Published by Yayasan Amerta Insan Unggul

DOI: 10.65246

p-ISSN 3063-9840 | e-ISSN 3063-8194

GoodWill Journal of Economics, Management, and Accounting

journal homepage: https://jurnal.amertainstitute.com/index.php/GoodWill/index



Key Drivers of Work Readiness: Soft Skills, Self-Efficacy, and Career Exploration among Universitas Siliwangi Students

Juniar Alisa[1]*, Dede Sri Rahayu[2], Fitri Ajeng Sari[3], Rubi'ah Sugiarti[4]
Department of Management, Faculty of Economics & Business, Siliwangi University
Email: juniaralisa@unsil.ac.id; dedesrirahayu@unsil.ac.id; fitriajengsari@unsil.ac.id; rubiahsugiarti@unsil.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Soft Skills; Self-Efficacy; Career Exploration; Work Readiness; University Students

Publication History:
Received: 11 April 2026
Screening: 25 April 2026
Review: 9 May 2026
Revision requested: 18 July 2026
Revised: 13 August 2026
Accepted: 27 October 2026

ABSTRACT

Work readiness has become an important issue in higher education as graduates are required to adapt to increasingly competitive labor market demands. This research aims to examine the effects of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration on students' work readiness. A quantitative explanatory approach with a cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from 162 active undergraduate students at Universitas Siliwangi selected using convenience sampling. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The results reveal that soft skills and self-efficacy have positive and significant effects on work readiness. Soft skills emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.602$, $p < 0.001$), followed by self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, career exploration did not have a significant effect on work readiness after controlling for soft skills and self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.005$, $p = 0.927$). Simultaneously, the three independent variables significantly influenced work readiness and explained 78.4% of its variance ($R^2 = 0.784$; $F = 191.5$; $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that interpersonal competencies and confidence in one's abilities are more influential in shaping work readiness than career exploration alone. The research highlights the importance of strengthening students' soft skills and self-efficacy through educational, organizational, and career development programs to better prepare them for the transition from higher education to employment.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, rapid economic growth and development have significantly transformed labor market dynamics, affecting employment opportunities, job seekers, and workforce qualification requirements, while employment remains a fundamental necessity that enables individuals to sustain their livelihoods and fulfill their daily needs (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022). Nevertheless, a persistent mismatch remains between the competencies acquired by university graduates and the skills required by employers. This discrepancy suggests that successful labor market integration depends not only on the acquisition of academic knowledge and technical competencies but also on the level of work readiness possessed by individuals. Accordingly, enhancing work readiness has become a critical concern in higher education, as it plays a pivotal role in enabling graduates to effectively adapt to and compete within a dynamic and highly competitive employment landscape (Makki et al., 2023).

Work readiness is a critical factor for organizations operating in a globally interconnected environment, as it enables employees to effectively respond to evolving opportunities and challenges (Deswarta et al., 2024). Work readiness represents a developmental stage in which students begin to perceive themselves as capable of entering the professional workforce (Nasution & Daulay, 2025). Work-ready individuals are typically characterized by psychological maturity and the possession of relevant experiences that facilitate their successful adaptation to social and professional environments (Nurbaiti & Putri, 2024). Work readiness reflects an individual's level of preparedness for employment, encompassing the knowledge, skills, competencies, and professional dispositions needed to adapt to workplace demands, perform effectively, and enhance career outcomes (Makki et al., 2023). This reflects a state of readiness characterized by adequate

DOI: 10.65246

preparation to achieve optimal performance outcomes and engage effectively in collaborative professional environments (Wiguna & Saragih, 2025).

Universities play a crucial role in producing competent graduates through the development of knowledge, skills, and character (Anisa & Sa'adah, 2025). Nevertheless, many graduates continue to face difficulties in meeting the qualifications demanded by employers, highlighting a persistent gap between higher education outcomes and workforce requirements (Nurbaiti & Putri, 2024). However, challenges related to graduates' work readiness persist, as university education tends to emphasize theoretical learning rather than practical experiences aligned with labor market demands, potentially creating a gap between graduates' competencies and industry expectations (Anisa & Sa'adah, 2025). Similar challenges are evident at Universitas Siliwangi, particularly among undergraduate students who are required to develop the competencies and preparedness necessary to meet the demands of a dynamic and competitive employment environment. University students face increasing challenges in preparing for the transition from higher education to the workforce. As labor market competition continues to intensify, work readiness has become an essential factor in enhancing graduates' ability to obtain and maintain employment. Furthermore, the relatively high unemployment rate among university graduates suggests that academic achievement alone is insufficient for successful labor market integration; rather, it must be supported by adequate *work readiness*, encompassing knowledge, skills, professional attitudes, and psychological preparedness to meet workplace demands.

Previous research has highlighted the significant role of *soft skills* and *self-efficacy* in improving work readiness. Research by Rahmadani and Mardalis (2022), Deswarta et al. (2024), Mahesi and Wasskito (2026) demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of *soft skills* and *self-efficacy* exhibit greater preparedness to adapt to workplace demands and successfully enter the workforce. Previous research conducted by Rahmadani & Mardalis (2022) has been limited in providing a comprehensive explanation of the factors influencing work readiness. To address this gap, the present study incorporates *career exploration* as an additional variable, as it enables individuals to gain a better understanding of career opportunities, job requirements, and the competencies needed to enhance their work readiness.

As labor market competition continues to intensify in the era of globalization, employers increasingly seek graduates who possess both technical expertise and soft skills, as these competencies are essential for achieving professional success and adapting to dynamic workplace environments (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). Employers increasingly seek graduates who possess strong interpersonal competencies, including communication, teamwork, and leadership, as these skills are essential for effectively responding to workplace demands (Mahesi & Wasskito, 2026). Soft skills encompass a range of non-technical competencies, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, and self-management, which facilitate effective workplace interactions and contribute significantly to an individual's work readiness, career development, and long-term professional success (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022). Soft skills play an important role in enhancing work readiness, as individuals with strong communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and time management abilities tend to be better prepared to meet workplace demands and successfully transition into the labor market (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). Beyond technical expertise, employers increasingly value interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, as these attributes are essential for effective job performance and long-term career development (Febriyana et al., 2023).

Students often experience low levels of *self-efficacy* when preparing to enter the workforce, which may result from limited experience and inadequate preparation (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in their ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to accomplish specific tasks and attain desired outcomes (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022). Such beliefs influence behavioral patterns, effort, perseverance, and problem-solving abilities, thereby playing a significant role in improving work readiness and overall performance in professional settings (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022). Students with higher levels of *self-efficacy* tend to be more motivated to achieve their goals and are better equipped to cope with workplace challenges (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). Individuals with high self-efficacy are more

DOI: 10.65246

likely to approach challenges positively, persist in difficult situations, and effectively manage their responsibilities, all of which contribute to greater work readiness (Febriyana et al., 2023).

Traditionally, career exploration has been regarded as a crucial component of the school-to-work transition and an important stage in individual career development (Zikic & Douglas, 2009). Career exploration refers to the exploration of the environment and the self with the aim of gathering career-related information (Kleine et al., 2021) . Career exploration is recognized as a critical predictor of students' work readiness, as it enables individuals to acquire a deeper understanding of career opportunities, labor market expectations, and occupational requirements (Sulistiyo, 2023). Career exploration is the process of seeking and evaluating information about careers, job opportunities, and occupational requirements to support career decision-making and improve work readiness (Makki et al., 2023). Thorough career exploration is essential, as it equips students with the knowledge and preparedness needed to face future workplace challenges and uncertainties (Sulistiyo, 2023). Career exploration enables individuals to develop a deeper understanding of their personal characteristics and the occupational environment, facilitating a better alignment between their interests, abilities, and workplace demands (Lee et al., 2023). Furthermore, career exploration helps students align their competencies with workplace demands, thereby enhancing their confidence and preparedness for the transition from higher education to employment (Sulistiyo, 2023). By increasing students' understanding of career options, workplace expectations, and occupational demands, career exploration contributes significantly to the development of work readiness (Taylor et al., 2026).Thorough career exploration is essential, as it equips students with the knowledge and preparedness needed to face future workplace challenges and uncertainties (Sulistiyo, 2023).

Previous research examining the roles of *soft skills* and *self-efficacy* in shaping work readiness has yielded inconclusive results. While Rahmadani and Mardalis (2022), Deswarta et al. (2024), Mahesi and Wasskito (2026) reported a positive and significant effect of *soft skills* on work readiness, Nurbaiti and Putri (2024) found no significant relationship between the two variables. Likewise, findings regarding *self-efficacy* remain inconsistent, Mahesi and Wasskito (2026) identified a significant positive effect on work readiness, whereas Ratuela et al. (2022) reported no significant influence. These contradictory findings highlight the existence of a research gap and indicate the need for further investigation into the effects of *soft skills* and *self-efficacy* on work readiness.

Previous research has reported inconsistent findings regarding the effects of soft skills and self-efficacy on work readiness. In addition, limited research has examined the combined role of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration in explaining work readiness among undergraduate students. This research aims to analyze the effects of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration on work readiness among undergraduate students.

1. Does soft skills significantly affect work readiness?
2. Does self-efficacy significantly affect work readiness?
3. Does career exploration significantly affect work readiness?
4. Do soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration simultaneously affect work readiness?

Theoretically, this research enriches the work readiness literature by integrating soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration into a single research framework. Practically, the findings provide insights for universities in designing learning and career development programs to enhance students' work readiness. The novelty of this research lies in incorporating career exploration alongside soft skills and self-efficacy to provide a more comprehensive explanation of work readiness among undergraduate students. Furthermore, this research addresses inconsistencies in previous findings regarding the determinants of work readiness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

2.1.1. Soft Skills

Hard skills and soft skills constitute two fundamental categories of competencies, where hard skills represent technical expertise in specific disciplines and soft skills encompass interpersonal, organizational, and collaborative abilities, both of which are essential determinants of graduates' success in adapting to professional and societal demands after completing their education (Dian et

DOI: 10.65246

al., 2023). Soft skills are intangible personal attributes and interpersonal competencies, including teamwork, integrity, communication, and adaptability, that significantly contribute to an individual's effectiveness and success in both professional and social environments (Dian et al., 2023). Soft skills facilitate effective interpersonal interactions, support the development of professional relationships, and enhance an individual's capacity to adapt to diverse workplace situations and organizational changes (Febriyana et al., 2023). Soft skills are influenced by intrinsic factors originating from within the individual, including self-esteem, which fosters a desire to achieve recognition, maintain personal prestige, and develop independence, as well as positive feelings and emotional states that encourage interest, enthusiasm, and constructive behavior in various activities (Dian et al., 2023).

2.1.2. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to effectively perform tasks, overcome challenges, and achieve desired outcomes through the efficient and appropriate use of their skills, knowledge, and efforts (Dian et al., 2023). *Self-efficacy* refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully accomplish specific tasks and is considered an important factor influencing work readiness (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). Self-efficacy represents an individual's belief in their competence to perform specific tasks, manage challenging situations, and achieve targeted goals through effective effort and perseverance (Mahesi & Wasskito, 2026). Self-efficacy strengthens individuals' confidence in their ability to accomplish tasks and achieve career goals, thereby enhancing their preparedness for workplace demands (Febriyana et al., 2023). Self-efficacy is developed through four primary sources: mastery experience, which arises from personal successes and failures that shape an individual's confidence in performing tasks; vicarious experience, which is gained by observing the achievements or failures of others with similar capabilities; verbal persuasion, which involves encouragement, guidance, and positive feedback that strengthen an individual's belief in their abilities; and physiological states, whereby physical and emotional conditions influence how individuals evaluate their competence and capacity to perform effectively in various situations (Dian et al., 2023).

2.1.3. Career Exploration

Exploration is defined as "the process of eliciting and sustaining one's interest in an environment, thereby encouraging exploration and the acquisition of valuable new knowledge (Jiang et al., 2019). Career exploration can be defined as a continuous process of self-development through which students seek to identify career opportunities that align with their interests and aspirations (Sulistiyo, 2023). Career exploration refers to a lifelong process of seeking and evaluating information about oneself and the environment to facilitate career planning and decision-making (Zikic & Douglas, 2009). Career exploration is defined as purposive behavior and cognitions that afford access to information about occupations, jobs, or organizations that was not previously in the stimulus field (Stumpf et al., 1983). It assists students in making informed career decisions before graduation by encouraging them to explore various occupational alternatives, gather career-related information, resolve career concerns, and develop a deeper understanding of the world of work (Sulistiyo, 2023). Furthermore, lecturers play an important role in guiding students throughout the career exploration process and supporting their transition into employment (Sulistiyo, 2023).

Career exploration enables individuals to acquire and process career-related information, helping them identify suitable career paths, make informed career decisions, and prepare for their future careers (Haenggli et al., 2025). Career exploration can be categorized into self-exploration and environmental exploration, where self-exploration focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of one's interests, abilities, career goals, and skill requirements, while environmental exploration involves obtaining information about career opportunities and workplace conditions through interaction with external sources and professional environments (Lee et al., 2023).

2.1.4. Work Readiness

Work readiness refers to an individual's preparedness to enter and perform effectively in the workplace, characterized by an understanding of job requirements, the ability to meet professional

DOI: 10.65246

standards, a positive attitude toward work, motivation to comply with organizational rules, responsible behavior, the capacity to accept occupational risks, and effective problem-solving skills in addressing work-related challenges (Dian et al., 2023). Work readiness can be defined as the extent to which individuals possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavioral competencies required to adapt to workplace demands and perform their job duties effectively and productively (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022). Work readiness reflects an individual's physical, mental, and emotional preparedness to enter the labor market (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). Work readiness can be conceptualized as the extent to which individuals possess the competencies, professional attitudes, and psychological preparedness necessary to adapt to and perform effectively within the workforce (Mahesi & Wasskito, 2026). Students who demonstrate a high level of work readiness are generally more likely to possess a clear understanding of their intended career paths and future professional goals (Nasution & Daulay, 2025). Work readiness is influenced by several key factors, including understanding, which enables individuals to assess situations, anticipate outcomes, and make appropriate decisions; skills, which support the effective performance of job-related tasks; self-efficacy, which reflects confidence in one's ability to overcome challenges and achieve success; and metacognitive abilities, which facilitate problem-solving, self-regulation, and the effective application of cognitive resources in workplace situations (Dian et al., 2023).

2.2. Review of Empirical Studies

Research on career exploration has also demonstrated its importance in supporting career development and employment preparation. Sulistiyo (2023), Makki et al. (2023), and Lee et al. (2023) reported that career exploration enhances students' understanding of career opportunities, occupational requirements, and future career planning. Nevertheless, most previous research examined career exploration separately or alongside limited variables, leaving insufficient evidence regarding its role when combined with soft skills and self-efficacy in explaining work readiness. In addition, much of the existing research focused on specific disciplines or institutions, limiting the generalizability of the findings across broader student populations.

2.3. Identification of the Research Gap

Despite extensive research on work readiness, several gaps remain. First, previous findings concerning the effects of soft skills and self-efficacy on work readiness have been inconsistent, indicating the need for further empirical verification. Second, although career exploration has been recognized as an important career development factor, limited research has simultaneously examined soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration within a single integrated framework. Third, most previous research has focused on specific educational settings, while empirical evidence from undergraduate students in Indonesian universities, particularly at Universitas Siliwangi, remains limited.

Therefore, this research addresses these gaps by examining the effects of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration on work readiness among undergraduate students at Universitas Siliwangi. By integrating these variables into a single model, this research provides a more comprehensive explanation of work readiness and contributes additional empirical evidence to the higher education and employability literature.

2.4. Development of the Conceptual Framework

This section discusses the main variables examined in this research, namely soft skills, self-efficacy, career exploration, and work readiness. The discussion emphasizes the relationships among these variables based on previous empirical research and relevant theoretical perspectives, providing the foundation for hypothesis development.

DOI: 10.65246

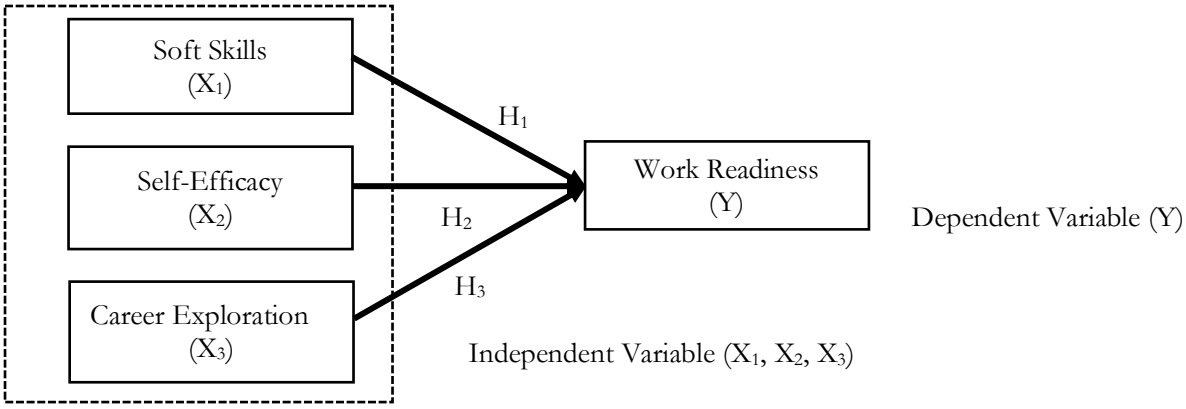


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the study.

2.5. Hypotheses or Research Propositions

2.5.1. Soft Skills and Work Readiness

Soft skills refer to non-technical competencies such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability. These competencies help individuals perform effectively in the workplace and enhance their work readiness. Previous research indicates that soft skills positively influence work readiness (Deswarta et al., 2024; Ismaya & Achmad, 2024).

H1: Soft skills have a significant effect on work readiness.

2.5.2. Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to perform tasks and overcome challenges. Individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to be more confident, motivated, and prepared to face workplace demands. Previous research has found that self-efficacy positively affects work readiness (Febriyana et al., 2023; Mahesi & Wasskito, 2026).

H2: Self-efficacy has a significant effect on work readiness.

2.5.3. Career Exploration and Work Readiness

Career exploration is the process of obtaining information about careers, work environments, and personal career interests. Through career exploration, students can better understand career opportunities and prepare for employment. Previous research suggests that career exploration contributes to work readiness (Sulistiyo, 2023; Makki et al., 2023).

H3: Career exploration has a significant effect on work readiness.

3. Research Methods

This research employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the effects of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration on work readiness among undergraduate students at Universitas Siliwangi. The methodology was designed to ensure alignment between the research objectives, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques used to test the proposed hypotheses.

3.1. Research Design

This research adopted a quantitative explanatory design using a cross-sectional survey approach. The design was selected because it enables the examination of relationships among variables and the testing of hypotheses based on empirical data collected at a single point in time.

3.2. Research Context and Setting

The research was conducted at Universitas Siliwangi, Indonesia. The university context was selected because undergraduate students are preparing for the transition from higher education to employment, making work readiness an important issue for investigation.

3.3. Population and Sample / Research Participants

The population consisted of active undergraduate students enrolled at Universitas Siliwangi. Respondents were selected using convenience sampling based on their willingness and availability to participate in the online survey.

Because the population size was unknown, the minimum sample size was determined using the

DOI: 10.65246

Lemeshow et al. (1990) formula with a 95% confidence level, p = 0.5, and a margin of error of 8%, resulting in a minimum requirement of 151 respondents. A total of 172 responses were collected. After excluding nine respondents from other universities and one inactive student, 162 valid responses were retained for analysis.

3.4. Data Sources and Data Collection

The research utilized primary data collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire gathered information related to the research variables as well as respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, study program, internship experience, organizational experience, freelance work experience, and participation in training or certification programs.

3.5. Measurement of Variables and Research Instruments

All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument consisted of 43 items, including 18 items for soft skills, 6 items for self-efficacy, 8 items for career exploration, and 11 items for work readiness. The total score for each variable was obtained by summing the responses to all relevant items.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using JASP and supported by Python (statsmodels). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions.

Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted, including tests of normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, linearity, and influential observations. Hypothesis testing was performed using t-tests for partial effects and the F-test for simultaneous effects at a significance level of 0.05. Additional analyses included Adjusted R^2, standardized beta coefficients, and effect size (f^2) calculations. Robust HC3 standard errors, weighted least squares (WLS), and bootstrap confidence intervals were used as sensitivity analyses.

3.7. Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Validity was assessed using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis between item scores and total scores. An item was considered valid when its correlation coefficient exceeded the critical value of r = 0.154.

Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. All variables demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Participation in this research was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and provided their consent before completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity of participant responses were maintained throughout the research process, and the collected data were used solely for academic purposes.

3.9. Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of several stages: (1) identifying the research problem and reviewing the literature, (2) developing the research instrument, (3) distributing the questionnaire, (4) collecting and screening the data, (5) testing the validity and reliability of the instrument, (6) conducting data analysis, and (7) interpreting and reporting the findings.

3.10. Methodological Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, data were collected from a single university, which may restrict the applicability of the results to other educational contexts. Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal relationships to be established. Finally, all variables were measured using self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings of the research on the effects of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration on work readiness among undergraduate students. The results subsection reports the outcomes of the statistical analyses objectively, while the discussion subsection interprets the findings by relating them to relevant theories and previous research. Through this

DOI: 10.65246

approach, the research findings are expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the determinants of work readiness and contribute to the existing literature on graduate employability and career development.

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1 Sample Description and Descriptive Statistics

a. Respondent Characteristics

The respondents consisted of 162 active students of Universitas Siliwangi. The majority were female (63.6%) and enrolled in the Management Study Program (74.1%). Approximately 59% of the respondents had never participated in an internship, while nearly half (49.4%) reported having organizational experience of more than three months (Table 1).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (n = 162)

Characteristic	Category	f	%q
Gender	Female	103	63.6
	Male	59	36.4
Study Program	Management	120	74.1
	Development Economics	15	9.3
	Digital Banking and Finance	10	6.2
	Other study programs (10 programs)	17	10.5
Internship Experience	None	96	59.3
	Less than 3 months	37	22.8
	More than 3 months	29	17.9
Organizational Experience	None	53	32.7
	Less than 3 months	29	17.9
	More than 3 months	80	49.4
Freelance Experience	None	98	60.5
	Previous experience	49	30.2
	Currently engaged	15	9.3
Training/Seminar/Certification Participation	None	77	47.5
	1–2 times	59	36.4
	More than 3 times	26	16.0

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

b. Descriptive Statistics, Validity, and Reliability

The average per item of the four variables was in the high to very high category, with career exploration being the lowest (3.83). All items on all four instruments were valid, with the smallest calculated r of 0.478 (X3) and all above the table r of 0.154. Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged from 0.821–0.907, so all instruments were reliable (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, validity, and reliability of instruments

Variable	Item	Average (SD) total score	Average per item (category)	Range r calculation	Alpha
Soft skill (X1)	18	76,57 (8,23)	4.25 (very high)	0,511–0,719	0,907
Self-efficacy (X2)	6	25,23 (3,53)	4.21 (very high)	0,625–0,787	0,821

DOI: 10.65246

Variable	Item	Average (SD) total score	Average per item (category)	Range r calculation	Alpha
Career Exploration (X3)	8	30,60 (5,00)	3.83 (height)	0,478–0,814	0,847
Work readiness (Y)	11	46,93 (5,75)	4.27 (very high)	0,495–0,826	0,895

Note
all items are valid (r count > r table 0.154; n = 162).

4.1.2. Data Quality and Preliminary Analysis

a. Classic Assumption Test

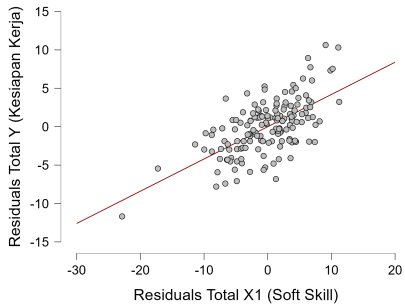
Normally distributed residuals (Shapiro-Wilk, 1996) W = 0.993; p = 0.615; skewness 0.01; kurtosis −0.03), and the Q-Q plot follows a diagonal line. Partial regression plots show uncurving linear relationships for all three predictors (Figure 3); lines on the career exploration plots are almost flat. No multicollinearity was found: tolerance 0.393–0.559 and VIF 1.790–2.545 (Table 6). The highest condition index was 34.9 (Table 3), but no dimension containing two variables with a proportion of variance above 0.50 so there was no indication of serious collinearity problems according to the criteria of Belsley et al. (1980). No standardized residuals exceeded ±3 and the maximum Cook (1977) distance was only 0.087.

Table 3. Collinearity diagnostics (eigenvalues, condition indexes, and proportions of variance)

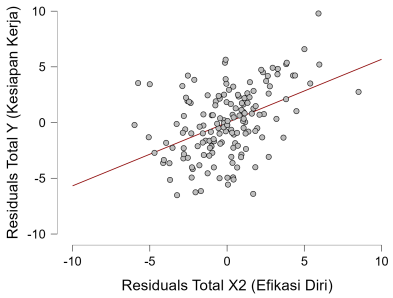
Dimensions	Own value	Condition index	Constant	Soft skill (X1)	Self-efficacy (X2)	Career Exploration (X3)
1	3,975	1,000	0,001	0,000	0,001	0,001
2	0,013	17,40	0,376	0,004	0,000	0,606
3	0,009	21,61	0,290	0,007	0,588	0,301
4	0,003	34,87	0,333	0,989	0,411	0,092

Note: in each dimension with a high condition index, only one predictor has a proportion of variance above 0.50. Source: JASP output.

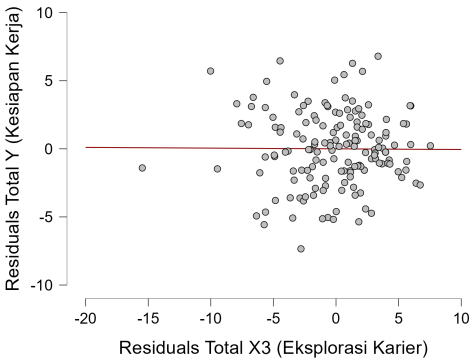
Source: JASP output, processed primary data.



(a) Soft skill (X1)



(b) Self-efficacy (X2)



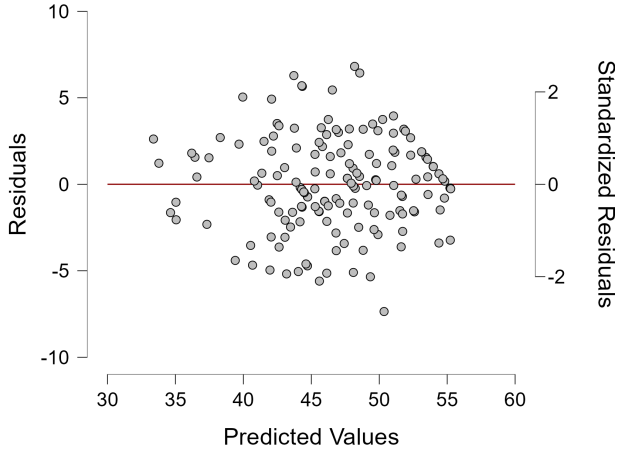
(c) Career exploration (X3)

DOI: 10.65246

Source: JASP output, processed primary data.

Fig. 3. Partial regression of the work readiness plot for each predictor

In heteroscedasticity, the residual scatterplot to the prediction value did not show a clear funnel pattern (Figure 3). However, formal tests indicated that the error variance was not constant: Breusch and Pagan (1979) LM = 11.63 (p = 0.009), White (1980) LM = 25.16 (p = 0.003), and Glejser were significant in career exploration (p = 0.001) but not in soft skills (p = 0.396) or self-efficacy (p = 0.631). Therefore the regression results were confirmed with the standard error HC3 (Table 7).



Source: JASP output, processed primary data.

Fig. 4. Residual plot to the predicted value

4.1.3. Main Analytical Results

a. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

A summary of the model is presented in Table 4. A model with three predictors (M_1) yields R = 0.886, R^2 = 0.784, and adjusted R^2 = 0.780, with an RMSE of 2.695, much smaller than the model's RMSE without a predictor (M_0) of 5.748. That is, the three independent variables together explain about 78% of the variation in job readiness.

Table 4. Model summary (bound variable: work readiness)

Models	R	R^2	R^2 customized	RMSE	R^2 Changes	db1	db2	p
M_0	0,000	0,000	0,000	5,748	0,000	0	161	–
M_1	0,886	0,784	0,780	2,695	0,784	3	158	< 0.001

Note: M_0 contains intercepts only; M_1 contains soft skills (X1), self-efficacy (X2), and career exploration (X3). Source: JASP output.

Source: JASP output, processed primary data.

The simultaneous tests in Table 5 show a significant model, F(3, 158) = 191.5; p < 0.001, so H4 is accepted. The center square of the regression (1391) far exceeds the residual center square (7.263).

Table 5. Simultaneous test results (ANOVA)

Source of variation	Number of squares	db	Center square	F	p
Regression	4172	3	1391	191,5	< 0.001
Residual	1148	158	7,263		
Total	5319	161			

Note: work readiness bound variables; X1, X2, and X3 predictors. Source: JASP output.

Source: JASP output, processed primary data.

DOI: 10.65246

The results of the partial test and collinearity statistics are presented in Table 6. Based on the non-standardized coefficient, the regression equation obtained is

$$Y = 0.605 + 0.420\ X_1 + 0.568\ X_2 - 0.005\ X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Based on the multiple linear regression analysis, the resulting regression equation is $Y = 0.6053 + 0.4199X_1 + 0.5676X_2 - 0.005X_3 + \varepsilon$. The constant value of 0.6053 indicates that if all independent variables (X_1, X_2, and X_3) are equal to zero, the predicted value of the dependent variable (Y) will be at this baseline level. The regression coefficient for X_1 of $+0.4199$ denotes a positive direct relationship, meaning that every one-unit increase in X_1 will increase Y by 0.4199, assuming all other variables remain constant (*ceteris paribus*). An even stronger positive effect is shown by X_2 with a coefficient of $+0.5676$, indicating that increases in X_2 yield the largest upward adjustment in Y. Conversely, X_3 exhibits a negative coefficient of -0.005, signifying an inverse relationship where every one-unit increase in X_3 leads to a slight decrease of 0.005 in Y.

Table 6. Regression coefficients and collinearity statistics

Models	Predictors	B	OR	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	Intersep	46,93	0,452	–	103,9	< 0.001	–	–
M_1	Constant	0,605	1,990	–	0,304	0,761	–	–
	Soft skill (X1)	0,420	0,041	0,602	10,21	< 0.001	0,393	2,545
	Self-efficacy (X2)	0,568	0,090	0,348	6,287	< 0.001	0,445	2,248
	Career Exploration (X3)	−0.005	0,057	−0.005	−0.091	0,927	0,559	1,790

Note: B = non-standardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized coefficient. Zero-order correlation with work readiness: X1 = 0.853; X2 = 0.785; X3 = 0.586. Source: JASP output.

Source: JASP output, processed primary data.

Because formal tests indicated heteroscedasticity, results were confirmed with HC3, *weighted least squares* (WLS), and bootstrap standard errors (Table 7). The entire approach yielded the same conclusions: soft skills and self-efficacy were significant, whereas career exploration was not, and only the career exploration bootstrap confidence interval covered zero.

Table 7. Sensitivity analysis to heteroscedasticity

Predictors	SE HC3	p HC3	B (WLS)	p (WLS)	95% bootstrap trust interval
Soft skill (X1)	0,046	< 0.001	0,433	< 0.001	[0,327; 0,505]
Self-efficacy (X2)	0,110	< 0.001	0,537	< 0.001	[0,366; 0,782]
Career Exploration (X3)	0,060	0,932	−0.005	0,930	[−0.118; 0.112]

Note: HC3 = robust standard error against heteroscedasticity; WLS with weights of residual absolute value regression; bootstrap 5,000 samples. The analysis was run with Python (statsmodels) on the same dataset.

Source: JASP output, processed primary data.

4.1.4. Hypothesis Testing Results / Key Findings

The hypothesis testing results were evaluated using the estimated regression coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and simultaneous F-test. The findings for each predictor and the overall regression model are summarized as follows.

Soft skills and work readiness. Soft skills had a positive and statistically significant relationship with work readiness (B = 0.420; β = 0.602; t = 10.21; p < 0.001). The HC3 and WLS analyses also confirmed the statistical significance of this relationship. The 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranged from 0.327 to 0.505 and did not include zero. Thus, soft skills were a significant positive predictor of work readiness.

Self-efficacy and work readiness. Self-efficacy also had a positive and statistically significant relationship with work readiness (B = 0.568; β =

DOI: 10.65246

0.348; t = 6.287; p < 0.001). This relationship remained statistically significant in the HC3 and WLS analyses. The 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranged from 0.366 to 0.782 and did not include zero. Therefore, self-efficacy was a significant positive predictor of work readiness.

Career exploration and work readiness. Career exploration had a negative but statistically nonsignificant relationship with work readiness (B = −0.005; β = −0.005; t = −0.091; p = 0.927). The sensitivity analyses produced consistent results, with p-values of 0.932 for HC3 and 0.930 for WLS. The 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranged from −0.118 to 0.112 and included zero. Accordingly, career exploration was not a statistically significant predictor of work readiness in the estimated model.

Simultaneous effects of the independent variables. The overall regression model was statistically significant, F(3, 158) = 191.5, p < 0.001, with R^2 = 0.784 and adjusted R^2 = 0.780. These findings indicate that soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration jointly explained 78.4% of the observed variation in work readiness. In accordance with the original hypothesis designation, H4 was supported.

Overall, the results identified soft skills and self-efficacy as statistically significant positive predictors of work readiness. Career exploration did not demonstrate a statistically significant partial relationship with work readiness. Nevertheless, the simultaneous test indicated that the three-predictor model was statistically significant.

4.2. Research Discussion

The results of the analysis showed that the three independent variables simultaneously explained 78.4% of the variation in student job readiness, with soft skills as the dominant predictor, self-efficacy as the second predictor, and career exploration without unique contributions. Work readiness in this study is understood as a multidimensional construct that includes skills, personal and social competencies, and psychological readiness to function in the workplace (Caballero et al., 2011; Peersia et al., 2024). Therefore, it is natural that the predictors that are closest to personal-social competence (soft skills) and self-confidence (self-efficacy) show the strongest relationship. The average per point of the four variables is in the high to very high category (3.83–4.27), so the following findings represent students who generally consider themselves to be quite prepared.

4.2.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

a. The Effect of Soft Skills on Work Readiness

Soft skills had a positive and significant effect on Work readiness with the highest standardized coefficient (β = 0.602; f^2 = 0.66), so H1 was accepted. These findings are consistent with a number of studies on Indonesian students. Hulu (2020) through multiple linear regression in 96 Business Education students of the State University of Medan reported that soft skills had a positive and significant effect on job readiness. Syifa et al. (2023) on 139 students of the Faculty of Economics, State University of Jakarta, also concluded that soft skills and self-efficacy had a positive and significant effect. At the international level, Teng et al. (2019), as referred to by Ingsih and Suhana (2023) , reported a significant relationship between various soft skills and graduates' readiness to enter the job market in 361 students in China and Malaysia.

Conceptually, these results are in line with the view that graduate employability is not solely determined by academic knowledge, but also by individual attributes and context (Clarke, 2018). A comparative study of the perceptions of students and employers shows that non-technical skills such as communication, commitment, and teamwork are considered important in increasing job opportunities (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Within that framework, students who assess their communication, cooperation, and self-management skills are more likely to feel better prepared to face the demands of the world of work.

However, these findings need to be read together with non-uniform evidence. Ingsih and Suhana (2023), with multiple linear regression on 185 students in Semarang, found that only part of the soft skill dimensions (lifelong learning, teamwork, leadership, and creativity at the level of 10%) had a significant effect, while problem-solving, communication, and ethics did not. Kristiana et al. (2025) in 100 final year students of Palangka Raya University even reported that soft skills did not have a direct effect on Work readiness (β = 0.044; p = 0.607), but had an indirect effect through self-efficacy. The difference can come from the model specifications: this study uses a total soft skill score and does not model mediation, so that the influence

DOI: 10.65246

of soft skills that work through self-efficacy is absorbed into the direct coefficient. This conjecture is in line with the high correlation between soft skills and self-efficacy in the data of this study (r = 0.731), but needs to be tested with a mediation model in the next study.

Soft skills have become a critical factor in enhancing graduates' employability and career success, as they enable individuals to communicate effectively, collaborate with others, adapt to change, and solve workplace problems (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). Consequently, employers increasingly regard soft skills as essential competencies for achieving sustainable professional performance in a dynamic work environment (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024). The development of soft skills contributes to the enhancement of both personal and professional competencies, thereby strengthening an individual's preparedness for successful labor market participation (Febriyana et al., 2023). Soft skills play a critical role in bridging academic knowledge and professional expectations by enhancing social adaptability, effective communication, workplace adjustment, productivity, and professional behavior (Mahesi & Wasskito, 2026). Soft skills encompass a range of non-technical competencies, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, responsibility, and self-management, which enable individuals to interact effectively with others and enhance their work readiness (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022).

b. The Effect of Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness

Self-efficacy had a positive and significant effect on Work readiness (β = 0.348; f^2 = 0.25), so H2 was accepted. These results are in line with the theory of self-efficacy that places confidence in one's own abilities as a determinant of effort and persistence (Bandura, 1977) as well as with the social cognitive theory of career (Lent et al., 1994; Betz & Hackett, 2006). Recent empirical findings support this direction. Significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and Work readiness in 154 final year students in Surabaya (r = 0.579). Yunita et al. (2026) on 321 students in Tangerang found that career self-efficacy had a positive and significant effect on Work readiness (estimate = 0.615; p < 0.001). Kristiana et al. (2025) placed self-efficacy as the strongest determinant of Work readiness (β = 0.589), and studies on final semester students in Indonesia reported the same direction (Diah Baiti et al., 2017; Erliana & Rozana, 2022).

There are two notes. First, self-efficacy has a smaller standardized coefficient than soft skills in this study, in contrast to Kristiana et al. (2025) who found self-efficacy to be more dominant. These differences can be related to differences in operationalization, sample size, and model specifications (models with mediated channels), so the comparison of the coefficient between studies must be done carefully. This suggests that the role of self-efficacy depends on model specifications, not that the relationship is non-existent.

The mechanism that is often proposed is self-efficacy of work as a psychological resource that transforms competencies and experiences into career preparation actions. This pattern was also found in other results: self-efficacy of career decisions mediated the influence of career emotional intelligence and self-esteem on career adaptability (Hamzah et al., 2021) as well as the influence of peer support on career adaptability (Salim et al., 2023), and self-efficacy mediated part of the relationship between organizational activeness and Work readiness (Adriansyah et al., 2024). In this sample, 49.4% of respondents had more than three months of organizational experience, which theoretically was a source of mastery experience for self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), although this study did not examine this relationship.

Self-efficacy reflects an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks, overcome challenges, and achieve desired outcomes. Higher levels of self-efficacy foster confidence, persistence, and effective problem-solving abilities, which contribute positively to work readiness (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022). Strong self-efficacy fosters confidence in competing within the labor market, thereby enhancing individuals' ability to adapt to professional environments and workplace challenges (Febriyana et al., 2023). Self-efficacy positively influences work readiness, indicating that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to be better prepared to enter the workforce (Febriyana et al., 2023). Individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to demonstrate greater work readiness, as strong self-belief enhances motivation, persistence, and preparedness to face the demands of the labor market. Therefore, self-efficacy is expected to have a

DOI: 10.65246

positive effect on work readiness (Ismaya & Achmad, 2024).

c. The Effect of Career Exploration on Work Readiness

Career exploration had no significant effect on Work readiness after soft skills and self-efficacy were controlled (β = −0.005; p = 0.927; 95% bootstrap confidence interval [−0.118; 0.112]), so H3 was rejected. This result needs to be distinguished from the statement that career exploration is not related to job readiness. The zero-order correlation of the two is quite strong (r = 0.586), but career exploration is highly correlated with soft skills (r = 0.644) and self-efficacy (r = 0.581). Once the two predictors were included in the model, the unique contribution was almost zero. A VIF value of 1.79 indicates that the estimate is not distorted by multicollinearity, but rather that the career exploration information largely overlaps with the other two predictors. Career exploration within the framework of Stumpf et al. (1983) is a behavior of seeking information about oneself and the work environment, so it is natural that this behavior goes hand in hand with one's self-confidence and competencies.

Several alternative explanations can be proposed as hypotheses for further research. First, career exploration is likely to work indirectly. The social cognitive model of career management positions the self-efficacy of exploration as a precursor to exploratory actions and career decision outcomes, and Nauta (2024) found that such mediating pathways are supported for self-exploration but not for environmental exploration. Su et al. (2024) in 421 college students in Guangdong also reported that the effect of career exploration on *career calling* was mediated by the self-efficacy of career decision-making. If a similar pattern were applicable to job readiness, the effect of career exploration would be captured on the path to self-efficacy, rather than on the direct path to job readiness. Second, the total score of career exploration does not distinguish self-exploration from environmental exploration, so the effect of one can be covered by the other. Fourth, *cross-sectional* design cannot capture the time lag between exploration and readiness formation.

There is one technical note. The formal test showed an indication of heteroscedasticity and the Glejser (1969) test was significant in career exploration. However, the standard errors of HC3, WLS, and bootstrap produced the same conclusion, so the insignificance of the career exploration did not appear to be an artifact of assumption violation.

The college years represent a critical period in emerging adulthood during which students establish career goals and explore potential career pathway (Kleine et al., 2021). However, selecting a career path and developing a coherent career identity can be a challenging process. Career exploration is a process through which individuals gather information about (Kleine et al., 2021) themselves and their environment to facilitate career decision-making (Stumpf et al., 1983). The process involves exploring personal characteristics and occupational opportunities, determining how and how frequently exploration is conducted, and focusing on specific career alternatives to achieve career goals (Stumpf et al., 1983). Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) suggests that individual characteristics and environmental factors influence career-related expectations, encouraging individuals to engage in career exploration and establish career goals (Lent et al., 1994). Career exploration involves both self-exploration and environmental exploration, enabling individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their professional interests, competencies, and career opportunities (Fu et al., 2026). Through active engagement in career exploration activities, students gain greater awareness of their interests, strengths, and professional aspirations, which facilitates informed career decision-making and career planning (Sulistiyo, 2023). By enhancing self-understanding and knowledge of career opportunities, career exploration enables individuals to establish meaningful career goals and prepare for future career development (Zikic & Douglas, 2009). Individuals who actively engage in career exploration are better equipped to make informed career choices, successfully enter the workforce, and adapt to their selected career paths (Lee et al., 2023). Career exploration enables individuals to gain valuable insights, experiences, and competencies that support future career development (Taylor et al., 2026). Consequently, students who actively explore career options are more likely to exhibit higher levels of work readiness compared to those with limited career exploration experiences (Sulistiyo, 2023). Career exploration enhances students' work readiness by helping them understand their personal

DOI: 10.65246

potential, develop career plans, improve career decision-making, and strengthen the knowledge, skills, and confidence required for successful entry into the workforce (Nasution & Daulay, 2025).

4.2.2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings broadly align with previous research identifying soft skills and self-efficacy as important correlates of students' work readiness. The positive and significant relationship between soft skills and work readiness is consistent with Hulu (2020) and Syifa et al. (2023), as well as the international evidence reported by Teng et al. (2019), as cited in Ingsih & Suhana, 2023). The present study extends this pattern by showing that soft skills remained a significant predictor when self-efficacy and career exploration were included in the same regression model.

At the same time, the findings differ from studies demonstrating that the relationship between soft skills and work readiness varies across dimensions or operates indirectly. Ingsih and Suhana (2023) found that only some soft-skill dimensions were significant, whereas Kristiana et al. (2025) identified an indirect relationship through self-efficacy rather than a significant direct effect. The present study's use of an aggregate soft-skill score and a regression model without an explicit mediation pathway may help explain these differences. Nevertheless, the proposed explanation requires further empirical testing.

The positive relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness is consistent with Yunita et al. (2026), Diah Baiti et al. (2017), and Erliana and Rozana (2022). However, the relative importance of self-efficacy differs from the results reported by Kristiana et al. (2025), who identified it as the strongest determinant. This contrast indicates that the relative predictive contribution of soft skills and self-efficacy may vary across samples, measurement approaches, and model specifications.

The finding for career exploration requires a more differentiated comparison. Previous studies have associated career exploration with career decision-making, career calling, and broader career development outcomes (Nauta, 2024; Su et al., 2024). Other studies emphasize its role in career planning and preparation for workforce entry (Lee et al., 2023; Nasution & Daulay, 2025; Sulistiyo, 2023). However, these relationships do not necessarily imply that career exploration must have a significant independent direct effect on work readiness after other related variables are controlled. The present result therefore adds a qualification to the existing evidence: the relevance of career exploration may depend on the outcome being examined and the other explanatory variables included in the analytical model.

Overall, the study supports the importance of soft skills and self-efficacy while indicating that the direct contribution of career exploration should not be assumed to be statistically significant in every model. These comparisons position the findings within the existing literature without treating differences across studies as direct contradictions when their constructs and analytical specifications may differ.

4.2.3. Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the understanding of work readiness by examining soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration simultaneously. The overall model explained 78.4% of the variation in work readiness, demonstrating that the selected predictors jointly accounted for a substantial proportion of the observed differences among respondents.

First, the significant positive coefficient for soft skills reinforces the relevance of individual and interpersonal competencies to work readiness. This finding is consistent with the broader understanding of employability as involving more than academic knowledge and technical qualifications (Clarke, 2018). It also supports the relevance of nontechnical competencies emphasized in research on student and employer perceptions of employability (Succi & Canovi, 2020). The study therefore provides empirical evidence that soft skills retain a significant relationship with work readiness when considered alongside self-efficacy and career exploration.

Second, the positive and significant coefficient for self-efficacy supports the relevance of self-efficacy theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory to the study of work readiness (Bandura, 1977; Betz & Hackett, 2006; Lent et al., 1994). The findings indicate that perceived capability is associated with work readiness beyond the contribution of soft skills and career exploration. However, the study does not directly test the psychological mechanisms proposed by these theories. Its contribution is therefore empirical support for the relevance of self-efficacy,

DOI: 10.65246

rather than a comprehensive test of the underlying theoretical processes.

Third, the nonsignificant direct coefficient for career exploration provides a qualification to explanations that associate exploratory career behavior with greater preparedness for employment. The findings do not invalidate career exploration as a career development construct. Rather, they indicate that its unique contribution may be limited when related competencies and psychological beliefs are included in the same model. This result raises the possibility that the relationship between career exploration and work readiness may involve indirect pathways, differences between exploration dimensions, or temporal processes that cannot be identified using the current regression specification.

Finally, the study highlights the value of distinguishing between bivariate relationships and unique predictive contributions. Career exploration was positively correlated with work readiness, yet its regression coefficient was not statistically significant after soft skills and self-efficacy were controlled. This distinction helps clarify why a variable can remain relevant at the conceptual level while failing to demonstrate a significant independent contribution within a multivariable model.

4.2.4. Practical and Policy Implications

The findings have implications for universities, study programs, career development units, and students preparing to enter the workforce. Because soft skills and self-efficacy were significant positive predictors of work readiness, interventions that strengthen these competencies may be useful components of university career preparation initiatives.

First, universities should consider integrating soft-skill development into academic and extracurricular activities. Communication exercises, collaborative projects, presentations, teamwork, leadership opportunities, and structured problem-solving tasks can provide students with opportunities to practice competencies relevant to workplace participation. These activities should be designed to complement disciplinary knowledge rather than replace it.

Second, career development programs should incorporate activities that strengthen students' confidence in their ability to complete work-related tasks. Practical assignments, supervised projects, internships, simulations, and constructive feedback may provide opportunities for students to build confidence through successful task completion and reflection on their progress. Such activities are consistent with the relevance of self-efficacy to work readiness identified in this study.

Third, organizational involvement may offer opportunities to develop both soft skills and self-efficacy. In the present sample, 49.4% of respondents reported more than three months of organizational experience. Universities could therefore facilitate meaningful student participation in organizational projects, committee responsibilities, and collaborative activities. However, the present study did not directly establish that organizational experience increases self-efficacy or work readiness; these activities should be regarded as plausible development opportunities rather than interventions whose effectiveness has been demonstrated by this analysis.

Fourth, career exploration programs should continue to provide students with access to career information, self-assessment activities, employer engagement, and guidance on career planning. The nonsignificant direct coefficient does not justify discontinuing such programs. Instead, career services could integrate exploration activities with soft-skill development and confidence-building opportunities so that students can translate career information into practical preparation. The effectiveness of this integrated approach would need to be evaluated separately.

Finally, university administrators and policymakers should avoid assessing student employability exclusively through academic performance or participation in career exploration activities. A broader approach that considers interpersonal competencies, confidence in performing work-related tasks, and opportunities for practical application is more consistent with the pattern of findings observed in this study. Program evaluations should also distinguish between students' perceived readiness and their subsequent employment outcomes.

4.2.5. Integration with the Research Gap

The findings help address the research problem of understanding how different personal and career-related factors are associated with university students' work readiness when considered

DOI: 10.65246

within the same analytical model. Rather than examining soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration only as separate constructs, the present study evaluates their simultaneous relationships with work readiness and distinguishes their overall explanatory contribution from their individual regression coefficients.

The results demonstrate that soft skills and self-efficacy each retained a statistically significant positive relationship with work readiness after the other predictors were controlled. In contrast, career exploration did not demonstrate a significant unique contribution, despite its positive zero-order correlation with work readiness. This distinction provides a more differentiated understanding of the relationships among the three predictors and shows why conclusions based on separate bivariate associations may differ from those obtained in a multivariable regression model.

The study also contributes context-specific evidence from 162 active students at Universitas Siliwangi. Its findings indicate that soft skills and self-efficacy are important predictors within this sample, while the independent role of career exploration remains uncertain under the specified model. The comparison with previous studies further highlights differences in the relative importance of soft skills and self-efficacy and the possibility that career exploration operates through mechanisms not captured by a direct-effect regression model.

Accordingly, the study's contribution lies in clarifying the relative predictive roles of the three variables rather than establishing that career exploration is unimportant. The precise extent to which these findings resolve the research gap depends on the gap as explicitly formulated in the literature review. Further investigation using mediation models, separate measures of self-exploration and environmental exploration, and longitudinal observations could extend this contribution by examining mechanisms that the current analysis does not identify.

4.2.6. Acknowledgement of Study Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the respondents consisted of 162 active students from one university, Universitas Siliwangi. Consequently, the findings may not represent students from other universities, study programs, or educational contexts. The results should therefore be generalized cautiously beyond the population represented by the sample.

Second, the analysis relied on the measured scores of soft skills, self-efficacy, career exploration, and work readiness. Because the findings reflect the relationships captured by these measures, they do not necessarily represent every dimension of the underlying constructs. In particular, the aggregate career exploration score did not distinguish between self-exploration and environmental exploration, which may have different relationships with work readiness.

Third, the regression model examined the predictors' simultaneous and individual relationships with work readiness but did not explicitly test indirect effects. Consequently, the possibility that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between soft skills and work readiness, or that career exploration contributes through other career-related mechanisms, remains unresolved. The relatively strong correlations among the predictors provide a reason for further investigation but do not establish these mechanisms.

Fourth, the cross-sectional nature of the analysis limits conclusions about temporal ordering and causality. Although soft skills and self-efficacy were positively associated with work readiness, the results do not establish that increases in either variable necessarily cause improvements in readiness. Similarly, the nonsignificant coefficient for career exploration does not establish that exploration has no effect over a longer period.

Finally, although the HC3, WLS, and bootstrap sensitivity analyses yielded consistent conclusions, the study remains subject to the scope of the variables, sample, and analytical model used. Future research could examine more diverse student populations, differentiate the dimensions of career exploration, test indirect pathways, and use longitudinal designs to assess how competencies and career-related beliefs develop in relation to work readiness over time.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study examined the effects of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration on students' work readiness. The findings demonstrate that soft skills and self-efficacy have positive and significant effects on work readiness, indicating that students

DOI: 10.65246

with stronger interpersonal, communication, problem-solving, and confidence-related competencies tend to be better prepared to enter the workforce. Among the independent variables, soft skills emerged as the strongest predictor of work readiness. Conversely, career exploration did not show a significant direct effect on work readiness when soft skills and self-efficacy were included simultaneously in the model. Furthermore, the results revealed that soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration collectively explained 78.4% of the variation in students' work readiness.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the work readiness literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the relative importance of soft skills, self-efficacy, and career exploration in predicting students' readiness for employment. The findings reinforce human capital and social cognitive perspectives that emphasize the role of competencies and personal beliefs in shaping career-related outcomes. In particular, the strong influence of soft skills and self-efficacy extends existing theoretical understanding of factors that support successful transitions from higher education to employment. The non-significant effect of career exploration suggests that its relationship with work readiness may be indirect or contingent upon other psychological and contextual factors, thereby offering new directions for future theoretical development and empirical investigation.

5.3 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings imply that universities should prioritize initiatives aimed at strengthening students' soft skills and self-efficacy. Educational institutions can achieve this through leadership development programs, communication and teamwork training, mentoring activities, internships, project-based learning, and career preparation workshops. Career development services should also integrate career exploration activities with competency-building programs to ensure students not only understand career opportunities but also possess the skills and confidence required to pursue them successfully. These initiatives are particularly important considering that many students have limited exposure to internships, professional training, and certification programs that could enhance their employability.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the use of convenience sampling and data collection from a single university restrict the generalizability of the results to broader student populations. Second, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables. Third, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce response bias. In addition, variables such as internship experience, organizational involvement, freelance work experience, and other employment-related activities were not included as control variables. Finally, the study did not examine potential mediation or moderation mechanisms that could further explain the relationship between career exploration and work readiness.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

Future research is encouraged to employ larger and more diverse samples across different universities, regions, and academic disciplines to improve the generalizability of findings. Researchers may also adopt longitudinal research designs to better capture causal relationships and changes in work readiness over time. Furthermore, future studies should investigate potential mediation and moderation models involving variables such as career adaptability, employability, internship experience, organizational involvement, and professional certification. Incorporating these additional factors may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which students develop work readiness and successfully transition into the labor market.

6. References

Adriansyah, M. A., Handoyo, S., Margono, H., & Sabar. (2024). The role of self-efficacy as a mediator between active organization and job readiness. *RSF Conference Proceeding Series: Business, Management, and Social Science, 4*(1), 34–41. https://doi.org/10.31098/bmss.v4i1.852

Anisa, R., & Sa'adah, L. (2025). The Influence of Self-Efficacy, Soft Skills, and Career Planning on the Work Readiness of Students at KH. A Wahab Hasbullah University, Tambakberas Jombang. *3rd Multidiscipline International Conference 2025*, 146–152.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying

DOI: 10.65246

theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Betz, N. E., & Hackett, G. (2006). Career self-efficacy theory: Back to the future. *Journal of Career Assessment, 14*(1), 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072705281347

Breusch, T. S., & Pagan, A. R. (1979). A simple test for heteroscedasticity and random coefficient variation. *Econometrica, 47*(5), 1287–1294.

Caballero, C. L., Walker, A., & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M. (2011). The Work Readiness Scale (WRS): Developing a measure to assess work readiness in college graduates. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 2*(1), 41–54. https://doi.org/10.21153/jtlge2011vol2no1art552

Clarke, M. (2018). Rethinking graduate employability: The role of capital, individual attributes and context. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(11), 1923–1937. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1294152

Cook, R. D. (1977). Detection of influential observation in linear regression. *Technometrics, 19*(1), 15–18.

Deswarta, Hamsal, & Aditya Nanda. (2024). The Influence of Ability, Digital Skills, Industry 4.0 Skill Sets, Soft Skills on Students' Work Readiness in Facing The Challenges of The Future World of Work (Case Study of Students of The Faculty of Economics and Business, Islamic University of Riau). *Management Studies and Entrepreneurship Journal*, *5*(2), 4122–4131. http://journal.yrpipku.com/index.php/msej

Diah Baiti, R., Abdullah, S. M., & Rochwidowati, N. S. (2017). Career self-efficacy dan kesiapan kerja pada mahasiswa semester akhir. *Jurnal Psikologi Integratif, 5*(2), 128–141.

Dian, L., Wibowo, J., Suhandiah, S., & Supriyanto, A. (2023). Perceptions of Student Soft Skills and Self Efficacy on Perceptions of Student Work Readiness in Surabaya. *International Journal of Global Accounting, Management, Education, and Entrepreneurship (IJGAME2)*, *4*(1), 199–208. https://doi.org/10.48024/ijgame2.v1i1.12

Erliana, V., & Rozana, A. (2022). Pengaruh career self-efficacy terhadap work readiness pada mahasiswa tingkat akhir di Unisba. *Bandung Conference Series, 2*(2), 150–157.

Febriyana, N., Indrawati, H., & Makhdalena, M. (2023). The Influence of Emotional Intelligence, Industrial Work Practices, Soft Skills, and Self-Efficacy on Students Work Readiness. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, *7*(3), 499. https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.7.3.p.499-517

Fu, W., Tao, T., Ouyang, B., & Yang, J. (2026). The Relationship of Career Exploration on The Teaching Intention of Pre-Service Special Education Teachers in China: A Chain-Mediating Role of Career Calling and Perceived Employability. *Acta Psychologica*, *269*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.107529

Glejser, H. (1969). A new test for heteroskedasticity. *Journal of the American Statistical Association, 64*(325), 316–323.

Haenggli, M., Hirschi, A., & Marciniak, J. (2025). Navigating Transitions: A Longitudinal Exploration of Career Decision-Making Process Dynamics in Adolescents. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *159*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2025.104125

Hamzah, S. R., Le, K. K., & Musa, S. N. S. (2021). The mediating role of career decision self-efficacy on the relationship of career emotional intelligence and self-esteem with career adaptability among university students. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 26*(1), 83–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2021.1886952

Hulu, F. (2020). Pengaruh kreativitas belajar dan soft skill mahasiswa terhadap kesiapan kerja mahasiswa Pendidikan Bisnis 2016. *NIAGAWAN, 9*(3), 263–270. https://doi.org/10.24114/niaga.v9i3.20327

Ingsih, K., & Suhana, S. (2023). Improving working readiness through mastering soft skills: Empirical evidence from university students in Indonesia. *Revista de Métodos Cuantitativos para la Economía y la Empresa, 35*, 268–279.

Ismaya, M. I. N., & Achmad, N. (2024). The Influence of Soft Skill and Hard Skill Development on Students Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness. *International Summit on Science Technology and Humanity (ISETH 2024)*, 291–303.

Jiang, Z., Newman, A., Le, H., Presbitero, A., & Zheng, C. (2019). Career Exploration: A Review and Future Research Agenda. In *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Vol. 110, pp. 338–356). Academic Press Inc. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.08.008

Kleine, A. K., Schmitt, A., & Wisse, B. (2021). Students' Career Exploration: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *131*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2021.103645

Kristiana, J., Syamsuddin, A., Giovanni, J., Meitiana, & Lampe, N. A. (2025). Bridging soft skills

DOI: 10.65246

and work readiness: The strategic role of self-efficacy and organizational experience in final-year students. *JSM: Jurnal Sains Manajemen, 14*(1), 1–15.

Lee, S. D., Aquino, A., Kuncel, N. R., & Hansen, J. I. C. (2023). Personality Predictors of Career Exploration: A Meta-Analysis. *Career Development Quarterly*, *71*(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12315

Lemeshow, S., Hosmer, D. W., Klar, J., & Lwanga, S. K. (1990). *Adequacy of sample size in health studies*. John Wiley & Sons.

Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). MONOGRAPH Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance. In *JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR* (Vol. 45).

Mahesi, A. E. R., & Wasskito, J. (2026). The Effect of Soft Skills, Hard Skills, and Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness With Part-Time Work Experience as a Mediation Variable. *Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Sharia Economics (IIJSE)*, *9*(1), 1885–1902.

Makki, B. I., Feng, F., Waqar, M. A., & Adhikari, I. M. (2023). Work Readiness, Decision-Making Self-Efficacy, and Career Exploration among Engineering Students: A Two-Step Framework. *Mathematical Problems in Engineering*, *2023*(1). https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/8166825

Nauta, M. M. (2024). Exploratory actions as mediators of the association between career exploration self-efficacy and decisional outcomes: Does exploration type matter? *Australian Journal of Career Development, 33*(2), 144–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/10384162241263033

Nasution, A. S., & Daulay, N. (2025). Layanan Bimbingan Karir Tahap Eksplorasi Dalam Meningkatkan Kesiapan Kerja Mahasiswa Tingkat Akhir BKPI UINSU Medan. *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, Dan Pengembangan*, *10*(6), 265–272. https://doi.org/10.17977/jptpp.v10i6.25919

Nurbaiti, & Putri, A. D. (2024). Hard Skill, Soft Skill dan Efikasi Diri Terhadap Kesiapan Kerja Mahasiswa Tingkat Akhir FEB Perguruan Tinggi di Kota Bandar Lampung. *Jurnal Administrasi Bisnis (JAB)*, *14*(1), 20–32.

Peersia, K., Rappa, N. A., & Perry, L. B. (2024). Work readiness: Definitions and conceptualisations. *Higher Education Research & Development, 43*(8), 1830–1845. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2366322

Rahmadani, D., & Mardalis, A. (2022). Improving Student's Working Readiness by Increasing Soft Skills, Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Organizational Activities. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Economics and Business Studies (ICOEBS 2022)*, *218*, 273–279.

Ratuela, Y. R. G., Nelwan, O. S., & Luminantang, G. G. (2022). The Influence of Hard Skills, Soft Skills and Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness in Final Students Majoring in Management FEB Unsrat Manado. *Jurnal EMBA*, *10*(1), 172–183.

Salim, R. M. A., Istiasih, M. R., Rumalutur, N. A., & Situmorang, D. D. B. (2023). The role of career decision self-efficacy as a mediator of peer support on students' career adaptability. *Heliyon, 9*(4), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e14911

Shapiro, S. S., & Wilk, M. B. (1965). An analysis of variance test for normality (complete samples). *Biometrika, 52*(3–4), 591–611.

Stumpf, S. A., Colarelli, S. M., & Hartman, K. (1983). Development of the Career Exploration Survey (CES). *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *22*, 191–226.

Su, X., Ahmad, A., & Alias, J. (2024). Examining career calling through career exploration: The influence of decision self-efficacy and openness. *Social Sciences, 13*(12), 685.

Succi, C., & Canovi, M. (2020). Soft skills to enhance graduate employability: Comparing students and employers' perceptions. *Studies in Higher Education, 45*(9), 1834–1847. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1585420

Sulistiyo, E. (2023). The Effect of Career Exploration on Employability Skills, Career Adaptability and Work Readiness of Indonesian Engineering Students Moderated by Teacher Support. *World Transactions on Engineering and Technology Education*, *21*(3).

Syifa, F. D., Wolor, C. W., & Adha, M. A. (2023). The effect of self efficacy and soft skills on work readiness in students of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Negeri Jakarta. *Jurnal Pendidikan Ekonomi, Perkantoran, dan Akuntansi, 4*(2), 29–38.

Taylor, J. D., McAlister, M., & Stover, J. (2026). From Career Exploration to Practice: A Nursing Workforce Journey. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing, 21*(2), e753–e757. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2025.12.015

Teng, W., Ma, C., Pahlevansharif, S., & Turner, J. J. (2019). Graduate readiness for the employment market of the 4th industrial revolution: The development of soft

DOI: 10.65246
employability skills. *Education + Training, 61*(5), 590–604. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-07-2018-0154

White, H. (1980). A heteroskedasticity-consistent covariance matrix estimator and a direct test for heteroskedasticity. *Econometrica, 48*(4), 817–838.

Wiguna, H. A., & Saragih, L. (2025). The Effect of Motivation, Self-Efficacy and Soft Skills on Students' Work Readiness as Generation Z in Facing the Digital Era. *Business, Economics, Law, Communication, and Social Sciences (BELACOSS)*, *1*(6), 702–715. https://journal.arepublisher.com/index.php/belacoss

Yunita, M. M., Lesmana, T., & Fallacorina, D. Q. (2026). Exploring work readiness: The role of future orientation mediated by career self-efficacy in university students. *Psympathic: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi, 13*(1), 41–52. https://doi.org/10.15575/psy.v13i1.49776

Zikic, J., & Douglas, T. H. (2009). Toward a More Complex View of Career Exploration. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *58*(2).