



Trust as Foundation and Limit: An Informal School and Business Vocational Partnership

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ABSTRACT

Vocational training can enhance the independence and work readiness of students with mild intellectual disabilities through authentic workplace learning supported by school-business collaboration. Previous studies have largely focused on vocational schools partnering with large industries through formal agreements, while partnerships between special schools and micro-enterprises remain underexplored. This study examines collaboration between SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi and Purple Steam in motorcycle pressure-washing training at the SMALB level, focusing on partnership arrangements, training implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and impacts on students' work readiness. A descriptive qualitative case study was conducted with purposively selected informants, including the principal, vocational and shadow teachers, business owner, field instructor, parents, and three students with mild intellectual disabilities. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, validated through source and technique triangulation and informant reconfirmation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. Findings reveal that the partnership operates through an oral agreement based on trust, sustained communication, and role division. The school provides guidance and assessment, while the business provides facilities, equipment, and technical instruction. Training uses demonstrations, hands-on practice, simplified work stages, repeated instruction, gradually reduced assistance, and adjusted water pressure. Partnership commitment, authentic workplace experience, and family support sustain the program, whereas differences between school and workplace equipment create challenges. Students demonstrate improvements in technical skills, independence, and confidence, although achievement varies individually. The study concludes that informal collaboration can effectively bridge students to local employment opportunities, but written institutionalization is needed to strengthen occupational safety responsibilities and ensure program continuity.

INTRODUCTION

Education for persons with disabilities is now required to answer a question that lies outside the classroom, namely the continuation of students' lives once schooling has ended. Trisnaningtyas et al. (2021) report that the problem faced by children with special needs is not merely completing their education but securing continuity after graduation, so that education functions as a foundation for career exploration through which they may obtain decent work. This shift in demand places vocational education in a central position, because learning outcomes are measured by work readiness and life independence rather than by the completion of academic material alone (Trisnaningtyas et al., 2021, p. 1).



That demand confronts a measurable gap in the labour market. Analysis of the 2018 National Labour Force Survey data shows that the probability of persons with disabilities entering the world of work and being employed is lower than that of persons without disabilities, although persons with disabilities in the mild category are more likely to be employed than those in the severe category (Saskara & Dewi, 2025, p. 235). This finding positions students with mild intellectual disabilities as the group with the greatest chance of entering the labour market and, at the same time, the group most disadvantaged if that opportunity is not facilitated. Because the right to equal education for persons with disabilities is guaranteed under Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, this gap in employment absorption is a matter of fulfilling rights, not merely a technical instructional problem (Abdussamad & Muhtar, 2023).

That opportunity rests on the characteristics of students with mild intellectual disabilities, who are classified as educable, so their intellectual barriers require education to emphasise the development of vocational skill potential in order for them to become independent (Rejokirono, 2018). Research on cognition in this population records limitations in short-term working memory and information processing (Marlina, 2015), and instructional design has conventionally responded by presenting training material concretely and repetitively (Astriani & Mufidah, 2022, p. 60). This study adopts those adaptations as a description of practice rather than as a statement of what students are capable of. Following the capability-based orientation advanced by Fischer and Kilpatrick (2023), the concrete and repetitive structure of the training is read here as a property of the learning environment that can be designed well or badly, not as a ceiling on student agency. That orientation matters for the analysis that follows, because it directs attention to what the workplace and the school arrange around the student rather than to what the student is presumed to lack.

Problems arise when the mastery of skills at school does not carry over into employment absorption. A preliminary study at SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi shows that most students with mild intellectual disabilities at the SMALB level are male and more interested in physical activity than in domestic skills such as sewing or cooking, while the density of motorcycle traffic in the area opens up a market for motorcycle washing services. These conditions make motorcycle pressure washing vocational training a choice that is relevant to the environment in which the students live. Nevertheless, a number of graduates who had mastered work skills still struggled to enter the workforce. This pattern is not confined to the research site. Azizah (2022) records that post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities in Indonesia remain poor relative to their peers without disabilities, and Gunarhadi et al. (2025) identify inadequate resources and limited job-placement support as recurring obstacles across Indonesian special schools. The gap observed at SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi therefore reflects a systemic condition rather than an isolated local failure, and it is that condition which led the school to pursue collaboration with a business owner so that graduates could gain access to real employment.

Previous studies on vocational education for students with special needs have moved in three directions that have yet to converge. The first direction highlights the governance of skills instruction within schools, as shown by Mastiani et al. (2021), who mapped the management of this curriculum as work preparation at the SMALB level, and by research showing that tailored career guidance and vocational training can improve students' career prospects and independence (Pardi & Herdi, 2024). The second direction tests the effectiveness of instructional techniques for one particular skill, such as research demonstrating that project-based learning can improve motorcycle-washing skills among students with mild intellectual disabilities (Fikri et al., 2025). The third direction examines school partnerships with the business world, namely Syauqi et al. (2022, p. 4), who emphasised the importance of compatibility between vocational-education providers and graduate users, while

Gunarhadi et al. (2025) identified inadequate resources and infrastructure, together with limited support for job placement, as obstacles to vocational education for students with disabilities. These three directions leave a space that remains unfilled. Governance studies stop at the school gate, instructional technique studies stop at individual skill attainment, and partnership studies depart from vocational high schools partnering with large industries through formal agreements. No study has yet examined how a special school builds a partnership with a micro-enterprise in its immediate surroundings without relying on a written agreement document, even though this pattern is a realistic option for special schools facing the funding and equipment limitations recorded in those studies.

The willingness of micro-entrepreneurs to enter into collaboration without a written agreement has been documented in some Indonesian business settings (Putro et al., 2022, p. 414). Angreny et al. (2022) indicate that the sustainability of micro-enterprises is supported by social capital in the form of networks, trust, and norms. In micro-scale businesses embedded in their own residential surroundings, interpersonal trust and adherence to neighbourly norms may function in place of contractual mechanisms, so that the willingness to accept students with special needs can be read as part of a social responsibility growing out of that closeness. This substitution is not costless. Hamid and Intan (2024) show that informal work arrangements in Indonesia leave participants outside the protections attached to a formal employment agreement, including occupational social security, and that Law Number 6 of 2023 has not closed that gap for the informal sector. Examining the partnership between a special school and a micro-enterprise as a pattern in its own right therefore means examining both what trust makes possible and what its informality leaves unprotected.

The novelty of this study lies in revealing how a vocational partnership operates without a written agreement, and in specifying the limits of that arrangement. Wijaya and Syarifah (2022, p. 534) treat the establishment of a memorandum of understanding as a critical stage for securing the legality and long-term sustainability of a life-skills programme. This study does not dispute that recommendation. It asks instead how a partnership that has not reached that stage nevertheless functions, what an oral agreement resting on trust and sustained communication can and cannot carry, and where the resulting arrangement diverges from the formalisation that the literature prescribes. This study also positions motorcycle pressure washing training as a skill connected to the local economic structure, so that the partnership is read not as a supplementary school programme but as a transition bridge for students with mild intellectual disabilities toward work available in their own environment.

Departing from these issues, this study examines the collaboration between SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi and the owner of Purple Steam in motorcycle pressure washing vocational training for students with mild intellectual disabilities at the SMALB level. It focuses on the form of partnership built between the school and the business owner, the way the training is conducted at an actual work site, the factors supporting and hindering the continuity of the collaboration, and the impact of the training on students' work readiness. Through this examination, the study is expected to provide a reference for special schools seeking to initiate similar partnerships with businesses in their surroundings.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design (Sugiyono, 2013), chosen because it allows a single partnership to be examined in depth together with the context surrounding it (Syauqi et al., 2022, p. 6). The design suits a collaboration that proceeds without a written agreement document and can therefore be understood only by tracing the practices and interactions taking place in the field. Two boundaries should be stated at the outset, because they

shape what the findings can claim. First, vocational progress is described through observation and informant accounts rather than through a standardised transition-readiness instrument such as the Pre-Employment Independent Life Education Program (Yıldız & Cavkaytar, 2022), so the developments reported here are descriptive and are not presented as measured gains. Second, no formal job safety analysis or ergonomics-of-disability framework was applied to the training site; the safety measures documented were observed as they occurred rather than evaluated against the systematic assessment that Bérubé et al. (2025) describe as necessary.

The research was conducted at SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi and at the Purple Steam training site, where, according to school programme documents, the partnership had been running for approximately two years before this study was carried out, with training held twice each week. Data collection took place over approximately one month, and the researcher attended every session in that period in order to observe every stage of the training, from the introduction of equipment through to independent practice. This time span limits the study, as the development of vocational skills in students with mild intellectual disabilities proceeds gradually and requires longer observation to capture more comprehensive change. The focus of the study covers the form of collaboration between the school and the business world, the process of implementing vocational training, the supporting and hindering factors of the collaboration, and the impact of the training on students with mild intellectual disabilities.

Informants were selected purposively for their knowledge of and direct involvement in the programme, and comprised the principal, the vocational teacher, the shadow teacher, the owner of Purple Steam, the field instructor, parents, and three students with mild intellectual disabilities who attended the training regularly, anonymised as KH, DF, and RZ. Their classification follows the categorisation recorded in the school's own student placement documents, which formed the basis for their enrolment at the SMALB level; no independent clinical or educational assessment was administered and no standardised baseline profile was compiled, which limits the replicability of the participant profiles and should be taken into account when comparing these findings with studies reporting standardised assessment data.

Ethical procedures preceded data collection. Research permission was obtained through official documentation with SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi, accompanied by approval from the owner of Purple Steam as the training site, and parental consent was collected through the school. Each student's own assent was also sought: the purpose of the research, what participation involved, and their freedom to decline or stop at any point were explained in short sentences and everyday vocabulary in the presence of the shadow teacher, and assent was confirmed verbally at the first session and reaffirmed at the start of subsequent observations. Participation was voluntary and did not affect learning assessment, any indication of reluctance was treated as withdrawal for that session, and the data collected were used solely for the purposes of this study.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation (Kaharuddin, 2020). Observation was conducted directly at the Purple Steam training site to record the work stages taught by the instructor, students' interaction with the shadow teacher and the field instructor, the use of facilities and infrastructure, and the level of student engagement while activities were under way (Lisdiana et al., 2024). Interviews were conducted face to face at the school and at the training site to explore the form of the collaboration, the delivery of the training, the supporting and hindering factors, and the impact of the training on students' work readiness (Pyo et al., 2023, p. 17). The documentation comprised the school's vocational programme, assignment letters for shadow teachers, student attendance lists, photographs of activities together with facilities and infrastructure, and records of student progress. Validity was established through technique triangulation, comparing observation, interview, and documentary accounts of the same event, and through source

triangulation across informants occupying different positions in the programme, namely the school, the business owner, and the students' parents, followed by re-confirmation of the summarised accounts with informants (Zairul, 2021, p. 246).

Data were analysed interactively using the Miles and Huberman model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Fadli, 2021, p. 42; Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Field notes and interview transcripts were read repeatedly and coded manually: open codes such as oral agreement, division of roles, demonstration of stages, repetition of instructions, equipment adaptation, and family support were grouped into categories, and interrelated categories were combined into the five themes reported in the results section. The open code of equipment adaptation records what the site did and how participants explained it; the adequacy of those adaptations was not assessed against a safety standard, and no occupational-safety expert was consulted during the reduction phase. The grouped data were displayed as narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, and interview quotations (Sugiyono, 2013), and conclusions were treated as provisional, updated as data accumulated and verified through re-confirmation with data sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observation, interviews, and documentation conducted at SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi and Purple Steam, five main themes were obtained that describe the implementation of the collaboration in motorcycle pressure washing vocational training for students with mild intellectual disabilities at the SMALB level, namely (1) school and business world collaboration based on a practical partnership, (2) learning through demonstration and hands-on practice, (3) supporting factors of the collaboration, (4) hindering factors of the collaboration, and (5) the impact of vocational training on students.

Table 1. Summary of Themes and Data Sources

Theme	Principal finding	Data source
Partnership based on an oral agreement	The collaboration runs without an MoU, sustained by trust, communication, and a clear division of roles	Interviews with the business owner and the vocational teacher; observation
Learning through demonstration and hands-on practice	The instructor demonstrates five work stages and students imitate them; the stages are simplified and repeated	Interviews with the field instructor and the vocational teacher; observation
Supporting factors	Commitment of both parties, a real work environment deliberately provided, and family support	Interviews with the business owner and parents; observation
Hindering factors	The gap between the school's practice facilities and the equipment of the business world requires an adaptation period	Interviews with the vocational teacher and the instructor; observation; documentation
Impact of the training	Learning outcomes are individual in nature; prompting needs differ among students	Interviews with the vocational teacher and parents; observation; progress records

Source: Research data (2026)

The first finding shows that the collaboration between SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi and Purple Steam does not rest on a written Memorandum of Understanding but on an oral agreement built on trust and sustained communication. The division of roles between the two parties nonetheless remains clear and consistent throughout the delivery of the programme. The school is responsible for guidance and for assessing students' progress, while the business owner provides the site, the equipment, and technical guidance from the field instructor. The owner of Purple Steam affirmed the basis of this collaboration: "This collaboration is not put down in black and white; what matters is mutual trust and smooth communication. So far our role and the school's role have been

clear, so the programme keeps running.” The vocational teacher reinforced this account: “Even though there is no written MoU, we can still run this programme because there is an oral agreement and a division of roles that keeps working.”

This finding is consistent with Estriyanto (2021), who concluded that vocational education partnerships require close relationships along with agreements to share knowledge, skills, equipment, and funding between both parties. In this case, the parties fulfilled those elements without the mediation of an administrative document, so that the continuity of the partnership depended more on the quality of the social relationship and the shared goal than on the binding force of an agreement.

The functioning of this arrangement should not be read as evidence that formalisation is dispensable. Wijaya and Syarifah (2022) treat the establishment of a memorandum of understanding as a critical stage in managing a life-skills programme, precisely because it secures institutional commitment beyond the tenure of the individuals who negotiated it. The case reported here does not contradict that position so much as illustrate what a partnership looks like before that stage is reached, and what remains exposed as a result.

Two exposures are apparent. The first concerns continuity. The absence of a document makes the programme dependent on the individuals currently holding office, so that a change of principal or a transfer of the management of the business has the potential to halt the collaboration without any clear transition mechanism. The second concerns occupational safety and its legal consequences. Students are placed at a commercially operating site where they handle pressurised equipment amid vehicle traffic, yet no written provision assigns responsibility in the event of a work accident. Hamid and Intan (2024) characterise arrangements of this kind as leaving participants outside the protections that attach to a formal employment agreement, including occupational social security, and observe that Law Number 6 of 2023 has not extended those protections to the informal sector. The students in this programme are trainees rather than employees, which places them further still from that protective framework: they are neither covered by a school-industry agreement nor by an employment relationship. The reduction of water pressure carried out by the business shows a genuine awareness of physical risk, but it is an initiative of the site rather than a documented procedure, and awareness of risk is not the same as allocation of liability.

Taken together, these exposures position trust as the foundation that enables the partnership to function while making clear that it is not a substitute for governance. Strengthening such a partnership should therefore be directed toward institutionalisation in the two areas where informality carries the highest cost, namely safety liability and succession, without sacrificing the flexibility that has been its strength elsewhere.

The second finding shows that the process of motorcycle pressure washing vocational training at Purple Steam is delivered through learning based on demonstration and hands-on practice with a decreasing gradient of assistance. The observation results show that each training cycle opens with an introduction to the equipment and to occupational safety procedures, continues with a demonstration by the instructor, then proceeds to guided practice with full support, and ends with independent practice under looser supervision. Before students carry out the work, the instructor first demonstrates the work stages that must be performed. After that, students are given the opportunity to imitate and directly practise the skill that has been modelled. The field instructor explained the sequence he demonstrated: “I demonstrate the washing from the beginning first: wet it, soap it, brush it, rinse it, dry it. Only after that do they follow.” The observation results show that these stages were indeed taught in sequence, beginning with wetting the motorcycle, applying soap, brushing particular parts, rinsing, and finally drying the motorcycle. These stages were simplified so as to match the learning capacity of students with mild intellectual disabilities. This finding was reinforced by the vocational teacher’s account: “The work has to be broken down into simple steps so that the children find it easier to understand and remember.” In addition, it was found that Purple Steam modified the pressure of the pressure washer used by the students. The field instructor explained the reason: “We lower the steamer’s spray pressure so that it is not too strong. It is safer for them, and easier to control.” This adjustment reduced the risk of work accidents while also making it easier for students to control the equipment. Throughout the practice, the shadow teacher and the field instructor consistently provided instructions and repeated reminders. This was done because some students still had difficulty remembering the sequence of the work. Based on the

observation results, students sometimes continued with one stage of the work, such as scrubbing a part of the motorcycle repeatedly, even though they should already have moved on to the next stage. The field instructor described the situation: “Some children sometimes stop at one stage and keep scrubbing the same spot. I have to remind them, ‘Come on, move on to rinsing.’ They really do have to be directed continually.” The vocational teacher added: “We always accompany them during practice, because direct and repeated guidance is important for the children.” Both accounts confirm that providing direction in stages and repeatedly is an inseparable part of the delivery of the training.

Read through a capability-based lens rather than a deficit one, these adaptations describe an environment that has been arranged to make participation possible. Fischer and Kilpatrick (2023) argue that vocational pathways for students with disability are shaped less by what students cannot do than by how employers structure tasks, supervision, and expectations around them. The simplification of stages, the sequencing of demonstration before practice, and the graduated withdrawal of assistance are, in that reading, design decisions of the workplace, and their success is attributable to the arrangement as much as to the individual student.

Their status as safety measures, however, requires a more careful statement than the data support at present. The reduction of water pressure was explained by the instructor in terms of controllability and safety, and it plainly reflects an awareness of risk. It was not, on the evidence collected, the outcome of a hazard identification exercise, and no documented procedure governs its application, its settings, or its review. Bérubé et al. (2025) show that in vocational traineeships for students with learning difficulties, occupational health and safety is managed by teachers and workplaces under time pressure and with little institutional guidance, so that safety comes to depend on everyday judgements rather than on systematic analysis, and that the resulting protection is uneven. The present case fits that description. Verbal prompting and lowered pressure are reasonable responses by attentive practitioners, but a formal job safety analysis adapted to cognitive disability would specify which hazards are present, which are eliminated by design rather than by supervision, and what happens when the instructor’s attention is elsewhere. This study reports the adaptations as practised; it does not evaluate their sufficiency, and the gap between the two is itself a finding worth recording.

Table 2. Motorcycle Washing Training Stages and Forms of Support

Work stage	Observed practice	Form of support
Wetting the motorcycle	Students direct the hose at the body of the motorcycle	Guidance on how to hold the hose and direct the spray; equipment pressure lowered
Applying soap	Application of soap to the surface of the motorcycle	Instructor demonstration before students imitate
Brushing	Brushing of particular parts; some students scrub one part repeatedly	Verbal reminders to move on to the next stage
Rinsing	Rinsing off soap residue	Verbal prompting from the instructor and the shadow teacher
Drying	Drying the body of the motorcycle as the closing stage	Supervision of the final result by the instructor

Source: Observation data (2026)

The third finding identifies three factors that sustain the continuity of the training, namely the commitment of both parties, the availability of a real work environment, and family support. Although the collaboration lacks a formal document, commitment is evident in the communication that is maintained, the clear division of roles, and the continuous delivery of the programme. The school demonstrates its support through the involvement of the shadow teacher who accompanies students at every training session, while the business owner provides access to a commercially operating work site.

The availability of an actual work environment distinguishes this training from a simulation in the school’s skills room. Students not only learn procedures but also deal with real work equipment, customers, and completion time demands. The provision of that site is a deliberate choice, as stated by the business owner: “I deliberately make this business available as a real work environment, so

that the children do not only learn theory but handle the equipment directly and experience an actual work atmosphere.” He added that efforts are made to keep the working atmosphere comfortable: “We make the work environment as comfortable as possible so that the children are not afraid. That way they can learn directly, just like real work.” The observation results show that the students follow the activities with enthusiasm and take a keen interest in the practice provided. This condition is in line with the theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 2015; Nagel et al., 2024, p. 140), which emphasises that learning is grounded in experience and develops through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation.

The pedagogical value of authenticity, however, is inseparable from the exposure that authenticity creates. The same features that make the site a genuine learning environment, namely operating machinery, moving vehicles, and the pace set by paying customers, are the features that generate risk. In this programme those risks are managed through the instructor’s presence, the shadow teacher’s prompting, and the lowered equipment pressure, all of which depend on continuous adult attention. Bérubé et al. (2025) note that such attention-dependent arrangements are precisely what become fragile when the workplace is busy, and that safe participation is better secured through the organisation of the work itself than through supervision alone. The authentic environment is therefore reported here as a strength with a condition attached: it is where the learning happens, and it is also where the absence of a documented safety framework matters most.

Family support complements these two factors. One parent related the reason for allowing her child to take part in the training: “I let my child join this training because I can see that he is happy and increasingly enthusiastic. Every time he is about to leave, I encourage him so that he attends regularly.” The change observed at home lies in the growth of a willingness to try: “I can see that he is beginning to be more independent now. He still needs help, but the important thing is that he is willing to make an effort and is not embarrassed.” Parents were also aware of the connection between family support and their child’s self-confidence: “Support from us at home really does matter. When we trust and support him, he becomes more confident during training.” The supporting factors of this training can therefore be read as a synergy among three parties, namely the school, the business world, and the family, which together prepare students with mild intellectual disabilities for independence after completing their education at the SMALB level.

The fourth finding, based on observation, interviews, and documentation, revealed a difference between the practice facilities available at the school and those used at Purple Steam. The practice equipment available at the school still uses simpler tools, whereas the equipment used at Purple Steam employs more modern technology and has a higher working capacity.

The vocational teacher explained the gap: “The equipment we have at school is still simple, so once the children arrive at Purple Steam they need time to adapt because the equipment is more modern.” It is precisely this difference in the characteristics and operation of the equipment between the school and the business world that requires an adjustment period for students. Gunarhadi et al. (2025) record inadequate equipment and infrastructure as a recurring constraint in Indonesian special schools, which suggests that the disparity documented here is a structural feature of the sector rather than a shortcoming particular to this school.

The observation results show that students appeared more cautious when using the pressure washer at Purple Steam. Several students required additional direction from the shadow teacher and the field instructor in order to understand the function of the equipment, how to hold the hose, how to direct the spray, and how to maintain safety while working. The field instructor described the process of familiarisation: “At first they were rather stiff holding the pressure hose. I taught them the correct grip and the spray direction, slowly, until they got used to it.” In order to reduce the risk of work accidents, Purple Steam modified the pressure of the spray equipment used by students. This

adjustment was made so that the equipment would be easier to control and suited to the capabilities of students with mild intellectual disabilities. Marlina (2015) asserts that in order for children with special needs to function optimally in vocational tasks, the work environment or equipment needs to be adapted for the sake of safety without eliminating the essence of the work skill itself. That principle is satisfied here at the level of intent. What the case does not demonstrate is the further step that Bérubé et al. (2025) describe as necessary, namely the translation of such intent into documented procedure, so that the adaptation survives a change of instructor and can be audited rather than merely observed.

The second obstacle stems from the condition of the work environment itself. The observation results show that the training site is a business that continues to serve customers while activities are under way, so that the atmosphere is fairly busy with the sound of machinery, vehicles entering and leaving, and conversation between workers and customers. These conditions require students to concentrate on their work amid a variety of stimuli, and on several occasions they appeared distracted and therefore required additional reminders from the shadow teacher. This situation relates to attentional demands that research has identified as significant for students with mild intellectual disability (Jacob et al., 2021). It is worth noting that distraction in this setting is a safety matter as much as a learning one, since the moments in which attention lapses are also the moments in which students are handling pressurised equipment near moving vehicles.

These two obstacles show that the gap between the learning environment at school and the actual work environment is not limited to differences in equipment but also encompasses differences in working atmosphere, so that students require a process of adaptation before they are able to work optimally in a real work environment.

The finding regarding the gap in practice facilities between the school and the business world shows that the transition of students with mild intellectual disabilities from the school environment to the work environment is influenced not only by individual capability but also by the suitability of the learning facilities used. The equipment available at the school is still simple, whereas the equipment used at Purple Steam employs more modern technology. That difference obliges students to undergo a process of adaptation to the equipment, work procedures, and operational standards that apply in the business world. This finding is consistent with Supriati et al. (2022), who explain that the success of vocational learning for students with special needs is influenced by the alignment of learning facilities with students' needs, and with Josephat et al. (2025), who identify environmental and logistical factors as determinants of vocational skills curriculum implementation. Differences in facilities between the school and the practice site can become a challenge in developing students' work competence, so that students require adjustment during the training. From the perspective of vocational education, alignment between the learning environment and the work environment is an important factor in preparing students to face the actual world of work (Löfgren et al., 2023, p. 349). The greater the gap between school facilities and industry facilities, the greater students' need for support and for an adaptation period while work practice is under way. Although it constitutes a hindering factor, this finding also shows the importance of partnership between the school and the business world (Fischer & Kilpatrick, 2023, p. 87). The presence of Purple Steam gives students the opportunity to become acquainted with technology, equipment, and a working culture that cannot be fully simulated at school. Training in the business world therefore functions as a bridge that assists students with mild intellectual disabilities.

The fifth finding shows that the vocational learning outcomes of students with mild intellectual disabilities are individual in nature. The observation results reveal differences in the level of independence among KH, DF, and RZ even though all three followed the same programme, duration, and form of support. The vocational teacher confirmed those differences: "Each child's

capacity for independence is different. Some are already fairly able on their own, while others still have to be guided step by step.” Besides the mastery of work stages, development was also observed in the confidence to interact. The observation results show that students began to ask the instructor questions when they encountered difficulty and to respond when spoken to by workers or customers at the training site. This development was not measured against any standardised instrument, and because no baseline profile was compiled before the training began, the changes reported here rest on the accounts of teachers and parents alongside the researcher’s observation rather than on a documented comparison. Parents’ accounts that their children had begun to make an effort and were no longer embarrassed reinforce that observation from the home environment. Among the three, RZ was recorded as the student who still required prompting at some of the work stages, while the other students were already able to complete some stages under looser supervision. This finding is consistent with research showing that learner diversity in vocational education requires attention to individual needs, including differences in motivation, and that adaptive guidance and differentiated support are important (Roos et al., 2021, p. 5). For that reason, instruction needs to be adjusted to the requirements of each student.

Teachers and instructors need to adjust the level of assistance, the instructional method, and the intensity of support in accordance with students’ capabilities so that work skills can develop optimally. In addition, the prompting still required by RZ shows that this strategy is an important part of the vocational learning process. This finding aligns with the concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), namely that students can attain a higher level of capability when they receive assistance, or scaffolding, from someone more competent. In this study, that assistance took the form of graduated direction, repetition of instructions, and prompting provided by the shadow teacher and the field instructor until students were able to complete tasks more independently. A qualification applies where safety is concerned. Scaffolding is a sound principle for skill acquisition, but prompting is a weak control when the hazard is physical and immediate, since it depends on an adult noticing in time. The finding that RZ continued to require prompting at some stages is therefore also an argument for controls that do not rely on attention, such as equipment settings fixed by design, which is the direction indicated by Bérubé et al. (2025).

On the basis of these findings, it can be understood that the success of vocational training is measured not only by improvement in work skills but also by the programme’s capacity to provide support suited to the individual needs of each student. Differentiation in the level of support therefore becomes an important factor in enhancing the work independence of students with mild intellectual disabilities.

DISCUSSION

The first finding, a partnership operating on an oral agreement, is better read through social capital than through contract. Angreny et al. (2022) show that the sustainability of Indonesian micro-enterprises is supported by networks, trust, and norms, and Putro et al. (2022, p. 414) document the willingness of micro-entrepreneurs to collaborate without written agreements. What this case adds is that the same resources can carry an educational function: trust, sustained communication, and a clear division of roles were sufficient to run a two-year vocational placement of the kind the literature would normally expect a memorandum of understanding to govern (Wijaya & Syarifah, 2022, p. 534). The compatibility between provider and graduate user that Syauqi et al. (2022, p. 4) treat as the condition of an effective school-industry partnership was achieved here through proximity rather than through documentation, because the business is embedded in the students’ own neighbourhood. The finding therefore qualifies the formalisation thesis rather than contradicting it: an oral agreement can govern routine operation, but this case demonstrates nothing about its capacity to govern exception.

The second and fifth findings, graduated assistance and individually differentiated outcomes, correspond closely to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Demonstration, simplification of work stages, repetition of instruction, and prompting that is gradually withdrawn are recognisable as scaffolding, and the differences recorded between KH, DF, and RZ under an identical programme confirm what Roos et al. (2021, p. 5) report about learner diversity in vocational education, namely that adaptive guidance and differentiated support matter more than uniform provision. The authentic workplace contributes what the school cannot simulate. Löfgren et al. (2023, p. 349) argue that alignment between the learning environment and the work environment is decisive in preparing students for actual employment, and Fischer and Kilpatrick (2023, p. 87) frame such partnerships as a capability-building resource rather than as a supplement to schooling. Read alongside those studies, the training at Purple Steam functions less as instruction in motorcycle washing than as sustained exposure to the pace, noise, and customer contact of a working business.

The hindering factors identified here are structural rather than local. The disparity between school and workplace equipment matches the inadequate facilities and infrastructure that Gunarhadi et al. (2025) record across Indonesian special schools, and it bears on outcomes in the way Supriati et al. (2022) and Josephat et al. (2025) describe, through the alignment of learning facilities and logistical conditions with students' needs. The distraction observed in a commercially operating environment connects to the attentional demands documented for this population (Jacob et al., 2021) and, in this setting, is a safety matter as much as a pedagogical one. Equipment adaptation of the kind Marlina (2015) prescribes was present in intent, but Berube et al. (2025) show that occupational health and safety in traineeships for students with learning difficulties depends on work organisation, conditions, and tools being assessed systematically, and prompting by an attentive adult is a weak substitute for that. The gap is consequential given the low employment probability recorded for persons with disabilities in Indonesia (Saskara & Dewi, 2025, p. 235) and the poor post-school outcomes reported by Azizah (2022), since a placement that is unsafe is also unlikely to be sustained.

The academic contribution of this study lies in describing a partnership type the literature has left unexamined and in specifying its limits. Governance studies stop at the school gate, studies of instructional technique stop at individual skill attainment, and partnership studies begin from vocational high schools contracting with large industry. This study documents a third configuration, a special school and a neighbourhood micro-enterprise bound by trust alone, and shows that it is workable in daily operation while unprotected at exactly two points: responsibility for occupational safety and the succession of the programme. It thereby extends the social capital account of micro-enterprise sustainability into special education, and refines the formalisation recommendation by identifying what formalisation is specifically needed for. The corollary for schools facing the resource constraints documented in the Indonesian literature is that a partnership of this kind is a legitimate starting point, provided those two provisions are put in writing.

CONCLUSION

The collaboration between SLB Negeri Kabupaten Bekasi and Purple Steam proceeds without a written Memorandum of Understanding, yet is carried out consistently because it rests on trust, sustained communication, and a clear division of roles: the school handles guidance and the assessment of students' progress, while the business owner provides the site, the equipment, and technical guidance from the field instructor. Clarity of roles maintained through communication can sustain a partnership in daily operation, but it does not carry the functions an agreement document performs when circumstances change or when responsibility must be assigned. The training itself is delivered through demonstration and hands-on practice at a commercially operating work site, with

the five stages of washing a motorcycle demonstrated before students imitate them, the stages simplified in line with students' learning capacity, direction repeated when they become stuck, and the pressure of the washer lowered so that it is easier to control. These adaptations show that work equipment can be adjusted without eliminating the essence of the skill being learned, but they were arrived at through practical judgement rather than a structured job safety analysis and remain undocumented, so their consistency depends on the individuals who currently apply them.

Continuity is sustained by the commitment of both parties, the real work environment deliberately provided by the business owner, and family support that keeps attendance consistent. Its principal obstacles are the gap between practice equipment at school and equipment in the business world, which demands an adjustment period, and the absence of a collaboration document that could guarantee continuity should the leadership of the school or the ownership of the business change. The impact of the training is evident in technical skills, work independence, and the confidence to interact in a work environment, although attainment is individual, so that the level of assistance required differs from student to student.

These findings imply that special schools facing limited facilities may pursue partnerships with businesses in their immediate surroundings as a way of providing real work experience, provided the trust forming their foundation is balanced by institutionalisation of two matters: responsibility for occupational safety, since students placed at a commercially operating site remain, as Hamid and Intan (2024) observe of informal arrangements more broadly, outside the protections a formal agreement would attach, including occupational social security; and succession, so that continuity does not depend on the individuals currently holding office. Local government can support both through the recording of potential partners and collaboration guidelines simple enough for a micro-enterprise to accept yet explicit on safety responsibility and on what happens when either party changes hands.

This study is limited to one form of vocational training, one business partner, and three students within an observation span of approximately one month, and it collected no data on students' initial capabilities, relied on the school's existing records for the classification of participants, and observed the safety adaptations as practised rather than evaluating them against an occupational health and safety framework. Its findings are therefore descriptive and cannot yet be generalised. Beyond these methodological constraints, the informality of the partnership is itself a limitation of the arrangement studied, not merely of the study: the model works, and it works without the protections that would apply if it were formalised. Further research should examine other types of training, involve more schools and business partners, and trace graduates' employment absorption, incorporating standardised transition instruments such as the Pre-Employment Independent Life Education Program (Yıldız & Cavkaytar, 2022) and a job safety analysis adapted to cognitive disability (Bérubé et al., 2025) so that progress and safety can be assessed systematically rather than described.

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