Exploring Work Readiness: The Role of Future Orientation Mediated by Career Self-Efficacy in University Students

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Abstract. This study investigates the role of future orientation and career self-efficacy in shaping work readiness among university students. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 321 students of a private university in Tangerang through validated questionnaires and analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results show that future orientation does not have a significant direct effect on work readiness, whereas career self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect. Moreover, future orientation significantly influences career self-efficacy, which in turn mediates the relationship between future orientation and work readiness, indicating full mediation. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening students' career self-efficacy as an internal resource to prepare them for the workforce. The study contributes to the understanding of psychological factors underlying work readiness and provides practical implications for career guidance and higher education.

Keywords: future orientation, career self-efficacy, work readiness, university students, structural equation modeling

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Introduction

Post-Modern Phenomena is unfolding recent activities in the workforce. These phenomena in contemporary education and work refer to labor-market conditions characterized by fragmented career paths, declining job stability, and increasing demands for adaptability, which challenge traditional linear models of career preparation (Piorunek et al., 2020). Within this context, previous studies have shown that changing labor-market expectations place greater focus on students' soft skills, psychological readiness, and proactive career planning as key indicators of work readiness among contemporary university students (Laurisz et al., 2024). In Indonesia, employment rate statistics vary across areas, such as Maluku, Riau, West Java, Banten, and DKI Jakarta, with percentages of 92.43%, 89.66%, 89.54%, 89.05%, and 89.05%, respectively. This result provides a general overview of labor market conditions, as reported by Rizaty (2021). However, the macro-level employment indicators do not directly capture students' psychological readiness to enter the workforce. High employment rates did not necessarily imply that graduates possessed adequate preparedness, while lower rates did not automatically suggest insufficient readiness.

Previous studies supported this view by showing that a substantial proportion of students exhibit only moderate levels of work readiness. Therefore, readiness is shaped more by individual psychological and developmental factors than by labor market conditions alone (Astuti et al., 2022). Some studies conducted before the pandemic also supported this view, where the 55.45% of respondents had a moderate level of work readiness (Diah Baiti et al., 2017). Another study consisting of 49 students showed that 38 students had a high level of work readiness, while the remaining 11 were moderate (Kurniawan, 2020). Based on these results, the study concludes that students' work readiness tends to be at a moderate level. This implies that specific solutions or strategies are still needed to help students achieve a higher level of work readiness.

Work readiness can be synthesized as a multidimensional construct reflecting an individual's preparedness to enter and function effectively in the workplace, including relevant skills and knowledge, personal and social competencies, organizational

awareness, and psychological readiness to perform and adapt to work demands (Caballero et al., 2011; Peersia et al., 2024; Pool & Sewell, 2007). Therefore, work readiness represents both a capability and a disposition that enable individuals to navigate career challenges with competence, adaptability, and maturity.

Although the millennial generation has been widely discussed as the dominant workforce requiring high levels of learning agility in fast-changing work environments (Jatmika & Puspitasari, 2019), most current undergraduate students belong to Generation Z. In this era, Generation Z students, who have grown up in highly digitalized and dynamic environments, face increasing career uncertainty and must develop adaptability, engage in continuous learning, and demonstrate psychological readiness to meet future work demands. Some studies also showed related psychological and developmental factors that influence the preparedness of students for the world of work, showing that the quality of college life significantly affects academic hardiness, while academic and social satisfaction with campus life experiences enhances resilience in facing challenges (Aprodita, 2021). Accordingly, the present study focuses on Generation Z university students and emphasizes psychological resources that support work readiness in dynamic career environments.

Career maturity is a crucial developmental task for final-year students, although previous studies indicate that many students still demonstrate only moderate levels of career maturity, suggesting that readiness for employment remains uneven (Jatmika & Linda, 2015). Prior studies identified various factors influencing work readiness, including personal, environmental, and educational factors (Kirani & Chusairi, 2022). However, considering that this study focuses on intra-individual psychological processes, primary attention is directed toward internal factors that reflect students' psychological dynamics and personal resources. Future orientation and self-efficacy are particularly salient, as these factors shape how students perceive their future goals, evaluate their capabilities, and sustain persistence in preparing for career-related demands. This emphasis is consistent with findings that show self-efficacy and future-oriented optimism as core components of psychological resources supporting work readiness (Masole & van Dyk, 2016). Accordingly, this study narrows its scope to examine how future orientation influences work readiness through career self-efficacy as a key internal psychological mechanism among university students.

From a theoretical perspective, future orientation reflects individuals' cognitive representations of their future goals, plans, and anticipated outcomes, shaping optimism about future success and motivating preparatory behaviors related to career development (Masole & van Dyk, 2016). In the Indonesian context, empirical studies have shown that students with stronger future orientation demonstrate better career planning and preparedness for work, as reflected in clearer career goals and higher readiness to engage in career-related tasks (Ridho & Siswanti, 2020; Tentama & Nabilah, 2020). Similarly, international studies indicate that future orientation contributes positively to students' perceptions of work readiness across diverse educational contexts, including both vocational and higher education settings (Chen et al., 2023; Tou, 2022). These findings suggest that future orientation serves as a psychological foundation that supports students' work readiness by guiding goal setting, sustaining motivation, and encouraging adaptive career-related behaviors.

The work readiness factor related to self-confidence, conceptualized as self-efficacy, can be connected to career self-efficacy, which also has the potential to influence overall work readiness (Masole & van Dyk, 2016). It is also found that career self-efficacy can help foster work readiness among final-year university students (Diah Baiti et al., 2017). In the United Kingdom, self-efficacy influences students' preparedness in choosing a career (Goncalves, 2021).

Studies on the contribution of career self-efficacy to work readiness have also been documented in several studies in Indonesia (Eagle et al., 2022; Erliana & Rozana, 2022; Lubis & Khairani, 2021). Some findings suggest that career self-efficacy fosters individuals' independence and confidence in making career decisions that are in line with their interests and abilities. Drawing on its original theoretical foundation, career self-efficacy is derived from Bandura's concept of self-efficacy and is defined as an individual's belief or confidence in their ability to organize and execute actions, perform tasks, achieve goals, and produce desired outcomes to attain specific competencies. Therefore, Career self-efficacy is an individual's belief in making appropriate career decisions in accordance with their abilities (Betz & Hackett, 2006).

Future Orientation can help foster career self-efficacy, and this has been reinforced by results from previous studies (Anaresti et al., 2022). The study explained that with a strong future orientation, high school students tend to develop confidence in their abilities to reflect on and make appropriate career decisions that are in line with themselves. Some findings also demonstrated that future orientation significantly influences career self-efficacy among unemployed individuals (Silva et al., 2023). In China, Future Orientation has a significant negative relationship with adolescents' difficulties in making career decisions (Xie et al., 2016). Furthermore, various studies suggest that future orientation encourages adolescents to consider different aspects of

their future lives, including the educational goals to be achieved and the career aspirations to be pursued (Basilici et al., 2025). Previous investigations show that future orientation enhances the work readiness of students approaching the end of studies as preparation for workforce entry (Ridho & Siswanti, 2020; Tabrani et al., 2020; Tentama & Nabilah, 2020; Tou, 2022).

This is because future orientation helps shape perceptions of the self-image that students wish to pursue in the future, as well as clear pathways to achieve their future goals. The clarity of this self-image and future goals subsequently motivates students to make adequate preparations and efforts for employment, thereby fostering work readiness. Various studies reported that Future Orientation can contribute to work readiness, though it is considered not that strong. Some findings suggest that the future orientation contributes to work readiness, which is between 24.3% and 40.5% (Ridho & Siswanti, 2020; Tentama & Nabilah, 2020). These findings suggest that future orientation alone may be insufficient to explain work readiness and that other variables, such as career self-efficacy, may function as mediators in this relationship. This creates a study gap that shows the need for further investigation to address the problem. Therefore, this study aimed to address the existing gap regarding the relationship between future orientation and students' work readiness, while drawing on significant empirical findings to inform relevant implications and recommendations.

Despite these theoretical explanations and partial empirical support, empirical findings regarding the relationship between future orientation and work readiness remain inconsistent. Several studies report that future orientation directly and significantly predicts students' work readiness (Ridho & Siswanti, 2020; Tentama & Nabilah, 2020; Tou, 2022), while other findings suggest that its contribution is relatively weak and insufficient to explain work readiness independently (Masole & van Dyk, 2016). In the context of university students, particularly those who are not yet in their final year, future orientation may not automatically translate into concrete work readiness without the presence of internal psychological resources such as career self-efficacy. This inconsistency indicates an existing gap that necessitates further investigation into the underlying mechanism through which future orientation influences work readiness. Therefore, this study positions career self-efficacy as a mediating variable to clarify the indirect pathway between future orientation and work readiness, thereby contributing novelty by explaining why future orientation may or may not directly predict work readiness among university students. The objectives of this study are as follows (1) to examine the influence of future orientation on students work readiness, (2) to examine the influence of career self-efficacy on students work readiness, (3) to examine the influence of future orientation on students career self-efficacy, and (4) to investigate the mediating role of career self-efficacy in the relationship between future orientation and students work readiness.

H1: Future orientation has a significant positive influence on students' work readiness.
H2: Career self-efficacy has a significant positive influence on students' work readiness.
H3: Future orientation has a significant positive influence on students' career self-efficacy.
H4: Career self-efficacy mediates the relationship between future orientation and students' work readiness.

Table 1.
Respondent Characteristics

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Boys	116	36.1
Girls	205	63.9
Age		
18-19	75	23.4
20-21	218	67.9
22-23	23	7.2
24 or Above	4	1.5
Semester		
4	138	42.9
6	172	53.6
8	11	3.5
Major Study		
Psychology	140	43.6
English Study	32	9.9
Mandarin Study	29	9
Digital Business	54	16.8
Information Technology	14	4.3
Information System	52	16.4
Domicile		
South Tangerang	286	89.1
Jakarta	28	8.7
Bogor	7	2.2

Methods

An explanatory correlational design was adopted with a cross-sectional survey method to examine the relationships among future orientation, career self-efficacy, and work readiness. The design aimed to explain the pattern of associations between variables rather than to establish causal relationships.

Respondent Characteristics

Information regarding the study respondents is presented in Table 1. The respondents consisted of 116 male students (36.1%) and 205 female students (63.9%). In terms of age, the majority were between 20 and 21 years old, totaling 218 students (67.9%). With respect to their academic level, the majority were in the

sixth semester, totaling 172 students (53.6%). The respondents also represented a range of fields of study, with the majority being psychology students, totaling 140 students (43.6%). In terms of domicile, the majority of respondents, 286 students (89.1%), resided in South Tangerang. This demographic distribution shows a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, academic background, and place of residence, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of students preparing to enter the workforce.

A non-probability sampling method was adopted using convenience sampling due to practical considerations, including accessibility of respondents and institutional approval. A total of 339 students initially completed the questionnaires. However, only 321 responses were retained for analysis, as 18 cases were excluded due to incomplete data. The respondents were recruited from a single private university located in Tangerang. This institution was selected based on preliminary observations and informal discussions with faculty members and deans, which indicated several challenges related to students' career preparation and work readiness. The challenges included unclear career plans, limited confidence in recruitment processes, insufficient internship experience, and difficulties in adapting to professional workplace expectations. These conditions indicate that students' work readiness at this institution requires further strengthening, particularly through the development of internal psychological factors such as career self-efficacy and future orientation. Therefore, this university provided a relevant and meaningful context for examining internal psychological mechanisms underlying students' work readiness.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles for investigations of human respondents. Ethical approval was obtained from the university authorities under approval number 164/SK/R/UPI.Y.A.I/VI/2025. Consent was secured from all participating students before data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Data were collected anonymously, and all responses were treated with strict confidentiality to ensure the privacy and protection of the respondents.

Procedure

The data collection process was carried out between May 3, 2024, and May 21, 2024. Before instrument administration, all questionnaires underwent a structured validation process. This process included a readability test to ensure item clarity and comprehensibility, followed by expert judgment conducted by three psychologists specializing in educational and career psychology to assess content relevance and conceptual clarity. Subsequently, a pilot construct test was performed to evaluate item discrimination and construct validity. Items with standardized factor loadings below .50 were eliminated during this stage. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), while construct validity was examined through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Only instruments that demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability were retained and employed in the main study.

Data were collected using hardcopy questionnaires, which were distributed to students during their regular class sessions. The analyst was present throughout each data collection session in the classroom to provide clarification and respond to any questions raised by the students during the completion of the questionnaires. This in-class data collection method was adopted following the recommendation of the university authorities, as agreed upon during preliminary meetings with the heads of the respective study programs.

Following data collection, responses were carefully entered into Microsoft Excel, where individual item scores were computed in decimal form. The data were then transferred to SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 24 for statistical analysis. Before hypothesis testing, the instruments were further examined through convergent validity and discriminant validity testing to ensure measurement accuracy. Only after establishing the psychometric soundness of the instruments were the main analyses conducted to test the hypotheses.

Measurement Instrument

Demographic data were collected based on the gender, age, semester level, field of study, and city of domicile of the respondents. This information was used to describe the characteristics of the student sample and to provide context for interpreting the main study variables.

Work readiness

Work Readiness was measured using the Students' Work-Readiness Scale developed by Sultoni et al. (2022), which was translated and culturally adapted for this study. The instrument is unidimensional and consists of 21 favorable items covering five aspects, including prior experience, maturity level, mental and emotional state, intelligence, and self-development efforts. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." In the original validation with 151 university students, the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .878. In the present study, CFA indicated a good model fit (Prob = .679; GFI = 1.000; CMIN/DF = .171; RMSEA = .000; AGFI = .997; TLI = 1.011; NFI = 1.000).

The CFA model specified a first-order factor structure with correlated latent variables. The excellent fit indices observed may reflect a just-identified or near-saturated model, particularly due to the use of composite indicators and the relatively parsimonious model specification. Further examination showed that standardized factor loadings ranged from .690 to .790, indicating acceptable convergent validity of the measurement model. Furthermore, the instrument achieved an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of .560 and a CR of .836, confirming that the scale was both valid and reliable for assessing students' readiness for the workforce (Example items include: "The learning experiences I gained at the university can help me in finding a job," and "I understand the strengths, enabling me to learn from them as a means of improving my own abilities.").

Future orientation

Future Orientation was assessed using the Future Orientation Scale developed by Steinberg et al. (2009). The original scale consists of 15 items representing three related dimensions, namely planning, future time perspective, and anticipation of future consequences. This study treated future orientation as a unidimensional construct reflecting an overall future-oriented cognitive tendency. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." In the present study, CFA indicated a good model fit (Prob = .106; GFI = .996; CMIN/DF = 2.608; RMSEA = .070; AGFI = .961; TLI = .982; NFI = .995).

Further examination showed that standardized factor loadings ranged from .580 to .840, indicating acceptable convergent validity of the measurement model. Furthermore, the instrument achieved an AVE value of .560 and a CR of .831, confirming that the scale was both valid and reliable for assessing individuals' orientation toward their future goals ("Example item: "I make plans ahead before completing a task or assignment," and "I think about the possible good or bad outcomes before making a decision.").

Career self-efficacy

Career Self-Efficacy was measured using the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (CDMSE-SF) developed by Taylor and Betz (1983) and revised by Betz and Klein (1996). The scale consists of 25 items representing five related aspects: self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem solving. This study treated career self-efficacy as a unidimensional construct reflecting students' overall confidence in their career decision-making abilities. Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale. The CFA results indicated an overall good model fit (Prob = .132; GFI = .997; CMIN/DF = 2.265; RMSEA = .062; AGFI = .966; TLI = .980; NFI = .994).

Further examination showed that standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.68 to 0.76, indicating acceptable convergent validity of the measurement model. The validity and reliability tests showed an AVE value of .510 and a CR value of .803, demonstrating that the instrument was both valid and reliable for measuring students' confidence in their career decision-making abilities (Example items include: "Searching for information in the library about careers you are interested in," and "Choosing one major from a list of potential majors you are considering.").

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis involved descriptive statistical analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overall description of the characteristics of respondents and the distribution of the study variables, including measures of central tendency and variability, using SPSS version 26. To test the proposed hypotheses, SEM was employed as a multivariate analytical technique that integrates factor analysis and regression analysis, allowing for the examination of relationships among observed indicators and latent constructs, as well as the structural relationships among latent variables within a single comprehensive model. The SEM analysis was performed using AMOS version 24 and followed standard procedures widely adopted in the SEM literature, including model specification, path diagram development, estimation, model identification, model fit evaluation, and interpretation (Byrne, 2010).

Table 2.
Full model fit measures

Index fit	Criteria	Results	Decision
Prob	> .05	.000	Not Fit
GFI	> .90	.936	Good Fit
CMIN/DF	< 50	1.442	Good Fit
RMSEA	< .08	.037	Good Fit
AGFI	> .90	.914	Good Fit
TLI	> .90	.971	Good Fit
NFI	> .90	.927	Good Fit

Results and Discussion

Results

Study Model Testing

The analysis of the SEM using the Maximum Likelihood (ML) method involves the use of a single variable with a single indicator. In situations where measurement error is present in an indicator, the measurement error is fixed at 0, while the loading from the indicator to the latent variable score (LVS) is set to 1. Modifications are carried out by inspecting

measurement errors that have negative values, and these values are adjusted to 0 in order to comply with the model's assumptions.

By implementing these changes, the model is expected to successfully converge and provide better estimation results. This model modification process is essential to ensure alignment between the proposed model and the observed data, thereby enhancing the reliability of the structural analysis results (Hair et al., 2019). The model fit indicators can be seen in Figure 1 on the next page.

The figure illustrates the structural model tested using CFA. In this model, OMD represents Future Time Perspective, KK refers to Work Readiness, and CSE stands for Career Self-Efficacy. Each construct is measured by four items that successfully passed the CFA process, ensuring that the model demonstrates an acceptable fit. The fitness indexes presented—such as GFI = .967, RMSEA = .034, AGFI = .946, TLI = .983, and NFI = .958—indicate that the model fits the data well, thereby supporting the validity of the constructs used in this study. The model fit test can be seen in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, six out of seven model fit indices indicate a good fit, while one indicates a poor fit. Therefore, given that the majority of indices demonstrate a good fit, the full model can be considered to exhibit an acceptable level of goodness of fit.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing involved the examination of both direct and indirect effects. Direct effects were tested to assess the influence of the exogenous variables on the endogenous variable and the mediator, while indirect effects were tested to evaluate the mediating role of career self-efficacy. The results of the direct and indirect effect analyses are presented in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Based on the results of the direct effect hypothesis testing shown in Table 3, H1 is rejected because future orientation (OMD) does not have a significant positive influence on students' work readiness (KK) (estimate = .031, p = .598). Meanwhile, H2 is accepted since career self-efficacy (CSE) significantly and positively influences students' work readiness (KK) (estimate = .615, p < .001). Furthermore, H3 is accepted because future orientation (OMD) has a significant positive influence on students' career self-efficacy (CSE) (estimate = .219, p = .002). These findings indicate that while future orientation does not directly impact work readiness, it plays an important role indirectly by strengthening students' career self-efficacy, which in turn enhances their readiness for work.

The results of the direct effect testing in Table 3 show that future orientation does not have a significant direct effect on work readiness, with an estimated value of .031 (p = .598, not significant). Meanwhile, the results of the indirect effect testing in Table 4 show that career self-efficacy mediates the relationship between future orientation and work readiness, with an estimated value of .101 (p < .05). The non-significant direct effect, together with the significant indirect effect, indicates the presence of full mediation. Therefore, H4 is accepted, showing that future orientation has a positive influence on work readiness through career self-efficacy as a mediator among students.

Table 3.
Results of the direct effect hypothesis testing

Variable	Estimate	S.E	z-value	p-value
OMD→ KK	.031	.045	.528	.598
CSE → KK	.615	.054	8.183	.000
OMD→CSE	.219	.074	3.061	.002

OMD= future orientation (FO); KK= work readiness (WR); CSE= career self-efficacy; S.E.=standard error

Table 4.
Results of the indirect effect hypothesis testing

Variable	Est	S.E	z	p
OMD→CSE→KK	.101	.036	2.799	.005

OMD= future orientation (FO); KK= work readiness (WR); CSE= career self-efficacy; Est= estimate; S.E.=standard error

Discussion

Future orientation and work readiness

The statistical test results indicate that future orientation does not have a significant effect on work readiness. This finding is not fully consistent with previous studies (Qomariyah & Febriyanti, 2021; Ridho & Siswanti, 2020; Tabrani et al., 2020; Tentama & Nabilah, 2020; Tou, 2022), which found that future orientation directly contributes to work readiness. Several factors may explain this discrepancy.

International studies such as Chen et al. (2023) report a significant positive relationship between future orientation and perceived employability. However, these findings are highly context-dependent and often involve samples of final-year students or educational systems with well-structured career preparation frameworks. In contrast, this study shows that among university students from various semester levels, future orientation alone is insufficient to predict work readiness. This suggests that future orientation may function more as a distal cognitive factor rather than a proximal determinant of work readiness, particularly when students lack confidence in translating future goals into actionable career-related behaviors.

In the study conducted by Tou (2022), future orientation was found to help shape a clear view of the future, which makes students more prepared to pursue the desired future. However, this study was conducted on vocational high school (SMK) students, who tend to

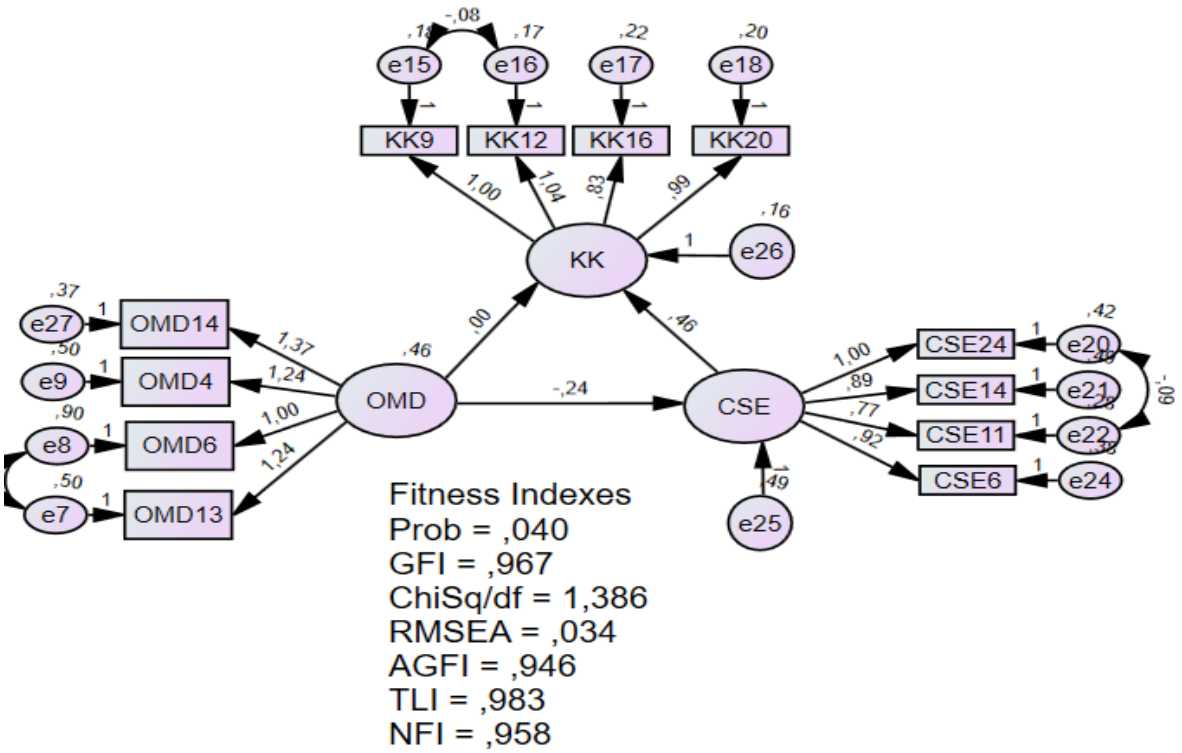

Figure 1. Path diagram of this study

have more structured career paths compared to university students. University students have more diverse career options and flexible educational pathways, so work readiness may depend more on internal factors such as career self-efficacy.

In the studies conducted by Ridho and Siswanti (2020) and Tabrani et al. (2020), future orientation helped students consider intended plans and enhanced work readiness. However, in the present study, respondents were drawn from various semester levels, with some not yet in the final stage of their studies. Future orientation may have a stronger influence on students who are closer to entering the workforce. For those not yet in the final stage of studies, career self-efficacy plays a more decisive role in shaping preparation for the world of work.

In the study by Tentama and Nabilah (2020), future orientation was found to help students shape their mindset regarding future career activities, thereby encouraging the students to improve the skills needed for those careers. However, this study used school students as subjects rather than university students. School students may be more influenced by external factors, such as guidance from teachers and a more structured educational environment, which assist in developing work readiness. In contrast, university students depend more on their personal beliefs (career self-efficacy) in developing their work readiness.

Finally, Qomariyah and Febriyanti (2021) stated that work readiness is influenced by an individual's understanding of their own position. This understanding can be associated with future orientation, although the results of this study indicate that students with a high level of future orientation are not necessarily ready to work without strong career self-efficacy. Students who have a clear vision of the future may possess well-defined career goals, but without confidence in ability to achieve those goals, there will be a feeling of unpreparedness to enter the workforce.

Career Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness

The statistical test results indicate that career self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on work readiness. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which can be explained as follows. In general, previous studies consistently indicate that career self-efficacy plays a crucial role in enhancing students' work readiness across various educational contexts (Baharin & Hanafi, 2020; Diah Baiti et al., 2017; Erliana & Rozana, 2022). Students who believe in their ability to make effective career decisions tend to engage more actively in career preparation behaviors, develop relevant skills, and demonstrate greater confidence in entering the workforce. Furthermore, evidence suggests that self-efficacy, both in general and in career-related domains, serves as a key psychological resource that supports students' readiness to face employment challenges, including during periods of uncertainty such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Eagle et al., 2022; Syofyan, 2021).

When students have confidence in choosing a career connected with the field of study, there is a higher tendency to feel prepared for work. This is based on the understanding that work readiness involves both prior experience and adequate intellectual capacity. In other words, when students gain valuable experiences from their studies and demonstrate strong intellectual ability in absorbing knowledge, work readiness tends to develop. Specifically, career self-efficacy involves self-assessment, planning, problem-solving, and goal-setting to support career choices. Through these aspects, students accumulate prior experiences and knowledge of the career they wish to pursue, which in turn enhances their work readiness.

Future Orientation and Career Self-Efficacy

The statistical test results show that future orientation has a positive and significant effect on career self-efficacy. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which can be explained as follows. Overall, prior studies consistently indicate that future orientation plays an important role in shaping students' career-related psychological resources. Students with stronger future orientation tend to develop clearer career visions, which enhance confidence in making career decisions and support the development of career self-efficacy (Anaresti et al., 2022; Febriyati et al., 2023). Moreover, future orientation has been shown to contribute to students' career maturity, as shown in their ability to make independent, realistic, and consistent career choices connected with interests and abilities (Grashinta et al., 2018; Khairunnisa & Indrawati, 2021; Subekti, 2022). Considering the close conceptual relationship between career maturity and career self-efficacy, these findings support the present study's assumption that future orientation serves as an important psychological antecedent of career self-efficacy.

These findings may be explained by the idea that future orientation essentially helps individuals form a vision of their desired future. A clear outlook on the future and the career to be pursued enables individuals to prepare the skills required to achieve that career, thereby enhancing career self-efficacy. When students possess strong future orientation, confidence in the chosen career path tends to develop (career self-efficacy). This is grounded in elements of future orientation, including planning, time perspective, and anticipation of future consequences, which encourage students to prepare for future goals. This is consistent with the components of career self-efficacy, which include planning and problem-solving related to career choices. However, through career self-efficacy, students prepare for the steps required to pursue the desired careers.

The Mediating Role of Career Self-Efficacy in the Influence of Future Orientation on Work Readiness

The statistical test results show that future orientation has a positive and significant effect on work readiness, with career self-efficacy as a mediator. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which can be explained as follows. Career self-efficacy is predicted to serve as a bridge between future orientation and work readiness. This is because future orientation helps students develop a clear view of their future, which ultimately fosters confidence in their ability to choose their desired career (Anaresti et al., 2022). Students with strong future orientation have a clearer picture of the career to be pursued in the future, which helps strengthen the skills needed to achieve that career (Febriyati et al., 2023).

Previous studies have already established connections between future orientation and career self-efficacy (Anaresti et al., 2022; Febriyati et al., 2023; Grashinta et al., 2018; Khairunnisa & Indrawati, 2021; Subekti, 2022), career self-efficacy and work readiness (Baharin & Hanafi, 2020; Diah Baiti et al., 2017; Eagle et al., 2022; Erliana & Rozana, 2022; Syofyan, 2021), as well as future orientation and work readiness (Qomariyah & Febriyanti, 2021; Ridho & Siswanti, 2020; Tabrani et al., 2020; Tentama & Nabilah, 2020; Tou, 2022).

The results of the mediation analysis show that future orientation does not directly predict students' work readiness but instead exerts its influence indirectly through career self-efficacy. This indicates a full mediation effect, in which future orientation strengthens students' work readiness only when it successfully enhances their belief in their ability to make career decisions. These findings reinforce the idea that having a strong vision of the future is not enough to prepare students for the workforce unless it is accompanied by a sense of confidence in their capacity to navigate career-related challenges.

Support for this mediating mechanism can be found in previous studies. Other studies demonstrated that career decision self-efficacy serves as a mediator connecting personal psychological resources, such as career emotional intelligence and self-esteem, to career adaptability among university students. Their findings highlight that self-efficacy has a strong predictive power for career adaptability, suggesting that belief in one's career-related abilities plays a central role in shaping readiness for future career demands (Hamzah et al., 2021). Similarly, recent studies also found that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between organizational activity and work readiness, showing that students' involvement in organizational activities influences both their self-efficacy and their preparedness for work (Adriansyah et al., 2024). These studies consistently emphasize that self-efficacy

functions as a psychological bridge that transforms internal resources and external experiences into concrete readiness for the world of work.

Another study also supports the mediating role of career self-efficacy by showing that career decision self-efficacy mediates the effect of peer support on career adaptability (Salim et al., 2023). They argue that CDSE functions as an internal driver shaping career-related behaviors, suggesting that the development of self-efficacy, whether through social support or future-oriented thinking, plays a crucial role in preparing students to navigate complex career decisions. These findings are in line with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which explains that self-efficacy influences individuals' choices, motivation, and perseverance in achieving desired career outcomes.

Overall, the present findings broaden the understanding of how future orientation operates in relation to work readiness. Rather than exerting a direct influence, future orientation provides a cognitive foundation that helps students envision the future. However, the transition from imagining the future to preparing for it requires career self-efficacy. Only when students believe in their capability to assess themselves, gather occupational information, make career plans, solve problems, and choose appropriate goals do they translate the future-oriented thoughts into concrete actions that enhance work readiness.

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the central psychological role of career self-efficacy in the development of students' work readiness. It shows that interventions aimed at improving work readiness cannot depend solely on strengthening students' future orientation. Instead, they must also include strategies that build confidence in their ability to make career decisions. These findings have important implications for career counselors, educators, HRD professionals, and policymakers, who may design programs that integrate future planning with self-efficacy training to support students' transition from university to the work force.

From a practical perspective, these findings imply that interventions aimed at improving students' work readiness should not solely focus on enhancing future orientation through career planning seminars or goal-setting workshops. Instead, higher education institutions are encouraged to design integrative career development programs that explicitly strengthen students' career self-efficacy. Such programs may include structured career counseling, experiential learning opportunities such as internships and simulations of recruitment processes, mentoring by industry practitioners, and training in career decision-making skills. By fostering students' confidence in self-assessment, information seeking, planning, and problem-solving, universities can facilitate the transformation of future-oriented thinking into tangible readiness for entering the workforce.

Limitation

First, the use of convenience sampling may introduce sampling bias and limit generalizability. Second, data were collected from a single institution, which may show institutional-specific characteristics. Third, the reliance on self-report measures raises the possibility of self-report bias and common method variance. Future studies should consider multi-institutional samples, longitudinal designs, and mixed-method approaches.

Future Study

Several suggestions need to be conveyed regarding this study. First, it is necessary to use variations or combinations of study methods, such as quantitative and qualitative approaches, to deepen the understanding of complex factors and the interactions among the variables studied, namely future orientation, career self-efficacy, and work readiness. Second, it should be considered that career self-efficacy may play a stronger role as a reinforcer or moderator in the relationship between future orientation and work readiness. There may be additional factors moderating this relationship that need to be identified through further study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, students' work readiness is not directly influenced by future orientation but is significantly enhanced through career self-efficacy. This variable plays a central role, functioning not only as a direct predictor of work readiness but also as a mediator connecting future orientation to work readiness. These findings contribute to the development of psychology by emphasizing the importance of internal psychological resources, particularly career self-efficacy, in shaping students' preparedness for entering the workforce. Strengthening students' confidence in their career-related abilities is therefore essential to improving their readiness for employment.

Declaration

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Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

AI tools were used solely for language editing and clarity improvement.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical approval was obtained from the university authorities under approval number 164/SK/R/UPI.Y.A.I/VI/2025. Consent was secured from all participating students before data collection

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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