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College Students' Career Readiness: As Seen from Self-Efficacy and Internship Experience

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ABSTRACT
Education and internship experience play an important role in preparing young people to face the world of work, because it forms adaptability, self-control, and healthy social relationships. This study aims to examine the influence of self-efficacy on college students' career readiness, and to see whether internship experience plays a role as a moderating variable in this relationship. This study uses a quantitative approach with a moderated regression analysis method, data processing using SPSS 27. The results of the study indicate that self-efficacy have a significant influence on college students' career readiness. Self-efficacy plays an important role in shaping individual confidence to set goals and take proactive steps in career planning. However, the results of the analysis also show that internship experience does not play a role as a moderating variable in the relationship between self-efficacy and career readiness. Thus, career readiness is more influenced by internal psychological factors than external experiences such as internships. These findings provide important implications for higher education institutions in designing career development programs based on improving students' psychological aspects.

Keywords: *Self-Efficacy, Career Readiness, Internship Experience, Moderation*

INTRODUCTION

Education constitutes a fundamental investment in human capital and plays a strategic role in developing a high-quality future workforce. Through higher education, students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the evolving demands of the labor market. This underscores the vital role of educational institutions in preparing students not only in terms of academic achievement but also in professional readiness for their future careers. Furthermore, education has been widely recognized as a key driver of employability and career success, as it enhances individuals' productivity and expands their career opportunities (Becker, 1993; OECD, 2021).

One of the important strategies in supporting students' transition from education to the workplace is through internship programs. Internships provide opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge in real work environments and gain direct experience of workplace dynamics.

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These experiences contribute to the development of both hard and soft skills that are essential for career success (Ufia et al., 2024). In addition, internships have been recognized as an effective approach to improving student competencies and preparing them for professional demands (Jufriani et al., 2025). Furthermore, internship experiences help students build professional networks and develop clearer career directions, which ultimately enhance their confidence and competitiveness in the labor market.

Previous studies have shown that internship experience has a positive and significant effect on students' career readiness (Simanjuntak & Armanu, 2023; Safitri & Syofyan, 2023; Faridah et al., 2024). However, most of these studies position internship experience as a direct predictor of career readiness, while its potential role in influencing other psychological factors remains underexplored. This indicates that the explanatory role of internship experience in the career readiness model is still limited.

In addition to experiential factors, psychological factors also play an important role in shaping students' career readiness. One of the most important psychological factors is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform tasks and achieve desired outcomes (Widiarma & Tegowati, 2024). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident in achieving goals, overcoming challenges, and adapting to workplace demands. This concept is rooted in Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes that individuals' beliefs influence their motivation, behavior, and performance (Bandura, 1997). Strengthening self-efficacy is particularly important in the context of career development, especially considering the uncertainty faced by students in entering the workforce.

Career readiness refers to an individual's preparedness to enter and adapt to the world of work, including both technical and non-technical competencies. Previous studies indicate that self-efficacy has a significant positive influence on career readiness (Aprilita & Trisnawati, 2022; Fitriani et al., 2021; Arma & Tegowati, 2024). However, other studies report inconsistent findings, showing that self-efficacy does not always significantly affect career readiness (Korbaffo et al., 2025; Novita, 2019). This inconsistency suggests that there may be other contextual factors that influence the strength of this relationship.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to examine the effect of self-efficacy on students' career readiness. Furthermore, internship experience is introduced as a moderating variable to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), self-efficacy plays a central role in shaping career behavior and readiness, while contextual learning experiences contribute to how individuals translate their beliefs into actual career outcomes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). In this context, internship experience can be viewed as a form of learning experience that provides students with opportunities to apply knowledge, face real workplace demands, and develop relevant competencies.

Therefore, it is expected that internship experience not only has a direct influence on career readiness but may also strengthen the effect of self-efficacy on career readiness. Students with high self-efficacy supported by meaningful internship experiences are expected to demonstrate higher levels of career readiness compared to those with similar self-efficacy but lower quality internship experiences. Accordingly, this study offers novelty by examining internship experience as a moderating variable in the relationship between self-efficacy and career readiness. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the factors influencing students' career readiness in preparing for the transition from education to employment

METHODS

The population of this study consisted of students in Surabaya who participated in an internship program, with an unknown population size. This study employed a purposive sampling technique, where respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) active undergraduate students in Surabaya, (2) sixth-semester students, and (3) students who had completed an internship program. This technique was used because the study required respondents with direct internship experience and who were in the career preparation stage.

The sample size was determined based on Roscoe (in Sugiyono, 2023), who suggests that an appropriate sample size ranges from 30 to 500 respondents and should be at least 10 times the number of variables. With three variables in this study (self-efficacy, internship experience, and career readiness), the minimum required sample size was 30 respondents. Therefore, 100 respondents were considered adequate for this study. The sample is expected to represent the population and allow generalization of findings (Mustafidah & Suwarsito, 2020). Data were analyzed using moderated regression analysis with IBM SPSS version 27.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study, illustrating the relationship between the key variables. The framework positions self-efficacy as an independent variable influencing students' career readiness as the dependent variable. In addition, internship experience is incorporated as a moderating variable that is expected to strengthen the relationship between self-efficacy and. Based on the proposed conceptual framework, the research hypotheses are formulated as follows. H1 states that self-efficacy has a positive effect on students' career readiness. H2 proposes that internship experience moderates the relationship between self-efficacy and career readiness. C

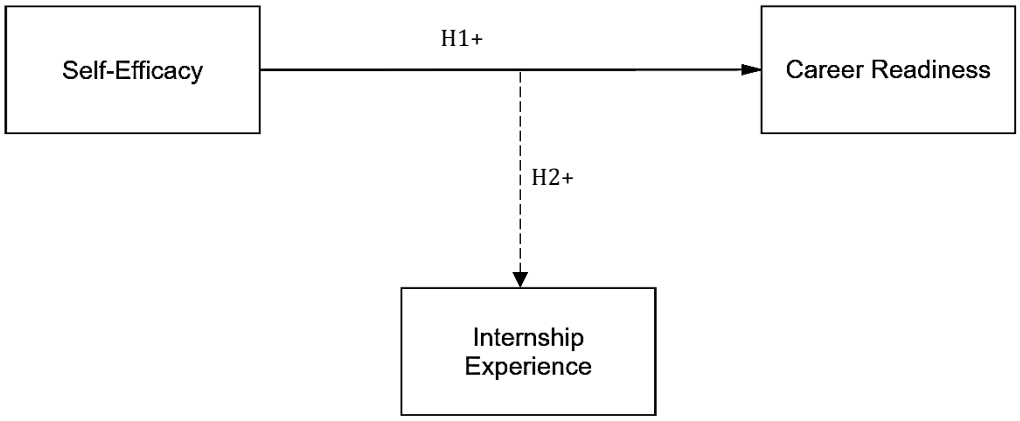

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Research

RESULT

1. Validity and Reliability Testing

The results of the validity test for each instrument in this research variable showed a calculated r value > table r value, thus concluding that all statements in the questionnaire were valid. The validity test results are as follows:

Table 1. Validity Test Results

Variables	Item-Item statement	r hitung	r table (α = 5%)	Description
Career Readiness	CR 1	0,612	0,1986	Valid

	CR 2	0,768	0,1986	Valid
	CR 3	0,766	0,1986	Valid
	CR 4	0,747	0,1986	Valid
	CR 5	0,747	0,1986	Valid
	CR 6	0,696	0,1986	Valid
Self-Efficacy	SE 1	0,737	0,1986	Valid
	SE 2	0,659	0,1986	Valid
	SE 3	0,679	0,1986	Valid
	SE 4	0,794	0,1986	Valid
	SE 5	0,865	0,1986	Valid
Internship Experience	CR 1	0,687	0,1986	Valid
	CR 2	0,838	0,1986	Valid
	CR 3	0,814	0,1986	Valid
	CR 4	0,860	0,1986	Valid
	CR 5	0,852	0,1986	Valid

Source: IBM SPSS 27 data processing results

The reliability calculations in table 2 show that all Cronbach's Alpha values are >0.6, thus concluding that the data is reliable.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Career Readiness	0,788	Reliable
Self-Efficacy	0,793	Reliable
Internship Experience	0,806	Reliable

Source: IBM SPSS 27 data processing results

2. Classical Assumption Test

a) Heteroscedasticity Test

In the heteroscedasticity test conducted using the Glejser Test, the significance value for each independent variable (in Table 3) was >0.05, indicating no heteroscedasticity.

Table 3. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.208E-15	1.317		.000	1.000		
	Total SE	.000	.077	.000	.000	1.000	.553	1.805

a. Dependent Variable: Unstandardized Residual

Source: IBM SPSS 27 data processing results

b) Normality Test

The normality test was conducted by analyzing the normal probability plot. As illustrated in Figure 2, the data points are distributed around and along the diagonal line, indicating a consistent

pattern. Therefore, it can be concluded that the normality assumption of the regression model has been satisfied.

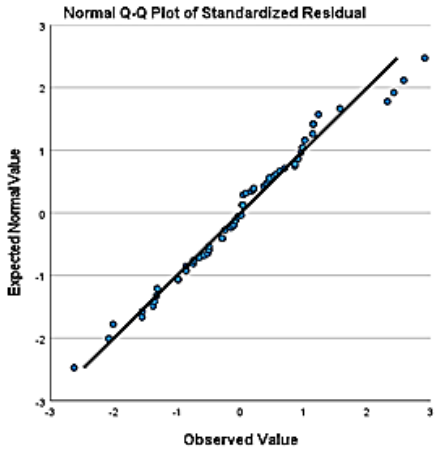

Figure 2. Normal Plot Graph

The normality test is also calculated based on the Z-skewness (value for skewness) and Z-kurtosis (value for kurtosis):

- ✓ Calculated value |z| < 1.96: The data distribution is close to normal.
- ✓ Calculated value |z| > 1.96: The data distribution is not normal.

Based on the calculation results in table 4, the z-skewness value = 0.199 and z-kurtosis = 0.772, both of which are less than 1.96. It can be concluded that the data is normally distributed.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Unstandardized Residual	100	1.42034805	.199	.241	.772	.488
Valid N (listwise)	100					

Source: IBM SPSS 27 data processing results

c) Absolute Difference Test

Theabsolute difference test comprises several statistical analyses, including the coefficient of determination test, the simultaneous significance test (F-test), and the individual parameter significance test (t-test):

1) Coefficient of Determination Test

The SPSS output results in Table 5 show that the Adjusted R^2 value is 0.422 (42.2%). This indicates that career readiness can be explained by internship experience, self-efficacy, and the interaction between self-efficacy and internship experience, while the remaining variance is explained by other variables outside the model. Therefore, the model can be considered adequate.. Therefore, it can be concluded that the model is quite good.

Table 5. Model Summary (Zscore(IE), SE*IE, Zscore(SE)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.663[a]	.439	.422	1.663

a. Predictors: (Constant), Zscore(IE), SE*IE, Zscore(SE)

Source: IBM SPSS 27 data processing results

2) Simultaneous Significance Test

The ANOVA (F-test) results showed a calculated F-value of 25.070 with a significance level of 0.000. This indicates that internship experience, self-efficacy, and the interaction between self-efficacy and internship experience jointly influence career readiness.

Table 6. ANOVA

ANOVA[a]						
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	207.940	3	69.313	25.070	.000[b]
	Residual	265.420	96	2.765		
	Total	473.360	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Zscore(IE), SE*IE, Zscore(SE)

Source: IBM SPSS 27 data processing results

3) Individual Parameter Significance Test

In the individual parameter test, self-efficacy has a coefficient value of 0.232 with a significance level of 0.003, indicating that this variable has a significant effect on career readiness. Furthermore, the interaction between self-efficacy and internship experience shows a non-significant coefficient (β = 0.405, p = 0.223), indicating that internship experience does not act as a moderating variable.

3. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The results of the t-test indicate that self-efficacy has a significant effect on students' career readiness, as shown by the significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. This finding suggests that students with higher self-efficacy tend to have better career readiness, as they are more confident in their ability to complete tasks, achieve goals, and overcome workplace challenges. This result differs from Febrianur & Rahmah (2024), who found that self-efficacy does not influence work readiness.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The analysis results show that the interaction between self-efficacy and internship experience does not have a significant effect on career readiness, as indicated by the significance value of 0.223, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is rejected. This means that internship experience does not moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and career readiness. In other words, the effect of self-efficacy on career readiness does not depend on the level of students' internship experience. This finding differs from Azizah (2025), who found that internship experience strengthens the effect of self-efficacy in developing adaptability in the workplace.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, self-efficacy has a significant effect on career readiness (β = 0.232, p = 0.003). This finding indicates that individuals with higher confidence in their abilities tend to be better prepared to plan, make decisions, and enter the workforce. Self-efficacy also serves as a source of intrinsic motivation, encouraging individuals to pursue career goals, make appropriate decisions, and persist in seeking job opportunities. Therefore, self-efficacy can be considered an important factor in supporting students' mental and emotional readiness for work.

In contrast, the results of the second hypothesis test reveal that internship experience does not act as a significant moderating variable in the relationship between self-efficacy and career readiness.

The significance value of 0.223, which is greater than 0.05, indicates that internship experience neither strengthens nor weakens the effect of self-efficacy on career readiness. This suggests that the role of self-efficacy in influencing career readiness remains stable regardless of the level of internship experience.

One possible explanation for this finding is related to the duration of the internship undertaken by the respondents. Most students in this study participated in internships for three months or less, which may not be sufficient to develop deeper competencies or a comprehensive understanding of the work environment. Short internship periods tend to limit students' exposure to real responsibilities, challenges, and decision-making situations, thereby reducing the potential impact of such experiences on strengthening the role of self-efficacy.

Another possible reason is that some internship programs may not be implemented optimally and tend to be more administrative or formal in nature. Limited mentoring, lack of meaningful tasks, and minimal interaction with actual workplace conditions can reduce the quality of the experience gained. As a result, internships may not function effectively as a bridge linking self-efficacy with career readiness. In addition, this study has several limitations, such as the use of self-reported questionnaires that may be subject to response bias, the relatively small and homogeneous sample limited to one institution, and the absence of control variables such as academic performance or organizational support. These limitations suggest that future research should involve a more diverse sample, longer internship duration, and additional variables to better capture factors influencing students' career readiness.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the SPSS output, the results of the first hypothesis test indicate that the variable self-efficacy has a significant effect on career readiness, with a coefficient of 0.232 and a significance value of 0.003. This finding suggests that individuals with strong confidence in their abilities are more prepared to plan, make decisions, and enter the workforce, as self-efficacy also serves as a source of intrinsic motivation that encourages individuals to achieve career goals, make appropriate decisions, and persist in seeking job opportunities. Furthermore, the results show that internship experience does not act as a moderating variable in the relationship between self-efficacy and career readiness, indicating that the influence of self-efficacy on career readiness is direct and independent of internship experience. This suggests that internal psychological factors play a more direct role in shaping career readiness, while the contribution of internship experience may depend on its quality, duration, and level of engagement. Therefore, strengthening students' internal capacities, particularly confidence and self-belief, is essential as a foundation for career preparation, while internship programs should be designed more effectively to maximize their potential impact.

Based on these findings, the researchers recommend that educational institutions focus not only on academic aspects but also develop self-efficacy development programs through soft skills training, counseling, and mentoring. Students are expected to actively develop self-confidence through various organizational activities, training, and internship experience. For further research, it is recommended to add other variables such as motivation and social support, as well as conduct qualitative studies to understand individuals' subjective experiences in preparing for their careers.

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