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Competency-Based Career Incubation for Young Graduates in Tuapukan Village, Kupang Regency

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Abstract
Limited formal employment opportunities in East Nusa Tenggara Province present significant challenges for young graduates entering the workforce. This community service program aimed to strengthen graduates' work readiness in Tuapukan Village, Kupang Regency, through competency-based career incubation. The program employed the first cycle of Participatory Action Research, comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection, in collaboration with the village government and human resource practitioners. A total of 49 participants received practical training in preparing professional curricula vitae compatible with automated recruitment systems, optimizing LinkedIn profiles, public speaking, job interview simulations, and psychological test preparation. Follow-up mentoring was conducted through a WhatsApp group. Program evaluation utilized a post-training perception questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The findings indicated that 89.8 percent of participants perceived themselves as better prepared for employment, while 85.7 percent reported increased confidence in participating in recruitment processes. However, understanding of recruitment procedures and automated recruitment-compatible curricula vitae remained relatively low, at 57.1 percent and 59.2 percent, respectively. These findings represent self-reported perceptions rather than objectively measured competency improvements. The program produced 49 trained participants, practical interview experience, and a digital career support community. This initiative demonstrates the potential of village-based partnerships to support graduate employability, although further evaluation using baseline assessments, practical competency measurements, and employment tracking is necessary.

Keywords: curriculum vitae; educated unemployment; employability; job interview simulation; work readiness

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INTRODUCTION

Today's labor market demands graduates who not only master academic knowledge but are also able to demonstrate their competencies during recruitment processes (Clarke, 2018). Globally, young people face greater barriers in the transition from education to decent work (International Labour Organization, 2022). In East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province, this challenge is structural. The open unemployment rate in NTT in August 2024 was 3.02%, which is relatively low in nominal terms, yet only 26.68% of the employed population were engaged in formal activities (BPS Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur, 2024). Nationally, the highest open unemployment rate by educational attainment was found among vocational high school (SMK) graduates, at 9.01% (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). These data indicate that the main problem is not merely a lack of jobs but rather graduates' limited ability to enter formal employment. Studies in Indonesia have also found that approximately one-third of workers with higher education degrees work outside their field of study (Yonanda & Usman, 2023), and a similar phenomenon occurs among vocational high school graduates (Setiyana & Oktora, 2025).

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In NTT, an analysis of National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) data showed that the likelihood of educated individuals being unemployed is influenced by, among other factors, age, work experience, and area of residence, whereas participation in job training has no significant effect (Makung et al., 2021). This finding suggests that the skills training currently available has not been sufficient to bridge graduates without work experience into the formal labor market. Tuapukan Village, located in East Kupang District, Kupang Regency, is a buffer village adjacent to Kupang City and has a large number of young graduates. A needs analysis conducted through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with village officials and youth representatives (detailed in the Methods section) identified three main barriers faced by graduates in this village: (1) limited ability to prepare job application documents that meet industry standards, (2) little experience with job interviews and psychological tests, and (3) limited access to information on formal job vacancies.

Employability studies emphasize that work readiness is shaped by a combination of human capital, social capital, individual attributes, and labor market context (Clarke, 2018; Donald et al., 2019). Social and noncognitive skills are increasingly decisive for success in the labor market (Deming, 2017; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). The meta-analysis by Liu et al. (2014) showed that job search programs that teach job application skills, enhance self-efficacy, and provide social support increase participants' likelihood of obtaining employment. Interview coaching has also been shown to improve candidate performance in structured interviews (Tross & Maurer, 2008). Conversely, automated screening systems such as Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) may exclude otherwise qualified candidates because the format and keywords of their application documents do not match the system's criteria (Fuller et al., 2021); thus, digital recruitment literacy has become an essential component of work readiness.

In Indonesia, community service programs on work readiness have been implemented in several forms: CV writing and job interview training for vocational high school students (Rachmawati et al., 2024), CV training and mock interviews for Package C equivalency program students at a community learning center (PKBM) (Rosada et al., 2026), soft skills training for vocational high school students (Putra & Dianastiti, 2026), and soft skills and work ethic training for village youth in Padang City (Yulihardi et al., 2025). Most of these programs targeted students enrolled in educational institutions and did not explicitly report training in digital recruitment literacy (ATS and LinkedIn) or the involvement of industry practitioners as mock interviewers. Furthermore, training outcomes are sustained only when support is available after the training ends (Blume et al., 2010); therefore, post-training mentoring needs to be part of the program design.

Building on these gaps, this program designed a competency-based career incubation program for graduates in Tuapukan Village. Compared with similar programs, its novelty lies in three aspects: (1) it targets graduates who have returned to the village and no longer receive career guidance services from their schools or universities; (2) its content covers digital recruitment literacy (ATS-compliant CVs and LinkedIn), mock interviews with HRD practitioners, and post-training mentoring through a digital career community; and (3) the village government is involved as a partner throughout the PAR cycle, from problem formulation to community sustainability. The program objectives were specifically formulated as follows: (1) to provide recruitment literacy training to graduates in Tuapukan Village, (2) to provide mock interview experience with individual feedback from HRD practitioners, (3) to establish a digital career community as a means of post-training mentoring, and (4) to map participants' perceived work readiness after the training as a basis for planning the next cycle.

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This article reports on the implementation of the first PAR cycle, participants' perceived work readiness, and lessons for developing community service models that improve work readiness in peri-urban buffer villages.

METHODS

The program employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which positions the target community and partners as actors involved in formulating problems, determining actions, and reflecting on results in iterative cycles (Baum et al., 2006; Kemmis et al., 2014; Kindon et al., 2007). This article reports on the first cycle. The program partner was the Tuapukan Village Government, East Kupang District, Kupang Regency. Face-to-face training was held at the Computer Laboratory of the Business Administration Study Program, Universitas Nusa Cendana, in 2026, followed by an online incubation period via a WhatsApp group.

The community service team from the Business Administration Study Program, Universitas Nusa Cendana, was responsible for program design, development of the training materials and questionnaire, provision of the computer laboratory, training facilitation, management of the digital career community, and data analysis. The Tuapukan Village Government contributed to problem formulation during the FGD, identified and invited participants, mobilized attendance, and maintained the continuity of the career community after the program. HRD practitioners served as resource persons on recruitment topics and as interviewers who provided individual feedback during the mock interviews. The facilitators comprised lecturers from the Business Administration Study Program, Universitas Nusa Cendana, and HRD practitioners who handle recruitment processes in the workplace.

Participants were recruited in a participatory manner through the Tuapukan Village Government, which identified and invited youth of productive age who resided in the village, had completed formal education, and were not yet employed in the formal sector. Participation was voluntary. A total of 49 participants took part in the full series of activities, consisting of senior high school or vocational high school graduates (55.1%), bachelor's degree holders (28.6%), three-year diploma (D3) holders (14.3%), and junior high school graduates (2.0%).

The stages of the first PAR cycle, together with the activities, stakeholders involved, and outputs, are presented in Table 1, and the workflow is visualized in Figure 1. In the planning stage, an FGD with village officials and youth representatives mapped the barriers graduates face when applying for jobs. In the action stage, practice-based training (learning by doing) covered ATS-compliant CV writing, LinkedIn profile optimization, public speaking, mock interviews, and an introduction to psychological tests. In the observation stage, the team administered the perception questionnaire and documented the activities, while HRD practitioners observed participants during the mock interviews. In the reflection stage, the questionnaire results were analyzed together with the partner to identify the lowest-scoring aspects and to formulate the plan for the next cycle. The incubation period via the WhatsApp group was used to share job vacancy information and provide online consultation.

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Table 1. Stages of the First PAR Cycle in the Career Incubation Program

PAR Stage	Activities	Stakeholders Involved	Outputs
Planning	FGD to map graduates' employment barriers; preparation of materials and schedule with the partner	Community service team, village officials, youth representatives	List of barriers and training needs
Action	Training on ATS-compliant CVs, LinkedIn, public speaking, mock interviews, and psychological tests	Academics, HRD practitioners, participants	49 trained participants; mock interview experience
Observation	Post-training perception questionnaire; observation of mock interviews; documentation	Community service team, HRD practitioners	Perception data from 49 participants; activity documentation
Reflection	Joint analysis of results with the partner; identification of the lowest-scoring aspects	Community service team, village officials	Improvement priorities: ATS-compliant CVs and LinkedIn; plan for Cycle II
Incubation period	Sharing job vacancies and online consultation via a WhatsApp group	Community service team, participants, village officials	Digital career community

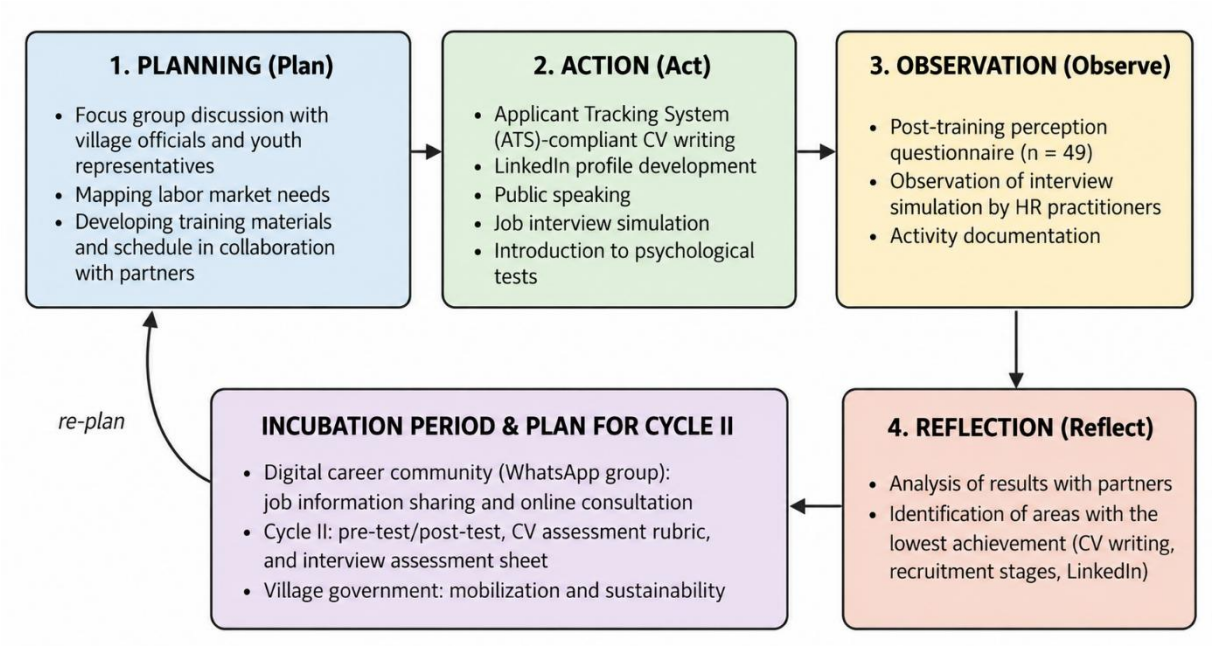


Figure 1. Participatory Action Research Cycle in the Career Incubation Program in Tuapukan Village

The evaluation used a perception questionnaire administered to the 49 participants at the end of the program. The questionnaire cons isted of 14 statements across two dimensions, namely technical competence (9 items) and psychological-affective readiness (5 items), rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was developed by the team based on the training materials and has not undergone formal construct validity testing. For each item, the percentage was calculated as the number of participants who selected a score of 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree), divided by 49 and multiplied by 100%. Because the questionnaire was administered only after the training and no pre-test was conducted, the results indicate the proportion of participants

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who *reported* themselves as competent or ready, rather than the magnitude of competency improvement. This limitation is addressed in the Discussion and Conclusion sections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Program Implementation

All stages of the first PAR cycle were completed, and all 49 participants took part in the activities through to the end. Each participant practiced writing a CV and managing a LinkedIn profile in the computer laboratory (Figure 2), attended a briefing on interview techniques (Figure 3), and completed a face-to-face mock interview with an HRD practitioner who provided individual feedback (Figure 4).



Figure 2. Hands-on practice in writing CVs and creating LinkedIn profiles at the Computer Laboratory of Universitas Nusa Cendana



Figure 3. Briefing session on job interview techniques

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Figure 4. Face-to-face (one-on-one) mock job interview with an HRD practitioner

Participants' Perceived Work Readiness

The results of the perception questionnaire are presented in Table 2. The highest proportions were found in the psychological-affective readiness dimension: 44 participants (89.8%) reported feeling more prepared for work, and 42 participants (85.7%) reported feeling confident about participating in job selection. In the technical competence dimension, the highest proportion was for understanding etiquette and body language during interviews (75.5%), whereas the lowest proportions were for understanding the general stages of recruitment (57.1%), ATS-compliant CVs (59.2%), and the ability to write a professional CV and manage a LinkedIn profile (61.2% each). Overall, the proportions in the psychological-affective readiness dimension (69.4–89.8%) were higher than those in the technical competence dimension (57.1–75.5%).

Table 2. Participants' Perceptions of Work Readiness after the Training (n = 49)

Dimension	Statement	f	%
Technical competence	I understand etiquette and body language during job interviews	37	75.5
	I know how to prepare myself before an interview	35	71.4
	I understand the purpose and benefits of psychological tests in selection	35	71.4
	I understand the importance of personal branding in the workplace	35	71.4
	I am able to answer interview questions in a structured manner	33	67.3
	I am able to write a professional CV	30	61.2
	I have a LinkedIn profile and am able to optimize it	30	61.2
	I understand how to create an ATS-compliant CV	29	59.2
	I understand the general stages of the recruitment process	28	57.1
Psychological-affective readiness	I feel better prepared for work after the training	44	89.8
	I have high confidence to participate in job selection	42	85.7
	I feel ready to take psychological tests	37	75.5
	I have better communication skills	36	73.5
	I am able to speak in public with confidence	34	69.4

Note: f = number of participants who selected a score of 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree) on a 1–5 Likert scale; % = f/49 × 100. The questionnaire was administered only after the training; therefore, these figures indicate the proportion of participants who reported themselves as competent or ready, not the magnitude of improvement. Source: Primary data from the community service program (2026).

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Mentoring and Sustainability

Following the face-to-face training, the program continued with an incubation period through a WhatsApp group comprising the participants, the community service team, and village government representatives. The group was used to share job vacancy information and served as a space for online consultation. To ensure sustainability, the village government was involved in managing the group, while the community service team continued to serve as resource persons. Group activity was not systematically recorded during this cycle; therefore, recording the number of vacancies shared, consultation questions, and participants who applied for jobs has been included in the plan for the next cycle. Documentation of the program's closing session is shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Closing of the career incubation program with Tuapukan Village youth and partners

Discussion

The high proportion of participants who reported feeling ready and confident is consistent with findings that interview coaching improves candidate performance (Tross & Maurer, 2008) and that effective job search interventions combine skills instruction with the enhancement of self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2014). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is shaped primarily by mastery experiences and verbal persuasion from credible sources. Both sources were present in the mock interviews, as participants practiced directly and received individual feedback from HRD practitioners. This pattern is consistent with the self-efficacy training for job seekers reported by Eden and Aviram (1993); thus, these results are an expected consequence of a simulation-based intervention. Nevertheless, the proportion of 89.8% should be interpreted with caution. Post-training self-assessment may be influenced by social desirability bias, that is, the tendency of participants to give answers they perceive as expected by the organizers (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and self-assessments often do not align with actual ability (Dunning et al., 2004). Interview anxiety was also not measured directly; therefore, no conclusion can be drawn regarding a reduction in anxiety. Future measurements could employ validated instruments (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004).

The lowest proportions in the perception data were found for digital recruitment aspects, namely ATS-compliant CVs (59.2%) and LinkedIn (61.2%), as well as for understanding of the recruitment

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stages (57.1%). This finding is understandable given that ATS and digital personal branding were new to most participants. However, the alignment of CV format and keywords determines whether an application passes automated screening (Fuller et al., 2021), and the benefits of LinkedIn accrue only when users actively build their networks (Utz & Breuer, 2019). The gap between high confidence and low technical understanding indicates that digital recruitment skills require repeated practice and longer mentoring than face-to-face sessions alone can provide. This finding became the main priority in the reflection on the first cycle.

The involvement of the Tuapukan Village Government from the planning stage facilitated the recruitment of participants who matched the target criteria and ensured that the training materials addressed the jointly formulated barriers. Reflection on the results of the first cycle yielded two decisions for the next cycle: (1) increasing the proportion of hands-on practice on ATS-compliant CVs and LinkedIn, and (2) improving the evaluation design through a pre-test, a CV assessment rubric, and an interview assessment sheet. The incubation period is important because the transfer of training to actual behavior is strongly influenced by post-training support (Blume et al., 2010). The finding of Makung et al. (2021) that job training has no significant effect on educated unemployment in NTT further reinforces the need for continued mentoring and access to vacancy information rather than one-off training.

CONCLUSION

The first cycle of the competency-based career incubation program using the PAR approach was implemented for 49 graduates in Tuapukan Village. The program outputs included recruitment literacy training, mock interview experience with feedback from HRD practitioners, and a digital career community co-managed with the village government. After the training, most participants reported feeling more prepared for work (89.8%) and confident about participating in job selection (85.7%). In contrast, the proportion of participants reporting an understanding of digital recruitment, particularly ATS-compliant CVs, remained low (59.2%). Collaboration among the university, HRD practitioners, and the village government was a key supporting factor in program implementation.

This program has several limitations: (a) the evaluation used only a post-training perception questionnaire without a pre-test or a comparison group and therefore cannot demonstrate competency improvement; (b) participants' outputs (CVs) and performance in the mock interviews were not assessed using standardized rubrics; (c) the program was limited to one village with 49 participants; (d) the program duration was short, so long-term impacts, including employment uptake, could not yet be measured; and (e) perception data are susceptible to social desirability bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Within Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) framework, this evaluation reached only the reaction level.

Based on these limitations, we recommend the following for the next cycle: (1) the use of a pre-test and post-test with instruments tested for validity and reliability; (2) assessment of CVs and mock interviews by HRD practitioners using standardized rubrics; (3) recording of digital career community activities and tracer studies at three and six months after the program to document the number of participants who apply for jobs, are invited to interviews, and are hired; (4) expansion of the program to other villages in East Kupang District; and (5) integration of the village career community with the job vacancy information services of the Kupang Regency Manpower Office.

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Author Contributions
Olaf Tri Wilopo Simanjuntak: program conceptualization, design of the community service methodology, coordination of program implementation, supervision, and preparation of the original draft and final revision of the article. Johanis Oenunu: methodology development, preparation of training materials, implementation of community service activities, and manuscript review and editing. Abram Danial Lubertus Laleb: technical program planning, development of the evaluation instrument, data collection, and analysis of program results. Theddy Baskhara Foenale: coordination of training implementation, facilitation of activities, participant mentoring, and interpretation of program evaluation results. Agusman Harefa: development of learning materials, delivery of work readiness skills training, data collection, and substantive review of the article. Ravel Anwar: management of evaluation data, formal analysis of questionnaire results, presentation of findings, and manuscript editing. James Miguel Danielo: technical preparation of activities, participant mentoring during the training, activity documentation, and field data collection. Kayleen Bale Doto: program implementation, mentoring in CV writing and LinkedIn profile management, questionnaire administration, and preliminary data processing. Adianto Stieven: technical coordination of program implementation, documentation, management of the digital career community, and preparation of supporting materials for the activity report. All authors participated according to their respective responsibilities, reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript, and are accountable for their contributions to the published article.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the implementation of this program or the writing of this article.

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