The Relationship Between Digital Literacy and Emotional Intelligence on Vocational High School Students' Work Readiness

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Abstract: Vocational education plays a crucial role in preparing a skilled workforce to meet industrial demands. However, the high unemployment rate among vocational high school (SMK) graduates, reaching 8.62% in February 2024 (BPS), indicates a gap between graduates' competencies and industry requirements. This study aims to examine the relationship between digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and job readiness among vocational students in Kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota. This research employed a quantitative approach with data collected through questionnaires and tests administered to 195 students from SMK Negeri 1 Guguak and SMK Negeri 2 Guguak. Multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the impact of digital literacy and emotional intelligence on job readiness. The results show that digital literacy significantly influences job readiness (t-value = 6.568, p < 0.05), highlighting the importance of mastering digital tools for employability. Similarly, emotional intelligence has a significant effect (t-value = 1.804, p < 0.05), demonstrating its role in workplace adaptability and collaboration. Furthermore, both variables collectively contribute to job readiness (F-value = 28.623, p < 0.05), explaining 54.9% of its variance. Moreover, strengthening digital literacy and emotional intelligence also supports the development of STEAM-based competencies, which are essential for preparing vocational students for the dynamic demands of the modern workforce. These findings emphasize the need for integrating digital literacy and emotional intelligence training in vocational education to enhance graduates' competitiveness in the labor market.

Keywords: Digital literacy; Emotional intelligence; Job readiness; Vocational education.

Introduction

Vocational education plays a strategic role in preparing a competent workforce that is ready to compete in the industrial world (Wahid & Khoulita, 2019). However, in reality, the unemployment rate among vocational high school (SMK) graduates remains a persistent challenge. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in February 2024, the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) for SMK graduates reached 8.62%, the highest among all educational levels.

This phenomenon reflects a gap between graduates' competencies and industry demands, which is caused by various factors, including outdated curricula, limited access to industry-standard training, and a lack of soft skills development. Among these factors, two crucial aspects that significantly impact job readiness are digital literacy and emotional intelligence (Maulanada et al., 2024).

Digital literacy is not merely about operating technological devices but encompasses a broader set of skills, including the ability to search, analyze, evaluate,

and manage information effectivelyn(Fattah et al., 2023). In today's rapidly evolving digital era, digital literacy has become an essential competency that must be mastered by SMK graduates to enhance their employability and competitiveness in the workforce. Unfortunately, an initial survey conducted on 150 SMK students from various vocational programs in Kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota revealed that only 45% of students feel confident in operating industry-relevant software. Moreover, 30% of students struggle with technology-based assignments, indicating a gap between the skills acquired in school and those required in the workplace. Additionally, 25% of students remain unfamiliar with productivity tools such as word processors, spreadsheets, and design software, which are commonly used in professional environments. This deficiency suggests that many students are not adequately prepared to meet the digital demands of modern industries.

Beyond technical skills, emotional intelligence plays a critical role in shaping graduates' readiness for employment. Emotional intelligence includes the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's emotions, as well as effectively interact with others. It is a crucial factor in workplace success, influencing how individuals handle pressure, adapt to changes, and collaborate within teams (Prabawati, 2019). The initial survey conducted in SMKs across Kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota showed that 55% of students experience difficulty in managing their emotions under task-related stress, which can negatively impact their problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Furthermore, 40% of students lack confidence when communicating with supervisors or colleagues, which may hinder professional growth and career advancement. Additionally, 35% of students reported struggling with teamwork, which is a fundamental skill required in almost every industry. These findings highlight a critical gap in the development of soft skills among SMK students, which could contribute to their challenges in securing stable employment.

The integration of digital literacy and emotional intelligence training into SMK curricula is essential for addressing these issues. Currently, vocational education primarily emphasizes technical proficiency, often neglecting the importance of holistic skill development. Many schools still rely on conventional teaching methods that focus on theoretical knowledge rather than hands-on digital applications and interpersonal skills training (Adolph, 2024).

As a result, students may excel in technical subjects but lack the adaptability and problem-solving abilities required in dynamic work environments. Industry expectations have shifted significantly, with employers increasingly seeking candidates who possess not only technical expertise but also strong communication skills, resilience, and the ability to collaborate effectively. In this context, digital literacy and emotional intelligence are not only pivotal for employability but are also integral components of STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics), which emphasizes holistic skill development for 21st-century careers. Therefore, an educational approach that balances technical knowledge with digital literacy and emotional intelligence development is crucial for improving the job readiness of SMK graduates(Witri & Muslikah, 2022).

This study aims to analyze the relationship between digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and job readiness among SMK students in Kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota. By conducting this research, we seek to identify specific areas where students face the greatest challenges and develop targeted strategies to enhance their preparedness for the workforce. Through a combination of empirical data analysis and industry insights, this study will provide actionable recommendations for educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders in vocational education. It is expected that the findings will contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and industry-relevant curriculum, ensuring that SMK graduates are equipped with the necessary competencies to thrive in an increasingly competitive and technology-driven labor market.

Ultimately, addressing the issues of low digital literacy and emotional intelligence will not only improve individual employability but also contribute to reducing the overall unemployment rate among SMK graduates. Enhancing these skills will enable graduates to be more adaptable, confident, and capable of navigating the complexities of the modern workplace. With targeted interventions and curriculum improvements, SMK graduates can become valuable assets to industries, aligning their competencies with market demands and ensuring a more seamless transition from education to employment.

Method

This study employs a quantitative research method with a survey approach and descriptive associative design. The objective is to examine the relationship between digital literacy and emotional intelligence on vocational high school students' job readiness. Data were collected from respondents who were selected as the research sample, using tests to assess digital literacy and questionnaires to measure emotional intelligence and job readiness. Similar studies have also utilized a quantitative survey method with a descriptive approach to explore causal relationships between these variables. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to

analyze how students' digital literacy and emotional intelligence contribute to their preparedness for the workforce in the Industry 4.0 era, considering that vocational high school students are trained with skills relevant to their respective expertise.

The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Guguak and SMK Negeri 2 Guguak, spanning a period of approximately two months (November – December 2024). The population of this study includes all 12th-grade students from vocational high schools in Guguak District, totaling around 440 students. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, targeting students who meet specific criteria relevant to the study. The appropriate sample size was determined using Isac and Michael's table with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a sample size of 195 students. The study employed a probability sampling technique, specifically random sampling, ensuring that each student had an equal chance of being selected. The selected students completed the digital literacy test and questionnaire on emotional intelligence and job readiness.

Data collection involved primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained directly from respondents through tests, surveys, and questionnaires, while secondary data were gathered from literature reviews, journals, books, and online sources relevant to digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and job readiness.

The research instruments included objective tests for digital literacy, structured based on a question blueprint aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy (C1 to C6). Meanwhile, questionnaires were used to assess emotional intelligence and job readiness, employing a semantic differential scale, where responses ranged from highly positive to highly negative. Scores were assigned from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating a highly positive response and 1 indicating a highly negative response. The data collected were analyzed using actual and ideal score comparisons to determine the influence of each variable.

To ensure instrument validity and reliability, the study conducted validity and reliability tests. The validity test employed the product-moment correlation technique, where an item was considered valid if its r-value exceeded the r-table value. The reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, where a coefficient exceeding the threshold indicated a reliable instrument. The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 23.

For data analysis, the study applied classical assumption tests, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. The normality test used the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, with a significance value of ≥ 0.05 indicating a normal distribution. The multicollinearity test examined the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, ensuring that Tolerance values exceeded 0.1 and VIF values were below 10. The heteroscedasticity test checked for the variance consistency of residual errors to ensure the robustness of the regression model.

Result and Discussion

Result
Data Description

Data collection was conducted from November to December 2024 at SMKN 1 Guguak and SMKN 2 Guguak, with a total of 195 respondents. Digital literacy data was measured through a test consisting of 40 items and a questionnaire with 40 statements. The test and questionnaire were distributed via class teachers using Google Forms. The collected data were processed and analyzed using SPSS version 23 to ensure accuracy and reliability.

The purpose of collecting this data was to determine the level of digital literacy and emotional intelligence among vocational high school students and how these factors contribute to their job readiness. A comprehensive understanding of these variables will help educators and policymakers develop targeted strategies to enhance students' employability.

Job Readiness (Y)

The summary statistics for job readiness are shown in Table 1, providing an overview of the distribution of student scores. Job readiness is an essential factor in determining students' preparedness to enter the workforce. Understanding these values allows educators to identify gaps and develop necessary interventions to improve students' competencies.

Table 1. Description of Job Readiness Data (Y)

Statistic	Value
Minimum	97.00
Maximum	144.00
Mean	120.32
Median	120.00
Mode	119.00
Standard Deviation	9.08
Variance	82.39

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of student job readiness scores, allowing for a clearer view of score variations among respondents. The distribution highlights the proportion of students in different readiness categories, providing valuable insights into how well-prepared they are for employment.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Student Job Readiness (Y)

No	Class Interval	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	95–100	4	2.05
2	101–106	5	2.56
3	107–112	31	15.90
4	113–118	46	23.59
5	119–124	42	21.54
6	125–130	40	20.51
7	131–136	21	10.77
8	137–142	5	2.56
9	143–148	1	0.52
Total	-	195	100

The table above shows that the majority of students fall within the score range of 113–130, indicating a moderate level of job readiness. However, some students still fall into lower categories, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to boost their employability skills.

Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the impact of Digital Literacy (X1) and Emotional Intelligence (X2) on Job Readiness (Y). The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	UC		SC	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	19.635	4.754	-	2.751	0.005
Digital Literacy (X1)	0.546	0.053	0.068	6.568	0.000
Emotional Intelligence (X2)	0.312	0.120	0.216	1.804	0.023

The multiple regression model suggests that an increase in digital literacy (X1) by one unit corresponds to an increase in job readiness (Y) by 0.546, while an increase in emotional intelligence (X2) results in a 0.312 increase in job readiness. These findings indicate that both variables significantly contribute to students' job readiness, with digital literacy having a stronger effect. This result emphasizes the importance of equipping students with digital skills as a primary factor in enhancing their employability. While emotional intelligence also plays a role, digital competencies appear to have a more substantial influence on job readiness.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (Adjusted R^2) measures how much variance in job readiness can be explained by digital literacy and emotional intelligence.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination (Adjusted R^2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.741	0.549	0.540	3.609

This result indicates that 54.9% of the variation in job readiness is explained by digital literacy and emotional intelligence, while the remaining 45.1% is influenced by other factors not included in this study. This finding underscores the need for further research into additional factors that may impact job readiness, such as industry partnerships, internship experiences, and personal motivation.

In conclusion, these results suggest that improving digital literacy and emotional intelligence should be prioritized to enhance students' job readiness. Vocational schools should incorporate targeted programs to strengthen these skills, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped for the demands of the workforce.

Discussion
The Relationship Between Digital Literacy and Work Readiness

Digital skills are not only focused on technical operations but also require higher-order thinking abilities, such as information retrieval, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving in digital technology use (Ambarwati et al., 2022). According to De Haan (2010), digital components are integral parts of professional skills that must be possessed, as organizations have rapidly evolved, requiring employees with extensive digital competencies. Mastering digital technology plays an active role in organizations because effective and efficient performance results from optimized technology use, making digital skills essential in work readiness (Sabrina et al., 2024).

Digital literacy is one of the key factors contributing to vocational students' work readiness. It encompasses not only the ability to operate technological devices but also the capacity to access, understand, and utilize information effectively through digital platforms (Cynthia & Sihotang, 2023). Digital literacy involves a variety of skills, including evaluating online information critically, collaborating virtually, and adapting to the ever-changing digital landscape (Sugiarto & Farid, 2023). These skills are crucial as today's workforce demands employees who can leverage digital tools to improve productivity. Work readiness among vocational students will improve significantly if digital literacy is systematically developed in educational environments.

Based on the study's findings, digital literacy has a positive and significant relationship with students' work readiness. This is supported by statistical test results,

where the t-value (6.568) is greater than the t-table value (1.667), with a significance level of 0.005 (< 0.05). This indicates that the research hypothesis is accepted, affirming that digital literacy directly influences students' work readiness at SMK Negeri 1 Guguak and SMK Negeri 2 Guguak. Consequently, digital literacy is recognized as a crucial factor in preparing students for the workforce.

Digital literacy extends beyond technical skills to encompass the ability to comprehend, process, and effectively utilize information technology. In this study, digital literacy enhances students' ability to adapt to the dynamic needs of the workforce. This competence gives students an advantage in tackling technology-based challenges, which are essential requirements in various industrial sectors. The findings confirm that digital literacy provides a strategic contribution to students' work readiness.

Consistent with the study by (Sari, 2023), which highlighted that digital literacy supports 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, and problem-solving, this research confirms the relevance of digital literacy in the modern job market. Students with high digital literacy levels are better equipped to adapt to evolving workplace environments, particularly in industries integrating digital technologies. Therefore, this study not only adds empirical evidence but also reinforces the importance of digital literacy as a core competency in the workforce.

This study aligns with previous findings and emphasizes the importance of digital literacy in vocational education. Schools must integrate digital literacy comprehensively into their curricula. This recommendation is in line with (Yulianti & Khafid, 2015), who suggested collaboration between the education sector and industries to ensure curriculum relevance to labor market needs. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on the relationship between digital literacy and work readiness while providing practical recommendations for vocational education policy development.

The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Work Readiness

One of the key factors contributing to an individual's success is intelligence quotient (IQ), which accounts for 20%, while other supporting factors, including emotional intelligence (EQ), contribute 80% (Lie & Darmasetiawan, 2018). Emotional intelligence helps individuals develop self-awareness, regulate emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and maintain good interpersonal relationships. In the workplace, emotional intelligence enables individuals to work collaboratively in teams, ensuring maximum productivity (Jannah et al., 2023).

The findings indicate that emotional intelligence has a positive and significant relationship with students' work readiness. Statistical analysis shows that the t-value (1.804) is greater than the t-table value (1.667), with a significance level of 0.023 (< 0.05). Consequently, the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted, confirming that emotional intelligence significantly enhances students' work readiness.

These results suggest that emotional intelligence plays a critical role in helping students manage stress, collaborate in teams, and adapt to workplace environments. The ability to recognize and regulate emotions both personal and interpersonal — is fundamental to their readiness for the workforce. Thus, emotional intelligence is as crucial as technical skills in determining students' success in professional settings (Purwanto, 2024).

This study aligns with research by Goleman (1995), which demonstrated that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to career success. Similarly, research by (Riza & Yoto, 2023) found that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle conflicts, communicate effectively, and develop higher self-confidence in the workplace. This study reinforces that emotional intelligence is not only relevant in social contexts but also a vital element in building work readiness.

Therefore, fostering students' emotional intelligence should be a priority for educational institutions, especially at vocational schools. Training programs and learning approaches that emphasize interpersonal skill development can better prepare students for workplace challenges(Miftahuddin & Robani, 2023). These findings provide practical recommendations for schools to integrate emotional intelligence training into their curricula, ensuring a balanced approach between technical skills and emotional competencies needed for professional success (Purnama et al., 2024).

The Combined Influence of Digital Literacy and Emotional Intelligence on Work Readiness

Developing emotional intelligence and digital literacy enhances work readiness, as both skills complement each other in improving performance and efficiency in the industrial world (Rosyida & Bahtiar, 2024). This is consistent with (Witri & Muslikah, 2022), who reported that both soft skills and hard skills positively influence employee performance in industrial activities.

Based on the simultaneous test (F-test), digital literacy and emotional intelligence together have a significant relationship with students' work readiness at SMK Negeri 1 Guguak and SMK Negeri 2 Guguak. The F-test results show that the F-value (28.623) is greater

than the F-table value (3.04), with a significance level of 0.002 (< 0.05). Therefore, the third hypothesis (H3) is accepted. These results confirm that digital literacy and emotional intelligence are essential variables that collectively enhance students' work readiness, highlighting the strong interconnection between technical and emotional skills in workforce preparation (Firmansyah et al., 2020). These two competencies align closely with STEAM principles, where technical proficiency (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) is complemented by interpersonal and creative capacities (Arts), ensuring a comprehensive readiness for industrial and professional environments.

Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R Square) value of 0.549 indicates that digital literacy and emotional intelligence together explain 54.9% of the variation in students' work readiness. The remaining 45.1% is influenced by other factors not included in this study, such as work experience, family support, and external influences. These findings emphasize the importance of digital literacy and emotional intelligence as core components in students' work readiness development while also suggesting the need for further exploration of additional influencing variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

These results suggest that vocational schools should focus on integrating both digital literacy and emotional intelligence development programs. By doing so, students will be better equipped to navigate the demands of the modern workforce. This research contributes to the discussion on vocational education strategies, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that combines technical proficiency with emotional competence for optimal career readiness (Riza & Yoto, 2023).

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the research findings and discussions, it can be concluded that digital literacy and emotional intelligence significantly influence the work readiness of vocational high school students. The study confirms that students with higher digital literacy levels are better prepared for the workforce, as evidenced by statistical results (t-value 6.568 > 1.667, p-value 0.005 < 0.05). Digital literacy enables students to efficiently complete tasks, collaborate, and utilize technology, reinforcing its role as a crucial element in workforce competency. Similarly, emotional intelligence has a significant impact on work readiness (t-value 1.804 > 1.667, p-value 0.023 < 0.05), demonstrating that students with strong emotional intelligence exhibit superior communication, decision-making, and interpersonal relationship skills. Furthermore, the combined influence of digital literacy and emotional intelligence is substantial (F-value 28.623 > 3.04, p-value 0.002 < 0.05), indicating that these two factors together contribute to the overall preparedness of students for the job market. Therefore, integrating digital literacy and emotional intelligence into educational curricula is a strategic approach to producing competent and adaptive graduates capable of thriving in an increasingly competitive job market. Integrating STEAM-based approaches by combining digital literacy and emotional intelligence will further strengthen vocational graduates' ability to innovate, collaborate, and adapt in multidisciplinary work settings.

Conflicts of Interest
The author declares no conflict of interest.

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