



From Curriculum Sync to Job Placement: Managing Sustainable Partnerships in Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide an in-depth description of the implementation of the partnership between SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman and the business/industrial sectors, viewed from the aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, while data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings indicate that the planning of the partnership was carried out in a structured manner through the establishment of job placement targets, curriculum synchronization, and the development of the Bina Kerja program. Program implementation was conducted gradually and systematically through socialization activities, the execution of Teaching Factory programs, and the strengthening of two-way communication with industry partners. Evaluation was conducted periodically through review meetings, graduate tracing, and reports from students and industry partners. These findings demonstrate that a well-planned, effectively implemented, and consistently evaluated partnership management significantly contributes to improving the quality of graduates and strengthening the linkage between vocational schools and the labor market.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan secara mendalam implementasi kerja sama antara SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman dan dunia usaha/dunia industri (DU/DI) ditinjau dari aspek perencanaan, pelaksanaan, dan evaluasi. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumentasi. Validitas data diuji melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik, sedangkan analisis data dilakukan secara interaktif menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perencanaan kerja sama dilakukan secara terstruktur melalui penetapan target penempatan kerja, sinkronisasi kurikulum, dan pembentukan program Bina Kerja. Pelaksanaan program dilakukan secara bertahap dan sistematis melalui sosialisasi, pelaksanaan Teaching Factory, serta penguatan komunikasi dua arah dengan mitra industri. Evaluasi dilakukan secara berkala melalui rapat evaluasi, penelusuran tamatan, serta pelaporan dari peserta didik dan mitra industri. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa manajemen kerja sama yang terencana, dilaksanakan dengan baik,

dan dievaluasi secara konsisten berkontribusi signifikan dalam meningkatkan mutu lulusan dan memperkuat keterhubungan SMK dengan dunia kerja.

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Introduction

The linkage between vocational education and the labor market has become a key concern in developing a competent and work-ready human resource (Fernandez and Condori, 2023). Vocational High Schools, as institutions of vocational education, are expected to produce graduates who meet the demands of the business and industrial sectors (DU/DI) (Heryuriani *et al.*, 2025). Therefore, partnerships between SMKs and industries must be managed professionally, systematically, and sustainably. Such collaboration should go beyond administrative cooperation and encompass comprehensive engagement, including curriculum planning, skills training, and workforce recruitment (Tarso *et al.*, 2025). One of the critical success factors of this partnership lies in the active role of the school's Public Relations (PR) division in building strategic communication and bridging the interests of the educational and industrial sectors (Putri *et al.*, 2024).

In the context of vocational education, school PR is not only responsible for disseminating information but also serves as a driving force in building a positive image and fostering productive partnership relations (Nugroho *et al.*, 2025). The PR division is tasked with designing communication strategies, facilitating cooperation, and ensuring the

continuity of relationships between the school and industrial partners (Mala *et al.*, 2025). The ability of PR personnel to manage information, understand the needs of industry partners, and develop synergistic programs plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of such partnerships (Makda, 2024). Thus, examining the role of public relations in the collaboration between SMKs and industries is essential as part of strengthening institutional management and developing an effective vocational education partnership model.

Building sustainable partnerships requires a systematic process that begins with thorough planning (Rambe *et al.*, 2025). At this stage, school PR plays a role in mapping potential industry partners, designing strategic objectives of the partnership, and establishing success indicators aligned with the needs of both the school and industry (Harahap *et al.*, 2025). Well-structured planning facilitates smooth cooperation implementation and prevents discrepancies between expectations and field realities. At SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman, partnership planning is integrated into the school's vision, mission, and graduate placement targets, demonstrating how the PR function is aligned to support the achievement of the institution's strategic goals (Fitriana *et al.*, 2025).

Following the planning stage, implementation becomes a crucial phase



requiring coordination and involvement from various stakeholders (Mala *et al.*, 2025). The school's PR division plays a significant role in communicating the program to internal and external stakeholders, convincing industry partners of the school's competencies, and managing the execution of activities such as industrial visits, internships (prakerin), apprenticeships, and the Teaching Factory (Tarso *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, PR serves as the communication bridge in two-way interactions between the school and industry partners to align expectations and strengthen collaborative relationships. Effective implementation fosters industrial partners' trust and opens doors to more extensive long-term cooperation (Siswanto and Fatimah, 2024).

Evaluation is the final but equally important stage in the partnership management cycle (Naufal *et al.*, 2025). In this context, PR is actively involved in designing and conducting evaluations regarding program achievements, implementation effectiveness, and the relevance of partnerships to students' and industries' needs. Evaluations are carried out periodically, both through internal meetings and with external partner involvement to provide feedback (Widyastuti *et al.*, 2024; Hanama, 2025). At SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman, evaluations are conducted progressively, from monthly to annual reviews, serving as the basis for decision-making and improvement of partnership programs (Saleh *et al.*, 2025). The PR division's involvement in evaluations demonstrates how strategic communication plays a vital role in bridging system improvements and ensuring sustainable collaboration.

SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman is one of the vocational schools actively engaged in partnerships with various industry partners to strengthen the "link and match" between education and the labor market. The school has shown initiative in developing innovative programs, pre-internship training, and

tracer studies, all of which are managed with strong support from the PR division (Akhadiyah *et al.*, 2019). With supporting facilities such as the Teaching Factory and a solid management team, the role of PR has become increasingly strategic in building partnerships that are not only administrative but also transformative. This phenomenon warrants further exploration as an example of best practices in partnership management within the vocational school context (Taylor *et al.*, 2022).

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to analyze in depth the role of public relations in building sustainable partnerships between vocational schools and industries at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman. The study focuses on three key aspects: planning, implementation, and evaluation of the partnership, employing a descriptive qualitative approach. It is expected that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of vocational education partnership management, particularly in strengthening the role of public relations as a strategic agent in fostering synergistic and sustainable relationships between schools and industries.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of providing an in-depth depiction of the implementation of the partnership between SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman and the business/industrial sector (DU/DI), viewed from the aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with key informants namely the Head of the Vocational Program, the public relations team, vocational subject teachers, department heads, and school management team; direct observation of school activities related to the partnership program; and document analysis of cooperation agreements (MoU), program



reports, Teaching Factory documentation, and evaluation reports.

Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation by comprehensively comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The entire research process was carried out systematically to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the partnership management practices between the vocational school and industry, with the ultimate goal of enhancing graduate quality and strengthening alignment with the labor market.

Results

1. Planning

Based on interviews with the Head of the Vocational Program and the Public Relations team at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman, the planning of partnerships with the business and industrial sectors (DU/DI) is conducted in a structured manner and focuses on improving graduate quality. One of the targets set is a minimum job placement rate of 81% of graduates each year. This target forms the foundation for designing partnership programs aligned with the school's vision and mission. In practice, the PR planning strategy includes setting objectives, goals, and success indicators, which are discussed and agreed upon in coordination meetings between the school and industry partners.

Observations show that the partnership planning process involves the entire school management team. This team consists of academic units that manage the curriculum, student affairs teams, internal quality assurance units, and department heads. Each unit plays a specific role in designing activities that align with industry needs. Documentation reveals that the school actively adjusts its curriculum to meet the competencies required by industry partners. This is evidenced by

curriculum synchronization activities, teacher training, and skill enhancement programs for students through direct industry involvement.

In its implementation, the school designs its partnership programs gradually. General programs include industry visits, industrial work practice (Prakerin), and internships. Additionally, there are specific programs such as pre-Prakerin training and mapping of work-ready students. From the reviewed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU), it is evident that before establishing partnerships, the school conducts mapping of industry types, capacity, and supporting facilities. These steps are part of the PR strategy to ensure real and sustainable connections between education and the world of work (Arifin *et al.*, 2025).

2. Implementation

Based on interviews and observations at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman, the implementation of partnership programs with DU/DI managed by the public relations department is carried out in a gradual and systematic manner. The first stage involves program socialization to internal stakeholders such as teachers, the school foundation, and parents, through regular meetings and direct engagement. Meanwhile, external socialization is conducted via digital platforms, such as the school's website and social media, managed by the IT team. Documentation reveals several flagship programs that have been promoted, including Learning with Industry, Industry Visits, Production-Based Training, Prakerin, work-ready student mapping, Bina Kerja, Internships, Vocational Competency Tests, and graduate recruitment. These initiatives are all part of the PR strategy to strengthen relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

The next step involves building stakeholder trust in the school's readiness and commitment to partnerships. Observations show that SMK



Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman has adequate facilities, such as practical workshops for each department, well-equipped classrooms, and other supporting infrastructure. The school also operates a Teaching Factory (TEFA), in which students are directly involved in producing goods and services, including workshop services. Interviews with vocational teachers and department heads indicate that the existence of TEFA provides concrete evidence of student competence and quality to the public. Documentation of student production and community participation highlights that the success of this program has led to increased public trust in the school.

The final implementation phase involves establishing two-way communication and follow-up. Based on interviews and discussions with the PR team, intensive communication is built among internal elements and between the school and external partners. This communication process is crucial for ensuring smooth program execution and reinforcing collaboration. In practice, communication occurs through coordination meetings, informal discussions, and digital channels such as social media groups and email. Observations show that open communication facilitates follow-up activities, accelerates decision-making, and enhances stakeholder participation. School documentation also notes that all implemented programs are routinely reported, evaluated, and followed up with improvement or development actions to ensure the sustainability of the DU/DI partnership.

3. Evaluation

Based on interviews and documentation at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman, the evaluation of the DU/DI partnership programs led by the Vice Principal for Public Relations is carried out in a planned and consistent manner. Evaluation activities include coordination

meetings and program reports, which serve as the primary tools for assessing the achievement of program targets. These meetings are not only held once at the beginning of the year but are conducted monthly. In these meetings, ongoing programs are reviewed to assess their effectiveness and outcomes, as well as to identify areas needing improvement.

Observations indicate that monthly evaluations involve not only the PR or industry partnership team but also the entire academic community. Each program aimed at students in grades X, XI, and XII has its own evaluation session at the end of its implementation. The school also conducts internal evaluations to assess program alignment with the school's vision, mission, and objectives. Interviews with teachers and vocational program heads emphasize that the involvement of all school elements in the evaluation process is crucial for maintaining program synergy and quality. Evaluations are also conducted for students participating in internships and *prakerin*, where students submit activity reports that are directly assessed by industry partners at the school (Astiwi *et al.*, 2024; Putri and Siswanto, 2024).

In addition to monthly evaluations, SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman conducts annual evaluations of the Bina Kerja program and other PR-related initiatives. According to documentation, these evaluations include graduate tracking, job vacancy information updates, and follow-up on alumni employment. Annual evaluations are conducted by the entire school management team to comprehensively assess target achievements. Findings from these evaluations serve as a basis for designing and developing more relevant programs. Discussions with the management team reveal that scheduled and continuous evaluations significantly support the school in maintaining program quality and



strengthening ties with the industrial sector.

Discussion

Findings on the planning of partnerships at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman reveal a systematic and strategic approach to improving the quality of graduates. The establishment of a minimum job placement target of 81% serves as a concrete result-oriented goal. This finding aligns with the research by Kadri *et al.* (2021) and Efendi *et al.* (2025), which states that well-structured partnership planning based on industry needs significantly affects graduates' readiness to enter the workforce. The involvement of cross-functional teams in the planning process including curriculum adjustments and teacher training demonstrates that the school does not merely develop internally-driven programs but also responds actively to external demands (Alam, 2025). Curriculum synchronization and training programs stand as strong indicators that this partnership planning is conducted adaptively and with a forward-looking vision (Rochmat *et al.*, 2025).

In the implementation aspect, SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman demonstrates its capacity to carry out programs in stages, from initial dissemination to the involvement of industry partners in the learning process. This supports the findings of Yoto *et al.* (2024) and Widodo *et al.* (2025), who argue that the success of school-industry collaboration depends not only on planning but also on consistent and tangible program execution. Flagship programs such as Production-Based Training and the Teaching Factory are innovations that directly connect students to the workforce. The implementation of the Teaching Factory as a real production environment serves not only as a contextual learning medium but also showcases the school's readiness to meet the "link and match" challenge between

vocational education and industry (Setiawan *et al.*, 2024).

Adequate facilities and tangible outputs of student production add value to the effectiveness of these partnerships. The availability of vocational workshops and student involvement in production activities reflect an authentic industry-based learning approach. Research by Donald *et al.* (2024) and Nurdiansyah (2025) highlights that the presence of representative practice facilities is one of the key factors in earning industry trust in vocational institutions. In this regard, SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman meets these prerequisites, which in turn increases industry and community trust in the competencies of its graduates.

Furthermore, the communication and follow-up efforts initiated by the public relations (PR) team demonstrate transparency and continuous coordination between the school and external partners. This reinforces Lasaiba (2024) and Wakhata *et al.* (2024) findings that emphasize the importance of two-way communication in maintaining sustainable collaboration between schools and industry. Supported by digital technologies such as social media and online platforms, communication processes become more flexible and intensive (Apriwulan *et al.*, 2025; Tarso *et al.*, 2025). Effective communication also accelerates decision-making and facilitates responsive program evaluation, ultimately enhancing the implementation of the partnership.

In terms of evaluation, the conduct of regular meetings and the involvement of the entire school community reflect a participatory and continuous evaluation approach. Evaluations are not only administrative but also reflective of the achievement of targets and the program's impact on students (Suherman and Vidákovich, 2022; Siswanto *et al.*, 2025). This is in line with the findings of (Wasik *et al.*, 2019; Imam, 2024), who assert that program evaluations involving all stakeholders tend to be more accurate in



assessing the success and shortcomings of implementation. Student participation in evaluation through the preparation of activity reports and competency assessments conducted by industry partners further illustrates a contextual evaluation model that directly measures learning outcomes.

Lastly, the annual evaluations and graduate tracking carried out by SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman demonstrate the school's commitment to building long-term relationships with industry. Graduate tracing programs and job vacancy information services indicate that collaboration does not end with training but extends into recruitment and job placement processes (Schaft *et al.*, 2020). This supports the findings of Suryawan and Lee (2023) and Hanama *et al.* (2024), who emphasize that follow-up actions in partnerships are crucial indicators of sustainability. Overall, the findings at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman prove that structured planning, implementation, and evaluation of industry partnerships can create a vocational education ecosystem that is both relevant and adaptive to the needs of the workforce.

Conclusion

The collaboration between SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Sleman and the business/industrial sectors (DU/DI) has been systematically, adaptively, and results-orientedly designed, implemented, and evaluated. Thorough planning with concrete targets, industry-based program implementation such as the Teaching Factory, and ongoing participatory evaluation demonstrate the school's ability to create a vocational education ecosystem that is responsive to labor market demands. Two-way communication strategies and follow-up actions, such as graduate tracking, further strengthen the sustainability of the established partnership. Therefore, it is recommended that this collaboration model be replicated

by other vocational schools, with due consideration to their respective contexts and resources, while continuously reinforcing synergy between school management, industry, and students to achieve an optimal link and match between education and the world of work.

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