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Optimization of Personal Grooming and Attitudes for Hospitality Internship Preparation at SMKN 2 Sukawati

Ni Luh Sudarmini[1], I Gede Sutarya[2], I Nyoman Kiriana[3]
Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia
niluhsudarmini334@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study addresses the limited research on the impact of Field Work Practice (*Praktik Kerja Lapangan*, PKL) on the development of students' personal attitudes and physical appearance, despite PKL's critical role in preparing vocational high school students for professional environments. The objective of this study is to analyze the influence of PKL on behavioral changes, specifically in areas such as discipline, cooperation, responsibility, appearance, and communication. Employing a quantitative research design, the study involved 60 vocational high school students in Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using structured observation sheets and teacher evaluation questionnaires administered before and after the PKL period. Descriptive statistics and comparative analysis techniques were used to analyze the data. The findings indicate a significant improvement in students' attitudes and physical appearance following their PKL experiences. Notable enhancements were observed in indicators such as neatness, politeness, initiative, and responsibility. These outcomes align with experiential learning theories, which emphasize the value of real-world engagement in fostering student development. The study concludes that PKL is instrumental in character formation and the enhancement of practical skills, affirming the importance of integrating workplace-based learning into vocational education

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curricula. Theoretically, the study contributes to the expanding body of literature on experiential learning and character development in vocational education. Practically, it provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers to strengthen the design, implementation, and evaluation of PKL programs. Future research is recommended to explore the varied impacts of PKL across different industry sectors and to include more diverse samples for broader generalizability.

Keywords: Field Work Practice (PKL); Vocational Education; Student Attitude; Physical Appearance; Character Building; Experiential Learning

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of Indonesia's most strategic sectors in national development. It not only contributes significantly to foreign exchange earnings but also drives regional development, creates employment opportunities, and stimulates growth in supporting industries (Sihombing, 2021). Bali, as the leading icon of Indonesian tourism, heavily depends on the quality of service provided in the hospitality sector, which forms the first and most vital impression for tourists. In an increasingly competitive global tourism landscape, hotels are expected to deliver not just luxurious facilities, but also professional, consistent, and warm service (Tabbada et al., 2023). The quality of service largely depends on human resources, particularly frontline employees such as receptionists, waiters, and housekeeping staff, who are often the first point of interaction between the hotel and its guests (Soffi & Mohamad, 2021). In this context, personal grooming and professional attitude become critical indicators that influence guest perception and overall service experience. Therefore, nurturing and strengthening these aspects from the vocational education stage is not only important but also strategic to support the sustainability of Indonesia’s hospitality industry.

SMKN 2 Sukawati, as one of Bali's leading vocational high schools specializing in tourism education, bears a significant responsibility in producing graduates who are not only technically competent but also professionally presentable and work-ethic-oriented. The Internship Program (Praktik Kerja Lapangan or PKL) serves as an essential bridge between the educational environment and the professional world, offering students firsthand experience in dealing with real-world work situations. However, preliminary observations and interviews with industry partners indicate a concerning gap between

student competencies and industry expectations, particularly in areas of personal grooming and work behavior. Many students have yet to fully understand the importance of maintaining a professional appearance consistently or demonstrate the necessary discipline and accountability while undertaking internships. This reflects a shortcoming in the process of instilling professional character values, which ideally should be embedded throughout technical learning activities in schools. As a result, students risk being perceived as unprepared or unprofessional, which in turn can tarnish the school's reputation and affect future opportunities.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that personal grooming goes beyond mere aesthetics or physical appearance it reflects internal values such as discipline, self-respect, and commitment to one's profession (Chaudhuri et al., 2022). When a student maintains cleanliness, wears a neat uniform, and displays appropriate body language, they are not only meeting dress code requirements but also conveying maturity and mental readiness for a professional career. Unfortunately, this understanding has not yet been systematically embedded within the vocational curriculum. Often, grooming training is offered as a one-off session just before students go on internship, without structured follow-up or ongoing evaluation involving teachers, industry mentors, and the students themselves. Similarly, the development of professional attitudes such as punctuality, responsibility, and respect is rarely treated as a continuous learning objective. The lack of integration between theoretical instruction and the internalization of professional values in daily school life contributes to students' weak work character.

From the industry's perspective, workplace supervisors frequently encounter challenges in guiding students who are unprepared both mentally and behaviorally. Several hotels have expressed reluctance to accept interns from particular schools due to previous negative experiences, particularly regarding student discipline and professionalism. This raises concerns about the over-reliance on industry as the primary training ground, without adequate groundwork laid by the schools. Ideally, vocational education should employ a holistic strategy, incorporating project-based learning, character development through extracurricular activities, and reinforcement of professional values in all aspects of the school environment. Furthermore, vocational education must give equal weight to character assessment alongside technical skills in evaluating student performance. Therefore, systemic reform in character development especially in personal grooming and

professional conduct is essential to ensure that vocational graduates are genuinely job-ready and industry-relevant.

Previous studies have highlighted the impact of personal grooming and work attitudes on service performance in the hospitality sector. For instance, research by Rodriguez and Darroca (2024) shows that interns with proper grooming received more favorable evaluations from hotel guests compared to those with poor grooming habits. Similarly, Trinidad (2020) emphasize the significance of proactive, polite, and responsive behavior in building customer loyalty in hotel services. However, most existing studies tend to focus on outcomes such as customer satisfaction or service quality without thoroughly exploring how these values are instilled within vocational education. Few studies specifically investigate the internal processes through which vocational schools cultivate grooming habits and work ethics aligned with industry expectations. This creates a meaningful research gap, providing an opportunity to explore not only the evaluation of student readiness but also the design and implementation of effective school-based development models.

Theoretically, this study draws upon several key frameworks. Self-Perception Farmaki (2018) posits that individuals develop attitudes by observing their own behavior suggesting that habitual grooming can lead to a stronger professional self-image. Similarly, Sabirin *et al.* (2018) explains that intrinsic motivation increases when individuals feel competent, autonomous, and connected elements that can be fostered through structured internship preparation. Constructivist learning theories by Piaget and Vygotsky further emphasize that meaningful learning arises through direct experience and social interaction, supporting the notion that hands-on exposure and guided reflection during school-based activities are essential for building lasting professional habits. These theoretical foundations underline the importance of integrated, student-centered approaches in shaping both technical and behavioral readiness.

This study offers novelty in its comprehensive approach, combining process evaluation and outcome assessment of personal grooming and professional attitude development among vocational students. Unlike previous research, it investigates not only student behavior but also school practices, curriculum integration, and stakeholder involvement in preparing students for the hospitality industry. By employing a descriptive qualitative method, this study aims to uncover best practices, challenges, and strategies

implemented at SMKN 2 Sukawati in grooming students both externally (appearance) and internally (character). The emphasis on aligning educational strategies with industry needs, especially in personal branding and work ethics, provides practical contributions for improving vocational education policies and practices.

The main objective of this research is to analyze how SMKN 2 Sukawati prepares its students in terms of personal grooming and professional attitude prior to internship placements. It also seeks to offer strategic recommendations to strengthen the school's internal systems in cultivating workplace-ready graduates. Through in-depth investigation and data triangulation, this research aims to propose an integrated model for student character development that not only improves internship performance but also contributes to long-term career success. Ultimately, the study aspires to enhance the role of vocational schools in producing professional, confident, and industry-aligned young talents who will support the sustainable growth of Indonesia's tourism and hospitality sectors.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is most appropriate for understanding the complex, contextual, and socially constructed nature of students' experiences and the educational strategies implemented by vocational institutions. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore phenomena in-depth, focusing on meanings, perspectives, and processes rather than quantifiable variables (Sugiyono, 2024). Given the study's aim to uncover how SMKN 2 Sukawati prepares its students in terms of personal grooming and professional attitudes, qualitative inquiry provides the necessary depth and flexibility to capture authentic insights from participants directly involved in the process students, teachers, and industry mentors. According to Aprila *et al.* (2023), qualitative research is particularly well-suited for studies where the goal is to interpret how people make sense of their lived experiences, making it an ideal fit for exploring character formation and professional readiness in an educational context. This research was conducted over a period of seven months, from October 2024 to April 2025, to ensure comprehensive data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The research design employed is a case study, which enables the investigation of a specific setting SMKN 2 Sukawati as a bounded system with distinct cultural, organizational, and educational characteristics. Andriani *et al.* (2023) defines a case study as

an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine the educational practices, school culture, and internship preparation processes holistically and from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Compared to other research on student readiness which may use survey-based or experimental designs focusing solely on outcomes, this case study emphasizes the processual dimension, offering a deeper exploration of how values are internalized. The case study approach also facilitates triangulation of data sources, enhancing the validity of the findings and allowing the identification of patterns and anomalies across different participant narratives.

The population of this study comprises students of SMKN 2 Sukawati in the Hospitality Department, particularly those who have recently completed or are currently undergoing their internship (PKL), as well as their teachers and industry mentors. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which is appropriate for qualitative research where participants are selected based on specific characteristics that align with the research objectives (Andriani, 2023). Participants were chosen based on their involvement in the internship program and their role in student preparation processes. This includes a sample of 10–12 students, 3–4 supervising teachers, and 2–3 hotel internship supervisors. The sample size is determined by the principle of data saturation when no new relevant information emerges from additional interviews (Rosalina et al., 2022). This method ensures the selection of rich information cases that can best answer the research questions.

Data were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allow for consistency across participants while enabling flexibility to probe deeper into specific responses (Istiqomah et al., 2020). Interview guides were developed based on prior research and expert input to ensure coverage of key themes, including grooming practices, character education, and internship experiences. To ensure instrument trustworthiness, the interview protocols were reviewed by two qualitative research experts and pilot-tested with one student and one teacher to refine question clarity. Observations were conducted in both classroom and simulated workplace settings to assess real-time student behavior related to grooming and professionalism. In addition, school documents such as lesson plans (RPP), internship guidelines, and assessment rubrics were analyzed to validate consistency between formal policy and actual implementation. Similar data collection

triangulation strategies were employed in previous research by Suardika *et al.* (2025), enhancing reliability through cross-verification.

The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis approach, involving systematic coding and interpretation of qualitative data. According to Ismail *et al.* (2025), thematic analysis enables the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within qualitative datasets. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded inductively and then grouped into categories representing key aspects of grooming and work readiness preparation. To enhance analytical rigor, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants for validation, and peer debriefing sessions were held with fellow researchers to test the credibility of interpretations. This analysis method aligns with the goal of generating nuanced, evidence-based insights into the internal school mechanisms shaping students' professional attitudes.

RESULTS

The research findings are based on data collected from October 2024 to April 2025 through structured interviews and document analysis involving five key industry partners who accepted internship students from SMKN 2 Sukawati. The industries provided comprehensive feedback on various aspects related to student grooming, professional behavior, communication, and work readiness.

Table 1 illustrates the percentage of employer evaluations in two main categories: "Excellent" and "Needs Improvement." The grooming standards of students were rated highly, with 85% categorized as excellent, reflecting the strong emphasis the school has placed on student appearance and discipline. However, emotional resilience had the lowest rating in the "Excellent" category (55%) and the highest in "Needs Improvement" (45%), indicating a clear area for improvement.

Table 1. Employer Feedback on Internship Students

Criteria	Excellent (%)	Needs Improvement (%)
Grooming Standard	85	15
Punctuality	80	20
Professional Attitude	78	22
Communication Skills	70	30

Criteria	Excellent (%)	Needs Improvement (%)
Initiative	60	40
Emotional Resilience	55	45

The graphical representation in Figure 1 below provides a clearer visual comparison across all criteria evaluated. The predominance of green bars indicates strengths in grooming, punctuality, and professional attitude, while the increasing yellow segments in criteria such as initiative and emotional resilience highlight developmental gaps.

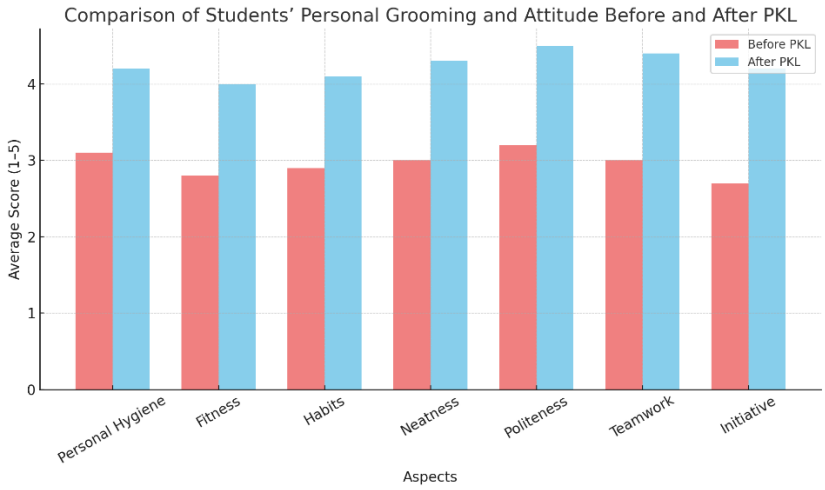


Figure 1. Employer Feedback on Internship Students from SMKN 2 Sukawati

Figure 1 illustrates a comparative analysis of students' average scores in various aspects of personal grooming and attitude before and after participating in the internship program (PKL). The aspects evaluated include Personal Hygiene, Fitness, Habits, Neatness, Politeness, Teamwork, and Initiative, with scores measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. The red bars represent the scores before PKL, while the blue bars represent the scores after PKL. It is evident from the graph that all aspects show a marked increase in average scores after the internship period, indicating a significant positive effect of the PKL experience on students' professional behavior and personal development.

The most notable improvements are seen in the aspects of Politeness, Initiative, and Teamwork. The Politeness score increased from approximately 3.2 to 4.5, highlighting enhanced social manners and professional communication after PKL. Similarly, the

Initiative aspect showed a substantial rise from 2.7 to 4.2, suggesting that students became more proactive and confident in taking responsibility after being exposed to real-world tasks during the internship. Teamwork also saw a considerable improvement from 3.0 to 4.4, reflecting better collaboration and cooperation skills essential soft skills in most work environments.

Other areas, such as Personal Hygiene and Neatness, also demonstrated meaningful gains. Personal Hygiene improved from 3.1 to 4.2, indicating increased awareness of grooming standards required in professional settings. Neatness rose from 3.0 to 4.3, suggesting that students adopted more organized habits, possibly influenced by company regulations and expectations. The Fitness aspect improved from 2.8 to 4.0, potentially due to increased physical activity or awareness of health during PKL. Likewise, Habits increased from 2.9 to 4.1, which may reflect changes in punctuality, consistency, and discipline instilled through structured internship routines.

Further qualitative findings from interview transcripts indicated that while students demonstrated a good initial understanding of workplace expectations, they often struggled under pressure, particularly in dynamic hospitality environments. This confirms the quantitative findings that emotional resilience and initiative are aspects needing reinforcement. Employers consistently appreciated the students' grooming and timeliness, often attributing this to the school's curriculum structure and the discipline culture instilled by the teachers. One hotel manager commented, "Their appearance and punctuality were on par with our regular staff, which is commendable." On the other hand, students' communication skills, especially in handling foreign guests or during team coordination, received more critical feedback. About 30% of industry representatives noted the need for better conversational English and confidence in verbal exchanges.

The aspect of initiative was also highlighted as a concern. Students tended to wait for instructions rather than proactively engaging with tasks. Employers recommended integrating more project-based or role-playing simulations into the school curriculum to prepare students for real-world expectations. Data triangulation from supervisor assessments within the industries supported these findings. Supervisors rated students highly for following standard operating procedures but lower for adaptability and quick problem-solving, again reinforcing the need to focus on emotional and cognitive flexibility.

To enhance these areas, the research suggests incorporating training modules in school that focus on stress management, conflict resolution, and communication role-plays. These are essential to preparing students not only for technical performance but for thriving in customer-centric, high-pressure roles. In conclusion, while SMKN 2 Sukawati has succeeded in preparing students for the visual and behavioral demands of the hospitality sector, the development of soft skills like resilience, initiative, and communication remains an essential next step. The findings provide actionable insights for curriculum improvement and closer alignment with industry expectations.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the Field Work Practice (PKL) program had a significant positive impact on students' attitudes and appearance, particularly in terms of personal grooming and professional character. As illustrated in Figure 1, there was a noticeable increase in the average scores across all indicators after the PKL, including personal hygiene, physical fitness, good habits, neatness, politeness, teamwork, and initiative. This implies that direct experience in the workplace encouraged students to adapt to professional standards commonly found in the industry. The internalization of these values occurred as students engaged directly in activities requiring both personal and social responsibility. This aligns with Plaza II and Sual (2017) Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning takes place through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

A particularly significant improvement was seen in the indicators of teamwork and initiative, which suggests that the PKL program not only improved students' individual habits but also enhanced their social competencies. In real workplace environments, success depends not just on individual performance, but on one's ability to collaborate, show empathy, and take initiative without being prompted. These findings reaffirm the relevance of Soft Skills theory as proposed by Galbraith and Mondal (2020), which emphasizes that non-cognitive skills such as work ethic, interpersonal communication, and leadership play a crucial role in long-term success. Thus, the observed improvements support the idea that structured work-based learning experiences can stimulate the

development of vital personal and interpersonal traits that are often difficult to cultivate through traditional classroom-based methods alone.

When compared to previous research, these findings align with Bawica (2021), who reported that students participating in internship programs showed enhanced discipline, independence, and responsibility. Similarly, Zopiatis *et al.* (2021) found that fieldwork participation significantly improved students' communication skills and professional demeanor. What distinguishes this study is its focus on more specific and measurable indicators, allowing for a sharper analysis of students' transformation before and after their PKL experience. This research also highlights the importance of observation and direct feedback from the industrial mentors as essential components in character development during vocational training.

However, this study's findings differ from Qu *et al* (2021), who found no significant change in student discipline after participating in PKL. This contrast may stem from differences in PKL implementation quality, such as the effectiveness of pre-placement training, the selection of host industries, and the level of supervision provided by mentors. The current study underscores that the success of PKL does not rely solely on its presence in the curriculum but also on the degree to which it is systematically designed and executed through strong collaboration between schools and industry partners. Therefore, this study adds depth to the discourse by identifying key elements that contribute to an effective field practice program.

These findings carry strong theoretical implications, particularly in reinforcing the importance of experiential learning in vocational education. The PKL program proves to be more than just a bridge to the world of work it serves as a medium for character formation that is practical and grounded in real contexts. This study provides empirical evidence supporting Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which stresses the importance of connecting instructional content with real-world applications. Through this lens, students not only acquire knowledge but develop it through direct interaction with real-life tasks and challenges, making the learning experience more holistic and meaningful.

From a practical perspective, this study offers valuable insights for schools and policymakers to optimize the integration of PKL into vocational curricula. Educational institutions can use these findings to design more structured internship systems from the selection of industry partners to the development of preparatory modules, supervision

procedures, and post-internship evaluations. For companies and industry collaborators, this research highlights the potential of PKL as a form of educational Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture may use these findings to strengthen competency-based education policies as mandated in Regulation No. 49 of 2014 on National Higher Education Standards.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted at a single educational institution, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the evaluation of student attitudes and appearances post-PKL relied heavily on questionnaires and teacher observations, which may be subject to subjectivity and perception bias. Third, external variables such as family background, individual motivation, and peer influence were not specifically controlled for, even though these factors could potentially influence the behavioral changes observed in students.

Moreover, this study did not differentiate the impact of PKL based on the type of industry where students were placed. In reality, factors such as workplace environment, organizational culture, and mentor quality may significantly affect the outcomes of the internship experience. Furthermore, the study did not explore in depth the students' reflections on their PKL experience. Future research should consider using a mixed-method approach to enrich quantitative data with interviews or in-depth case studies. This would allow for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how PKL shapes students' character and work readiness.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the Field Work Practice (PKL) program significantly contributes to the development of students' attitudes and physical appearance in a vocational high school setting. Through structured workplace exposure, students exhibited measurable improvements in indicators such as personal hygiene, neatness, politeness, teamwork, and initiative. These changes were evident in the comparative data collected before and after the PKL period, demonstrating that experiential learning environments play a vital role in fostering both personal and professional growth. The results affirm that PKL is not merely an academic requirement but a transformative learning experience that supports character education and enhances student readiness for the workforce.

However, the study is not without its limitations. It was conducted within a single institution, which may affect the generalizability of the results across broader educational contexts. The reliance on teacher evaluations and self-reported questionnaires introduces a degree of subjectivity that may affect data accuracy. Additionally, the study did not account for variables such as individual motivation, the specific characteristics of different industry placements, or the role of family and peer environments, all of which may influence students' behavioral changes. These limitations suggest that while the findings are valuable, they should be interpreted with caution and within the study's contextual boundaries.

In light of these findings and limitations, future research is encouraged to adopt a broader and more diverse sample across multiple institutions and regions to enhance generalizability. Using mixed-method approaches that include qualitative data such as interviews or reflective journals can provide deeper insights into students' lived experiences during PKL. Moreover, future studies should explore the differential impact of various industry sectors, the quality of mentorship, and the duration of placements to identify what factors most effectively support character and skill development. By addressing these gaps, future research can offer more refined recommendations for designing impactful PKL programs that benefit students, schools, and industry partners alike.

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