Research Article

Analysis of Work Readiness Among Management Students of the 2021 Cohort at Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jawa Timur University

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the influence of interpersonal skills (soft skills) and practical skills (hands-on skills) on the work readiness of students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" East Java in the 2021 academic year. The approach used was quantitative with a survey method through the distribution of questionnaires to 79 respondents. The collected data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. The results of the study indicate that both interpersonal skills and practical skills play an important role in improving students' work ability or work readiness. This finding confirms that mastery of two types of skills, namely technical skills (technical skills) and non-technical skills (non-technical skills), is essential for students to be able to adapt and compete in the world of work. Thus, educational institutions are expected to balance the development of academic aspects and practical skills to prepare graduates who are ready to face professional challenges.

Keywords: Hard Skill; Higher Education; Soft Skill; UPN Veteran Jawa Timur; Work Readiness.

1. Introduction

The open unemployment rate in Indonesia, particularly among university graduates, remains a significant problem. This situation has exacerbated the phenomenon of educated unemployment, which is rooted in low job readiness. The changes in the labor market in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution require graduates to master technical skills, in addition to adequate soft skills.

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) shows that the reported unemployment rate (TPT) for bachelor's degree graduates remains at 5.25%. This highlights the gap between the higher education system and labor market needs. (R. I. Putri & Harahap, 2023)suggest that universities play a crucial role in supporting this readiness, acting as key facilitators for students' self-development and achieving optimal career readiness.

A person's preparedness is shaped by maturity, mental and physical maturity, and accumulated experience. Readiness to enter the labor market, a key skill for students, can be determined by excellent knowledge of basic skills and the ability to adapt to the latest developments in science and technology. According to (Novita et al., 2023), students who are able to search for information, express ideas, manage activities, collaborate, solve problems, think logically, and master a global language demonstrate a high level of preparedness.

As a student, understanding and improving soft skills is a long-term investment. These soft skills are not only complementary to each other, but have become essential competencies that human resources professionals must master to compete in the professional workplace. Technical skills can also be likened to the technical capabilities that enable individuals to perform work within their career path. (Lasinta, 2024) explains that these skills have clear, measurable objectives and can be continuously developed in line with technological developments.

This situation underscores the importance of researching the impact of soft and practical skills on students' work readiness. This study aims to understand the factors that improve graduates' work readiness. The results are expected to serve as a reference for educational institutions to design more flexible curricula, and for students to be more proactive in developing both technical and non-technical competencies. Thus, graduates are expected not only to meet the demands of the labor market but also to be globally competitive.

2. Literature Review

Existing research strongly supports the relationship between student capabilities and ultimate employability. (Mamentu et al., 2023) found that the synergistic effect of soft skills and self-efficacy significantly contributes to graduates' workforce readiness. Similarly, (Damayantie et al., 2022) found a positive predictive relationship between soft skills, self-efficacy, and employability in a group of UPN "veteran" East Java students. However, (Putri & Nurbaiti, 2024) found a more nuanced finding. They observed that while technical skills and self-efficacy have a statistically significant independent impact on employability, the impact of soft skills is primarily manifested through interactions with other variables. These contrasting findings lead to the conclusion that optimal employability is achieved through the integrated and simultaneous development of technical and soft skills.

Soft Skill

Soft skills are conceptually defined as personal attributes that facilitate an individual's ability to engage with others both effectively and harmoniously Ali in (Roofiq et al., 2024). These competencies encompass a range of interpersonal traits, including communication proficiency, emotional intelligence, collaborative teamwork, leadership aptitude, and adherence to ethical standards. (Sharma, 2021) further articulates five fundamental indicators that comprehensively define the construct of soft skills: communication ability, emotional intelligence, critical thinking and problem solving, ethical behavior, and leadership. These non-technical attributes are crucial for successfully navigating organizational changes and mediating interpersonal conflicts, ultimately contributing to the development of self-confidence, fostering collaboration, and enhancing motivation vital for a successful professional career trajectory.

Hard Skill

Technical competencies, commonly referred to as hard skills, represent the distinct proficiencies required for the successful completion of specific tasks. These skills are fundamentally rooted in the theoretical understanding necessary for analytical thinking and substantive decision-making (G Ratuela et al., 2022). (Podungge et al., 2023) stress that hard skills incorporate command over field-relevant knowledge, technology, and technical expertise. Specifically, (Rahmat et al., 2019) delineate the primary components of hard skills through these measurable indicators: (1) Internet accessibility and navigation, (2) Word processing expertise, (3) Fluency in application usage, (4) Technological operation and text processing skills, and (5) Proficiency in creating effective presentations.

Work Readiness

Work readiness is defined as the state wherein a student possesses the necessary attributes to transition directly into the professional environment immediately following graduation, minimizing the requisite period for environmental adaptation. As articulated by (Setiarini et al., 2022), this condition requires a critical integration of physical and mental maturity alongside learning experiences that are congruent with the demands of the modern workforce. To assess this preparedness empirically, (Rahmat et al., 2019) have established five key indicators of individual work readiness: (1) Adaptability capacity; (2) Skill application ability; (3) Acquisition of new knowledge; (4) Task completion efficiency; and (5) Flexibility in work style modification.

3. Research Method

A quantitative methodology was selected for this study. Data collection was accomplished via an electronic questionnaire disseminated to the participants using Google Forms. The full study population was composed of 365 senior management students belonging to the 2021 cohort at UPN "Veteran" East Java. Utilizing the Slovin formula and setting the allowable deviation (margin of error) at 10%, the necessary sample size was calculated to be 79 individuals. Finally, the resulting dataset underwent analysis through Partial Least Squares (PLS) modeling, as executed in the SmartPLS program.

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4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. R-Square.

Variabel Dependen	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Kesiapan Kerja (Y)	0.299	0.280

The R-Square table shows a value of 0.299. This figure shows that this research model can explain 29.9% of the work readiness phenomenon through the influence of personal and practical skills. The remaining 70.1% is influenced by other variables not studied in this study (except for personal and practical skills).

Table 2. Path Coefficients (Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values).

	Path Coefficients (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
SOFT SKILL (X1) > **KESIAPAN KERJA** (Y)	0.241	0.273	0.121	2.001	0.046
HARD SKILL (X2) > **KESIAPAN KERJA** (Y)	0.385	0.372	0.115	3.368	0.001

Based on the hypothesis testing table above, the following can be formulated:

1. Hypothesis 1 (H1): Soft skills were found to have a positive and statistically significant influence on the work readiness of Management students (Class of 2021) at UPN Veteran University East Java. This hypothesis is accepted. The statistical evidence includes a path coefficient of 0.241, a t-statistic of 2.001 (which exceeds the critical value of 1.65 at alpha = 0.10), and a P-value of 0.046 (which is less than 0.10).
2. Hypothesis 2 (H2): Hard skills also influence the work readiness of the same cohort of Management students (Class of 2021), is also accepted. The relationship is positive and statistically significant, demonstrated by a stronger path coefficient of 0.385. The t-statistic of 3.368 is well above the critical threshold of 1.65, and the highly significant P-value is 0.001 (less than 0.10).

5. Conclusions

The research confirms a correlation between both soft skills and hard skills and the work readiness of Management students at UPNVJT. Soft skills (e.g., communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, leadership) were identified as the strongest driver of enhanced professional confidence and adaptability. Furthermore, hard skills (e.g., digital literacy, data management) effectively boost students' technical readiness for job execution. Consequently, the study emphasizes the institutional imperative for universities to implement skill-based curricula that seamlessly merge theoretical instruction with practical training. The creation of specialized platforms, such as digital labs, focused workshops, and competency certifications, is essential for building job-oriented capabilities. Moving forward, scholars should enrich the existing body of knowledge by exploring the contributions of mediating or moderating variables, including self-efficacy, learning motivation, or practical internship experience, to develop a more robust understanding of work readiness factors.

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