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Theory of Work Adjustment Integration in the Implementation of Career Guidance at SMK PIKA Semarang

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ABSTRACT

Career guidance in Vocational High Schools (SMK) plays a strategic role in preparing students to adapt to the demands of a dynamic labor market. A relevant theoretical framework for supporting the work readiness of vocational students is the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), which emphasizes the alignment between an individual's characteristics and the requirements of the work environment. This study examines the integration of the Theory of Work Adjustment into career guidance at SMK PIKA in Semarang, specifically within the context of the Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) program. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. The research subjects included guidance and counseling teachers, the industrial work practice coordinator, and students, all selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, supported by Quirkos software. The findings indicate that SMK PIKA has integrated TWA principles through a practice-based curriculum, assessments of student capabilities, the cultivation of the "4C" character values (competency, compassion, conscience, and commitment), and the placement of students in industrial work practices tailored to their individual skills and interests. Career guidance services play a crucial role in supporting students as they adapt to the demands of the workplace and the industrial environment. In conclusion, the integration of the Theory of Work Adjustment into career guidance at SMK PIKA is effective in enhancing work readiness, adaptability, and the alignment between students and their work environments.

Career Guidance; Theory of Work Adjustment; Career Adaptability; Vocational High School.

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ABSTRAK

Bimbingan karir di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) memiliki peran strategis dalam mempersiapkan siswa agar mampu menyesuaikan diri dengan tuntutan dunia kerja yang dinamis. Salah satu pendekatan teoretis yang relevan untuk mendukung kesiapan kerja siswa SMK adalah *Theory of Work Adjustment* (TWA), yang menekankan kesesuaian antara karakteristik individu dan tuntutan lingkungan kerja. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji integrasi Theory of Work Adjustment dalam implementasi bimbingan karir di SMK PIKA Kota Semarang, khususnya dalam konteks pelaksanaan Praktik Kerja Industri (Prakerin). Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Subjek penelitian meliputi guru Bimbingan Konseling, koordinator prakerin, dan siswa yang dipilih melalui teknik *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan model Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña dengan bantuan perangkat lunak Quirkos. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SMK PIKA telah mengintegrasikan prinsip TWA melalui kurikulum berbasis praktik, asesmen kemampuan siswa, pembiasaan nilai karakter 4C (competency, compassion, conscience, commitment), serta penempatan prakerin yang disesuaikan dengan kemampuan dan minat siswa. Layanan bimbingan karir berperan penting dalam mendampingi proses adaptasi siswa terhadap tuntutan kerja dan lingkungan industri. Kesimpulannya, integrasi Theory of Work Adjustment dalam bimbingan karir di SMK PIKA efektif dalam meningkatkan kesiapan kerja, kemampuan adaptasi, serta kesesuaian siswa dengan lingkungan kerja.

Kata kunci: Bimbingan Karir; *Teory of Work Adjustment*; *Adaptability career*; Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan.

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INTRODUCTION

Career guidance is an integral component of guidance and counseling services aimed at helping students develop career competencies that align with the demands of the labor

market. Career guidance programs are designed to address students' developmental needs, particularly in terms of self-understanding, career exploration, and appropriate career decision-making (Nurdianah & Maq, 2021). At the vocational high school (VHS) level, these needs become increasingly pressing because vocational education emphasizes graduates' work readiness and their ability to adapt to the changing dynamics of industry.

Career development is a long-term process shaped by personal, social, and environmental dynamics. Various career theories have been developed to explain this process, including those that focus on the fit between individuals and their work environments, as well as those that emphasize the lifelong construction of career meaning. Savickas (2002) argues that career theories generally seek to explain how individuals find a suitable fit within occupational structures and how career development unfolds across the life span. Thus, career theories do not merely explain occupational choice but also address the processes of adaptation, vocational identity formation, and the negotiation of career meaning over time.

In educational settings, vocational high school students are expected to possess well-developed career planning skills. Career planning is a systematic process through which individuals engage in self-exploration, seek information about the world of work, and establish meaningful career goals (Amin et al., 2014; Fathonah, 2019). These skills enable students to recognize their potential and determine career directions that are consistent with their competencies and personal values. At this stage, schools are expected not only to provide career information but also to create learning experiences that enable students to develop a realistic understanding of their abilities, aspirations, and the demands of the labor market.

One theoretical model particularly relevant to the work readiness of vocational high school students is the *Theory of Work Adjustment* (TWA). Developed by Dawis and Lofquist, this theory posits that vocational success is determined by the degree of *correspondence* between individual characteristics (abilities, values, and needs) and the demands of the work environment, particularly its reinforcers (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984, as cited in Bundaa et al., 2025). TWA conceptualizes work adjustment as a process in which an individual's ability to adapt to the work environment plays a critical role in sustaining long-term work functioning. It views employment as a reciprocal relationship between individuals and their work environments, in which both parties exert demands and provide feedback (Lent et al., 2020). Accordingly, work adjustment is understood as a reciprocal

process: individuals strive to meet job demands, while the work environment provides reinforcement that sustains the employment relationship.

Recent research indicates that the application of TWA in career guidance can improve work congruence, self-understanding, and students' readiness to enter the workforce (Bundaa et al., 2025). In school settings, this theory can be implemented through assessments of students' interests, values, and abilities; job simulations; internship programs; and intensive collaboration among counselors, schools, and industry partners to ensure a supportive environment for students. An interview with a member of the Internship Program Team, identified by the initial P, indicated that this approach is consistent with the needs of students at SMK PIKA Semarang, whose educational characteristics emphasize practical training and a high level of work discipline. This was also reflected in an interview with the internship coordinator, who explained that students are prepared from Grades X to XII to adapt to workplace routines, organizational cultures, and industry standards.

At the same time, the increasing complexity of the labor market calls for more systematic approaches to career guidance. International programs have demonstrated that integrating career theories into guidance practices, including group-based interventions, can enhance students' career exploration, career self-efficacy, and adaptability (Falco & Shaheed, 2021). Constructivist approaches to career services, such as *Life-World Design* (Lai et al., 2024), also emphasize the importance of helping students understand both external realities and their personal circumstances so that they can develop flexible and adaptive future orientations. These perspectives suggest that effective career interventions should go beyond providing information; they should also strengthen students' psychological capacities and adaptive competencies to help them navigate uncertainty in the world of work.

Therefore, integrating the *Theory of Work Adjustment* into career guidance at SMK PIKA in Semarang is particularly relevant. As a vocational institution with a strong orientation toward industry-based education, SMK PIKA requires a career guidance model capable of: (1) assessing the congruence between students' competencies and industry demands; (2) reducing the gap between students' work readiness and workplace expectations; and (3) strengthening students' work adjustment from the internship stage through the post-graduation period. A TWA-based approach is expected to provide a systematic framework for developing work readiness through comprehensive assessment, mapping of environmental requirements, and continuous guidance. In addition, this study seeks to

examine whether students' individual characteristics correspond to the work demands they encounter in the *Praktik Kerja Industri* (PRAKERIN), or industrial work placement program.

Accordingly, investigating the integration of the *Theory of Work Adjustment* into the implementation of career guidance at SMK PIKA in Semarang is important for examining its relevance, effectiveness, and implications for developing a career guidance model that is responsive to industry needs and the characteristics of vocational high school students.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the integration of the *Theory of Work Adjustment* (TWA) into the implementation of career guidance at SMK PIKA in Semarang. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and included the internship coordinator, school counselors, and students directly involved in the industrial work placement program (*Praktik Kerja Industri*, or PRAKERIN). Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol developed around the key dimensions of TWA, namely *abilities–requirements fit*, *values–reinforcer pattern*, *satisfaction*, and *satisfactoriness*.

Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which involves three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analytical process was supported by Quirkos software, selected for its intuitive thematic visualization capabilities, its facilitation of pattern identification across categories, and its contribution to the transparency of the analytical process.

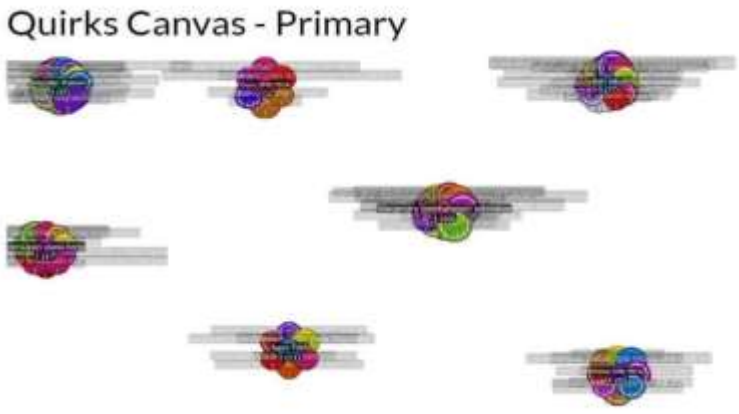

Figure 1. Data Display Generated Using Quirkos

The figure presents the data display developed by the researchers to identify and establish relationships among the codes generated during data reduction. The resulting code clusters provided the basis for identifying data relevant to achieving the research objectives.

Recent studies have indicated that Quirkos can effectively support qualitative data analysis by facilitating collaborative coding, maintaining a clear analytical audit trail, and enabling cross-source triangulation (Atieno, 2024; Rahman & Idris, 2023; Mitchell & Lohan, 2021). Accordingly, the use of Quirkos in this study was intended not only to strengthen the reliability of the analysis but also to facilitate the examination of thematic relationships within the context of TWA integration in the vocational school setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews with teachers and students at SMK PIKA revealed that the school implements a strongly practice-oriented educational system that differs from that of many conventional vocational high schools. Learning is organized through a block system, consisting of one week of theoretical instruction followed by one week of practical training. This arrangement familiarizes students with work rhythms that closely resemble those of industrial settings.

One teacher explained:

> "We have a competency-leveling system as well as a character-development system. For example, in the first year, students are expected to develop certain work-related characteristics, such as manual dexterity. They work here five days a week, from morning until afternoon, and much of their learning takes place through working. Our practical training follows a block system: one week of practice and one week of theory. In this way, they become accustomed to working, so when they graduate, they are no longer unfamiliar with the working environment."
>
> *Source: Interview transcript with Mr. Tanto.*

The teacher further explained that the curriculum is designed progressively. The first year focuses on the development of basic work quality, the second year emphasizes work ethics and efficiency, the third year focuses on cooperation and teamwork, and the fourth year is devoted entirely to internships as a process of preparing students for entry into the workforce.

This practical habituation is also reflected in students' daily activities. One teacher described how students are expected to engage in practical work for extended periods,

beginning at 7:00 a.m. and continuing until approximately 3:30 p.m. Students are expected to remain engaged in productive tasks rather than spend excessive time chatting or engaging in unrelated activities. This arrangement is intended to cultivate discipline and familiarity with workplace routines.

Student C, one of the interview participants, explained that the curriculum does not merely provide theoretical instruction but also strengthens practical skills through real projects. Referring to the learning activities in the first and second years and a showroom project undertaken in the third year, the student stated:

> "In the first and second years, we work on furniture projects. In the third year, we happened to receive a showroom project, which involved working on an interior space. That was helpful because we learned the techniques involved, what materials and resources were needed, and the knowledge required for interior design."
>
> *Source: Interview with Calvin.*

These project-based learning activities provide students with direct exposure to actual work processes and help them understand the realities of professional practice. The curriculum therefore directs students from the early stages of their education toward developing technical competencies and preparing for the demands of industrial workplaces. Field findings also indicated that workplace culture is introduced from the beginning of students' enrollment at SMK PIKA. Teachers emphasize that discipline, proper work procedures, and attention to detail are systematically developed through everyday learning activities. The school also instills character values through its 4C approach, comprising *competency, compassion, conscience,* and *commitment*.

> A student explained these four values as follows:
>
> "The four Cs consist of competency, which refers to students' skills and expertise; compassion, which means a sense of care and concern; conscience, which is related to one's inner sense of right and wrong; and, finally, commitment, which means being committed to practicing all three."

Source: Interview with Calvin.

These values are reinforced through habits such as maintaining orderly work practices, being punctual, acting honestly and responsibly, and complying with occupational safety standards. Several students reported that the school environment is deliberately designed to resemble a company workplace, including the way teachers supervise students' work in a manner similar to industrial supervisors. Consequently, students become accustomed to

workplace pressures and high-quality performance standards. This habituation not only develops practical skills but also cultivates a work-oriented mindset that serves as an important foundation before entering the labor market.

The interviews also revealed that SMK PIKA has a tiered evaluation system designed to measure students' competency development more accurately. Teachers explained that the school is strengthening its assessment system through the introduction of competency cards, which are intended to document the technical skills that each student has or has not yet mastered.

One teacher explained:

> "We are also planning to introduce what we call competency cards. This idea has only recently emerged, with the intention that every student will have a competency card at each educational level. For example, by the time students graduate after the fourth year, they may be expected to have mastered 15 competencies. The cards will show whether each student has achieved all 15 competencies. In this way, we can track their skills."

Source: Interview transcript with Mr. Tanto.

Assessment is conducted continuously to determine students' readiness to participate in projects and industrial work placements. The assessment process also serves as a basis for determining students' placement during their internships, ensuring that each student is assigned to a field that corresponds to their abilities and skill tendencies. Teachers emphasized that the school seeks to ensure that students have developed adequate competencies before entering the workplace. This systematic approach illustrates how assessment is positioned as an integral component of students' skill development and work readiness.

The school counselor also described the evaluation process as a means of monitoring students' progress toward their previously established career goals. The results are used to improve and adjust future career guidance methods and provide students with feedback on their achievements.

Source: Interview response from Mr. Eko, school counselor.

The findings further indicate that the relationship between SMK PIKA and industry partners is one of the school's major strengths in preparing students for employment. The school collaborates with various companies in curriculum development, the implementation of industrial work placements, and the evaluation of graduates following their internships.

Teachers explained that, after the internship period, the school actively seeks feedback from companies to assess student performance and identify areas for curriculum improvement.

One teacher described this process:

> "We also ask companies and engage in discussions with them about their needs. We conduct evaluations and seek feedback from industry partners regarding the shortcomings and weaknesses of our students and what needs to be improved. Through this process, we can identify the gaps between the school and industry, and then determine what the school needs to improve."
>
> *Source: Interview transcript with Mr. Tanto.*

Alumni involvement is another important component of this relationship. Many graduates hold strategic positions in industry and are frequently invited back to the school to motivate current students, share their professional experiences, and provide insights into workplace demands. Their presence helps students build confidence and gain a better understanding of the actual challenges encountered in industry. One student explained that the achievements of alumni served as a source of inspiration:

> "The support that has influenced me the most might be the inspiration I get from alumni. Many of them have been successful, so it makes me feel that I should be able to achieve that too."
>
> *Source: Interview with Calvin.*

The interviews also revealed that one of the main challenges faced by SMK PIKA students during their *Praktik Kerja Industri* (PRAKERIN), or industrial work placement, is adapting to unfamiliar work environments. Students must adjust to work rhythms, organizational cultures, and the characteristics of colleagues, which often differ from their everyday learning experiences at school. Adaptation is required in various areas, including work habits, communication patterns, and specific workplace norms. Students reported that some companies enforce strict disciplinary practices, whereas others provide a more flexible learning environment. These differences require students to adapt quickly to the working styles of their respective internship placements.

Nevertheless, some students reported positive experiences in establishing relationships with workplace colleagues. One student described the interaction as follows:

> "The interactions with the people there were good because they treated me as if I were their own child."

When asked how long it took to become familiar with the people in the workplace, the student responded:

"Three days. After three days, I had already become very close to them."

Source: Interview transcript with Sachio.

The interviews further indicated that, after the initial adaptation period, many students experienced considerable development in their technical skills. They were given opportunities to perform actual work tasks, such as operating machinery, carrying out interior work, and completing projects that were not typically available at school. In addition to technical competencies, students also developed non-technical skills, including communication, teamwork, discipline, and time management. They learned to interact with colleagues, understand instructions from supervisors, and regulate their work pace to complete tasks on time. Students also reported that direct interaction with experienced workers helped them recognize the importance of effective communication and professional conduct.

The school counselor explained that student performance during internships was assessed by observing several indicators, including the ability to work in teams, communicate effectively, adapt to job and workplace demands, and complete tasks in accordance with the standards established by the internship organization.

Source: Interview response from Mr. Eko, school counselor.

The dynamic nature of workplace environments also provides opportunities for students to learn how to adjust their communication styles to different contexts. In some cases, internships help students identify their interests and potential more clearly. The school counselor explained that when students encounter difficulties or experience a mismatch with their internship placement, the school seeks solutions collaboratively. These may include additional training or, in certain circumstances, relocating students to other internship placements that better match their abilities and interests, taking their individual circumstances into account.

Source: Interview response from Mr. Eko, school counselor.

Thus, PRAKERIN not only enhances students' technical and non-technical competencies but also serves as a means of self-exploration in determining their career directions. Industry partners have provided varying assessments of SMK PIKA students' performance during internships. According to the interviews, several companies considered PIKA students to have a good foundation of practical skills and the ability to adapt quickly.

As a result, these students could be entrusted with technical tasks after a relatively brief orientation period. Companies also appreciated their work ethic and ability to follow established work procedures.

However, not all companies expressed the same assessment. Some raised concerns about students' psychological readiness, particularly their ability to cope with workplace pressure. Instances were reported in which students demonstrated inconsistent attention to detail, limited initiative, or difficulty communicating with more experienced workers. These observations have become important considerations for the school in evaluating its curriculum and character-development practices.

One teacher described feedback received from industry partners:

> "Recently, I received feedback from industry partners about several PIKA students who had difficulty coping. Some had only been working for a month and could not handle the pressure; after being reprimanded a few times, they decided to leave. This reflects a difference in mental resilience compared with previous generations. Times have changed as well."

The teacher further explained:

> "Nowadays, students are easily distracted by things such as mobile phones and have difficulty maintaining focus. Teachers are also no longer allowed to reprimand students in the same way, which, in my opinion, can make some students overly sheltered. I think their mental resilience is still insufficient because they lack endurance. This is one of the challenges we face."
>
> *Source: Interview transcript with Mr. Tanto.*

In response to this feedback, the school maintains direct communication with companies after the internship period ends. An annual meeting is held specifically to discuss internship evaluation results, including feedback from industry partners. This evaluation process enables the school to improve teaching methods, strengthen students' psychological readiness, and update teacher training programs. Industry feedback therefore serves not merely as input but also as a basis for improving the overall learning system.

Overall, PRAKERIN plays a substantial role in enhancing the work readiness of SMK PIKA students. Through internships, students gain practical insights into the world of work, including organizational structures, production processes, and the demands of punctuality and quality. These experiences provide them with a direct understanding of workplace expectations. Internships also help students develop stronger work-related characteristics,

particularly discipline, perseverance, and responsibility. Students reported learning to work more systematically, value time, and complete tasks in accordance with high standards. Honesty is another value strongly emphasized, given that industrial environments require integrity in every aspect of work. This is reflected not only in the completion of technical tasks but also in students' conduct, communication, and ability to maintain the trust placed in them by companies.

Integration of the Theory of Work Adjustment in Career Guidance at SMK PIKA

Based on the data analysis conducted using Quirkos, the implementation of education and career guidance at SMK PIKA in Semarang demonstrates substantial alignment with the framework of the *Theory of Work Adjustment* (TWA). This alignment is evident not only at the curriculum policy level but also in learning practices, assessment procedures, and student support mechanisms throughout the industrial work placement period. These findings suggest that students' work adjustment is systematically developed from the beginning of their education rather than occurring incidentally only when they enter industrial settings.

Regarding the *ability–requirement fit* dimension, the analysis indicates that SMK PIKA consistently seeks to align students' abilities with job requirements through a practice-based curriculum, progressive learning activities, and continuous competency assessment. The block system, which alternates between theoretical and practical instruction, together with students' involvement in authentic industry-related projects, enables them to understand the quality standards, work pace, and attention to detail required in the workplace. These findings reinforce the central assumption of TWA that correspondence between individual abilities and job requirements is a key prerequisite for achieving *satisfactoriness*, or effective work functioning. In other words, the technical readiness of SMK PIKA students is not developed in an abstract manner but through work experiences that closely resemble actual industrial conditions.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that technical competency alone does not fully guarantee successful work adjustment. Several cases in which students ended their internships prematurely suggest a mismatch in other dimensions of TWA, particularly *needs–reinforcer fit*. The school has sought to instill work-related values through its 4C culture, comprising competency, compassion, conscience, and commitment. These values are intended to bridge students' personal needs with the values and expectations of the industrial environment. However, the interviews revealed that some students continue to

experience difficulties when their personal values, psychological conditions, or emotional needs are not adequately accommodated by the workplace.

From the TWA perspective, these conditions suggest that although the work environment may provide external reinforcers, such as experience, skills, and learning opportunities, not all students experience an adequate level of job *satisfaction*. Such dissatisfaction tends to emerge when students encounter interpersonal pressure, harsh supervisory styles, or work demands that exceed their emotional readiness. This finding emphasizes that *needs–reinforcer fit* is not limited to material aspects or workplace facilities but also encompasses the psychosocial climate and work relationships experienced by students during their internships.

The analysis also revealed variations in students' *adjustment cycles*. Some students were able to respond to workplace demands by developing adaptive coping strategies, such as strengthening their discipline, adjusting their work pace, and establishing communication with colleagues. This process indicates the achievement of a relatively stable stage of adjustment, as described in TWA. Conversely, for some students, workplace pressure triggered maladaptive responses, such as withdrawal or the decision to terminate their internships. In this context, unsuccessful work adjustment should not be understood solely as an individual weakness but rather as an indication of an imbalance among personal abilities, needs, and environmental reinforcers.

The role of school counselors is particularly crucial in this context. The analysis indicates that career guidance services at SMK PIKA function as a space for student reflection and evaluation, both before and during internships. School counselors help students understand the gap between their personal expectations and workplace realities, while also providing support when conflicts or psychological pressures arise. This practice is consistent with the intervention function within TWA, which emphasizes the importance of modifying either the individual or the work environment to restore a state of correspondence.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that psychosocial support during internships could be further strengthened. Cases involving students who possess adequate technical competencies but are unable to sustain their work roles suggest that emotional readiness and psychological resilience have not yet been fully integrated into career guidance services. Therefore, strengthening TWA-based career guidance should not be limited to mapping

students' abilities and interests but should also encompass the development of coping skills, emotional regulation, and preparedness to deal with workplace pressure.

Overall, this discussion highlights that the successful implementation of the *Theory of Work Adjustment* at SMK PIKA cannot be understood in absolute or binary terms. Students' successful internship experiences indicate that correspondence between individual abilities and work-related values has been systematically developed. Meanwhile, cases of unsuccessful adjustment provide important diagnostic information for improving career guidance services. Accordingly, PRAKERIN functions not merely as a temporary work placement but also as a career-learning environment in which students can experience and reflect on the dynamics of work adjustment in real-world settings.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that SMK PIKA in Semarang has integrated the principles of the *Theory of Work Adjustment* (TWA) into its educational system, career guidance services, and industrial work placement program (PRAKERIN). Its practice-based and progressively structured learning system equips students with strong technical competencies (*abilities*). Character development through a culture of discipline, work ethics, and the 4C values prepares students to develop work-related values that align with industry expectations (*reinforcers*). PRAKERIN serves as a crucial stage for examining the correspondence between students and actual work environments (*fit*), while providing firsthand experience in responding to industrial demands.

Guidance and counseling services play an active role in supporting students as they navigate adaptation challenges, engage in self-reflection, and align their abilities and personal values with job requirements through the *adjustment cycle*. Furthermore, strong partnerships between the school and industry, together with alumni involvement, strengthen feedback on student performance, enhance satisfaction among both parties, and help sustain the quality of graduates (*satisfactoriness* and *satisfaction*). Overall, the integration of TWA at SMK PIKA contributes to the development of an educational ecosystem that prepares students to become competent, well-rounded, adaptable individuals who are ready to enter the workforce.

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