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The Effect of The Apprenticeship Program on The Employer's Intention to Hire SMK Graduates: As Seen in The Evidence in MM2100 Industrial Town, Bekasi

Andrio A

Sekolah Tinggi Manajemen IPMI, Jakarta, Indonesia
andrio@ipmi.ac.id
Orcid: 0009-0001-4078-3164

Dr. Ir. Amelia Naim INDRAJAYA

Sekolah Tinggi Manajemen IPMI
amelia.naim@ipmi.ac.id
Orcid: 0000-0001-9021-902X

ABSTRACT

BPS data shows that Indonesia's economic performance in 2022 has returned to pre-pandemic levels, above 5% YoY. This trend opens job opportunities for Indonesian, which positively contributes to lower unemployment from 6,49% to 5,86% in 2022 nationally. Bekasi Regency, the largest industrial area in Southeast Asia and a buffer zone for the capital city of DKI Jakarta, also experienced a declining unemployment trend from 2020 to 2021. However, the unemployment rate is increasing from 10,09% to 10,31% in 2022. The most significant contributor to unemployment comes from the graduates of Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK). The unemployed population from SMK reached 14,63% in 2022. To cope with this issue, the government, in cooperation with companies, actively absorbs labor from SMK graduates through apprenticeship programs. Once they complete the program, they will receive a completion certificate from the companies, and they will be able to be recruited directly as workers by companies that conduct apprenticeships. Therefore, this program plays a significant role in decreasing unemployment. Nevertheless, much controversy exists about the relationship between apprenticeship programs and managers' intention to hire SMK graduates. This research would like to analyze how apprenticeship impacts the intention to hire SMK graduates. This paper is quantitative research with t 102 sampling of SMK graduates in the Bekasi area, using a non-probability purposive sampling method. The findings show that apprenticeship plays a critical role directly toward the intention to hire but is not significant as a moderating variable.

Keywords: Apprenticeship Program, Intention to Hire, Vocational High Schools, Unemployment

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on the data from The Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Indonesia's economic growth throughout 2022 was 5.31% on an annual basis or Year on Year (YoY), or much higher than growth in 2021 which was 3.70% YoY. (Perekonomian, 2023). This growth had a positive impact on the lower unemployment rate in Indonesia. The BPS noted that the number of unemployed people in Indonesia was monitored at 5.86% in August 2022. Therefore, when compared to the same period a year earlier, the number of unemployed in Indonesia was recorded to have decreased. In August 2021, the number of unemployed people in Indonesia was 9.1 million or 6.49% (BPS, 2022). The above trend was followed by West Java province. The BPS West Java noted that this province's unemployment rate had decreased yearly. The latest BPS data shown that the percentage is decreasing to 8.31% by 1.51 points compared to August 2021, which was 9.82%. The decline is higher than the national data (BPS, 2022). The reason is West Java has many job opportunities, but there are also many enthusiasts (JabarProv, 2023).

Unlike the unemployment rate trend in Indonesia and West Java, the unemployment rate in Bekasi is getting higher. BPS records that the number of unemployment in Bekasi Regency reached 203,000 people in 2022. This number has increased compared to 2021, which was 197,000 people or from 10.09% in 2021 to 10.31% in 2022 (Prokopim, 2023). The Head of the Bekasi Regency Manpower Office, Edi Rohyadi, acknowledged that there were difficulties in reducing the unemployment rate in Bekasi. One of the reasons is the wave of job seekers from outside the region who keep arriving (Liptan6, 2023). According to him, Bekasi - the largest industrial area in Southeast Asia as well as a buffer zone for the capital city of DKI Jakarta - is often the target of many job seekers from outside the region, i.e., fresh graduates.

From the point of view of education background, BPS reports that most of the unemployment in Indonesia comes from the group of graduates from Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, SMK). The unemployed population from SMK reached 10.38% in February 2022 (CNBC Indonesia, 2022). It is an irony because SMK graduates are designed to work immediately once they are graduated from school. In reality, they are not. This is because they are not prepared in accordance with market demand, mainly because the training curriculum has not been aligned with the dynamic needs of the workplace; thus, there is a gap in competence between those provided by educational institutions and market demand (Cho, Erdem, & Johanson, 2007; Subramonian, 2008). Coping with the issue, the West Java provincial government, in cooperation with companies, actively absorbs labor from SMK graduates through Vocational Education and Training (VET), i.e., apprenticeship. This program has been proven in many countries to meet the demands of society (Deissinger, 2011; Payne, 2002; Steedman, 2012).

Therefore, in Indonesia, this initiative is fully supported by the central government. On December 23rd, 2016, President Jokowi witnessed the National Apprenticeship Declaration organized by the Ministry of Manpower, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin), and the Indonesian Employers' Association (APINDO), in the Karawang International Industrial City area, Karawang, West Java. 2,648 companies in West Java attended the program (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2016). However, until 2022, SMK graduates are still the biggest contributor to unemployment even though the central government has set up a National Apprenticeship Program. The central government regulated this program through the

regulations of the Ministry of Manpower (Permenaker) No. 36 of 2016, which was later revised to Permenaker No. 6 of 2020.

2. RESEARCH GAP

It is not conclusive that the Apprenticeship Program has always positively impacted labor absorption in a country or region. And most perspectives come from the government or academics. However, the employers' perspective on the apprenticeship program has not been explored much. It's the employers who make final decision on who will be hired in the company as per their manpower planning. Therefore, their perspective on this program is precious to measure its effectiveness and impact on their hiring decisions, especially on SMK graduates who have attended the Apprenticeship Program in Indonesia.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

According to the identified problem, this research will answer the following 7 (seven) research questions:

1. How does the Attitude towards SMK graduates affect the Intention to Hire SMK graduates?
2. How does the Subjective Norms (SN) affect the Intention to Hire SMK graduates?
3. How does the Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) affect the Intention to Hire SMK graduates?
4. How is the moderating effect of the Apprenticeship Program on the Attitude towards SMK graduates on Intention to Hire SMK graduates?
5. How is the moderating effect of the Apprenticeship Program on the Subjective Norms towards SMK graduates on Intention to Hire SMK graduates?
6. How is the moderating effect of the Apprenticeship Program on the Perceived Behavioral Control towards SMK graduates on Intention to Hire SMK graduates?
7. How does the Apprenticeship Program affect the Intention to Hire SMK graduates?

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The TPB is a theory that has been used to predict and explain individual behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). To be specific, this is one of the theories that are primarily used in measuring employer's Attitude, intentions, and behaviors to hire employees (Ajzen, 2011; Khasni, Kesminder, & Chuah, 2021; Elhoushy & El-Saida, 2020; Laua, Keongb, & Luenc, 2018; Piramanayagam & Seal, 2020). There are five primary components in TPB. They are (1) attitude, (2) subjective norms, and (3) perceived behavioural control which is presumed to impact (4) behavioural intentions and affected (5) behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB model stipulates that the intention to perform a specific behaviour is stronger when the attitude and subjective norm are more positive and perceived behavioural control is higher (Ajzen, Davis, Saunders, & Williams, 2002).

4.2. Attitude

In the TPB Model, the first factor is attitude. Attitude refers to a person's beliefs regarding the numerous consequences he or she might experience from performing a

particular behaviour. Cheng, Lam, and Hsu (2006) state that before an individual commits to a specific behaviour, they tend to assess the advantages and costs resulting from the behaviour they are about to commit. Once an individual is confident that their attitude would contribute to a positive outcome, there is a higher possibility that they would commit to the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Cheng et al., 2006; Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010).

4.3. Subjective Norms (SN)

Subjective norms are characterised as “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour” in question (Ajzen, 1991). A similar definition was also provided by Chang (1998). This factor indicates the beliefs about the normative norm of significant others. Significant others refer to family members, close friends, colleagues, or business partners (Ajzen, 2002). Thus, an individual's motivation to communicate throughout a particular behaviour is dictated by the perceived preferences of their close ones.

4.4. Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)

The last factor in the context of the TPB model is perceived behavioural control. Ajzen (1991) refers to perceived behavioural control as the perceived ease or difficulty when an individual experience performs a specific behaviour. Han et al. (2010) also indicated that perceived behavioural control appraises ‘the perception of how well one can control factors that may facilitate/constrain the actions needed to deal with a specific situation’. Actual behavioural control may encompass skills and environmental limitations, and it is concluded to impact perceived behavioural control and moderate the intention-behaviour relationship.

4.5. Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention was defined as a measure of relationships between an individual and some actions, and how hard he was willing to perform the actions, and that behavioral intention was an individual’s decision or commitment to perform a given behavior. When an intention to perform a particular act was high, the likelihood of such actions was equally high (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975).

4.6. Apprenticeship Program

Apprenticeship is the oldest learning method known in vocational education and is still widely used today. One of the targets of this program is job readiness, especially targeting the fresh graduates. Apprenticeship provides work experience and provides skills training according to the competencies needed by the industry (Mahfud et al., 2017). In other words, apprenticeship is work-based training to gain technical and non-technical work experience so that fresh graduates are ready to work. At the end of the program, they will get recognition or competency certification that is trained in the workplace.

By conducting apprenticeship program, there are many benefits for the stakeholders, i.e. government, company and the apprentice. For the government, there will be a number of workforce in Indonesia who are suitable with the needs of the industry and the technology development. Therefore, it would increase the nation competitiveness in compared to the other countries.

4.7. Hypothesis Development

4.7.1. Attitude towards SMK graduates

In general, employers are complaining that graduates are unable to fulfil their needs in the uncertain environment of the current market (Salina, Nurazariah, Noraina Mazuin, & Jegatheesan, 2011). This research is supported by Harvey, Moon and Geall (1997), who found a skills gap between employer requirements and the graduates from the educational system.

In term of hiring SMK graduates, there are several factors causing vocational school graduates are not the preferred ones to be hired by the employers, namely: (a) Industry commonly seeks workers experienced in their fields; (b) Industry always complains that vocational graduates have no good skills, easy to give up when the situations in workplace are changing (Hanafi, 2012). In addition, the SMK graduates were believed to be not ready to enter the workplace because of their lack of work experience, and the readiness of graduates to work was considered low (Sasmito, Panji, Kustono, & Patmanthara, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, the following hypotheses was formulated:

H1: The Attitude towards SMK graduates affects the Intention to Hire SMK graduates

4.7.2. Subjective Norms about SMK graduates

Subjective Norm is defined as a person's perception that most people who were important to him thought he should or should not perform the behavior in question (Ajzen, 1991). The expectation of such important persons close to him often added pressure to the desired behavior; hence, high subjective norm often resulted in the individual's high willingness to perform the desired action (Vansteenkiste et al., 2015). Therefore, subjective norm is a measurement of the individual's perceived social pressure from people of important references as to whether he should or should not perform a particular act.

Employers, even though not believe in the skills acquired by SMK graduates, they basically still prefer the latter due to strong focus on practical skills and the fit of the studies with labor market demands compared to the general high school graduates (Breen, 2005; Müller & Gangl, 2003; Shavit & Müller, 1998). In countries with strong vocational systems (i.e. Netherlands and Germany), a vocational degree seems to offer more reliable information about immediate employability and productivity than a general education pathway (Bol & van de Werfhorst, 2011; Di Stasio & van de Werfhorst, 2016). Therefore, the employers still prefer to hire vocational school graduates compared to general school.

For the purpose of this study, the following hypotheses was formulated:

H2: The Subjective Norms toward SMK graduates affects the Intention to Hire SMK graduates

4.7.3. Perceived Behavioral Control over SMK graduates

Fishbein and Ajzen (2011) indicated that despite stronger intentions contribute to the higher feasibility of performing a behaviour, when actual behavioural control is low, for example, lack of essential skill or presence of environmental barriers, individuals that could be hindered from actualising their intentions. Therefore, it is confirmed that perceived behavioral control is related to behavioral intention, and that the correlation is significant (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

Employers are under pressure when making hiring decisions because they have to finalise the most suitable candidate for the job description (Dwoskin, Squire, & Patullo, 2013). Hiring decisions inevitably involve taking chances, and if the individual that they have hired does not meet their expectation, the employers are the ones that must bear the responsibility. To cope with this challenge, the future workers must have the employability skills which are needed for someone's success in the workplace (Werner, 1995). This skill is a must have to face changes in the working market demands (Sumarno, 2008). Nevertheless, SMK graduates are seem of not ready to work because of lack of skill and work experience (Sasmito, Panji, Kustono, & Patmanthara, 2015).

In the present study, perceived behavioral control is defined as the perception of employers on how easy or difficult for them on the availability of resources to intend the hiring of SMK graduates for their companies. The skills acquired by SMK graduates will help the employers to make decision whether to hire or not the graduates. Based on the above, the hypotheses was formulated as below:

H3: The Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) toward SMK graduates affects the Intention to Hire SMK graduates

4.7.4. Effect of Apprenticeship Program towards Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Intention to Hire SMK graduates

The researcher hardly found the direct research related to the effect of apprenticeship program towards Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Intention to Hire SMK graduates. But a number of studies has shown that secondary level education systems, combining school-based vocational education with employer-provided, apprenticeship training, have a positive track record in helping the school to work transition process, lowering the unemployment rate, and increasing the quality of work (Daniel, 2013; Rosenbaum et al., 1990; Müller and Shavit, 1998; Shavit and Müller, 2000; Ryan, 2001; Breen, 2005; Wolbers, 2007; Wolter and Ryan, 2011; Piopiunik and Ryan, 2012).

Based on the study of Hanafi (2012) and Sasmito et al (2015), the challenge for education in SMK is how to create learning activities providing knowledge, skills and learning experiences and these activities are in line with the demand in a business and an industry. They mentioned that work experience can only be obtained if students are involved intensively in the apprenticeship program, or directly involved in activities on the business or industry. Scholars also convey that apprenticeship is a training program that provides real work experience in the industry (Andersson et al., 2015; Mahfud et al., 2017; Sharpe & Gibson, 2005).

By having the real work experience, the apprentice will be able to gain employability skills which is defined as "ability to find a job and to be employed" (Nilsson, 2010). It refers to skills such as understanding concepts and personal attributes that make graduates preferred and successful in their careers, along with the ability to benefit the workforce, community and economy in which they serve (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). There are two types of employability skills, i.e. subject skills and transferable skills (Cox & King, 2006).

Once they have acquired employability skills through apprenticeship program, the attitude and PBC towards SMK graduates will be changed. Based on the above, the hypotheses was formulated as below:

H4a: The Apprenticeship Program moderates the effect of Attitude towards intention to hire SMK graduates

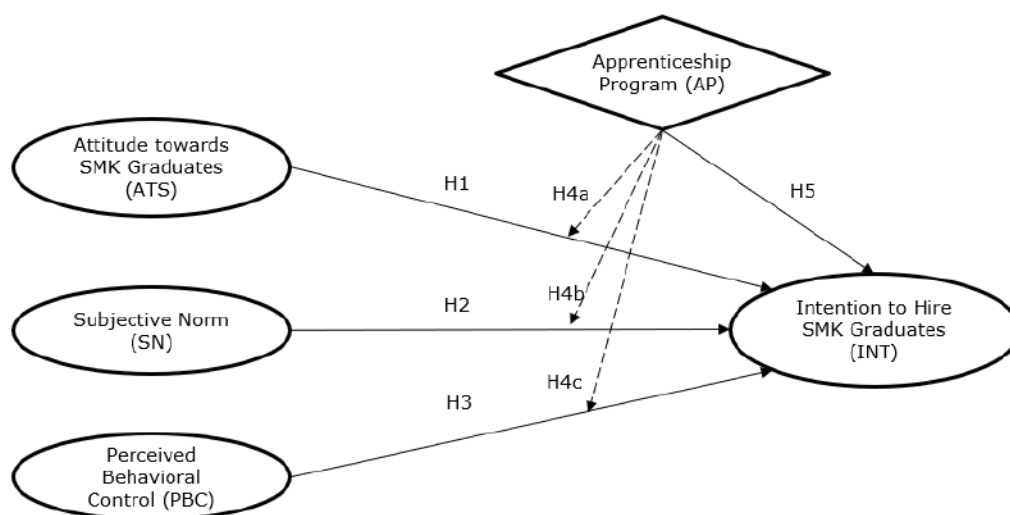
H4b: The Apprenticeship Program moderates the effect of Subjective Norms towards intention to hire SMK graduates

H4c: The Apprenticeship Program moderates the effect of PBC towards intention to hire SMK graduates

H5: The Apprenticeship Program affects the intention to hire SMK graduates

4.8. Research Framework

Based on the literature reviewed here, a conceptual model, was developed, which treats attitude towards SMK graduates, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, apprenticeship program as the independent variables; intention to hire SMK graduates as the dependent variable.



Based on the framework, the hypothesis are:

- H1: The Attitude towards SMK Graduates affects Intention to Hire SMK graduates
- H2: The Subjective Norms toward SMK Graduates affects Intention to Hire SMK graduates
- H3: The Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) toward SMK Graduates affects Intention to Hire SMK graduates
- H4a: The Apprenticeship Program moderates the effect of Attitude towards intention to hire SMK graduates
- H4b: The Apprenticeship Program moderates the effect of Subjective norms towards intention to hire SMK graduates
- H4c: The Apprenticeship Program moderates the effect of PBC towards intention to hire SMK graduates
- H5: The Apprenticeship Program affects the intention to hire SMK graduates

5. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is quantitative research by examining the relationship among variables, with assumptions in creating a hypothesis based on a deductive approach that include bias protections, adapting for various theories, and the ability to generalize and reproduce the results as critical considerations. The types of data and information used in this study are primary data and secondary data. In this study, primary data were obtained directly from questionnaires that respondents had filled in. Meanwhile, secondary data is the source of research data obtained by searching for and collecting materials from BPS data, books, reports, brochures, and other data previously collected by others.

As for the primary data, the information will be gathered from a questionnaire filled out by respondents through an online form (spread of Google form). The target respondents will be the employers who made a decision on who will be accepted to work in the company. Before the questionnaire was distributed to respondents, a pilot test was conducted to test 1) validity and 2) reliability. This study's population is the employers/decision makers in the companies in Kawasan Industri MM2100, Bekasi. The sampling method used in this research is non-probability sampling. In non-probability sampling, the respondent has no known or predefined likelihood of being chosen as a sample subject in non-probability sampling (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019).

6. FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

The study utilized Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients to assess internal consistency, with a value of 0.70 or higher being considered acceptable. For this pilot study, a minimum level of reliability was established at a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70. Pearson's Correlation was used to determine survey validity, with a value of 0.30 or higher being considered a moderate to strong connection. The pilot study was conducted from May 3rd, 2023 to May 4th, 2023 with a target of 30 respondents. Actual data collection resulted in 36 respondents with valid and reliable result.

The respondents were the employees who have experience in recruiting new employees and working at Kawasan Industri MM2100. The total of respondents was 102 who met three main criteria: (1) has been working at least 6 months in the company, (2) the minimum position is team leader level, (3) have experienced on hiring SMK graduates. They were the employees in company starting from the team leader level to director and had experience of hiring SMK graduates. The data collection was supported by the HR community in the industrial area. They shared the questionnaire with their company team from May 6th, 2023, to May 12th, 2023.

After checking and measuring all the data through PLS-SEM, author found the following result:

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficient	t Statistics	p Values	Results
H1	ATT -> INT	0.161	1.677	0.094	H not supported
H2	SN -> INT	0.297	2.635	0.008	H supported
H3	PBC -> INT	0.369	3.146	0.002	H supported
H4a	AP x ATT -> INT	-0.091	0.800	0.424	H not supported

H4b	AP x SN -> INT	-0.068	0.661	0.509	H not supported
H4c	AP x PBC -> INT	0.101	0.907	0.365	H not supported
H5	AP -> INT	0.217	3.213	0.001	H supported

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings suggest that Attitude (ATT), Subjective Norm (SN), Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), and Apprenticeship Program (AP) have a positive influence on the intention to hire SMK graduates. However, the AP does not have a significant impact as a moderating variable on ATT, SN, and PBC in relation to the intention to hire.

According to the Importance Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA), Perceived Behavioral Control is deemed the most crucial variable among all the presented ones. However, there are opportunities for improvement to enhance its contribution to the intention of hiring SMK graduates. Employers in Kawasan Industri MM2100 assert that they could aid in hiring more SMK graduates in the future if they are granted the authority to do so. It is also necessary to equip these employers with the knowledge and skills required to effectively and efficiently recruit them. This will enable companies to onboard capable new employees. Additionally, they perceive this program as highly significant for graduates to acquire the necessary soft skills and hard skills.

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