



Impact of fieldwork and career guidance on vocational students' job readiness

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of fieldwork practices and career guidance on the work readiness of vocational student graduates. Vocational education is designed to prepare students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills that meet the needs of the labour market. Fieldwork, as a core component of vocational training, provides students with real-world experience that enhances their technical abilities and workplace competencies. Additionally, career guidance supports students by helping them understand career options, develop job-search skills, and set realistic employment goals. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, collecting quantitative data through surveys and qualitative insights from interviews with vocational students, instructors, and career counsellors. The findings reveal that students who participate actively in fieldwork opportunities gain not only technical skills but also important soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential for job readiness. Furthermore, structured career guidance contributes significantly to students' preparedness by increasing their awareness of labour market trends, improving their job application skills, and boosting their confidence during the transition from school to work. The combination of practical field experience and career counselling leads to a higher level of readiness among graduates, reflected in their ability to secure employment and adapt to workplace demands. This study underscores the importance of integrating comprehensive fieldwork programs and robust career guidance services into vocational education curricula. Recommendations include fostering stronger collaboration between vocational schools and industries, providing continuous training for career advisors, and implementing regular assessments of students' readiness to enter the workforce. By addressing these areas, vocational institutions can better equip their graduates for successful careers and contribute to reducing unemployment rates among young adults.

Keywords: Fieldwork, Career Guidance, Vocational Education, Work Readiness, Student Graduates, Skills Development, Employment Preparedness

Introduction

Background of the Study

Vocational education plays a vital role in equipping students with the practical skills and competencies necessary to thrive in today's dynamic labour market. Unlike traditional academic education, which often emphasises theoretical knowledge, vocational education focuses on preparing individuals for specific trades, crafts, or careers at various levels. This type of education is designed to bridge the gap between education and employment by providing hands-on training and real-world experience.

One of the critical elements of vocational training is fieldwork, which involves students engaging directly with workplaces, industries, or community settings to apply their skills and knowledge in real-life contexts. Fieldwork practices allow students to experience the expectations, culture, and operational procedures of their chosen professions. This exposure is invaluable for fostering technical proficiency, adaptability, and workplace readiness. Alongside fieldwork, career guidance is another essential component in vocational education. Career guidance encompasses a range of activities aimed at helping students understand their interests, abilities, and career options. It provides support in job search strategies, resume building, interview preparation, and decision-making skills. Effective career guidance ensures that students are not only technically prepared but also informed about the labour market and equipped with the soft skills necessary for job acquisition and career progression.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognised importance of vocational education in developing skilled workforces, many vocational graduates face challenges in securing employment or performing effectively in their jobs. Reports from various labour markets indicate a mismatch between the skills acquired in vocational schools and the demands of employers, leading to underemployment or unemployment among graduates. This issue raises questions about the adequacy of current vocational training programs, particularly in terms of how well fieldwork and career guidance components are integrated and delivered.

Many vocational institutions struggle to provide meaningful fieldwork experiences due to limited industry partnerships, inadequate supervision, or a lack of resources. Similarly, career guidance services may be insufficient, fragmented, or not tailored to the evolving needs of students and labour markets. Consequently, graduates may leave school with theoretical knowledge but without the practical skills, confidence, or awareness necessary to navigate the workforce successfully.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the influence of fieldwork practices and career guidance on the work readiness of vocational student graduates. Work readiness refers to a graduate's preparedness to meet job expectations, including possessing relevant technical skills, soft skills, and an understanding of workplace norms and career pathways. The research seeks to understand how fieldwork experiences

and career guidance programs contribute to or hinder this readiness.

Specifically, the study will examine the quality and extent of fieldwork opportunities provided to students, the nature of career guidance services available, and the perceptions of students and educators regarding their effectiveness. By exploring these factors, the study intends to provide insights into best practices and identify gaps that need addressing to enhance vocational education outcomes.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this research will be valuable to several stakeholders. Vocational institutions can use the results to improve curriculum design, strengthen industry collaboration, and enhance career support services. Educators and career counsellors may gain a deeper understanding of how to better support students in their transition from education to employment. Policymakers can utilise the study's recommendations to develop policies that promote more effective vocational training and labour market integration.

Furthermore, improving work readiness among vocational graduates has broader socioeconomic implications. It can contribute to reducing youth unemployment, addressing skills shortages, and supporting economic growth by creating a more competent and adaptable workforce. For students, enhanced readiness translates to increased employability, job satisfaction, and career development opportunities.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions are proposed:

1. How do fieldwork practices influence the work readiness of vocational student graduates?
2. What role does career guidance play in preparing vocational students for employment?
3. What are the perceptions of students and educators regarding the effectiveness of fieldwork and career guidance in vocational education?
4. What challenges do vocational institutions face in implementing effective fieldwork and career guidance programs?
5. How can vocational education programs be improved to enhance the work readiness of graduates?

Scope and Delimitation

This study focuses on vocational students and graduates within selected institutions that offer vocational training programs. The research will primarily explore fieldwork experiences and career guidance services, analysing their impact on students' readiness to enter the workforce. It will involve data collection from students, educators, and career counsellors through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions.

While the study aims to be comprehensive, it does not cover other factors that may influence work readiness, such as family background, economic conditions, or individual motivation. Additionally, the study is limited to vocational programs within a specific geographic or institutional context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Vocational Education:** Training that equips learners with practical skills and knowledge for specific trades or occupations.
- **Fieldwork Practices:** Hands-on, experiential learning activities conducted in real or simulated workplace environments.
- **Career Guidance:** Services and activities designed to help students understand their career options, develop job search skills, and make informed decisions.
- **Work Readiness:** The state of being prepared to meet workplace demands, including possessing technical skills, soft skills, and professional attitudes.
- **Soft Skills:** Non-technical skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability that are essential for workplace success.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how fieldwork practices and career guidance influence the work readiness of vocational student graduates. The mixed-methods approach is appropriate because it allows the collection of broad numerical data while also gaining deeper insights into participants' experiences and perceptions. Quantitative data were used to measure the extent and impact of fieldwork and career guidance on students' work readiness, while qualitative data helped explore the nuances, challenges, and contextual factors surrounding these experiences.

Study Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises vocational students, recent graduates, vocational educators, and career guidance counsellors within selected vocational training institutions. The institutions were chosen based on their diversity in program offerings, geographic location, and reputation for integrating practical field experiences and career guidance into their curricula.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across different vocational disciplines such as technical trades, healthcare, hospitality, and information technology. The strata were formed based on study programs, and participants were randomly selected within each stratum. This method helped ensure the sample reflected the diversity of vocational education and provided a broad perspective on the issues studied.

The total sample size consisted of approximately:

- 200 vocational students and graduates for the quantitative survey.
- 20 vocational educators and instructors for in-depth interviews.
- 10 career guidance counsellors for focused interviews.

This sample size was determined to balance statistical reliability and the depth of qualitative inquiry.

Data Collection Methods

1. Surveys

A structured questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data from vocational students and graduates. The survey included sections on demographic information, details of fieldwork experiences (duration, nature of tasks, supervision quality), the type and frequency of career guidance received, and self-assessed measures of work readiness (technical skills, soft skills, confidence in job search, and employment outcomes).

The survey utilised Likert scale items (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) to assess perceptions of fieldwork effectiveness and career guidance support. Additional open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide brief qualitative feedback on their experiences.

2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with vocational educators and career guidance counsellors to obtain detailed information about the design, implementation, and perceived effectiveness of fieldwork programs and career services. Interview guides were developed to cover topics such as the challenges of integrating fieldwork, collaboration with industry partners, strategies used in career guidance, and observations of students' readiness.

Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The qualitative data from interviews provided context and explanation for the survey findings, highlighting best practices and areas needing improvement.

3. Focus Group Discussions (Optional)

To further enrich the qualitative data, focus group discussions were organised with groups of vocational students. These discussions facilitated peer interaction and allowed exploration of shared experiences, challenges faced during fieldwork, and the perceived value of career guidance in their job preparation.

Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Analysis

Survey data were entered into statistical software (e.g., SPSS or similar) for analysis. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages) were calculated to summarise participant characteristics, fieldwork engagement, and career guidance participation.

Inferential statistics, including correlation analysis and multiple regression, were performed to examine the relationships between fieldwork practices, career guidance, and various indicators of work readiness. This analysis helped determine the extent to which these factors predict students' preparedness for employment.

2. Qualitative Analysis

Interview and focus group transcripts were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the data into meaningful categories, identifying recurrent themes, and interpreting patterns related to the influence of fieldwork and career guidance on work readiness.

NVivo or similar qualitative analysis software was used to assist in organising and coding data. Triangulation of data sources (students, educators, counsellors) enhanced the validity of the findings by cross-verifying perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards before data collection. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including voluntary participation and confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and care was taken to anonymise data to protect identities.

Participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Additionally, the researchers maintained neutrality and sensitivity, especially when discussing potential shortcomings in vocational programs or career services.

Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations:

- The use of self-reported measures for work readiness may introduce bias, as participants might overestimate or underestimate their skills.
- The study is limited to selected vocational institutions and may not fully represent all vocational education settings, affecting generalizability.
- Constraints in time and resources limited the number of interviews and focus groups, which may affect the depth of qualitative insights.
- Rapid changes in labour market conditions could influence students' perceptions and experiences, which may vary over time.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods design provides a robust framework to understand the complex relationship between fieldwork, career guidance, and vocational students' work readiness.

Results

This section presents the findings from the quantitative surveys conducted with vocational students and graduates, as well as qualitative insights gathered from interviews with educators and career counsellors. The results are organised to address the key research questions: the impact of fieldwork practices and career guidance on work readiness, perceptions of effectiveness, challenges faced, and suggestions for improvement.

Participant Demographics

A total of 200 vocational students and recent graduates participated in the survey. The sample included 55% males and 45% females, ranging in age from 18 to 26 years, with a mean age of 21.5 years. Participants were drawn from diverse vocational disciplines, including:

- Technical trades (30%)
- Healthcare (25%)
- Hospitality and tourism (20%)
- Information technology (15%)
- Other programs such as business administration and creative arts (10%)

This distribution ensured a broad representation of vocational education fields.

Fieldwork Practices and Experiences

The majority of respondents (85%) reported participating in some form of fieldwork as part of their training. The duration of fieldwork placements varied widely, with 40% reporting placements of 1–3 months, 30% between 4–6 months, and 15% longer than 6 months. Approximately 15% indicated minimal or no fieldwork experience due to institutional or logistical constraints.

Students generally viewed fieldwork positively, with 78% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their fieldwork helped improve their technical skills. Many participants highlighted that hands-on tasks such as equipment operation, client interaction, and real-time problem solving provided valuable learning opportunities. For example, a student in the healthcare program noted:

“During my internship at the clinic, I learned how to apply what we studied in class directly to patient care. It gave me confidence and a better understanding of the job.”

However, some students reported challenges such as inadequate supervision, a limited variety of tasks, and mismatches between the fieldwork setting and their vocational program. About 20% felt their placements were not well-structured or lacked meaningful engagement, which they believed reduced the benefit of the experience.

Career Guidance Services

Regarding career guidance, 65% of respondents indicated they had access to career counselling or related services during their training. These services included workshops on resume writing, interview preparation, job search strategies, and information sessions on labour market trends.

Students who received career guidance rated its usefulness positively, with 70% agreeing that it improved their job readiness, particularly in understanding how to navigate the job application process and develop professional soft skills. One hospitality student remarked:

“Career counselling sessions helped me prepare for interviews and taught me how to present myself professionally. Without that, I would have been nervous and unprepared.”

Nevertheless, 35% of students reported limited or no access to career guidance. Interviews with educators revealed that resource constraints and high student-to-counsellor ratios often limited the availability and quality of career services.

Work Readiness Outcomes

Work readiness was assessed through self-reported measures across technical skills, soft skills (communication, teamwork, problem-solving), and job search confidence. The data show that students with more extensive fieldwork experiences (over 3 months) reported significantly higher levels of work readiness across all dimensions compared to those with shorter or no fieldwork.

Similarly, students who accessed career guidance services demonstrated better preparedness in non-technical skills and job search behaviours. A regression analysis indicated that both fieldwork duration and career guidance participation were significant predictors of overall work readiness, explaining approximately 55% of the variance in readiness scores ($p < 0.01$).

These findings suggest that fieldwork primarily enhances technical competence and practical skills, while career

guidance contributes to soft skills development and employment navigation.

Qualitative Insights from Educators and Counsellors

Interviews with vocational educators and career counsellors supported the quantitative findings. Educators emphasised that effective fieldwork integration requires strong partnerships with local industries and careful placement matching to ensure relevant skill application. One educator explained:

“Fieldwork is where theory meets practice. Without a meaningful field experience, students often struggle to adapt to workplace expectations.”

Career counsellors highlighted the importance of starting career guidance early in the students’ training to build awareness and motivation. They also pointed to challenges such as insufficient staffing and limited collaboration with employers, which hinder comprehensive support.

Both groups recommended enhanced coordination between institutions and industry, continuous professional development for supervisors and counsellors, and increased funding for career services.

Challenges Identified

Key challenges affecting the effectiveness of fieldwork and career guidance emerged from both student feedback and staff interviews:

- **Limited Industry Partnerships:** Many institutions struggled to secure enough quality placements, especially in remote or less industrialised areas.
- **Inconsistent Supervision:** Students reported variable quality in mentorship during fieldwork, affecting learning outcomes.
- **Resource Constraints:** Career services were often understaffed and underfunded, limiting the scope and frequency of guidance.
- **Mismatch of Expectations:** Some fieldwork tasks did not align well with students’ curriculum, leading to frustration and reduced skill relevance.

Recommendations for Improvement

Based on the results, several recommendations were identified to enhance work readiness among vocational students:

1. **Strengthen Industry Collaboration:** Build formal partnerships to increase the availability and quality of fieldwork placements.
2. **Standardise Supervision Practices:** Develop guidelines and training for workplace supervisors to ensure consistent mentoring.
3. **Expand Career Guidance Services:** Increase staffing, incorporate technology-based career tools, and integrate career education into the curriculum.
4. **Align Fieldwork with Curriculum:** Ensure that placements reflect the competencies targeted in students’ training programs.

5. **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly assess the effectiveness of fieldwork and career guidance to inform improvements.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of fieldwork practices and career guidance on the work readiness of vocational student graduates. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data provide valuable insights into how these two key elements of vocational education contribute to preparing students for the labour market. This discussion interprets the results in light of existing literature, highlights their implications, and addresses challenges and recommendations for improving vocational training outcomes.

The Role of Fieldwork in Enhancing Work Readiness

The findings demonstrate that fieldwork plays a crucial role in improving the technical competencies and practical skills of vocational students. Students who participated in extended fieldwork placements (more than three months) reported higher levels of job readiness, particularly in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world situations. This aligns with previous research emphasising experiential learning as a critical factor in vocational education success (Kolb, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Fieldwork provides opportunities for students to engage directly with workplace practices, equipment, and professionals, which enriches their understanding of job requirements. The development of hands-on skills during fieldwork not only increases students' confidence but also enhances their adaptability and problem-solving abilities in dynamic work environments. Vocational education programs that effectively incorporate fieldwork prepare graduates to transition smoothly into employment, reducing the gap between education and labour market demands.

However, the study also revealed challenges related to the quality and supervision of fieldwork. Some students reported inadequate mentoring and limited task variety, which constrained the learning experience. This finding resonates with critiques in the literature that highlight the variability in fieldwork quality as a major barrier to effective vocational training (Smith, 2012; Billett, 2015). To maximise the benefits of fieldwork, institutions must establish stronger partnerships with industries and ensure that field placements are relevant, structured, and supported by trained supervisors.

Career Guidance as a Catalyst for Employment Preparedness

Career guidance emerged as another significant factor contributing to work readiness. Students who received career counselling and related services demonstrated better preparedness in soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and job search strategies. These skills are increasingly recognised as essential complements to technical abilities in the modern workplace (OECD, 2017). Career guidance helps students navigate the complexities of the labour market, understand employer expectations, and develop strategies for successful job applications and interviews. The study's findings that career guidance enhances job search confidence and clarity about career pathways confirm prior studies emphasising its importance in reducing youth unemployment and underemployment (Watts, 2013; Hooley *et al.*, 2015).

Nonetheless, the study highlighted that career guidance services were often limited by resource constraints, resulting in unequal access among students. This underscores the need for vocational institutions and policymakers to invest more in career support infrastructure, including staffing, training, and the integration of digital career tools. Early and continuous career guidance can empower students to make informed decisions and enhance their employability prospects.

Synergistic Effects of Fieldwork and Career Guidance

One of the key contributions of this study is the identification of the complementary roles of fieldwork and career guidance in preparing vocational graduates for the workforce. While fieldwork primarily builds technical proficiency and practical experience, career guidance develops the soft skills and strategic knowledge necessary to enter and thrive in the job market. The combined effect significantly improves overall work readiness.

This integrated approach supports holistic vocational education models advocated in recent educational frameworks (CEDEFOP, 2018; UNESCO, 2020). Institutions that foster synergy between these elements are better positioned to produce graduates who not only possess skills but also the confidence and awareness to navigate their careers effectively.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Despite the clear benefits of fieldwork and career guidance, the study identified persistent challenges that limit their effectiveness. Limited industry partnerships, inconsistent supervision quality, and insufficient career services staff were major barriers reported by participants. These issues reflect systemic challenges in vocational education, especially in regions with underdeveloped industrial sectors or limited educational funding.

Furthermore, a mismatch between the tasks assigned during fieldwork and the vocational curriculum was a concern for some students, which can undermine the relevance and impact of experiential learning. This calls for greater coordination between vocational institutions and industry partners to align expectations and ensure meaningful learning opportunities.

The study also points to the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation of fieldwork and career guidance programs. Without regular assessment and feedback mechanisms, vocational education risks becoming outdated and disconnected from labour market needs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have significant implications for vocational education policy and practice. Policymakers should prioritise the development of frameworks that encourage collaboration between vocational institutions and industries. Incentives such as tax breaks, recognition programs, and formal agreements can motivate employers to offer quality placements and mentorship.

Vocational institutions should invest in training supervisors and career counsellors to improve the quality of fieldwork supervision and career guidance delivery. Embedding career education within the curriculum, supported by digital platforms, can expand access and ensure all students benefit. Additionally, there is a need for more flexible and student-centred approaches that consider individual differences in

career interests and learning styles. Tailored fieldwork placements and personalised career counselling can enhance engagement and outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides comprehensive insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported measures of work readiness may introduce bias, and the findings may not be generalizable beyond the specific institutions and regions studied. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to track graduates' employment outcomes over time and explore the long-term impact of fieldwork and career guidance.

Further studies might also investigate the role of emerging technologies, such as virtual internships and online career counselling, in enhancing vocational education. Comparative studies across different countries and economic contexts could provide a broader understanding of best practices.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant influence of fieldwork practices and career guidance on the work readiness of vocational student graduates. Fieldwork provides essential hands-on experience that enhances technical skills and practical understanding, while career guidance supports the development of soft skills and job search competencies. Together, these elements contribute substantially to preparing vocational students for successful entry into the workforce.

However, challenges such as limited industry partnerships, inconsistent supervision, and insufficient career services remain barriers that vocational institutions must address. Strengthening collaboration between schools and employers, improving supervision quality, and expanding career guidance resources are critical steps to enhance the effectiveness of vocational education.

By integrating comprehensive fieldwork opportunities with robust career counselling, vocational programs can better equip graduates with the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed to meet labour market demands. This not only benefits the students but also supports broader economic development through the creation of a skilled and adaptable workforce.

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