

Public Relations Management in Enhancing the Collaboration Between SMK Negeri 6 Malang City and the Industrial Sector

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Industrial Collaboration, Role of Public Relations, Vocational Education	<p>This study explores the role of the Public Relations (PR) division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City in strengthening collaboration with the industrial sector to ensure that graduates possess competencies aligned with labor market demands. The primary issue addressed is how PR can bridge the gap between vocational education and industry requirements through strategic communication and partnership programs. The purpose of this research is to identify the strategies employed by the PR division in establishing and maintaining industrial partnerships, as well as to understand the challenges encountered. The study adopts a qualitative approach utilizing in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that programs such as industrial classes and job fairs significantly contribute to enhancing students' technical skills and soft skills required in the workplace. Despite facing resource limitations and differing expectations between institutions and industries, the established collaborations have had a positive impact, providing students with valuable practical experiences and improving the school's reputation in the broader community. In conclusion, the development of sustainable industrial partnerships is a crucial factor in increasing the relevance of vocational education and ensuring graduates' employability.</p> <p>This is an open-access article under the CC-BY-SA license.</p> 

Introduction

The relationship between vocational schools and the industrial sector is crucial for preparing students to transition into the workforce. Vocational High Schools (SMK) serve as educational institutions that not only deliver theoretical knowledge but also equip students with practical skills tailored to industrial needs. In this context, vocational education must adapt to the

rapid changes in the industrial landscape, especially in the era of Industry 4.0, which demands higher competencies from graduates (Sari, 2023; Hanafi, 2013; Wibowo, 2016).

Vocational education at SMK is designed to develop students' technical and non-technical skills, both essential for improving their competitiveness in the job market. Technical skills encompass specific knowledge in their field of expertise, while non-technical skills—such as emotional intelligence and communication abilities are vital for effective teamwork and adaptability in dynamic work environments (Riza, 2023; Sa'idah et al., 2022). Research indicates that students with strong emotional intelligence tend to succeed more in the workplace as they are better able to manage emotions and interact effectively with colleagues (Riza, 2023).

One key strategy for enhancing the relevance of vocational education to industry needs is through internships (Praktik Kerja Lapangan or PKL). PKL offers students direct exposure to real work environments, which is critical for understanding industrial dynamics and applying their school-acquired skills in practice (Sa'idah et al., 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2022). Through internships, students also develop professional networks that can assist in their job search after graduation (Wibowo, 2016; Husein, 2019). Moreover, involving industries in vocational curriculum development ensures that educational content remains aligned with market demands (Arifin, 2017; Disas, 2018).

The "link and match" policy between vocational education and the industrial sector has become a central strategy for improving the quality of SMK graduates. This concept aims to bridge the gap between school-taught competencies and the skills required by industries (Disas, 2018; Ahmanda, 2022). By involving industries in the educational process, schools can adjust curricula and teaching methods to better meet labor market requirements, thus reducing unemployment rates among SMK graduates (Wibowo, 2023; Suroto et al., 2023).

Additionally, the development of specialized job placement information systems within SMKs plays an important role in helping students access employment opportunities. Such systems serve as platforms connecting students with companies seeking skilled workers, streamlining the job search process (Kusuma et al., 2019; Syahputra, 2023). Through these systems, students can find job vacancies suited to their expertise and obtain additional training to enhance their competitiveness in the labor market (Mariani et al., 2021).

The importance of strengthening school-industry relations is also reflected in efforts to improve the quality of vocational education. Schools must continuously innovate and update curricula to keep pace with technological advancements and evolving industrial needs (Sari, 2023; Wibowo, 2016; Z, 2022). Collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and industries is essential for creating an educational environment that supports the development of relevant, high-quality skills (Suroto et al., 2023; Ahmanda, 2022).

Ultimately, to ensure that SMK students are prepared to face the challenges of the

workforce, schools must provide comprehensive, industry-oriented training. This includes technical skill development, soft skills enhancement, and practical experience through internships and collaborative projects with industry partners (Sa'idah et al., 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2022). A holistic approach like this is expected to produce competent graduates who are ready to compete in the global labor market.

Building a strong relationship between vocational schools and industries is increasingly vital to ensure the production of competent, work-ready graduates. However, establishing effective collaboration is not without challenges. SMK Negeri 6 Malang City faces difficulties in managing the role and function of its PR division to foster harmonious, mutually beneficial relationships with various industrial sectors. Key issues to be addressed include the extent to which the PR division can perform its strategic role, the specific strategies employed to foster industrial relations, and the obstacles encountered in this process. Understanding these aspects is critical for evaluating the effectiveness of PR in achieving the school's main goal: enhancing the relevance of vocational education to labor market demands through close industry collaboration.

To address these challenges, the PR division of SMK Negeri 6 can implement various strategic solutions that strengthen the school's position as an attractive partner for industries while facilitating students' adjustment to workforce requirements. One major solution is to establish long-term, sustainable partnerships with industries through formal agreements such as Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). These agreements should not only regulate internship (PKL) programs but also involve curriculum updates to align with industrial developments and competency standards.

Additionally, PR can enhance student competencies by establishing industrial classes in cooperation with related companies. These classes provide both technical training and soft skills development, along with certifications recognized by the industry, thereby increasing the competitiveness of SMK Negeri 6 graduates in the labor market. Another key solution involves training PR personnel to improve their capacity for managing strategic partnerships, negotiation, and external communications. With these enhanced capabilities, the PR division can expand the school's industrial network by participating in business forums, industrial seminars, and job fairs to foster new collaboration opportunities.

This research aims to thoroughly explore and understand the role of the PR division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City in strengthening collaboration with the industrial sector. The primary focus is to identify the strategies implemented by PR to build, manage, and sustain relationships with industries, and to comprehend the challenges encountered during this process. By examining these aspects, this study is expected to offer valuable insights into how PR efforts can bridge the gap between educational offerings and industrial needs, thereby fostering sustainable partnerships that benefit both student competency development and the overall competitiveness

of SMK Negeri 6 graduates in the labor market.

Despite the extensive discussions on vocational education and school-industry collaboration, limited studies have specifically explored the strategic role of public relations (PR) divisions within vocational schools in facilitating and sustaining such collaborations. Most existing research focuses on curriculum development or internship effectiveness, leaving a gap in understanding how PR contributes to building long-term partnerships with industries. This study addresses this gap by investigating the PR division's strategic functions at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City in managing industrial relations, a topic that remains underexplored in the context of Indonesian vocational education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to deeply explore the roles and strategies of the Public Relations (PR) division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City in enhancing collaboration with the industrial sector. A qualitative method is suitable for obtaining in-depth and contextualized understanding of social phenomena, especially when exploring organizational roles and stakeholder perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data collection techniques utilized in this research included in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, which are commonly applied in qualitative case studies to triangulate data and enhance credibility (Yin, 2018). In-depth interviews were conducted with several key informants, including PR personnel, the principal, teachers involved in industrial collaboration programs, and representatives from industries that had established partnerships with SMK Negeri 6 Malang City. Observations were carried out to directly examine the interactions and activities undertaken by the PR division in managing partnership programs with the industrial sector. Document analysis was also utilized to gather supporting data from archives, partnership agreements, and relevant activity reports (Bowen, 2009).

The research participants comprised PR personnel who were actively engaged in building and maintaining relationships with industries, as well as representatives from partner industries. Furthermore, the principal and several teachers involved in the industrial partnership programs were included to provide a more holistic understanding of the collaboration process. Selecting a range of participants from different institutional roles aligns with purposive sampling strategies commonly used in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The data collection instruments used in this study included semi-structured interview guides, which allow flexibility while maintaining focus on key topics (Kallio et al., 2016). In addition to the interview guides, observation checklists were employed to systematically record PR activities related to industrial collaboration. The combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis facilitated data triangulation, improving the depth and reliability of findings

(Patton, 2015).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which involve identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began with transcription of interview recordings, followed by initial coding, theme development, and theme refinement. This inductive analysis approach enabled the researcher to capture nuanced perspectives and organizational practices related to the PR division's role in fostering collaboration with industries. The insights generated are expected to contribute to the understanding of effective PR strategies in vocational education settings and offer practical implications for improving school-industry partnerships.

Result and Discussion

The results of this study show that the Public Relations (PR) division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City plays a strategic role in fostering partnerships with the industrial sector, which is crucial for enhancing the relevance of vocational education to labor market demands. Based on interviews with the Head of PR, it was stated that, "*PR functions as the primary liaison between the school and industry; we strive to identify companies whose visions align with the educational goals of this vocational school.*" This role encompasses active communication to identify collaboration opportunities, both in the form of student internships (PKL) and curriculum updates aligned with the latest industry standards.

Table 1. Interview Excerpts on the Role of Public Relations

Informant	Interview Excerpt
Head of PR	<i>"We conduct various outreach activities and discussions with companies to explore new partnership opportunities."</i>
Supervising Teacher	<i>"PR serves as an essential intermediary, maintaining active communication with companies to ensure the smooth implementation of internship programs."</i>
Industry Representative	<i>"The role of PR is excellent in preparing students to better understand industry expectations. We have greatly benefited from the programs initiated by the PR division."</i>

The strategies adopted by the PR division to build and sustain relationships with industries are diverse. One of the standout programs is the sustainable partnership model through industrial classes, where several major companies collaborate with SMK Negeri 6 to organize specialization classes tailored to their specific needs. Observations revealed that students participating in these industrial classes received direct technical training from industry practitioners, not only enhancing their technical competencies but also providing practical insights into real-world work environments.

Additionally, the PR division organizes an annual job fair attended by several partner companies. This program offers students the opportunity to engage in direct interviews with

companies and gain a better understanding of industry requirements and expectations. From interviews with PR personnel, it was revealed that *"The job fair program greatly assists students, particularly those who intend to enter the workforce immediately after graduation, as it allows them to interact directly with potential employers."*



Picture 1. SMK Negeri 6 Malang PR Division Facilitates Recruitment Activities for Students and Alumni Through BKK

Source: *Researcher's Documentation*

The PR division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City employs various strategies to establish solid partnerships with the industrial sector, including effective communication, image enhancement, and trust building. Acting as a bridge between the organization and its public, PR prioritizes collaboration and relations with the media to deliver a positive image (Nurhadi, 2023; Zubair et al., 2018; Rifa'i, 2022). In the business sector, PR strengthens trust through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and service communications (Putri et al., 2021; Zulianti, 2022).

Industrial partnerships to improve graduate competencies and synergy are also prioritized, including through media gathering efforts (Rahmawati, 2022; Mahriva & Wuryanata, 2021). Moreover, PR contributes to building the school's organizational identity and leverages digital media for rapid communication in the era of Industry 4.0 (Rosmala, 2021; Nugraha et al., 2020). In facing crises, PR plans crisis management and adapts communication strategies, including adjustments for online learning environments (Kuncoro & Saptaningtyas, 2021; Amaliah & Sudana, 2021).

Public Relations also utilizes marketing public relations strategies to strengthen relationships with partners (Opiyalana, 2023; Sholeh, 2023). Sustainability aspects, such as maintaining good relations with media outlets and managing customer satisfaction, are also important focuses (Suherman, 2023; Panggabean, 2022). In the public sector, government PR efforts aim to foster goodwill and explain public policies transparently (Sani et al., 2020; Simanjuntak, 2023).

Despite the many successes achieved, the Public Relations (PR) division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City encounters several challenges in building effective collaborations with the industrial sector. One of the primary challenges is the limitation of resources, both in terms of personnel and budget. Based on interviews, the Head of PR stated, *"The resources we have are limited, so we*

must be highly selective in choosing the collaboration programs to implement."

Another significant challenge involves the divergence in expectations between the school and industry, particularly regarding curriculum standards. An industry representative interviewed noted, *"There are often discrepancies between the competency standards expected by the industry and what is taught in schools; therefore, more in-depth discussions are needed to align the curriculum accordingly."*

The collaboration between SMK Negeri 6 Malang City's PR division and industries faces several major obstacles, including resource limitations (Cahyaningtyas et al., 2019), differences in competency expectations (Costumato, 2021), and difficulties in building mutually beneficial relationships (Durose et al., 2015). Additionally, the separated organizational structures hinder effective communication (Oldeide et al., 2019), indicating a need to strengthen PR's capacity in relationship management (Elsadig et al., 2017) and encourage stakeholder involvement in collaborative decision-making (Maulana & Dečman, 2023).

Implementing improved communication strategies can help articulate the mutual benefits of collaboration and enhance participation from all parties involved (Corbin et al., 2016). The collaboration established is not merely technical; it also shapes the working culture between the school and industries (Juvonen et al., 2017). A more strategic and inclusive approach is necessary to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these partnerships (Tell et al., 2022).

The collaboration established between SMK Negeri 6 Malang City and the industrial sector has had a significant impact on both students and the school itself. Students who participated in internship programs (PKL) and industrial classes demonstrated notable improvements in both technical skills and soft skills, such as communication abilities and teamwork. Interview results with students who had completed their internships revealed that these real-world work experiences helped them apply theoretical knowledge learned at school to practical workplace situations. One student stated, *"The internship greatly helped me understand how machines operate firsthand and how to coordinate effectively with colleagues on the field."*



Figure 2. SMK Negeri 6 Malang PR Team Monitoring Internship Students in the Informatics Engineering Department at the TNI AD Polytechnic

Source: *Researcher's Documentation*

The positive impact was also evident for the school itself, which became increasingly recognized as an educational institution with strong industrial partnerships. This improvement in reputation led to a higher interest among prospective students and parents in enrolling at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City, as graduates from this school were perceived to have better job prospects due to training that closely aligned with industry needs. In an interview, the school principal remarked, *"Through this collaboration, the school's reputation has improved; many parents and prospective students now believe that this school can provide relevant and high-quality training for their future careers."*

Table 2. Interview Excerpts on the Role of Public Relations

Informant	Interview Excerpt
Internship Student	"The internship greatly helped me understand how machines work firsthand and how to coordinate with a team."
School Principal	"Collaboration with industry has significantly boosted the school's reputation; enrollment interest increases every year."
Industry Representative	"We observe that students from SMK Negeri 6 possess better workplace readiness, thanks to the collaborative programs implemented."

The findings of this study demonstrate that the PR division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City plays a crucial role in enhancing the relevance of vocational education through industry collaboration. Programs initiated by PR, such as industrial classes and job fairs, provide direct benefits to students by improving their competencies and competitiveness. Despite facing challenges such as limited resources and differing expectations between schools and industries, the positive impacts of these collaborations on students, the school, and industry stakeholders are substantial.

This research concludes that developing sustainable partnerships with the industrial sector is essential to ensure the production of competent graduates who are ready to face the challenges of the modern labor market.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the Public Relations (PR) division at SMK Negeri 6 Malang City plays a vital role in bridging the gap between educational needs and industrial demands. Through programs such as industrial classes and job fairs, PR has successfully enhanced the relevance of vocational education to meet labor market requirements. These programs have helped students acquire both technical skills and essential soft skills, such as communication and teamwork abilities, which are highly valued by the industry. Although several challenges were encountered, including resource limitations and differing expectations between the school and industry the collaborations established have generated significant positive impacts for both students and the school. Students benefited from hands-on experiences that

better prepared them to adapt to real-world working environments, while the school succeeded in improving its reputation and attractiveness among prospective students and parents. Overall, the development of sustainable partnerships between vocational education institutions and the industrial sector is crucial for producing competent graduates who are ready to compete in a dynamic and competitive labor market. By focusing on strengthening collaboration, aligning curricula with industry needs, and adapting communication strategies, it is expected that these partnerships will offer strategic solutions to the evolving challenges faced by vocational education in the era of rapid technological and industrial change.

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