

Bridging School and Industry: A Correlational Study on Internship Experience and Custom Fashion Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

Internship programs are mandatory in Indonesian vocational schools, including SMK Negeri 1 Kendal, to enhance students' skills and work readiness. This study investigates the correlation between internship experience and learning outcomes in custom-made fashion production among 106 twelfth-grade fashion students. Using a quantitative correlational approach, data were collected through internship experience questionnaires and students' competency exam scores. Statistical analysis via IBM SPSS 19 included validity and reliability tests, descriptive statistics, normality and linearity tests, and hypothesis testing using correlation and determination coefficients. Results showed a very weak and negative correlation ($r = -0.126$, $p = 0.199$), with only 1.6% of the variance in learning outcomes explained by internship experience. Although internships provided broad exposure to garment industry divisions, they did not significantly impact students' performance in custom fashion making. This finding highlights a potential misalignment between internship content and curriculum goals, suggesting the need for program redesign and further in-depth research.

Keywords: internship experience, custom fashion, learning outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Internship program is an integral component of vocational education in Indonesia, intended to bridge the gap between school-based learning and real-world industrial practices (Yoto et al., 2024). As mandated by the Ministry of Education and Culture and reinforced through the *Merdeka Curriculum*, internship is a compulsory subject designed to provide hands-on experience in industries related to students' vocational competencies (Sumual & Soputan, 2018). For students in three-year vocational programs, a minimum duration of six months (792 hours) is required, allowing them to engage in authentic work environments aligned with their study programs.

At SMK Negeri 1 Kendal, students in the Fashion Design program undertake internships at various industry partners, including local garment manufacturers and tailoring businesses. These internships aim to enhance technical skills and provide contextual understanding that supports classroom learning. One of the key subjects closely related to internship is Custom-Made Fashion, which focuses on producing personalized garments using tailoring or couture techniques. These subject demands precision, creativity, and mastery of garment construction procedures, all of which are expected to be reinforced through field experience.

Existing literature underscores the importance of internship programs in developing vocational competencies. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory posits that knowledge is constructed through concrete experiences followed by reflection and application (Akella, 2010). In the vocational context, internships are seen as critical experiential platforms. Jackson (2015) emphasize that structured workplace experiences help students develop technical, social, and behavioral skills that are essential for workforce integration.

Several studies have supported this theoretical perspective. Kozar & Hiller Connell (2015) demonstrated a significant relationship between internship experience and sewing quality among fashion education students, while Putriatama et al. (2016) found that industrial practice positively influenced students' job readiness and practical skills. However, most prior research tends to focus on general competence or post-internship perceptions rather than examining the direct correlation between internship experience and academic performance in a specific subject like Custom-Made Fashion. Moreover, little

attention has been given to secondary-level vocational students, especially in the fashion sector, where internship experiences vary in depth and relevance.

Preliminary observations in April 2025 at SMK Negeri 1 Kendal revealed that 39.62% of twelfth-grade students had not reached the minimum passing score in the Custom-Made Fashion subject prior to their internship. This raises questions about the extent to which internship contributes to actual academic outcomes. While internships are presumed to enhance students' practical competencies, the impact on formal learning achievements remains unclear.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the correlation between internship experience and learning outcomes in the *custom-made fashion* subject among twelfth-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Kendal. Grounded in experiential learning theory and the school-to-work transition framework (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999), this research aims to assess whether practical industry exposure translates into measurable academic gains in vocational learning. The findings are expected to contribute to the discourse on improving the relevance and effectiveness of internship programs in vocational education.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between students' internship experience and their learning outcomes in the Custom-Made Fashion subject. The correlational approach was selected to determine the degree and direction of association between the two variables without manipulating any conditions. The study was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Kendal during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The population consisted of all twelfth-grade students enrolled in the Fashion Design program. A total sampling technique was applied, involving all 106 students as research participants.

The independent variable in this study was internship experience, while the dependent variable was the learning outcome in the Custom-Made Fashion subject. Data were collected through two sources. First, a questionnaire adapted from Shazrena (2022), consisting of 28 items, was used to assess students' experiences during their internship. Second, documentation in the form of students' academic achievement scores in the Custom-Made Fashion subject was obtained from school records to measure their learning outcomes.

The internship experience questionnaire was subjected to content validity testing using Aiken's V method, which showed that the items were valid. Reliability was assessed using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), and the results indicated that the instrument had acceptable internal consistency. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS version 19. The analysis procedures included validity and reliability testing of the instrument, descriptive statistical analysis, normality and linearity tests to meet the assumptions of correlation analysis, and hypothesis testing using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to determine how much of the variance in the learning outcomes could be explained by the students' internship experience. All statistical analyses were performed at a significance level of 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 106 twelfth-grade students from the Fashion Design program at SMK Negeri 1 Kendal during the 2024/2025 academic year. Using total sampling, the study investigated the relationship between internship experience and learning outcomes in the Custom-Made Fashion subject. Data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire and documentation of students' scores in the final competency test. Descriptive analysis was performed on both variables to observe their frequency distribution.

Table 1 presents the category distribution of students' internship experience scores.

Table 1. Category of Internship Experience Scores

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Very Low	$X < 112.66$	7	6.6%
Low	$112.66 < X \leq 120.63$	26	24.5%
Moderate	$120.63 < X \leq 128.69$	36	34.0%
High	$128.69 < X \leq 136.76$	30	28.3%
Very High	$X > 136.76$	7	6.6%
Total		106	100.0%

The results show that most students (34.0%) had moderate internship experience, followed by 28.3% with high experience, and a small percentage (6.6%) with very low or very high experience.

Table 2 summarizes the category distribution of students' learning outcomes in Custom-Made Fashion.

Table 2. Category of Learning Outcomes

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Very Low	$X < 87$	10	9.4%
Low	$87 < X \leq 90$	22	20.7%
Moderate	$90 < X \leq 94$	34	32.0%
High	$94 < X \leq 97$	36	33.9%
Very High	$X > 97$	4	3.7%
Total		106	100.0%

The majority of students achieved moderate to high scores, indicating a generally acceptable level of achievement in the subject.

A normality test was conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Normality Test Results (One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test)

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	K-S Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
106	124.6604	8.06862	0.787	0.566

The Asymp. Sig. value of 0.566 is greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed and suitable for parametric testing.

Linearity was assessed to ensure that the relationship between internship experience and learning outcomes could be analyzed using Pearson correlation. The linearity test resulted in an F-value of 1.183, which is lower than the F-table value of 1.56, and a significance level of 0.277. This confirms that the data exhibit a linear relationship.

To examine the correlation between internship experience and students' learning outcomes, Pearson's product-moment correlation test was conducted. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Between Internship Experience and Learning Outcomes

	Internship Experience (PKL)	Learning Outcomes
PKL	1.000	-0.126
Learning Outcomes	-0.126	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.199

The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.126$) indicates a very weak and negative relationship between internship experience and learning outcomes. The significance value ($p = 0.199$) exceeds the threshold of 0.05, leading to the conclusion that the relationship is not statistically significant.

Further analysis using the coefficient of determination is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (Model Summary)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.126	0.016	0.006	3.864

The R^2 value of 0.016 indicates that only 1.6% of the variance in students' learning outcomes can be explained by their internship experience. The remaining 98.4% is likely influenced by other variables not explored in this study.

These results align with findings from (Elom et al., 2024), who noted that internship experience and interest had a limited, non-significant influence on job readiness. Similarly, Rosyada & Suratman (2025) reported no significant relationship between internship experience and work readiness or motivation. These studies collectively suggest that internship programs may offer general exposure to the workplace but may not directly improve specific academic achievements.

Moreover, several internal and external factors may have stronger effects on learning outcomes. Kurniawan et al. (2018) found that motivation (80.6%), interest (66.4%), and attention (61.5%) were highly influential internal factors, while teaching methods (63.9%) and learning media (66.8%) were significant external factors. Anyaegbu et al. (2022) also emphasized the role of psychosocial conditions, including

cognitive, affective, and family support. Agustin et al. (2025) highlighted that learning media, teaching methods, and student motivation combined contributed to learning outcomes in vocational settings.

In the case of Custom-Made Fashion, internship placements may not always provide tasks or experiences aligned with the curriculum's technical requirements. Students may be involved in general sewing or supporting tasks, which, while useful, do not necessarily reinforce classroom competencies such as technical design analysis or couture production. This misalignment could explain the lack of significant correlation between the two variables.

In conclusion, the data suggest that internship experience has no significant effect on students' performance in Custom-Made Fashion. This highlights the need to align internship activities with curriculum objectives and to consider other factors—such as motivation, instructional quality, and media use—that may have greater influence on vocational learning outcomes.

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the limitations of assuming that field-based learning, such as internships, automatically enhances students' academic achievement in specialized vocational subjects. Although internships are widely advocated in vocational education as means of improving student competencies and workplace readiness (Kapareliotis et al., 2019), this study confirms that exposure alone is insufficient unless it is purposefully structured and aligned with curriculum goals.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which underpins this study, suggests that learning is most effective when learners go through all stages of the experiential cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. However, if students are engaged primarily in routine or mechanical tasks during their internships—without structured guidance, feedback, or opportunities to reflect and apply learning in meaningful ways—they may remain at the level of "concrete experience" without fully progressing through the cycle. This may explain why, despite completing the internship, their academic outcomes in Custom-Made Fashion remain unchanged or only marginally improved.

Another consideration is the mismatch between school-assigned competencies and industry demands or practices. In the fashion industry, workplace efficiency often prioritizes specialization and speed rather than holistic learning. Interns may be assigned repetitive tasks such as cutting or stitching, without being involved in more complex cognitive activities like design interpretation, material analysis, or measurement adjustment—all of which are essential components of the Custom-Made Fashion curriculum.

In addition, student agency and motivation during internships can vary widely. Not all students actively seek learning opportunities or reflect critically on their experiences. This passive involvement limits the impact of internships on internalized learning outcomes. Research by Liu et al. (2020) has shown that workplace learning requires not just affordances (opportunities) provided by the industry but also students' engagement and capacity to transform those experiences into personal competence. Therefore, internships that are poorly designed or insufficiently monitored by schools may become procedural rather than developmental.

Institutional factors may also play a role. Schools often lack control over the quality and consistency of internship programs due to their dependence on external industry partners. Without close collaboration between teachers and industry mentors, students' field experiences may diverge significantly from the intended pedagogical outcomes. This situation reinforces the importance of school–industry partnership models that emphasize co-planning, supervision, and evaluation to ensure learning goals are met.

Furthermore, the fact that 98.4% of the variance in learning outcomes was explained by variables outside internship experience underscores the multidimensional nature of academic achievement in vocational education. Internal factors such as cognitive ability, prior knowledge, self-discipline, and emotional resilience—as well as external elements like peer interaction, family support, teaching quality, and access to learning resources—all interact to shape outcomes. The low correlation observed in this study is therefore not only statistically informative but also pedagogically significant.

Finally, the findings invite reflection on how internships should be restructured. Rather than treating them as isolated experiences, schools should embed reflective journals, portfolio-based assessments, and teacher-mentor debriefings into the internship process. These additions would facilitate deeper learning, support knowledge transfer, and enhance metacognitive awareness among students. It is also recommended that schools collect feedback from students and industry supervisors to continuously refine internship design and ensure that learning is authentic, scaffolded, and aligned with curricular goals.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between internship experience and learning outcomes in the Custom-Made Fashion subject among twelfth-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Kendal. Using a quantitative correlational approach, the findings revealed a very weak and negative relationship between the two

variables, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.126 and a significance value of 0.199. The coefficient of determination (R^2) further indicated that only 1.6% of the variation in students' learning outcomes could be explained by their internship experience, while the remaining 98.4% was influenced by other factors.

These results suggest that internship experience, as currently implemented, does not significantly enhance students' academic performance in fashion-specific competencies such as custom-made garment construction. The findings highlight a potential misalignment between the internship activities assigned to students and the learning objectives emphasized in the vocational curriculum. While internships provide real-world exposure, their educational value appears limited when learning is not structured, guided, or assessed in ways that promote deep understanding and skill transfer.

This study emphasizes the need for vocational institutions to rethink the design and implementation of internship programs. Schools should strengthen collaboration with industry partners to ensure that students are given meaningful, varied, and curriculum-relevant tasks during their placements. Additionally, integrating reflective components, formative assessments, and feedback mechanisms into the internship process could enhance students' ability to connect workplace experience with classroom learning.

Future research should explore other contributing factors that influence vocational learning outcomes, including student motivation, teaching quality, instructional media, and school support systems. Qualitative investigations into students' lived experiences during internships could also provide deeper insights into how and why certain placements succeed or fail in supporting learning. Overall, this study contributes to the growing discourse on improving the relevance and effectiveness of work-based learning in vocational education.

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