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Setting the First Step: The Role of Soft Skills and Self-Efficacy in Students' Career Readiness

Fatimah Az Zahra[1*], Luthfiyyah Maharani Izzati[2]

Pamulang University, Indonesia[1,2]
*zahrahusen204@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze and investigate the influence of Soft Skills and Self-Efficacy on Career Readiness among final-year university students who are already employed. Career readiness is a crucial aspect determining student success in the transition from the academic environment to the professional world, where they are required to possess technical competence, interpersonal skills, and strong self-belief. Soft Skills, including communication, teamwork, time management, problem-solving, and adaptability, are considered essential. Meanwhile, Self-Efficacy, referring to an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully complete specific tasks, plays a vital role in building motivation, persistence, and resilience when facing dual job demands. This quantitative study utilized simple and multiple linear regression methods analyzed using SPSS, with a sample of 106 respondents, predominantly female (57.5%) and aged between 17–20 years (66%). The statistical analysis yielded strong and significant findings: The overall regression model is highly significant in predicting Career Readiness ($F = 121.850$, Sig. < 0.001), with 70.3% of the total variance in Career Readiness being explained by the combination of Soft Skills and Self-Efficacy ($R^2 = 0.703$). In both partial and multiple analyses, Self-Efficacy emerged as the most dominant factor ({Beta} = 0.686, B = 0.644, Sig. < 0.001), indicating that students' self-belief is the primary predictor of career readiness, though Soft Skills also showed a positive and significant influence (B = 0.138, Sig. = 0.010). In conclusion, this study affirms that Career Readiness is a product of psychological attributes (Self-Efficacy) and interpersonal competencies (Soft Skills), with the model proven robust (Durbin-Watson = 2.171). The practical implications highlight the necessity for higher education institutions to integrate structured Soft Skills training and Self-Efficacy development into career preparation programs.

Keywords:
Career Readiness, Soft Skills, Self-Efficacy, Multiple Regression, Working Students.

Introduction

Career readiness is a crucial aspect that determines the success of university students in entering the professional world, particularly for final-year students who are already employed. The transition from an academic environment to a professional setting requires students to possess not only hard skills but also strong soft skills, which include communication, leadership, problem-solving, time management, and teamwork abilities. Soft skills are considered a key determinant of career readiness, as they enable individuals to interact effectively in the workplace and respond adaptively to dynamic challenges (Chen & Lee, 2025).

In addition to soft skills, self-efficacy also plays a vital role in shaping students' career readiness. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully complete specific tasks. Students with high self-efficacy tend to display stronger confidence when facing recruitment processes, adapting to organizational culture, and taking initiative in completing job responsibilities. Self-efficacy is closely linked to motivation, persistence, and resilience in overcoming obstacles, thereby becoming a significant predictor of students' career readiness (Galanakis et al., 2016).

Career readiness can be defined as the level of preparedness of an individual to meet the demands of the workforce, which encompasses career planning, skill development, and adaptability to professional environments. Students with high career readiness are not only capable of meeting technical job requirements but are also adaptable to organizational dynamics and able to build effective professional networks (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022). Therefore, soft skills and self-efficacy are essential contributing factors to career readiness, as they equip students with the ability to proactively respond to real-world challenges in their careers.

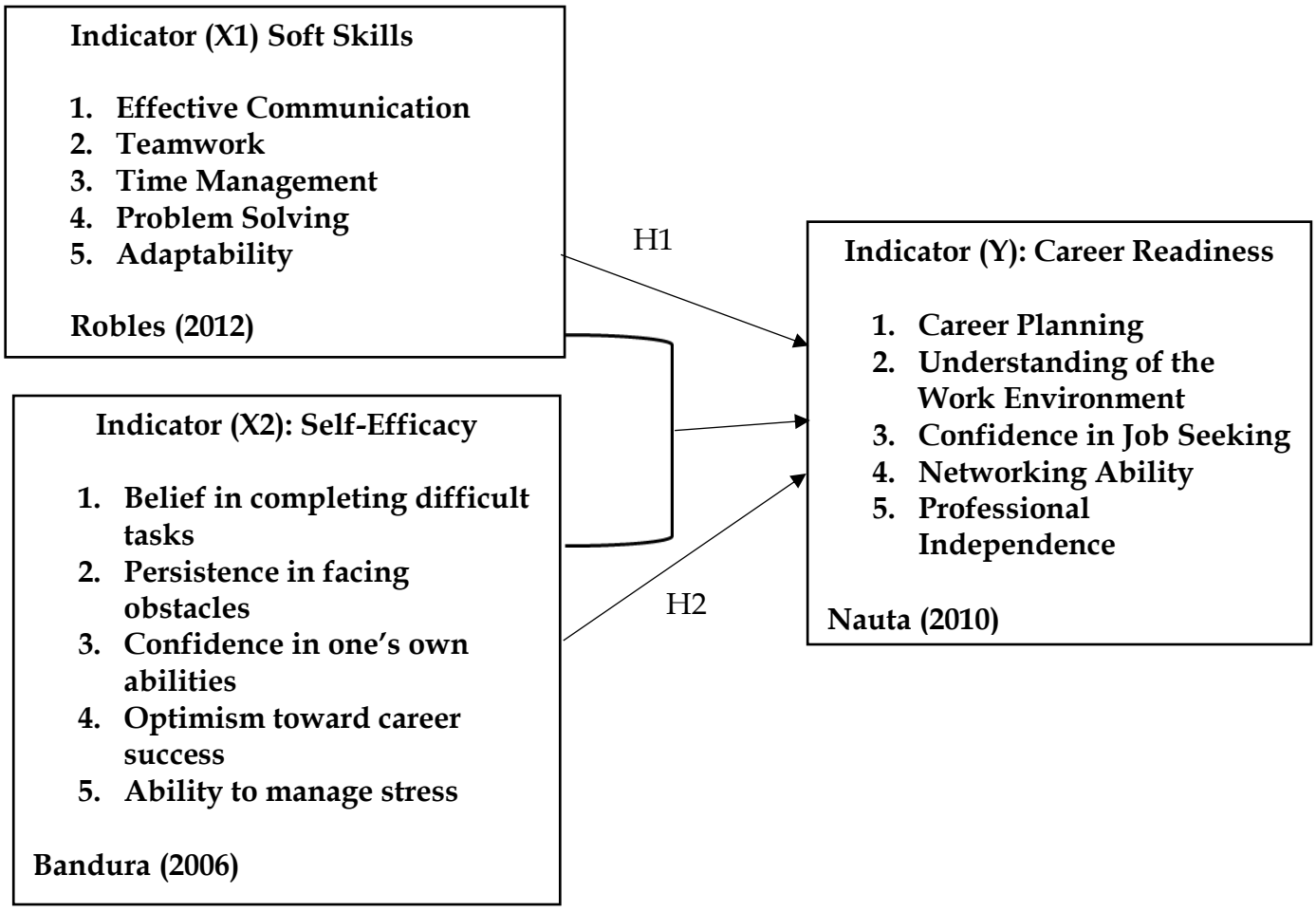
Among final-year students who are already employed, the relationship between soft skills, self-efficacy, and career readiness becomes even more relevant. Work experience may enhance students' interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, while self-efficacy enables them to manage the dual demands of academic and professional responsibilities. Previous studies indicate that the combination of work experience, well-developed soft skills, and strong self-efficacy significantly improves career readiness, as students gain not only theoretical knowledge but also practical exposure in real-world contexts (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022; Chen & Lee, 2025).

This study aims to investigate the influence of soft skills and self-efficacy on the career readiness of final-year university students who are currently working. The results are expected to provide practical contributions for higher education institutions in designing more relevant career development programs, and for students in strengthening their personal competencies to be better prepared for entering the workforce. Understanding the factors that influence career readiness is also necessary as a foundation for developing effective learning strategies, career guidance, and

professional development initiatives, so that the transition from academic life to the professional world can occur more efficiently and successfully.

Theoretical Framework

Framework of thinking



The theoretical framework illustrated above explains the relationship between soft skills (X1) and self-efficacy (X2) toward career readiness (Y) among final-year university students who are already working. Soft skills, as conceptualized by Robles (2012), encompass essential non-technical competencies such as effective communication, teamwork, time management, problem solving, and adaptability. These competencies are highly demanded in the workplace, as modern industries

expect candidates not only to have strong academic or technical abilities, but also the interpersonal and intrapersonal capabilities to collaborate, adapt to change, and handle real-world challenges. Therefore, soft skills directly contribute to students' preparedness to enter professional environments.

Furthermore, self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006) is defined as an individual's belief and confidence in their ability to successfully perform tasks and overcome obstacles. The indicators of self-efficacy in this study include belief in completing difficult tasks, persistence when facing challenges, confidence in one's own abilities, optimism about future career success, and the ability to manage stress. Final-year students who are already employed tend to experience dual responsibilities between academic requirements and workplace demands, thus strong self-efficacy becomes essential for maintaining performance and motivation. When students possess high self-efficacy, they are more likely to proactively pursue career opportunities, persist despite setbacks, and remain psychologically stable under pressure.

Career readiness (Nauta, 2010) is described as an individual's level of preparedness to enter the workforce, measured by career planning, understanding of the work environment, confidence in job seeking, networking ability, and professional independence. Students who demonstrate high career readiness are not only aware of their career direction but are also capable of building professional networks, presenting themselves confidently during recruitment processes, and functioning independently in a professional setting. The framework posits that both soft skills and self-efficacy simultaneously influence students' readiness to transition from academic life into the professional world.

The conceptual model visually represents how soft skills (X1) are expected to have a direct positive impact on career readiness (Y), because individuals with strong communication, teamwork, and adaptability are more likely to feel prepared and confident in navigating recruitment and organizational environments. Likewise, self-efficacy (X2) is hypothesized to positively influence career readiness (Y) because belief in one's ability and persistence in facing obstacles allow students to enter the labor market with higher confidence and direction. The visual arrows labeled H1 and H2 indicate the hypothesized influence from each independent variable (X1 and X2) toward the dependent variable (Y).

Based on the theoretical explanation and the model above, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:
H1: Soft Skills (X1) have a significant positive influence on Career Readiness (Y) among final-year working university students.
H2: Self-Efficacy (X2) has a significant positive influence on Career Readiness (Y) among final-year working university students.

H3: There is a positive and significant influence between self-efficacy and career readiness among final-year students who are working.

Method

This study employs a quantitative research method with statistical analysis using SPSS. Data were collected through a Likert scale questionnaire. Simple linear regression was conducted to examine the separate influence of soft skills and self-efficacy on career readiness, while multiple regression analysis was used to assess their simultaneous effect. The t-test was applied to evaluate the partial effect of each independent variable, whereas the F-test was used to determine the joint influence of soft skills and self-efficacy. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was utilized to measure the extent to which both independent variables contribute to explaining the career readiness of final-year students who are working.

Result

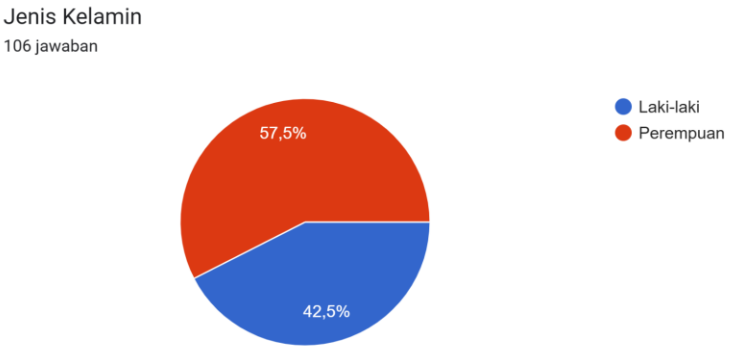


Figure 1. Respondent Gender

Based on the chart above, it can be seen that out of a total of 106 respondents, the majority are female, accounting for 57.5%, while male respondents make up 42.5%. This indicates that the participation in this study is predominantly from females. With this composition, the subsequent analysis may more strongly reflect the perspectives

or characteristics of female respondents, although the difference in proportion is not extremely large.

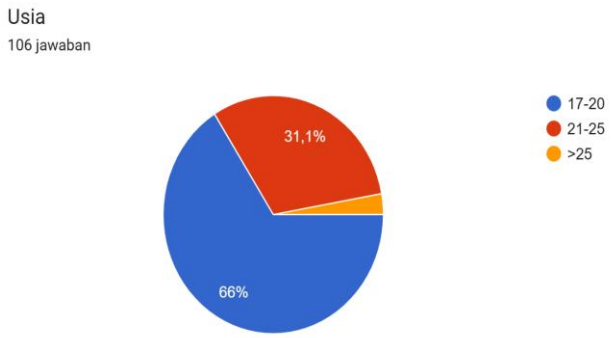


Figure 2. Respondent age

Based on the chart above, it can be seen that the majority of respondents are in the 17–20 years old age range, accounting for 66%. Meanwhile, 31.1% of respondents are in the 21–25 years old category, and only around 2–3% are over 25 years old.
This indicates that most respondents are in the early adulthood stage, typically those who are still pursuing higher education or just entering the workforce. This age composition is relevant to the context of career readiness research, as this group is actively in the phase of preparing for their future careers.

Table 1. Simple Regression

X1 Against Y

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	9.287	2.485		3.737	<,001					
	Soft Skills	.472	.050	.682	9.498	<,001	.682	.682	.682	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

The regression analysis results indicate that soft skills have a positive and significant influence on career readiness. The regression coefficient of 0.472 shows that every one-unit increase in soft skills leads to a 0.472-unit increase in career readiness. This finding is further supported by a t-value of 9.498 and a significance level of less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant effect. The standardized beta value of 0.682 demonstrates that soft skills make a strong contribution to career readiness. Additionally, there is no indication of multicollinearity, as both the VIF and Tolerance values are 1.000, meaning the model is valid and reliable. The constant value of 9.287 suggests that even without considering soft skills, career readiness remains at that baseline level. Overall, the results confirm that soft skills play a crucial role in

enhancing students' career readiness. In other words, the higher the level of soft skills possessed by students, the more prepared they are to enter the professional workforce.

Table 2. Simple Regression

X2 Against Y

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.238	2.183		.109	.913					
	Self-Efficacy	.775	.052	.826	14.963	<,001	.826	.826	.826	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

The regression results indicate that self-efficacy has a very strong and significant influence on career readiness. The regression coefficient of 0.775 shows that each increase in self-efficacy directly enhances students' career readiness. The t-value of 14.963 with a significance level below 0.001 confirms that this influence is statistically significant. The standardized beta coefficient of 0.826 further demonstrates that self-efficacy contributes strongly and dominantly to career readiness. Meanwhile, the constant value of 0.238 reflects the baseline level of career readiness when self-efficacy is not considered, although this result is not significant. There is no indication of multicollinearity, as both Tolerance and VIF values are 1.000. Overall, these findings confirm that the higher the students' confidence in their own abilities, the higher their level of readiness to enter the workforce.

Table 3. Multiple Regression

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-1.090	2.182		-.499	.619					
	Soft Skills	.138	.052	.199	2.640	.010	.682	.252	.142	.506	1.975
	Self-Efficacy	.644	.071	.686	9.092	<,001	.826	.667	.488	.506	1.975

a. Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

The table shows that both soft skills and self-efficacy have a significant positive influence on career readiness when tested simultaneously. The regression coefficient for soft skills is 0.138 with a significance level of 0.010, indicating that soft skills contribute meaningfully to improving career readiness. Meanwhile, self-efficacy has a much stronger effect, with a coefficient of 0.644 and a significance level below 0.001, demonstrating that students' confidence in their abilities plays a more dominant role in shaping their readiness to enter the workforce. The standardized beta values support this, showing that self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.686$) has a greater relative influence than

soft skills (β = 0.199). The tolerance values of 0.506 and VIF of 1.975 indicate that there is no multicollinearity issue between the two independent variables. Overall, the findings suggest that both soft skills and self-efficacy are important predictors of career readiness, with self-efficacy emerging as the stronger determinant.

Table 4. t-Test

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-1.090	2.182		-.499	.619
	Soft Skills	.138	.052	.199	2.640	.010
	Self - Efficacy	.644	.071	.686	9.092	<,001

a. Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

The regression Coefficients table indicates that both predictors, Soft Skills and Self-Efficacy, have a positive and significant influence on the dependent variable Career Readiness. Specifically, a one-unit increase in Soft Skills contributes to an increase in Career Readiness by 0.138 units (B=0.138), and this effect is significant (Sig. = 0.010). Meanwhile, Self-Efficacy shows a much stronger effect, where a one-unit increase will boost Career Readiness by 0.644 units (B=0.644), and this effect is highly significant (Sig. = <0.001). By comparing the standardized Beta coefficients, it is evident that Self-Efficacy ({Beta} = 0.686) is a far more dominant and powerful predictor of Career Readiness than Soft Skills ({Beta} = 0.199), suggesting that self-belief (Self-Efficacy) is the key factor in career readiness according to this model.

Table 5. F Test

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2429.296	2	1214.648	121.850	<,001[b]
	Residual	1026.742	103	9.968		
	Total	3456.038	105			

a. Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self - Efficacy, Soft Skills

This ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) table is used to test whether the regression model involving Self-Efficacy and Soft Skills simultaneously is capable of significantly predicting Career Readiness. The results of the ANOVA analysis indicate that the regression model using Self-Efficacy and Soft Skills as predictors is statistically significant in explaining the variation in Career Readiness. This is demonstrated by

the very high calculated F value (F = 121.850) with a highly significant p-value (Sig. < 0.001$). Since this significance value is much lower than the 0.05 critical threshold, it is concluded that at least one of the predictor variables has a significant influence on Career Readiness. Therefore, the regression model as a whole is valid and acceptable for predicting Career Readiness.

Table 6. Test Of the Coefficient Of Determination

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.838[a]	.703	.697	3.157	2.171

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self - Efficacy, Soft Skills

b. Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

The Model Summary table indicates that the regression model using Soft Skills and Self-Efficacy together has a very strong positive correlation (R = 0.838) with Career Readiness. The R^2 value of 0.703 signifies that 70.3% of the total variance in Career Readiness can be explained by these two predictors, demonstrating the model's high predictive power. The Adjusted R^2 of 0.697 confirms this strong explanatory ability when generalized to the population. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.171 falls within the acceptable range (typically 1.5 to 2.5), suggesting that the assumption of no autocorrelation among the residuals has been met. Overall, the model is highly effective and robust in predicting Career Readiness.

Discussion

The descriptive results indicate that the respondents in this study are predominantly female (57.5%) and mostly fall within the 17–20 years old age range (66%). This composition illustrates that the majority of respondents are in the early transition period from academic life to the professional world, where they typically still require the development of practical experience and confidence. The dominance of female respondents also suggests that the perception of career readiness in this study may largely reflect the perspectives and psychological tendencies of female students, who, according to previous studies, tend to experience higher levels of career-related anxiety compared to males—hence making factors such as self-efficacy and soft skills particularly crucial.

Theoretically, soft skills play a significant role in preparing students for the dynamic demands of the workplace. The findings of this study are expected to reinforce the argument that communication, teamwork, and time management skills are essential components that determine students' readiness to enter professional environments.

This is in line with Robles (2012) and Chen & Lee (2025), who state that modern industries not only evaluate individuals based on technical competence but also on their interpersonal capabilities, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities.
Additionally, self-efficacy is theoretically proven to have a strong influence on career readiness, as belief in one's own abilities encourages students to be more proactive in navigating recruitment processes, building professional networks, and coping with work-related pressures. Final-year students who are already employed are in a unique position, as they face dual responsibilities between academic requirements and workplace expectations. Thus, high self-efficacy enables them to manage both demands more effectively. In accordance with Bandura (2006) and Galanakis et al. (2016), confidence in one's ability directly contributes to motivation, persistence, and adaptability.

Should the results of the simple and multiple regression analyses support the proposed hypotheses, it can be concluded that both soft skills and self-efficacy significantly enhance the career readiness of final-year university students who are employed. This further emphasizes that career readiness is not solely influenced by work experience but is also shaped by the quality of psychological attributes and interpersonal competencies possessed by students. These findings are expected to provide meaningful implications for higher education institutions, highlighting the importance of not only focusing on academic hard skills but also integrating soft skills development and self-efficacy enhancement through career programs, workplace simulations, and professional coaching.

Therefore, this study is expected to contribute significantly to the understanding of psychological and competency-based factors that drive career readiness among students, while encouraging educational institutions to design more comprehensive and relevant career development strategies aligned with current workforce realities.

Conclusion

Based on the overall analysis and theoretical explanation, it can be concluded that soft skills and self-efficacy are significant determinants of career readiness among final-year university students who are already working. The respondent profile shows that the majority are young adults aged 17–20 and predominantly female, indicating that most of them are still in the early transition phase between academic life and the professional environment. This demographic context reinforces the importance of psychological preparedness and interpersonal competence in facing career challenges.

Soft skills — such as communication, teamwork, time management, and adaptability — are proven to be essential for students to confidently navigate professional settings, as modern workplaces prioritize not only technical competence but also behavioral and collaborative capabilities. Meanwhile, self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping

students' confidence, persistence, and initiative in pursuing career opportunities, especially for those juggling both academic and work responsibilities.

If the statistical results confirm the proposed hypotheses, it can be affirmed that both soft skills (H1) and self-efficacy (H2) have a positive and significant effect on career readiness, and their combined influence (H3) further strengthens students' preparedness to enter the workforce. This means that career readiness is not solely a result of work experience, but more importantly a product of strong psychological belief and interpersonal competence.

In conclusion, this study highlights the need for higher education institutions to integrate structured soft skills training and self-efficacy development into career preparation programs. By doing so, students will be better equipped to transition smoothly and successfully from the academic environment into the professional world.

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