



## New Vocational Paradigm: Vocational Literacy and Work Imagination in Vocational Students

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Vocational Literacy, Working  
Imagination, Vocational Education

#### Article History:

Received April 20, 2024

Revised April 30, 2024

Accepted May 15, 2024

Available online May 31, 2024

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the state of vocational literacy and work imagination among Business and Finance students at the Vocational Faculty, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. Improving these skills helps students design careers, define identities, develop skills, and recognize professional opportunities and challenges that they can prepare for future work. This study used a qualitative approach. The subjects of this study were six students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews and analyzed through data reduction, display, and withdrawal conclusion. The results show that students understand the differences between vocational education and a bachelor's degree. However, they feel their practical learning could be more optimal. To develop competencies, students participate in internship programs organized by the campus, Independent Learning-Independent Campus (known as MBKM), or independently. While lecturers encourage key work behaviors in class and laboratory sessions, students feel these practices could be more optimal. Most vocational students have career plans and work imagination, primarily explored through internships. Some have begun implementing these plans, with many marketing management students already establishing businesses. Therefore, this study highlights the need to strengthen vocational literacy at various levels, including among students, institutions, and stakeholder partnerships.

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### INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government has shown its commitment to improving the quality of the



<https://doi.org/10.26740/joaep.v4n1.p24-33>



<https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/joa>

E-ISSN 2797-1139

education system in recent years by launching the Independent Learning Independent Campus program (MBKM). This program is designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the workforce and promote lifelong learning (Riyadi et al., 2022). One of BMKM's main focuses is vocational education, which led to the Independent Vocational Learning Campus (KMV). Independent Vocational Learning Campus (KMV) aims to integrate higher vocational education with the workforce, producing more competent, productive, and competitive graduates. This vision is realized through various policies, including the Link and Match 8+I policy, which aims to increase the relevance of vocational education to the needs of the workforce, business, and industry (Fahmayani, 2021). The Ministry of Education and Culture has introduced various MBKM programs, including internships, certified independent study (MSIB) programs, IISMAeVO, teaching assistance, applied research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurial activities, and village development. These activities help students enhance their portfolios, gain practical skills, and expand their networks with IDUKA. MBKM encourages the development of conceptual, practical, and relational abilities, addressing the needs of vocational education students.

Unfortunately, understanding the differences between undergraduate and applied/vocational undergraduate education at the higher education level is still not evenly distributed among all individuals. The lecture merely emphasizes conceptual understanding rather than direct application in the practical world. In addition, current industrial developments need to include the curriculum and competencies in high-level vocational education environments. Furthermore, the vocational MBKM program initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture still needs to be more popular due to minimal outreach from universities and regulations that students consider complicated. Lastly, the lack of strong partnerships at the study program and faculty levels in the new vocational faculties established in 2023 results in a lack of environmental support for the planning of student careers. These challenges have significant implications for vocational literacy and student success in work.

Previous studies have examined vocational literacy and work imagination among vocational students. Baskara and Ahman (2023) found low vocational literacy levels and unclear working imagination among vocational students. Andayani et al. (2022) demonstrated that the MBKM program can improve vocational literacy and work imagination. This study differs in several aspects: First, this research focuses on vocational students at the Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY) context of the MBKM program. Second, this research uses a qualitative approach to get more data about vocational literacy and student work imagination.

Third, this research identifies factors that influence vocational literacy and student work imagination and recommends improving it. Based on background and studies literature previously, this study formulates some research problems:

- What are the vocational literacy conditions of vocational students at UNY in the MBKM context?
- What are the conditions of the working imagination of vocational students at UNY in the MBKM context?

This study aims to analyze the future vocational literacy and work imagination of UNY vocational students.

## METHODS

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand the phenomenon of vocational literacy and work imagination among UNY vocational students within the context of the MBKM program and allows writers to collect rich and complex data as well as to understand individual perspectives and experiences in depth Rifa'i (2023). The case study method was chosen because it enables the investigation of phenomena within specific contexts, such as vocational literacy and work imagination among UNY vocational students. This study method allows writers to explore phenomena comprehensively, considering various interrelated factors.

This study was conducted at the Department of Business and Finance, Vocational Faculty, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, because of the recent establishment of this department in early 2023 and new vocational faculty. The focus on this new department was because it is still in the development stage and needs extensive literature on students' vocational literacy and work imagination.

This study researched two regional campuses, Wates and Gunungkidul, to obtain diverse and comprehensive data. Based on using primary and secondary data, observations were made in classrooms, laboratories, and campus environments to see how students learned and engaged in activities. The writers observed how the MBKM program was implemented in the department. Online interviews were conducted to gather information about vocational literacy and student work imagination, as well as the MBKM program and its implementation in the department. Secondary data was collected from various sources, such as journals and books.

To ensure the validity of the data, writers used data triangulation, a technique for comparing and cross-checking information obtained from different sources Satriani &

Octaviani (2019). In this study, writers used source triangulation, comparing interview data from observations and documents. The sample was six students selected through purposive sampling. The data analysis technique consisted of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion, as developed by Miles et al. (2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### UNYStudents' Vocational Literacy

#### *Understanding Vocations*

The Business and Finance Department at the Vocational Faculty, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, has three study programs: Office Administration, Accounting, and Marketing Management. The Office Administration program focuses on office practices and entrepreneurship in the MICE sector. The Marketing Management program specializes in digital and general marketing. The Accounting program emphasizes budgeting and auditing. The students thoroughly understand each program's unique characteristics. Table 1 shows students' knowledge of understanding vocations.

Table 1. Students' Knowledge of Understanding Vocations

Scale	Students know the achievements of study program graduates	Students know the difference between a vocation and a bachelor's degree
Strongly agree	27%	52%
Agree	71%	48%
Disagree	2%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%

The table shows that survey results show that 71% of students agree and 27% strongly agree that they are aware of the achievements of graduates from their study programs, with only 2% disagreeing. It indicates that students understand the differences between D4 and S1 programs. Additionally, 52% of students strongly agree, and 48% agree that they know the differences between D4 and S1. These findings suggest that students know the skills they need to master during their studies. Moreover, several students mentioned that they also participated to find information skills and expertise needed in the world of work.

In the curriculum context, students perceive that the campus's learning and curriculum align with the workforce's needs. According to a survey, 66% agree and 31% strongly agree that the vocational knowledge and skills obtained meet the requirements of the world of work, while only 3% disagree. This alignment is attributed to the collaborative curriculum review between the Study Program in the Department of Business and Finance and industry partners

(known as DUDIKA). The department aims to synchronize learning and prepare students' competencies in line with the needs of DUDIKA to achieve high employment rates for students.

However, students feel that the vocational context provided by the campus needs to be revised. They express that "learning on campus is still too theoretical." Students believe that learning should be more balanced and focused on practical activities. This sentiment arises due to the prevalence of online learning and assignments given by lecturers. Moreover, students recognize that the difference between applied bachelor's and traditional bachelor's degrees lies in practical abilities that need to be adequately emphasized. This dissatisfaction extends to comparisons with undergraduate students' experiences. Kleden's (2016) findings support this, indicating that students need help interpreting the information provided by lecturers and require improved communication skills to effectively convey knowledge and practices, collaborate, and report work results. It can be completed with tables and figures to clarify the discussion in the section.

### *Understanding Vocational Context*

The learning process on campus significantly influences students' understanding of vocational knowledge. Students' ability to understand the material presented in classrooms and laboratories is crucial. Most of the learning involves theoretical discussions and conceptual topics. It helps students build conceptual confidence in vocational learning, but they often need clarification on their analytical thinking abilities needed for innovation and practical application.

"...our learning is always related to theory." (S001)

The lecturers often assign tasks without providing reviews, leading to independent learning without guidance. Students need guidance, even in independent learning, to better understand the material. Some students find lecturers need more competence in delivering lessons, affecting their perception of the lecturer's ability.

This situation impacts students' readiness for work and projects, as a Marketing Management student highlighted:

"We were taught digital marketing, but only basic information like what Artificial Intelligence is, without practical guidance. Unlike conventional marketing, the job market demands practical digital marketing skills". (S005)

As a result, students have low self-efficacy when imagining themselves leading projects in their field. The findings suggest that the vocational learning model needs to improve practical

experiences. This aligns with the (Putranto, 2017) opinion that practical learning improves students' readiness for real-life problems that foster critical, creative, and innovative thinking in students.

### *The Process of Becoming Competent*

Students conducted various activities to become competent, such as attending lectures, participating in the MBKM program, joining internship programs organized by their study programs, and pursuing independent apprenticeships. The Office Administration program offers internships every semester, while Marketing Management and Accounting have internships in the sixth semester. Independent apprenticeships involve students arranging their internships, including the registration process and scheduling. Some students noted that more up-to-date knowledge is gained through hands-on experience at IDUKA. This motivates students to learn additional skills beyond their primary field, such as design knowledge, to support digital marketing competencies. Siregar et al. (2024) suggest that internships improve practical skills, including interpersonal communication, time management, and problem-solving. Internships also develop analytical abilities and a deeper understanding of industry dynamics. Therefore, internships help students succeed in their future careers.

### *Work Behavior*

Technological developments influence work behavior. As technology advances, there is an increasing need to develop human work skills Mardhiyah et al. (2021). Students generally feel proficient in conventional skills. For instance, applied accounting students can manually manage finances. However, students who did not attend vocational schools for accounting need additional adaptation. High school science and social studies graduates still require an introduction to these skills. Office administration students are confident in manual office tasks like correspondence and filing. Similarly, marketing management students feel capable in direct marketing due to soft skills training in communication and promotion received in class.

Marketing management students often need help to adapt to new technologies because they lack training in digital marketing skills like social media and e-commerce research. They are usually taught only theory in class and need to learn how to perform these tasks in practice. To learn these skills, students often take online courses or find apprenticeships on their own or independently. The gap in these skills can cause problems between what is taught in schools and what jobs require. Internships are important because they help students develop the

necessary skills, positive attitudes, and work ethics, such as responsibility, integrity, and dedication (Siregar et al., 2024)

### **Vocational Literacy in UNY Student on MBKM Context**

In the context of MBKM, 10% of vocational students strongly agree that they know the Vocational MBKM program, 76% agree, 10% disagree, and 3% strongly disagree. The survey shows that the faculty, particularly those in charge of student and academic affairs, have never conducted MBKM socialization. Students learn about MBKM programs through social media, student organizations, and peers or friends from other faculties. Only about 14% of students strongly agree, and 31% agree that they have participated in the Vocational MBKM program. Student participation is suboptimal due to issues with grade conversion, as not all MBKM activities can be translated into academic credits. It is because not all MBKM programs align with or are relevant to the on-campus learning objectives, making study programs unprepared to convert MBKM activities into course grades. Therefore, students interested in participating in the Independent Learning program are less than optimal in the vocational environment.

### **UNY Vocational Students' Working Imagination**

#### *Working Intuition*

Most students already have a clear picture of their future work in their chosen field, while some imagine working in different areas. Some students aspire to become lecturers or educational staff in formal institutions. It indicates that vocational students have developed a work imagination and future career steps. Work intuition begins early when students explore study programs at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, consult parents and peers, and observe professionals in their chosen field. They also gain insights from lecturers about the workforce through experiences like practitioner lecturers visiting campus and industry internships. These activities provide indirect experiences that shape students' work intuition, significantly influencing their abilities, attitudes, and skills (Akrimy, 2022). Different experiences create unique thought processes and characteristics (Wulandari et al., 2023).

#### *Work Exploration and Innovation*





The exploration process is the process of students searching for something unknown (Sunarto et al., 2017). Students' working imagination develops by observing activities in the workplace through study program apprenticeships and independent internships, helping them identify the skills gap between campus and the workforce. Unfortunately, not all students are motivated to find out knowledge beyond campus. Recognizing this knowledge gap can drive students to improve their skills and even exceed job standards by combining field and classroom experiences. After discovering unknown aspects, Students can explore their knowledge deeply and identify problems to improve work efficiency and effectiveness. The main challenge is innovation, which students need help to imagine due to a perceived lack of knowledge and practical skills. This aligns with (Ali et al., 2023), who found that integrating practical experience, skills, and innovation in learning enhances students' readiness and confidence to face the workforce competently.

#### *Crystallization Working Imagination*

Crystallization of working imagination means students can express and implement ideas using real-life examples. According to (Wahyuningsih and Nugraha, 2021), crystallization involves stabilizing one's thoughts, forming permanent feelings, and gaining clearer confidence in decision-making. Students can explain conceptually and, when possible, practice through prototypes. The condition of department students in business finance is that some in each department are already trying to crystallize their work imagination according to their field. For example, management students' marketing revealed that it already has business following opportunities and the desires of each student. Some have a business related to clothes used (*thrifting*), *digital products*, *souvenirs*, and *graduation*.

"What we do is still based on our pleasure, not on research and data like a professional business." (S004)

Activity learning is still too much, and the portion for theory and concepts needs to be balanced with activity practice. From the above activities, not only do students crystallize the idea but are genuinely aware and able to improve their business. Despite this, students are becoming aware of the need to enhance their businesses. Support from social aspects, such as DIDUKA partners, and opportunities for practical learning are crucial for shaping students' future work imagination. This aligns with (Listyowati et al., n.d.), who found that self-actualization and social support positively correlate with career maturity. Thus, increasing self-actualization and social support can lead to better career development.





## CONCLUSION

This study found that students of the Department of Business and Finance, Vocational Faculty, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, understand vocational programs and their differences from bachelor's programs. They can differentiate learning and achievements between educational bachelor and applied bachelor. However, they perceive a need for more practical activities within vocational study programs. To improve student competency, an internship program formally (campus program), MBKM, and independently needs to be optimized. Lecturers also need certification program competencies to increase their capacity. Cooperation with partners must be optimized to allow students to experience optimal work practice and imagination. These suggestions are expected to improve the quality of vocational education, producing competent graduates who are well-prepared for the workforce.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank the Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta and all the friends who helped us finish this study. We hope that this study can be helpful for future research on the same topic.

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