

A Real-Work-Activity-Based Post-School Workshop Model for Developing Work Readiness in Autistic Adults

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Abstract: The transition from school to employment remains a challenge for autistic adults, particularly in developing work readiness skills that can be applied in authentic workplace contexts. This study aimed to describe the implementation of a real-work-activity-based post-school workshop model and its contribution to the development of work readiness skills among autistic adults at River Company. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The study was conducted at River Company from late April to May 2026 and involved 11 autistic adults and 7 facilitators and institutional stakeholders selected through purposive sampling.. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation and analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation used to support data credibility. The findings showed that the workshop model was implemented through authentic vocational divisions, including housekeeping, Arya Mart, coffee shop, laundry, and sewing. The implementation was supported by visual schedules, individualized work placement, direct demonstrations, verbal and gestural prompts, and gradual fading of assistance. These activities supported the development of work readiness skills, particularly instruction comprehension, task initiation and completion, work responsibility, functional communication, and adaptation to workplace challenges. In conclusion, a structured post-school workshop based on real-work activities provides a contextual learning environment that supports the development of work readiness among autistic adults. The model emphasizes authentic work experience, individualized placement, and structured support as important components of vocational transition programs.

Keywords: autistic adults, post-school workshop, real-work activities, vocational education, work readiness

INTRODUCTION

The transition from school to the workforce remains a significant challenge for individuals with autism, particularly in adulthood (Cope & Remington, 2022). Although intervention and educational services for children with autism continue to evolve, post-school transition programs focused on work readiness remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of ongoing and contextualized vocational training (Hedley et al., 2018). This situation results in many adults with autism facing barriers in securing and retaining employment, particularly regarding communication skills, social interaction, adaptation to the work environment, and behavioral regulation in the workplace (Lei & Russell, 2021).

Work readiness skills are a set of competencies that support individuals in entering, adapting to, and maintaining functional performance in the workplace. These skills include the ability to understand instructions, self-management, interpersonal communication, work responsibilities, and the ability to adapt to job demands (Cope & Remington, 2022). For individuals with autism, the development of work readiness skills requires structured, consistent, and contextual learning experiences so that the learned abilities can be functionally applied in real-world work situations (Hume et al., 2021).

Experience-based learning approaches are known to be more effective for individuals with autism than abstract or simulated learning. Direct involvement in real-world work contexts allows individuals to understand job requirements more concretely while developing adaptive skills

through everyday experiences (Cope & Remington, 2022). A contextual learning environment also provides opportunities for individuals with autism to build a more meaningful understanding of work, behavioral regulation, and social skills through active engagement in authentic activities (Trusson & Travers, 2025). Therefore, vocational programs that integrate real-world work activities are essential in supporting the development of work readiness skills and independence in adults with autism.

This study uses Situated Learning theory as a conceptual framework for understanding the learning process of individuals with autism through real-world work activities. Situated Learning theory posits that learning develops through an individual's active participation in social contexts and authentic activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through engagement in communities of practice, individuals gradually build knowledge, skills, and understanding of the activities they perform. This approach is relevant in the context of vocational education for individuals with autism because it places direct experience and meaningful participation at the center of the process of developing work readiness.

Several recent studies indicate that vocational programs based on real-world work experience have a positive impact on the development of work skills, communication, responsibility, and independence among adults with autism (Cope & Remington, 2022). Direct involvement in work activities allows individuals with autism to learn work skills in a more contextual manner through authentic experiences and consistent practice (Khikmah et al., 2024). Nevertheless, structured post-school transition programs that systematically integrate real-world work activities remain relatively limited within the context of special education in Indonesia (Alfiyati, 2023). This situation highlights the need to develop vocational models that not only focus on technical skills training but also support the work readiness of individuals with autism through real-world and sustained work experiences.

This gap highlights the need for a practical, structured, and context-specific work transition model to support the development of work readiness skills among adults with autism. Therefore, this study aims to describe the implementation of a post-school workshop model based on real-world work activities in developing

work readiness skills among adults with autism at River Company. This study focuses on the program implementation process, the form of support provided, and the development of participants' work readiness skills as an effort to introduce relevant work transition practices within the context of special education in Indonesia.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of a real-work-activity-based post-school workshop and the development of work readiness among autistic adults in a natural setting. A qualitative case study was selected because the study focused on examining the implementation process, forms of support, and participants' work readiness development within a specific vocational program context (Creswell, 2014).

Time and Research Setting

The study was conducted at River Company from late April to May 2026. River Company is a vocational program that provides post-school workshop activities for autistic adults. The research setting was selected because the program provides direct engagement in authentic work activities through several vocational divisions, including housekeeping, Arya Mart, coffee shop, laundry, and sewing.

Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised individuals directly involved in the implementation and use of the post-school workshop program at River Company. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, in which participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives and their direct involvement in the implementation or experience of the program (Patton, 2002). The participants consisted of 11 autistic adults who participated in the workshop activities, three teachers or facilitators, one director, and service users. The 11 autistic adults were observed during their participation in real-work activities to obtain data regarding the implementation of the workshop and the development of their work readiness skills. Meanwhile, the teachers or facilitators, director, and service users were

selected as informants to provide information regarding the implementation of the program, forms of support provided, participants' experiences, and the outcomes of the post-school workshop program.

Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of several stages. First, the researcher identified the implementation of the post-school workshop program and the vocational activities provided at River Company. Second, observations were conducted during participants' engagement in authentic work activities, including cleaning, customer service, retail activities, laundry, sewing, and other assigned vocational tasks. Third, in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant participants and program personnel to obtain information regarding the implementation of the workshop, forms of support, participants' experiences, and challenges encountered during work activities. Fourth, documentation was collected in the form of program records and participant progress reports to complement the observation and interview data. Data from observations, interviews, and documentation were then compared through source and method triangulation to support the credibility of the findings (Moleong, 1989; Sugiyono, 2017).

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed qualitatively using an inductive process consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was conducted by selecting, organizing, and focusing the collected information on the implementation of the workshop model, forms of support, and development of work readiness skills. The reduced data were then presented in a systematic form to identify patterns and relationships among the findings. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the identified patterns and comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. The analysis focused on identifying the main components of the real-work-activity-based workshop model and the development of participants' work readiness, including instruction comprehension, task initiation and completion, work responsibility, functional communication, and adaptation to workplace challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Workshop Model for After-School Programs Based on Real-World Work Activities at River Company

Research findings indicate that River Company implements an after-school workshop model based on real-world work activities as a transition program for adults with autism to prepare them for employment. This model is carried out through several work divisions, namely housekeeping, Arya Mart, the coffee shop, laundry, and sewing. Each division is designed to resemble real-world work situations so that participants not only receive theoretical instruction but are directly engaged in productive activities with real-world work demands. Training models based on direct work experience are known to provide greater opportunities for individuals with autism to develop work readiness skills in authentic contexts (Lee et al., 2022).

Based on the observations, the workshop began with the creation of an activity schedule, a brief briefing, the assignment of tasks, the execution of the work, and concluded with a final evaluation. Each participant had an individual timetable outlining the sequence of work activities from arrival until leaving school. The schedule was presented visually to help participants understand the flow of activities in a more structured and consistent manner. The use of visual aids in a work setting is known to help individuals with autism understand activity expectations and increase their independent engagement in work (Hume et al., 2021).

Participants' engagement in real-world work activities demonstrates that the learning process occurs through direct experience within an authentic work context. Participants not only learn work procedures but also develop an understanding of the work rhythm, task responsibilities, and social interactions that arise during the activities. A consistent activity structure also helps participants gradually develop self-regulation. Visual schedules serve as an external support that helps participants understand work expectations and reduces confusion regarding changes in activities. These conditions indicate the presence of an experience-based learning process that takes place contextually within a real work environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Interviews with support teachers revealed that participants were placed in their respective

divisions based on initial observations of their abilities, responses to instructions, and interest in specific activities. Support teachers placed participants in the divisions deemed most suitable for their individual characteristics so that they could work in an environment that optimally supported the development of their abilities. Aligning individual characteristics with the work environment is a critical factor in supporting the successful work transition of individuals with autism (Mäkinen, 2021).

In addition, the workshop model at River Company employs a phased support approach through verbal and gestural prompts, as well as direct demonstrations. The level of assistance is gradually reduced as participants demonstrate increased independence in their work. This approach allows participants to receive support throughout the work-learning process without fostering dependence on their mentors. A phased support strategy is known to be effective in improving the participation and work performance of adults with autism (Lee et al., 2022).

Based on the overall findings, the post-school workshop model based on real-world work activities at River Company has three main components: engagement in authentic work activities, work placement based on individual characteristics, and structured, phased support. These three components form the primary foundation for supporting the development of work readiness in adults with autism.

The Development of Work Readiness Skills in Adults with Autism

The research findings indicate that participants demonstrated improvements in their work readiness skills in the areas of understanding instructions, task execution, work responsibility, communication, and adaptation to workplace challenges. Regarding the ability to understand instructions, participants were able to respond quite well to both verbal and visual cues provided by their mentors. Most participants were able to understand instructions and immediately apply them in their work activities. This ability developed through consistent practice and repetition of activities. Repetition of work activities is known to help individuals with autism establish more stable and predictable work patterns (Elfina, 2026).

Regarding task initiation, participants demonstrated the ability to begin work

immediately after instructions were given. In certain situations, particularly when facing new tasks or more complex procedures, participants still required instructions to be repeated one or two times. Clear instructions and a structured work environment contribute to the ability to initiate tasks more independently (Hume et al., 2021).

The ability to see tasks through to completion stands out as one of the most notable strengths. In the Arya Mart division, participants demonstrated the ability to keep track of customers with outstanding payments and proactively follow up with them. In the housekeeping division, participants were able to complete cleaning tasks in full according to the assigned targets. Attention to detail and consistency in work are strengths that develop through structured work experience (Cope & Remington, 2022).

However, the quality of neatness in work results varied across divisions. In structured tasks such as recording transactions and organizing goods, participants tended to work more meticulously. Conversely, in cleaning activities such as scrubbing bathrooms or wiping windows, some participants still required correction from their supervisors to ensure more thorough results. Immediate feedback helped participants gradually improve their work performance (Galizzi et al., 2023)

Discussion

A Workshop Model for After-School Programs Based on Real-World Work Activities at River Company

The research findings indicate that the after-school workshop model based on real-world work activities at River Company provides an authentic learning experience for adults with autism. This finding reinforces the concept of situated learning, which posits that learning is more effective when individuals are directly engaged in activities that resemble real-world contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this context, the workshop environment functions not only as a training site but also as a community of practice that enables participants to learn through direct involvement in daily work activities.

The use of various work divisions—such as housekeeping, coffee shop, laundry, and retail, creates a diverse yet structured work environment. This setting supports the vocational learning

process for individuals with autism by providing opportunities to develop work skills in a contextual and repetitive manner (Weld-Blundell et al., 2021). Recent research indicates that vocational interventions based on real-world work environments and adaptive environmental support contribute to improved employability and work transition readiness among individuals with autism (Clouder et al., 2023).

The use of visual schedules in this study also reinforces findings indicating that visual supports are a crucial component in enhancing the work independence of individuals with autism. Visual schedules not only help participants understand the sequence of activities but also serve as a behavioral regulation tool that reduces reliance on verbal instructions (Hume et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the process of placing participants based on individual characteristics highlights the importance of person-environment fit in a work context. The alignment between an individual's abilities and job demands is a key factor in the successful work transition of individuals with autism. In this study, placement based on initial observations served as a strategy to support the optimization of participants' potential within their respective work divisions. (Ohl et al., 2017)

Step-by-step support through verbal and gestural prompts and demonstrations also reflects the application of the principle of fading support, which involves systematically reducing assistance to encourage independence. This strategy aligns with findings showing that gradually reducing assistance is effective in enhancing the work independence of individuals with autism in real-world work settings. (Cope & Remington, 2022)

The Development of Work Readiness Skills in Adults with Autism

Participants' development of work readiness skills indicates that hands-on work experience plays a crucial role in fostering adaptive work skills. Regarding instruction comprehension, learning based on repetition and routines helps individuals with autism improve their ability to follow instructions more consistently. (Clouder et al., 2023) Regarding task initiation, participants' ability to start work more quickly indicates progress in work behavior control. The clarity of the environmental structure and consistency of instructions play a key role in helping individuals with autism reduce their reliance on external prompts (Hume et al., 2021).

The ability to complete tasks thoroughly reflects the development of task persistence and work responsibility. Structured work experiences can enhance the persistence of individuals with autism in completing tasks, especially when such activities hold functional meaning within a real-world work context (Cope & Remington, 2022). Variations in work quality across departments indicate that task complexity influences the performance of individuals with autism. Immediate feedback is crucial in the process of improving work quality, as it helps individuals make gradual corrections and enhance the accuracy of their work performance over time (Galizzi et al., 2023).

Communication and Workplace Interaction

The results of the study indicate that participants were able to respond to instructions and interact with customers more actively than their peers. Individuals with autism tend to demonstrate better communication performance in the context of functional interactions with clear objectives, such as customer service (Walsh et al., 2014). The limited interactions among participants suggest that more complex social communication skills still require additional support. Individuals with autism often face challenges with social flexibility, particularly in unstructured interactions or those without an immediate goal (Romualdez et al., 2021). Verbal mediation by a support person has been shown to help participants prioritize tasks and improve work behavior regulation. The importance of verbal scaffolding in helping individuals with autism manage simultaneous work demands (Ji et al., 2022).

Work Adaptation and Problem Solving

Participants' adaptive abilities showed individual variation, particularly in responding to sudden changes in instructions. These findings are consistent with the literature indicating that cognitive flexibility is one of the primary challenges for individuals with autism in the workplace (Eisner, 2025). However, the participants' tendency to seek help directly indicates an adaptive coping strategy. A supportive work environment can enhance problem-solving skills in individuals with autism through a combination of social support and hands-on experience (Bury et al., 2021). The ability to accept corrections without significant emotional reactions is also an

important indicator of the development of self-regulation. Self-determination theory explains that an environment that supports autonomy can increase feelings of competence and intrinsic motivation in completing tasks (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Implications of the Model for the Employment Transition of Adults with Autism

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the notion that real-world work experience makes a significant contribution to the employment readiness of adults with autism. Direct work experience is a strong predictor of successful post-school transitions, particularly when supported by consistent structure and mentoring (Maslahati et al., 2022). The workshop model at River Company demonstrates that work readiness is not solely about technical skills but also encompasses self-regulation, communication, and adaptability. Work readiness is a combination of functional skills and adaptive social abilities within a real-world work environment (Cope & Remington, 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of communities of practice in this workshop reinforces the concept that learning occurs through sustained social participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This indicates that the work transition for individuals with autism requires a learning environment that is not only instructional but also social and contextual. Thus, this workshop model has the potential to be replicated within the context of special education in Indonesia as a more practical work transition strategy. This study reinforces that an approach based on real-world work activities is more effective than simulated vocational training in enhancing the work readiness of adults with autism.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully and comprehensively identified, analyzed, and described the implementation of a post-school workshop model based on real-world work activities in developing work readiness among adults with autism at River Company. Using a qualitative approach through a case study design, this study involved the director of River Company, supervisors or mentor teachers, and service users as primary informants, thereby generating rich and in-depth data regarding the program implementation process, forms of support, and the

development of participants' work readiness within an authentic work context. The research findings indicate that the development of work readiness among adults with autism occurs optimally through direct engagement in structured and meaningful real-world work activities. The model's implementation spans various work divisions—such as housekeeping, Arya Mart, the coffee shop, laundry, and sewing, tailored to each participant's characteristics, abilities, and needs.

Support in the form of visual schedules, job placements based on initial observations, and gradual guidance through scaffolding strategies has proven effective in enhancing participants' ability to understand instructions, initiate and complete tasks, demonstrate work responsibility, communicate functionally, and adapt to workplace challenges. In addition to providing a concrete picture of post-school vocational practices for adults with autism, this study also generates new knowledge regarding a work transition model based on real-world work activities that is relevant for application within the context of special education in Indonesia. The empirical findings are expected to serve as a reference for special education practitioners, vocational service agencies, parents, and policymakers in designing more structured, contextual, and work-readiness-oriented work transition programs. Thus, this study not only contributes to the academic development of vocational education research for adults with autism but also offers practical implications in supporting the independence, social functioning, and employment opportunities of adults with autism in society. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term effectiveness of this model and to develop broader partnerships with the business and industrial sectors so that participants' employment opportunities after the program can be further optimized.

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