

## **Specificity without Correspondence: Vocational Secondary Education and Youth Employment in Indonesia**

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| Info Articles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| <p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Received : 05-09-2026</p> <p>Revised : 29-09-2026</p> <p>Published : 05-10-2026</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p><i>industry linkage, school-to-work transition, vocational education, workplace learning, youth employment</i></p> | <p>Indonesia has expanded vocational secondary education on the expectation that occupational specificity would ease the transition to employment, yet vocational graduates have persistently recorded unemployment rates at or above those of general secondary graduates, inverting the policy's central premise. This study aims to examine how the policy framework constructs the relationship between vocational schooling and employment, to identify the conditions comparative evidence establishes as necessary for vocational education to improve transition outcomes, and to formulate reconstruction that improves outcomes without sacrificing lifecycle adaptability. The research combines qualitative document analysis with normative examination of the framework, analysing the National Education System Law, national education standards, the presidential instruction on vocational school revitalisation, and the presidential regulation on vocational education revitalisation, tested against scholarship in labour economics, comparative vocational systems, and workplace learning theory. The findings show that specificity confers an entry advantage only where curricula correspond to employer requirements, a correspondence weakened in Indonesia by supply-driven programme allocation, absent local labour market information, and industry agreements limited to accepting placements; that employer-linked systems rest on collective institutions absent in the Indonesian configuration, producing thin and unstable firm engagement; that workplace practice is regulated by duration rather than by affordance; and that</p> |

| Info Articles | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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|               | compressing general education transfers risk from labour market entry to later working life. The article recommends sectoral coordinating capacity, regulation of placement affordance, host supervisor preparation, a protected general education floor, and investment in guidance and pathway transfer. |

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has expanded vocational secondary education more rapidly than almost any comparable system, pursuing a deliberate policy of shifting enrolment toward vocational schools on the expectation that specific occupational preparation would ease the transition from schooling to employment. The policy has been reinforced through successive revitalisation programmes addressing curriculum, teaching staff, facilities, and industry linkage.<sup>1</sup>

The results have been persistently disappointing in one specific respect: vocational school graduates have repeatedly recorded open unemployment rates at or above those of general secondary graduates, a pattern that inverts the policy's central expectation. This is among the most significant unresolved puzzles in Indonesian education policy, and it has generated responses that address symptoms more equipment, more industry agreements, more certification without adequately examining the mechanism that produces the result.

The ideal condition is specified in law. The National Education System Law establishes vocational secondary education as preparing students primarily to work in particular fields, while also affirming that every pathway must permit continuation to further study.<sup>2</sup> The vocational revitalisation framework directs the alignment of provision with labour market needs, the involvement of industry in curriculum and practice, and the development of teaching staff with industry experience.<sup>3</sup>

The actual condition displays several features that the international evidence identifies as predictive of poor transition outcomes. Programme offerings frequently reflect

<sup>1</sup> Instruksi Presiden Nomor 9 Tahun 2016 tentang Revitalisasi Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan dalam rangka Peningkatan Kualitas dan Daya Saing Sumber Daya Manusia Indonesia; Peraturan Presiden Nomor 68 Tahun 2022 tentang Revitalisasi Pendidikan Vokasi dan Pelatihan Vokasi, Pasal 2–5.

<sup>2</sup> Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, Pasal 15 dan Pasal 18 ayat (3).

<sup>3</sup> Perpres Nomor 68 Tahun 2022, Pasal 5–8.

the availability of teachers and equipment rather than local labour demand; industry partnerships are numerous but often shallow, amounting to placement agreements without joint curriculum design or assessment; workplace practice is frequently short, unsupervised in any educational sense, and concentrated in tasks that do not develop the competences claimed; and the general education component language, mathematics, and reasoning is compressed in favour of occupational specificity.

That last feature connects to the most robust finding in the comparative literature on vocational education, and it is the finding that frames this article. Analysis of lifecycle labour market outcomes across countries indicates that vocational education confers an initial advantage in employment at labour market entry, and that this advantage erodes and in some systems reverses over the working life, as the specificity that eased entry becomes an obstacle to adaptation.<sup>4</sup> Evidence specific to Indonesia has raised more fundamental questions, finding limited or negative returns to vocational schooling relative to general schooling in several cohorts.<sup>5</sup>

Scholarly debate has approached vocational education from three directions. Economic analysis has examined returns, transition patterns, and the trade-off between initial employability and lifecycle adaptability.<sup>6</sup> Institutional analysis has examined the conditions under which employer-linked systems function, identifying the collective institutions that sustain apprenticeship in the systems most often cited as models.<sup>7</sup> Learning theory has examined how occupational competence develops, emphasising participation in genuine work under guidance.<sup>8</sup>

The research gap this article addresses lies in the limited integration of these perspectives within analysis of the Indonesian policy framework. Indonesian scholarship has extensively documented implementation problems in vocational schools and has evaluated particular interventions, but has rarely analysed the policy architecture against

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<sup>4</sup> Eric A. Hanushek, Guido Schwerdt, Ludger Woessmann, and Lei Zhang, "General Education, Vocational Education, and Labor-Market Outcomes over the Lifecycle," *Journal of Human Resources* 52, no. 1 (2017): 48–87.

<sup>5</sup> David Newhouse and Daniel Suryadarma, "The Value of Vocational Education: High School Type and Labor Market Outcomes in Indonesia," *World Bank Economic Review* 25, no. 2 (2011): 296–322.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ryan, "The School-to-Work Transition: A Cross-National Perspective," *Journal of Economic Literature* 39, no. 1 (2001): 34–92.

<sup>7</sup> Werner Eichhorst, Núria Rodríguez-Planas, Ricarda Schmidl, and Klaus F. Zimmermann, "A Roadmap to Vocational Education and Training in Industrialized Countries," *ILR Review* 68, no. 2 (2015): 314–337.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Billett, "Learning through Work: Workplace Affordances and Individual Engagement," *Journal of Workplace Learning* 16, no. 6 (2004): 312–324; Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29–58.

the institutional conditions that comparative evidence identifies as necessary for employer-linked vocational systems to function. The novelty of this article lies in that analysis, and in its argument that Indonesia has adopted the curricular form of employer-linked vocational education without the collective institutions that make such systems work, producing schools that are specific enough to foreclose alternatives and not connected enough to deliver the employment advantage that specificity is supposed to buy.

Three research questions follow. First, how does the Indonesian policy framework construct the relationship between vocational schooling and employment, and what institutional conditions does that construction presuppose? Second, what does comparative evidence establish about the conditions under which vocational education improves transition outcomes, and how does the Indonesian configuration compare? Third, what reconstruction of curriculum, industry linkage, and pathway design would improve outcomes without sacrificing lifecycle adaptability?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The economic literature on vocational education is organised around a trade-off. Occupational specificity eases entry into the labour market by reducing the training costs an employer must bear, and it therefore improves employment prospects at the point of transition. The same specificity reduces the transferability of skills, which becomes costly when occupational structures change. The lifecycle evidence indicates that this trade-off is real and that its balance depends on the rate of structural change in the economy and on the extent to which vocational programmes retain general educational content.<sup>9</sup>

The condition under which the initial advantage materialises deserves emphasis, because it is frequently assumed rather than examined. Specificity eases entry only where the specific skills taught correspond to skills employers actually require, which requires either an accurate forecast of local demand or a mechanism through which employers themselves shape provision. Where neither obtains, the student bears the cost of specificity without receiving its benefit: their preparation is narrow and it is narrow in the wrong direction. This is the central analytical point of the present article, and it explains how a system can simultaneously exhibit high specificity and poor employment outcomes without any contradiction.

Institutional analysis identifies what makes employer shaping possible. The systems most often cited as successful those with strong apprenticeship traditions rest on collective

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<sup>9</sup> Hanushek et al., "General Education, Vocational Education, and Labor-Market Outcomes," 60–78.

institutions: employer associations with the capacity and mandate to coordinate, chambers with a role in certification, negotiated occupational standards, and legal frameworks governing training relationships.<sup>10</sup> These institutions do the work that markets alone do not: they prevent free-riding by firms that hire trained workers without training any, they maintain standards across firms of different sizes, and they give training a currency that is portable between employers. Systems that adopt the pedagogical form of apprenticeship without these institutions generally find that firm participation is thin, concentrated among large firms, and unstable across economic cycles.

Learning theory supplies the third component. Occupational competence develops through participation in genuine work of increasing complexity, under the guidance of experienced practitioners.<sup>11</sup> The corollary is that workplace practice which involves observation, peripheral tasks, or activities unrelated to the occupation develops little occupational competence, whatever its duration. Since Indonesian workplace practice is frequently of this character, the learning-theoretic analysis predicts precisely the outcome the economic data show.

A fourth strand concerns the general education component. The capabilities that support adaptation across a working life reading demanding text, quantitative reasoning, structured problem-solving are developed through general education, and their compression in favour of occupational content is a transfer of risk from the point of labour market entry to the remainder of the working life. The comparative evidence indicates that this transfer is unfavourable in economies undergoing rapid structural change, which describes Indonesia.<sup>12</sup>

The theoretical gap addressed here is the absence of an integrated analysis treating specificity, institutional capacity, and workplace learning quality as jointly determining transition outcomes. Each literature explains part of the Indonesian puzzle; the puzzle itself requires their combination.

### **III. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs qualitative document analysis combined with normative examination of the policy and regulatory framework governing vocational education. The

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<sup>10</sup> Eichhorst et al., "A Roadmap to Vocational Education and Training," 320–330.

<sup>11</sup> Billett, "Learning through Work," 315–321; Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 29–58.

<sup>12</sup> OECD, *Learning for Jobs: OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2010), 41–70.

approach suits research questions concerned with the construction of a policy and the institutional conditions it presupposes.<sup>13</sup>

Three approaches are combined. The statutory approach examines legislation, presidential instruments, and subordinate regulation governing vocational education and its revitalisation. The conceptual approach examines the categories of competence, industry linkage, and workplace practice as they appear in these instruments, testing what each presupposes. The comparative approach examines the institutional configurations of vocational systems in other countries, with attention to the conditions each requires rather than to the practices each displays.

Materials are organised in three tiers. Primary materials comprise Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System; Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 as amended on National Education Standards; Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2016 on the Revitalisation of Vocational Secondary Schools; and Presidential Regulation Number 68 of 2022 on the Revitalisation of Vocational Education and Vocational Training. Secondary materials comprise peer-reviewed scholarship in labour economics, comparative vocational education, and workplace learning, including studies specific to Indonesian outcomes. Supporting materials comprise international reviews of vocational education and training and reports on youth employment.<sup>14</sup>

Analysis proceeded in four stages. The policy corpus was coded for provisions addressing curriculum specificity, industry involvement, workplace practice, and pathway continuation. The institutional conditions presupposed by these provisions were made explicit. Comparative evidence on the conditions required for employer-linked systems was then assembled and compared against the Indonesian configuration. Finally, reconstruction proposals were derived and tested for consistency with the statutory framework. The study analyses policy design and published evidence rather than conducting primary fieldwork; characterisations of school-level practice are derived from documented structure and existing research.

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<sup>13</sup> Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40; Peter Mahmud Marzuki, *Penelitian Hukum*, rev. ed. (Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media, 2017), 133–142.

<sup>14</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024* (Geneva: ILO, 2024), 15–42.

## **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **A. Specificity without Correspondence**

The Indonesian framework constructs vocational schooling as preparation for work in specific fields, with programmes organised around defined occupational areas and competence standards.<sup>15</sup> This is the specificity that comparative evidence associates with an entry advantage, and its adoption is rational on that evidence.

The advantage, however, is conditional on correspondence between what is taught and what local employers require. Three features of the Indonesian configuration systematically weaken that correspondence.

The first is supply-driven programme allocation. The programmes a school offers are determined substantially by the teachers it employs and the equipment it holds, both of which are durable and expensive to change, and only weakly by the structure of local labour demand, which changes faster than either. Once a programme is established, the institutional cost of closing it is high and falls on identifiable people, while the cost of continuing it falls diffusely on students. Predictably, programmes persist beyond the demand that justified them.

The second is the absence of reliable local labour market information. Correspondence requires knowing what local employers need, at a level of geographic and occupational detail that national aggregate statistics do not provide. Where schools cannot know local demand, programme decisions cannot respond to it, and exhortations to align provision with industry needs are addressed to institutions that lack the information the alignment would require.

The third is the thinness of employer involvement in curriculum. Agreements with industry are numerous, and the policy framework encourages them. Their content, however, is typically limited to accepting students for placement. Where employers do not participate in specifying competences, designing assessment, or validating that graduates meet standards, the curriculum reflects what schools believe employers want, which is a different thing and is systematically outdated.

The resulting configuration produces the worst combination available: specificity high enough to narrow students' options and correspondence low enough to deny them the entry advantage that specificity purchases. This, rather than any deficiency in student effort

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<sup>15</sup> Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003, Pasal 15; Perpres Nomor 68 Tahun 2022, Pasal 5.

or teacher commitment, is the most plausible explanation for the persistent unemployment pattern.

## **B. Workplace Practice and the Quality of Learning**

Workplace practice is the component in which occupational competence should develop, and it is the component whose quality is least regulated.

The learning-theoretic requirements are clear: access to genuine work of increasing complexity, guidance from an experienced practitioner, and participation whose contribution matters.<sup>16</sup> Where these are present, a placement of modest duration develops substantial competence. Where they are absent, extended placement develops familiarity with an environment and little else.

Indonesian placement practice varies widely and is largely unmeasured. Several structural features work against quality. Placements are frequently arranged by the school on the basis of willingness to accept students rather than capacity to train them, since the supply of willing hosts is the binding constraint. Host supervisors receive no preparation and no compensation for the time supervision requires. And the school's supervisory contact is typically limited to administrative visits, which cannot detect whether learning is occurring.

The policy response to placement quality has generally been to extend duration. This is understandable duration is measurable and its extension is administratively straightforward but it addresses the wrong variable. Where the affordances are absent, longer placement produces more of the same. Where they are present, extension is genuinely valuable. Regulating duration without regulating affordance therefore imposes cost on students and firms without reliable benefit.

**Table 1. Conditions for Effective Vocational Preparation and the Indonesian Position**

| Condition                  | Comparative Requirement                        | Indonesian Position                             | Consequence                         |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Correspondence with demand | Employer participation in defining competences | Programmes supply-driven; agreements limited to | Specificity without entry advantage |

<sup>16</sup> Billett, "Learning through Work," 315–321.

| Condition                  | Comparative Requirement                               | Indonesian Position                                                      | Consequence                                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Collective institutions    | Associations and chambers coordinating and certifying | placement<br>Limited coordinating capacity; firm participation voluntary | Thin, unstable employer engagement            |
| Workplace learning quality | Genuine work, guidance, progression                   | Unregulated affordance; unprepared supervisors                           | Duration without competence development       |
| General education base     | Retained literacy, numeracy, reasoning                | Compressed in favour of occupational content                             | Adaptability reduced over the lifecycle       |
| Pathway openness           | Continuation to further study preserved               | Formally preserved; practically constrained                              | Early, weakly informed choice becomes binding |

Source: Author's analysis of the policy framework and comparative literature, 2026.

### C. Collective Institutions and the Limits of Bilateral Agreement

The systems Indonesian policy documents cite as models rest on institutional foundations that the documents rarely mention. Employer associations with the mandate and capacity to coordinate; chambers involved in examination and certification; negotiated occupational standards revised through a defined process; legal frameworks governing the training relationship and the trainee's status.<sup>17</sup>

These institutions solve collective action problems that bilateral school-firm agreements cannot. A firm that trains bears costs; a firm that hires trained workers without training does not. Absent a mechanism that distributes the cost, training is under-supplied relative to its social value, and the firms that do train are those large enough to internalise the benefit or civic-minded enough to accept the loss. This is precisely the pattern

<sup>17</sup> Eichhorst et al., "A Roadmap to Vocational Education and Training," 320–330.

Indonesian vocational education displays: engagement concentrated among large firms, thin among the small and medium enterprises that employ the majority of the workforce, and vulnerable to downturn.

Two implications follow. The first is that policy aimed at increasing the number of school–industry agreements addresses a symptom. What matters is not how many agreements exist but whether firms have a reason to invest in training quality, and bilateral agreements supply no such reason. The second is that building coordinating capacity sectoral bodies with a mandate to define competences and validate assessment, with genuine employer participation rather than nominal representation is the higher-leverage investment, and it is institutional work of a kind that education ministries are not well positioned to undertake alone.

A realistic assessment must also acknowledge a constraint that comparative admiration tends to obscure: apprenticeship systems developed over long periods in economies with particular industrial structures, high rates of formal employment, and strong traditions of collective organisation. Indonesia’s labour market is substantially informal, and a large share of vocational graduates will work in settings that no employer-linked system reaches. A policy that designs exclusively for the formal sector addresses a minority of the destinations its graduates will actually occupy.

#### **D. General Education, Adaptability, and the Cost of Early Specialisation**

The compression of general education in vocational programmes is defended on the ground that vocational students are served better by occupational content. The lifecycle evidence indicates this defence is short-sighted.

Two mechanisms operate. The first is direct: literacy and numeracy at the levels developed in strong general education are themselves labour market assets, increasingly so as routine occupational tasks are automated. The second is indirect: these capabilities are the foundation on which later retraining is built, and a worker whose occupation disappears retraining successfully or not substantially according to that foundation. The compression therefore purchases a small near-term gain at the cost of a larger long-term one, and the transaction is concealed because the cost falls decades later and is never attributed to the schooling decision.

There is a further consideration concerning the age of choice. Indonesian students select between vocational and general pathways at around age fifteen, on the basis of limited information about both the occupations concerned and their own aptitudes, and frequently under the influence of proximity and cost rather than of interest. Making a

consequential and partly irreversible decision at that age is defensible only where the pathway chosen remains genuinely open to continuation, and where support for revision is available. The statutory framework preserves continuation formally; the practical constraints entrance requirements referencing general subjects, preparation gaps, and cost narrow it substantially.

The policy implication is not that vocational education should be abolished or deferred. It is that the general component should be protected as a floor rather than treated as a residual, that pathway transfer should be actively supported rather than merely permitted, and that career guidance at the point of choice deserves investment commensurate with the weight of the decision.

#### **E. What Would Improve Outcomes: A Reconstruction**

Six proposals follow from the analysis, ordered by expected leverage.

First, build sectoral coordinating capacity. Bodies with genuine employer participation, a mandate to define and revise occupational competences, and a role in validating assessment would create the correspondence that bilateral agreements cannot. This is slow institutional work and it is the foundation on which the remaining proposals depend.

Second, regulate placement affordance rather than duration. Approval of a host should depend on a specification of the tasks the student will perform and the practitioner who will guide them, and renewal should depend on whether the specification was honoured.

Third, prepare host supervisors. Brief, practical preparation in what the student should learn and how to guide and give feedback is inexpensive and among the most reliable available improvements to placement quality.

Fourth, protect the general education floor. A defined minimum in language, mathematics, and reasoning, assessed on the same basis as in general schooling, prevents the compression whose costs fall later and invisibly.

Fifth, make programme offerings responsive to demand by supporting closure as well as opening. Programmes cannot realign if closing one is institutionally impossible; transition support for affected teachers is the mechanism that makes realignment feasible.

Sixth, invest in career guidance and pathway transfer. The decision made at fifteen should be revisable at seventeen, and revisability requires bridging provision rather than permission alone.

## **F. Informality, Entrepreneurship, and the Destinations Policy Ignores**

A final analytical point concerns where vocational graduates actually go. A substantial share will work in informal employment or in self-employment, and a further share will work in occupations unrelated to their field of study. Policy designed around placement into formal employment in the field of training therefore addresses a minority of outcomes, and evaluates itself against an indicator employment in field that describes a minority experience.

Two consequences follow. The first concerns curriculum. Capabilities relevant across informal and self-employed work costing and pricing, basic financial record-keeping, dealing with customers and suppliers, identifying and evaluating an opportunity are broadly useful and are frequently marginal in vocational curricula organised around technical competences. Their inclusion is not a dilution of vocational preparation but a recognition of where graduates work.

The second concerns evaluation. Judging vocational schooling by field-matched formal employment rates penalises schools whose graduates enter self-employment successfully and rewards those whose graduates enter poorly paid but matched formal work. An evaluation framework attentive to earnings, stability, and progression across all destinations would give a more accurate picture and would produce less distorting incentives, though it requires tracer capacity that is currently limited.

Taken together with the earlier analysis, this suggests a reframing of the policy's purpose. The defensible aim of vocational secondary education in a rapidly changing, substantially informal economy is not to deliver a worker matched to a current vacancy, but to produce a young person with a solid general foundation, a genuine practical capability developed through real work, and the disposition and means to continue learning. That is a more modest claim than the policy currently makes, and considerably more likely to be honoured.

## **G. Teachers, Equipment, and the Obsolescence Problem**

Two resource questions bear directly on correspondence and deserve separate treatment, because they are usually discussed as funding matters when they are in fact design matters.

The first concerns teaching staff. Vocational teachers are generally recruited on the basis of formal qualification and appointed on terms identical to those of general teachers, which means that industry currency is neither a condition of entry nor a requirement of continued service. A teacher who entered the profession with current industry knowledge

will, absent deliberate arrangements, be teaching practices a decade out of date within a decade. The remedies are well known and modest in cost: structured industry placements for teachers on a periodic cycle, dual appointments allowing practitioners to teach part-time without meeting full teacher qualification requirements, and recognition of industry experience in career progression. Each requires adjustment to employment rules rather than new expenditure, and each is more consequential for correspondence than an equivalent investment in equipment.

The second concerns equipment itself, which absorbs a large share of vocational funding and depreciates in relevance faster than it depreciates physically. A workshop equipped to a specification set five years ago teaches students to operate machinery that local firms may have replaced. Three responses are available. Provision may be concentrated in shared regional facilities used by several schools, raising utilisation and permitting more frequent renewal. Firms may host the equipment-intensive component, which is the apprenticeship logic and depends on the institutional conditions discussed above. Or curricula may be designed around principles that transfer across equipment generations, with specific operation learned at the workplace. The three are complementary, and the current pattern every school equipped individually to a national specification is the most expensive and least adaptive of the available configurations.

A related observation concerns certification. Competence certification issued by the education system carries limited weight with employers where employers had no part in defining the competences or validating the assessment. Certification schemes proliferate in such circumstances, each claiming currency and none commanding it, and the cost falls on students who pay for credentials of uncertain value. This is a further argument for employer participation in standard-setting: without it, certification is an administrative product rather than a labour market signal.

#### **H. Objections and the Limits of the Analysis**

Three objections deserve engagement.

The first holds that the unemployment comparison between vocational and general graduates is misleading because the two populations differ systematically: students entering vocational schooling are on average from lower-income households and have lower prior attainment, so a raw comparison of outcomes confounds selection with effect. This objection is sound and important. The Indonesian studies that address selection more carefully find smaller effects than raw comparison suggests but do not find the substantial positive advantage the policy assumed, and the analysis here rests on the absence of the

expected advantage rather than on the raw gap. The selection point does, however, carry its own implication: if vocational schooling serves disproportionately disadvantaged students, the quality of its provision is an equity question and not only an efficiency one.

The second holds that the policy has not failed but has not yet been implemented, and that the revitalisation programmes now underway will produce the expected results in time. This cannot be refuted from documentary analysis, and it may be correct. The argument advanced here is that revitalisation as currently designed addresses equipment, agreements, and certification while leaving the correspondence mechanism and the collective institutions untouched, and that a programme which does not alter the mechanism producing an outcome should not be expected to alter the outcome.

The third holds that the emphasis on general education reflects an academic bias that undervalues practical capability. The response is that the argument runs the other way: the position advanced here is that practical capability is developed poorly by current arrangements, because real capability requires genuine work under guidance and that is precisely what placements often fail to provide. A curriculum of compressed general education combined with unsupervised placement delivers neither foundation nor craft.

The study's limitations should be acknowledged. It relies on documentary analysis and published research rather than on primary fieldwork, and the published Indonesian evidence on returns is drawn from cohorts that predate the recent revitalisation programmes. Contemporary evidence on whether the pattern persists would materially strengthen or weaken the argument, and its absence is the most significant constraint on the conclusions offered here.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

This article has examined why Indonesian vocational secondary education has not delivered the employment advantage its expansion assumed, and has located the explanation in a configuration that combines high occupational specificity with weak correspondence to actual demand.

In response to the first research question, the policy framework constructs vocational schooling as preparation for work in specific fields and presupposes institutional conditions employer participation in defining competences, workplace settings capable of training, and information about local demand that it does not establish. In response to the second, comparative evidence indicates that specificity confers an entry advantage only where correspondence with employer requirements is secured, that such correspondence rests on collective institutions rather than on bilateral agreements, that workplace learning

depends on affordance rather than duration, and that compressing general education transfers risk from labour market entry to the remainder of the working life. The Indonesian configuration diverges at each point. In response to the third, reconstruction requires sectoral coordinating capacity, regulation of placement affordance, preparation of host supervisors, protection of a general education floor, institutional support for programme closure as well as opening, and investment in guidance and pathway transfer.

The theoretical implication is that the specificity trade-off identified in the lifecycle literature is conditional rather than automatic: a system may incur the costs of specificity without obtaining its benefits, and analyses that treat vocational education as a single treatment obscure the institutional variables that determine which outcome occurs.

The practical implications are addressed to policymakers, who should redirect effort from counting industry agreements toward building coordinating institutions; to schools, which should treat placement quality rather than placement duration as the object of management; and to the evaluation apparatus, which should judge provision by outcomes across all destinations rather than by field-matched formal employment alone.

Further research should pursue three directions: study of what students actually do during workplace practice and how this varies by host characteristics; analysis of earnings and stability trajectories across destinations rather than employment status at a single point; and evaluation of sectoral coordination pilots, which would provide evidence on whether collective institutions can be built deliberately rather than only inherited.

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