et al., 2022](#)). Social support generally includes two components, namely perceived social support and received social support. Perceived social support reflects the availability and adequacy of social relationships that individuals perceive and refers to perceptions and appraisals of support that come from family, friends, and significant others ([Wu et al., 2022](#)). The focus of this study is on perceived social support because the perceived availability of social support is more important than the actual support individuals receive ([Setiasih & Jayanti, 2018](#)). This is because if support information is not considered or perceived as a source of support, then the information will not be used by individuals. Previous research has found that perceived social support has a positive effect on career adaptability ([Fachri et al., 2022](#); [Rençber & Paşaoğlu Baş, 2023](#)), where career adaptability can later have a significant effect on job readiness ([Lakshmi & Elmartha, 2022](#)). A direct correlation between social support to students' work readiness was also identified ([Tentama & Riskiyana, 2020](#)). In addition, social support in this case functions as a social network that can provide information and services related to individual career development needs and facilitate individuals during the job search process, as well as psychological resources needed in overcoming stress and perceptions of the possibility of individuals not getting a job ([Tentama & Riskiyana, 2020](#)). Furthermore, earlier studies by Ma et al. ([2024](#)) also found a positive and significant correlation between perceived social support and work readiness.

This study aims to examine the role of learning agility and perceived social support on work readiness in vocational students. Previous research has focused more on learning agility interventions in improving students' work readiness ([Qomariyah et al., 2022](#)), but not specifically on vocational high school students, as in this study. In addition, previous research also focused more on social support and self-regulation ([Tentama & Riskiyana, 2020](#)) not on learning agility as one of the abilities that students must have to adapt to changes that occur, especially in the context of work that is currently needed. Investigating learning agility and perceived social support simultaneously will provide a more comprehensive picture of the factors that influence vocational students' work readiness. The hypotheses proposed in this study are (1) there is a role of learning agility on vocational high school students' work readiness, (2) there is a role of perceived social support on vocational

high school students' work readiness, and (3) there is a role of learning agility and perceived social support on vocational high school students' work readiness.

## Method

### Research Design

The research design of this study is a quantitative method with a correlational design.

### Participants

The population of this study was class XI students majoring in office management at one of the vocational high schools in Surakarta, totaling 105 students. The research sample was selected using a simple random sampling technique, which ensures that each member of the population has the same opportunity to be selected. Data were collected from a sample of 93 students. All participants were given a consent form to express their willingness to participate in this study. The majority of participants in this study were female, with ages varying between 15 and 17 years. The distribution of participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*The Distribution of Study Participants*

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	5	5.38%
Female	88	94.62%
Age		
15 years old	2	2.15%
16 years old	62	66.67%
17 years old	29	31.18%

Note. N=93.

### Instruments

Work readiness was measured using the Work Readiness Scale developed by Nasution (2021), which originally consisted of 35 items; however, after the tryout process conducted to ensure reliability and validity, 5 items turned out to be invalid. The instrument is finally 30 items and is based on Brady (2010) work readiness theory consisting of 6 aspects, which include responsibility (e.g., *"I complete the task according to the time specified"*), flexibility (e.g., *"I can adjust to schedule changes that occur at any time"*), skills (e.g., *"I have skills that will be needed in the world of workforce"*), communication (e.g., *"I do not hesitate to ask others for help when experiencing difficulties"*), self-view (e.g., *"I can be relied upon to do a task well"*), and health & safety (e.g., *"I feel that I am in good enough health to work"*). The level of students' work readiness is considered high when the total score obtained is high, and vice versa. The Work Readiness Scale for the current study has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.95 and an item discrimination index ranging from 0.37 to 0.81.

Learning agility was assessed using the Learning Agility Scale, originally developed by Gravett and Caldwell (2018) and translated into Indonesian by Wardhani et al. (2022). The instrument comprises 18 items based on 4 dimensions, including people agility (e.g., *"I enjoy working with others to solve problems"*), results agility (e.g., *"I can find ways to get the job done even when not given clear directions"*), mental agility (e.g., *"I am optimistic that I can learn new information"*), and change agility (e.g., *"I try to seek feedback on my skills and abilities"*). The total score reflects the level of students' learning agility. The

Learning Agility Scale for the current study has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.92 and an item discrimination index ranging from 0.36 to 0.73.

Perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), originally developed by Zimet et al. (1988), then translated into Indonesian by Sulistiani et al. (2022). This instrument consists of 12 items, assessing students' perceived social support from 3 dimensions, including family (e.g., "*I got the emotional help and support I needed from my family*"), friends (e.g., "*I can talk about my problems with my friends*"), and significant other (e.g., "*I have a special person who is a real source of comfort for me*"). The MSPSS scale can assess these three sources of social support as a unidimensional construct with an excellent category value (Sulistiani et al., 2022). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support used in the current study has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.92 and an item discrimination index ranging from 0.37 to 0.85.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using multiple regression analysis techniques with the SPSS software. Before conducting hypothesis testing, the assumptions for normality and linearity were tested. The data were found to be normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ), and the results indicated linearity between learning agility and work readiness, as well as between perceived social support and work readiness ( $p < 0.05$ ). The multicollinearity test was assessed through VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) and tolerance value, and no multicollinearity was found (VIF = 1.21; tolerance = 0.83). The heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser test also indicates the absence of heteroscedasticity in the regression model ( $p > 0.05$ ). Lastly, an autocorrelation test is conducted through the Durbin-Watson method, showing the absence of autocorrelation in the data.

### Results

The results of hypothesis testing revealed that learning agility was significantly predicted vocational high school students' work readiness ( $t = 5.49$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), so the first hypothesis is accepted. However, social support perceived by vocational high school students did not predict work readiness ( $t = 1.31$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), so the second hypothesis is rejected. See Table 2. When analysed together, learning agility and perceived social support can predict work readiness among vocational high school students ( $F = 22.88$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), so the third hypothesis is accepted. See Table 2.

**Table 2**

#### Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
Regression	0.58	0.34	0.32	22.88	0.00

Note. The dependent variable is work readiness

The results showed the role of learning agility and perceived social support in predicting work readiness among vocational high school students. Learning agility and perceived social support simultaneously explained 33.7% of the variance in work readiness ( $R^2 = 0.34$ ), while the remaining 66.3% could be attributed to other factors not included in this study. See Table 3.



**Table 3**  
*Partial Test Results*

	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	65.35	5.20		12.57	0.00
Learning Agility	0.35	0.06	0.52	5.49	0.00
Perceived Social Support	0.18	0.14	0.12	1.31	0.19

## Discussion

The research findings show that the first hypothesis is accepted. Learning agility positively predicts vocational students' work readiness. This result means that if there is an increase in student learning agility, then student work readiness also increases. This result is aligned with the research findings by Qomariyah et al. (2022) that work readiness tends to increase in participants who take part in learning agility training. The increase in work readiness occurs because learning agility focuses on increasing curiosity, flexibility, and problem-solving skills that produce new experiences and become a source of learning. The existence of learning agility will make it easier for individuals to be more adaptive to changes that occur, especially those experienced by students during the transition from school to the world of work. Individuals with learning agility are also described as having openness, willingness to learn, and flexibility (Gravett & Caldwell, 2018).

These characteristics are part of the indicators that show work readiness, especially in the aspects of skills and flexibility. However, the analysis also showed that social support perceived by vocational students was not able to significantly predict vocational students' work readiness. Thus, this result contradicts previous research findings from Sari (2017) as well as Indrayana and Kumaidi (2021) as both found that social support and work readiness in vocational high school students are positively and significantly correlated. The absence of a significant correlation between perceived social support and work readiness also indicates that the findings of this study are not in line with the results previously obtained by Ma et al. (2024).

This insignificant result can be caused by several things. First, social support that is present and received by students can certainly be a supporting resource in building confidence to face future career demands. However, perceived social support emphasizes the subjective perceptions of individuals who receive social support, and these perceptions can be influenced by individual differences (Meuleman et al., 2024). Not all individuals perceive that social support is available, and even when it is, there are individual differences in the extent to which they choose to utilize it. This is reflected in the decisions of some individuals who prefer independence in dealing with problems or making decisions, while others prefer to seek support from others (Wilson et al., 2021).

In addition, the social support measurement tool used in this study is still general and has not specifically measured social support in the context of a career. This may have influenced the results of the analysis, as generalized social support may not necessarily be relevant or have a direct impact on aspects of work readiness. A person may feel supported in their social or family life, but this may not necessarily relate to the support needed in planning, preparing, or facing the world of work. Thus, the mismatch between the social support measured and the context of work readiness analyzed could be one of the causes of not finding a significant relationship between the two.

Social support obtained in certain situations can also be interpreted as a burden and add to individual worries, rather than playing a role in increasing work readiness (Mitra & Attiq, 2024). Ultimately, the effectiveness of social support provided to help improve work readiness will be determined by students' subjective perceptions of the support available. In addition, perceived social support does not directly have a significant relationship with work

readiness, but may be able to relate to work readiness when mediated by other factors. Previous research conducted by Mitra and Attiq (2024) found that although there was no significant relationship between social support and work readiness, when the relationship between the two variables was mediated by self-efficacy, there was a positive relationship. Through the availability of emotional and practical resources, social support helps individuals to build self-confidence, which in turn facilitates goal achievement, including improving work readiness (Mitra & Attiq, 2024).

Furthermore, it was found that learning agility and perceived social support significantly predicted job readiness among vocational high school students. Although perceived social support was not able to make a significant contribution separately, its presence in the model still helped explain some of the variation in vocational school students' work readiness, especially when joined with learning agility. The level of work readiness demonstrated by vocational high school students can be significantly predicted based on the level of learning agility and perceived social support. Learning agility and perceived social support explained 33.7% of work readiness. This result contributes to work readiness research in the context of vocational high school students in Indonesia, as no previous research has examined these three variables simultaneously. The significant results indicate that students who have the willingness and ability to learn from experience and apply it to new situations and are supported by the perceived availability of relevant social support, both from friends, family, and significant others, will be more prepared to face the world of work. Learning agility allows individuals to learn quickly and be flexible in changing thoughts and behaviors as needed (Lee & Song, 2022), which can contribute to individual readiness in facing a dynamic work environment. At the same time, students who perceive specific social support related to relevant knowledge and skills will find it easier to do career planning and make preparations to enter the world of work (Tentama & Riskiyana, 2020).

The results of this study provide a number of practical implications that can be used by schools, counseling guidance teachers, and vocational education policy makers. First, learning agility was found to contribute significantly to work readiness, so schools need to start designing learning development programs that not only focus on technical skills but also train students to become resilient, flexible, and adaptive learners. For example, using a curriculum that can integrate experiential learning or case study approaches. Guidance teachers or homeroom teachers can also provide soft skills training that emphasizes aspects such as the ability to learn from failure, openness to feedback, and speed of adapting to new demands.

Secondly, although social support did not show a significant relationship in this study, social support likely needs to be more specifically provided in the context of students' careers. Therefore, schools and families can be empowered to provide more contextual and career-oriented support, such as providing information related to the world of work or emotional support in facing the transition from school to the world of work. Third, the contribution of the two variables, which only amounted to 33.7% makes schools also need to consider other factors in improving students' work readiness. For example, providing an understanding of the job market, opportunities for internships, or direct mentoring from field practitioners in order to build a more holistic work readiness.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered in interpreting the results and their implications. First, the scope of the study, which was limited to only grade XI students majoring in office management at one of the vocational high schools in Surakarta, limits the generalizability of the results. The findings may not reflect the condition of students from other majors or regions that have different characteristics, curricula, and learning environments. Therefore, future research is expected to involve more diverse samples from various majors, grade levels, and vocational schools in various regions so that the results are more representative.

Second, this study only tested two predictors of work readiness, namely learning agility and perceived social support. Together, the two variables only explain 33.7% of the variance in work readiness. This shows that there is still 66.3% other variance influenced by other factors that have not been revealed, such as practical or internship experience, information about the work field, and interpersonal communication skills ([Azky & Mulyana, 2024](#); [Ihsan, 2018](#); [Indrawati et al., 2023](#); [Istiqamah & Jalal, 2020](#)). Future research needs to consider more psychosocial and contextual factors that have the potential to contribute significantly to work readiness.

Third, the definition and scope of individuals included in the category of significant others in the perceived social support scale are not explicitly described. The meaning of who is considered as a source of support (for example, parents, teachers, peers, or other figures) can vary between individuals and affect their perceptions of the availability of support ([Thoits, 2011](#)). This difference in interpretation could potentially affect the results of the study, so future research is expected to explicitly define the category of significant others in the measuring instrument or provide space for respondents to self-identify the source of support that is most meaningful to them.

Finally, there is an imbalance in the composition of respondents based on gender, where there are more women than men. This imbalance can affect the results of the analysis because there are gender differences in the way individuals build work readiness and receive and utilize social support ([Astuti et al., 2025](#); [Ismail et al., 2020](#)). Future research should consider a more balanced gender distribution or test gender differences exploratively to see if there are specific patterns based on gender.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that learning agility and perceived social support simultaneously influence work readiness among vocational high school students. However, when perceived social support was analyzed separately, the results were not significant in influencing students' work readiness. Meanwhile, learning agility was able to significantly predict students' work readiness separately.

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