

## The Role of School Public Relations in Establishing Cooperation with DUDI to Increase the Absorption of Graduates of Muhammadiyah 1 Salam Vocational School

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### Abstract

*The high unemployment rate among vocational school graduates indicates a gap between graduate competencies and the needs of the business and industrial world. This condition requires the strategic role of school public relations in establishing and managing sustainable cooperation with the business and industrial world in order to increase graduate employment. This study aims to analyze the role of school public relations in establishing cooperation with DUDI to improve graduate employment at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study type. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation with informants selected purposively, including the principal, vice principal for public relations and curriculum, Special Job Exchange (BKK) manager, department heads, and industry partners. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and was tested for validity through source and technique triangulation. The results showed that the role of public relations in increasing graduate employment was carried out through four main stages, namely planning, organizing, actuating and controlling. Public relations plays a mediating role in analyzing competency requirements, mapping DUDI partners, developing and implementing cooperation through MoU and conducting evaluations based on tracer studies. The cooperation established includes field work practices, industry classes, teaching factories, guest teachers, teacher internships, and graduate recruitment. These findings indicate that the role of public relation, when managed systematically and collaboratively, contributes positively to increasing the absorption of vocational school graduates into the workforce.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation for a nation's development and progress. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to various levels of education, including secondary education. Vocational High Schools (SMK) are formal educational units that provide a specific skills-based learning and training system with the aim of empowering students to develop professional competencies and work readiness in line with the demands of the workforce (Ahyanuardi Ahyanuardi, Sri Rahmadhani & Zuryana Zuryana, 2022; Ilmi & Rukun, 2020). From the initial stages of education, students are guided to build a commitment to mastering applied skills and gaining work experience in specific areas of expertise, such as construction, mechanical engineering, automotive engineering, business and management, and other relevant fields. In this context, SMK, as a vocational educational

institution, is positioned as a primary driver of economic and social dynamics in the community. The existence of SMK is expected to produce a multiplier effect, namely not only improving community educational attainment but also making a tangible contribution to economic growth, particularly through strengthening the information sector (Rohaeni et al., 2021).

The objectives of vocational high school education, according to Law No. 20 of 2003 on National Employment, are to equip students to be ready to enter specific fields of work, to produce skilled human resources that are in line with the demands of the business world and industry, and to foster self-development capacity in absorbing and adapting to advances in science, technology, and the arts (Zuhairah et al., 2021). However, facts on the ground show that education still faces a major problem, namely the unemployment rate in Indonesia, especially in vocational high schools (SMK). Based on data published by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), SMK graduates show a dominant proportion in the open unemployment rate (TPT). This is a problem because the goal of vocational high schools is to prepare students to have skills that are ready for immediate employment. (BPS, 2025)

Table 1. Labor Force According to the Last Education Completed

No	Last education	Year		
		2023	2024	2025
1	SD	39,76 %	36,54 %	35,89 %
2	JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	18,24 %	18,15%	17,81%
3	SMA	19,18%	20,55%	20,63%
4	Vocational School	11,31%	12,09%	12,84%
5	Diploma I/II/III	2,20%	2,39%	2,39%
6	Diploma IV, S1, S2, S3	9,31%	10,28%	10,44 %

The unemployment rate for vocational high school graduates is projected to be 11.31% in 2023, 12.09% in 2024, and 12.84% in 2025. The year-over-year increase in unemployment is a negative sign for the education sector. In this context, vocational high schools are expected to play a role as institutions that produce quality graduates to meet workforce needs, rather than being a major contributor to the high unemployment rate.

Vocational High Schools (SMK), as educational institutions oriented toward graduates' job readiness, require active community involvement in their implementation. In this regard, the community is positioned as a school stakeholder, providing support and contributing directly to efforts to improve educational quality (Candrasasmi et al., 2023). To achieve a harmonious relationship between the school and the community, a pattern of continuous cooperation and communication is required from both parties. Accordingly, every activity held within the school environment must be aligned with the demands and evolving needs of the business and industrial world (DUDI). This is done through information dissemination activities and deliberation forums related to school program planning with relevant parties in the business and industrial world (DUDI). This will ultimately build a reciprocal and beneficial partnership pattern between the school and the business and industrial world (DUDI) through an MoU (*Memorandum of Understanding*) (Amaliya et al., 2024). This strategy does not stop at the signing of a cooperation agreement, but includes ongoing efforts to maintain relations between parties. Maintaining relationships is carried out through consistent information exchange, accompanied by ongoing coordination between both

parties to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the cooperation (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Zidni Choiron Nafi, 2024). Therefore, to achieve this, the role of school public relations (PR) is needed.

The existence of school public relations (PR) plays a strategic role as the frontline in building and managing communication and collaboration with the business and industrial world (DUDI). PR acts as a mediator, bridging the interests and communication between internal school components and external parties from the industrial world, so that the continuity of the partnership can be maintained effectively and long-term. Through the implementation of planned communication, official correspondence, and intensive coordination with all stakeholders, PR contributes significantly to ensuring the transition process of vocational high school graduates to the world of work can proceed optimally (Safitri et al., 2024; Werdiningsih, 2020).

The relationship between Vocational High Schools (SMK) and the world of work is strong, because the competencies and skills provided in schools must be aligned with the needs of the job market that continues to develop in society. Thus, efforts to improve the quality of SMK cannot be separated from the dynamics and developments of the employment sector. Government Regulation of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 50 of 2020 concerning Field Work Practices for students, specifically Article 4 paragraphs (1) and (2), emphasizes that students at the SMK/MAK, SMAKB, and LPK levels are required to carry out PKL in the world of work environment. What is meant by the world of work in these provisions includes several sectors, namely the business world, the industrial world, state-owned or regional-owned enterprises, government agencies, and other relevant institutions (Permendikbud, 2020).

The benefits of collaboration between schools and the Industrial and Industrial Industries (DUDI) have a significant impact on the quality of education and the quality of graduates, as well as the courage and mental abilities of students to enter the workforce (Hidayat, 2023). In this day and age, schools are not only sufficient to equip students with theory, but also provide practical training to prepare students directly for work in the field, according to the direction of schools that have collaborated with DUDI. The role of public relations in liaising with DUDI provides mutual benefits for both parties, thus contributing to reducing the unemployment rate among young graduates.

Thus, this research aims to conduct an in-depth study and analysis of the role of school public relations in collaborating with the industrial sector to increase the absorption of graduates of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam. This research is expected to contribute conceptual and academic reinforcement to enrich the literature discussing the relationship between school institutions and the industrial sector.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. This approach was chosen because the researcher focused on an in-depth study of the role of school public relations in increasing graduate absorption, particularly in the context of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam. Through this approach, the research aimed to comprehensively understand the processes, experiences, and social dynamics that developed uniquely at the research location. The exploratory nature of the case study allowed the researcher to examine the complexity of the phenomenon from various perspectives (Bancong, 2025). Thus, the focus of the research was not directed at generalizing the findings, but rather on achieving a comprehensive understanding of the unique situation, as recommended in case study studies on vocational education (Sarmila et al., 2025).

The research was conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam, Magelang, Central Java, during the period from November 2025 to January 2026. The determination of informants

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in this research was carried out by applying the technique of *purposive sampling*, namely the deliberate selection of subjects based on certain criteria and considerations relevant to the research objectives, by considering the established criteria. The informants involved consisted of teachers serving as principals, vice principals for curriculum, vice principals for public relations, teachers or staff assigned to the Special Job Exchange (BKK), industry partners who act as workshop heads, and teachers who serve as department heads. The purposive sampling technique was used because it allows researchers to selectively determine informants based on suitability to research needs, so that each participant has in-depth knowledge, experience, and information relevant to the focus of the study (Andriani et al., 2025). Through the application of this technique, researchers can explore in-depth narratives and experiences from informants who are directly involved in implementing collaborations with DUDI.

Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Interviews are conducted with an open-ended guide to allow for unexpected data to emerge. Observations are conducted to identify any *teaching factory* (TEFAs), industrial culture, and industrial class, while documentation includes a *tracer study*, a school MoU with DUDI, lesson schedule that has been synchronized with DUDI. Data validity was carried out through triangulation of data sources and technical triangulation, as well as member checking techniques with key informants to ensure the validity of the narrative (M. Husnullail, Risnita, M. Syahran Jailani, 2024). Data analysis in this study applies the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes three main stages, namely data collection, data reduction process, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Qomaruddin, 2024). Data were coded manually to find dominant themes related to the role of public relations in establishing cooperation with DUDI to increase the absorption of student graduates.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study describes the dynamics of the school's public relations role in building partnerships with the business and industrial world (DUDI) to increase graduate absorption at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam. The study focuses on the managerial dimension, encompassing the planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation stages. All findings were obtained through a data triangulation process that included in-depth interviews, field observations, and a review of various supporting documents.

#### A. Public Relations Planning in Establishing Cooperation with DUDI to Increase the Absorption of Graduates of Muhammadiyah 1 Salam Vocational School

The public relations planning stage at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam in establishing cooperation with DUDI requires the involvement of multiple parties, starting from the school leadership, heads of departments, curriculum, special job fairs to industry partners. The public relations program needs to be designed carefully and directed while still referring to the vision of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam as the main foundation. In this context, planning occupies a very strategic position because it is the basis for all school public relations activities. Good planning allows public relations to play a more effective role, especially in building and strengthening cooperation with the business world and the industrial world (DUDI), so that efforts to increase graduate absorption can be implemented systematically and sustainably.

The vice principal for public relations stated that the public relations department carries out a collaborative planning process with the industrial and industrial sectors (DUDI) through an analysis of the need for expertise and competency that aligns with the graduate profile and the school's vision and mission. This is relevant to research conducted by Ahyanuardi Ahyanuardi, Sri Rahmadhani & Zuryana Zuryana, 2022, 1645 | **The Role of School Public Relations in Establishing Cooperation with DUDI to Increase the Absorption of Graduates of Muhammadiyah 1 Salam Vocational School** (Hesti Risatina)

which states that public relations officers must create a plan before carrying out their duties, which must be aligned with the school's vision and mission. This planning stage also includes mapping the industrial and industrial sectors (DUDI) at both the local and regional levels, implementing field work practices (PKL), and recruiting graduates. This was conveyed by the vice principal for public relations, who stated:

"...so, to plan for DUDI collaboration to increase graduate absorption, we first analyze the competency of the skills. Then, we align them with the profile of vocational school graduates, their vision, and mission. We also map DUDI for internships and recruit graduates."

Throughout the entire process, public relations acts as a mediator, bridging the interests of the school and the industrial and business sectors to build mutual understanding. The drafting of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) is a concrete manifestation of the planning undertaken, serving not only as an administrative document but also as a representation of the long-term commitment between the two parties. Therefore, the planning carried out by the public relations department at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam is quite effective. The planning is aligned with the school's vision and mission.

## **B. Organizing Public Relations in Establishing Cooperation with DUDI to Increase the Absorption of Graduates of Muhammadiyah 1 Salam Vocational School**

During the organizational stage, SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam assigned responsibilities to the public relations department, the vice principal for curriculum, the BKK, and the head of the TKR department. This was based on the organizational structure and the Task Distribution Decree established by the principal. This was clarified by the principal:

"...the distribution of teacher duties is adjusted based on the Task Distribution Decree. Therefore, Public Relations is assisted by the BKK and PKL..."

So, public relations don't work alone, but rather with the assistance of the Community Service Agency (BKK) and the Field Workers (PKL). The BKK and PKL are under the command of the Public Relations Department. At SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam, public relations focus more on networking. Networking here refers to building communication with the industrial and business sectors (DUDI). This was emphasized by the Principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam:

"...in PR, it's more about building networks, so building intense communication with the DUDI (industrial and industrial) sector. Ideally, a PR professional should frequently visit the industry to understand its needs and the content..."

The curriculum department's responsibility for the vice principal is to synchronize the curriculum with the DUDI (industrial and industrial) sectors. The vice principal coordinates this by aligning the curriculum with the needs of the business and industrial world through curriculum synchronization activities involving the public relations department as a liaison with industrial partners. Information from the public relations department and the BKK regarding industry needs and job opportunities will serve as the basis for developing learning materials and scheduling internships.

## **C. Implementation of Public Relations in Establishing Cooperation with DUDI to Increase the Absorption of Graduates of Muhammadiyah 1 Salam Vocational School**

The implementation of Public Relations at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam is most evident in implementing various forms of collaboration with the Industrial and Industrial Industry (DUDI). Public Relations actively communicates and coordinates

directly with industrial partners, both through visits, formal meetings, and online communication. The collaboration includes internships, industrial classes, guest teachers, interns, and graduate recruitment. This was emphasized by the Principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam, who stated:

"...Our collaboration with DUDI is outlined in the MoU. The MoU covers curriculum synchronization, teacher training/teacher internships, and internships *teaching factory* (TEFA) to the recruitment of workers..."

The MoU signed by the school and the Industrial and Industrial Industries (DUDI) is inseparable from the public relations efforts in establishing a good relationship. Furthermore, public relations play a role in building a positive image of the school. DUDI has confidence in the quality of its graduates. The implementation of the collaboration not only focuses on activities, but also on mentoring students to prepare them for entering the workforce. Public relations are not alone, assisted by the BKK (Vocational Education Agency) and PKL (Training Professionals) to facilitate the recruitment process, disseminate job vacancy information, and provide training in industry ethics and work culture. Thus, graduates not only possess technical skills but also mental readiness and a professional attitude.

#### **D. Evaluation of Public Relations in Establishing Cooperation with DUDI to Increase the Absorption of Graduates of Muhammadiyah 1 Salam Vocational School**

The evaluation conducted by the public relations department of Muhammadiyah 1 Salam Vocational School aims to assess the extent to which collaboration with the Industrial and Industrial Industries (DUDI) has impacted graduate absorption. Public relations play a role in gathering feedback from industry partners regarding student and graduate performance, as well as conducting a *tracer study* to determine the status of graduates after graduation. The evaluation results serve as a basis for collective reflection to improve planning and implementation of future collaborations. This is reinforced by the principal's statement that:

"...Evaluations are conducted periodically through several steps. We conduct tracer studies to determine data on graduates who are working, continuing their education, or becoming entrepreneurs. This data is analyzed by the BKK (Education and Community Empowerment Agency) as evaluation material. We then hold evaluation meetings. The results of the evaluation are realized through strengthening cooperation with the DUDI (Industrial Industry and Business) ..."

Regular evaluations help schools maintain the relevance of their collaborations and ensure that their relationships with the industrial and industrial sectors remain productive. With systematic evaluations, collaborations go beyond signing an MoU and contribute significantly to improving graduate quality and employability. The Head of the TKR Department (Kajur) emphasized this point, stating:

"...we are evaluating graduate absorption by periodically reviewing graduate data through tracer studies coordinated with the BKK and Public Relations. We will evaluate these results in department and school meetings..."

These findings are consistent with the research results by Wahyu Wisnu Setiawan and Slamet Winaryo (2021), which emphasized that the evaluation process functions as a mechanism for improvement and strengthening deficiencies in the implementation of work programs, so that their implementation in the future can be optimized to achieve more effective and sustainable performance.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the role of public relations and DUDI (Industrial and Industrial Workforce) in increasing the absorption of graduates at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam. Initially, planning, implementation, organization, and evaluation were carried out. Where the planning was carried out in accordance with the vision of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam as the main foundation. The planning includes an analysis of the need for expertise competencies that are aligned with the graduate profile and the school's vision and mission. The planning stages also include mapping DUDI both at the local and regional levels, and the implementation of field work practices (PKL) to the graduate recruitment mechanism. The organization of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Salam in assigning responsibilities to public relations, the vice principal of curriculum, BKK, and the head of the TKR department, is based on the organizational structure and the Decree on the Division of Tasks that have been determined by the principal. The implementation of the collaboration includes PKL, industrial classes, guest teachers, intern teachers, and graduate recruitment. Evaluation is carried out by conducting a tracer study where this is to track students who work, continue their education, and become entrepreneurs. The results of the tracer study will be evaluated in an evaluation meeting.

School policies are needed regarding data on students who are working, continuing their education, or becoming entrepreneurs, in addition to tracer studies. The cooperative relationship between schools and the industrial and business sectors (DUDI) is already well-established, so it should be maintained.

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