Employability on vocational high school students in the "3T" area Bawean Island

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Vocational high schools in "3T" area on Bawean Island have limitations in human resources quality, equipment, production or practice tools, and industrial partnership, which differed from the vocational high schools located in advanced and developed areas. This research objective is to discover the description of employability to the vocational high school students in "3T" area in Bawean island. The research method applied was the qualitative method using the phenomenology approach. The data collection was obtained through semi-structured interviews. This research participant was eight students at vocational high school "X," "Y," "Z," and "W" schools in Bawean Island, which is one of the "3T" area. The analysis method in this research was content analysis. This research result shows that students in the "3T" area were showing their effort to prepare themselves in facing the job market by enhancing their employability in learning activities within the class or practice in the laboratory. The students' employability includes skills, knowledge, comprehension, personality, career identity, social and human relations, and personal adaptability. Students realize that they are in the "3T" area and must work harder to improve their work skills so as not to lose their jobs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The greatest challenge in current education is creating graduates with excellent employability as the provisions to find a job include knowledge, skills, comprehension, and a pleasing personality. Employability is essential for every student in educational institutions, particularly in vocational high schools. Vocational high schools must prepare their students for employability to get a job in the future [1]. Low employability can hinder entering the job market [2], [3]. Students must prepare themselves maximally to face the competition in the working communities [4].

Employability is a set of skills that individuals need to seek sustainable employment [5]. This ability helps individuals identify a variety of alternative career opportunities and a suitable work environment [6]. Employability was defined as 'gaining, sustaining and progressing in employment' [7]. Rothwell and Arnold [8] add that employability is an individual's ability to seek a job corresponding to their interests or desires. As such, employability is closely related to the skills, knowledge, comprehension, and personality that the students must have as the provisions to get the job and maintain it when they have to work in the future.

Pool and Sewell [2], the aspects forming employability are skills, knowledge, comprehension, and personality attribution: i) skills, the skills required to perform some tasks developed from training and experience obtained. Practical, creative, and innovative skills include critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperating, self-adjustment, and communication skills. ii) the knowledge creates the learning as the basis of theory so the students can be experts in their discipline. iii) comprehension is one's ability to understand or comprehend something known or remembered so that the job can be done. It is to understand the knowledge that has been learned, determined, estimated, and prepared for what will occur and be able to decide. iv) Personality encourages someone to push the potential within oneself regarding work ethic, responsibility.

According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics [9] the open unemployment rate based on education level 2020-2022, vocational high school graduates dominate the highest unemployment rate. It is known that the unemployment rate for vocational high school graduates in February 2020 was 13.55%, in February 2021, it was 11.13%, and in February 2022, it was 9.42%. In February 2023, it will increase by 9.60%. As of last February 2020, the unemployment rate of vocational high school graduates reached up to two digits, that is, 11.45 percent, and it rose almost 36 percent compared to the previous year. In addition, Young unemployed are dominated by those with vocational education at 35.61% [10]. The unemployment rate in vocational high schools is the highest among other educational institutions. The employability of vocational high school graduates becomes very important and a top priority to be prepared as soon as possible. It is because employability is closely related to preparing skills, knowledge, comprehension, and personality as the provisions for competing to get the job or starting their business to open employment independently. The increasing unemployment rate was caused by the low employability of the individual [11].

Employability is an essential element to be learned and studied because it represents the ability to get a job and can also positively impact maintaining one's job. It is crucial to expand and improve the employability of the students [12] because it can positively impact the individual by managing their career [13], [14]. Employability can improve a team's working performance, communication, self-management, and critical thinking [15]. Low employability impacts low self-esteem and laziness in the working world [16]. Such individuals will need help to enter the job market or get an occupation conforming to their desired career [3].

Vocational High School is one of the vocational educational institutions equipped with human resources, skills, and production tools capable of creating graduates who are ready to compete and work corresponding to their skills required in the working community. Employability is essential for vocational high school students because the education here is vocationally based, which trains students explicitly and develops their knowledge and skills according to their expertise in the major they take. Graduates from this school are targeted to be ready to look for work and ready to work according to the skills they have in the major they have taken. This is supported by the vision, mission, and goals of vocational high schools, namely, creating graduates ready to work and become independent entrepreneurs according to their skills. However, in the underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T), the circumstances are different from the advanced and developed regions with all the supporting facilities and enormous and qualified human resources. The studying facilities and infrastructure, both in the class and in the laboratory, are not representative enough. Human resources skills, especially those of teachers, are still lacking. The learning application was very limited only to specific models and methods without any model and method variations, so it makes education in 3T areas very hard to accomplish educational goals similar to the schools of the urban area. Indeed, such circumstances and conditions impact students' employability in the vocational high school located in the 3T areas.

The interview results with the three students indicate that they know that the competition and demand in the job market are high; they feel that their current skills are still at the minimum to compete. These students are getting inferior because they come from vocational high schools located in the 3T areas, lacking in various aspects compared to those outside the Bawean Island, which have developed and advanced in many ways. However, the students still try to prepare themselves while studying at home; the preparation to enter the actual work was carried out maximally. Skills, knowledge, comprehension, and personality, which constitute the maximum students' employability, become the school's expectations and the students.

The novelty in this research is that the employability research was applied in the underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T) in Bawean Island, in which they have minimum human resources both in knowledge and ability, limitations in production tools or practice tools, and limitation in industrial partnership. This condition is different with the vocational high schools in the developed and advanced regions. The study aims to explore the data profoundly about the description and life experiences experienced by vocational high schools students related to their employability.

2.   METHOD

This research employed a qualitative method using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a subjective experience or awareness from one's primary perspective or met by various types and subject types. The objective of the qualitative method in this research is to examine, define, or interpret the employability phenomenon of vocational high school students in the underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T) in the perspective of meanings explained by the informant to the researchers. The research approach using phenomenology is to gather respondent data, analyze meaning from the same experiences of the respondents, and process and interpret so that it obtains the explainable result universally [17]. The research procedure was carried out in the following steps: firstly, identifying the problem and determining the problem formulation based on the phenomena that occurred; secondly, selecting research participants using purposive sampling, with specific characteristics determined in this research. Third, create a list of questions (interview guide) to conduct interviews and observe participants' experiences. Fourth, conduct interviews and observe participants. Fifth, analyze interview and observation data by analyzing the content/meaning of the interview results and processing and interpreting them so that universally explained results can be obtained. Finally, the results are presented, and a clear discussion of the research findings.

2.1. Participant

These participants were eight students who studied in vocational high schools in the underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T) of Bawean Island. The students came from four schools in Bawean Island, namely vocational high school "X", "Y", "Z", and "W". The vocational high schools in Bawean Island were only these four schools. The participant sampling was carried out using purposive sampling, with specific characteristics corresponding to the research objective. The participant demographic data are presented in Table 1.

The participant characteristics in this research are:
−   The participants were the vocational high school students in the Bawean Island area.
−   They lived in underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T).
−   The participants were at the grade XII.
−   They have taken Field Practical Work.
−   The participants have finished in the Field of Industrial Practice.
−   The participants were male and female.

Table 1. The identity of the research participant

Remark	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Name (Initial)	SA	SI	AU	OA	FI	RN	PI	EA
Age (year)	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
School	"X"	"X"	"Y"	"Y"	"Z"	"Z"	"W"	"W"
Origin	Bawean	Bawean	Bawean	Bawean	Bawean	Bawean	Bawean	Bawean

2.2. Data collection method

The data collection method applied in this research is a semi-structured interview using guided interviews arranged by the researchers based on Pool and Sewell's [2] theory that employability is the ability including ability/skills, knowledge, comprehension, and personality which makes someone can select and comfortable with their work as a result they are satisfied and eventually achieving success. The researchers conducted the supporting method, passive participatory, during the interview or building rapport with the participants. The observations were carried out using the anecdotal record method, taking notes of the participants' specific, unique, and critical behavior.

2.3. Research trustworthiness

The credibility of a qualitative study lies in its success in revealing problems or describing the setting, process, social groups, or complex interaction pattern. The data validity test in this research was emphasized deeply on the validity test to observe the data's credibility. Several strategies can be used to increase the data's credibility. Such strategies are triangulation, prolonged engagement, negative case analysis, providing the report or description of research result to the informant to determine whether the research result has been conforming to themselves (member checking), using broad description to explain the research findings and discussion with fellow researchers (peer debriefing) [17].

The strategy applied to increase the data credibility in this research was member checking and requesting feedback from the informant about the accuracy of such research findings. Additionally, to strengthen research trustworthiness, it is by employing prolonged entanglement, that is, utilizing a much

longer time in the field with the intention to enhance researchers' comprehension of the employability that was currently examined and increase the degree of data trustworthiness collected. The last phase is conducted through discussion and question-and-answer sessions among fellow researchers (peer debriefing) to improve the accuracy of this research result.

2.4. The data analysis

The method of analysis in this research is content analysis. This analysis method uses words, meanings or interpretations, images, symbols, or themes generated from the interview results. In this research, the stages of data analysis refer to Creswell's [17] theory explaining that the phenomenology research using content analysis covers:
− Describing research subjects related to the studied phenomenon.
− Making a list of essential questions regarding how the research subject experienced the phenomena from the interview result.
− Important questions are categorized into a broader piece of information known as a meaning unit.
− Describing what and how the research subject experiences the phenomena.
− Describing the combination of such phenomena was an essential part of the phenomenology study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research result and discussion in this study is the interview result with the research participants. These participants were eight students who studied in vocational high schools in the underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T) of Bawean Island. The research results and discussion are as follows below:

3.1. Skills

The skill to conduct practice is one of the strengths expected from vocational high school graduates. The students in the vocational high schools in Bawean Island derive many subjects or courses followed by assignments and practice. The following quote is from the interview.

> *"Practice using accounting computer calculating finance using excel and word, I learn many formulas, functions, in Excel... I am more skilled in calculating finance than before."* (Informant 2, SI)
> *"We learn to make reports, some lesson with practice and digital simulation, number processor apps, tax administration, and business management."* (Informant 3, AU)
> *"The skill was trained through finance accounting practice, tax administration, and other stuff."* (Informant 7, PI)
> *"We also study in the laboratory and the class in many practices variations in training our skills."* (Informant 6, RN)
> *"...I was participating in practice such as mangrove tea, sewing, and choir so that in the end we can do these things ourselves."* (Informant 1, SA)
> *"In the school, we learn many things, about how to calculate using number processor, how to write with keyword, and formulas in excels and other stuff."* (Informant 1, SA)
> *"The practicum is that we learn to do finance reports."* (Informant 8, EA)
> *"The teacher taught me how to make products and the skills to do my own business."* (Informant 7, PI)
> *"My friends and I make a product, we test and label it, and we market the product."* (Informant 1, SA)
> *"The skills I learned during the practice was how to process mangrove tea."* (Informant 2, SI)
> *"...my practice is to make the financial report for enterprise, worksheet, adjusting journal entry, word, excel."* (Informant 4, OA)

The skills owned by the students were derived from various experiences, such as assignments, practicum, and practical fieldwork. There are multiple skills owned by vocational high school students, such as making financial reports, operating various supporting software, and establishing their simple business. Chu *et al.* [18], employability needs to be supported by skills such as communication, managing information, processing numbers, problem-solving, and personal management skills. Various assignments from the teachers make the student train their skills to work within a team, communicate, think creatively, and solve problems. Lu [19], skills are highly required by workers in the 21st century. The skill is the needed skills and

the experience derived by the student to get and do their job. In the job market, the skill will be beneficial to perform their duties in their work.

3.2. Knowledge

The vocational high school students in Bawean Island describe their study results at the school. The student derives general and specific knowledge about the material in every major. The knowledge was derived during lesson subjects, fieldwork and industry practice, and the school-organized workshop. The following quote is the interview result.

> *"In the school, I learned a lot how to manage the finance, financial report, either in writing or using the computer."* (Informant 4, OA)
>
> *"...at the school, I learn about the financial systems and financial management."* (Informant 5, FI)
>
> *"We study about managing the finance in institution or enterprise, inputting the data."* (Informant 6, RN)
>
> *"...from learning excel, I know how to record and manage the finance in excel as the provisions in working."* (Informant 1, SA)
>
> *"...in the manufacturing major, we are introduced to do small weld and learn about it."* (Informant 2, SI)
>
> *"My friend and I were taught how to manage an enterprise."* (Informant 5, FI)
>
> *"In the school, I learned to make a report in the computer laboratory and external cash flow."* (Informant 5, FI)
>
> *"The entrepreneurship subject taught us to trade and market the product we made. The teacher explained to us, and we practice it, such as processing tea, sugar ginger, and other products."* (Informant 1, SA)
>
> *"Sometimes we derive the knowledge from a workshop. Sometime within three months, the school arranges a workshop."* (Informant 3, AU)

The interview above implies that the knowledge derived by the students can be obtained through class lessons, practice in the laboratory, and workshops. The knowledge includes managing finance, making financial reports, and building entrepreneurship from theory to practice. Adequate knowledge becomes critical in the students' working readiness [20]. Ramberg *et al.* [21] research revealed that the students' knowledge development would follow the professional skills development required when working. The knowledge owned by the students is theoretically the basis for students to become experts conforming to their major [2].

3.3. Comprehension

The vocational high school students in Bawean Island derive their lessons either through thorough explanation in class, practice at the laboratory, or fieldwork practice. From these learning activities, the students obtain various lesson materials taught in the school. The lesson material comprehension is described from the following interviews.

> *"...I was provided with the explanation on the practice to make the report. Until I understand that a financial management has its system, we can just do it randomly."* (Informant 3, AU)
>
> *"... I am more understanding when following the accounting practice in a service company, trading company, and accounting."* (Informant 8, EA)
>
> *"I understand how to manage financial management. Our capital was by sharing. It trains our mentality to do business. The experience is that it has a delivery cape. We get the experience on how to manage finances."* (Informant 5, FI)
>
> *"...Using the computer, all students can better understand the function in word and excel. The computer laboratory is open anytime, so we just had to head to the laboratory."* (Informant 1, SA)

Comprehension is the student's ability to understand or comprehend something that has been known or remembered so that the task or work can be done and they are satisfied, at the same time, to discover what they really want. The students understand the lesson studied, determine, estimate, prepare what will occur, and make decisions [2].

3.4. Personality

The learning at the school was not only to train students' cognitive ability but also to have an excellent, effective ability. In addition to the lesson subject that prioritizes the cognitive aspect, the learning at the vocational high school also has a specific lesson teaching the students about soft skills and ethics. These lessons were attached to the following interviews with the students.

"The experience is that yesterday we learned to self-study or independently, how to manage income and expenditure." (Informant 7, PI)
"From the professional ethic, we must be honest and behave appropriately in working." (Informant 2, SI)
"We are taught to be honest as an accountant." (Informant 3, AU)
"We learn about ethics of the profession, about how we learn to speak properly." (Informant 2, SI)
"Following lessons in the class and practice at the laboratory on time to train our discipline and responsibility." (Informant 4, OA)
"The teacher teaches us how to grow learning motivation and willingness to do business conforming to my major." (Informant 1, SA)
"It trains our mentality to do business. The experience is that it has a delivery cape. But we have the experience on how to manage the finance." (Informant 5, FI)

In the current working community, individual personality highly influences employability. Ma *et al.* [22] research results reveal that proactive personality positively affects employability. Trait personalities correlated to employability are agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience [23]. The students' learning motivation and studying achievement also contribute to employability [24], [25]. The high students' learning motivation will be followed by the increase in students' academic achievement, either in their skills or knowledge, so that students have better working readiness when they graduate. Additionally, the ability to interact with others was also required as a provision for graduates' working readiness in the vocational high school. In the job market, people are demanded to cooperate and interact appropriately with peers to complete the work. The vocational high school students were trained to interact with their peers in performing their assignments because the peers significantly influence the students' employability in the real working community in the future [26].

The imbalance between working opportunities in the institution or specific agency with the current graduates' amount of vocational high school impacted the unemployment rate of vocational high school graduates. The ability to do business is highly needed to create working opportunities independently. The intention to do business is an important matter, and it must be instilled in vocational high school students [27]. The research result shows that the intention to do business contributes to the students' employability in vocational high schools [28].

3.5. Career identity

The vocational high school students were equipped with knowledge and skills corresponding to their major with the expectation that when they graduated, they would have the readiness to work. Consequently, the vocational high school students already had the description of the type of work they would like to do when they graduated from vocational high school. Such career identity was seen in the following interview results.

"I imagine that after graduation, I want to be a cashier because I took an accounting major." (Informant 2, SI)
"After graduating, I want to work according to my major or at least do business conforming to the skills that I learn now." (Informant 7, PI)
"I could go to accounting or graphic design in college. Because I graduated from vocational high school, if I work, I think I will start from the bottom in Indomaret, it could be in the cashier or administration." (Informant 3, AU)
"Insya Allah, if there is money, I want to continue in a management college if I am not working. If I am really going to college, I want to take management at work. If I am working, I could work in the administration section." (Informant 1, SA)

Career identity represents how an individual defines themselves in a career context. It becomes the cognitive compass used to lead the individual to the opportunity of their career [29]. The vocational high school students were given the knowledge and skills required to work after they graduated, conforming to their major. Students are expected to have a clearer image and conform to the type of work when provided with such knowledge and skills. The career identity becomes the guide for the individual when determining the goals of work identified as the opportunity to select their career path in the future [14].

3.6. Social and human relations

The other crucial skill students must have in preparing themselves to enter the job market is building social connections or relationships. In the vocational high school, this skill was trained with particular lesson material that provided students with various group assignments and projects, including when conducting practical fieldwork or industrial work. The following is the interview result.

"From the professional ethics, we can interact with other people, dress up politely when we are working, and learn to behave." (Informant 1, SA)
"The education that I get during the study in the school is how we can speak to other people. When we enter a company, what we will do first." (Information 2, SI)
"I was taught how to interact with other people, how to dress up, how to handle an accident and other kinds of stuff." (Informant 3, AU)
"We learn the profession ethics, about how to speak correctly and to use nice and decent language to other people." (Informant 2, SI)

Social and human relations skills are required to interact and connect with other people effectively. Therefore, an individual needs to express behaviors corresponding to the environment context [30]. The learning process of social and human relation skills starts when they are children and is developed until adolescence to provide experience on how individuals establish positive social relationships during adult stages so that they have good social competency [31]. Vocational high school students need the skills to prepare their self-readiness to work. Social and human relations skills are critical components of building employability or students' working readiness [28].

3.7. Personal adaptability

The informants' ability to adapt was shown by their skill in finding the solution when working on the assignment. The informants try to maximize the assignment despite several resource limitations: time, workforce, and cost. This indication can be seen in the following interview results.

"In the class, we are divided into several groups, consisting of 3-4 persons, for instance, we make the product with our shared capital, we arrange the marketing process, even more, we also create a brochure, we also utilize the school facilities." (Informant 4, OA)
"It trains our mentality to do business. The experience is that it has a delivery cape. But we had the experience to manage the finance." (Informant 5, FI)
"From morning until the afternoon at the school, some lessons in the class and the others in the laboratory. We have to work it on although it is intense, not to mention the tasks were plenty, we have to finish it all." (Informant 8, EA)

Personal adaptability is an individual's ability to adapt to situational changes, particularly those that influence the individual. So, he must be involved in such a proactive effort to adapt [32], the individual with excellent personal adaptability will be more optimistic, have a driving passion for learning, always be open, and have better self-efficacy [28]. The ability to adapt can also mediate the relationship between proactive personality and employability [22].

Based on the research results above, student employability includes skills, knowledge, understanding, career identity, social and human relations, and personal adaptability. Therefore, vocational high schools, especially in the "3T" area of Bawean Island, need to pay attention to and prioritize these factors. Schools need to make efforts to improve the quality of their student graduates through the quality of their teachers in conducting learning. Personality aspects (soft skills) need to be a priority for schools now by focusing on particular soft skill subjects, which will be the best solution to complement students' complex skills. Apart from that, it is necessary to improve learning and work practice facilities to support the factors above.

4.   CONCLUSION

The students at vocational high school "X", "Y", "Z", and "W" in the underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas (3T) in Bawean Island show their effort for self-readiness in facing the job market by enhancing their employability in every activity in the school either during the learning lesson in the class or practice at the laboratory. Students' employability includes skills, knowledge, comprehension, career identity, social and human relations, and personal adaptability. The school was demanded to improve its human resources quality, learning facilities, practical facilities, and specific subject lessons that teach soft skills to improve students' personalities.

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