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# Building An Entrepreneurial Spirit In Vocational High Schools

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**Abstract:** This research aims to explore strategies for developing entrepreneurial spirit in Vocational High Schools (SMK). With a descriptive qualitative approach, data was obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, focused group discussions (FGDs), and documentation studies. The results show that the integration of project-based learning, collaboration with the business world and industry, and the establishment of entrepreneurship units in schools have a significant role in fostering students' entrepreneurial interest and competence. The main challenges lie in limited resources, student passive attitudes, and lack of teacher training. This study provides recommendations for the implementation of adaptive curriculum, entrepreneurship teacher training, and strengthening the school ecosystem that supports student innovation.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Contextual Learning, Innovative Ecosystems, Vocational.

## A. Introduction

Vocational High Schools (SMK) have a strategic role in preparing a skilled workforce that is ready to enter the world of work. However, reality shows that vocational school graduates still face significant challenges in obtaining jobs. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that in August 2024, the national Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) will be 4.91%. However, vocational school graduates recorded the highest national TPT compared to other levels of education, which was 9.01%, followed by high school 7.05%, higher education 5.25%, diploma 4.83%. Meanwhile, TPT for those who have never gone to school until they graduate from junior high school is 6.43% (BPS, 2024).

The high unemployment rate among vocational school graduates indicates that there is a gap between the competencies of students and the needs of the world of work. In the midst of rapid technological developments and shifting needs in the world of work, vocational schools are expected to not only produce ready-to-use workers, but also individuals who have an entrepreneurial spirit. An entrepreneurial spirit is needed to face future economic challenges and create new jobs. However, studies show that the entrepreneurial spirit among vocational school students is still relatively low.

This shows the need for a new approach in vocational education, one of which is through strengthening the entrepreneurial spirit among students (Nurani et al., 2023). By equipping students with entrepreneurial skills, it is hoped that they will not only become job seekers, but also be able to create their own jobs, in order to reduce the unemployment rate in Indonesia, as well as improve the economy (Rahdiyanta, 2019). The open unemployment rate (TPT) for the last four years can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1. Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) in the Last 4 Years**

| Education Level | OUR Based on Education Level (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
| No/Never Gone to School/Haven't Graduated and Graduated from Elementary School | 3,61 | 3,59 | 2,56 | 2,32 |
| Junior High School | 6,45 | 5,95 | 4,78 | 4,11 |
| High School | 9,09 | 8,57 | 8,15 | 7,05 |
| Vocational High School | 11,13 | 9,42 | 9,31 | 9,01 |
| Diploma I/II/III | 5,87 | 4,59 | 4,79 | 4,83 |
| University | 5,98 | 4,80 | 5,18 | 5,25 |

Source**:** (BPS, 2025)

This research aims to explore how vocational schools can play a more active role in instilling entrepreneurial values through contextual and collaborative learning approaches, so that they can be an alternative solution in overcoming the high unemployment rate among vocational school graduates.

## B. Materials and Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. Data collection techniques include semi-structured interviews with school principals, productive teachers, students, and DUDI partners; observation of the activities of the school entrepreneurship unit; FGD with students who are active in entrepreneurial activities; and analysis of curriculum documents and school program reports (Arifin, 2020).

The research population consisted of 45 respondents from 3 vocational schools, namely SMK Negeri 7, SMK Negeri 3 and SMK Satria in Kendari City, with a case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of entrepreneurship development.

## C. Results and Discussion

The results of this research are as follows:

### Entrepreneurial Spirit Development Strategy

To develop an entrepreneurial spirit, the following are carried out:

1. Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

   PjBL Placing students as active subjects in the learning process. Students are challenged to identify real problems, develop business plans, design products or services, and evaluate their impacts. The projects carried out are usually directly related to the expertise competencies of each department (Agunawan & Rijal, 2024).

   Benefits of learning in the context of entrepreneurial development (Agunawan et al., 2024):

   a. Proactive attitude and problem-solving: Train students' ability to deal with uncertainty and solve business challenges.
   b. Integration of knowledge and skills: Combining entrepreneurial theory

with vocational skills in an integrated manner.

c. Creativity and innovation: Encourage the creation of new business ideas that are relevant to the market.
d. Collaboration and social responsibility: Instilling the importance of teamwork and the social impact of a business.
e. Authentic evaluation: Provide an assessment based on real achievements from project results.
f. Real social impact: Creating business solutions that provide direct benefits to the surrounding community.

One example of the effective implementation of PjBL is at SMK Negeri 7 Kendari, where students majoring in processing fishery products have succeeded in making local products (shredded tuna, smoked tuna) that are marketed through social media. In this project, students learn about production, branding, digital marketing, and business financial management first-hand (Agunawan et al., 2021).

Although it has many advantages, the implementation of PjBL also faces challenges (Dewi, 2023), among others:

a. Teachers are not used to designing entrepreneurial projects.
b. Limitations of tools and materials for the project.
c. Time constraints in the academic calendar.
d. Students are not yet used to independent and creative learning.

This research recommendation is for strengthening:

a. Teacher training on the design and implementation of PjBL.
b. Provision of support from industry partners for student projects.
c. Integration of PjBL into the curriculum and evaluation.
d. Development of digital platforms for showcases and marketing of student products.

2. Industry, Business and Work Collaboration

The synergy between educational institutions and industry provides real experience and in-depth business insights for students. This collaboration is also a bridge between learning at school and the real needs of the world of work (de Almeida Borges et al., 2020).

This collaboration provides various concrete benefits for the development of an entrepreneurial spirit:

a. Access to the latest industry technologies and practices.
b. Direct assistance from business people.
c. Real-life work experience that boosts confidence.
d. Application of learning through real business projects.
e. Networking and potential for post-graduation business cooperation.

Collaboration can take various forms, such as:

a. Internship program: Provides opportunities for students to experience first-hand business operations in the real world.
b. Industry visits and field studies: Provide first-hand insight into production processes, business management, and entrepreneurial practices.
c. Business mentoring and coaching: Industry practitioners are involved as mentors in the development of students' business ideas.
d. Provision of real projects: Industry provides students with real business challenges to complete in the form of projects or entrepreneurship competitions.
e. Business Partnerships: This collaboration can also open up

opportunities for the marketing of students' products through the business network of industry partners.

One example of the implementation of collaboration is SMK Satria Kendari with Honda, where students majoring in workshops are trained directly by Honda technicians in carrying out engine maintenance. And the tools used were provided by Honda.

Challenge:

a. Not all industries have a concern for vocational education.
b. Lack of teacher readiness to establish partnership relationships.
c. Coordination of time and activities between industry and schools.

Solution:

a. Encourage formal MoUs and regulation of partnerships, based on shared needs.
b. Training for teachers as facilitators of school-industry relations.
c. Integrated calendar creation that adapts to the industry agenda.

Recommendations:

a. Strengthening the role of school committees involving industry players.
b. Incentives for industries that actively contribute to vocational education.
c. Digital platform to connect SMK and business actors.

3. School Production Unit (SPU)

SPU It serves as an entrepreneurial laboratory that provides students with hands-on experience in managing businesses from upstream to downstream. This process includes planning, production, packaging, marketing, and financial evaluation (Adomako & Ahsan, 2022). Thus, SPU becomes an effective vehicle for:

a. Applying technical knowledge and skills in a real context.
b. Improve students' understanding of business management.
c. Instilling the value of responsibility and independence.

SPU Beneficial to make various positive contributions to the growth of students' mentality and entrepreneurial abilities:

a. Real business practice exercises that foster confidence.
b. Improvement of technical competence through a sustainable production process.
c. Business financial management, including transaction recording and profit and loss calculation.
d. Marketing and branding activities that train students' creativity.
e. Fostering a sense of responsibility through joint unit management.
f. Become a source of additional income for students and schools.

Challenges of implementing school production units:

a. Limited initial capital and production raw materials.
b. Lack of teacher training in business management.
c. Competition with commercial products outside of school.
d. Lack of promotion that reaches the wider community.

To strengthen this SPU, a strategy is needed:

a. Collaboration with Industry for raw material provision, training, and marketing.
b. Formation of a student management team to strengthen SPU's organizational structure.
c. Integration of SPU activities into the curriculum of productive and entrepreneurial subjects.
d. Utilization of social media and e-commerce as marketing channels.

**Implementation Challenges**

The challenges faced in the implementation:

1. Lack of teacher training in entrepreneurship.

   The role of teachers is not only as a material presenter, but also as a facilitator, mentor, and motivator who assists students in developing their business. When teachers do not have adequate understanding and experience in entrepreneurship, the learning process becomes less contextual, stagnant, and uninspiring (Harding et al., 2018).

   Some field findings and program evaluation results, the main obstacles that are often encountered in vocational schools are:

   a. Most productive teachers focus more on technical competencies according to their majors, but are less equipped with entrepreneurial insights.
   b. The entrepreneurial training available is still theoretical and non-sustainable.
   c. The lack of direct experience of teachers in running a business makes the mentoring process feel rigid and irrelevant to the real world.

   This has an impact on the following aspects:

   a. Learning is less applicative and only emphasizes conceptual aspects.
   b. Students don't get inspirational figures who are able to guide them in making business decisions.
   c. Lack of innovation in entrepreneurial learning methods in the classroom.
   d. The activities of production units or student business projects tend to run stagnant without strong direction.
2. Limited school resources to support students' entrepreneurial practices.

   In reality, many vocational schools, especially those located in suburban areas or with limited financing status, face a major challenge in providing basic necessities for students' entrepreneurial practices. This has a direct impact on the low intensity and quality of student entrepreneurial activities (Rahdiyanta, 2019).

   The limited resources in schools can be classified in several aspects, namely:

   a. Many vocational schools do not have adequate production space, equipment, or supporting machinery to run school business units.
   b. The lack of allocation of funds for the purchase of raw materials makes business practice activities unsustainable.
   c. Limited experts or technicians who can help students in the process of product production and marketing.
   d. The lack of digital devices and internet networks limits students in running a business based on online platforms or digital marketing.

   Unpreparedness of facilities and resources leads to:

   a. The limited frequency of students' business practices, so that the mastery of entrepreneurial competencies becomes low.
   b. Student products do not reach market standards, due to the lack of quality production support tools.
   c. Lack of motivation and student participation, due to the lack of availability of interesting practical vehicles that are close to business reality.
3. Low interest and motivation of some students in entrepreneurial activities.

   This is a significant obstacle in creating an entrepreneurial culture in the school environment. This phenomenon reflects the gap between the opportunities offered and the mental readiness of students to run them. Several factors that cause students' lack of interest in entrepreneurship (Akhmetshin et al., 2019; Dwi Lestari, 2023; Gunawan, 2022) among others:

a. The stigma against entrepreneurship as a "forced" option for those who fail to work formally.
b. Lack of inspirational figures or role models of young entrepreneurs who are close to the student environment.
c. Lack of real experience or business success in the environment around students.
d. The influence of family or society that encourages permanent work rather than starting a business.
e. Fear of failure and risk of financial loss.

This low motivation has an impact on:

a. Passive participation in the school's entrepreneurial program, such as a production unit, business competition, or entrepreneurship bazaar.
b. Lack of enthusiasm for innovation and experimentation in the development of business ideas.
c. Difficulties in forming a solid and sustainable business group.
d. Dominance of theoretical approaches because students are reluctant to take an active role in field practice.

**Supporting Factors**

Factors that can support, can be in the form of:

1. Full support from the school management.

   Visionary and proactive school leadership is not only the main driver in the implementation of entrepreneurship programs, but also creates a school culture that is conducive to innovation and creativity (SULFAN MUSLIM, 2017).

   School management support can be realized in the form of:

   a. Drafting of pro-entrepreneurship school policies. By listing entrepreneurship development as a strategic priority, as well as allocating a budget and special work programs for these activities.
   b. Provision of facilities and infrastructure. In the form of production rooms, business laboratories, equipment, and supporting technology for students to practice and run a business in real life.
   c. Mentoring of teachers and entrepreneurship teams. School principals encourage teacher capacity building through training, seminars, or cooperation with external parties such as Iduka and universities.
   d. Facilitate external cooperation. School management is a bridge in establishing partnerships with local governments, industry players, and the entrepreneurial community to open up access and opportunities for student business development.
   e. Awards and appreciation. The school provides incentives or recognition to students and teachers who excel in entrepreneurial activities as a form of motivation and affirmation.

   Strong support from the school management has a positive impact on the:

   a. Increase the active participation of students and teachers in entrepreneurship programs.
   b. Building a school climate that encourages innovation and the courage to try new things.
   c. Ensure the sustainability of the program through planned policies and funding.
   d. Strengthening the school's branding as a vocational institution oriented towards the development of independent businesses.

2. Strategic cooperation with the local entrepreneurial community.

   The local entrepreneurial community includes groups of micro, small, and

medium enterprises (MSMEs), entrepreneur associations, youth cooperatives, and community-based business incubators active in a region (Kusuma et al., 2021). Forms of strategic cooperation that can be carried out include:

a. Mentoring and sharing sessions: The community is invited as resource persons in training activities, workshops, or entrepreneurial dialogues at school.
b. Field trips and internships: Students conduct observations or internships in community business units as part of contextual learning.
c. Product and marketing collaboration: Students' products are sold together in community events or platforms, creating economic synergies.
d. Business competition and incubation: The community assists in the development of students' business ideas through competition programs and advanced coaching.

The contribution of this local entrepreneurial community strengthens the entrepreneurial learning process by providing tangible benefits such as:

a. Access to locally-based business experiences and practices relevant to the student's context.
b. Networking and collaboration opportunities across ages and business backgrounds.
c. Validation of students' business ideas by real market participants.
d. Formation of an entrepreneurial mentality through direct interaction with resilient and adaptive MSME actors.

3. Awards and incentives for outstanding students in the field of business.

Awards and incentives are a form of motivational strategy that has been proven to be able to increase student participation and achievement in entrepreneurial activities. Recognition of students' efforts and achievements creates an intrinsic drive to continue learning, innovating, and taking business initiatives (Bagis et al., 2024).

Awards and incentives can be given in various forms, both material and non-material, including:

a. Certificates and award certificates: Awarded to students who win business competitions at the school, regional, or national level.
b. Cash or business capital prize: Used to develop a business that has been started by students.
c. Entrepreneurship Scholarship: Awarded to students actively engaged in entrepreneurship as a form of continuing education support.
d. Product showcase opportunities: Students are given space to exhibit and sell products in the school's bazaar, expo, or digital platform.
e. Recognition in the school's report card or portfolio: Business activities are included as part of a student's formally recognized achievement.

Rewards and incentives that are given consistently and planned can result in some of the following positive impacts:

a. Increased motivation and participation: Students are encouraged to participate in entrepreneurship programs because of the real appreciation from the school.
b. Healthy and innovative competition: The existence of an award system creates a competitive climate that encourages creativity and innovation.
c. Confidence boosting: Students feel that their efforts are appreciated, so they are more confident to develop their own business.

d. Example and inspiration for other students: Rewarded students become role models in the school environment.

## D. Conclusion

Instilling an entrepreneurial spirit in vocational high schools (SMK) is a strategic step in answering the challenge of the high unemployment rate of vocational graduates. Building entrepreneurial spirit and competence from an early age provides opportunities for students to not only become job seekers, but also job creators. This research found that entrepreneurial development in vocational schools can be significantly supported through key strategies such as project-based learning, active collaboration with the business and industry, establishment of school production units, and full support from school management.

In addition, partnerships with local entrepreneurial communities have been proven to enrich students' insights and build entrepreneurial networks, while reward and incentive systems are able to increase student participation and motivation on an ongoing basis. However, implementation challenges are still faced, especially related to the lack of teacher training in the field of entrepreneurship, limited school resources, and low interest and motivation among some students. These factors indicate the need for a more systemic and collaborative approach in the implementation of entrepreneurship education in vocational schools.

To overcome these challenges, things that can be done include:

1. Strengthening teacher capacity through practical training and industrial internship programs,
2. Utilization of external resources through multi-stakeholder partnerships,
3. Innovation of learning methods that are more contextual and based on student interests, and
4. The implementation of school policies that explicitly support entrepreneurial development as part of the strategic vision of vocational education.

Thus, the development of an entrepreneurial spirit in vocational schools is not only an additional program, but must be an integral part of the vocational education system itself. The success of this effort will be an important key in producing a young generation that is adaptive, creative, and independent in facing the challenges of the world of work in the era of the digital economy and globalization.

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