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**From College to Career: Career Readiness as a Driver of Work
Readiness in Final-Year Students**

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Abstract

The number of higher education graduates entering the industrial workforce has declined. One of the factors influencing this issue is the low level of work readiness among university graduates. Work readiness is considered an important aspect that can contribute to increasing the absorption of graduates into the workforce. The low work readiness of university graduates needs to be addressed to prepare students to enter the job market in line with industry demands. This study aims to identify the relationship between career readiness and work readiness among final-year students. The subjects in this study were 90 final-year students from various majors. The study used a correlational quantitative approach, employing career and work readiness scales. The results of this study indicate that the hypothesis is accepted: career readiness is related to work readiness among final-year students ($r = 0.590$, $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$). The higher an individual's capacity to prepare for their career, the higher their work readiness. These findings suggest that forming a clear picture of one's career can be important in preparing to face the world of work.

Abstrak

Jumlah angkatan kerja lulusan pendidikan tinggi yang terserap didunia kerja industri mengalami penurunan. Permasalahan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh Salah satu faktor yang memengaruhi hal tersebut adalah rendahnya kesiapan kerja lulusan perguruan tinggi. Kesiapan kerja dianggap sebagai aspek penting yang dapat mendorong peningkatan penyerapan lulusan di dunia kerja. Rendahnya kesiapan kerja lulusan perguruan tinggi perlu ditangani guna mempersiapkan mahasiswa agar siap memasuki dunia kerja sesuai dengan tuntutan industri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi hubungan antara kesiapan karir dengan kesiapan kerja pada mahasiswa tingkat akhir. Subjek dalam penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa tingkat akhir dari berbagai jurusan berjumlah 90 orang. Penelitian ini dirancang dengan pendekatan kuantitatif korelasional. Menggunakan skala kesiapan karir dan skala kesiapan kerja. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa hipotesis diterima, kesiapan karier memiliki hubungan dengan kesiapan kerja mahasiswa tingkat akhir ($r=0.590$, $p=0.001$, $p<0.05$). Semakin tinggi kapasitas individu untuk menyiapkan kariernya akan diikuti oleh peningkatan pada kesiapan kerja. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa persiapan gambaran karier individu dapat menjadi variabel penting untuk menyiapkan diri menghadapi dunia kerja.

Keywords: Career readiness; college student; correlational analysis; work readiness

Introduction

Unemployment in Indonesia has increased year by year. According to data from tradingeconomics.com, based on a survey of Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia ranks second in unemployment,

just after Brunei Darussalam. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reported that in August 2022, the total labor force was 143.72 million people, with an Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) of 5.86% (BPS, 2022). Overall, the number of unemployed individuals in Indonesia by the end of 2022 had decreased compared to 2021, totaling 8.42 million (BPS, 2022). However, based on the same BPS survey, there was a decline in the number of employed individuals based on their highest completed level of education. The proportion of workers with the highest education level being a Diploma IV, Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree dropped from 10.18% in 2021 to 9.87% in 2022 (BPS, 2022). This issue deserves special attention from higher education institutions.

Employers adjust their absorption of university and institute graduates based on their skills and competencies. Many university graduates work in fields unrelated to their skills and educational background. Zahira's (2024) analysis shows a mismatch between workers' skills and educational backgrounds and their current jobs, affecting 39% of research subjects. This phenomenon reflects a gap between the needs of employers and the supply of prospective workers provided by higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Many factors influence the employability of university graduates in Indonesia. According to Alam (2016), one factor affecting the employability of graduates is economic growth. As of 2022, Indonesia's economic growth stood at 5.31% (BPS, 2022). In addition, labor skills are another key factor affecting graduate employability (Jarmita et al., 2024). According to Dessler (2017), a mismatch between company needs and job applicants has become a trend in human resource management. An APEC (2015) report notes that Indonesia is not facing a shortage of graduates but workers with the right skills. Priyono and Nankervis (2019) argue that a current challenge is the mismatch between the vocational and university education curricula and the skills demanded by industries now and in the future. As providers of future workers, I believe this situation presents a major challenge for higher education institutions in equipping students with the right skills.

The shift in technological trends presents a unique challenge for higher education institutions tasked with producing graduates as future workforce members. According to a survey conducted by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) in 2019, Indonesia has successfully embraced the digital revolution, spurring the growth of digital service companies. The skills companies require have also shifted toward

technological competencies and social skills, emotional intelligence, and higher-order cognitive abilities (MGI, 2019). Therefore, higher education providers are expected to prepare graduates who meet these criteria to produce skilled future workers.

In addition to possessing various skills, university graduates are also expected by employers to demonstrate work readiness (Ratuela et al., 2022). Work readiness refers to the degree to which graduates are perceived to have the attitudes and attributes necessary to be prepared for and succeed in the workplace (Fenech et al., 2019). The issue of graduate work readiness has arisen partly due to the introduction of new technologies across all industrial sectors, which has implications for workplaces, job roles, and work processes. This issue is further compounded by a significant failure by three major stakeholders—governments, employers, and educational institutions—to recognize, combine, and adapt to these changes (Nurjanah & Ana, 2022).

Given these challenges, it is not an exaggeration to say that student work readiness is a critical aspect for which higher education institutions must prepare. Caballero et al. (2011) state that work readiness comprises personal characteristics, organizational acumen, job competencies, and social intelligence.

Work readiness in individuals can be cultivated and developed before they enter the workforce. One way to achieve this is by preparing a career plan that aligns with each individual's self-concept. Caballero and Walker (2010) state that personal attributes such as building relationships, job competence, and organizational skills are key factors in determining work readiness. Research by Masole and van Dyk (2016) found that one personal attribute that can strengthen work readiness is emotional intelligence. Career readiness is another important attribute that supports work readiness (Overacker et al., 2018). According to Caballero et al. (2011), career readiness is a significant developmental milestone in which young individuals consider roles that enhance personal growth, social adaptation, and overall well-being. It includes awareness of career choices and knowledge about the world of work. Research by Mahmud et al. (2022) shows that career readiness training for university students can improve their career decision-making self-efficacy.

This study also considers the dynamics of the contemporary job market in Indonesia, which is characterized by a mismatch between graduate competencies and industry needs (skill mismatch), shifts in competency demands due to digitalization, and an increasing need for

non-technical skills such as social intelligence, emotional regulation, and organizational abilities. Within this context, the present study offers a theoretical contribution by examining career readiness as a predictor of work readiness. This approach will provide a foundation for developing systematic strategies within higher education institutions to strengthen students' career readiness throughout their studies, enhancing graduate relevance to labor market demands.

Based on the problems outlined above, it can be concluded that the work readiness of university graduates must receive special attention. Work readiness can be an added value that helps graduates be absorbed into the workforce. Further exploration is needed to understand the relationship between work readiness and other influencing factors. This study examines the career and work readiness relationship among final-year university students.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational method. The variables involved in this research were career readiness and work readiness. Career readiness is operationally defined as an individual's condition in considering roles and jobs prepared to enhance personal capacity development, measured through crystallizing, exploring occupations, deciding, and preparing (Caballero et al., 2011). The second variable, work readiness, is the degree to which an individual's ability is indicated through attitudes and attributes that reflect readiness for success. This variable is measured through personal characteristics, organizational acumen, job competence, and social intelligence.

This study's participants were 90 final-year students at a public university completing their undergraduate theses. The instruments used in this study were the Career Readiness Scale developed by Sholikah et al. (2017) and the Work Readiness Scale developed by Ainiyah and Husna (2022). The Work Readiness Scale consists of 25 statement items with a Cronbach's alpha reliability score of 0.907 and a convergent validity score of 0.777. The Career Readiness Scale consists of 35 items with a reliability score of 0.905 and item validity scores of 0.85 to 0.95. Each item on both scales included four response options, ranging from Strongly Disagree (STS) to Strongly Agree (SS). The data analysis technique used to test the hypothesis was the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, conducted using SPSS software.

Result and Discussion

The participants in this study consisted of 90 final-year students from public universities in Indonesia. Table 1 presents the distribution of the participant's demographic data. 69%, or 62 respondents, were students from social sciences and humanities majors, while the remaining 31%, or 28 respondents, were from science and technology majors. Based on the data collected, 36%, or 32 participants, were not actively involved in student organizations, while the other 64%, or 58 participants, were actively engaged in organizational activities. Additionally, based on the questionnaire responses, most participants—87% or 78 students—were in their seventh semester at the time of data collection.

Table 1.
Respondent's Demographic Data

Category	Characteristic	N	Percentage
Major	Social Sciences and Humanities	62	69%
	Science and Technology	28	32%
	Total	90	100%
Organization	Active	58	64%
	Inactive	32	36%
	Total	90	100%
Semester	7	78	87%
	≥8	12	13%
	Total	90	100%

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics and Correlational Test

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	1	2
Career Readiness	90	52	100	78.26	10.820	-	
Work Readiness	90	99	151	125.97	12.197	590	-

*p<0.05

Based on the descriptive statistical analysis of the independent and dependent variables presented in Table 2, the mean score for career readiness among final-year students was M = 78.26, with a standard deviation (SD) = 10.820. Meanwhile, the mean score for work readiness was M = 125.97, with SD = 12.197.

Before testing the hypothesis, assumption testing was conducted to assess the distribution and linearity of the data. Normality was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which indicated that the data were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). The p-value for career readiness was 0.466, and for work readiness, it was 0.062. The linearity test also confirmed that the two variables were linearly related, with a deviation from the linearity value of 0.192 ($p > 0.05$).

The Pearson product-moment correlation test results, as shown in Table 2, revealed a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.590 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the research hypothesis is accepted: a significant moderate positive correlation exists between career and work readiness. In other words, the higher a student's career readiness, the higher their level of work readiness is likely to be.

The findings of this hypothesis test demonstrate that career readiness is positively associated with work readiness. An increase follows an increase in career readiness scores in work readiness scores. According to Fidia and Kholifah (2022), career-ready individuals tend to also show higher levels of work readiness. Career readiness is reflected through behaviors such as recognizing personal interests, identifying core personal values, and other related actions (Savickas et al., 2018). These behaviors are accompanied by the development of attitudes and personal attributes that prepare individuals for entering the workforce. Ridho and Siswanti (2020) suggest that individuals require a clear perspective on their future to attain work readiness. This perspective can be developed through self-concept identification, exploration of career fields and opportunities, decision-making, selecting a suitable profession, and preparing to pursue that path.

According to Burgess, Cameron, Dhakal, and Brown (2018), the concept of employability readiness goes beyond formal qualifications such as education. Graduates are expected to possess attributes that enhance their ability to secure employment in fields aligned with their qualifications. Prikshat, Nankervis, Burgess, and Dhakal (2019) define employability readiness as a dynamic and integrated competence that requires the reconfiguration, synthesis, and integration of four key resources—intellectual, personality, meta-skills, and job-specific skills—which graduates must shape into a holistic, compelling, and personalized narrative to attract potential employers. Employability readiness is thus a critical factor in understanding the transition from education to employment (Prikshat et al., 2019).

The relationship between the variables in this study can also be understood through factors influencing work readiness, including supportive and aspirational factors (Ihsan, 2018). One such supportive factor is access to information about preferred job types. The more information final-year students have about career opportunities, the better prepared they are to enter the job market.

Research on work readiness has been growing in recent years. Findings by Ranganathan (2018) indicate that work readiness skills improve employee retention. Similarly, Li et al. (2022) found that work readiness predicts self-efficacy, job commitment, and organizational retention intention among nursing graduates. Other research by Walker and Campbell (2013) shows that work readiness predicts job satisfaction and employee engagement. These studies emphasize the importance of work readiness in predicting various behaviors in the workplace.

However, the capacity of final-year students to prepare themselves for the workforce remains underexplored, especially in the context of higher education. When considering the roles of new graduates in corporate and non-profit organizations, it becomes clear that work readiness needs to be developed and honed before students enter the professional world. Gajda (2019) found that employees generally need at least two months to adapt to a new work environment, with some individuals requiring even more time. Personal characteristics, particularly mental resilience, help individuals adjust quickly to new work settings.

An individual with career readiness is characterized by having the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to plan and map out their future (Gysbers, 2013). Sampson Jr. et al. (2013) argue that career readiness is influenced by the individual's ability to make career decisions while considering external factors such as family, organizational environment, social dynamics, and economic conditions. Career readiness is also often referred to by related terms such as career maturity or career preparedness.

Final-year students, in particular, require structured career planning as they prepare to transition out of higher education. The earlier they develop career readiness, the more time they have to explore and enhance their competencies, strengthen their characteristics, develop organizational awareness, build job competencies, and cultivate their interpersonal skills (Tiarmoko & Fairuz, 2024).

Research on career readiness has continued to expand, particularly in countries like Australia and the United Kingdom. This trend is driven by government policies that mandate young individuals to understand their career pathways, plan necessary steps, and prepare accordingly (Dodd et al., 2021). According to Mahmud et al. (2022), career readiness helps individuals reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, and abilities. In Indonesia, however, efforts to map these elements have not been widely supported through specific programs in the education sector. The findings of this study may thus serve as evidence to support future research and policy development aimed at strengthening career preparation efforts that enhance individual work readiness.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, career readiness correlates with final-year students' work readiness. An increase in an individual's capacity to plan and identify the career they wish to pursue is directly related to their ability to prepare for the workforce. This study addresses the research question and is expected to encourage further research on developing individual career preparation and competency building at an early stage to support the achievement of graduate work readiness.

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