

# Special Job Exchange Strategies for Enhancing Graduate Employability in Vocational High Schools Center of Excellence in Yogyakarta and Central Java

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## ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the strategy of the Special Job Exchange (BKK) of the Central Vocational Education Center of Excellence (SMK PK) in Yogyakarta and Central Java in increasing the absorption of graduates in the world of work. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with data collection techniques through interviews with the Principal and Chairman of BKK from 10 PK Vocational education selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis uses Miles and Huberman's interactive model with the help of NVIVO version 12 Plus software. The results of the study show that BKK's main strategy includes cooperation with industry, development of job preparation programs, strengthening students' soft skills and mentality, and the implementation of tracer studies. The challenges faced include students' interests and mentality that need to be improved, limited resources, data and communication management, program synchronization, expansion of industry networks, parental support, and improvement of the quality of graduates. This study concludes that BKK has an important role in increasing the absorption of vocational school graduates, but still faces various challenges that require a comprehensive and collaborative approach to overcome them.

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## Introduction

The open unemployment rate in Indonesia is still high. Vocational school graduates have become the largest contributor to unemployment rate in Indonesia in the last five years (Wijaya & Utami, 2021). Industry-recruited graduates are based on academic expertise and practical skills in the work environment (Russell, 2018). SMK is an educational institution that prepares its graduates to enter the world of work (Suharno et al., 2018; UUSPN, 2003). Industry collaboration with vocational education has proven to be an effective strategy (Nguyen et al., 2023) by referring to a structured educational approach that integrates theoretical learning and effective career practice (Ramli & Abd Wahid, 2021) and sustainable (Cockrill & Scott, 1997). Employability in the form of skills, knowledge, and competencies is important to increase job opportunities and facilitate access to the job market (Cheong & Lee, 2016). Vocational education and industry-school collaboration are important to improve graduate employability in the job market (Tentama & Yusantri, 2020). The Central Statistics Agency in February 2023 stated that the unemployment rate from vocational school graduates, which was 9.6% (BPS, 2023). This condition is contrary to Government Regulation Number 17 of 2010 which states that vocational education aims to produce graduates who are ready to work (PP.17, 2010). Education at vocational education aims to equip students with attitudes, knowledge, and skills so that they are ready to work, and absorbed in the world of work or entrepreneurship (Wibowo et al., 2018). Most vocational school graduates are expected to be able to work immediately but in reality, cannot be absorbed in the world of work due to the lack of competence from graduates and because these conditions are not balanced with the number of job opportunities (Nadiya & Andari). The form of the program implemented to create or develop the competencies of vocational school graduates so that they are absorbed in the world of work is with the Center of Excellence Vocational Education (SMK PK).

SMK PK is an effort to develop vocational education through the process of cooperation with the business world and the industrial world to improve the quality and quality of SMK's performance (Diksi, 2020). To optimize the absorption of graduates, SMK PK seeks to optimize the function of special job exchange (BKK) as an implementing unit that provides services and job vacancy information. Cooperation between schools and the world of work is a program that must be carried out (Lestari et al., 2022). BKK in vocational secondary education units has a function as a job placement implementer (Suprap, 2024). BKK manages information about job vacancies, carries out recruitment, selection, and placement of graduates to industry (Listiana, 2019). BKK is an institution under SMK that can make a significant contribution to student work readiness (Efrinaldi et al.,

2023). Student job readiness is believed to reduce the discrepancy between the number of vocational school graduates and job vacancies in the industry (Sayuti & Mujiarto, 2018). A study related to the BKK strategy is needed to overcome the inequality between the fact that vocational education are the largest contributor to unemployment and the expectations of vocational school graduates as graduates who are ready to compete in the world of work. Many studies have examined the BKK strategy of each school, but there has been no research discussing the BKK strategy of several schools labeled PK especially several areas of Yogyakarta and Central Java to increase the absorption of its graduates.

## Method

This research is descriptive research, the approach used in this study is a qualitative method because this research intends to obtain a study related to the factors that cause vocational education as the largest contributor to open unemployment and how the BKK strategy of the Central Java Center of Excellence Vocational Vocational education in DIY Central Java in increasing the distribution of its graduates. Based on these objectives, the research method used is qualitative descriptive. The research sample is 8 PK Vocational education obtained through purposive sampling. The ten schools are three PK Vocational education in Yogyakarta, one PK Vocational education in Magelang, two PK Vocational education in Klaten, and three PK Vocational education in Boyolali. Data collection uses interview techniques, with resource persons from the Principal and the Chairman of BKK. Data analysis uses the Miles & Huberman model. The Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model describes the qualitative research process as a dynamic and integrated cycle. In this approach, data collection and data analysis run simultaneously and influence each other. This process involves conceptualization, categorization, and description that develops based on findings in the field. Unlike linear models, qualitative data analysis according to Miles and Huberman is simultaneous and interactive, reflecting the adaptive and responsive nature of qualitative research to the context and data that emerges during the study. Data analysis was carried out with the help of NVIVO version 12 Plus software which was used to facilitate the process of making concept maps of qualitative research results (Tambun, 2021; Wahid et al., 2023). Miles et al. (2014) describes the process of qualitative research data analysis as follows on figure 1:

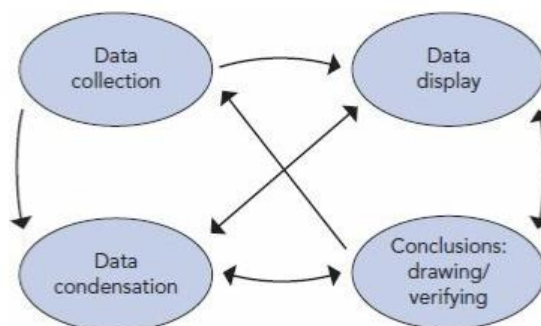


Fig 1: Data Analysis Component: Interactive Model (Miles et al., 2014: 33)

## Result and Discussion

### Data Collection

Based on the results of interviews and observations of BKK SMK PK in Yogyakarta and Central Java, the research sample is in table 1.

SMK Name	Results of Interviews and Observations
SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Andong	SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Andong has a target of 40% of graduates working, 40% becoming entrepreneurs, and 20% continuing their studies, though entrepreneurship and further studies are still below target. More than 40% of graduates successfully enter the workforce. To support this, BKK conducts career guidance, including interview and psychological test preparation, with support from companies like Sosro and Sido Muncul. The main challenge is students' discipline and motivation, which are addressed through continuous mentoring. BKK also uses Google Forms and WhatsApp for tracer studies to monitor graduates' career paths.
SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Jatnom	SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Jatnom emphasizes early career planning from grade 10 through job training with BLK. The school benefits from SMK PK assistance, improving collaboration with industries and strengthening student competencies. However, challenges arise in forming new industry partnerships and encouraging students to work outside their hometowns. The school evaluates its programs annually, aiming to establish at least five new MoUs with industries each year. Despite obstacles like HRD network limitations, BKK actively gathers job vacancy information and shares it with students through social media and alumni groups.
SMK Muhammadiyah Imogiri	SMK Muhammadiyah Imogiri has been implementing the SMK Center of Excellence (PK) program since 2021, ensuring BKK activities align with industry needs. The school collaborates closely with companies to tailor the curriculum and provide special classes. Teachers also undergo internships to enhance their industry-related skills. Routine tracer studies help evaluate graduate absorption. Students receive training in job applications, interviews, and financial literacy. Although industry demands fluctuate and some students face challenges in adapting to the workplace, continuous communication with companies and program evaluations help address these issues.
SMK Muhammadiyah Mungkid	SMK Muhammadiyah Mungkid, established in 1975, has built a strong reputation for supplying skilled graduates to companies like Astra Honda Motor and PT Pama Persada Nusantara. Since 2004, its BKK has facilitated student recruitment and internships, supported by collaborations with companies such as Mitsubishi. The main challenge is expanding industry partnerships and ensuring students' job readiness. The school overcomes this through intensive training and skill enhancement programs, aiming to maintain its high employment rates.
SMK N 3 Magelang	SMK N 3 Magelang integrates career preparation into its curriculum, introducing students to industry environments from grade 10. The school focuses on work culture development, specialized industrial classes, practical job training, and soft skills training. Job recruitment is facilitated at no cost, ensuring fair access to opportunities. With strong alumni engagement, a curriculum aligned with industry needs, and a zero-fee recruitment policy, the school successfully produces graduates in high demand.
SMK N 2 Depok Sleman	SMK N 2 Depok Sleman highlights the role of parental support in students' career success, particularly for those working outside their region. Industry collaborations with companies like Mitsubishi and Toyota provide students with direct workplace experience. However, recruitment challenges persist, as some job vacancies receive fewer applicants than needed. To bridge this gap, the school emphasizes soft skills and mental resilience training. Alumni networks also play a crucial role in maintaining industry relationships and securing job placements. By 2027, the school aims to establish industrial classes across all majors.
SMK N1 Mojosoongo Boyolali	SMK N 1 Mojosoongo Boyolali has a strong track record in preparing students for international careers, particularly in Japan. This success stems from robust foreign language training and industry partnerships. BKK also focuses on job training, tracer studies, and expanding international job networks. Challenges include low student interest in certain jobs and limited parental support, but initiatives like mental strengthening programs and skill development continue to enhance graduate employability.
SMK Negeri 2 Yogyakarta	SMK Negeri 2 Yogyakarta prioritizes branding to align vocational education with industry expectations. Career preparation includes visioning workshops, psychological tests, and job fairs. The school actively fosters industry relationships, particularly in mining and manufacturing, to streamline graduate recruitment. Budget constraints and limited BKK personnel pose challenges, but tracer studies help refine strategies and improve program effectiveness. Career mapping begins in grade 10 to align students' aspirations with available career pathways.
SMK Muhammadiyah 4 Boyolali	SMK Muhammadiyah 4 Boyolali's BKK focuses on job seeker services, career counseling, and industry collaboration. Strong partnerships with businesses and government agencies facilitate graduate job placement. Coordination between school leadership and BKK ensures smooth program implementation, while ongoing industry engagement increases job opportunity access for graduates.
SMK Tunas Harapan Pati	SMK Tunas Harapan Pati has benefited from PK program assistance since 2021, strengthening recruitment training, tracer studies, and industry partnerships. Students interested in higher education are guided by BK, while BKK handles job-seeking graduates. A key challenge is the age limit in employment requirements, preventing under-18 students from joining the workforce. Some graduates also face difficulties in workplace environments, but BKK assists them in finding better accommodations. Tracer studies indicate that 75-85% of graduates are successfully employed, with industries consistently recruiting from the school due to graduate competency.

### Data Condensation

Based on the results of interviews from various vocational education in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and Central Java, the following are the conclusions regarding the strategies and challenges of the Special Job Exchange (BKK) in increasing the absorption of vocational school

graduates in the following table 2 and table 3:

Table 2. BKK's Main Strategy

Strategy	Description
Cooperation with Industry	Establish extensive cooperation with various local, national, and international industries. Developing an MoU that covers various aspects such as street vendors, recruitment, and teacher internships. Synchronizing the curriculum with industry needs.
Job Preparation Program Development	Mapping students' career interests since grade 10. Providing soft skills training, CV making, and job interview preparation. Hold industry classes and bring in motivators from companies
Strengthening Soft Skills and Students' Mentality	Cultivating work from the beginning through the introduction of the industrial world. Collaborate with external parties such as the TNI to build student character. Focus on developing discipline and work ethic.
Tracer Study and Program Evaluation	Conduct regular graduate tracing to assess the effectiveness of the program. Using tracer study data for evaluation and improvement of the BKK program.
Socialization and Approach to Parents	Hold meetings with parents to instill a work mindset. Provide an understanding of the benefits of working outside the region.

Table 3. BKK's Biggest Challenge

Challenge	Description
Students' Interests and Mentality	Low interest of students to participate in recruitment activities Students' tendency to choose jobs that are comfortable and close to home
Resource Limitations	Funding constraints to run the BKK program optimally Limited number of personnel who manage BKK
Data and Communication Management	Difficulties in conducting tracer studies due to loss of contact with alumni Inefficient management of job seeker and company data
Program and Schedule Synchronization	Schedule clashes between BKK activities and the agenda of the curriculum or other institutions Challenges in coordinating various parties involved in the BKK program
Expansion of Industrial Network	Difficulties in establishing new partnerships, especially with large industries without personal connections Challenges in maximizing the benefits of existing cooperation
Parent Support	Parents' worries about children who work away from home Challenges in convincing parents about the benefits of working outside the area
Improving the Quality of Graduates	The need to continuously improve the quality of graduates to match industry standards Challenges in preparing students to compete in an increasingly competitive job market.

### Data Display

The Diagram on figure 2 is Analysis of BKK strategies and challenges illustrates the role of BKK in increasing the absorption of vocational school graduates from various strategies and challenges. BKK's main strategies include cooperation with industry, the development of job preparation programs, strengthening students' soft skills and mentality, and the implementation of tracer studies. Cooperation with industry includes making MoUs, adjusting the curriculum, and organizing industrial classes. Job preparation programs involve CV preparation and interviews, soft skills training, and career interest mapping. Strengthening students' soft skills and mentality is carried out through an introduction to the industrial world and cooperation with external parties. The challenges faced by BKK include students' interests and mentality that need to be improved, limited resources, data and communication management, program synchronization, expansion of industry

networks, parental support, and improvement of the quality of graduates. The implementation of the tracer study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and improve the program on an ongoing basis. This diagram shows the complexity of BKK's task in preparing vocational school graduates for the world of work, with various interrelated strategies and challenges that need to be overcome to achieve success.

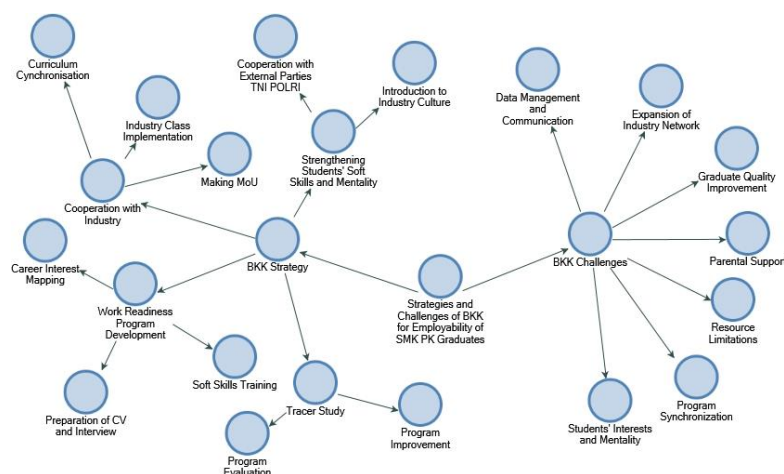


Figure 2. Diagram of Strategy and Challenge Analysis of BKK SMK PK

### Drawing conclusions

In achieving its goals, BKK needs to make improvements in management Plan, Do, Check and Act. BKK management has a significant influence and contributes a total of 70% to the work readiness of students (Hubbaya, 2023). Careful planning (Plan) needs to be done by BKK to understand the problems that occur. All schools that are respondents have done various ways to understand the problems that occur such as collecting data on career specializations, conducting tracer studies, conducting SWOT analysis, and evaluating each program that has been carried out previously to become the basis for planning now and in the future. All schools still tend to conduct tracer studies as the basis for policy-making for the BKK program, and only a few schools mention collecting data on students' career interests, the rest of the BKK programs that are prepared only adjust to previous programs without improvement. To increase the effectiveness of BKK's role in distributing graduates, it is necessary to make improvements from programs that have been carried out previously and continue to make improvements in tracer studies (Dinata, 2020).

Implementation and control (Do) are conducted by all schools that are respondents, which is carried out based on data obtained from career mapping and tracer studies. Some of the BKK programs carried out such as intensive guidance programs for physical test preparation, interviews and psychological tests, education and training programs (job training, job readiness training, skills

training, and job application training), industrial network expansion programs, visioning programs (career planning), workshops, job information services, job intermediary guidance, parent socialization, and job fairs. Some schools have started to develop websites to facilitate the distribution of job vacancy information. BKK should start utilizing a website-based information system so that information distribution is more effective and easy to reach job seekers (Al Hamzah & Ujianto, 2024). With website design, BKK can overcome the problem of managing graduate data, accelerating work information, making it easier to access information and manage application documents (Tabrani et al., 2020). The industrial network expansion program is also an important thing that BKK must do. To optimize job distribution for graduates, BKK needs to collaborate with various companies or industries (Rifa'i & Hakim, 2023; Sasongko et al., 2020). Establishing cooperation with industry can be done by promoting the profile of graduates to the industry (A'yunin, 2022). BKK is expected to collaborate with various new industries, but BKK also needs to build sustainable partnerships with the industry (Widiyarso & Utama, 2021) and need to strengthen cooperation with industry (Ayu & Trihantoyo, 2021). The better the implementation of BKK services and the ability to cooperate, the higher the job readiness of graduates (Efrinaldi et al., 2023). In addition to providing information and establishing cooperation, in carrying out its role, BKK needs to communicate with alumni and parents (Triana, 2021; Yusneti et al., 2022). Job readiness guidance is also effective in channeling graduates if supported by good services, support from various parties, and partnerships with industry (Suprap, 2024). Support from various parties, especially in schools, can be done by conducting teacher internships to improve teachers' abilities in the hope of being able to prepare graduates according to industry needs (Susanti, 2023). Job readiness guidance can be done with career guidance services that are tailored to the needs of students in the hope of increasing readiness to work (Falaqiyah, 2021). The BKK program to increase the absorption of graduates can also be carried out with additional training and education (Hidayati et al., 2021), career seminars/workshops and job fairs (recruitment) (Nasrullah, 2024). Both job fairs and seminars can be carried out in collaboration between schools and industry to facilitate the distribution of skilled labor (Ma'rufiati et al., 2024). BKK needs to adjust to the characteristics of existing resources in schools and is based on mapping data and existing problems, in its implementation it requires program coordination and supervision (Santoso et al., 2023).

Obstacles and obstacles in the implementation of the BKK program were also experienced by most of the schools that were respondents. Some of the obstacles and obstacles such as lack of interest of students, students' mental readiness in facing the world of work, lack of communication

and coordination of human resources, difficulty in establishing cooperation with industry, risks of working away from home, implementation of programs that clash with other school agendas, decrease in the number of needs from industry, mistakes of graduates in the workplace, limited parental support, foreign language skills, and limited funds. To overcome internal obstacles such as coordination between human resources and limited funding through improving the quality of human resources and the efficiency of the use of funds (Pranoto & Wardoyo, 2022). Human resource problems can also be overcome by instilling a responsible attitude and cooperation in carrying out activities (Tobing & Santoso, 2023). The various problems experienced make it important to evaluate and analyze (Check). BKK to channel graduates into the world of work through analysis and identification of resources, implementation of activities, and control through regular evaluations and reports (Hanif et al., 2023; Hidayati, 2023; Marifa, 2020).

Enhancement actions (Act) is done to further improve the readiness of graduates to face the world of work. The evaluation carried out at the end of the activity is expected to improve BKK's performance (Nurlaili, 2022). The performance of BKK, which is the respondent, can be mostly assessed as necessary improvements in particular Accountability on the work unit (Fitriana & Wibawani, 2022). Improving BKK's performance can also be done by conducting transparency in communication, evaluating resources, and developing responsive policies to increase the competitiveness of graduates (Rahmi, 2023) and continuous service is needed (Ainah, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of qualitative data analysis from various vocational education in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and Central Java, it can be concluded that BKK has an important role in increasing the absorption of vocational school graduates in the world of work. The main strategies implemented by BKK include close cooperation with industry, the development of job preparation programs, strengthening students' soft skills and mentality, and the implementation of tracer studies for program evaluation. In establishing cooperation with industry, BKK focuses on making MoUs that cover various aspects such as street vendors, recruitment, and teacher internships. This effort aims to adapt the curriculum to the current industry needs. The job preparation program developed includes mapping students' career interests from grade 10, soft skills training, CV making, and job interview preparation. Some schools also hold industrial classes and bring in motivators from companies to provide insights to students. Strengthening students' soft skills and mentality is a priority by cultivating a work culture from the beginning through the introduction of the industrial world. Some schools even collaborate with external parties such as the TNI to build student



character. Tracer studies are conducted regularly to assess the effectiveness of the program and make necessary improvements.

Despite this, BKK still faces some big challenges. Low interest and mentality of students to participate in recruitment activities are the main obstacles. Students tend to choose jobs that are comfortable and close to home. Limited resources, both in terms of funding and personnel, are also an obstacle in running the BKK program optimally. Data and communication management is still a challenge, especially in conducting tracer studies and managing job seekers and company information. Synchronization of programs and schedules is also often a problem, with clashes between BKK activities and the agenda of the curriculum or other institutions. The expansion of industry networks, especially with large companies without personal connections, is still an obstacle for some schools. Parental support is also an important factor. Some parents are still worried if their children work away from home, so more efforts are needed to convince them about the benefits of working outside the area. Finally, improving the quality of graduates remains an ongoing challenge so that students can meet industry standards and compete in an increasingly competitive job market.

BKK in Yogyakarta and Central Java has implemented various innovative strategies to increase the absorption of graduates. However, there are still significant challenges that require a comprehensive and collaborative approach to overcome them. By continuing to increase cooperation between schools, industry, and other stakeholders, it is hoped that BKK can be more effective in preparing vocational school graduates to enter the world of work. A more thorough study is needed for the next research, namely involving the industry in the research to get their perspective on the effectiveness of graduates through the BKK program and measuring the absorption rate of vocational school graduates before and after the implementation of the BKK strategy. The schools studied admitted that the data tracer study is still problematic, both because there is a version of the Ministry of Manpower, the version of the Ministry of Elementary and Secondary Education through the Directorate General of Vocational, the Regional Education Office, and the school version. The second problem is that the rate of return of tracer data is not optimal. So it is not robust to explain the phenomenon of absorption or non-absorption of graduate work. It is a big question because BPS (Central Statistics Agency) data that has been consistent for many years reveals the phenomenon of the highest unemployment rate of vocational school graduates.

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We thank the reviewers for the thoughtful feedback regarding the insight from industry. We appreciate the reviewer's commitment to ensuring the rigor and comprehensiveness of our work. However, after careful consideration, we believe that adding insight from the industry at this stage of our research may not be feasible or necessary for this study. The current dataset was carefully designed to address the objectives outlined in the manuscript. Expanding the dataset further might extend beyond the scope of this current research and potentially divert focus from the core objectives. We also believe that the current dataset is sufficiently robust to support the conclusions drawn in the manuscript. In addition, your suggestion regarding the insight from industry will be accommodated in our future works section as shown in the revised version of our manuscript.

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