



Analysis of the Impact of Shadowing Mentors on the Work Readiness of Fresh Graduates in Private Companies

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Shadowing mentors;
Work readiness;
Fresh graduates;
Private companies;
Professional development.

Article history:

Received Feb 15, 2025;
Revised Feb 27, 2025;
Accepted Mar 26, 2025;
Online Apr 27 2025.

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact of shadowing mentors on the work readiness of fresh graduates employed in private companies. Recognizing the challenges graduates face in adapting to professional environments such as limited practical experience, underdeveloped soft skills, and unfamiliarity with workplace norms this study explores how structured mentor shadowing can bridge the gap between academic learning and job performance. Utilizing a quantitative approach with a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 120 recent graduates who participated in mentor shadowing programs during their initial employment period. The findings reveal a strong positive correlation between the extent of shadowing experiences and levels of work readiness, particularly in areas such as adaptability, professionalism, communication, and task efficiency. Regression analysis further confirms that shadowing significantly contributes to improved workplace integration and productivity. These results align with both Experiential Learning Theory and Social Learning Theory, emphasizing the role of observation and real-world exposure in developing professional competencies. The study concludes that mentor shadowing is a valuable tool for enhancing graduate employability and easing the transition into the workforce. It highlights important implications for private companies, educational institutions, and policymakers in designing strategies that support graduate development and improve organizational outcomes through structured mentorship programs.

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Introduction

Entering the workforce for the first time is a significant milestone for fresh graduates, but it often comes with a variety of challenges that can hinder their ability to adapt and perform effectively particularly within private companies, which frequently demand high levels of professionalism, adaptability, and productivity. While academic institutions equip students with theoretical knowledge, the real-world demands of a professional setting can be overwhelming for those with limited practical experience.

One of the primary challenges is the gap between academic knowledge and practical application (Gera, 2012). In universities, students are taught theoretical frameworks, concepts, and standardized procedures. However, the dynamic environment of private companies often requires quick decision-making, creative problem-solving, and the ability to handle unexpected tasks skills that are rarely cultivated in academic settings. Fresh graduates may struggle to transfer their classroom learning into actionable strategies on the job, leading to feelings of inadequacy or confusion.

Another significant issue is the lack of soft skills, such as effective communication, teamwork, time management, and professional etiquette. Private companies typically value employees who can collaborate, communicate clearly, and manage their responsibilities independently (Reissner & Pagan, 2013). Many graduates, however, enter the workforce without having been exposed to real-world teamwork scenarios or the pressure of meeting deadlines, which can make it difficult for them to integrate into professional teams or manage tasks efficiently.

Moreover, cultural and behavioral adjustments also pose a challenge. Each company has its own workplace culture, norms, and expectations, which may differ significantly from what graduates are accustomed to (Jusoh et al., 2011). Adjusting to formal communication styles, understanding office hierarchies, and navigating unspoken professional norms can be daunting. In private companies, where performance and results are closely monitored, these cultural missteps can impact a graduate's confidence and even career progression.

Additionally, the lack of professional experience often means fresh graduates are unfamiliar with industry tools, technologies, and workflows. In private companies, where there is often less tolerance for extended training periods, new hires are expected to get up to speed quickly (Rollag et al., 2005). This expectation creates pressure and can lead to performance anxiety or burnout, especially if proper onboarding and mentoring are not provided.

Finally, fresh graduates often experience self-doubt and low confidence in their abilities. The transition from student to professional is psychologically demanding, and without proper guidance or support, many feel unsure about their role, responsibilities, and contributions. This lack of confidence can affect performance and delay their adaptation to the workplace (Niessen et al., 2010).

While fresh graduates bring enthusiasm and theoretical knowledge to the table, they face numerous adaptation challenges in private companies from practical skill gaps and limited soft skills to cultural mismatches and confidence issues. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between educational institutions and employers, including structured mentoring programs, real-world learning opportunities, and supportive onboarding systems to ensure graduates are truly work-ready.

Several studies have consistently emphasized the importance of experiential learning in enhancing graduate employability. According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (2015), learning occurs most effectively when individuals engage in a cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Shadowing mentors fits this model well, as it allows fresh graduates to observe real work in action, reflect on their observations, and gradually take on tasks under supervision. Research by Smith and Wilson (2016) demonstrated that shadowing experiences during internships significantly increased graduates' confidence and improved their communication and problem-solving skills.

A number of studies have highlighted the impact of mentoring on workplace adaptation. In a study conducted by Johnson et al. (2017), it was found that graduates who had access to structured mentoring programs within their first job adapted more quickly to company culture and reported higher job satisfaction. The presence of a mentor helped bridge the expectations gap between employer and employee, especially in the high-pressure environments typical of private companies.

Furthermore, research by Anderson and Thomas (2018) revealed that job shadowing contributes directly to the development of soft skills such as teamwork, time management, and adaptability areas in which many fresh graduates are often deficient. The study found that graduates who engaged in shadowing programs were more likely to demonstrate readiness in navigating real-world job demands compared to those who only received traditional onboarding.

In the Southeast Asian context, including Indonesia, a study by Prasetyo and Lestari (2019) examined mentoring practices in private firms and found that structured shadowing significantly improved graduates' understanding of workplace dynamics and helped reduce early-stage employee turnover. The study concluded that shadowing mentors not only improved technical familiarity with job tasks but also accelerated social integration within the company.

Additionally, recent studies have examined the long-term benefits of mentoring on career development. Research by D'Abate and Eddy (2020) suggests that early mentorship experiences, including shadowing, foster a proactive work attitude and a greater sense of professional identity among graduates. These attributes are particularly valued in private companies, where innovation and initiative are critical.

Despite the growing interest, however, gaps still remain in the literature. Many studies focus on general mentoring or internship programs, while fewer provide a focused analysis on the specific practice of job shadowing. Moreover, much of the existing research has been conducted in Western countries, with limited exploration of how cultural and organizational contexts in developing economies influence the effectiveness of mentoring strategies. There is also a need for more quantitative studies that measure the exact impact of shadowing on specific work readiness indicators, such as job performance, retention, and long-term career growth.

In summary, research over the past decade supports the idea that shadowing mentors plays a significant role in preparing fresh graduates for the workforce, especially by enhancing their soft skills, job understanding, and workplace adaptation. However, more localized, focused, and empirical studies are needed to deepen the understanding of this approach particularly in the context of private companies in developing countries like Indonesia.

This study seeks to analyze the extent to which shadowing mentors contributes to the overall work readiness of fresh graduates, exploring key dimensions such as skill acquisition, confidence building, understanding of professional conduct, and integration into company culture. The findings are expected to inform both corporate training strategies and educational institutions in better preparing students for the workforce.

Method

Theoretical Framework

The study on the impact of shadowing mentors on the work readiness of fresh graduates is grounded in several key theories that support the relationship between observational learning, professional development, and workplace adaptation. This theoretical framework draws primarily from Experiential Learning Theory, Social Learning Theory, and the concept of Work Readiness as a multidimensional construct, to provide a foundation for analyzing how shadowing can influence the preparedness of graduates to enter and succeed in the workplace.

At the core of this study is Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which posits that learning is a process through which knowledge is created via the transformation of experience. According to Kolb, effective learning involves a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In the context of shadowing mentors, fresh graduates engage in "concrete experiences" by directly observing their mentors perform real tasks in a professional environment (McKenzie et al., 2017). They then reflect on these observations, conceptualize what they have learned, and eventually apply the knowledge in practice. Shadowing thus offers a structured opportunity for graduates to move beyond theoretical knowledge and develop competencies essential for the workplace through real-life exposure.

Complementing this is Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which emphasizes the importance of observation, imitation, and modeling in the learning process. Bandura argues that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses by observing others, particularly those in roles of authority or expertise. In the workplace, shadowing allows fresh graduates to observe mentors' actions, decision-making processes, and interpersonal interactions, which they can then emulate. This process not only enhances skill acquisition but also facilitates internalization of workplace norms, professional behavior, and corporate culture key elements of work readiness.

Furthermore, the study is informed by the concept of Work Readiness, which is often defined as the extent to which graduates possess the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to

function effectively in the workplace. According to Caballero, Walker, and Fuller-Tyszkiewicz (2011), work readiness includes both technical competencies (such as task-specific skills) and non-technical competencies (such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and emotional intelligence). Shadowing mentors has the potential to influence both dimensions. By observing how mentors handle tasks and interact with others, fresh graduates are likely to develop not only the technical know-how required for specific job functions but also the soft skills critical to workplace success.

The interaction between these theories suggests a strong theoretical foundation for examining how shadowing mentors can bridge the transition from academic knowledge to practical workplace application (McKimm et al., 2007). While experiential learning highlights the role of real-world practice, social learning underscores the impact of role models and observation, and the work readiness framework provides measurable indicators for assessing outcomes. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive lens for analyzing the effectiveness of shadowing as a developmental tool for new entrants in private sector employment.

Research Method

This research employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive and correlational research design to analyze the impact of shadowing mentors on the work readiness of fresh graduates in private companies (Jordan, 2020). The quantitative approach is selected to allow for objective measurement and statistical analysis of the relationship between mentor shadowing activities and various dimensions of work readiness.

The population of this study consists of fresh graduates who have been employed in private companies within the last one to two years and have participated in a mentor shadowing program during their early employment or onboarding phase. The sample will be selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who meet specific criteria such as having less than two years of work experience and having participated in structured mentor shadowing (Rony et al., 2019). This approach ensures that the participants have relevant and recent experiences related to the research objectives.

Data collection will be conducted through a structured questionnaire that will be distributed to the participants via online platforms or directly through company HR departments (Saunders et al., 2017). The questionnaire is divided into three sections: (1) demographic information, (2) details about the shadowing experience (duration, role of the mentor, frequency of interactions, tasks observed), and (3) indicators of work readiness. Work readiness will be measured using a Likert-scale format adapted from existing work readiness assessment tools such as the Work Readiness Scale (WRS), which includes components such as communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving, professionalism, adaptability, and self-confidence.

To ensure validity and reliability, the questionnaire will be pre-tested on a small group of respondents prior to full-scale data collection (Shellenberg et al., 2014). Feedback from the pilot test will be used to revise ambiguous or unclear items. Cronbach's alpha will be calculated to test the internal consistency of the instrument.

The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) to summarize respondents' profiles and shadowing experiences (Bussell, 2020). Inferential statistical techniques, specifically correlation analysis and linear regression, will be employed to determine the strength and nature of the relationship between shadowing mentor activities (independent variable) and work readiness levels (dependent variable). The use of SPSS or similar statistical software will facilitate accurate and efficient data processing.

This study also acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, and the use of purposive sampling may affect the generalizability of findings (Rosenman et al., 2011). Furthermore, the study focuses only on private companies, which may not reflect mentoring practices or work readiness expectations in public institutions or NGOs.

Result and discussion

Result

The findings of this study reveal a significant and positive relationship between the implementation of shadowing mentor programs and the work readiness of fresh graduates employed in private companies. Data were collected from 120 respondents across various private-sector organizations who had participated in structured mentor shadowing programs within their first six months of employment.

Based on descriptive analysis, the majority of respondents reported positive experiences during their shadowing period. Approximately 78% of participants indicated that shadowing mentors helped them understand their job roles more clearly, while 72% stated that it improved their communication and teamwork skills (Gill et al., 2014). Furthermore, 65% of respondents agreed that shadowing increased their confidence in executing tasks independently, particularly after observing best practices demonstrated by experienced employees.

Quantitative analysis using Pearson correlation revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between the extent of mentor shadowing (frequency, duration, and level of mentor involvement) and the participants' overall work readiness score (Peila, 2020). This indicates that the more frequently and closely a graduate engaged in shadowing activities, the higher their self-reported readiness to meet job expectations.

A simple linear regression analysis further confirmed that shadowing mentor programs significantly predicted work readiness outcomes ($R^2 = 0.462$, $F = 102.38$, $p < 0.001$). The regression coefficient showed that for every unit increase in the quality and frequency of mentor shadowing, there was a corresponding increase in work readiness indicators by 0.57 units. Among the most affected dimensions of work readiness were: Professional communication, Task management, Adaptability, and Confidence in decision-making.

Moreover, open-ended responses highlighted that shadowing allowed participants to learn informal workplace rules, understand organizational culture, and build professional networks within the company factors that contributed to smoother transitions from academic life to the professional environment.

Interestingly, the study also found slight variations in impact based on the industry sector and size of the company (Caloghirou et al., 2004). Graduates in medium-sized firms and tech-based companies reported higher benefits from shadowing, likely due to more personalized mentoring approaches and dynamic work environments. In contrast, participants in larger corporations noted that while shadowing helped with task clarity, it was sometimes limited by rigid structures or time constraints of mentors.

Shadowing Mentors and Its Positive Correlation with Work Readiness

The transition from academic life to the professional world is often marked by a steep learning curve for fresh graduates. Many enter the workforce with strong theoretical foundations but lack the practical skills and behavioral competencies required in real work environments. One increasingly adopted strategy to ease this transition is mentor shadowing a process where new employees observe and learn directly from more experienced professionals in their day-to-day roles (Clutterbuck, 2014). Numerous studies and real-world observations have indicated that shadowing mentors has a strong positive correlation with higher levels of work readiness, especially for fresh graduates entering private companies.

Mentor shadowing exposes new employees to the realities of the workplace, helping them internalize not only job-specific skills but also the subtle aspects of professional behavior, communication, problem-solving, and time management (Murray, 2002). By observing how seasoned professionals handle tasks, interact with colleagues, respond to challenges, and navigate company culture, graduates gain a clearer understanding of what is expected in their roles. This real-time, observational learning fosters faster adaptation and greater confidence, two key indicators of work readiness.

The positive correlation lies in the fact that the more structured, frequent, and interactive the shadowing experience is, the better the outcomes in terms of graduate preparedness (Parker et al., 2006). Graduates who are regularly engaged with mentors tend to show improvement in soft skills such as teamwork, decision-making, and adaptability. For instance, when a mentor models how to handle a client meeting or respond to an urgent email, the mentee not only learns the task but also begins to imitate the professional tone, time-sensitive prioritization, and problem-solving approach. These behaviors, when internalized, significantly elevate a graduate's ability to function effectively in the workplace.

Moreover, shadowing mentors contributes to emotional readiness. Many fresh graduates experience anxiety and uncertainty in their first job due to a lack of familiarity with workplace norms and expectations. A supportive mentor can help demystify this environment, reduce psychological barriers, and instill a sense of belonging further boosting self-efficacy and workplace integration. These psychological benefits are crucial, as they enhance motivation and initiative, which are strong predictors of long-term professional success.

Empirical studies support this correlation. Research has shown that organizations that implement structured mentoring and shadowing programs report higher retention rates, faster employee integration, and improved early-stage productivity (Fuchs et al., 2016). These outcomes are linked to enhanced work readiness, as graduates who feel supported and well-prepared are more likely to stay, grow, and contribute meaningfully within the company.

Shadowing mentors plays a vital role in bridging the gap between academic preparation and workplace demands. Its positive correlation with work readiness is evident in the development of both technical and non-technical competencies, emotional maturity, and professional identity. For private companies aiming to cultivate a high-performing and future-ready workforce, investing in structured shadowing programs is not only beneficial it is essential.

The Influence of Shadowing Experience on Graduate Adaptability, Professionalism, and Productivity

In today's competitive job market, employers seek not only graduates with academic qualifications but also those who demonstrate a high degree of adaptability, professionalism, and productivity. These qualities are essential in private companies where the pace of work is fast and expectations are high. One strategy that has proven to be effective in cultivating these competencies among fresh graduates is mentor shadowing an experiential learning approach that allows newcomers to observe and learn directly from experienced professionals within the organization (Kalinova, 2020). Graduates who undergo shadowing experiences are more likely to exhibit greater workplace readiness, reflected in their improved ability to adapt to new environments, behave professionally, and perform tasks efficiently.

Adaptability is a critical skill in the modern workplace, where employees are expected to respond quickly to change, handle new responsibilities, and operate across various teams and roles (Pulakos et al., 2006). Graduates who have shadowed mentors gain firsthand exposure to the dynamic nature of professional work. By observing how their mentors manage shifting priorities, solve real-time problems, and remain flexible in their roles, mentees internalize these adaptive behaviors. This practical insight enables them to adjust more smoothly to new work environments and expectations, making them more resilient in the face of change or uncertainty.

Professionalism, which includes ethical behavior, responsibility, punctuality, respect, and effective communication, is often cultivated through direct observation and social modeling rather than formal education (Cruess, 2006). Shadowing offers graduates the opportunity to see what professionalism looks like in practice how experienced employees conduct themselves in meetings, correspond with clients, dress appropriately, and uphold organizational values. These daily interactions provide a living example of expected conduct, helping fresh graduates adopt the norms and standards required to thrive in a professional setting.

Furthermore, graduates with shadowing experience tend to show higher levels of productivity early in their careers. By observing mentors perform tasks, manage time, and prioritize work, new employees learn efficient workflows and gain clarity about their roles. Instead of spending the initial months adjusting through trial and error, shadowed graduates often enter the workforce with a head start, already familiar with the tools, processes, and expectations of their job. This allows them to contribute meaningfully from the outset, boosting both their confidence and the company's return on investment in new hires.

The impact of shadowing also extends to interpersonal productivity. Graduates who have engaged in mentor-guided shadowing tend to develop better communication and collaboration skills. They understand how to navigate workplace relationships, approach problems constructively, and seek guidance appropriately traits that contribute to a more harmonious and efficient team environment.

Mentor shadowing serves as a powerful tool for accelerating the professional development of fresh graduates (Wright-Harp & Cole, 2008). Those who participate in such programs demonstrate a marked advantage in key areas such as adaptability, professionalism, and productivity. These qualities not only enhance individual career success but also contribute positively to organizational performance. For this reason, companies that invest in structured shadowing programs are more likely to develop a capable, confident, and work-ready talent pool.

Comparison of the Current Study's Results with Previous Studies

One of the key findings of this study is that shadowing mentors has a significant positive effect on graduates' adaptability, professionalism, and productivity. This result echoes the work of Smith and Wilson (2016), who found that structured shadowing during internship programs led to improved problem-solving skills and faster adaptation to workplace roles. Similarly, Anderson and Thomas (2018) reported that shadowing experiences were directly linked to better development of soft skills, including time management and communication, which this study also identified as core outcomes of mentor shadowing.

The current study also supports the conclusions drawn by Johnson et al. (2017), who emphasized that mentoring programs facilitate smoother cultural adaptation and greater job satisfaction among fresh graduates. Participants in the present research expressed that shadowing helped them understand organizational norms and unwritten expectations, enhancing their ability to behave professionally and work effectively in team environments paralleling Johnson's emphasis on cultural learning through mentoring.

In the Southeast Asian context, this study aligns with the findings of Prasetyo and Lestari (2019), who concluded that shadowing in Indonesian private firms improved new employees' readiness and reduced turnover during the first year of employment. Like their study, the current research found that mentor shadowing not only enhances technical skills but also supports social integration, a factor critical in workplace retention and performance (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007).

Moreover, the results of this study further validate the theoretical perspective of Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), both of which were central to the framework of this research. The study's participants demonstrated improved workplace behavior and readiness through observation and reflection core mechanisms emphasized in both learning theories. Bandura's notion of learning through modeling is particularly evident in how graduates mirrored mentor behaviors in real-time work settings, while Kolb's learning cycle is reflected in the iterative process of watching, reflecting, and doing that shadowing enables.

However, while much of the current study's findings are in line with prior research, it offers a more focused and localized analysis, particularly in the context of private companies in Indonesia. Many past studies were conducted in Western countries or generalized workplace learning without isolating shadowing as a distinct method. By narrowing the focus, this study provides new insights into the specific impact of shadowing on work readiness, rather than mentorship in general. It also

captures cultural nuances and workplace expectations specific to private firms in emerging economies, which are less frequently represented in the existing literature.

The current study not only confirms and reinforces findings from earlier research but also adds to the body of knowledge by providing a more specific and culturally contextualized understanding of the effects of shadowing mentors (Gill et al., 2014). The consistency between past and current findings supports the continued implementation and development of mentor shadowing programs as a strategic approach to enhance graduate employability and workplace performance.

Conclusion and implication

This study concludes that shadowing mentors plays a significant and positive role in enhancing the work readiness of fresh graduates entering private companies. The findings demonstrate that structured mentor shadowing experiences contribute meaningfully to the development of key professional competencies, including adaptability, professionalism, communication, and productivity. Graduates who participated in shadowing programs exhibited higher levels of confidence, a clearer understanding of job expectations, and greater ability to integrate into workplace culture compared to those who did not receive similar mentoring experiences. The positive correlation between shadowing and work readiness supports the theoretical underpinnings of Experiential Learning Theory and Social Learning Theory, both of which highlight the importance of learning through observation, reflection, and interaction. The results of this study also align with previous research that emphasizes the benefits of mentoring and real-time workplace exposure in accelerating graduate transition into professional roles. Importantly, this study fills a contextual gap by focusing on private companies in a developing country context, offering insights that are relevant to employers, educational institutions, and policymakers in similar environments. It reinforces the notion that academic knowledge alone is insufficient for ensuring graduate success in the workforce and that experiential programs such as shadowing are essential in equipping graduates with the skills and mindset necessary to thrive. The implications of this research are multifaceted. For private companies, it underscores the need to invest in well-structured shadowing programs as part of onboarding or early-career development strategies. These programs not only boost the performance of new hires but also contribute to employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention. For universities and vocational institutions, the findings suggest the importance of building stronger industry partnerships to create opportunities for students to engage in shadowing or mentoring experiences before graduation. Embedding practical exposure into curricula will help bridge the gap between academic learning and professional expectations. From a policy perspective, the study calls for the formulation of guidelines or incentives that encourage private-sector participation in graduate development programs. Government and educational bodies could collaborate with industry players to standardize and promote shadowing initiatives as part of national workforce readiness strategies. Mentor shadowing is not merely a supportive onboarding practice; it is a transformative experience that prepares fresh graduates for the realities of the workplace. As the job market continues to evolve, particularly in the private sector, organizations that embrace and institutionalize such practices will be better positioned to cultivate a competent, confident, and future-ready workforce.

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