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How Internship Experience, Self-Efficacy, and Digital Literacy Shape Work Readiness Among Final-Year Students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of self-efficacy, digital literacy, and internship experience on the readiness of Indonesian final-year university students to enter the workforce. This study used the quantitative survey approach with 190 respondents from 28 provinces in Indonesia, driven by the ongoing discrepancy between graduate competencies and labor market needs. Data were collected with a five-point Likert scale and analyzed with multiple linear regression using IBM SPSS Statistics version 30. The results showed that work preparation was considerably increased by digital literacy, self-efficacy, and internship experience, which explained 53.4% of the variance. The most important predictor is self-efficacy, which shows that psychological preparation has an important role in graduate employability. In stepwise analysis, the only skills that exhibited significant effects were career-related skills in digital literacy and trust competency in self-efficacy and explicit goals in internship experience as the most contributing factors. The results support the Social Cognitive Career Theory paradigm and indicate the importance of an integrative approach, which includes career-oriented digital competence, psychological empowerment, and experiential learning for work readiness. Higher education institutions are recommended to improve training of digital skills in alignment with the industry, development of self-efficacy, and structured internship programs to better prepare graduates for the current profession.

Keywords*: Internship Experience; Self-Efficacy; Digital Literacy; Work Readiness*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's labor market continues to face a persistent challenge. The number of university graduates grows every year but unemployment among educated individuals remains a serious worry. The open unemployment rate for university graduates was 5.33% (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025), showing a mismatch between the competencies produced by higher education and the capabilities needed by employers. This problem shows that access to higher education is not enough. Gohae (2020) observed that the main reason for graduate unemployment was the low level of work preparation among final-year students. The goal is not simply to produce more graduates, but to prepare them well enough to navigate the transition from university to work.

Work readiness is a multidimensional concept that involves much more than academic performance. It contains a blend of cognitive, behavioral, and affective skills that help individuals to effectively enter the job, adjust to professional settings, and contribute meaningfully within organizations (Peersia et al., 2024). Likewise, Lawton et al. (2023) believe that work readiness reflects the extent to which graduates are able to meet workplace expectations across technical, interpersonal, and adaptive domains. As workplaces continue to evolve in response to digital transformation and rapid

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technological change, these expectations have become increasingly complex. “Besides having strong disciplinary knowledge, today’s graduates are expected to be resilient in the face of challenges, be able to collaborate effectively with diverse stakeholders and be able to leverage digital technologies to navigate dynamic and often unpredictable labor market conditions.

Higher education institutions therefore play a crucial role in preparing students for the transition from university to the workplace. This responsibility extends beyond delivering academic knowledge and requires the creation of learning experiences that foster the skills, attitudes, and competencies needed in professional settings (Peersia et al., 2024). To address this challenge, many universities have incorporated project-based learning, industry partnerships, and structured internship programs into their curricula as practical approaches to narrowing the gap between academic preparation and workplace expectations (Lawton et al., 2023). While these efforts provide meaningful opportunities for experiential learning, they are not necessarily equally beneficial in improving students’ career preparedness. The degree to which such interventions result in significant work readiness outcomes is shaped by a variety of individual and contextual factors that are not yet well understood and require further study.

Among the various factors that contribute to work readiness, internship experience has become one of the most impactful. Internships provide students with the opportunity to move beyond theoretical learning by engaging directly in real workplace settings, where they can apply academic knowledge, develop professional competencies, and gain a deeper understanding of organizational expectations and work practices (Supriyanto et al., 2022; Hassouna & Zaazou, 2024). These experiences will enable students to acquire practical skills and become more familiar with the realities and requirements of professional life. Internship is also important in preparing students for employment as evidenced by empirical evidence. Alharethi et al. (2025) found that internship experience significantly enhances work readiness by strengthening role clarity and facilitating skill development. Similarly, Banker and Borchardt (2025) found that students who participate in structured internship programs report higher levels of career readiness and adaptability when transitioning into the workforce after graduation.

Experiential learning opportunities such as internships are crutial, but students’ psychological resources are critical in developing their readiness for work. Among these resources, self-efficacy has been found to be a major effect in the way that individual approach career-related obstacles and changes. Lent and Brown (2019) describe self-efficacy as a key element of career behavior, influences individuals' goal setting, effort maintenance, barrier overcoming, and career advancement. Students with high self-efficacy are more confident in their talents, more motivated to attain career goals, and more able to cope with workplace expectations and uncertainties in relation to job preparation (Handoko & Wijono, 2023). These attributes assist individuals to better participate in career preparation activities and to better adapt to changing work settings. This is also corroborated by the studies of Tan et al. (2025) who show that general self-efficacy influences undergraduate employability through the mediators of career adaptability and proactive career behavior, underscoring the important role it plays in facilitating a smoother transition from higher education to employment.

In addition to experiential and psychological factors, digital literacy has become a key competency for graduates preparing to enter today's workforce. As organizations increasingly adopt digital technologies, the ability to effectively navigate digital environments is no longer considered a supplementary skill but a fundamental requirement for employability. Van Laar et al. (2020) describe digital skills as threshold competencies in knowledge-based economies, such as technical skills, the ability to analyze information critically, collaboration via digital platforms, and use of technology for work-related tasks. These competencies have become increasingly relevant in the contexts of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0 to help graduates remain competitive in a fast-digitalizing labor market (Muliasari et al., 2024; Afandi et al., 2024). It seems that digital skills affect not only the technical value but also the perception of their own career capabilities. Digital competence not only increases self-efficacy and leads to more optimistic expectations for future career outcomes (Jalil et al., 2025), but digital literacy also provides the skills and mental resilience needed for successful career changes.

To understand how these factors collectively shape students’ readiness for the workforce, this study adopts the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) proposed by Lent and Brown (2019) as its guiding theoretical framework. SCCT suggests that career-related behaviors and outcomes are influenced by the dynamic interplay between learning experiences, self-efficacy beliefs, and contextual

factors. From this perspective, internship experience may be seen as a beneficial mastery learning experience which allows students to acquire professional competencies and a greater grasp of job expectations. Digital literacy as an increasingly important contextual resource forms individuals' expectations and opportunities in a digitalized labor market. Self-efficacy as a central psychological resource influences career decision-making, persistence, and goal-directed behavior.

This study investigates the influence of internship experience, self-efficacy, and digital literacy on work readiness among final-year university students in Indonesia. Drawing on data from 190 students across 28 provinces, the study contributes to the work readiness literature by extending the application of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) in the Indonesian higher education context and by providing practical implications for enhancing graduate preparedness for the workforce.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative survey design to examine the influence of internship experience, self-efficacy, and digital literacy on the work readiness of final-year university students in Indonesia (Sugiyono, 2020). The target population consisted of final-year students (semester 7–8) aged 20–24 years who were enrolled in higher education institutions in Indonesia and had completed an internship program of at least six months. Following Hair et al. (2019), the minimum sample size was determined using a 10:1 respondent-to-dimension ratio. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used, 190 valid responses were obtained, meeting the minimum sample size requirement based on Hair et al.'s (2019) recommendation of a 10:1 respondent-to-dimension ratio. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms using a five-point Likert scale. Four instruments were adapted for this study. Internship Experience (X1) was adapted from Luk and Chan (2020) and measured clear goals, menial tasks, and support for learning. Self-Efficacy (X2), adapted from Tramontano et al. (2021), measured knowledge and personal efficiency competency, trust competency, self-care competency, social and relational competency, and emotional competency. Digital Literacy (X3), adapted from Afandi et al. (2024), measured hardware and software basics, information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, security, problem solving, and career-related competencies. Work Readiness (Y), adapted from Sartika and Nengsi (2022), measured personal character, organizational intelligence, job competence, and social intelligence.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 30, including validity (Pearson product-moment correlation), reliability (Cronbach's alpha, $\alpha \geq 0.70$; Hair et al., 2019), classical assumption tests (normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity), multiple linear regression to examine simultaneous and partial effects at a 5% significance level, and exploratory stepwise regression to identify dimensions contributing most meaningfully to work readiness. The dataset supporting this research are openly available at *https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20687303*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondent Characteristics

The research involved 190 final-year students from various regions in Indonesia. Based on gender, 66.2% were female and 33.8% were male. The majority of respondents were aged 22 years (46.3%), followed by 21 years (22.9%). Geographically, most respondents came from West Java (23.4%), DKI Jakarta (17.9%), and East Nusa Tenggara (9.5%). Regarding institutional type, 71.6% studied at universities, with 55.2% from state universities. In terms of education level, 85.1% were undergraduate (S1) students. The study programs were diverse, with the largest representations from Management (9.5%), Psychology (9.5%), and Accounting (8.5%).

Validity and Reliability Test Results

Validity testing confirmed that all items yielded r-values exceeding the critical r-table value of 0.361, indicating that all questionnaire items are valid Reliability test results showed Cronbach's Alpha

values for all variables exceeded 0.70: Internship Experience (0.827), Self-Efficacy (0.856), Digital Literacy (0.923), and Work Readiness (0.920), confirming all instruments were reliable (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Reliability Test Result

Variable	Cronbach's α	Threshold	Result
Internship Experience (X1)	0,827	0,70	Reliable
Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,856	0,70	Reliable
Digital Literacy (X3)	0,923	0,70	Reliable
Work Readiness (Y)	0,920	0,70	Reliable

Classical Assumption Test Results

The normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method showed an Asymp.Sig value of 0.074 (> 0.05), indicating normally distributed residuals. The multicollinearity test showed VIF values < 10 and tolerance values > 0.10 for all independent variables, indicating no multicollinearity. The heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser method showed significance values > 0.05 for all variables, indicating no heteroscedasticity.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis produced the following equation: $Y = -0.220 + 0.618X_1 + 0.887X_2 + 0.319X_3 + e$. The constant value of -0.220 indicates that if Internship Experience, Self-Efficacy, and Digital Literacy are zero, Work Readiness will be -0.220. The regression coefficients show that: (1) Each one-unit increase in Internship Experience increases Work Readiness by 0.618 units; (2) Each one-unit increase in Self-Efficacy increases Work Readiness by 0.887 units; (3) Each one-unit increase in Digital Literacy increases Work Readiness by 0.319 units. Among the three variables, Self-Efficacy has the strongest influence on Work Readiness.

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
(Constant)	-0,220	11,224		-0,020	0,984
Internship Experience (X1)	0,618	0,192	0,174	3,225	0,001
Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,887	0,080	0,593	11,099	<0,001
Digital Literacy (X3)	0,319	0,110	0,156	2,891	0,004

Dependent Variable: Work Readiness (Y). F (3, 186) = 73,261, p <0,001, Adjusted R^2 = 0,534.

Hypothesis Testing Results

The t-test results indicated that Internship Experience (t = 3.225, p = 0.001), Self-Efficacy (t = 11.099, p < 0.001), and Digital Literacy (t = 2.891, p = 0.004) each had a significant positive effect on Work Readiness, as all t-values exceeded the t-table value of 1.973 and significance values were below 0.05. The F-test confirmed that the three variables simultaneously influence Work Readiness (F (3, 186) = 73.261, p < 0.001). The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.534 indicates that 53.4% of the variation in Work Readiness is explained by the three independent variables, while the remaining 46.6% is attributable to variables not examined in this study.

To further explore the relative contribution of each dimension to Work Readiness, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted. This procedure is exploratory in nature and is intended to identify which specific dimensions within each variable contribute most meaningfully to the outcome variable (Table 3).

Table 3. Stepwise Test Results

Variable	Dimension	Sig (<0.05)	Result	Beta	Zero Order	Contribution (Beta X Zero Order)
Internship Experience (X1)	• Clear Goals	0.012	Significant	0.134	0.279	6.63%
	• Menial task	0.016	Significant	0.128	0.227	5.15%
	• Support for learning	-	Not significant	-	-	-
Self-Efficacy (X2)	• Knowledge and Personal efficiency competencies	0.001	Significant	0.173	0.340	10.43%
	• Trust Competency	0.001	Significant	0.339	0.523	31.43%
	• Self-Care competency	0.001	Significant	0.233	0.426	17.60%
	• Social & Relational Competency	0.001	Significant	0.243	0.358	15.42%
	• Emotional Competency	0.001	Significant	0.207	0.318	11.67%
Digital Literation (X3)	• Hardware and Software Basics	-	Not significant	-	-	-
	• Information and Data Literacy	-	Not significant	-	-	-
	• Communication and Collaboration	-	Not significant	-	-	-
	• Digital content creation	-	Not significant	-	-	-
	• Security	-	Not significant	-	-	-
	• Problem Solving	-	Not significant	-	-	-
	• Career Related Competencies	0.035	Significant	0.106	0.089	1.67%

Within Internship Experience (X1), Clear Goals (β = 0.134, 6.63%) and Menial Task (β = 0.128, 5.15%) emerged as significant dimensions, while Support for Learning did not reach significance. Within Self-Efficacy (X2), all five dimensions were significant: Trust Competency contributed most substantially (β = 0.339, 31.43%), followed by Self-Care Competency (17.60%), Social and Relational Competency (15.42%), Emotional Competency (11.67%), and Knowledge and Personal Efficiency Competencies (10.43%). Within Digital Literacy (X3), only Career Related Competencies reached significance (β = 0.106, 1.67%), while the remaining six dimensions (Hardware and Software Basics, Information and Data Literacy, Communication and Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Security, and Problem Solving) did not. Collectively, the seven significant dimensions accounted for 100% of the explained variance, with Self-Efficacy dimensions dominating at 86.55%.

Discussion

This study aimed to analyse the effect or internship experience, self-efficacy, and digital literacy on the work readiness of final-year university students in Indonesia. Work readiness is a multidimensional construct that reflects the cognitive, behavioral, and affective capacities necessary for successful transition and performance in professional situations (Peersia et al., 2024; Lawton et al., 2023). The findings showed that internship experience, self-efficacy, and digital literacy jointly explained 53.4% of the variance in work readiness (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.534$, $F(3, 186) = 73.261$, $p < .001$), indicating that these factors play an important role in preparing students for the workforce. These findings are consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which proposes that career outcomes are influenced by the interaction between learning experiences, self-efficacy beliefs, and contextual factors (Lent & Brown, 2019). In this sense, students are more work ready if they have relevant work experience, confidence in their competence and the digital capabilities to negotiate the labour market today.

Internship Experience and Work Readiness

Internship experience had a significant positive influence on work readiness ($B = 0.618$, $\beta = 0.174$, $p = .001$). Within the SCCT framework, internship as mastery learning experiences, that enable students to apply knowledge in real workplace settings and develop a clearer understanding of professional expectations (Lent & Brown, 2019). The findings suggest that direct exposure to workplace tasks helps students build confidence and practical competencies that support their transition into employment. Similar patterns have been reported in previous studies, which found that internship participation enhances employability, role clarity, adaptability, and work readiness (Supriyanto et al., 2022; Hassouna & Zaazou, 2024; Alharethi et al., 2025; Banker & Borchardt, 2025). Evidence from Indonesia confirms these findings further. According to Rahayu and Najib (2025) and Alam and Susti (2025), performing an internship has a significant positive impact on students' work readiness by increasing problem-solving skills and confidence in handling professional problems.

The exploratory stepwise analysis showed that Clear Goals ($\beta = 0.134$, 6.63%) and Menial Task ($\beta = 0.128$, 5.15%) contributed the most to work readiness, and Support for Learning was not included in the model. This is consistent with Luk and Chan (2020) who found that goal clarity and task engagement are among the two most critical characteristics of internship quality that influence student learning outcomes. Internships seem to be more advantageous for those students who have good knowledge of their responsibilities and are active participants at workplace. The findings indicate that task structure and direct involvement in work activities may be more significant in developing work readiness than supervisory support alone.

One possible explanation is that task clarity and hands-on experience provide students with more direct opportunities to develop workplace competencies, confidence, and familiarity with organizational practices. Students who know their roles and actively participate in tasks in the workplace are more likely to have meaningful learning experiences that contribute toward work readiness. On the other, the role of supervisory support may be less obvious in cases when work tasks and expectations are already well defined.

From a practical perspective, higher education institutions should focus on the quality assurance of the internship experience not merely on the provision of internship opportunities. Clear learning goals, meaningful task assignments, well-defined performance expectations, and structured reflection activities may help maximize the contribution of internships to students' work readiness. It should be noted that the stepwise procedure is exploratory in nature and may capitalize on chance variation within a specific sample. Therefore, the non-significance of Support for Learning should not be interpreted as evidence that the dimension has no effect on work readiness, but rather that it was not retained in the present model. Further studies using independent samples are needed to determine whether this pattern remains consistent across different contexts.

Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness

Self-efficacy exhibited the strongest effect on work readiness among the three predictors (B = 0.887, β = 0.593, p < .001), supporting SCCT's proposition that self-efficacy serves as a central mechanism linking learning experiences to career outcomes (Lent & Brown, 2019). This finding suggests that students who are confident in their ability to perform work-related tasks, overcome challenges, and adapt to new situations are more likely to feel prepared for the transition from university to the workplace. Similar evidence has been reported across different educational contexts, where self-efficacy was found to enhance employability, career adaptability, proactive career behavior, and work readiness (Tan et al., 2025; Puspitasari & Fadhli, 2024; Habibah & Dwijayanti, 2023; Wiharja et al., 2020). The present finding also aligns with Chotimah and Suryani (2020), who identified self-efficacy as the most dominant predictor of work readiness compared to other variables.

The strong influence of self-efficacy suggests that work readiness involves not only by students' skills and experiences but also by their confidence in using these in workplace settings. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach challenges proactively, persist when facing difficulties, and adapt to unfamiliar work environments, which may explain why self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor in the present study.

The exploratory stepwise analysis identified all five self-efficacy dimensions as significant contributors to work readiness: Trust Competency (β = 0.339, 31.43%), Self-Care Competency (β = 0.233, 17.60%), Social and Relational Competency (β = 0.243, 15.42%), Emotional Competency (β = 0.207, 11.67%), and Knowledge and Personal Efficiency Competencies (β = 0.173, 10.43%). Among these, Trust Competency was the strongest contributor, suggesting that the ability to build professional relationships, work independently, and be reliable may be especially crucial for graduate preparation. The importance of all five factors also suggests that work preparedness is a function of a mix of cognitive, emotional and relational competencies rather than a single psychological attribute (Tramontano et al., 2021).

From a practical perspective, higher education institutions should should embrace a comprehensive approach towards self-efficacy development. Experiential learning, group projects, professional mentoring, and activities that promote emotional regulation and interpersonal skills can help students acquire the psychological resources needed to make a successful transition into the workforce.

Digital Literacy and Work Readiness

Digital literacy had a significant but small influence on work readiness (B = 0.319, β = 0.156, p = .004). This finding is in line with previous studies suggesting digital literacy contributes to students' work readiness and employability (Muliasari et al., 2024; Fuada et al., 2025; Widiawati et al., 2025). Similarly, Jalil et al. (2025) demonstrated that digital skills increase self-efficacy and foster good professional outcome expectancies. However, the present study contributes to this literature by showing that among the digital literacy dimensions, only Career Related Competencies retained predictive power (β = 0.106, 1.67%) when self-efficacy and internship experience were considered simultaneously. This suggests that the contribution of digital literacy to work readiness might be not only about technical abilities but also how digital skills might be implemented in a career setting.

The non-significance of the other dimensions, including Hardware and Software Basics, Information and Data Literacy, Communication and Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Security, and Problem Solving, could indicate that basic digital skills are now popular among university students. Van Laar et al. (2020) claimed that many digital skills have become threshold competencies rather than differentiating characteristics in the job market. The descriptive results support this interpretation, with all digital literacy dimensions showing consistently high scores (84%–93%). Such limited variation may reduce their ability to explain differences in work readiness, even when the competencies themselves remain important.

This finding suggests that digital literacy contributes to work readiness not merely through technical proficiency, but through the ability to apply digital skills in career-related contexts. In other words, what differentiates work-ready graduates may not be whether they possess basic digital skills,

but whether they can use those skills strategically to support career development and employment-related activities. Therefore, higher education institutions should complement general digital literacy training with career-oriented digital competencies, such as digital portfolio development, professional networking, online recruitment platforms, and personal branding (Ririen & Daryanes, 2022; Yulianti et al., 2021; Masriyanda et al., 2024).

The significant simultaneous effect of internship experience, self-efficacy, and digital literacy (**F (**3, 186) = 73.261, $p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.534$) indicates that work readiness is shaped by a combination of experiential, psychological, and contextual factors. This finding supports Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent & Brown, 2019) and aligns with Peersia et al.'s (2024) view of work readiness as a multidimensional construct. Among the three predictors, self-efficacy showed the strongest contribution ($\beta = 0.593$), followed by internship experience ($\beta = 0.174$) and digital literacy ($\beta = 0.156$), highlighting the important role of psychological readiness in preparing students for the workforce. This study contributes to the SCCT literature by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian higher education context and by demonstrating the relevance of digital literacy as a contemporary contextual factor influencing work readiness. Practically, the results suggest that institutions of higher education should not just focus on academic accomplishment but should also improve the quality of internships, self-efficacy development, and career-oriented digital competencies. Therefore, it is necessary to increase collaboration between universities, industry partners and policymakers to better equip graduates for the realities of the current job market.

Limitations

Several limitations should be addressed when evaluating the findings of this study. While respondents were taken from 28 provinces in Indonesia, the sample was still concentrated in West Java (23.4%) and DKI Jakarta (17.9%), which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other locations. Also, the cross-sectional design does not allow for the establishment of casual linkages. Future research can address these limitations by applying longitudinal designs, enhancing geographic representation, and examining additional factors such as career adaptability, internship quality, intrinsic motivation, and institutional support to develop a more comprehensive understanding of students' work readiness.

CONCLUSIONS

This findings of this study indicated that internship experience, self-efficacy, and digital literacy significantly influence the work readiness of final-year university students in Indonesia, explaining 53.4% of its variance. Among the three predictors, self-efficacy was the largest contribution, particularly through Trust Competency and Self-Care Competency, followed by internship experience through Clear Goals and Menial Task, and digital literacy through Career Related Competencies. The findings suggest that students become work-ready not only through internship experiences and digital skills, but also through confidence in their ability to perform effectively in professional environments. This reinforces the importance of developing both technical and psychological resources during the transition from higher education to employment. Overall, the results support Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent & Brown, 2019), and its emphasis on the interaction of learning experiences, self-efficacy beliefs, and contextual factors in shaping career-related outcomes.

The results of this study imply that students should encouraged to take an active part in internship opportunities and constantly improve their career-related digital skills. Higher education institutions should complement academic learning with structured internship programs, self-efficacy development initiatives, and industry-oriented digital skills training. Future research future research might investigate other factors such as career adaptability and intrinsic drive and use more geographically diverse samples to boost the generalizability of the findings.

ACKNOWLEGMENT & DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The dataset supporting this research are openly available at *https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20687303*
Credit authorship contribution statement:
Oktafiano Reinaldi Angelo Magang: *Project Administration, Methodology, Writing Original Draft, Resources*. Ira Setyawati: *Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing - Review & Editing*.

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