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Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness: Mediating Role of Perceived Social Support among Indonesian University Students

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study examines the structural relationship between general self-efficacy, perceived social support, and work readiness among university students. Drawing on the agentic perspective of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), it positions self-efficacy as a key cognitive factor influencing environmental appraisal and workforce readiness.
Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 217 final-year university students in Indonesia. The constructs were measured using established reflective scales, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).
Findings – Self-efficacy significantly predicts perceived social support ($\beta = 0.761$, $p < 0.001$) and work readiness ($\beta = 0.664$, $p < 0.001$). However, perceived social support does not significantly affect work readiness ($\beta = 0.092$, $p = 0.455$) and does not mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness ($\beta = 0.070$, $p = 0.463$). The findings therefore support a direct-only relationship in which internal psychological agency plays a more decisive role in workforce readiness.
Originality/Value – This study extends SCT-based employability research by challenging the assumption that external social support is a primary determinant of career readiness. The findings highlight self-efficacy as a critical psychological resource and suggest that higher education and employers should prioritize experiential learning and mastery-building activities to strengthen students' workforce readiness.

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1. Introduction

The transition from higher education to the labor market remains a complex challenge in emerging economies, including Indonesia (Wani & Ahmed, 2024). While universities aim to produce professionally adaptable graduates, macroeconomic indicators highlight persistent difficulties. Data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April 2026 indicated an unemployment rate of 4.9 percent in Indonesia, positioning it higher than several neighboring Southeast Asian countries (International Monetary Fund, 2026). Notably, college graduates constitute a significant portion of this demographic; Statistics Indonesia (2025) reported an Open Unemployment Rate of 5.25% for individuals with tertiary education. Consequently, understanding the mechanisms that foster work readiness—specifically a graduate's self-assessed possession of the necessary attitudes, skills, and psychological preparedness for the workforce—has become a priority in human resource development research (Haq & Adiwati, 2024; Pool & Sewell, 2007).

In highly dynamic labor markets, employers increasingly emphasize psychological capital over mere academic credentials (Zhang & Chen, 2024). Graduates frequently encounter ambiguous tasks and rapid technological shifts, demanding high psychological agility (Blokker et al., 2023). In this context, career preparation relies heavily on an individual's internal psychological resources, primarily self-efficacy, and the external support structures available within their environment. Self-efficacy, rooted in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), represents an individual's belief in their capability to execute actions required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1977). Concurrently, perceived social support—encompassing emotional, informational, and instrumental backing from family, peers, and institutions—is traditionally viewed as a crucial environmental factor that facilitates coping mechanisms during the school-to-work transition (Sarafino & Smith, 2014).

Despite extensive research on employability, empirical inconsistencies persist regarding how internal efficacy and perceived external support interact to predict work readiness. Many previous studies uniformly position social support as an external antecedent that develops an individual's self-efficacy (Agoes Salim et al., 2023). However, SCT, particularly through its agentic perspective, conceptualizes human functioning as a reciprocal interaction between personal cognitive factors and environmental perceptions (Bandura, 2001). A critical gap remains in examining the inverse pathway: how robust internal self-efficacy shapes an individual's cognitive appraisal of their environment. Based on this perspective, highly efficacious individuals may process environmental cues more positively, thereby perceiving higher levels of emotional and instrumental support compared to their less confident peers (Holderman & Wijono, 2024).

Furthermore, within the collectivist sociocultural context of Southeast Asia, communal interdependence is often assumed to be an absolute predictor of career readiness (Wang & Wang, 2026). Yet, there is limited evidence evaluating whether perceived social support maintains a significant predictive relationship with self-assessed work readiness when strong internal psychological traits, such as self-efficacy, are simultaneously accounted for in a single structural model.

To address these empirical and theoretical gaps, this study utilizes the agentic perspective of Social Cognitive Theory as its primary theoretical lens. It positions self-efficacy as the core cognitive predictor of both perceived social support and work readiness. The research objectives are: (1) to examine if self-efficacy positively predicts perceived social support; (2) to assess the direct statistical relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness; (3) to

evaluate if perceived social support directly predicts work readiness within a collectivist context; and (4) to test whether perceived social support mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness. By testing these pathways, this study contributes to the employability literature by clarifying the boundaries of perceived environmental support and highlighting the dominance of internal psychological agency.

2. Literature Review & Hypothesis Development

The conceptual architecture of this study is designed to address a critical gap in contemporary employability literature by focusing on a single, cohesive theoretical mechanism, in accordance with rigorous academic standards. This study is exclusively anchored in the agentic perspective of Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977, 2001), supplemented by the Employability Development Framework proposed by Pool and Sewell (2007) to operationalize work readiness. By integrating these two specific frameworks, this study explains how internal cognitive beliefs (human agency) dictate how graduates appraise their environmental resources, and how these factors independently or jointly predict professional preparedness.

2.1 Self-Efficacy and the Cognitive Appraisal of Perceived Social Support

Traditionally, organizational and vocational research has positioned environmental factors, such as social support, primarily as external antecedents that foster an individual's internal self-efficacy (Agoes Salim et al., 2023). However, SCT conceptualizes human functioning as a system of reciprocal determinism among personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977). Through the lens of the agentic perspective, individuals are not merely passive products of their surroundings; their internal psychological states significantly dictate how they experience and interpret their environment (Bandura, 2001).

In highly disruptive economic environments, self-efficacy functions as a powerful cognitive filter. Students possessing robust self-efficacy exhibit greater confidence in their coping abilities. Consequently, rather than necessarily performing physical actions to mobilize or extract resources, highly efficacious individuals are theoretically more likely to interpret their existing social interactions positively. Their internal optimism allows them to perceive higher levels of emotional, informational, and instrumental backing from their family, peers, and academic institutions (Sarafino & Smith, 2014). Therefore, this study proposes that perceived social support represents a cognitive appraisal whose magnitude depends significantly on students' internal confidence.

H1: Self-Efficacy is positively related to perceived Social Support.

2.2 Self-Efficacy as the Core Psychological Engine of Work Readiness

While the preceding section establishes how internal efficacy shapes environmental perceptions, it is equally critical to understand its direct link to career outcomes. Work readiness represents the extent to which an individual possesses the comprehensive attitudes, skills, and psychological preparedness required to perform effectively in the professional workforce (Haq & Adiwati, 2024). According to the employability framework by Pool and Sewell (2007), technical competencies become rapidly insufficient without a resilient psychological foundation.

SCT posits that self-efficacy acts as the central engine of this psychological capital, determining how individuals persist through obstacles and frame structural disruptions (Bandura, 1977; Blokker et al., 2023). Empirical research consistently supports this mechanism, demonstrating that self-efficacy directly contributes to the work readiness and career preparation of students

and graduates (Lusiana et al., 2026; Taufan et al., 2025). Efficacious individuals process labor market ambiguity as manageable challenges rather than existential threats, thereby elevating their self-assessed readiness for the workforce (Holderman & Wijono, 2024).

H2: Self-Efficacy is positively related to Work Readiness.

2.3 Perceived Social Support and Work Readiness in a Collectivist Context

Individual development occurs within a socio-cultural context. In the collectivist framework prevalent in Southeast Asian emerging economies, communal interdependence is traditionally assumed to be a prerequisite for early-career success (Wang & Wang, 2026). Supportive environments comprising emotional encouragement and instrumental assistance are widely documented to function as a psychological safety net, mitigating the anxieties of structural unemployment (Sarafino & Smith, 2014).

However, there is a critical gap regarding how perceived external resources predict work readiness when dominant internal psychological traits are simultaneously accounted for in a single model. To explicitly test the predictive power and boundaries of this traditional environmental asset verifying if merely feeling supported directly translates to feeling professionally prepared the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Perceived Social Support is positively related to Work Readiness.

2.4 The Mediating Mechanism of Environmental Appraisal

By linking the arguments established across the direct pathways, a final mediating mechanism is conceptualized. SCT suggests that a sequence of internal cognitive appraisals may bridge the school-to-work transition. Specifically, robust internal psychological capital (self-efficacy) empowers a positive cognitive appraisal of the environment, resulting in higher perceived social support.

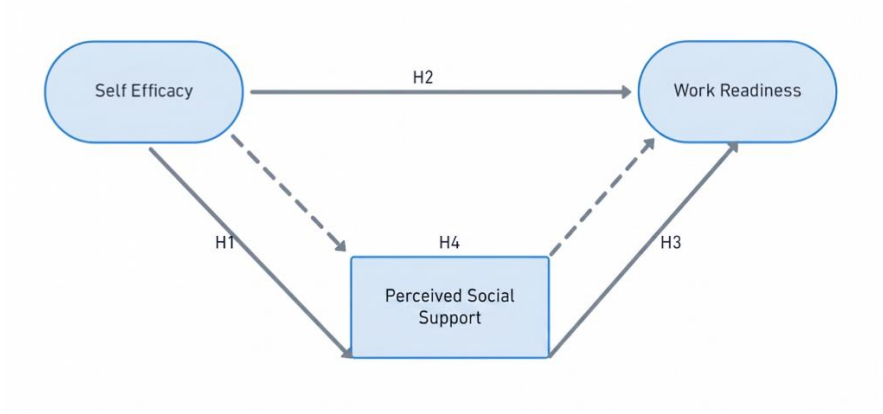
Traditionally, contemporary vocational psychology conceptualizes this perceived support as a vital conduit that translates internal confidence into actualized workforce readiness (Agoes Salim et al., 2023). Theoretically, the perception of having instrumental and emotional backing provides the necessary psychological comfort to convert internal self-belief into operational career readiness. Testing this hypothesis determines whether the cognitive appraisal of external support is structurally necessary to mediate the effect of personal agency on occupational readiness.

H4: Perceived Social Support mediates the relationship between Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness.

2.5 Conceptualized Research

Based on the theoretical synthesis of the agentic perspective of SCT and the Employability Development Framework detailed above, a conceptual framework is constructed to illustrate the structural relationships between the variables. This model positions Self-Efficacy as the independent variable (X) acting as the primary internal psychological engine, Perceived Social Support as the mediating variable (M) representing the cognitive appraisal of environmental resources, and Work Readiness as the dependent variable (Y) representing the ultimate operational outcome of a graduate's school-to-work transition. The structural linkages and the hypothesized pathways are visually conceptualized in the research framework model below:

Figure 1. Conceptualized Research



3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the predictive boundaries of internal psychological capital and the cognitive appraisal of environmental resources. A variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach was selected as it is highly robust for evaluating simultaneous mediation paths and predicting target constructs within complex organizational behavior frameworks (Hair et al., 2019, 2021).

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The target population comprises final-year university students in Indonesia who are actively preparing for the school-to-work transition amidst the current post-pandemic labor market realignment. Data collection was executed utilizing a self-administered online survey distributed via institutional and digital communication networks. To ensure broad representation across disciplines, a non-probability purposive and snowball sampling strategy was utilized. The inclusion criterion was strictly limited to active final-year undergraduates preparing to enter the recruitment cycle.

To ensure robust statistical validity and address the limitations of traditional population proportion formulas in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019; Kock & Hadaya, 2018), the minimum required sample size was determined a priori using G*Power software (Faul et al., 2009). The calculation was based on a linear multiple regression model (fixed model, R^2 deviation from zero) with the maximum number of predictors directed at the dependent variable being two (Self-Efficacy and Perceived Social Support). Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) as recommended by Cohen (2003), a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), and a rigorous statistical power of 0.95, the minimum required sample size was calculated at 107. The final operational sample of 217 valid responses substantially exceeds this threshold, thereby providing excellent statistical power to detect meaningful structural paths within the conceptual framework.

3.2 Measures and Operationalization

All focal constructs were operationalized using indicators adapted from established international psychometric scales. Because the original scales were in English, the items underwent a rigorous translation and back-translation process, followed by expert validation to ensure conceptual equivalence and cultural appropriateness in the Indonesian higher education context prior to distribution (Brislin, 1970). Specifically, the independent variable was operationalized as general self-efficacy, capturing the students' broad belief in their capability to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations in their

early career transitions, rather than a narrow task-specific or occupational self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 2012).

Furthermore, to ensure construct clarity, the outcome variable is strictly defined as perceived work readiness, acknowledging that the measurements are entirely based on the students' global self-evaluations rather than objective employer evaluations (Caballero et al., 2011; Pool & Sewell, 2007). The complete operationalization detailing the dimensions, specific indicators, and their corresponding measurement items is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalization of Variables and Measurement Items

Construct & Source	Dimension	Indicator	Code	Measurement Item (Translated to English)
Self-Efficacy (Adapted from Bandura, 1977)	Confidence in Skills	Self-ability belief	SE1	I feel confident in my current abilities.
		Perception of overcoming challenges	SE2	I am able to overcome challenges in completing tasks.
	Past Experience	Previous success	SE3	Past successful experiences make me confident in facing new challenges.
		Learning from failure	SE4	Past work or task failures provide many lessons for me, and I am increasingly confident in my abilities.
	Modeling	Observing others' success	SE5	The success of friends/others motivates me to succeed as well.
		Role model influence	SE6	I have a role model or individual who inspires my success.
	Social Feedback	Social support	SE7	I am confident in my abilities because I have a surrounding environment (friends or family) that supports my abilities.
		Feedback influence	SE8	I feel that praise or appreciation makes me more confident.
Perceived Social Support (Adapted from Sarafino & Smith, 2014)	Emotional Support	Acceptance and empathy	SS1	I feel understood and emotionally supported by the people around me.
		Availability of a listener	SS2	I feel that people around me care and provide a sense of security, respect, and love.
	Esteem Support	Moral support	SS3	People around me (family or friends) provide moral support when I am under pressure.
		Achievement recognition	SS4	I receive recognition for my achievements from the people around me.
	Tangible/Instrumental Support	Practical help	SS5	I receive practical help (funds, services, or others) from people around me when facing difficulties.
		Support availability	SS6	I have people who are willing to help me directly.
	Informational Support	Individual direction and advice	SS7	I receive direction and advice from people around me, which helps when facing difficulties.
		Access to various sources	SS8	I have access to information sources (lecturers, supervisors, and others) that help me solve tasks or problems.

Construct & Source	Dimension	Indicator	Code	Measurement Item (Translated to English)
Work Readiness (Adapted from Pool & Sewell, 2007)	Skill	Capability in completing tasks	WR1	I am able to solve problems at work.
	Skill	Teamwork ability	WR2	I am able to communicate with other parties when completing various tasks.
	Knowledge	Mastery of field material	WR3	I understand the relevant theory and practice in the field of work I will undertake.
	Knowledge	Training/work activity experience	WR4	I have the skills/expertise suitable for the field of work.
	Understanding	Work accuracy	WR5	I master the knowledge learned in lectures to carry out tasks or jobs correctly.
	Understanding	Decision making	WR6	I am able to interpret information so that I can make decisions correctly.
	Personality Attribute	Responsibility	WR7	I am willing to bear obligations as a form of responsibility in completing every task.
	Personality Attribute	Initiative and work enthusiasm	WR8	I am enthusiastic and passionate about the work I do.

While theoretically multidimensional, both Perceived Social Support and Work Readiness are modeled in this study as unidimensional reflective constructs, representing a holistic, global self-evaluation by the students. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

3.3 Data Analysis and Common Method Bias Mitigation

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 (Richter et al., 2022). The analytical protocol followed a rigorous two-stage evaluation (measurement model and structural model) using a non-parametric bootstrapping routine with 5,000 resamples (Hair et al., 2021). Indicator deletion during the measurement model assessment was conducted exclusively for indicators with weak outer loadings to establish convergent validity, carefully ensuring that the conceptual domain of each construct remained intact and theoretically justified.

Because all variables were self-reported, the study addressed Common Method Bias (CMB) both procedurally and statistically. Procedurally, respondent anonymity was guaranteed, and the survey instructions emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers. Statistically, CMB was evaluated using the full collinearity assessment approach (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). The inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all constructs ranged from 1.000 to 1.411. Because all VIF values fall strictly below the conservative threshold of 3.3, the model is empirically proven to be free from pathological Common Method Bias, ensuring that the structural relationships are not artificially inflated by a shared measurement method.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment (Outer Model)

Prior to testing the structural relationships, the measurement model was rigorously evaluated to ensure the reliability and validity of the latent constructs (Hair et al., 2021). The initial conceptual model consisted of 24 measurement items across three constructs. During the initial assessment of indicator reliability, the outer loadings of all items were evaluated (see Table 4.1). To achieve the required thresholds for convergent validity and internal consistency,

an iterative item-trimming process was conducted. Consequently, six specific problematic indicators (SE 4, SE 8, SS 8, WR 2, WR 4, and WR 8) were eliminated from the model.

Theoretically, the removal of these specific items was conducted with strict adherence to preserving the constructs' content validity. According to Hair et al. (2021), while deleting indicators with poor loadings is necessary to establish statistical fit, it is crucial not to compromise the theoretical coverage by eliminating an entire dimension. Since each dimension within this study's framework was operationalized by two specific indicators, the trimming process was strategically executed to ensure that no single theoretical dimension was entirely lost. This careful deletion process minimizes conceptual noise while successfully preserving the comprehensive theoretical structure and broad conceptual coverage of Self-Efficacy, Social Support, and Work Readiness.

Table 2. Outer Loadings

Indikator	Self Efficacy	Social Support	Work Readiness
SE 1	0.758		
SE 2	0.839		
SE 3	0.768		
SE 4	0.509		
SE 5	0.538		
SE 6	0.734		
SE 7	0.796		
SE 8	0.487		
SS 1		0.764	
SS 2		0.753	
SS 3		0.781	
SS 4		0.775	
SS 5		0.548	
SS 6		0.657	
SS 7		0.716	
SS 8		0.497	
WR 1			0.710
WR 2			0.737
WR 3			0.837
WR 4			0.786
WR 5			0.727
WR 6			0.684
WR 7			0.568
WR 8			0.386

The modified measurement model, now comprising 18 retained items, demonstrated robust indicator reliability. While a few retained items (e.g., SE 5, SS 5, WR 7) possessed loadings slightly below 0.708, they were strictly retained because their removal did not lead to an increase in the construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) or Composite Reliability (ϱc) above the recommended threshold and retaining them preserves content validity (Hair et al., 2021). Subsequently, internal consistency reliability and convergent validity were evaluated for the trimmed model. As presented in Table 4.2, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (ϱc) values for all constructs Self Efficacy, Social Support, and Work Readiness are well above the minimum threshold of 0.70, demonstrating excellent internal consistency.

Furthermore, the AVE for all constructs safely exceeds the 0.50 minimum acceptable level, confirming robust convergent validity.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Retained Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (ρc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Self Efficacy	6	0.843	0.886	0.567
Social Support	7	0.850	0.884	0.524
Work Readiness	5	0.781	0.852	0.538

Finally, discriminant validity was established using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, which is considered a superior criterion in variance-based structural equation modeling compared to traditional methods (Henseler et al., 2015). As shown in Table 4.3, all HTMT values are strictly below the conservative threshold of 0.90. Although the HTMT value between Self Efficacy and Work Readiness approaches the upper threshold (0.891), it remains safely under the 0.90 limit, confirming that each latent construct is empirically distinct. Theoretically, while both constructs involve self-perceived capabilities, Self-Efficacy captures the fundamental psychological belief in one's general capacity to succeed, whereas Work Readiness captures broader, multidimensional occupational preparedness encompassing specific transitional skills and practical workforce adaptability.

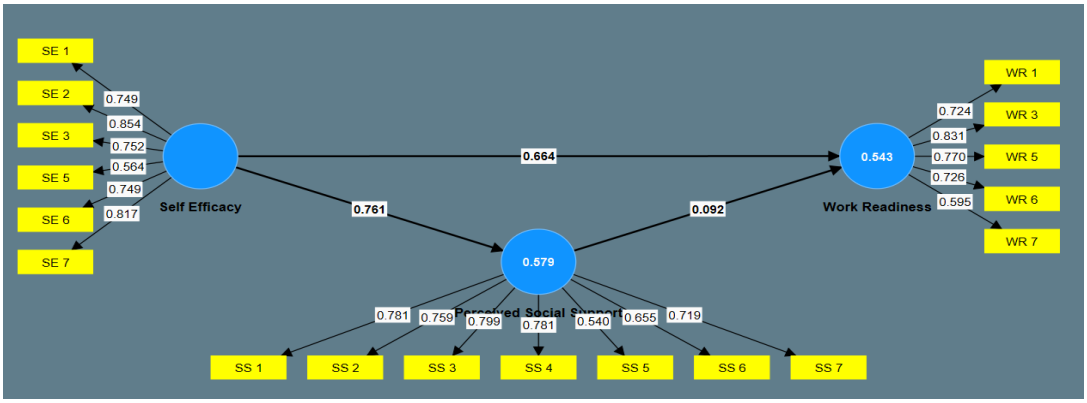
Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Constructs	Self Efficacy	Social Support	Work Readiness
Self Efficacy	-		
Social Support	0.868	-	
Work Readiness	0.891	0.686	-

4.2 Structural Model Assessment (Inner Model)

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural paths were evaluated. The overall empirical measurement and structural model, depicting indicator outer loadings, standardized path coefficients (β) and explained variance R^2 values, is visually illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Structural Model Results



The model's explanatory power was assessed using the Coefficient of Determination (R^2). As shown in Figure 4.1, the analysis revealed an R^2 value of 0.579 for Perceived Social Support, indicating that Self-Efficacy explains 57.9% of the variance in students' cognitive appraisal of their support networks. Furthermore, the model achieved a robust R^2 of 0.543 for Work Readiness, demonstrating that the structural model explains 54.3% of the variance in graduates' occupational preparedness. The Stone-Geisser Q^2 values via blindfolding (Social Support = 0.138; Work Readiness = 0.244) were strictly greater than zero, confirming the predictive relevance of the structural model.

The statistical significance of the standardized path coefficients (β) was determined through a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. The empirical results of this structural assessment are summarized in Table 4.4.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results (Path Coefficients)

Path / Hypothesis	Original Sample (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P-Values	Decision
H1: Self Efficacy → Social Support	0.761	0.758	0.049	15.465	< 0.000	**Supported**
H2: Self Efficacy → Work Readiness	0.664	0.650	0.101	6.588	< 0.000	**Supported**
H3: Social Support → Work Readiness	0.092	0.105	0.123	0.748	0.455	**Not Supported**
H4: Self Efficacy → Social Support → Work Readiness	0.070	0.082	0.095	0.734	0.463	**Not Supported**

The structural analysis demonstrates that Self-Efficacy is a strong, positive, and highly significant predictor of Perceived Social Support ($\beta = 0.761$, $p < 0.001$), firmly supporting H1. Self-Efficacy also exerts a dominant, direct positive influence on Work Readiness ($\beta = 0.664$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. However, the direct relationship between Perceived Social Support and Work Readiness is statistically non-significant ($\beta = 0.092$, $p = 0.455$); thus, H3 is not supported. Consequently, testing the specific indirect effect (H4) revealed that the mediation pathway from Self-Efficacy to Work Readiness through Perceived Social Support yielded a non-significant coefficient ($\beta = 0.070$, $p = 0.463$). Therefore, H4 is not supported, confirming that perceived social support does not structurally mediate this relationship in the current sample.

4.3 Discussion

The empirical findings of this study offer profound and nuanced insights into the dynamics of employability development among university students. By exclusively utilizing the agentic perspective of SCT (Bandura, 2001), this study successfully challenges traditional structural assumptions regarding the necessity and function of external support systems in the contemporary school-to-work transition.

4.3.1 The Cognitive Appraisal of Environmental Support (H1)

Firstly, the robust support for H1 ($\beta = 0.761$, $p < 0.001$) fundamentally reframes the relationship between internal psychological capital and environmental resources. Traditionally, organizational and vocational research has positioned social support as an external antecedent

that builds an individual's confidence (Agoes Salim et al., 2023). However, aligning with Bandura's (2001) agentic perspective, the current findings demonstrate that students with strong internal confidence function as active cognitive agents who shape their own environmental reality. Rather than merely receiving support passively, highly efficacious students possess a cognitive filter that interprets their social interactions more optimistically. Their internal psychological drive allows them to perceive higher levels of emotional, informational, and instrumental backing from their families, peers, and academic institutions compared to their less efficacious peers (Holderman & Wijono, 2024). This confirms that in highly disruptive environments, feeling supported is significantly dictated by one's internal state of mind.

4.3.2 Self-Efficacy as the Core Engine of Employability (H2)

Secondly, the strong direct effect of Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness (H2, $\beta = 0.664$, $p < 0.001$) corroborates the premise that internal psychological capital is the absolute primary engine of career preparedness. The transition from higher education to the labor market is fraught with ambiguity, rapid technological shifts, and structural challenges (Wani & Ahmed, 2024). In such a climate, technical skills alone are rapidly rendered obsolete without a resilient psychological foundation. Efficacious students are significantly more prepared to navigate this transition because they possess the cognitive agility to process professional ambiguity as manageable challenges rather than existential threats (Blokker et al., 2023). This finding aligns with recent empirical works (Lusiana et al., 2026; Taufan et al., 2025), reinforcing that a graduate's self-assessed readiness for the workforce is overwhelmingly driven by their internal belief in their capability to execute required professional actions.

4.3.3 The Boundary Conditions of Perceived Social Support (H3 & H4)

Most notably, the empirical rejection of both the direct impact of perceived Social Support (H3, $\beta = 0.092$, $p = 0.455$) and its mediating role (H4, $\beta = 0.070$, $p = 0.463$) establishes crucial boundary conditions for the efficacy of environmental support. While efficacious students perceive greater social support, this feeling of being supported does not automatically or significantly predict their self-assessed readiness for the labor market. Furthermore, it fails to act as a structural bridge mediating the core relationship between efficacy and readiness.

These findings provide a critical theoretical disruption to the collectivist assumptions prevalent in Southeast Asian employability frameworks. Much of the literature assumes that in collectivist cultures, communal harmony and external social backing are unconditional prerequisites for career success (Wang & Wang, 2026). However, this study proves that in a highly competitive, post-pandemic labor market, merely feeling emotionally or instrumentally supported is structurally insufficient (Pham, 2022). External support fails to translate into work readiness unless the individual independently possesses the internal psychological agency to operationalize those resources. Consequently, the study highlights a direct-only, non-mediation model where substantive work readiness is driven almost exclusively by the student's internal psychological agency and confidence in their own capabilities.

4.4 Practical Implications

4.4.1 Implications for Higher Education Institutions

For universities and educational institutions, the implication is a critical and immediate pivot in curriculum design and student affairs management, grounded in three strategic arguments:

a. **The Inadequacy of Passive Support Mechanisms**

The conventional approach of heavily investing in "soft" social support mechanisms such as

generic academic counseling, passive mentoring programs, or motivational seminars must be critically re-evaluated. Recent literature emphasizes that university interventions focusing merely on passive support or generic career planning fail to equip students for unpredictable labor markets, as they do not trigger proactive career behaviors (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2022).

b. **Cultivating Internal Agency over External Dependency**

Because the empirical data proves that external social support fails to act as a predicting or mediating bridge toward employability on its own, universities must stop functioning primarily as passive "safety nets." Providing external support networks without first establishing a student's internal psychological capital yields minimal operational impact. Institutional resources should therefore be reallocated from building communal dependency toward empowering students' independent psychological resilience (Zhang & Chen, 2024). Without an overwhelmingly strong internal psychological core, external support becomes an underutilized resource.

c. **Experiential Learning for Mastery Growth**

University management should redirect resources into experiential learning frameworks that force the organic growth of self-efficacy through direct mastery experiences. Contemporary sustainable career frameworks emphasize that robust internal psychological capital equips graduates for diverse professional trajectories, empowering them to become academic researchers, independent practitioners, or industry consultants (Blokker et al., 2023; Donald et al., 2024). By implementing high-stakes, project-based learning, rigorous business incubators, and direct academic-industry research simulations, universities build the critical cognitive agility necessary for students to proactively construct their unique professional identities.

4.4.2 Implications for Corporate Management & HR

For corporate organizations, these findings offer a definitive blueprint for optimizing talent acquisition and onboarding strategies in contemporary human resource management:

a. **Recalibrating Recruitment Metrics towards PsyCap**

Human Resource (HR) managers should recalibrate their recruitment strategies to heavily weigh candidates' psychological capital (PsyCap) and self-efficacy, rather than merely evaluating cultural fit or the prestige of their academic support networks. The data explicitly demonstrates that external backing does not guarantee professional readiness. In the highly disruptive work environment, an individual’s internal capacity to adapt proactively is the strongest and most reliable predictor of long-term organizational value (Kaliannan et al., 2023).

b. **Accelerating Efficacy through Early Stretch Assignments**

During the onboarding process, management trainees should be immediately exposed to challenging "stretch assignments." Providing early mastery experiences in the workplace directly accelerates the development of self-efficacy. HR must realize that rapidly building a new hire's internal confidence is far more critical than merely integrating them into a comfortable, peer-supported environment. High self-efficacy empowers young professionals to proactively orchestrate their roles and adapt to their careers autonomously (Agoes Salim et al., 2023).

c. **Transitioning to Empowering Leadership and Job Crafting**

Management must decisively shift from a purely "supportive" hand-holding approach to an empowering leadership model. Encouraging employee empowerment and job crafting allows self-efficacious young professionals to proactively reconstruct their work tasks and find meaning in their roles. Rather than waiting for social support to buffer professional shocks, this autonomous job crafting leads to significantly higher work performance, innovation, and

direct adaptability (Berlian et al., 2026).

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusion

This study empirically investigates the structural mechanisms underlying graduate employability by examining the intricate interplay between internal psychological capital (Self-Efficacy), the cognitive appraisal of environmental resources (Perceived Social Support), and Work Readiness. The empirical findings offer a critical, counter-intuitive disruption to conventional employability paradigms in emerging economies, yielding three primary conclusions:

a. **Self-Efficacy as the Primary Driver**

Rather than being a mere antecedent of career preparation, self-efficacy acts as the absolute and dominant catalyst for work readiness. Internal psychological agency plays a far more critical role in preparing graduates for the workforce than external factors.

b. **Active Cognitive Appraisal**

This study refines traditional paradigms by demonstrating that highly self-efficacious students are not passive beneficiaries of their environment. Through the agentic perspective, they act as active cognitive agents. Rather than physically mobilizing resources, their strong internal drive operates as a psychological filter, leading them to interpret their environment more optimistically and perceive higher levels of support from their networks.

c. **Boundary Conditions of Social Support**

Most critically, the findings establish important boundary conditions for the role of perceived social support in graduate employability. Although self-efficacious students perceive greater social backing, this feeling of being supported does not translate directly into higher work readiness, nor does it mediate the core relationship. This implies that emotional and instrumental support is structurally insufficient without the internal psychological mechanisms required to transform those resources into substantive career preparedness.

5.2 Suggestions and Practical Implications

Based on the empirical conclusions, this study proposes several strategic recommendations for educational policy and organizational management:

5.2.1 For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

HEIs must pivot away from passive, "soft-support" mechanisms and transition toward rigorous, experiential learning environments.

a. **Experiential Curriculum Design**

Curriculums should integrate mandatory high-stakes simulations, problem-based learning, and rigorous professional internships that mimic the pressures of the modern workplace.

b. **Targeted Efficacy Interventions**

Rather than relying solely on general career counseling, universities should implement structured coaching programs designed to systematically build student self-efficacy through direct mastery experiences and vicarious learning.

5.2.2 For Corporate Management and HR

To optimize the onboarding and integration of the young workforce, corporate leaders should restructure their talent acquisition and development strategies:

a. **Efficacy-Based Recruitment**

Selection processes should incorporate psychometric assessments that measure core self-efficacy and adaptability, prioritizing proactive psychological capital over static academic

credentials.

b. **Autonomy-Driven Onboarding**

Early career training programs should avoid over-protectiveness. Instead, organizations should design onboarding pathways that provide immediate, moderate-stakes responsibilities, allowing new hires to build organic competence and psychological resilience through early professional victories.

6. Limitations and Future Research

6.1 Limitations

Despite the robust theoretical integration and empirical findings of this study, several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged:

a. **Cross-Sectional Nature of the Data**

The primary limitation of this research is its cross-sectional design. Because data were collected at a single point in time, the structural model can only establish statistical associations rather than absolute longitudinal causality. This prevents the study from mapping how these psychological states evolve over time.

b. **Contextual and Sampling Constraints**

Although the sample size of 217 robustly exceeds the a priori G*Power requirements for variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the non-probability purposive sampling approach and the specific geographical focus limit the absolute global generalizability of the findings to broader, non-collectivist higher education contexts.

c. **Potential for Common Method Bias (CMB)**

This study relied exclusively on self-reported psychometric scales to measure the latent constructs. Although the structural model successfully passed rigorous collinearity evaluations (VIF < 3.3) and discriminant validity checks utilizing the conservative Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, self-reported data inherently carry the risk of social desirability bias, where respondents may overstate their psychological readiness.

6.2 Future Research Directions

To address the limitations identified above and further advance the literature on graduate work readiness, several pathways are proposed for future academic inquiries:

a. **Utilization of Longitudinal Designs**

Future researchers should employ longitudinal or wave-based designs to track the same cohort of graduates at multiple intervals (e.g., during their final semester, six months post-graduation, and after two years of employment). This approach would clarify whether the observed resource dynamics and boundary conditions of social support persist or shift as early-career employees encounter actual workplace stressors.

b. **Expansion of Scope and Institutional Moderation**

Scholars are encouraged to replicate this framework across a more diverse range of higher education institutions globally. Future studies could also test institutional characteristics (such as public versus private universities, or vocational versus academic-heavy curricula) as moderating variables to determine if different educational structures alter the dynamics between efficacy and readiness.

c. **Triangulation via Multi-Source Data**

To completely eliminate the risk of common method variance, future inquiries should incorporate multi-source data. For instance, researchers could pair graduates' self-reported self-efficacy with objective performance evaluations from workplace supervisors, internship

employers, or independent university career advisors during the job placement phase.

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During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly and ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language editing, improving manuscript organization, summarizing and synthesizing literature, and refining the presentation of theoretical concepts. The AI tool was used solely as a writing support tool and was not used to generate, analyze, or interpret research data or research findings. After using this tool, the authors critically reviewed, revised, and verified all content and references as appropriate and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the published work.

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