Research Article

Interaction Symbolic Between Heads School and Teacher as Strategy Social For Improving Vocational High School Students' Employability : A Study on Central Vocational High Schools Advantages in Pasuruan Regency /City

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal how symbolic interaction between principals and teachers is interpreted as a social strategy in improving the employability of vocational high school students, especially in the Mechanical Engineering Expertise Competence. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research population was conducted at the Center of Excellence Vocational High Schools in Pasuruan Regency/City, while the sample was 4 vocational high schools that have mechanical engineering expertise competencies. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The results of the study indicate that the symbolic interaction that occurs is not only verbal communication, but also reflects shared values, expectations, and visions in preparing graduates who are adaptive to the world of work. The principal builds meaning through symbols of consistent leadership actions, such as involving teachers in strategic decision-making and instilling an industrial work culture. Teachers, on the other hand, respond to these symbols with more contextual and work-oriented learning practices. This interaction forms a productive school habitus that is the basis for improving student employability.

Keywords: Employability; Machining engineering; Social strategy; Symbolic interaction; Vocational high school

1. Introduction

In context education vocational , challenges the biggest moment This is produce graduates who do not only competent in a way technical , but also has readiness suitable work (employability). with need industry (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff , 2000; Rahayu & Fajar, 2020). Amidst the rapid development of technology and a dynamic world of work, vocational schools are required to create a learning environment that represents real industrial conditions and forms adaptive and professional student characters. One approach that is rarely raised but is very important is symbolic interaction in the school environment.

This concept emphasizes how meaning is formed through symbols, communication, and social interactions that occur between educational actors (Blumer, 1969). This study uses symbolic interaction theory. Symbolic interaction theory was popularized by George Herbert Mead who explained the idea of symbolic interaction in his book entitled Mind, Self, and Society. Researchers use this theory on the grounds that in communicating between principals and teachers face to face there are symbolic messages. Principals and teachers as the main actors in the school environment play an important role in building shared meanings that have an impact on the formation of student work culture (Gunawan & Widodo, 2023).
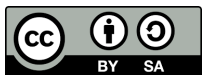
Thus, symbolic interaction can be interpreted as a social strategy to form awareness, motivation, and work behavior needed in the industrial world. This study focuses on the Center of Excellence Vocational Schools, which is a model for developing superior vocational education resulting from government policy in strengthening links and matches with the world of work (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This study aims to explore how symbolic interaction between principals and teachers can be a social strategy in improving
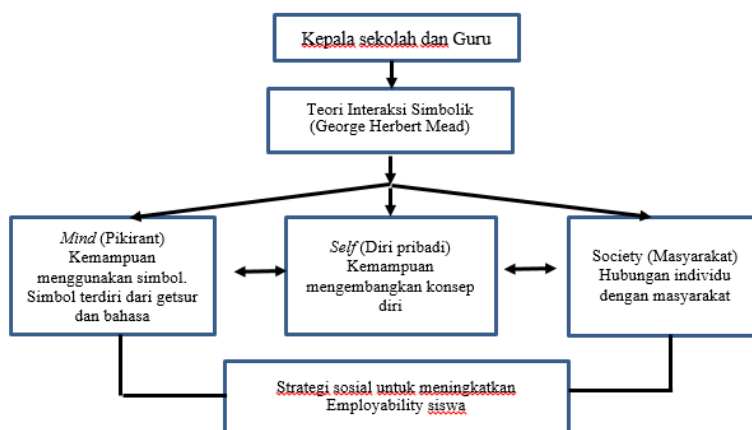
1.1 Framework of thinking

Figure 1 Framework of thinking

In this study, the researcher conducted a study on how symbolic interaction communication between the principal and teachers at the Center of Excellence Vocational High School in Pasuruan Regency/City. using Symbolic Interaction Theory which comes from the ideas or ideas of George Herbert Mead. In this theory there are three basic ideas, namely Mind (Mind) how the symbols are contained in the communication process in the classroom, Self (Self) which is the concept of self owned by the principal and teacher, and Society (Society) the relationship between individuals with other individuals. Symbolic interaction helps build a strong relationship between the principal and teachers. Through effective communication, both can create a sense of mutual trust and collaboration. The symbols used, such as jargon or rituals, reflect the values and culture of the school. This helps teachers understand and internalize the vision and mission of the institution. The principal can communicate the vision and mission of education that focuses on developing work skills.

Through certain symbols, such as slogans or excellent programs, teachers can better understand and convey these goals to students. Symbolic interactions, such as awards for outstanding teachers or recognition for learning innovations, create a supportive atmosphere. This positive environment contributes to students' motivation to develop skills relevant to the world of work. Principals can use symbolic interactions to emphasize the importance of soft skills, such as communication and teamwork. By providing training or seminars, teachers can teach these skills to students. Through the symbolism of cooperation with companies, principals can invite teachers to get involved in programs that connect students with job

opportunities. This increases the relevance of the curriculum and prepares students for the demands of the job market.

2. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand the phenomenon of symbolic interaction as a social strategy in increasing the employability of vocational high school students. This approach was chosen because it is able to capture the complexity of meaning and dynamics of social interaction that cannot be explained quantitatively (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). The main focus of this study is on subjective meanings constructed through symbols, actions, and communication between educational actors in the vocational high school environment.

2.1 Location And Subject Study

Study conducted at two Central Vocational Schools The advantages that are in the region Regency and Pasuruan City , Province Java East . Second school chosen purposively because has have a skills program Technique Active machining to weave collaboration with industry partner as well as show indicator success in implementation of the Teaching Factory and link and match programs. Subject study includes :

a. The principal as a strategic and symbolic leader in forming the school's work culture;
b. The vice principal for curriculum is directly involved in learning planning and partnerships;
c. Productive and normative/adaptive teachers who interact directly with students in industry-based learning processes;
d. Grade XII students who have undergone learning experiences in the Teaching Factory environment or industrial internship program.

2.2 Technique Data collection

Data was collected using three main techniques, namely:

a. Interview deep

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with all key informants. Questions were designed to explore perceptions, experiences, and meanings of symbolic interactions that are built in the school environment. Interviews were conducted in several sessions to allow for clarification and deepening of meaning. Recordings interview transcribed verbatim for needs analysis .

b. Observation participatory

Observations were conducted in the school environment, including the teachers' room, classrooms, workshops, and the Teaching Factory area. The researcher was involved as a passive observer to capture symbolic practices that appeared in actions, routines, verbal and nonverbal expressions, and the atmosphere of relations between educational actors. Notes field made in a way systematic every day observation .

   c. Studies documentation

Documentation was analyzed to complement and verify findings from interviews and observations. Documents reviewed included: school work plans, industry partnership programs, curriculum syllabus, Teaching Factory implementation reports, and photos and videos of relevant learning activities.

2.3 Technique Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which includes:

   a. Data reduction , which is the process of selecting, focusing, and transforming raw data into a more organized form.

   b. Data presentation is done through matrices, thematic narratives, and concept maps to facilitate understanding of the relationships between concepts and categories.

   c. Drawing conclusions/verification , is carried out iteratively throughout the analysis process through testing the consistency of meaning, data triangulation, and interpretive reflection.

2.4 Data Validity Test

Data validity is maintained through technique triangulation , good from side data source (informant) different), technique collection (interviews , observation , documentation), as well as time (repetition) data retrieval in period time In addition , member checking was also carried out by asking for clarification from informants regarding the interim results of the analysis, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers to avoid interpretive bias.

2.5 Location And Subject Study

Study This implemented on vocational school level in the region district / city Pasuruan namely SMKN 1 Purwosari , SMKN Gempol , SMKN Rembang and State Vocational School 2 of Pasuruan City for 6 months start month October 2024 to April 2024.

2.6 Population And sample

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Table 1. Research Informant Data from the Principal

No	Head School	Length of Service	District /City
1	State Vocational	More than 10 years	Regency
2	Gempol State	6-10 years	Regency
3	State Vocational	1-5 years	Regency
4	Pasuruan City	-	City of Pasuruan

Table 2 Informant Data Study from Teacher

No	Name	Number of teachers
1	State Vocational School 1	17
2	Gempol State Vocational	7
3	State Vocational High School	10
4	Pasuruan City	-
	Total	34

Informants were chosen because productive subject teachers have more teaching hours per week than normative/adaptive teachers. So teachers have more time to motivate students to enter the workforce after graduation. Berns, RG, & Erickson, PM (2001, in Contextual Learning Theory) stated that productive teachers have more opportunities to link material to the workforce because of teaching hours and applicable curriculum content. Teachers will teach material effectively when knowledge is linked to real contexts (the workforce), and productive teachers play a central role in this process because:

Table 3 Research Informant Data from Students

No	Name of Vocational School	Amount student
1	State Vocational School 1	48
2	Gempol State Vocational School	17
3	State Vocational High School	61
4	Pasuruan City	30
	Total	156

3. Results and Discussion

Description of the Impact of Successful Implementation of Symbolic Interaction

3.1 Interpretation of the results data study

Table 4 Symbolic Interaction Data of Principals with Teachers

No	Component	Answer	Percentage (%)
Part 1: Interactions with teacher			
1	**Communication with teacher**		
	a. Every day	2	66.6%
	b. Several times in a week	1	33.3%
	c. Very in a week	-	-
	d. Seldom	-	-

2	Form communication with		
	a. Formal meeting	-	-
	b. Formal discussion	3	100%
	c. Via electronic media (email, WhatsApp, etc.)	-	-
	d. Other :.	-	-
3	Effectiveness communication with teacher		
	a. Very effective	2	66.6%
	b. Effective	1	33.3%
	c. Enough effective	-	-
	d. Nope effective	-	-

Based on data results from table on known that head the school that do communication with 66.6 % of teachers indicating that level relative communication high : The figure of 66.6% shows that more from two one third of teachers involved in communication with head school . This reflects the significant effort of the principal to interact and communicate actively with his/her teaching staff. The importance of communication, this high level of communication can be considered important in the context of school management. Effective communication between the principal and teachers can improve the understanding of the school's vision and mission, as well as the teaching strategies implemented.

Impact on teacher performance, with good communication, teachers may feel more supported and motivated, which in turn can have a positive impact on their performance and, ultimately, on student learning outcomes. Areas for improvement, although 66.6% is a positive figure, there are still 33.4% of teachers who may feel less involved in communication. This suggests opportunities to improve interaction, for example through discussion forums, regular meetings, or the use of communication technology. Development Strategy: These results can be the basis for principals to design better communication development strategies, including training or collaborative activities involving all teachers.

Table 5 Teacher Interaction Data with Principal

No	Question	Answer	Percentage (%)
Part 1: Interaction with the principal			
1	Communicate with head school		
	e. Every day	1	2.9
	f. Several times in a week	13	38.2
	g. Very in a week	2	5.9
	h. Seldom	18	52.9
2	Form of communication with the principal		
	e. Formal meeting	14	41.2
	f. Formal discussion	9	26.5
	g. Via electronic media (email, WhatsApp, etc.)	7	20.6
	h. Other :.	4	11.8
3	Effectiveness of communication with the principal		
	e. Very effective	7	20.59
	f. Effective	14	41.18

No	Question	Answer	Percentag
	g. Enough effective	10	29.41
	h. Nope effective	3	8.82
4	Feel comfortable providing input to the principal		
	a. Very comfortable	3	8.8
	b. Enough comfortable	11	32.4
	c. Comfortable	15	44.1
	d. No comfortable	3	8.8
5	It is important to interact with the principal in improving the quality of teaching.		
	a. Very important	12	35.3
	b. Important	14	41.2
	c. Enough Important	8	23.5
	d. No important	0	0.0
6	Readiness vocational school students for enter		
	a. Very Ready	3.0	8.8
	b. Enough Ready	11.0	32.4
	c. Ready	19.0	55.9
	d. No Ready	1.0	2.9

The results of research on the importance of interaction with the principal in improving the quality of teaching show the following:

a.   High Awareness of the Importance of Interaction: With 76.5% of respondents (35.3% very important and 41.2% important) rating interaction with the principal as important or very important, it can be concluded that the majority of teachers are aware that communication and collaboration with the principal contribute significantly to improving the quality of teaching.

b.   Influence on Teaching Quality: This high percentage indicates that teachers believe that good interaction with the principal can provide the support, guidance, and feedback needed to improve their teaching methods.

c.   Managerial Support: This figure reflects the belief that the principal as a school leader has an important role in creating a positive learning environment and supporting teacher professional development.

d.   Low Negative Views: With 0.0% of respondents rating this interaction as unimportant, it shows that no teachers doubted the value of communicating with the principal. This is a good indication that all teachers see value in the relationship.

e.   Opportunity For Improvement : Although 23.5 % of teachers assessed interaction This as " enough " important ," thing This can become an area for exploration more continue . Schools can consider increasing the frequency and quality of interactions between principals and teachers so that more teachers feel the positive impact.

Table 6 Student Assessment of Principal and Teacher Interactions

No	Question	Answer	Percentag
12	The importance of interpersonal skills for students in the world of work		

	a. Very important	106	67.9
	b. Important	43	27.6
	c. Enough Important	5	3.2
	d. No important	0	0.0
13	Interaction between principal and teachers has an impact on students' work readiness		
	a. Very impact	47	30.1
	b. Impact	77	49.4
	c. Enough impact	26	16.7
	d. No impact	6	3.8
14	Students get information about job opportunities from school		
	a. Very often	48	30.8
	b. Often	86	55.1
	c. Sometimes	17	10.9
	d. Seldom	5	3.2
15	Students feel encouraged to participate in activities that enhance work readiness.		
	a. Very pushed	69	44.2
	b. Driven	63	40.4
	c. Enough pushed	19	12.2
	d. No pushed	5	3.2
16	The role of the principal in creating a learning environment that supports work readiness		
	e. Very big	60	38.5
	f. Big	60	38.5
	g. Enough	34	21.8
	h. Small	2	1.3
17	The importance of good communication between students and teachers in preparing for the world of work		
	a. Very important	107	68.6
	b. Important	43	27.6
	c. Enough Important	6	3.8
	d. No important	0	0.0
18	Students have positive experiences related to		
	a. Yes	152	97.4
	b. No	4	2.6
19	Support from head school Enough For help Ready enter world Work		
	c. Very Enough	52	33.3
	d. Enough	97	62.2
	e. Not enough	7	4.5
	f. Very not enough	0	0.0

Based on the results of the analysis of students' opinions regarding the symbolic interaction between teachers and students, we can interpret it as follows:

a. importance interpersonal skills

b. 67.9% of students considered interpersonal skills very important, and 27.6% considered them important. This shows that students recognize the value of

interpersonal skills in the workplace, which are essential for collaboration and communication in a professional environment.

a. the impact of interactions between principals and teachers

79.5% of students believe that interactions between principals and teachers have an impact (30.1% have a great impact and 49.4% have an impact) on their work readiness. This shows students' awareness that communication and collaboration between school administrators and teachers contribute to their preparation for the world of work.

b. information opportunity Work

85.9% of students received information about job opportunities from school (30.8% very often and 55.1% often). This shows that schools play an active role in providing relevant information to help students understand the job market.

c. Encouragement For Participate

107.2% of students felt encouraged to participate in activities that enhance work readiness (44.2% strongly encouraged and 63% encouraged). This indicates that the school creates an environment that supports student engagement in activities that focus on developing work skills.

d. The Role of the Principal

77% of students rated the principal's role in creating a learning environment that supports job readiness as large or very large (38.5% very large and 38.5% large). This indicates student recognition of the importance of principal leadership in facilitating an educational atmosphere that is conducive to job readiness.

e. The Importance of Communication between Students and Teachers

96.2% of students considered good communication between students and teachers to be very important or important. This shows that students realize that effective interaction with teachers can help them prepare for the world of work.

f. experience positive interaction

97.4% of students reported having positive experiences related to interactions with teachers that impacted their work readiness. This indicates that the symbolic interactions that occur between students and teachers have a significant influence on their preparation.

g. support from head school

95.5 % of students feel that support from head school sufficient (33.3% very Enough and 62.2% sufficient) for help they enter world work . This shows that students feel supported by the principal's policies and actions in preparing them for future careers.

3.2 Hierarchical Principal-Teacher Interaction and the Lack of Shared Meaning Development about Employability

3.2.1 Dominant Top-Down Communication Pattern

The interaction between principals and teachers in many vocational schools is still top-down, with communication limited to administrative instructions or curriculum targets, rather than strategic collaboration to improve student employability. Sutadji (2017) emphasized that principals in many vocational schools tend to act as bureaucrats rather than collaborative facilitators. Interactions are more instructive (for example in evaluation meetings) without opening up a dialogue space to redefine employability based on teacher input and industry needs.

As a result, student development programs often fail to address soft skills and dynamic technology adaptation. Spillane and colleagues found that hierarchical leadership tends to separate the roles of principals and teachers in decision-making. In vocational schools, this leads to miscommunication about employability goals—for example, teachers focus on achieving technical grades, while principals pursue institutional accreditation. Without in-depth dialogue, policies fail to address the real needs of industry.

3.3 Disparity Perception about Employability

Supriyanto found that symbolic interactions (such as meetings or training) are often formalities, not a medium for aligning perceptions of employability . Teachers are not involved in planning non-technical skills programs (such as teamwork), so that classroom practices remain fragmented. In fact, shared meaning between the principal and teachers is the key to the success of vocational education. In a case study in a technical vocational school (Sutadji & Rachmadtullah, 2019), it was found that:

a. The principal defines employability as the level of absorption of graduates in industry , so that the policy focuses on achieving employment figures.

b. Teachers understand it as mastery of curriculum competencies , so that learning is limited to achieving certification. The absence of a forum to align this perception causes technical expertise programs (eg CNC machining) not to be integrated with problem-solving or communication training in the workplace.

3.4 Principal Leadership Symbol as a Sign of Work Culture

The principals of both Center of Excellence Vocational High Schools play a central role in shaping and representing symbols of work-oriented leadership. Daily practices such as the use of industrial attributes (work helmets, production uniforms), being present directly during workshop practices, and consistency in voicing jargon such as "SMK Bisa", "SMK Hebat", to "SMK Produktif", build a strong symbolic narrative in the school environment. These symbols not only function as motivational communication, but also form a frame of reference for teachers and students about the expected work values. Blumer (1969) emphasized that symbols are the basis of social action; meaning is formed, negotiated, and brought to life

through repeated social interaction processes. This symbolic leadership is the initial foundation for the formation of a school work culture that is in sync with industry needs (Sutadji, 2022).

3.5 Teachers as a Bridge of Meaning and Implementation of Industrial Culture

Productive teacher to give meaning to symbols leadership head school as form trust to capacity professional them . This encourages teachers to not only deliver curriculum content, but also internalize industrial work values into learning strategies. Field observations show that teachers are starting to adopt the Teaching Factory approach, real-world work simulations, the use of industrial technical terms, and an emphasis on work attitudes such as responsibility, orderliness, and collaboration. Teachers act as a bridge between the school's managerial vision and students' learning experiences. Through this symbolic approach, teachers help strengthen the ecosystem of a vibrant work culture in schools. Interactions between teachers and students based on symbols and values create new, deep-rooted meanings, transforming the learning process into a social means for instilling work character (Mead, 1934; Supriyanto, 2023).

3.6 The Formation of Productive School Habitus and Its Impact on Employability

The results of the study indicate that consistent and meaningful symbolic interactions between the principal, teachers, and students form an internal social structure in the form of a productive school habitus. In Bourdieu's (1990) framework, habitus is a system of dispositions formed through repeated experiences and interactions, creating patterns of action that are automatic and natural in certain contexts. This habitus is evident in student routines such as discipline in coming in the morning, maintaining a clean work area, initiative in practical tasks, and a language of communication that resembles an industrial work environment. This indicates the internalization of the values of productivity, efficiency, and responsibility, which are important dimensions of employability (OECD, 2010; Wahyudi & Hakim, 2021). In this context, student employability is not only determined by technical competence, but also by character and work behavior that are constructed through social interaction. The lively symbolic interaction between the principal, teachers, and students plays an important role in shaping the professional identity of students at SMK Teknik Pemanian.

3.7 Implications Theoretical And Practical

These findings reinforce the view that schools are not only academic institutions, but also social arenas where meaning and character are constructed. Symbolic interaction is not just a means of communication, but also an effective managerial and pedagogical strategy in shaping students' work readiness holistically. Practically, this study provides recommendations that professional development programs for teachers and principals at SMK Pusat Keunggulan strengthen reflective and symbolic aspects in leadership and learning practices. The use of symbols of work culture needs to be managed consciously to strengthen the values and identity of the school as CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of the study indicate that This study shows that symbolic interaction between the principal and teachers in vocational high schools for students concentrating on Mechanical Engineering expertise plays an important role as a social strategy in shaping and improving student employability. Through the use of symbols, routine actions, and meaningful communication, a productive work culture is formed that is transmitted socially and psychologically to students. This interaction not only encourages mastery of technical competencies, but also forms work ethics, professional attitudes, and students' readiness to face the industrial world. Students have a very positive view of interactions with principals and teachers. They believe that good communication and support from the school play an important role in improving their work readiness. These results emphasize the importance of effective collaboration and interaction in the context of vocational education.

Overall, communication between principals and teachers reaching 66.6% indicates progress, but also shows the need for further attention to involve all staff in the effective communication process. This finding confirms that the strategy to improve the quality of vocational school graduates does not only rely on the curriculum and facilities and infrastructure, but also on the social processes that occur in school life. Thus, the symbolic leadership of the principal and the educational relationship between teachers and students are important keys in creating a learning ecosystem that supports holistic work readiness.

The implication of this study is the importance of integrating sociological approaches in the development of vocational education, which has tended to be technocratic. This study opens up new space to understand the dynamics of vocational schools as an arena for meaningful social interaction, where symbols, relationships, and work culture are intertwined in forming graduates who are ready to face the world of work.

4. Conclusions

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