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Research Article

Enhancing Students' Work Readiness through Internship Experience

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze the direct effect of internship experience on work readiness, the effect of work motivation on work readiness, the effect of internship experience on work motivation, and the mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between internship experience and work readiness. The study was conducted among students from the 2022 cohort of the Faculty of Engineering at Diponegoro University. This research employed a quantitative approach. Data were collected from 200 respondents through a questionnaire that met validity and reliability criteria. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS version 4.1.1.8 to examine relationships among variables and to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings show that internship experience has a positive and significant effect on work readiness. Internship experience also has a positive and significant effect on work motivation, while work motivation 0068as a positive and significant effect on work readiness. These findings indicate that internship experience can improve students' work-readiness, both directly and indirectly through higher work motivation. This study is expected to contribute to the development of internship programs to strengthen students' work readiness at the Faculty of Engineering, Diponegoro University.*

Keywords: *Internship Experience, Work Motivation, Work Readiness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Work readiness is an important aspect because businesses and industries do not focus solely on graduates with academic ability but also on individuals who possess practical skills, professional attitudes, and the ability to adapt to workplace changes. This condition encourages higher education institutions to play a more active role in preparing students to enter the professional world effectively and competitively [1]. Higher education is also viewed as an institution with a significant role in improving the quality of human resources to meet labor market needs, as it can open broader employment opportunities and support graduates' career development [2].

However, the reality in the field shows that the challenges remain considerable. Data from Statistics Indonesia indicate that the open unemployment rate among higher education graduates reached 5.39%, ranking third after vocational high school and senior high school graduates [3]. This condition indicates a competency gap between university graduates and labor-market needs, causing many graduates to have difficulty obtaining jobs that match their field of study. This situation emphasizes that universities cannot focus solely on academic aspects; they must also strengthen students' practical experience to improve work readiness.

One effort to address this issue is the internship program, which provides students with opportunities to obtain direct work experience in a professional environment. Through internships, students can understand job demands, organizational culture, and performance standards in the industry. Direct experience in real-world practices is an effective form of learning because it enables individuals to connect theoretical knowledge with empirical experience [4]. Internship experience also provides a realistic picture of professional work conditions, enabling students to understand the demands and dynamics they will face [5].

A well-implemented internship experience is believed to improve students' work readiness. Work readiness reflects an individual's ability, attitude, and understanding to enter the workplace and carry out tasks optimally [1]. Students with internship experience tend to be better prepared to meet job demands because they are familiar with workplace situations, work patterns, and industry performance standards [6].

This study was conducted among students of the Faculty of Engineering, Diponegoro University, who had participated in internship programs as part of their learning process and preparation for entering the workplace. The program was designed to provide students with direct work experience so they can apply knowledge gained in lectures and understand various professional demands in the workplace. Conceptually, internship experience is considered to play a significant role in improving students' work readiness after completing higher education.

Work motivation also plays an important role in helping individuals face challenges and job demands. High motivation enables individuals to demonstrate persistence, make decisions independently, and adapt to various work conditions [8], [9]. In addition, work motivation functions as a linking mechanism that explains how internship experience affects work readiness [10], a view also supported by Rosyada and Suratman [11] regarding the mediating role of work motivation.

Given this background, research on the effect of internship experience on work readiness, with work motivation as a mediating variable, is important and relevant. This study is expected to make theoretical contributions to the development of human resource management research and practical contributions to universities in designing more effective internship programs to improve graduate work-readiness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A) Work Readiness

According to Caballero et al. [7], work readiness is a construct that describes the extent to which graduates have the capacity to enter and function effectively in the workplace. This concept emphasizes that work readiness is not solely determined by mastery of knowledge or technical skills, but also by attitudes and personal attributes that support an individual's success in meeting job demands. In its theoretical framework, work readiness reflects a combination of task performance ability, understanding of organizational context, and psychological and social readiness that enables individuals to adapt and contribute optimally at work. Thus, work readiness can be understood as comprehensive readiness encompassing competencies, character, and behaviors relevant to labor-market needs.

B) Internship Experience

Wang [12] explains that internship experience is practical exposure to an industrial environment that enables students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical skills, shape professional identity, and strengthen work motivation. Internships involve direct exposure to operational roles, compliance with safety and service standards, and the management of difficult situations, all of which play an important role in developing a clear, stable professional identity. Similarly, Pianda et al. [13] explain that internship experience is a period in which students obtain practical work experience before graduation, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills and making them more attractive to employers.

C) Work Motivation

According to Robbins and Judge [14], motivation is an internal process that influences the intensity of a person's effort, the direction of behavior toward certain goals, and the level of persistence in maintaining that effort until the goal is achieved. Thus, motivation not only serves as an initial driver of behavior but also as a factor that maintains individual consistency in pursuing optimal performance. In relation to work readiness, motivation is an important component that shapes professional attitudes, discipline, and an individual's readiness to face workplace dynamics.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative research approach with internship experience as the independent variable, work readiness as the dependent variable, and work motivation as the mediating variable. Each variable was operationalized through measurable indicators. The study was conducted among students from the 2022 cohort of the Faculty of Engineering at Diponegoro University in 2026. The population consisted of 2,185 students, while the sample comprised 200 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The criteria for respondents were students who had participated in an internship program at least once. The research instrument was a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed online via Google Forms to measure the research variables using predetermined indicators. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, and secondary data were sourced from relevant institutions. The data analysis technique used Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4.1.1.8, including outer model analysis to test validity and reliability, and inner model analysis to examine relationships among variables and test the research hypotheses.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A) Data Analysis

a. Outer Model Analysis

The outer model analysis showed that the indicators for each variable generally demonstrated good validity, with indicator values meeting the required criteria. The measurement model was therefore considered adequate for further analysis.

b. Convergent Validity

The outer loading results showed that most indicator values were above 0.70. Two indicators in the work readiness variable had values below 0.70: KK2 (0.648) and KK3 (0.680). According to Hair and Alamer [15], outer loading values above 0.60 can still be accepted as long as they do not compromise the AVE and composite reliability. Thus, all indicators in this study met the criteria for convergent validity and can be declared valid. The latent variables used in this study, namely

internship experience, work readiness, and work motivation, therefore have strong relationships with the indicators used to measure them.

In the work readiness variable, the relatively lower outer-loading values for KK2 and KK3 indicate that students' internal drive and self-management abilities have not fully reflected work readiness. In the context of the Faculty of Engineering, this finding suggests that although students may have good technical competencies, soft skill aspects such as intrinsic motivation and priority management still need improvement. This condition is important because industry does not only require technical ability, but also adaptability, initiative, and time management.

In the internship experience variable, the highest outer loadings were observed for indicators PM3 and PM5. This indicates that students' internship experiences successfully strengthened theoretical understanding and practical ability in accordance with workplace standards. In the context of the Faculty of Engineering, this finding indicates that the internship program has been effective in connecting classroom theory with industry practice. The faculty, therefore, needs to maintain and optimize the quality of internship programs, especially by ensuring alignment between internship placements and students' academic competencies and the workplace standards applied in industry. Evaluation and supervision during internships also need to be strengthened so that the experience students gain remains consistent in improving comprehensive work-readiness.

The Average Variance Extracted values for all dimensions of the latent variables were above 0.50. This indicates that all indicators met the criteria for convergent validity. Therefore, internship experience, work motivation, and work readiness were valid constructs because they had strong relationships with their measurement indicators.

c. Discriminant Validity

The cross-loading results showed that each indicator had higher loadings on the construct it measured than on other constructs. This indicates that the indicators accurately represented their respective constructs. Therefore, all indicators met the criteria for discriminant validity because each indicator loaded more strongly on its intended construct than on other constructs.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion also showed that the correlations among latent variables did not exceed the square root of the AVE for each variable. The diagonal values were higher than the correlations in the same row or column, indicating that each construct was able to explain its own indicators more strongly than its relationship with other constructs. Thus, the measurement model used in this study had adequate discriminant validity.

d. Composite Reliability

The composite reliability values for all constructs ranged from 0.902 to 0.931, exceeding the 0.70 threshold. Cronbach's alpha values for all variables ranged from 0.869 to 0.918, also exceeding the threshold of 0.70. These results indicate that all variables in this study had good reliability. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted values ranged from 0.552 to 0.631, exceeding 0.50. This shows that each construct adequately explained the variance in its indicators. Overall, the measurement model met the criteria for reliability and convergent validity.

B) Inner Model Analysis

a. Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)

The R-square value for work motivation was 0.198, with an adjusted R-square of 0.194. This means that internship experience explained 19.8% of the variance in work motivation, while other variables outside the research model influenced the remaining 80.2%. The R-square value for work readiness was 0.591, with an adjusted R-square of 0.587. This indicates that internship experience and work motivation jointly explained 59.1% of the variance in work readiness, while variables outside the model influenced the remaining 40.9%. Thus, the model has a meaningful explanatory power for work readiness.

b. F-Square Effect Size

The F-square test was used to determine the effect size of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Referring to Chin [16], an F-square value of 0.02 indicates a small effect, 0.15 indicates a moderate effect, and 0.35 indicates a large effect at the structural level. The results showed that work motivation had a strong effect on work readiness, with an F-square value of 0.506. The internship experience had a moderate effect on work motivation (0.247) and a moderate-to-strong effect on work readiness (0.303). These results strengthen the conclusion that both internship experience and work motivation play important roles in explaining students' work readiness.

c. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing results showed that internship experience had a positive and significant effect on work readiness, with a path coefficient of 0.393, a t-statistic of 7.066, and a p-value of 0.000. Internship experience also had a positive and

significant effect on work motivation, with a path coefficient of 0.445, a t-statistic of 7.940, and a p-value of 0.000. In addition, work motivation had a positive and significant effect on work readiness, with a path coefficient of 0.508, a t-statistic of 9.966, and a p-value of 0.000. Because all p-values were below 0.05 and all t-statistics exceeded 1.96, all direct hypotheses were accepted.

d. Mediation Test

The specific indirect effect analysis showed that the indirect effect of internship experience on work readiness through work motivation was positive and significant, with an original sample value of 0.226, a t-statistic of 6.120, and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that work motivation acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between internship experience and student work readiness.

The Variance Accounted For value was 26.75%. Because this value falls between 20% and 80%, the mediation is considered partial. This means that work motivation partially mediates the effect of internship experience on work readiness. Internship experience still has a direct effect on work readiness, but part of its influence is also transmitted through students' work motivation.

e. Interpretation of Results

The findings show that internship experience has a positive and significant relationship with students' work readiness in the 2022 cohort of the Faculty of Engineering, Diponegoro University. This positive relationship indicates that the better the internship experience students have, the higher their readiness to enter the workplace. For engineering students, internship experience includes the development of knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. Internship programs that allow students to engage in real-world work, face challenges, and solve problems can improve their work-readiness. It has strategic implications for the Faculty of Engineering at Diponegoro University in improving the quality of its internship programs. The faculty can strengthen industry collaboration, enhance the role of internship supervisors, and provide assignments or projects aligned with labor market needs. These efforts can help students gain more meaningful experiences and improve their work readiness. The finding is consistent with Beno et al. [17], who found that internship experience has a positive and significant effect on work readiness, and with Mustari [18], who also found a significant relationship between internship experience and work readiness.

The results indicate that internship experience has a positive and significant effect on work motivation. This means that the more meaningful the internship experience students obtain, the higher their motivation to enter the workplace. Direct experience in a professional environment not only provides practical knowledge and skills but also encourages students to develop career goals, confidence, and enthusiasm for future work. The F-square value also indicates that internship experience provides a meaningful contribution to increasing work motivation. Overall, this finding emphasizes that internship experience plays an important role in shaping and strengthening students' work motivation. Through direct workplace exposure, students can better understand the relevance of their academic knowledge to professional practice. Therefore, the quality of internship implementation is an important factor that needs attention in efforts to increase student motivation.

The results show that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on work readiness. This means that the higher the students' work motivation, the greater their readiness to meet workplace demands. Students with high motivation tend to be more proactive in developing competencies, more prepared to face challenges, and more mentally ready to enter the workplace. The F-square value shows that work motivation has a strong effect on work readiness. This finding confirms that work motivation is a key factor influencing students' readiness for employment. Therefore, increasing work motivation should be an important concern in preparing students to compete in the professional world.

The mediation test confirms that work motivation significantly mediates the relationship between internship experience and work readiness. This result explains the mechanism by which internship experience contributes to students' work-readiness. Internship experience not only provides practical learning but also stimulates work motivation, thereby strengthening students' readiness to compete in the labor market. Further analysis shows that several factors play a dominant role in shaping this relationship, including the drive to work optimally, the belief that effort leads to success, and the ability to collaborate with others. These aspects strengthen the role of work motivation as a mediating variable. In addition, the effect of internship experience on work motivation and the stronger effect of work motivation on work readiness confirm that motivation is an important mechanism in the relationship between internship experience and work readiness.

Overall, the findings show that a high-quality internship experience can improve students' work motivation, which, in turn, enhances their work readiness. Therefore, internship programs that provide real-world experience, workplace challenges, and direct learning opportunities in a professional environment are important for shaping students' motivation and readiness to enter the workforce.

V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze and test the effect of internship experience on work readiness with work motivation as a mediating variable among students from the 2022 cohort of the Faculty of Engineering, Diponegoro University. Based on the results and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn.

1. Internship experience has a significant effect on the work readiness of students from the 2022 cohort of the Faculty of Engineering, Diponegoro University. This indicates that internship experience directly improves students' readiness to enter the workplace.
2. Internship experience has a significant effect on students' work motivation. This indicates that meaningful internship experiences can increase students' motivation to work and prepare for their future careers.
3. Work motivation has a significant effect on student work readiness. This indicates that students with stronger work motivation are better prepared to meet workplace demands.
4. Work motivation mediates the relationship between internship experience and work readiness among students from the 2022 cohort of the Faculty of Engineering, Diponegoro University. However, the direct effect of internship experience on work readiness is stronger than the indirect effect through work motivation. This means that internship experience directly contributes to improving student work-readiness, while work motivation partially strengthens that relationship.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study provide several important implications. First, from a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on work readiness by confirming that internship experience is an important factor in preparing students to enter the labor market. The results also strengthen the role of work motivation as a mediating variable, showing that internship experience not only improves students' practical knowledge and skills but also encourages stronger motivation to work. This indicates that work readiness is shaped not only by external learning experiences, but also by internal psychological factors such as motivation. Second, from a practical perspective, the findings suggest that universities need to design internship programs that are more structured, relevant, and meaningful for students. Internship activities should provide students with tasks that are aligned with their field of study, direct supervision from workplace mentors, opportunities to solve real-world problems, and exposure to professional work culture. By improving the quality of internship programs, universities can help students develop technical competence, confidence, adaptability, and stronger motivation to prepare for their future careers. Third, for the Faculty of Engineering at Diponegoro University, this study implies the need to strengthen collaboration with industry partners. The faculty should ensure that internship placements are relevant to students' academic backgrounds and future career paths. In addition, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure students receive proper guidance during their internships. These efforts can help bridge the gap between academic learning and industry expectations. Fourth, for students, the results highlight the importance of actively engaging in internship activities. Students should not view internships merely as an academic requirement, but as an opportunity to build professional experience, improve soft skills, understand workplace expectations, and strengthen their career motivation. Students with higher work motivation are more likely to be proactive in developing their competencies and better prepared to face the transition from university to the workplace. Overall, the findings imply that internship experience and work motivation should be considered as key elements in developing work-ready graduates. A high-quality internship program, supported by strong student motivation, can be an effective strategy to improve graduate employability and facilitate a smoother transition into professional employment.

Interest Conflicts

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publishing of this paper.

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