

FROM CAMPUS TO CAREER: HOW INTERNSHIP, SKILLS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL EXPOSURE SHAPE WORK READINESS

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ABSTRAK

Di tengah persaingan pasar kerja yang semakin ketat, kesiapan kerja lulusan perguruan tinggi menjadi isu penting yang perlu mendapatkan perhatian. Berbagai penelitian sebelumnya mengenai faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi kesiapan kerja menunjukkan hasil yang belum konsisten, khususnya terkait peran soft skills, pengalaman magang, dan pengalaman organisasi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh ketiga variabel tersebut terhadap kesiapan kerja mahasiswa tingkat akhir di Jakarta. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan teknik purposive sampling. Sebanyak 150 responden yang terdiri dari mahasiswa tingkat akhir dan lulusan baru berpartisipasi melalui kuesioner daring. Analisis data dilakukan dengan SmartPLS 4.1.1.2 melalui dua tahapan, yaitu pengujian outer model untuk menguji validitas dan reliabilitas, serta inner model untuk menilai hubungan antarvariabel, R^2 , dan uji hipotesis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga variabel independent, yaitu pengalaman magang, soft skills, dan pengalaman organisasi berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kesiapan kerja. Di antara ketiganya, soft skills memiliki pengaruh paling dominan dengan koefisien jalur sebesar 0.520, menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi non-teknis menjadi faktor utama dalam membentuk kesiapan kerja. Nilai R^2 sebesar 0.828 mengindikasikan bahwa 82,8% variasi kesiapan kerja dapat dijelaskan oleh model penelitian ini. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi simultan ketiga variabel tersebut ke dalam satu model prediktif, sehingga mampu memberikan gambaran lebih komprehensif mengenai faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi kesiapan kerja. Temuan ini juga memberikan rekomendasi praktis bagi perguruan tinggi untuk memperkuat pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman dan pengembangan soft skills dalam kurikulum akademik guna meningkatkan daya saing lulusan.

Kata Kunci: Kesiapan Kerja, Pengalaman Magang, Soft Skills, Pengalaman Berorganisasi

ABSTRACT

In today's increasingly competitive job market, graduate work readiness has emerged as a pressing issue for higher education institutions. Previous studies on the determinants of work readiness have often reported inconsistent findings, particularly regarding the roles of internships, soft skills, and organizational experience. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to investigate the combined influence of these three factors on the work readiness of final-year university students in Jakarta. A quantitative research design was employed using purposive sampling, with data collected from 150 respondents consisting of final-year students and recent graduates through online questionnaires. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.1.1.2, involving outer model testing to establish validity and reliability, and inner model testing to examine structural relationships, coefficient of determination (R^2), and hypothesis testing. The findings reveal that internship experience, soft skills, and organizational experience all have a positive and significant effect on work readiness. Among these, soft skills emerged as the most dominant factor with a path coefficient of 0.520, indicating that interpersonal competencies and self-management abilities are critical for graduate preparedness. Furthermore, the R^2 value of 0.828 suggests that 82.8% of the variance in work readiness can be explained by the three predictors combined. The novelty of this study lies in its simultaneous integration of internships, soft skills, and organizational experience into a single predictive model, offering a more comprehensive perspective on student employability. These results provide

actionable implications for universities, emphasizing the need to strengthen experiential learning opportunities and systematically embed soft skill development into academic curricula to better equip graduates for professional challenges.

Keywords: *Work Readiness, Internship Experience, Soft Skills, Organizational Experience.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapidly intensifying job market today demands that individuals master a wide range of competencies and outperform their peers. Such conditions highlight the importance of developing high-quality human resources. Consequently, every student needs thorough preparation to compete for employment opportunities both at the national and global levels. Those who are still pursuing higher education are expected to finish their studies on time and be fully equipped to enter the workforce (Brkovic et al., 2023)

Work readiness holds a central role in enabling students to succeed in professional settings (Peersia et al., 2024). The transition from university life to employment can be demanding, as it involves intense competition, workplace pressures, and significant responsibilities (Verma et al., 2018). Magfiroh & Jaro'ah (2023) define work readiness as an individual's ability to carry out tasks in line with established standards, while overcoming challenges and producing results within a specified time frame.

Internship involvement is often highlighted as an essential contributor to work readiness. Gohae (2020) notes that practical exposure through internships is vital to preparing graduates with the knowledge and skills that facilitate a smooth transition into employment. In contrast, Kapareliotis et al. (2019) suggest that internship activities do not always produce significant effects, implying that the outcomes depend on specific contexts and the manner in which the programs are implemented.

Currently, soft skills are also recognized as a crucial determinant of work readiness and should not be considered as secondary abilities. Succi & Canovi (2020) argue that hard skills alone are insufficient for success, as cognitive ability accounts for only 20% of performance, while personality traits and the development of soft skills shape the remaining 80%.

Research on the relationship between soft skills and work readiness has produced inconsistent conclusions. Some scholars reported that soft skills do not significantly influence work readiness (Rasli, 2020). On the contrary, Succi & Canovi (2020) demonstrated that soft skills exert a positive and significant impact on an individual's preparedness for employment.

Another factor that can shape work readiness is organizational experience (Saleh & Aqsha Syamsul, 2024). By actively participating in organizations, students gain valuable exposure and opportunities to develop skills such as communication, resilience, responsibility, and other essential interpersonal competencies. These experiences are believed to enhance overall work readiness (Sihotang & Santosa, 2019). However, findings by Nasution et al. (2022) revealed that organizational involvement does not always generate a positive contribution to readiness for work.

The urgency of this study arises from the continuing mismatch between the competencies of university graduates and the expectations of employers in the labour market. Despite the increasing number of graduates, many still struggle to demonstrate practical experience, interpersonal competence, and

adaptability required in professional settings. These challenges call for a deeper examination of how higher education can effectively foster work readiness. Accordingly, this study contributes by empirically analysing how internship experience, soft skills, and organizational involvement jointly influence students' work readiness. Theoretically, it integrates three experiential factors into a single predictive framework to address inconsistencies in previous studies. Practically, it offers guidance for universities to strengthen experiential learning and embed soft skill development within curricula, thereby enhancing graduates' competitiveness and employability.

In line with the above background, this study positions internship experience, soft skills, and organizational experience as the independent variables, while work readiness is examined as the dependent variable.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

This study is grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) developed by Lent et al. (1994). SCCT explains how individuals develop career interests, make career-related decisions, and achieve work success through the interaction of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and learning experiences. The theory emphasizes that individuals' beliefs in their abilities influence how they approach challenges, regulate effort, and pursue goals, which ultimately shape their readiness to perform in professional environments.

In the context of higher education, work readiness can be viewed as an outcome of self-efficacy and prior learning experiences. According to SCCT, learning experiences such as internships and organizational participation enhance self-efficacy through mastery experiences, social modelling, and feedback from real situations. Meanwhile, soft skills represent behavioural and cognitive abilities that help individuals regulate emotions, communicate effectively, and perform well under pressure, all of which contribute to stronger self-efficacy and adaptability.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the SCCT framework in this study explains that students' exposure to real work environments through internships and organizational activities, together with the development of personal attributes such as soft skills, reinforces their self-efficacy and outcome expectations. As a result, students become more confident, adaptive, and ready to enter the professional world. Work readiness in this sense reflects the behavioural manifestation of self-belief and adaptive competence shaped by experiential learning.

Caballero & Walker (2010) describe work readiness as a developmental and motivational construct that reflects the degree to which university graduates demonstrate the attributes and attitudes required to succeed in the workplace. Similarly, Winterton & Turner (2019) interpret work readiness as the extent to which an individual is prepared to engage and perform effectively in professional settings, particularly in nursing, where readiness encompasses theoretical understanding, applied competencies, and the adaptability necessary to perform. Carnevale & Smith (2013) further define work readiness as the level at which graduates are equipped to enter and function in the labour market, while Gohae (2020) emphasizes both mental and physical preparedness to face the demands of employment.

In this study, the concept of work readiness refers to an individual's confidence in entering the world of work, their ability to adapt to new environments, their capacity to collaborate in teams, and their effectiveness in completing tasks. These indicators are adapted from Sari & Rini (2023), who explain that work readiness manifests through psychological readiness, adaptability, teamwork, and task execution.

Internship experience is widely recognized as a critical factor in enhancing work readiness. Gohae (2020) asserts that internship participation improves practical skills, workplace familiarity, and self-confidence, which are essential for a smoother transition into the workforce. Kapareliotis et al. (2019) and Adeosun et al. (2022) describe internships as work-based learning opportunities that bridge academic knowledge with real-world application, while Sari & Rini (2023) highlight their role in building self-efficacy. In this research, internship experience is assessed through students' understanding of work culture, their ability to work under pressure, their time management skills during the internship, and their task completion performance, all derived from indicators developed by Vilysia & Turangan (2024). Therefore, it is assumed that greater internship experience enhances students' ability to integrate theory and practice, thus increasing their readiness for employment.

H1: Internship experience positively affects work readiness.

Soft skills are another core dimension of work readiness. Robles (2012) and Lucas et al. (2017) emphasize that success in employment today requires not only technical skills but also well-developed soft skills. These include the ability to communicate, lead, manage oneself, and make informed decisions. In accordance with this study, Lucas et al. (2017) operationalize soft skills through four key aspects: communication competence, leadership ability, decision-making skills, and self-management. These dimensions are crucial in enabling graduates to navigate interpersonal dynamics and professional responsibilities in the workplace. Thus, students who demonstrate stronger soft skills are expected to perform better in adapting to workplace demands and collaborating effectively with others.

H2: Soft skills positively affect work readiness.

Organizational experience is also found to significantly shape students' readiness for employment. According to Sihotang & Santosa (2019), involvement in student organizations helps individuals develop leadership, responsibility, and problem-solving abilities. Saleh & Aqsha Syamsul (2024) further argue that organizational participation fosters the skills needed for teamwork and strategic thinking. This study adopts the framework proposed by Azizah et al. (2019), which outlines organizational experience in terms of active involvement in decision-making, delegation of tasks, participation in problem-solving, and assuming leadership roles. Such experiences offer an informal yet powerful setting for learning and preparing for real-world professional challenges. Hence, students who actively engage in organizational activities are more likely to develop interpersonal and managerial competencies that strengthen their preparedness for professional life.

H3: Organizational experience positively affects work readiness.

By drawing upon these theoretical foundations and aligning with validated measurement indicators from prior research, this study aims to investigate how internship experience, soft skills, and organizational experience collectively contribute to the work readiness of final-year university students.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a quantitative design, collecting data through online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms to students living in the DKI Jakarta region. The sampling method employed was non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, yielding a total of 150 valid responses. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS version 4, which enabled the examination of relationships among constructs and the identification of both direct and indirect influences.

The design chosen is descriptive in nature, intended to generate information that illustrates the characteristics of the objects under investigation, which may include individuals, products, brands, organizations, or institutions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A cross-sectional time horizon was adopted, meaning that data were gathered from respondents only once, within a similar time frame, to provide answers to the proposed research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The following table presents a synthesis of the indicators identified for each construct in this study,

Table 1. Operational Indicators of Constructs

Variable	Code	Indicators
Work Readiness	WR1	Psychological readiness
	WR2	Adaptability to new environments
	WR3	Teamwork/collaboration
	WR4	Task execution effectiveness
Internship Experience	INT1	Understanding of work culture
	INT2	Ability to work under pressure
	INT3	Time management skills during internship
	INT4	Task completion performance
Soft Skills	SS1	Communication competence
	SS2	Leadership ability
	SS3	Decision-making skills
	SS4	Self-management
Organizational Experience	ORG1	Active involvement in decision-making
	ORG2	Delegation of tasks
	ORG3	Participation in problem-solving
	ORG4	Assuming leadership roles

For the analytical stage, SmartPLS version 4.1.1.2 was used as the primary tool. The process consisted of two phases: evaluating the outer model and assessing the inner model. The outer model evaluation focused on both validity and reliability, utilizing indicators such as convergent validity, discriminant validity, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability. Once these criteria were met, the inner model was analyzed, which involved testing for multicollinearity, evaluating the R-squared (R^2) values and analyzing path coefficients. Additionally, hypothesis testing was conducted to ensure the robustness of the findings.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Result

This research engaged 150 participants living in Jakarta, all of whom were either active university students in their final semester or recent graduates who had undergone internship and organizational

activities. Respondents who completed the questionnaire in full and matched the inclusion criteria were categorized as valid and included in the subsequent analysis.

The analysis process was conducted in two stages: outer model testing and inner model testing. In the outer model, both validity and reliability assessments were carried out. Convergent validity was confirmed through loading factor values greater than 0.7 (Table 2) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.5 (Table 3). Discriminant validity was established by demonstrating that cross-loading values for each indicator were higher on their intended construct than on others (Table 4), and by showing Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios below 0.9 (Table 5). For reliability, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged between 0.6 and 0.95, while Composite Reliability values were consistently above 0.7 (Table 6). These results indicate that all constructs in this study met the criteria for both validity and reliability.

Table 2. Loading Factor Analysis

	Internship Experience	Organizational Experience	Soft Skill	Work Readiness
INT1	0.836			
INT2	0.846			
INT3	0.710			
INT4	0.716			
ORG1		0.915		
ORG2		0.939		
ORG3		0.960		
ORG4		0.813		
SS1			0.813	
SS2			0.839	
SS3			0.789	
SS4			0.784	
WR1				0.776
WR2				0.718
WR3				0.784
WR4				0.745

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted Analysis

	Average variance extracted
Internship Experience	0.608
Organizational Experience	0.826
Soft Skill	0.650
Work Readiness	0.572

Table 4. Cross Loadings Analysis

	Internship Experience	Organizational Experience	Soft Skill	Work Readiness
INT1	0.836	0.914	0.436	0.784
INT2	0.846	0.538	0.311	0.561
INT3	0.710	0.344	0.170	0.362
INT4	0.716	0.400	0.248	0.427

ORG1	0.824	0.915	0.436	0.772
ORG2	0.710	0.939	0.381	0.646
ORG3	0.740	0.960	0.362	0.706
ORG4	0.487	0.813	0.272	0.504
SS1	0.425	0.431	0.813	0.656
SS2	0.356	0.389	0.839	0.743
SS3	0.208	0.194	0.789	0.487
SS4	0.273	0.237	0.784	0.492
WR1	0.468	0.441	0.583	0.776
WR2	0.490	0.370	0.431	0.718
WR3	0.836	0.914	0.436	0.784
WR4	0.369	0.395	0.833	0.745

Table 5. Heterotrait-MonotraitRatio Analysis

	Internship Experience	Organizational Experience	Soft Skill	Work Readiness
Internship Experience				
Organizational Experience	0.796			
Soft Skill	0.443	0.434		
Work Readiness	0.857	0.820	0.926	

Table 6. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Internship Experience	0.793	0.860	0.860
Organizational Experience	0.929	0.951	0.950
Soft Skill	0.824	0.845	0.881
Work Readiness	0.754	0.765	0.842

At the Inner model analysis stage in this study, it consists of multicollinearity test, R Square (R^2) analysis, path coefficient, and research hypothesis testing.

Based on the results in the **Table 7**, the variables used in this study cannot be multicollinear because they have VIF values that are less than 5 (<5).

Table 7. Multicollinearity Test

	Internship Experience	Organizational Experience	Soft Skill	Work Readiness
Internship Experience				2.574
Organizational Experience				2.580
Soft Skill				1.227
Work Readiness				

Based on **Table 8**, the R^2 value for the Work Readiness variable of 0.828 indicates that 82.8% of the variation in can be explained by the variables in the model. The Adjusted value of 0.825 indicates that after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model explains 82.5% of the variation.

Table 8. R^2 Analysis

	R^2	Adjusted
Work Readiness	0.828	0.825

Table 9. Significance Test Result

	Original sample	t-statistics	p- values
Internship Experience → Work Readiness	0.295	5.513	0.000
Organizational Experience → Work Readiness	0.295	5.613	0.000
Soft Skill → Work Readiness	0.520	11.465	0.000

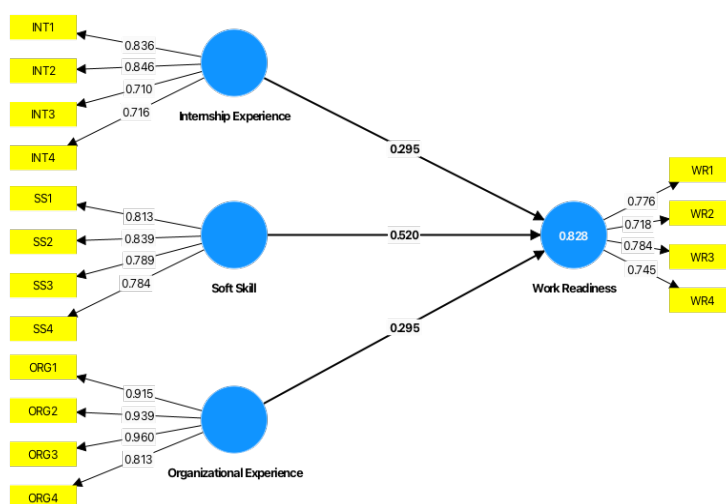


Figure 1. Structural Model and Measurement Loadings

Figure 1 presents the results of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) analysis, illustrating both the measurement loadings and the structural model pathways. The model evaluates the effects of three exogenous constructs Internship Experience, Organizational Experience, and Soft Skill on the endogenous variable Work Readiness. Each latent construct is measured by four indicators, all of which exhibit satisfactory outer loading values (all above 0.7), thus confirming strong convergent validity.

As shown in Table 9, Soft Skill exhibits the most significant influence on Work Readiness, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.520, indicating a substantial direct effect. This suggests that improvements in students' soft skills significantly enhance their readiness for the workforce. This finding is further substantiated by the t-statistic of 11.465 and a p-value of 0.000, demonstrating high statistical significance. Therefore, hypothesis H3 is accepted.

Similarly, both Internship Experience and Organizational Experience contribute positively and significantly to Work Readiness, with standardized path coefficients of 0.295. While these effects are moderate, they remain statistically significant with t-statistics of 5.513 and 5.613, respectively, and p-values of 0.000 in both cases. These results confirm hypotheses H1 and H2, suggesting that experiential learning, through internships and involvement in organizations, plays a significant role in developing students' workplace readiness.

Furthermore, the model exhibits high explanatory power, with an R-squared value of 0.828 for the Work Readiness construct, indicating that approximately 82.8% of the variance in work readiness can be collectively explained by the three exogenous variables. This high level of explained variance underscores the robustness of the model and supports its predictive relevance in the context of higher education and career preparedness research.

Discussion

The results of the present study offer meaningful insights into the ongoing discourse surrounding factors that contribute to students' readiness for employment. The structural model tested in this research demonstrates that internship experiences, soft skills, and organizational participation all exert significant and positive influences on the work readiness of final-year university students. These findings reinforce the view that employability is shaped not solely by formal academic achievement but by a complex interplay of experiential and personal development factors accumulated throughout one's educational journey.

The effect of internship experience on work readiness is particularly noteworthy. With a standardized path coefficient of 0.295 and a highly significant t-value (5.513), the results empirically support previous assertions by Gohae (2020), who emphasized that internships provide crucial practical exposure that allows students to acquire workplace-relevant knowledge, develop a professional mindset, and build confidence. In addition, the findings align with Pratiwi and Rini (2023), who argued that internships enhance students' self-efficacy, which in turn strengthens their psychological readiness to face real-world challenges in organizational settings. By integrating students into actual work environments before graduation, internships allow for an early understanding of job expectations, communication protocols, and industry standards, all of which contribute to smoother transitions into the workforce. However, the present findings must also be interpreted in light of the critique, which highlights that the benefits of internship programs often depend on the quality, relevance, and structure of the internship itself. Thus, while internships generally support work readiness, their impact may vary depending on the program's level of student engagement.

Equally important is the substantial and statistically significant effect of soft skills on work readiness, as evidenced by the highest path coefficient (0.520) and a t-value of 11.465. This highlights the crucial role that interpersonal competencies and self-management skills play in shaping graduate preparedness. The findings are consistent with the argument proposed by Carnevale & Smith (2013), who stressed that cognitive intelligence or technical skills alone are not sufficient for success in the modern workplace. Instead, personality traits, adaptability, emotional regulation, communication skills, and teamwork capabilities form the majority foundation of what determines long-term professional effectiveness. In contrast to studies such as Ratuela et al. (2022), which reported a lack of significant influence of soft skills on employability outcomes, the current research provides robust statistical evidence that soft skills development remains crucial in shaping how students perceive their

readiness to engage with and succeed in employment. This discrepancy may be attributed to contextual factors, such as differences in institutional culture, the extent to which soft skills are integrated into university curricula, or students' valuation of such attributes.

The relationship between organizational involvement and work readiness also presents compelling insights. Similar to the internship dimension, the path coefficient from organizational experience to work readiness is 0.295, with a *t*-value of 5.613, indicating that participation in student organizations significantly contributes to preparing students for life beyond academia. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Sihotang & Santosa (2019), who argued that organizational engagement enables students to develop critical workplace-aligned attributes, such as responsibility, resilience, time management, and decision-making. Nasution et al. (2022) further supported this by identifying campus organizations as effective informal learning spaces where students can develop and strengthen their leadership, collaboration, and conflict resolution skills. Through participation in extracurricular activities, students often face real-world challenges that mirror professional scenarios, such as tight deadlines, team dynamics, and public accountability, thus enhancing their overall readiness for employment. Nonetheless, similar to the critique of internship quality, the contribution of organizational experience may also depend on the depth of involvement. Students who assume leadership roles or actively participate in managerial activities are likely to gain more valuable insights than those whose participation is nominal or limited to administrative duties.

Another critical consideration lies in the strength of the model's explanatory power. The R^2 value of 0.828 indicates that 82.8% of the variance in work readiness can be explained collectively by the three predictor variables. This exceptionally high level of explained variance signals that internship participation, soft skills, and organizational involvement are not only individually meaningful but also collectively account for a substantial portion of what drives students' perceptions of their professional preparedness. It reflects the integrated nature of learning, where classroom knowledge, practical exposure, and character formation interact dynamically to build readiness for employment. The high predictive power also confirms that universities should not treat these domains in isolation, but rather as mutually reinforcing elements of a comprehensive educational strategy.

Taken together, the findings of this study emphasize that producing work-ready graduates requires more than knowledge transmission. The data suggests that practical experience, personal competency development, and organizational involvement must be considered as equally essential learning domains. These outcomes reaffirm the idea that readiness to work is a holistic construct, one that is informed not only by what students know, but by what they have done and who they have become during their time in higher education. These findings also provide relevant evidence for universities, particularly in Indonesia, to re-evaluate how they design learning experiences that prepare students for future careers. By placing equal importance on academic curriculum, internship facilitation, soft skills training, and student organization participation, institutions can play a more active role in cultivating graduates who are not only academically qualified but also adaptable, socially competent, and emotionally prepared for the professional challenges ahead.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that internship experience, soft skills, and organizational involvement all significantly contribute to students' work readiness. Among these, soft skills have the most substantial effect, indicating the essential role of interpersonal and adaptive abilities in preparing students for the

workforce. The findings underscore that experiential learning, both inside and outside the classroom, is vital for bridging the gap between academic life and employment demands.

However, the study is limited by its purposive sampling, cross-sectional design, and narrow geographic focus on Jakarta. Future research should consider broader samples, longitudinal designs, and additional variables, such as motivation and digital skills, to deepen the understanding of work readiness. Universities are advised to integrate structured internship programs, promote student participation in organizations, and regularly develop students' soft skills to enhance their employability upon graduation.

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