The Effect of Integrating Social Cognitive Theory, Career Adaptability, and Human Capital on the Work Readiness Level of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa Graduates

Muhammad Rizqi Fauzi

Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
rizqifauzimuhammad@gmail.com

Abstract: Work readiness has shifted from merely possessing technical skills to a complex multidimensional construct, particularly amidst the technological disruption of the 21st century. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the determinants of higher education graduates' work readiness through theoretical synthesis and empirical testing. By integrating Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), Career Adaptability Theory, and the Graduate Capital Model, this article examines how internal factors (self-efficacy, soft skills) and external factors (internship experience, curriculum quality) interact in shaping work readiness. A causal-quantitative approach was employed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a sample of 250 final-year students. The analysis results indicate that self-efficacy, soft skills, and internship experience exert a positive and significant effect on work readiness, both directly and indirectly through career adaptability as a mediating variable. The research findings suggest that optimal work readiness is achieved when higher education institutions are capable of transforming academic capital into social and psychological capital that is adaptive to industry needs.

Keywords: Work Readiness, Social Cognitive Career Theory, Career Adaptability, Graduate Capital, Higher Education.

1 Introduction

In a time of big changes, colleges and universities today need to do more than just give students degrees.They also have to help create people who are ready to handle the difficulties and changes they will face in their careers. Work readiness isn't just about how well someone does in school.It includes many things like thinking skills, being able to manage emotions, and being flexible when things change. The high number of unemployed university graduates in Indonesia shows that there is a gap between what these graduates can do and what the industries now need. To solve this issue, we need to look at all the factors that affect how ready someone is for work, and consider them together in a complete and connected way.

Having control over human capital is a very important base. From the viewpoint of graduates moving into their careers, human capital means the knowledge they have learned, the skills they can show, and the experiences they have gained while studying,

© The Author(s) 2026
K. Chandra Kirana et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business, Economic, and Social Sustainability (ICOBES 2026)*, Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research 409,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6239-811-5_17

according to Tomlinson in 2012. Even though classical human capital theory suggests that investing in education can lead to better career success (Becker, 1964), real-life situations show that a person might not be able to make the most of that education without having enough confidence and being mentally ready.

Therefore, psychological factors like those explained by the Vocational Social Cognitive Theory or Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) play a very important role as a key link. Based on Bandura's (1997) ideas, the Social Cognitive Career Theory, created by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994, focuses on how a person's belief in their own abilities and their expectations about the results of their actions are the key factors that influence their career choices. Students with strong skills but low confidence often act shy and unsure when dealing with competitive job choices. On the other hand, strong self-confidence will help graduates keep trying and make the most of job chances.

The workplace today is constantly changing, full of uncertainty, and hard to predict, which means people need to be able to think flexibly and adjust quickly. Career Construction Theory explains this idea through the concept of Career Adaptability, which was first introduced by Savickas in 2005. Career adaptability is a type of personal strength like caring, feeling in control, being curious, and having confidence that helps someone deal with changes and handle unexpected problems or tough experiences in their work life. A strong connection between powerful human abilities, positive thinking about learning and skills, and the ability to adjust in one's career will, in theory, lead to being fully prepared for work.

Many studies have been done on work readiness, like research that looks only at career adaptability or human resources.But even though these studies exist, they often look at these three main factors one at a time. There is still a lack of research on how to test the combination of these three theories at the same time, especially when looking at a particular school's social and cultural environment. Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa has its own special features because it was started based on the educational ideas of Ki Hadjar Dewantara. The good values taught to students should help build their character, make them more flexible, and improve their ability to work in teams. However, there isn't a lot of real-world proof about this topic yet.

Because there is not enough information in current studies about this topic, this research looks closely at how Social Cognitive Theory, Career Adaptability, and Human Capital affect the work readiness of graduates from Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa. This research is likely to offer new ideas to the study of human resource development and give real-world advice to universities on how to better prepare their students for their careers.

2 Literature Review And Theoretical Framework

2.1 Work Readiness

Historically, the concept of work readiness is often equated with employability. However, Caballero and Walker asserted that the two have a clear distinction [3]. While employability focuses more on a person's ability to get a job—such as CV writing skills, interview techniques, and networking—work readiness focuses on a person's

capacity to maintain employment and perform effectively in it from the first day of work. The most comprehensive conceptual model was defined by Caballero, Walker, and Fullarton [4] through the development of the Work Readiness Scale. They stated that work readiness is not a single construct, but rather an integration of four main pillars.

Personal Characteristics: This attribute encompasses individual psychological aspects such as resilience (resilience to pressure), cognitive flexibility, work ethic, and independence. **Organizational Acumen:** This dimension refers to an individual's understanding of business dynamics, organizational culture, and corporate hierarchical structures. **Work Competence:** Includes technical capabilities (hard skills) and methodological abilities, such as critical problem-solving skills and digital literacy. **Social Intelligence:** The ability to interact, negotiate, collaborate in cross-disciplinary teams, and manage interpersonal conflicts wisely.

2.2 Social Cognitive Career Theory

Developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett [11], Social Cognitive Career Theory explains that one's career development and work readiness are shaped by reciprocal interactions between personal cognitive elements and environmental factors. The three main pillars in Social Cognitive Career Theory are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. In the context of work readiness, when a student has high career self-efficacy, they will actively take preparatory actions, which in turn will increase their capacity for future work.

2.3 Career Adaptability Theory

Savickas [13] suggested that career adaptability is a psychological construct indicating an individual's readiness and the resources they possess to cope with current and anticipated developmental tasks in an occupational role. Savickas formulated a 4C framework consisting of: Concern (concern for career future), Control (personal control over the future), Curiosity (curiosity and exploration of opportunities), and Confidence (self-confidence in solving career problems).

2.4 Graduate Capital Model

Tomlinson [16] offers a comprehensive viewpoint stating that work readiness is shaped by the possession of five types of capital: Human Capital (technical knowledge), Social Capital (industry networks and relations), Cultural Capital (understanding of work culture), Identity Capital (self-understanding and career narrative), and Psychological Capital (efficacy, optimism, and resilience). This model asserts that work readiness does not occur in an academic vacuum, but is rather the result of psychosocial capital accumulation.

3 Hypothesis Development

3.1 The Effect of Career Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness

Self-efficacy acts as a psychological driving engine. Students who believe they are capable of negotiating, presenting, and analyzing data well will exhibit lower anxiety levels when entering a new work environment. Empirical research by Bandura [1] and Purwanto et al. [12] confirmed that self-efficacy has a positive and significant correlation with the mental work readiness of fresh graduates.
H_1 : Career self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on work readiness.

3.2 The Effect of Soft Skills on Work Readiness

Technical skills (hard skills) are often the ticket to getting an interview, but soft skills are what determine whether someone can keep their job. Communication, time management, teamwork, and leadership skills are very crucial in the Social Intelligence dimension of work readiness [6], [8].
H_2 : Soft skills have a positive and significant effect on work readiness.

3.3 The Effect of Internship Experience Effectiveness on Work Readiness

Effective internship programs act as socio-professional laboratories. Through internships, abstract theoretical concepts in the classroom are directly tested on real problems in the industry. According to Jackson [9] and Wibowo [17], students who participate in structured internships have a much more mature level of organizational acumen.
H_3 : The effectiveness of internship experience has a positive and significant effect on work readiness.

3.4 The Effect of Curriculum Quality on Work Readiness

A co-designed curriculum with the industry ensures that learning materials remain relevant to actual labor market needs. A curriculum based on real problem-solving (Project-Based Learning) linearly stimulates students' technical competency readiness [15].
H_4 : Curriculum quality has a positive and significant effect on work readiness.

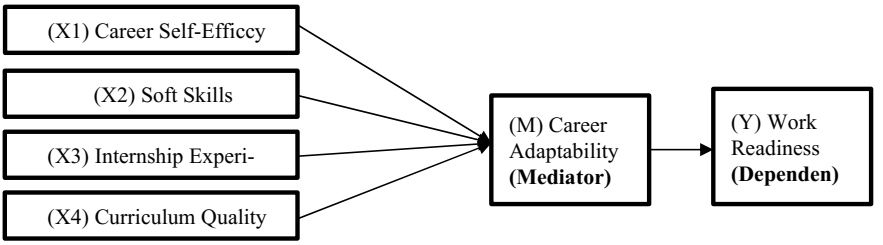
3.5 The Mediating Role of Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is a dynamic capacity that bridges an individual's potential with environmental realities. A person may have good soft skills and internship experience, but if they lack the psychological flexibility to adapt to changes in work culture, their work readiness will not be optimal. Savickas and Porfeli [14] proved that career adaptability reconstructs a person's internal capacity into actual work-ready

behavior.

H_5 : Career adaptability mediates the effects of self-efficacy, soft skills, internship experience, and curriculum quality on work readiness.

3.6 Framework



4 Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Sample

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research method. The population in this study is final-year students at three Universitas Sarjana Wiyata Tamansiswa in Indonesia who have completed industrial internship programs. The sampling technique used is proportional stratified random sampling. Based on the guidelines of Hair et al. [7] for SEM models, the minimum sample size is 5 times the number of indicators. With a total of 42 indicators in this study, the sample was set at 250 respondents. Data were collected via an onlin questionnaire using a 1-5 Likert scale.

4.2 Operational Definition of Variables

- **Work Readiness (Y):** Measured using an adaptation of the Work Readiness Scale from Caballero et al. [4] with 4 dimensions: personal characteristics, organizational acumen, work competence, and social intelligence (12 indicators).
- **Career Adaptability (M):** Measured using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale from Savickas & Porfeli [14] which includes the dimensions of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (12 indicators).
- **Career Self-Efficacy (X1):** Measured based on the individual's level of confidence in making career decisions, adopting the CDMSE theory by Betz et al. [2] (6 indicators).
- **Soft Skills (X2):** Measured through indicators of interpersonal communication, time management, teamwork, and leadership (6 indicators).
- **Internship Experience Effectiveness (X3):** Measured by the suitability of

internship tasks, supervision quality, and internship atmosphere (3 indicators).

- **Curriculum Quality (X4):** Measured by the relevance of lecture materials, project-based learning methods, and technology utilization (3 indicators).

4.3 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed using the variance-based Structural Equation Modeling or Partial Least Squares method with the help of SmartPLS software. The analysis was carried out in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to test instrument validity and reliability, and evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to test hypothesis relationships and mediation effects.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Based on the outer model test, all indicators have a loading factor value above 0.70. The Average Variance Extracted value for all variables is above the minimum threshold of 0.50, which indicates that the convergent validity requirement has been met. Discriminant validity is also met because the cross-loading value of each indicator is greater for its own latent variable compared to other variables. Reliability testing showed Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70 for all constructs, proving that this research instrument is consistent and reliable.

5.2 Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Hypothesis testing was conducted via the bootstrapping method by looking at the path coefficient values, t-statistics, and p-values. The R2 value for the Career Adaptability (M) variable is 0.584 and for Work Readiness (Y) is 0.672. This shows that 67.2% of the variance in work readiness can be explained by the structural model built in this study.

Relationsip Path	Path Coefficient	t-statistics	p-value	Conclusion
H_1: Career Self-Efficacy (X_1) → Work Readiness (Y)	0,245	3,821	<0,001	**Accepted**
H_2: Soft Skills (X_2) → Work Readiness (Y)	0,312	4,912	<0,001	**Accepted**
H_3: Internship Experience (X_3) → Work Readiness (Y)	0,218	3,450	0,001	**Accepted**
H_4: Curriculum Quality (X_4) → Work Readiness (Y)	0,085	1,421	0,156	**Rejected**

H5: Career Adaptability (M) → Work Readiness (Y)	0,340	5,114	<0,001	**Accepted**

5.3 Mediation Effect Analysis

The indirect effect analysis shows that Career Adaptability (M) significantly mediates the effects of Career Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.115$, $p < 0.001$), Soft Skills ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.001$), and Internship Experience ($\beta = 0.098$, $p = 0.003$) on Work Readiness. However, career adaptability does not significantly mediate the effect of curriculum quality on work readiness ($\beta = 0.031$, $p = 0.210$). The type of mediation occurring in **H_1**, **H_2**, and **H_3** is partial mediation.

5.4 Discussion

The test results show that individual internal factors have the most dominant influence on work readiness. Soft skills ($\beta = 0.312$) and Career Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.245$) are proven to be the main pillars forming graduate work readiness. This finding is in line with the Social Cognitive Career Theory [11] which states that individuals' cognitive beliefs direct their readiness actions. Graduates who have emotional intelligence and a good mastery of soft skills are considered more adaptive in the Social Intelligence dimension on the work readiness scale, making them more preferred by the industry [12].

On the external factor side, Internship Experience Effectiveness has a significant direct effect on work readiness ($\beta = 0.218$). This proves the truth of the Graduate Capital Model by Tomlinson [16] that direct interaction with the working world builds social capital (networks) and cultural capital (understanding of professional work culture) that students cannot obtain merely from reading textbooks. Quality internship experiences provide a real picture of organizational acumen, thereby reducing culture shock when graduates start working full-time [9], [17].

Interestingly, Curriculum Quality does not have a direct effect on Work Readiness ($\beta = 0.085$, $p = 0.156$). This finding indicates that a good curriculum, if it stops at the theoretical level in the classroom without being integrated with practical experience and student character development, will not be able to increase work readiness instantly. This result serves as a critique for higher education institutions that often assume that updating the curriculum administratively is sufficient to solve the skills mismatch problem [15].

Finally, the crucial role of Career Adaptability as a mediator proved to be highly significant ($\beta = 0.340$). Adaptability acts as a driving wheel that transforms internal psychological capital (self-efficacy) and external experience (internship) into real work competence. Graduates with high career adaptability possess strong concern and control, making them consistently flexible in facing disruptive industry dynamics [14].

6 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This study successfully formulated an integrative structural model explaining the mechanism of work readiness formation among university graduates. Work readiness is not an instant attribute obtained solely by possessing a diploma or high academic grades. This construct is the crystallization of soft skill maturity, career self-efficacy, and the quality of practical work experience through internship programs. The presence of career adaptability as a mediating variable confirms that the psychological flexibility of students in exploring and controlling their careers is the main key to transforming academic capital into performance readiness in the real industry.

6.2 Policy and Practical Implications

- **For Higher Education:** Radical reforms to the teaching system are required. Conventional lecture methods must be replaced with Project-Based Learning partnered with the industry. Furthermore, the Career Center on campus must be optimized to train students' psychological aspects (resilience, self-efficacy, adaptability) from their first year of study, rather than merely acting as a distributor of job vacancy information upon graduation
- **For Industry Partners:** The industry is advised to design structured internship programs, have competent mentors, and provide real projects for interns, rather than merely assigning administrative tasks.

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has limitations in terms of generalizability because the sample is restricted to students from three universities. Future research is advised to expand the sample coverage to various geographic regions and types of educational institutions, such as vocational education. The use of mixed-methods is also highly recommended to dig deeper into the perspectives of employers regarding graduate work readiness qualitatively.

References

[1] Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman and Company.

[2] Betz, N. E., Klein, K. L., & Taylor, K. M. (1996). Evaluation of a short form of the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale. Journal of Career Assessment, 4(1), 47-57.

[3] Caballero, C. L., & Walker, A. (2010). Work readiness in graduate recruitment and selection: A review of current assessment methods. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 1(1), 13-25.

[4] Caballero, C. L., Walker, A., & Fullarton, N. (2011). The development of a working model of work readiness.

[5] *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 2(1), 41-54.

[6] Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. Bantam Books.

[7] Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). *Multivariate data analysis* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.

[8] Jackson, D. (2014). Self-assessment of employability skills among business students. *Education+ Training*, 56(4), 220-236.

[9] Jackson, D. (2015). Employability skill dev opment in work-integrated learning: Barriers and best practice.

[10] *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(2), 350-367.

[11] Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79-122.

[12] Purwanto, A., Asbari, M., & Santoso, P. B. (2021). Analisis Faktor Efikasi Diri dan Soft Skills terhadap Kesiapan Kerja Lulusan Perguruan Tinggi di Masa Pandemi COVID-19. *Jurnal Manajemen dan Organisasi*, 12(2), 115-128.

[13] Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42-70). John Wiley & Sons.

[14] Savickas, M. L., & Porfeli, E. J. (2012). Career Adapt-Abilities Scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3), 661-673.

[15] Slamet, P. H. (2014). Pengembangan Kesiapan Kerja Lulusan Pendidikan Vokasi. *Jurnal Pendidikan Vokasi*, 4(2), 143-157.

[16] Tomlinson, M. (2017). Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability. *Education+ Training*, 59(4), 338-352.

[17] Wibowo, A. (2019). Pengaruh Pengalaman Magang Industri dan Penguasaan Soft Skills Terhadap Kesiapan Kerja Mahasiswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bisnis dan Manajemen*, 5(3), 102-11.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

