

The Role of Entrepreneurial Mindset As A Mediator In The Influence of Experiential Learning on Career Readiness Among Vocational High School Students

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Abstract

The study investigates the direct and indirect influence of Experiential Learning (EL) on Career Readiness (CR), mediated by the dimensions of Entrepreneurial Mindset (Elaborating Mindset, EM1, and Implementing Mindset, EM2) among Vocational High School (SMK) students in Mojokerto, Indonesia. Despite vocational education, SMK graduates still face high unemployment, highlighting a competency gap. This quantitative study used a descriptive explanatory design with a sample of 377 Grade XII students from four Mojokerto SMKs. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The novelty lies in examining EM's two dimensions as a mediator in the EL-CR relationship within this specific context. Results confirm a positive and significant direct influence of EL on CR, EM1, and EM2, and a positive and significant influence of both EM1 and EM2 on CR. Crucially, EM1 and EM2 significantly and partially mediate the EL-CR relationship. The main implication is that hands-on experience (EL) must be complemented by the development of reflective and execution-oriented thinking (Entrepreneurial Mindset) to optimally enhance student readiness for the challenging job market.

Keyword: Experiential Learning, Elaborating Mind-set, Implementing Mind-set, Entrepreneurial Mind-set, Career Readiness

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a developing country, is projected to be among the world's top five economies by 2030, driven by growth in the creative and service sectors. This requires building



a globally competitive human resource development system, with Vocational High School (SMK) education playing a crucial role. Vocational education is intended to produce graduates with practical skills that match industry needs. However, recent data from Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reveals a paradoxical issue: graduates of Vocational High Schools (SMK) have the highest Open Unemployment Rate (TPT), recorded at 9.01% in February 2024, compared to the general senior high school (SMA) rate of 7.05% and university rate of 5.25%.

This suggests a persistent misalignment between vocational education and industry demands. Key contributing factors include a curriculum that is often slow to adapt to industrial and technological changes, limited practical training, and inadequate industry collaboration. As a result, SMK graduates frequently struggle to adapt to the technical and interpersonal skills required by the labor market.

One effective pedagogical approach to close this gap is Experiential Learning (EL), which prioritizes active learning through real-world engagement such as internships, business simulations, and industry projects. Based on Kolb's model, effective EL involves a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This process sharpens critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. Previous research indicates that applying EL in vocational education significantly improves students' Career Readiness (CR) by helping them internalize relevant work ethics and skills, ultimately increasing self-confidence and collaboration abilities.

However, the efficacy of EL in ensuring optimal CR is contingent upon the development of a resilient professional and entrepreneurial mindset. In the face of technological disruption and a volatile job market, students must possess the ability to innovate, adapt, and think entrepreneurially, which collectively forms the Entrepreneurial Mindset (EM). This mindset is characterized by two essential dimensions: Elaborating Mindset (EM1), the capacity to generate ideas and design opportunities, and Implementing Mindset (EM2), the capability to execute those ideas into concrete actions. Empirical studies show that students with a strong EM are better at formulating career goals and even creating their own job opportunities.

Research Gaps and Novelty While the direct link between EL and CR is well-established, a significant research gap exists in understanding the mediating role of the entrepreneurial mindset, particularly its two distinct dimensions (EM1 and EM2), in strengthening this relationship within the context of Indonesian vocational education. Most relevant studies focus on higher education settings, and the specific application in SMK in regions like Mojokerto remains under-explored.

This study aims to address this gap by: Novelty 1: Developing and testing an integrative





model that explicitly links Experiential Learning (EL) with Career Readiness (CR), through the mediating role of both Elaborating Mindset (EM1) and Implementing Mindset (EM2) in a single framework. Novelty 2: Focusing on SMK students in Mojokerto, providing valuable, localized data concerning the influence of experiential learning on job-readiness in the local labor market.

Thus, this research seeks to clarify how the psychological factor of the entrepreneurial mindset reinforces the effect of hands-on experience on students' readiness for the competitive professional world.

Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective is to analyze the direct and indirect influences between the variables.

1. Does Experiential Learning positively and significantly influence Career Readiness? (H1)
2. Does Experiential Learning positively and significantly influence Elaborating Mindset? (H2)
3. Does Experiential Learning positively and significantly influence Implementing Mindset? (H3)
4. Does Elaborating Mindset positively and significantly influence Career Readiness? (H4)
5. Does Implementing Mindset positively and significantly influence Career Readiness? (H5)
6. Does Elaborating Mindset mediate the influence of Experiential Learning on Career Readiness? (H6)
7. Does Implementing Mindset mediate the influence of Experiential Learning on Career Readiness? (H7)

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive explanatory research design. The descriptive aspect aims to systematically illustrate the phenomena, while the explanatory aspect seeks to examine the cause-and-effect relationship between variables and test the established hypotheses.

The model consists of four variables:

- Predictor Variable (X): Experiential Learning (EL)
- Intervening Variables (Z1, Z2): Elaborating Mindset (EM1) and Implementing Mindset (EM2)
- Criterion Variable (Y): Career Readiness (CR)

The theoretical model examined is illustrated in



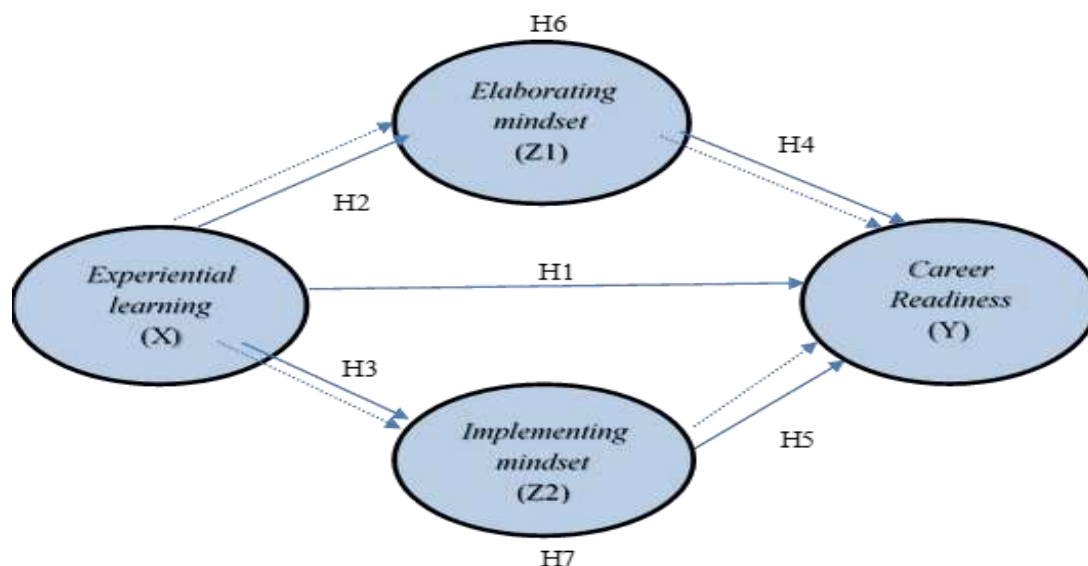


Figure 1. Research Model

Population and Sample

The population comprised all students enrolled in state and private Vocational High Schools (SMK) in Mojokerto City, Indonesia. The total number of students in the four schools selected as the research object was 1,858.

A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed. Based on the RAOSOFT sample size calculator, with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, the minimum required sample size was 319 respondents. Data collection utilized an online questionnaire distributed via Google Form. The number of respondents who completed the survey exceeded the minimum, totaling 377 students from Grade XII who had taken entrepreneurship subjects.

Table 1. Research Population

No	School Name	Population	Minimal Sample (Proportional)
1	SMKN 1 Mojokerto	494/1858 x 319	85
2	SMKN 2 Mojokerto	406/1858 x 319	70
3	SMKS Tamansiswa Mojokerto	711/1858 x 319	122
4	SMKS PGRI Mojokerto	247/1858 x 319	42
	Total Sample		319

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using closed questionnaires with a 5-point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

Table 2. Interpretation of Respondent Score Value

No.	Index Value	Assessment Category
1	1.00 – 1.79	Very Low/Very Poor
2	1.80 – 2.59	Low/Poor
3	2.60 – 3.39	Sufficient/Moderate
4	3.40 – 4.19	High/Good
5	4.20 – 5.00	Very High/Very Good

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS software. This technique was chosen as it is suitable for testing the complex relationship between the predictor (EL), mediators (EM1, EM2), and criterion (CR) variables. The SEM-PLS evaluation procedure followed the guidelines by Chin (1999) and Hair et al. (2017), which include Outer Model assessment (Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Reliability) and Inner Model assessment (R-Square, F-Square, and Hypotheses Testing).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis showed that all four variables – Experiential Learning (EL), Elaborating Mind-set (EM1), Implementing Mind-set (EM2), and Career Readiness (CR) – were perceived by respondents as being at a High/Good level (mean index ≥ 3.40).

Table 3. Result of Data Analysis Variables

Variable	Combined Average	Category
Experiential Learning (EL)	3.62	High
Elaborating Mindset (EM1)	3.63	High
Implementing Mindset (EM2)	3.60	High
Career Readiness (CR)	3.56	High

SEM-PLS Analysis: Measurement Model (Outer Model) Evaluation

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using the Loading Factor (threshold ≥ 0.70 or ≥ 0.50 for initial development) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (threshold ≥ 0.50).

- All indicator items for EL (14 items), EM1 (3 items), EM2 (4 items), and CR (9 items) showed Loading Factors between 0.723 and 0.951, all exceeding the ≥ 0.70 threshold, thus confirming their validity.
- The AVE values for all constructs were also above the 0.50 threshold: EL (0.647), EM1 (0.758), EM2 (0.715), and CR (0.696).

Reliability

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (α) (threshold ≥ 0.70). All constructs demonstrated high reliability, as all values exceeded 0.70:

Table 4. Result of Data Analysis Variables

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Evaluation
Experiential Learning (X)	0.958	0.962	Highly Reliable
Elaborating Mindset (Z1)	0.841	0.904	Highly Reliable
Implementing Mindset (Z2)	0.860	0.908	Highly Reliable
Career Readiness (Y)	0.945	0.954	Highly Reliable

SEM-PLS Analysis: Structural Model (Inner Model) Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

R-Square (R2) and Predictive Relevance (Q2)

The R2 values indicate the magnitude of the model's explanatory power:

- Career Readiness (Y): $R^2=0.892$. This means 89.2% of the variance in Career Readiness is explained by EL, EM1, and EM2, suggesting a Strong/Substantial Model.
- Elaborating Mindset (Z1): $R^2=0.516$. This means 51.6% of the variance in Elaborating Mindset is explained by EL, suggesting a Moderate Model.
- Implementing Mindset (Z2): $R^2=0.875$. This means 87.5% of the variance in Implementing Mindset is explained by EL, suggesting a Strong/Substantial Model.

The total predictive relevance (Q2) was calculated as 0.993, which is close to 1 and greater than 0, confirming the model has high predictive relevance.

Hypothesis Testing (Direct and Indirect Effects)

Hypotheses were tested using the t-statistic from the bootstrapping procedure. A hypothesis is supported (accepted) if the t-statistic ≥ 1.96 and the P-value ≤ 0.05 (at 5% significance level).

Table 5. Result of Data Analysis Hypothesis Direct Effects

Hyp.	Relationship	Original Sample (Path Coefficient)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Result
H1	EL $\rightarrow$ CR	0.811	12.967	0.000	Accepted
H2	EL $\rightarrow$ EM1	0.718	17.171	0.000	Accepted
H3	EL $\rightarrow$ EM2	0.935	110.026	0.000	Accepted
H4	EM1 $\rightarrow$ CR	0.157	4.710	0.000	Accepted
H5	EM2 $\rightarrow$ CR	0.254	3.667	0.000	Accepted

All direct hypotheses (H1 to H5) are supported, indicating a positive and significant relationship.

Table 6. Result of Data Analysis Indirect Effects (Mediation)

Hyp.	Relationship	Original Sample	T-Statistics	P-Values	Result
H6	EL $\rightarrow$ EM1 $\rightarrow$ CR	0.113	4.280	0.000	Accepted (Partial Mediation)
H7	EL $\rightarrow$ EM2 $\rightarrow$ CR	0.237	3.641	0.000	Accepted (Partial Mediation)

Both indirect hypotheses (H6 and H7) are supported. Given that the direct effect (H1: EL $\rightarrow$ CR) is also significant, this indicates a partial mediation role for both Elaborating Mindset (EM1) and Implementing Mindset (EM2)

DISCUSSION

Experiential Learning and Career Readiness (H1)

The finding that Experiential Learning (EL) positively and significantly influences Career Readiness (CR) (H1 accepted) is consistent with the initial premise and strongly supported by existing literature. The highly positive path coefficient (0.811) suggests EL is a major determinant of CR. This result aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), where the cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation fundamentally supports the transition to a matured career readiness. Empirical evidence from a study in

Vocational High Schools corroborates this, emphasizing EL's role in boosting technical skills, communication, collaboration, and self-confidence for the job market. The positive perception of EL by students in Mojokerto (mean 3.62) confirms the practical relevance of industry practice, internships, and business simulations in their career preparation.

Experiential Learning and Entrepreneurial Mindset (H2 and H3)

The positive and significant influence of EL on Elaborating Mindset (EM1) (H2 accepted) and EL on Implementing Mindset (EM2) (H3 accepted) demonstrates that hands-on experience not only builds practical skills but fundamentally shapes the student's psychological approach.

- EL → Elaborating Mindset (EM1): Experiential activities force students to connect real-world problems (concrete experience) with theoretical knowledge (abstract conceptualization) through reflection. This process cultivates the reflective and analytical thinking characteristic of EM1. This is consistent with studies confirming EL enhances the entrepreneurial mindset, particularly the elaborating dimension.
- EL → Implementing Mindset (EM2): The execution-focused nature of EL, aligning with Kolb's Active Experimentation phase, pushes students to translate ideas into tangible action. High path coefficient (0.935) suggests that EL is a powerful driver of EM2. This builds the confidence and courage to take decisions and execute plans, essential components of EM2. Research consistently shows that involvement in industry projects and practice strengthens EM2 significantly.

Entrepreneurial Mindset and Career Readiness (H4 and H5)

Both mindset dimensions showed a positive and significant direct influence on Career Readiness (H4 and H5 accepted), confirming their direct utility for job preparedness.

- Elaborating Mindset (EM1) → Career Readiness (CR): Students who excel in EM1 are better at integrating new knowledge and using critical thinking to solve complex problems. This cognitive capital, supported by Resource-Based View (RBV), makes them more adaptable and confident in the complex work environment, significantly enhancing CR.
- Implementing Mindset (EM2) → Career Readiness (CR): The ability to apply knowledge and execute plans (EM2) is a strategic resource that directly increases a graduate's competitive advantage. High EM2 strengthens students' self-efficacy (Social Cognitive Career Theory - SCCT) and confidence during hiring and in professional situations. This skill-application component is vital for meeting industry demands.

Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Mindset (H6 and H7)

The most critical finding is the significant partial mediation by both Elaborating Mindset (H6 accepted) and Implementing Mindset (H7 accepted) in the EL → CR relationship.

This implies that while experiential learning directly improves CR, its total impact is significantly amplified when it successfully cultivates the Entrepreneurial Mindset.

- EL → EM1 → CR (H6): The field experience (EL) is not enough by itself; it must be processed through the analytical and reflective filter of the Elaborating Mindset (EM1) to be optimally converted into Career Readiness (CR). EM1 allows students to systematically dissect their practical experiences and internalize them as generalized professional skills.
- EL → EM2 → CR (H7): Similarly, practical experience must be accompanied by the courage and planning skills of the Implementing Mindset (EM2). EM2 ensures that the knowledge gained during EL is converted into actionable, repeatable professional behavior, directly linking learning to job readiness.

The mediation confirms the theoretical integration: ELT provides the experience, which is then processed psychologically through the EM (EM1: reflection/conceptualization; EM2: experimentation/action), leading to the outcome predicted by SCCT and RBV (high CR). The entrepreneurial mindset thus acts as the "psychological engine" that maximizes the effectiveness of experiential learning in vocational education%.

CONCLUSION

The study definitively concludes a positive and significant influence across all tested direct relationships: Experiential Learning (EL) significantly enhances both Elaborating Mindset (EM1) and Implementing Mindset (EM2), and subsequently, both EM dimensions significantly contribute to Career Readiness (CR). Most importantly, the Entrepreneurial Mindset (both EM1 and EM2) acts as a significant partial mediator between EL and CR. This highlights that hands-on learning (EL) is most effective when consciously integrated with the development of reflective/analytical thinking and practical implementation skills. Practical Recommendations, For SMK Schools in Mojokerto: Strengthen the implementation of experiential learning by systematizing industry-based curriculum, such as mandatory, extended professional internships, realistic business simulations, and collaborative industry projects. For Educators: Design learning activities that deliberately encourage both dimensions of the Entrepreneurial Mindset. This includes challenging students with problem-solving scenarios (to foster EM1) and pushing them to execute and take action on their solutions (to foster EM2).



For Policymakers: Develop policies that foster more systematic integration of EL into the SMK curriculum and encourage strategic, long-term partnerships between vocational schools and local industries to increase the relevance of practical experiential results

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