

The Influence of Internship Experience and Soft Skills on Work Readiness Mediated by Self Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between internship experience, soft skills, and work readiness among Generation Z in Indonesia. The study focuses on final-year university students and recent graduates. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, using purposive sampling. The analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, utilizing the Smart PLS 4 software for evaluation. The findings reveal that internship experience significantly influences both work readiness and self-efficacy. Similarly, soft skills have a notable effect on self-efficacy and work readiness. Moreover, self-efficacy not only directly affects work readiness but also serves as a mediator in the link between internship experience, soft skills, and work readiness

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has entered the era of globalization, which brings intense competition in the labor market along with increasingly dynamic demands. In this increasingly fierce labor competition, prospective workers need to possess a strong potential to adapt and compete with developments and changes across various aspects of life, particularly in the professional world, which requires high-quality Human Resources (HR) (Astuti et al., 2023). Education serves as one of the key instruments in shaping excellent HR, and higher education institutions play a significant role in preparing job-ready individuals (Orr et al., 2023). The education sector contributes as a source of labor and acts as a driving factor in improving the quality of HR in Indonesia (Putri & Muizu, 2024). Therefore, university graduates need to have competencies and skills that enhance their chances of entering the labor market (Peersia et al., 2024). Various studies have identified competence as a key element supporting the success of graduates in the workforce, where the term "competence" is often associated with individual skills and attributes (Priksat et al., 2020).

According to the 2024 report from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) in Indonesia as of February 2024 reached 4.82% of the total population, with the 15–24 age group being the largest contributor (BPS, 2024). During the same period, the TPT among this youth group stood at 16.42%. This 15–24 age group is dominated by Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012 (Arum et al., 2023). In terms of education, the majority of Generation Z within this age range are still students or recent higher education graduates, often referred to as fresh graduates. The unemployment rate based on education level in February 2024 shows that the unemployment rate among university graduates was 5.63%, an increase of 0.11% from the previous year. One of the key causes of this high rate of educated unemployment is the lack of work readiness among graduates, resulting in many of them not being optimally absorbed into the labor market (Lestari & Ubaidillah, 2022).

In this case, work readiness in Indonesia, as reported by BPS in 2024, shows that around 20.27% of Indonesian youth aged 15–24 were not enrolled in school, employed, or in training. This segment of the population is often labeled as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), underscoring the difficulties faced during the shift from academic life to professional employment. The high unemployment rate and NEET proportion among Generation Z – which includes final-year university students and recent graduates – indicate a gap between the skills possessed by Gen Z and the demands of the labor market. This underscores the importance of developing both technical and non-technical skills (soft skills), as well as boosting self-efficacy to improve work readiness among young people, particularly Gen Z. Final-year students and fresh graduates entering the workforce need to be equipped with skills aligned with industry needs to ensure mature work readiness. Work readiness refers to an individual's ability to develop the necessary skills and attributes to enter the job market. With good work readiness, individuals can not only adapt to the professional world but also contribute to creating a competitive and professional workforce capable of meeting labor market demands (Daud et al., 2024).

One of the key factors supporting work readiness is internship experience. Internships provide students with the opportunity to gain firsthand exposure to the world of work, understand real workplace environments, develop their potential, and cultivate discipline and responsibility (Puteri & Rozamuri, 2023). Through internship experiences, individuals can better understand the dynamics and demands of the workplace and hone essential skills. With improved skills, their chances of being accepted into the workforce increase.

In addition to internship experience, soft skills also play an important role in work readiness. Soft skills encompass a range of interpersonal and communication abilities that support success in the professional world. In a highly competitive job market, soft skills serve as differentiating factors that enhance an applicant's competitiveness. Individuals with strong soft skills tend to stand out more in the eyes of employers, thereby increasing their readiness to enter the job market (Paramitha & Jalinus, 2020).

Self-efficacy, commonly understood as self-confidence, is another key factor that shapes an individual's readiness for the workforce. It reflects an individual's confidence in their ability to achieve particular goals. Students who possess high self-efficacy are generally more equipped to tackle obstacles and exhibit stronger motivation to achieve success (Syandianingrum & Wahjudi, 2021). This sense of confidence influences how individuals think, feel, and behave when dealing with various situations, including workplace challenges (Cheng et al., 2019). Those with elevated self-efficacy tend to persevere through difficulties and handle life's pressures with a more optimistic attitude (Sulistiowati & Komari, 2020). For instance, individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more inclined to view criticism as an opportunity for growth and self-betterment (Setiawan et al., 2023). Prior studies have also shown that self-efficacy plays a mediating role, significantly impacting the link between internship experiences and readiness for employment (Pitaloka et al., 2022).

What sets this study apart from prior research is its comprehensive approach in examining multiple factors that impact work readiness, including internship experience, soft skills, and self-efficacy. This study specifically focuses on Generation Z, particularly those in their final year of university and individuals who have recently completed a bachelor's degree. The outcomes of this study are anticipated to enrich academic discourse and offer valuable perspectives for Generation Z in Indonesia as they navigate the transition into professional life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internship Experience

Internship experience is an opportunity for students to hone practical skills, broaden industry insights, and enhance work readiness, all of which have been shown to positively impact academic achievement and career opportunities (Anggraeni, Nurhasanah, & Arifiani, 2024). The factors influencing the quality of internships include supportive organizational culture, supervisor support, task involvement, a conducive work environment, interpersonal skills, and personal motivation and interest – all of which collectively determine the effectiveness of the internship experience and students' work readiness (Kaban & Augustinus, 2022; Septiana & Harahap, 2024).

Soft Skills

Soft skills are abilities that encompass intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that play a vital role in helping individuals interact with others and manage themselves to achieve optimal performance and success in both social and professional environments. According to various previous studies, soft skills include communication skills, leadership, time management, emotional intelligence, motivation, and adaptability, which are all crucial in the workplace (Fauzan & Markoni, 2022; Sailah, 2008; Abdullah Aly in Neneng, 2021). Soft skills development is shaped by multiple factors, including one's social surroundings, organizational culture, guidance from supervisors or mentors, individual motivation, and experiential learning through practical engagement in academic or professional environments (Kaban & Augustinus, 2022; Septiana & Harahap, 2024). Therefore, a combination of internal factors – such as individual motivation and ability – and external factors – such as work environment and guidance from mentors – significantly determines the extent to which a person masters soft skills.

Work Readiness

Work readiness refers to the condition in which an individual, especially a fresh graduate, possesses sufficient skills, knowledge, attitudes, and mental preparedness to perform tasks and effectively adapt to the work environment. Recent studies reveal that work readiness includes technical and non-technical skills, professional behavior, and both physical and mental preparedness that support productivity in the workplace (Sentinuwo, Worang, & Walangitan, 2023). Several factors influence work readiness, including training, self-efficacy, social support, motivation, practical experience, and well-planned career development (Sentinuwo et al., 2023; Sari & Nurhifayati, 2022). Research by Sentinuwo et al. (2023) demonstrates that training significantly enhances work readiness, with self-efficacy acting as a crucial mediating factor in this relationship. Consequently, both internal elements – such as personal motivation and self-confidence – and external influences – like training programs and social support – collectively contribute to shaping an individual's preparedness for entering the job market.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks or face certain situations to achieve desired goals. This concept emphasizes the importance of personal confidence in managing actions so that tasks can be performed effectively and efficiently – not merely based on inherent abilities (Azhari et al., 2022). Self-efficacy consists of three key components: magnitude (the difficulty level of tasks believed to be achievable), strength (the degree of confidence in one's ability), and generality (the scope of confidence across different contexts) (Aprian in Andre & Santoso, 2022). Factors influencing self-efficacy include mastery experience (previous success or failure), vicarious experience (observing others' successes), social support and verbal persuasion, as well as individuals' physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1997; Kartika et al., 2022). Thus, self-efficacy is shaped by a combination of personal experience, environmental influence, and psychological conditions that build one's confidence in facing challenges and achieving goals (Azhari et al., 2022).

Relationship between Variables

Internship Experience and Self-Efficacy

Earlier research indicates that internship experience enhances a person's self-confidence, which subsequently boosts their readiness to enter the workforce. This indicates that internship experience must be accompanied by self-belief so that individuals feel capable of performing tasks well, thereby increasing their readiness for the workforce (Pitaloka et al., 2022). However, some studies show differing results. For example, a study exploring the connection between internship experience – specifically industrial work placements – and self-efficacy revealed that the relationship was not statistically significant. This suggests that participating in internships does not necessarily lead to increased confidence in handling real-world job challenges (Nurhayati & Kusmuriyanto, 2019).

H1 = Internship experience has a positive and significant effect on self-efficacy.

Soft Skills and Self-Efficacy

According to Paais & Apituley (2023), self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping soft skills. It empowers individuals to manage themselves efficiently, enabling them to perform tasks effectively and reach desired goals. While studies directly examining the link between soft skills and self-efficacy remain limited, existing research has identified a strong and positive association between these two variables (Amat & Talhah, 2021).

H2 = Soft skills have a positive and significant effect on self-efficacy.

Internship Experience and Work Readiness

Research by Supriyanto et al. (2023) found that internship experience has a positive and significant effect on work readiness. This means that the more internship experience an individual has, the higher their level of readiness to enter the workforce. Other studies also confirm that internship experience plays an important role in improving work readiness. The better the quality of internships students experience, the better prepared they are to face the professional world (Fauzan et al., 2023). Several other studies reinforce this finding by showing that internship experience significantly impacts individual

work readiness (Febriyana et al., 2023; Putri Pambajeng et al., 2024; Suyanto et al., 2019).

H3 = Internship experience has a positive and significant effect on work readiness.

Soft Skills and Work Readiness

Damayantie & Kustini (2022) discovered that soft skills positively and significantly influence students' readiness for the workforce. This implies that individuals with stronger soft skills tend to be better prepared for employment. Developing these skills helps individuals adapt more effectively to professional environments. However, not all studies align with this conclusion. For instance, research by Ratuela et al. (2022) found no significant link between soft skills and work readiness. Nonetheless, numerous other studies have affirmed that soft skills significantly contribute to an individual's level of work readiness (Deswarta et al., 2023; Fransiska & Aida, 2022; Sari & Manunggal, 2023).

H4 = Soft skills have a positive and significant effect on work readiness.

Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness

Fataron & Sijabat (2019) discovered that self-efficacy has a positive and significant impact on students' readiness to enter the job market. Essentially, those with high self-efficacy tend to approach challenges with greater confidence and have a higher likelihood of success, which enhances their overall work readiness. This conclusion is echoed by other researchers who also highlight the important role of self-efficacy in enhancing work readiness (Astuti et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2022). Nonetheless, contrasting evidence exists—such as the study by Violinda et al. (2023)—which reported that self-efficacy does not significantly affect students' readiness for employment.

H5 = Self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on work readiness.

Self-Efficacy as a Mediator between Internship Experience and Work Readiness

Pitaloka et al. (2022) demonstrated that self-efficacy acts as a mediator between internship experience and work readiness. This means that the impact of internship experience on an individual's preparedness for the workforce is strengthened when they possess confidence in their skills. Supporting this view, earlier research by Rochmah et al. (2021) also highlighted self-efficacy's mediating role in the connection between internship experience and work readiness. However, limited studies have thoroughly examined the interplay of these three factors. Some findings suggest that self-efficacy does not always mediate the relationship, possibly because some individuals feel their skills do not match their internship field, resulting in diminished confidence (Nurhayati & Kusmuriyanto, 2019).

H6 = Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between internship experience and work readiness.

Self-Efficacy as a Mediator between Soft Skills and Work Readiness

Research investigating self-efficacy's mediating role between soft skills and work readiness is still scarce, indicating a need for further study in this area. One study by Dian et al. (2023) suggests that self-efficacy significantly mediates the connection between soft skills and work readiness. As a vital component of an individual's preparedness for work, self-efficacy plays an important role in successfully completing tasks (Damayantie & Kustini, 2022). Moreover, research has shown that individuals with higher self-efficacy levels generally exhibit greater work readiness (Fataron & Sijabat, 2019). Consequently, self-efficacy can be seen as a key mediator that enhances the influence of soft skills on work readiness. The stronger a person's self-efficacy, the more assured they are in utilizing their soft skills, thereby boosting their overall readiness to enter the labor market.

H7 = Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between soft skills and work readiness.

Conceptual Framework

Referring to the description above, the research framework can be designed as follows:

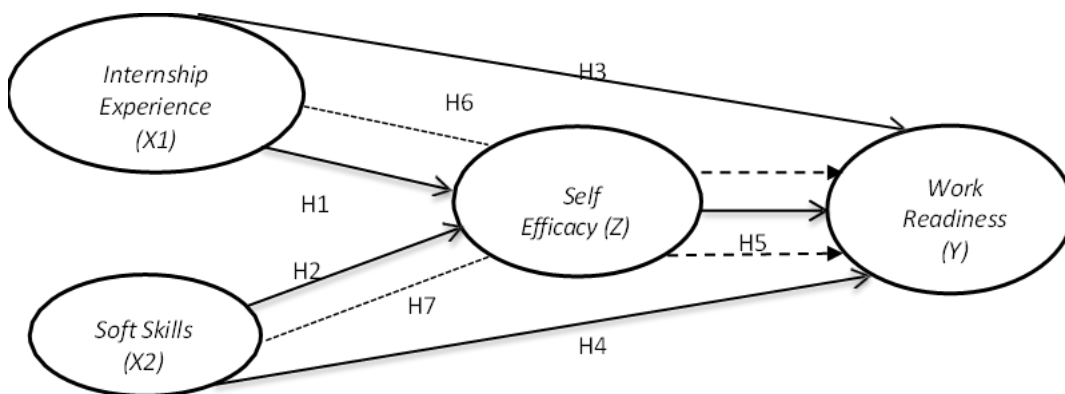


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study falls into the category of quantitative research with a causal-associative approach. Data were collected through the distribution of online questionnaires via social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram) using Google Forms, with the Likert scale as the measurement tool. The Likert scale used in this study consists of five categories: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire items for each variable were developed based on previous research. The Internship Experience variable (X1) consists of four main indicators: clear objectives, workplace support, university support, and general competencies (Nogueira et al., 2021). The soft skills variable (X2) includes five indicators: communication skills, emotional intelligence, critical thinking ability, ethics, and leadership (Nurbaiti & Putri, 2024). The self-efficacy variable (Z), which serves as a mediating variable, is composed of three key indicators: task difficulty level (magnitude), self-confidence or resilience (strength), and behavioral scope

(generality) (Violinda et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the Work Readiness variable (Y) is measured using four indicators: skills, knowledge, understanding, and personal attributes (Violinda et al., 2023).

The population of this study consists of final-year students and recent graduates from Generation Z in Indonesia. This study determines the sample size using the formula suggested by Hair et al. (2019), which calculates it by multiplying the total number of indicators by 10. With a total of 16 indicators, the minimum required sample size is 160 participants. Initially, the study involved 292 participants; however, after data screening and selection, only 262 respondents met the predetermined criteria. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, a non-probability method, with the following criteria: (1) aged 19–27 years; (2) final-year students (minimum 7th semester) or recent graduates (maximum of 2 years post-graduation); (3) enrolled in public or private universities in Indonesia; (4) have Internship Experience; (5) are aware of their level of self-efficacy; and (6) are aware of the soft skills they possess. This study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for data analysis, utilizing Partial Least Squares (PLS) as the analytical technique. The data were processed using SmartPLS version 4 software.

Measurement Models

Table. 1 Variable Measurement

Variable	Indicator	Items	Statements
Internship Experience (Luk & Chan, 2020)	Clear objectives	IE 1	I know roughly what I will do it for my internship.
		IE 2	From the beginning, it was clear what was I am expected to learn from this internship.
	Workplace support	IE 3	My boss is always inspiring to I to produce the best work.
		IE 4	I was given useful feedback on my work.
	University support	IE 5	My academic advisor was very supportive of me.
		IE 6	My major is very helpful in preparing me to look for an internship.
	General competencies	IE 7	I get exercise ability Analysis in solving problems
		IE 8	This internship has helped develop my ability to plan and organize my daily work.
Soft Skills (Efendi, 2021)		SS 1	I get Communicate interactively with my colleagues.

Variable	Indicator	Items	Statements
	Communication skills		
	Emotional intelligence	SS 2	I am able to speak firmly in expressing opinions.
		SS 3	I help colleague If I have difficulty in doing the task.
	Critical thinking ability	SS 4	I can make decisions that are well in various working conditions.
		SS 5	I can quickly see errors of an object and situation.
		SS 6	I follow and give contribution idea when are discussing in the group.
	Ethics	SS 7	I can accept suggestions or criticism from colleagues regarding work.
		SS 8	I always follow The rules in my neighborhood are in.
	Leadership	SS 9	I can lead colleagues I deep a team if needed.
		SS 10	I get consider Various option before make decisions.
Work Readiness (Wong, et al., 2024)	Skills	WR 1	I can find new ways to complete the task.
		WR 2	I fast Adapt with a new environment.
	Knowledge	WR 3	I can explain my field to others well.
		WR 4	I understand information basis about the type of work I'm interested in.
	Understanding	WR 5	I tend to consider carefully every decision I want to make.
		WR 6	I understand Important effective communication in a work environment.
		WR 7	I want deepen knowledge of the world of work, so I try to find information in relevant areas.

Variable	Indicator	Items	Statements
Self efficacy (Journal & Teaching, 2019)	Meganitude	WR 8	I tend to Be open to new ideas and experiences at work.
		SE 1	When I get a difficult task, I am confident that I can complete it.
	Strength	SE 2	I can complete a task that easy.
		SE 3	When faced with problems, I remain confident and will try harder to find solutions and solve them as well as possible maybe.
		SE 4	I always motivate myself myself when I failed.
	General	SE 5	I always want Increase my skills and knowledge.
SE 6		I believe in my ability to successfully accomplish tasks across various fields of knowledge.	

RESULT

Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2. Respondent Profile

Category	Items	F	%
Gender	Man	140	47.9
	Woman	152	52.1
Age	19-20	72	24.7
	21-24	124	42.5
	25-27	96	32.9
Final education	SLTA(SMA/SMK)	72	24.7
	D3	24	8.2
	D4	24	8.2
	S1	128	50.7
	S2	24	8.2
Internship Period	Aug - Oct 2024	43	14.7
	Apr - Jun 2024	24	8.2
	Feb - Apr 2024	42	14.4
	Jan - Mar 2024	37	12.7
	Jul - Sep 2024	37	12.7
	Jun - Aug 2024	36	12.3
	Mar - May 2024	40	13.7
	May - Jul 2024	33	11.3
Company/ Agency where the internship took place	BPS	23	7.9
	Bank Indonesia	22	7.5
	Bappeda	18	6.2
	Tourism	26	8.9
	Education Office	17	5.8
	Disdukcapil	31	10.6
	KPU	20	6.8
	Governor's Office	19	6.5
	Ministry of Social Affairs	21	7.2
	Kominfo	19	6.5
	PT Pertamina	25	8.6
	PT Telkom Indonesia	27	9.2
	National Library	24	8.2

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Respondent data collection was conducted online through social media platforms, including Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram, by analyzing demographic aspects to gain a general overview of the survey participants' profiles. A total of 292 individuals initially participated in this study; however, after the outlier data screening process, only 263 respondents met the criteria to proceed to the hypothesis analysis stage. Respondents who were excluded were categorized as outliers due to having data values that significantly deviated from the majority of other participants (Ghozali, 2021). Table 2 presents the detailed characteristics of the respondents, where the majority were female (52%), aged between 21 and 24 years old (42%), and held a bachelor's degree (50%). Regarding the internship period, the largest group completed their internships between August and October 2024 (14%), with most respondents interning at the

Department of Population and Civil Registration (Disdukcapil), totaling 31 individuals (10%).

Evaluation of Measurement Model (Loading Factor)

Table 3. Loading Factor

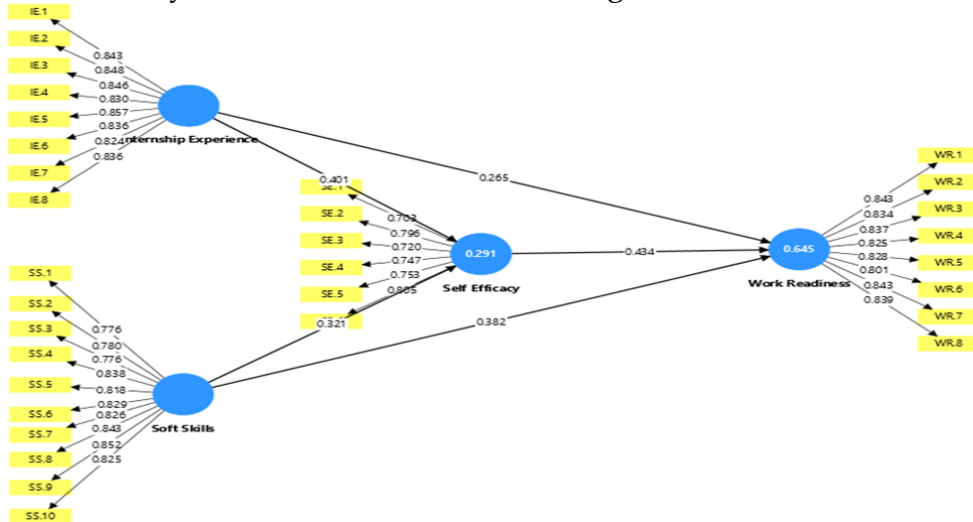
Variable	Items	Statements	Value loading factor > 0.70	AVE value > 0.5
Internship Experience	IE 1	I know roughly what I will do it for my internship.	0.843	0.706
	IE 2	From the beginning, it was clear what was I am expected to learn from this internship.	0.848	
	IE 3	My boss is always inspiring to I to produce the best work.	0.846	
	IE 4	I was given useful feedback on my work.	0.830	
	IE 5	My academic advisor was very supportive of me.	0.857	
	IE 6	My major is very helpful in preparing me to look for an internship.	0.836	
	IE 7	I get exercise ability Analysis in solving problems	0.824	
	IE 8	This internship has helped develop my ability to plan and organize my daily work.	0.836	
Soft Skills	SS 1	I get Communicate interactively with my colleagues.	0.776	0.667
	SS 2	I am able to speak firmly in expressing opinions.	0.780	
	SS 3	I help colleague If I have difficulty in doing the task.	0.776	
	SS 4	I can make decisions that are well in various working conditions.	0.838	
	SS 5	I can quickly see errors of an object and situation.	0.818	
	SS 6	I follow and give contribution idea when are discussing in the group.	0.829	
	SS 7	I can accept suggestions or criticism from colleagues regarding work.	0.826	
	SS 8	I always follow The rules in my neighborhood are in.	0.843	

Variable	Items	Statements	Value loading factor > 0.70	AVE value > 0.5
Work Readiness	SS 9	I can lead colleagues I deep a team if needed.	0.852	0.691
	SS 10	I get consider Various option before make decisions.	0.825	
	WR 1	I can find new ways to complete the task.	0.843	
	WR 2	I fast Adapt with a new environment.	0.834	
	WR 3	I can explain my field to others well.	0.837	
	WR 4	I understand information basis about the type of work I'm interested in.	0.825	
	WR 5	I tend to consider carefully every decision I want to make.	0.828	
	WR 6	I understand Important effective communication in a work environment.	0.801	
Self Efficacy	WR 7	I want deepen knowledge of the world of work, so I try to find information in relevant areas.	0.843	0.570
	WR 8	I tend to Be open to new ideas and experiences at work.	0.839	
	SE 1	When getting a difficult task, I am confident that I can solve it.	0.703	
	SE 2	I can complete a task that easy.	0.796	
	SE 3	When faced with problems, I remain confident and will try harder to find solutions and solve them as well as possible maybe.	0.720	
	SE 4	I always motivate myself myself when I failed.	0.747	
	SE 5	I always want Increase my skills and knowledge.	0.753	
	SE 6	I am confident that I can complete all tasks in different areas of knowledge.	0.805	

Source: Processed Data (2025)

As presented in Table 3, the analysis results indicate that all items under their respective constructs have loading values greater than 0.70, confirming their validity. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was computed to evaluate discriminant validity. The findings show that each construct has an AVE value exceeding 0.5, thereby meeting the threshold for convergent validity as established by Hair et al. (2019).

The validity indicators are shown in the figure below.



Source: Processed Data (2025)
Figure 2. Algorithm Model Result

Discriminant Validity

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Test Results

Variable	IE	SE	SS	WR
Fornell-larkcer criterion				
IE	0.840			
SE	0.434	0.755		
SS	0.103	0.362	0.817	
WR	0.493	0.687	0.566	0.831

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 4 presents the results of the discriminant validity test based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values has been shown to exceed the correlations between the corresponding constructs. The values are as follows: Internship Experience 0.840, Self-Efficacy 0.755, Soft Skills 0.817, and Work Readiness 0.831. These findings indicate that each measurement item demonstrates an adequate and acceptable level of discriminant validity.

Composite Reliability

Table 5. Reability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)
IE	0.940	0.950
SE	0.848	0.888
SS	0.944	0.952
WR	0.936	0.947

Source: Processed Data (2025)

To determine the level of reliability, the variance explained by the construct reliability and validity is compared with the total available variance. According to Hair et al. (2019), an ideal composite reliability value should be greater than 0.70. Based on Table 5, all constructs show composite reliability alpha and rho_c values greater than 0.70, indicating that all constructs possess strong reliability. Therefore, the instrument used in this study can be categorized as valid.

R Square (R2)

Table 6. Discriminant Validity Test Results

Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted
Self Efficacy	0.291	0.285
Work Readiness	0.645	0.641

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 6 presents the R Square values, which illustrate the extent to which the mediating variable contributes to the dependent variable. Accordingly, the model in this study is able to explain 29.1% of the variance in Self-Efficacy, while the influence on Work Readiness reaches 64.5%. After all preliminary tests were confirmed to be valid, the next step was to conduct hypothesis testing based on the formulated hypotheses.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Hypotheses Test Results

Effect	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standart Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/ST DEV)	P Value	Description
Internship Experience -> Self Efficacy	0.401	0.402	0.051	7.869	0.000	Significant
Soft Skills -> Self Efficacy	0.321	0.324	0.050	6.361	0.000	Significant
Internship Experience -> Work Readiness	0.265	0.266	0.046	5.707	0.000	Significant
Soft Skills -> Work Readiness	0.382	0.383	0.041	9.348	0.000	Significant
Self Efficacy -> Work Readiness	0.434	0.434	0.051	8.559	0.000	Significant
Internship Experience -> Self Efficacy -> Work Readiness	0.174	0.174	0.028	6.163	0.000	Significant
Soft Skills -> Self Efficacy -> Work Readiness	0.139	0.140	0.026	5.380	0.000	Significant

Readiness

Source: Processed Data (2025)

DISCUSSION

In this study, five direct effects and two indirect effects were included in the hypothesis testing. The specifics of these effects are outlined in Table 6. The first hypothesis, which explores the impact of Internship Experience on Self-Efficacy, reveals a significant and positive relationship. This hypothesis is supported, as indicated by a T-statistic of 7.869, which is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Overall, it can be concluded that higher-quality internship experiences tend to enhance individuals' self-efficacy, which in turn strengthens their readiness to enter the workforce. This finding aligns with previous studies by Lin et al. (2018), who found that internship experiences significantly and positively affect students' self-efficacy. Similarly, Nurrahman (2021) found that internship programs have a positive and significant impact on self-efficacy, identifying internship experiences as one of the key factors contributing to students' confidence in their capabilities.

The second hypothesis, which investigates the influence of soft skills on self-efficacy, also shows a positive and significant result. This hypothesis is supported, with a T-statistic of 6.361 and a p-value of 0.000. Put simply, individuals who possess strong soft skills—like communication, collaboration, and self-regulation—tend to have higher confidence in managing challenges and responsibilities. This confidence, referred to as self-efficacy, acts as a mediator that enhances the connection between soft skills and readiness for the workforce. This means soft skills not only directly impact one's preparedness for the workplace but also exert an indirect influence through enhanced self-efficacy.

Individuals with strong soft skills tend to feel more confident in their abilities, making them more prepared and competent in entering the workforce. These findings are consistent with prior studies by Paais & Apituley (n.d.) and Diriri et al. (2024), who also found a positive and significant relationship between soft skills and self-efficacy.

The third hypothesis tests the effect of Internship Experience on Work Readiness. The analysis indicates a positive and significant relationship, and the hypothesis is therefore accepted. This is demonstrated by a T-statistic of 5.707 and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that direct involvement in professional work environments allows individuals to gain practical insight into workplace dynamics and culture while developing the necessary technical and social skills. Additionally, this experience enhances adaptability to change and organizational dynamics. Not only does it build capacity and skills, but it also fosters confidence – ultimately preparing individuals both mentally and professionally to face real-world workplace challenges. These results align with previous research by Dian et al. (2023) and Fauzan et al. (2023), who also found that internship experiences positively and significantly affect work readiness.

The fourth hypothesis, which explores the impact of soft skills on work readiness, indicates a significant and positive relationship. The hypothesis is accepted, with a T-statistic of 9.384 and a p-value of 0.000. This means that the better an individual's communication, collaboration, leadership, emotional regulation, and time management skills, the more prepared they are to enter the workforce. Soft skills play a crucial role in shaping professional behavior, strengthening adaptability, and fostering self-confidence. Therefore, developing soft skills is a key factor that supports individual success in both entering and sustaining a career in a competitive work environment. These findings are in line with studies by Syari (2024) and Indriayu (2024), which also found that soft skills positively and significantly influence work readiness.

The fifth hypothesis, which investigates the effect of self-efficacy on work readiness, demonstrates a significant and positive impact, while also confirming self-efficacy's mediating role in work readiness. This is supported by a T-value of 8.559 and a p-value of 0.000. Essentially, individuals with stronger confidence in their ability to accomplish tasks and overcome challenges tend to be better prepared for entering the workforce. These findings are in line with previous research by Astuti et al. (2023) and Fataron (2019), both of which reported a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness.

The sixth hypothesis, which investigates the effect of Internship Experience on Work Readiness with Self-Efficacy as a mediating variable, demonstrates a positive and statistically significant mediation effect, as evidenced by a T-statistic of 6.163 and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that active participation in a professional work setting allows students to acquire practical skills and gain a deeper understanding of workplace dynamics. Moreover, self-efficacy – the confidence in one's own abilities – serves as a mediator in this relationship. In essence, internship experience not only directly enhances work readiness but also boosts self-confidence, which further strengthens an individual's capacity to successfully navigate workplace challenges. These

results align with earlier findings from Pitaloka et al. (2022) and Rangkuti et al. (2023), who similarly reported that internship experience significantly improves work readiness through the mediation of self-efficacy.

The seventh hypothesis, which investigates the effect of soft skills on work readiness with self-efficacy as a mediating variable, also shows a positive and significant mediating effect, as indicated by a T-statistic of 5.380 and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that soft skills play a crucial role in shaping an individual's readiness to face the professional world. Skills such as effective communication, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability not only enable a person to perform well in a professional environment but also significantly affect their level of work readiness. This impact occurs not only directly but also indirectly, through self-efficacy – an individual's belief in their own capacity. Thus, individuals with strong soft skills tend to be more confident in dealing with workplace challenges, which in turn enhances their overall readiness to enter and succeed in the professional world. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Dian et al. (2023) and Syifa et al. (2023), who also found that soft skills significantly and positively influence work readiness through self-efficacy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Findings indicate that self-efficacy serves as a crucial mediator linking the effects of internship experience and soft skills to work readiness. Internship experience has been proven to positively influence self-efficacy. This implies that higher-quality internship experiences tend to enhance an individual's level of self-efficacy. Furthermore, soft skills have been shown to have a positive impact on both self-efficacy and work readiness. The better one's soft skills – such as communication, teamwork, and self-management – the greater their confidence in handling various challenges and responsibilities. As a mediating variable, self-efficacy strengthens the relationship between internship experience and soft skills with work readiness.

To improve both work readiness and self-efficacy, it is recommended to participate in internships or practical work programs within industry settings. Direct exposure to real-world work environments helps individuals understand organizational culture, develop technical competencies, and build the confidence needed to face professional challenges. Additionally, enhancing soft skills – such as communication, collaboration, leadership, emotional regulation, and time management – should be prioritized.

Future research is encouraged to explore other factors that may influence work readiness and self-efficacy, as many potentially relevant variables were not identified in the current study. This research is also limited to Generation Z in Indonesia and focuses solely on two independent variables, one dependent variable, and one mediating variable. Thus, further studies involving broader populations and more complex models are recommended to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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