



Does Gender Moderate the Effect of Soft Skills Development on Perceived Work Readiness?

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ABSTRACT

The transition from university to the professional workforce demands that graduates possess strong soft skills to improve their readiness for employment. This study investigates the effects of several dimensions of soft skills development, namely communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time management skill, and adaptability skill, on perceived work readiness, while also examining the moderating role of gender. A quantitative research design was adopted using a survey of 210 final-year university students. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using IBM SPSS, including validity and reliability tests, classical assumption tests, multiple linear regression analysis, and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The findings reveal that problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, and time management skill significantly and positively influence perceived work readiness. In contrast, communication skill and adaptability skill do not exhibit significant effects. The moderation analysis further demonstrates that gender does not significantly moderate the relationships between the dimensions of soft skills development and perceived work readiness. These results emphasize the importance of enhancing students' problem-solving, teamwork, and time management competencies as key factors in strengthening their preparedness for successful entry into the labor market.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent changes in the world of work have altered the way organizations assess the readiness of university graduates. The growth of digitalization, automation, artificial intelligence, and increasingly flexible work arrangements means that the labor market no longer demands only technical mastery, but also non-technical abilities that support communication, collaboration, problem solving, and adaptation to change. This indicates that communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and willingness to learn are the skills most consistently required by employers in the 21st century (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). In line with this, work readiness is increasingly recognized as an important concept in higher education, although it still requires greater clarity in definition and operationalization in order to be measured more consistently (Peersia et al., 2024). This condition shows that graduate readiness for work can no longer be viewed as a supplementary issue, but rather as one of the key indicators of higher education quality.

The urgency of this issue becomes even stronger when it is linked to current labor market competency demands. The Future of Jobs Report 2025 shows that around 70% of companies identify analytical thinking as a core skill, followed by resilience, flexibility, leadership, and social influence as competencies whose demand is expected to continue increasing. At the same time, World Bank data based on ILO estimates show that the global youth unemployment rate in 2025 remains at 13.4%. This indicates that the labor market places young graduates under two simultaneous pressures: rising competency standards and the difficulty of transitioning from education to employment. In this context, research on the factors that shape students' work readiness becomes increasingly relevant because it is directly related to graduates' ability to respond to more complex and competitive work demands (Peersia et al., 2024).

Global employability literature continues to show a skills mismatch between graduates and employer expectations (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Similar findings indicate that employers today do not only consider academic achievement and technical ability, but also place great emphasis on soft skills, personal attributes, and adaptability when recruiting new graduates (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023). This shows that the issue faced by graduates is not merely whether jobs are available, but also whether the competencies they possess truly match the professional demands they will encounter.

This problem is also evident in a study that explains that the main issue faced by graduates is the lack of alignment between the skills developed during university education and the skills required by the labor market (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). Their study of 100 recent graduates from various public universities in Indonesia who had secured full-time employment found that only 64% of respondents obtained full-time jobs within six months. In addition, there was considerable variation across universities, for example 86% among graduates of UI and 38% among graduates of ITS. These findings show that the transition from higher education to the labor market has not occurred evenly, even among graduates from public universities. Thus, the issue of work readiness in this study has a strong empirical basis and is not merely a theoretical assumption.

In this context, perceived work readiness is an important concept to examine because it reflects how individuals assess their own readiness to enter the labor market. Work readiness

should be understood as a multidimensional form of readiness that includes professional, social, and behavioral aspects, not only academic outcomes (Peersia et al., 2024b). Consistent with this, human capital, social capital, career self-management behavior, protean career orientation, and labor market conditions are important predictors of perceived graduate employability (Ma & Bennett, 2024). This indicates that the feeling of being ready to work does not arise automatically once students complete their studies, but is influenced by a combination of personal resources, career behaviors, and employment opportunities. Therefore, perceived work readiness is important to study because it can explain the subjective dimension of work readiness that is often not visible when only formal academic achievement is measured.

This study specifically places soft skills development at the center of attention because recent studies show that non-technical skills play a major role in shaping graduates' work readiness. Empirical findings demonstrated that all examined dimensions of soft skills had positive and statistically significant relationships with perceived work readiness (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). Quantitatively, communication skill had a correlation coefficient of 0.559, problem-solving skill 0.609, teamwork 0.657, time management skill 0.481, and adaptability skill 0.587, all significant at $p < 0.001$. These findings indicate that the better the soft skills possessed by graduates, the higher their perceived work readiness. A positive association between leadership potential and self-perceived employability among undergraduate students has also been documented (Shomotova et al., 2024). In other words, soft skills can no longer be viewed as merely supplementary abilities, but have become an important foundation that shapes how students assess their own readiness to face work demands.

Final-year students were selected as the focus of this study because they are in the transition phase closest to the labor market. At this stage, students begin to evaluate whether the competencies they possess are sufficient to meet employer demands, whether the learning experiences they gained during university are relevant to job requirements, and whether they have the confidence to compete after graduation. Work readiness is closely related to how graduates are prepared for and integrated into real work contexts (Peersia et al., 2024b). Meanwhile, students' perceptions of employability are shaped by a combination of personal resources, career management behavior, and labor market conditions (Ma & Bennett, 2024). Therefore, final-year students are an appropriate group to study because it is during this phase that work readiness perceptions are formed most intensively and have direct implications for successful transition into the professional world.

In addition to the direct influence of soft skills, this study also includes gender as a moderating variable because the relationship between competence and work readiness may not be the same across student groups. Among 1,713 STEM students in China that self-perceived employability differs according to gender, region, and their interaction, with male students tending to report higher levels of perceived employability (Ma & Bennett, 2024). Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills for employment were found to differ by gender, with female students generally assigning greater importance to certain soft skills than male students (Aziz et al., 2024). These findings indicate that gender may influence how students perceive and develop their non-technical competencies. Therefore, including gender as a moderating variable is important so that this study does not only explain whether soft skills affect perceived work readiness, but also whether the strength of that relationship differs across student groups.

From an academic perspective, this study still has a clear research gap. The concept of work readiness is still not fully standardized in terms of definition and measurement (Peersia et al., 2024), while research on employability skills continues to develop but still requires more contextual testing among specific student groups (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Although the study was conducted among recent graduates, its findings remain relevant to the present study because final-year students are at the immediate stage preceding the transition into the labor market, making their perceptions of work readiness particularly important to understand (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). Accordingly, there is a clear research gap, namely the need to examine the five dimensions of soft skills more specifically among final-year students and to assess whether gender moderates this relationship.

1.1. Literature Review

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, developed by Becker (1964), explains that investments in education, training, and skill development increase individuals' productivity and economic value through the accumulation of human capital. The soft skills examined in this study—communication, problem-solving, teamwork, time management, and adaptability—represent forms of general human capital because they are transferable across occupations and industries (Becker, 1964). In higher education, developing these skills enhances students' employability and perceived work readiness by improving their productive capacity and competitiveness in the labor market. Universities facilitate this process through curricula and experiential learning, while employers increasingly value adaptability and flexibility as essential competencies for graduate employability in a rapidly changing work environment (Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015). Therefore, Human Capital Theory provides the theoretical foundation for the relationship between soft skills and perceived work readiness.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) as an extension of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), explains career development through three key cognitive mechanisms: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Within this framework, perceived work readiness is primarily associated with self-efficacy, reflecting students' beliefs in their ability to perform effectively in the workplace rather than their actual competencies (Parsons et al., 2011). Soft skills developed through academic and co-curricular experiences, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, provide mastery experiences that strengthen self-efficacy, enhance positive career outcome expectations, and encourage goal-directed career development, thereby increasing students' perceived readiness for employment (Gale et al., 2021; Okolie, 2022; Wang & Liu, 2022). Recent studies further demonstrate that graduate work readiness and employability are influenced by the interaction between career self-efficacy, career competencies, human capital, and proactive career behaviors (Peersia et al., 2024; Ma & Bennett, 2024; Zhao et al., 2021). Moreover, SCCT recognizes gender as an important personal input that shapes self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career-related behaviors through differences in socialization, gender-role stereotypes, and role-model exposure (Lent et al., 1994). Therefore, SCCT provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for explaining both the direct influence of soft skills development on perceived work readiness and the moderating role of gender, while complementing Human Capital Theory in understanding students' readiness to enter the labor market.

Soft Skills Development

Soft skills are non-technical competencies that encompass interpersonal, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive abilities, enabling individuals to interact effectively and perform successfully in professional environments. Unlike hard skills, which are technical, measurable, and task-specific, soft skills are closely related to emotional intelligence, personal attributes, and social interaction (Lamri & Lubart, 2023). Increasing empirical evidence highlights their critical role in employability and work readiness. A semi-systematic review identified communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and willingness to learn as the most consistently demanded employability skills (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023), while the World Economic Forum's 2025 survey similarly emphasized analytical thinking, creativity, resilience, and collaboration as essential future skills. Moreover, automation and artificial intelligence have further increased the importance of soft skills because interpersonal and adaptive capabilities remain difficult to replicate by technology. In the Indonesian context, all dimensions of soft skills, including communication, problem-solving, teamwork, time management, and adaptability, were found to have a positive and significant relationship with perceived work readiness among recent graduates (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). Furthermore, employers increasingly consider soft skills to be as important as technical competencies when recruiting university graduates (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that soft skills development constitutes an essential human capital investment that strengthens students' confidence and enhances their perceived work readiness.

Communication Skill (X1)

Communication skill refers to an individual's ability to convey, receive, and interpret information accurately through verbal and non-verbal channels in professional contexts. It is recognized as a multidimensional competency that enables individuals to exchange information effectively, build interpersonal relationships, adapt to workplace situations, and enhance employability (Touloumakos, 2023; Amghar et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023). The main indicators of communication skill in this study include the ability to deliver messages clearly and systematically, listen actively and empathetically, participate constructively in group discussions, speak confidently in public, and use non-verbal communication effectively (Wu et al., 2023). In the context of work readiness, communication skill is a fundamental competency because it enables individuals to express ideas clearly, collaborate effectively, build professional relationships, and adapt to diverse work environments, thereby contributing positively to perceived work readiness and employability (Dauber & Spencer-Oatey, 2023; Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024; Shomotova et al., 2024). From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), communication skill represents a source of mastery experience that strengthens career self-efficacy, as successful communication experiences in academic and professional settings increase students' confidence in their ability to perform effectively in the workplace. Therefore, the better students' communication skills are, the higher their perceived work readiness will be.

Problem Solving Skill (X2)

Problem-solving skill refers to an individual's ability to identify, analyze, and resolve problems systematically and logically through effective decision-making and evaluation (D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971). This competency involves understanding problems, generating alternative solutions, implementing appropriate actions, and evaluating outcomes to address

complex situations effectively (Adeoye & Jimoh, 2023). As one of the most essential workplace competencies, problem-solving enables employees to respond effectively to work-related challenges and enhances overall employability (Nugraha et al., 2020). It is consistently recognized as a core skill demanded by global employers because it integrates analytical, creative, and collaborative abilities needed to solve complex and dynamic workplace problems (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, problem-solving skill represents a valuable cognitive asset in the labor market, while Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) suggests that successful problem-solving strengthens career self-efficacy through mastery experiences. Empirical evidence further indicates that problem-solving skill is strongly associated with perceived work readiness, as students with higher problem-solving ability tend to feel better prepared to enter the workforce (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), and work readiness itself includes a cognitive dimension related to analytical and problem-solving abilities (Peersia et al., 2024b). Consistent with these findings, the World Economic Forum (2025) identifies analytical thinking and complex problem-solving among the ten most important skills for careers in 2025–2030, highlighting the critical role of problem-solving skill in preparing students for successful workforce transition.

Teamwork Skill (X3)

Teamwork skill is defined as an individual's ability to collaborate effectively with others to achieve shared goals through coordination, communication, interpersonal adaptability, conflict resolution, and situational leadership (Grote & Kozlowski, 2023). As modern workplaces become increasingly collaborative, cross-functional, and characterized by hybrid or virtual work arrangements, teamwork has emerged as one of the most important non-technical competencies sought by employers and is consistently recognized as a key attribute expected from university graduates (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023; Bouhafa et al., 2023). Empirical evidence also shows that teamwork skill has the strongest relationship with perceived work readiness among various soft skills dimensions ($r = 0.657$), highlighting its critical role in preparing students for professional careers (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), successful teamwork experiences, such as group projects and team competitions, provide mastery and vicarious experiences that enhance students' confidence in their ability to perform effectively in collaborative work environments, thereby strengthening their overall work readiness.

Time Management Skill (X4)

Time management skill refers to an individual's ability to plan, prioritize, and control the use of time effectively in order to achieve set goals. Time management as a self-regulatory process that includes planning, goal setting, and strategy selection so that individuals can organize and adjust their schedules to personal and professional goals (Aeon et al., 2021). This ability is part of self-regulated learning and plays an important role in reducing procrastination and increasing productivity. Time management behaviors, including planning and scheduling, have been shown to improve job performance, academic achievement, and overall well-being, demonstrating their importance for successful performance in academic and professional settings (Aeon et al., 2021). Effective time management has been associated with greater perceived control of time, higher job satisfaction, improved health, and better performance, highlighting its importance for individual productivity and workplace effectiveness (Das, 2019). Effective time management, including planning, prioritizing, and organizing tasks, has consistently been identified as an important factor supporting productivity, achievement, and successful goal attainment across educational and

professional contexts. A strong relationship between time management skill and perceived work readiness has been confirmed (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). Time management, organization, and the ability to meet deadlines have been identified as key employability skills that support graduates' successful transition into the workplace (Black et al., 2014). Time management skill therefore reflects students' ability to manage priorities, responsibilities, and task completion effectively. This competency is one of the key indicators supporting perceived work readiness.

Adaptability Skill (X5)

Adaptability skill refers to an individual's ability to adjust effectively to changing situations, cope with uncertainty, learn new tasks and technologies, and demonstrate interpersonal and cultural flexibility in dynamic work environments (Sony & Mekoth, 2022). As a multidimensional competency, adaptability encompasses responding to uncertainty, managing work pressure, and continuously acquiring new knowledge and skills, making it increasingly essential in an era of rapid technological advancement and evolving labor market demands (Sony & Mekoth, 2022). The World Economic Forum (2025) identifies resilience and flexibility among the most critical competencies required for the future workforce, while employers consistently recognize adaptability and continuous learning as key employability attributes (Tran et al., 2024; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Furthermore, adaptability enables graduates to manage career transitions and workplace changes effectively, contributing to positive career outcomes and enhanced employability (Rudolph et al., 2017; Li et al., 2022). Empirical evidence also shows that adaptability skill has a significant positive relationship with perceived work readiness, including among Indonesian graduates ($r = 0.587$), indicating that individuals with higher adaptability are more likely to perceive themselves as prepared to meet workplace demands and organizational changes (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). Therefore, adaptability skill is considered a strategic factor in enhancing perceived work readiness.

Perceived Work Readiness (Y)

Work readiness is a key dimension of employability that reflects graduates' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal attributes needed to successfully transition into the workforce (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2022). Although employability encompasses a broader range of capabilities, perceived work readiness specifically refers to individuals' subjective assessment of their preparedness to perform work roles effectively and succeed in the workplace (Peersia et al., 2024b). This perception is shaped by factors such as human capital, social capital, and proactive career orientation, and has important behavioral implications, including greater job-seeking activity and lower transition anxiety (Ma & Bennett, 2024). In the Indonesian context, work readiness refers to graduates' confidence in their ability to enter and perform successfully in the labor market (Sagita et al., 2020), while demographic characteristics, such as gender, have also been found to influence perceived employability and career readiness among STEM students (Ananthram et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes perceived work readiness as final-year students' perception of their readiness to enter the workforce based on their competencies, experiences, and self-beliefs, serving as the dependent variable that reflects the outcome of soft skills development.

Gender as a Moderating Variable (Z)

Gender is positioned as a moderating variable in the relationship between soft skills development and perceived work readiness based on Gender Role Theory (Eagly, 1987),

which argues that gender-based social norms shape individuals' behavior, aspirations, and self-perceptions. Women are generally socialized to develop communal competencies, such as communication and teamwork, whereas men are encouraged to develop agentic competencies, such as leadership and decision-making, leading to differences in soft skills profiles and their contribution to perceived work readiness. Empirical evidence supports these differences, with female students placing greater importance on employability-related soft skills, including communication, time management, willingness to learn, and positive attitudes, while male students tend to report higher self-efficacy in leadership and problem-solving (Aziz et al., 2024). Moreover, male students have been found to perceive themselves as more employable than female students (Räty et al., 2018), and the relationship between specific soft skills and perceived employability varies significantly by gender (Shomotova et al., 2024), suggesting that gender influences the strength of the association between soft skills and work readiness. These differences may arise from gender stereotypes, variations in career self-efficacy, professional networks, and academic socialization. Consequently, gender may either strengthen or weaken the effect of soft skills on perceived work readiness depending on the congruence between individuals' skill profiles and prevailing gender role expectations. Understanding this moderating effect also has practical implications for designing more inclusive and targeted employability programs in higher education that address the distinct developmental needs of male and female students (Bridgstock et al., 2019). Therefore, this study examines whether the influence of soft skills development on perceived work readiness differs between male and female students.

Hypothesis Development

The Effect of Communication Skills on Perceived Work Readiness

Communication skills are a critical form of general human capital that enhances students' ability to adapt to diverse workplace contexts by enabling them to convey ideas effectively, interpret information accurately, and build professional relationships. Within Human Capital Theory, these skills increase individuals' value in the labor market, while Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) suggests that communication experiences gained through presentations, discussions, and academic interactions strengthen career self-efficacy, thereby fostering confidence in performing career-related tasks. As one of the most essential 21st-century competencies (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023), communication skills have been consistently associated with higher employability and perceived work readiness (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024; Shomotova et al., 2024) and are increasingly valued by employers, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023). For senior students transitioning from university to the workforce, effective communication supports professional interactions, confidence in recruitment processes, and positive perceptions of their readiness for employment. Therefore, stronger communication skills are expected to contribute to higher perceived work readiness.

H1: Communication skills have a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness among senior students.

The Influence of Problem-Solving Skill on Perceived Work Readiness

Problem-solving skill refers to an individual's ability to identify, analyze, and resolve problems through systematic and effective decision-making. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, this competency represents a valuable cognitive asset that enhances graduates' competitiveness in the knowledge-based labor market, while Social Cognitive

Career Theory (SCCT) suggests that repeated success in solving academic and non-academic problems strengthens students' confidence in handling future workplace challenges. Consistent with these perspectives, problem-solving is widely recognized as a core employability skill demanded by modern employers (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Previous studies have also shown that work readiness is closely associated with analytical thinking and problem-solving ability (Peersia et al., 2024b), that problem-solving skill has a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), and that human capital contributes to graduates' perceived employability (Ma & Bennett, 2024). Therefore, final-year students with stronger problem-solving skills are expected to demonstrate higher perceived work readiness because they are better equipped to adapt to complex and uncertain workplace demands.

H2: Problem-solving skill has a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

The Influence of Teamwork Skill on Perceived Work Readiness

Teamwork skill refers to the ability to collaborate effectively with others to achieve shared goals and is recognized as an important form of human capital because modern workplaces rely heavily on collaboration rather than individual performance. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), teamwork provides mastery and vicarious experiences that strengthen students' confidence in their ability to perform effectively in professional environments requiring coordination, communication, and conflict resolution. Students who actively engage in collaborative learning and organizational activities generally develop stronger teamwork competencies, which contribute to higher perceived work readiness. Empirical evidence supports this relationship, with employers consistently identifying teamwork as one of the most valuable employability skills (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023; Hoque et al., 2023), while Aprilita and Pritasari (2024) found that teamwork exhibited the strongest association with perceived work readiness among various soft skill dimensions. Furthermore, integrating teamwork development into higher education through curriculum-based and work-integrated learning initiatives enhances graduates' readiness for the workforce. Therefore, students with stronger teamwork skills are expected to perceive themselves as better prepared to enter collaborative professional environments, leading to the following hypothesis.

H3: Teamwork skill has a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

The Influence of Time Management Skill on Perceived Work Readiness

Time management skill refers to an individual's ability to plan, prioritize, and allocate time effectively to accomplish tasks efficiently. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, this competency represents an investment in behavioral efficiency and self-regulation that enhances productivity, while Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) suggests that effective time management strengthens career self-efficacy through mastery experiences gained from organizing schedules, avoiding procrastination, and completing tasks on time. Consequently, time management functions as both a practical competency and a psychological resource that improves perceived work readiness. Previous studies have shown that time management is closely associated with self-regulation, planning, and goal setting (Aeon et al., 2021), positively influences job satisfaction (Das, 2019), and has a significant positive relationship with perceived work readiness among university students (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024). For

final-year students, who must simultaneously manage academic responsibilities, extracurricular activities, internships, and career preparation, effective time management enables them to balance competing demands, work under deadlines, and prioritize tasks efficiently, thereby increasing their confidence and readiness to enter the workforce.

H4: Time management skill has a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

The Influence of Adaptability Skill on Perceived Work Readiness

Adaptability skill refers to an individual's ability to adjust effectively to changing environments, new demands, emerging technologies, and unpredictable workplace situations. Within the frameworks of Human Capital Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), adaptability is considered a valuable form of human capital and a key aspect of career adaptability that enhances individuals' confidence in managing career transitions and workplace uncertainty. Students who are able to adapt to new learning methods, unfamiliar tasks, and diverse social environments are more likely to perceive themselves as ready for dynamic work environments. Previous studies have identified adaptability as one of the most essential employability skills (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023), demonstrating its positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), perceived employability, and career-related readiness (Kim et al., 2024), while also enabling individuals to cope effectively with career transitions and changing work demands (García-Sánchez et al., 2022). Therefore, for final-year university students transitioning from higher education to professional employment, higher adaptability skill is expected to strengthen perceived work readiness by increasing confidence in their ability to successfully meet evolving workplace demands.

H5: Adaptability skill has a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness among final-year university students

Gender as a Moderator of the Relationship between Communication Skill and Perceived Work Readiness

Gender may moderate the relationship between communication skill and perceived work readiness because gender socialization shapes how individuals develop and interpret their communication abilities. According to Gender Role Theory, women are generally socialized toward communal roles emphasizing interpersonal communication and empathy, whereas men are encouraged toward agentic roles characterized by assertiveness and independence, leading communication skills to carry different meanings across genders. As a result, strong communication skills may be more strongly associated with perceived work readiness among female students than male students. Empirical evidence supports this perspective, with female students placing greater importance on communication and teamwork for employability (Aziz et al., 2024), significant gender differences reported in self-perceived employability among engineering students (Yepes Zuluaga & Granada, 2023), and communication skills shown to positively influence self-perceived employability (Shomotova et al., 2024). Therefore, gender is expected to act as a contextual moderator that influences the strength of the relationship between communication skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

H6: Gender moderates the relationship between communication skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

Gender as a Moderator of the Relationship between Problem-Solving Skill and Perceived Work Readiness

Gender may moderate the relationship between problem-solving skill and perceived work readiness because confidence in analytical ability is influenced not only by individual competence but also by socialization and societal expectations. According to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), self-efficacy develops through mastery experiences, but the effects of these experiences vary across social contexts. As a result, individuals with similar problem-solving skills may perceive their work readiness differently depending on gender. Empirical evidence supports this perspective, with studies reporting gender differences in problem-solving-related competencies and soft skills (Aziz et al., 2024), career readiness (Ananthram et al., 2024), and self-perceived employability (Bennett et al., 2022). For final-year university students, problem-solving skill is essential for identifying problems, evaluating alternatives, and making effective decisions in professional settings. However, unequal social recognition and reinforcement of these competencies may lead to different perceptions of work readiness between male and female students. Therefore, the moderating role of gender in the relationship between problem-solving skill and perceived work readiness warrants empirical investigation.

H7: Gender moderates the relationship between problem-solving skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

Gender as a Moderator of the Relationship between Teamwork Skill and Perceived Work Readiness

Gender is expected to moderate the relationship between teamwork skill and perceived work readiness because teamwork depends on communication, coordination, empathy, and interpersonal collaboration, which may be experienced differently by male and female students. According to Gender Role Theory, women are generally socialized into communal roles emphasizing cooperation and collective responsibility, whereas men are more often encouraged to adopt independent and agentic roles. Consequently, successful teamwork may be interpreted as stronger evidence of professional readiness among female students than male students. Empirical evidence supports this view, with (Aziz et al., 2024) reporting that female students place greater importance on communication and teamwork skills, while (Bennett et al., 2022) found that perceived employability differs across gender. Although teamwork enhances students' confidence in entering collaborative workplaces, its contribution to perceived work readiness is unlikely to be uniform across gender groups. Therefore, gender is expected to moderate the relationship between teamwork skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

H8: Gender moderates the relationship between teamwork skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

Gender as a Moderator of the Relationship between Time Management Skill and Perceived Work Readiness

Time management skill encompasses self-discipline, prioritization, and the ability to complete tasks efficiently within established deadlines, making it an important determinant of perceived work readiness among final-year university students who must balance academic responsibilities, organizational activities, internships, and career preparation. According to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), successfully managing time and meeting

deadlines strengthens career self-efficacy through repeated mastery experiences; however, the influence of these experiences may differ across gender because of variations in gender socialization, role expectations, and academic experiences. Students who effectively organize their schedules and accomplish multiple responsibilities generally perceive themselves as better prepared for professional work, although the extent to which time management enhances perceived work readiness may vary between male and female students. This argument is supported by (Aeon et al., 2021), who identified time management as a fundamental component of self-regulation related to planning and goal setting, (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), who found a positive relationship between time management skill and perceived work readiness, and (Das, 2019), who reported that effective time management contributes to higher job satisfaction. Therefore, gender is expected to moderate the relationship between time management skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

H9: Gender moderates the relationship between time management skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

Gender as a Moderator of the Relationship between Adaptability Skill and Perceived Work Readiness

Adaptability skill refers to an individual's ability to adjust effectively to environmental changes, technological developments, new responsibilities, and evolving workplace demands. Within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), adaptability is closely related to career adaptability, which enhances individuals' confidence in managing career transitions and responding constructively to uncertainty. Among final-year university students, adaptability is particularly important because the transition from university to employment requires continuous adjustment, leading students to perceive change as an opportunity for learning and strengthening their perceived work readiness. However, the contribution of adaptability to perceived work readiness may differ between male and female students due to variations in socialization experiences, gender role expectations, and career-related experiences. Previous studies have shown that gender is associated with differences in perceived employability, career readiness, and soft skill evaluations (Aziz et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Bennett et al., 2022), suggesting that gender may moderate the relationship between adaptability skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

H10: Gender moderates the relationship between adaptability skill and perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method to examine the relationship between soft skills development and perceived work readiness, with gender as a moderating variable. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed online and offline to 210 final-year university students who are preparing to enter the workforce. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time-management skill, adaptability skill, perceived work readiness, and gender. The operational variables were measured based on relevant indicators, where communication skill refers to the ability to convey and interpret information effectively, problem-solving skill reflects the ability to analyze and resolve problems, teamwork skill represents effective collaboration,

time-management skill refers to the ability to organize and prioritize tasks, adaptability skill describes the ability to adjust to changing situations, and perceived work readiness reflects an individual's confidence and preparedness to perform in the workplace. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS through validity and reliability testing, descriptive statistical analysis, classical assumption testing, multiple linear regression analysis, and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The validity test was used to assess whether questionnaire items accurately measured the variables, while reliability testing examined the consistency of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha criteria (Ghozali, 2011). Classical assumption tests included normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests to ensure the suitability of the regression model. Hypothesis testing was conducted using F-test, t-test, and coefficient of determination (R^2) to evaluate the simultaneous and partial effects of independent variables on perceived work readiness, as well as the moderating effect of gender (Sugiyono, 2013).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description and data analysis

This study employed a survey method using structured questionnaires to collect primary data. The study aimed to examine the effect of soft skills development on perceived work readiness, with gender as a moderating variable. The respondents consisted of 210 final-year university students selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives. Respondent characteristics were analyzed based on demographic aspects, including age, gender, educational status, employment status, and monthly income, to provide an overview of the sample profile. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents included in this study.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–20 years	19	9.0
	21–25 years	187	89.0
	26–30 years	4	2.0
Gender	Male	105	50.0
	Female	105	50.0
Educational Status	Diploma (D3)	10	4.7
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	86	41.0
	Other (students who have not yet completed their studies)	114	54.3
Employment Status	Unemployed	104	49.5
	Freelance	47	22.4
	Employed	35	16.7
	Internship	24	11.4
Monthly Income (IDR)	No Income	88	42.0
	500,000–1,000,000	32	15.2
	1,500,000–3,000,000	57	27.1
	3,100,000–5,000,000	15	7.1
	>5,000,000	18	8.6

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents were aged 21–25 years, consisting of 187 respondents (89.0%), indicating that the sample primarily represented students in the typical final-year university age range. The gender distribution was balanced, with 105 male respondents (50.0%) and 105 female respondents (50.0%), allowing comparable

representation between gender groups. In terms of educational status, most respondents were students who had not yet completed their studies (54.3%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (41.0%) and diploma graduates (4.7%). Regarding employment status, nearly half of the respondents were unemployed (49.5%), while others were engaged in freelance work (22.4%), employment (16.7%), and internships (11.4%). Furthermore, the monthly income distribution showed that the largest proportion of respondents had no income (42.0%), followed by those earning IDR 1,500,000–3,000,000 (27.1%). These findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly final-year students who were still in the transition phase toward entering the professional workforce, making them relevant for analyzing perceived work readiness.

Validity Test

The validity of the research instrument was assessed using Pearson's Product Moment correlation analysis to determine whether each questionnaire item accurately measured the intended construct. An item was considered valid if the calculated correlation coefficient (rcount) was greater than the critical value (r table) at a significance level of 0.05. In this study, the critical correlation value was 0.1161. The validity test results for all research variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Validity Test Results of Research Variables

Variable	Item	rcount	r table	Result
Communication Skill	CS1	0.586	0.1161	Valid
	CS2	0.690	0.1161	Valid
	CS3	0.575	0.1161	Valid
	CS4	0.545	0.1161	Valid
	CS5	0.636	0.1161	Valid
	CS6	0.562	0.1161	Valid
Problem-Solving Skill	PSL1	0.611	0.1161	Valid
	PSL2	0.574	0.1161	Valid
	PSL3	0.555	0.1161	Valid
	PSL4	0.663	0.1161	Valid
	PSL5	0.720	0.1161	Valid
	PSL6	0.677	0.1161	Valid
Teamwork Skill	TS1	0.567	0.1161	Valid
	TS2	0.686	0.1161	Valid
	TS3	0.666	0.1161	Valid
	TS4	0.629	0.1161	Valid
	TS5	0.639	0.1161	Valid
Time Management Skill	TMS1	0.641	0.1161	Valid
	TMS2	0.520	0.1161	Valid
	TMS3	0.678	0.1161	Valid
	TMS4	0.711	0.1161	Valid
	TMS5	0.779	0.1161	Valid
Adaptability Skill	AS1	0.620	0.1161	Valid
	AS2	0.704	0.1161	Valid
	AS3	0.665	0.1161	Valid
	AS4	0.510	0.1161	Valid
	AS5	0.657	0.1161	Valid
Perceived Work Readiness	PWR1	0.749	0.1161	Valid
	PWR2	0.752	0.1161	Valid
	PWR3	0.750	0.1161	Valid

Source: Primary Data Processed (2026)

Based on Table 2, all questionnaire items for the six research variables, namely communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time management skill, adaptability skill, and perceived work readiness, have rcount values greater than the r table value of 0.1161. The correlation coefficients range from 0.510 to 0.779, indicating that all items have a significant correlation with their respective total scores. Therefore, all questionnaire items are declared valid and can be used for further statistical analysis.

Reliability Test

Following the validity assessment, a reliability test was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the research instrument. A construct is considered reliable when its Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeds 0.60 (Ghozali, 2006). The reliability test results for each research variable are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cornbach's alpha	Result
Communication skill	0,639	Reliable
Problem solving skill	0,704	Reliable
Teamwork skill	0,634	Reliable
Time management skill	0,683	Reliable
Adaptability skill	0,602	Reliable
Perceived work readiness	0,654	Reliable

As presented in Table 3, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.602 to 0.704, all exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.60. Therefore, the measurement scales for Communication Skill, Problem-Solving Skill, Teamwork Skill, Time Management Skill, Adaptability Skill, and Perceived Work Readiness demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and were considered reliable. Consequently, all measurement instruments were deemed appropriate for subsequent statistical analyses.

Testing Classical Assumptions

Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the residual data in the regression model followed a normal distribution. This study employed the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, where the data are considered normally distributed if the significance value exceeds 0.05 (Ghozali, 2011). The results of the normality test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Normality Test Results

Variable	Zcount	Significance	Result
Unstandardized Residual	0.052	0.200	Normally Distributed

Source: Primary Data Processed (2026)

Based on Table 4., the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test show that the test statistic value is 0.052 with a significance value of 0.200. Since the significance value is greater than 0.05, the residual data are considered to be normally distributed. Therefore, the regression model meets the normality assumption, and further regression analysis can be conducted.

Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test was conducted to determine whether there is a high correlation among the independent variables included in the regression model. The presence of multicollinearity was assessed using the tolerance value and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). A regression model is considered free from multicollinearity if the tolerance value is greater than 0.10 and the VIF value is less than 10 (Ghozali, 2006). The results of the multicollinearity test are presented in Table 5:

Table 5. Multicollinearity Test Results

Independent Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Result
Communication Skill (X1)	0.436	2.294	No Multicollinearity
Problem-Solving Skill (X2)	0.357	2.802	No Multicollinearity
Teamwork Skill (X3)	0.439	2.278	No Multicollinearity
Time Management Skill (X4)	0.503	1.988	No Multicollinearity
Adaptability Skill (X5)	0.530	1.888	No Multicollinearity
Gender (Z)	0.957	1.045	No Multicollinearity

Source: Primary Data Processed (2026)

Based on Table 5, all independent variables have tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF values below 10. The tolerance values range from 0.357 to 0.957, while the VIF values range from 1.045 to 2.802. These results indicate that the regression model does not experience multicollinearity problems, meaning that there is no excessive correlation among the independent variables. Therefore, the regression model is appropriate for further analysis.

Heteroscedasticity Test

The heteroscedasticity test was conducted to determine whether the variance of the residuals in the regression model remains constant across observations. This study employed the Glejser test by regressing the absolute residual values against the independent variables. The decision criteria were based on the significance value at a 5% significance level, where a significance value greater than 0.05 indicates that the regression model is free from heteroscedasticity (Ghozali, 2011). The results of the heteroscedasticity test are presented in Table 6:

Table 6. Heteroscedasticity Test Results

Variable	Sig.	Result
Communication Skill (X1)	0.247	No Heteroscedasticity
Problem-Solving Skill (X2)	0.431	No Heteroscedasticity
Teamwork Skill (X3)	0.134	No Heteroscedasticity
Time Management Skill (X4)	0.880	No Heteroscedasticity
Adaptability Skill (X5)	0.333	No Heteroscedasticity
Gender (Z)	0.659	No Heteroscedasticity

Based on Table 6, all independent variables and the moderating variable have significance values greater than 0.05, with values ranging from 0.134 to 0.880. These results indicate that the regression model does not experience heteroscedasticity, meaning that the residual variance remains constant across observations. Therefore, the assumption of homoscedasticity is fulfilled, and the regression model is considered appropriate for further analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the direction and magnitude of the effects of communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time management skill, and adaptability skill on perceived work readiness. This analysis was performed using IBM SPSS statistical software to determine the partial effects of each independent variable and the overall explanatory ability of the regression model. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are presented in Table 7:

Table 7. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results of the Main Model

Variable	B	t-value	Sig.	Decision
Constant	3.275	2.940	0.004	
Communication Skill (X1)	0.113	1.899	0.059	H1 Rejected
Problem-Solving Skill (X2)	0.156	2.530	0.012	H2 Accepted
Teamwork Skill (X3)	0.151	2.067	0.040	H3 Accepted
Time Management Skill (X4)	0.116	2.113	0.036	H4 Accepted
Adaptability Skill (X5)	0.071	1.305	0.193	H5 Rejected
F-statistic	31.001			
F-significance			<0.001	
R ²	0.432			
Adjusted R ²	0.418			

$$Y = 3,275 + 0,113X_1 + 0,156X_2 + 0,151X_3 + 0,116X_4 + 0,071X_5$$

Based on Table 7, the results indicate that problem-solving skill (X2), teamwork skill (X3), and time management skill (X4) have a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness, as indicated by significance values below 0.05. Therefore, hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 are accepted. Meanwhile, communication skill (X1) and adaptability skill (X5) show positive effects but do not have a statistically significant influence on perceived work readiness because their significance values exceed 0.05. Thus, hypotheses H1 and H5 are rejected. These findings indicate that students' ability to solve problems, collaborate effectively, and manage time contributes significantly to their perceived readiness to enter the workplace.

Furthermore, the F-test results show an F-statistic value of 31.001 with a significance value below 0.001, indicating that all independent variables simultaneously have a significant effect on perceived work readiness. The coefficient of determination (R²) value of 0.432 indicates that communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time management skill, and adaptability skill collectively explain 43.2% of the variation in perceived work readiness, while the remaining 56.8% is explained by other factors outside the research model. The adjusted R² value of 0.418 confirms that the regression model has a moderate explanatory ability in predicting perceived work readiness among final-year university students.

Model with the Inclusion of Gender

After testing the main model containing five independent variables, the analysis was continued by incorporating gender into the regression model. This additional model was used to examine the direct effect of gender on perceived work readiness and to evaluate whether the inclusion of gender improved the explanatory ability of the model. The results of the t-test and coefficient of determination for the model with the addition of gender are presented in Table 8

Table 8. Results of t-Test and Coefficient of Determination for the Model with Gender Inclusion

Variable	B	t-value	Sig.	Description
Communication Skill	0.114	1.903	0.059	H6 Rejected
Problem-Solving Skill	0.146	2.322	0.021	H7 Accepted
Teamwork Skill	0.156	2.126	0.035	H8 Accepted
Time Management Skill	0.121	2.197	0.029	H9 Accepted
Adaptability Skill	0.074	1.350	0.178	H10 Rejected
R	0.434			
R Square	0.417			

Based on Table 8, the t-test results indicate that Problem-Solving Skill, Teamwork Skill, and Time Management Skill have a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness, as their significance values are below 0.05. Meanwhile, Communication Skill and Adaptability Skill do not have a significant effect because their significance values exceed 0.05. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.417 indicates that the independent variables included in the model with gender inclusion explain 41.7% of the variation in perceived work readiness, while the remaining 58.3% is explained by other factors outside the research model. The R value of 0.434 indicates a moderate relationship between the independent variables and perceived work readiness.

Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA)

Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) was conducted to examine whether gender moderates the relationship between communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time management skill, and adaptability skill on perceived work readiness. The analysis was performed by incorporating the independent variables, gender as the moderating variable, and the interaction terms between each independent variable and gender. Gender is considered to have a moderating effect when the interaction term shows a significance value below 0.05. The results of the MRA analysis are presented in Table 9:

Table 9. Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) Results

Variable	B	t-value	Sig.	Description
Constant	2.445	1.304	0.194	Not Significant
Communication Skill (X1)	0.089	1.040	0.300	Not Significant
Problem-Solving Skill (X2)	0.216	2.461	0.015	Significant
Teamwork Skill (X3)	0.046	0.436	0.663	Not Significant
Time Management Skill (X4)	0.170	2.359	0.019	Significant
Adaptability Skill (X5)	0.124	1.525	0.129	Not Significant
Gender (Z)	1.138	0.489	0.626	Not Significant
Communication Skill × Gender (Z1)	0.095	0.791	0.430	Does Not Moderate
Problem-Solving Skill × Gender (Z2)	-0.155	-1.232	0.219	Does Not Moderate
Teamwork Skill × Gender (Z3)	0.244	1.662	0.098	Does Not Moderate
Time Management Skill × Gender (Z4)	-0.137	-1.225	0.222	Does Not Moderate
Adaptability Skill × Gender (Z5)	-0.100	-0.907	0.366	Does Not Moderate

$$Y = 2,445 + 0,089X_1 + 0,216X_2 + 0,046X_3 + 0,170X_4 + 0,124X_5 + 1,138Z + 0,095X_1Z - 0,155X_2Z + 0,244X_3Z - 0,137X_4Z - 0,100X_5Z$$

Based on Table 4.7, the MRA results indicate that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between any of the independent variables and perceived work readiness.

This is evidenced by the significance values of all interaction terms, namely Communication Skill $\times$ Gender (0.430), Problem-Solving Skill $\times$ Gender (0.219), Teamwork Skill $\times$ Gender (0.098), Time Management Skill $\times$ Gender (0.222), and Adaptability Skill $\times$ Gender (0.366), which are greater than 0.05. Therefore, gender does not strengthen or weaken the effects of communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time management skill, and adaptability skill on perceived work readiness. However, among the main effects, problem-solving skill (0.015) and time management skill (0.019) have significant positive effects on perceived work readiness, while communication skill, teamwork skill, adaptability skill, and gender itself do not show significant effects.

Discussion

The Effect of Communication Skills on Perceived Work Readiness

Based on the t-test results, the communication skills variable yielded a calculated t-value of 1.903 with a significance value of 0.059. Since the significance value is greater than 0.05 ($0.059 > 0.05$), H1 is rejected. This means that communication skills do not have a significant effect on perceived work readiness among senior students. In terms of direction, the regression coefficient is positive, but its effect is not strong enough to explain the respondents' perceived work readiness.

These results differ from the study by (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), which found a significant positive relationship between communication skills and perceived work readiness. This discrepancy is likely due to the fact that the respondents in this study were senior-year students with relatively uniform levels of communication skills. Under such conditions, communication skills no longer function as a primary distinguishing factor but rather as a basic competency that is generally assumed to be possessed by students.

The Effect of Problem-Solving Skills on Perceived Work Readiness

The results of the t-test for the problem-solving skills variable showed a calculated t-value of 2.322 with a significance level of 0.021. Since the significance level is less than 0.05 ($0.021 < 0.05$), H2 is accepted. This means that problem-solving skills have a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness among senior students. The positive regression coefficient indicates that the better students' problem-solving skills are, the higher their perceived work readiness.

These findings align with Human Capital Theory, as problem-solving skills represent an investment in high-level cognitive capacities that are highly valued in the labor market. Within the SCCT framework, successfully completing complex academic tasks creates mastery experiences that reinforce students' confidence in their ability to tackle workplace challenges. Thus, problem-solving skills not only enhance actual capacity but also foster a sense of readiness to enter the professional world.

These results are consistent with (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), who found that problem-solving skills have a significant positive relationship with perceived work readiness. These findings are also supported by (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023) as well as the World Economic Forum (2025), which identify analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities as core skills sought by employers. Therefore, problem-solving skills in this study can be understood as a key determinant of final-year students' work readiness.

The Effect of Teamwork Skills on Perceived Work Readiness

The t-test results for the teamwork skills variable yielded a calculated t-value of 2.126 with a significance level of 0.035. Since the significance level is less than 0.05 ($0.035 < 0.05$), H3 is accepted. This means that teamwork skills have a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness. The regression coefficient for this variable was also the largest among the significant variables, indicating that the ability to work in a team is one of the strongest factors shaping respondents' perceptions of work readiness.

This finding supports Human Capital Theory, as the ability to collaborate is a cross-contextual skill that is valued and required in nearly all fields of work. From an SCCT perspective, experiences of successfully completing group projects, joint presentations, or collaborative work can serve as mastery experiences and vicarious experiences that enhance students' confidence in their ability to function in collaborative work environments. In other words, teamwork skills are not merely social skills but also a source of self-confidence regarding work readiness.

These research findings align with those of (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), who found that teamwork skills have the strongest relationship with perceived work readiness compared to other dimensions of soft skills. These findings are also consistent with (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023), who assert that employers are increasingly prioritizing teamwork skills when recruiting new graduates. Thus, teamwork skills in this study appear to be a highly relevant competency for fostering the work readiness of senior-year students.

The Effect of Time Management Skills on Perceived Work Readiness

The results of the t-test for the time management skills variable showed a calculated t-value of 2.197 with a significance level of 0.029. Since the significance level is less than 0.05 ($0.029 < 0.05$), H4 is accepted. This means that time management skills have a positive and significant effect on perceived work readiness among senior students. This indicates that the ability to manage time, set priorities, and complete tasks on time contributes to a sense of readiness for work.

Theoretically, these results support Human Capital Theory because time management skills reflect an investment in an individual's self-regulation and executive functions. Within the SCCT framework, time management skills also strengthen self-regulation self-efficacy the belief that an individual can effectively manage themselves when facing professional demands. Senior students who are able to manage their time well tend to be better prepared to face the demands of work because they are accustomed to managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

These findings are also consistent with (Black et al., 2014), who identified time management, organization, and the ability to meet deadlines have been identified as key employability skills that support graduates' successful transition into the workplace.

Thus, the results of this study show that time management skills are not only important academically but also have a direct impact on how students perceive their readiness to enter the workforce.

The Effect of Adaptability Skills on Perceived Work Readiness

The t-test results for the adaptability skills variable yielded a calculated t-value of 1.350 with a significance value of 0.178. Since the significance value is greater than 0.05 ($0.178 > 0.05$), H5 is rejected. This means that adaptability skills do not have a significant effect on

perceived work readiness among senior students. In terms of direction, the regression coefficient remains positive, but the effect is not strong enough to be considered statistically significant.

This finding differs from the theoretical predictions of Human Capital Theory and SCCT, both of which identify adaptability as a key competency for coping with workplace changes and career uncertainty. This discrepancy can be explained by the empirical finding that the mean score for adaptability skills in this study's sample was the lowest among all soft skill dimensions. Furthermore, adaptability likely shares variance with problem-solving skills and time management skills, thereby reducing its unique contribution when all variables are tested simultaneously in the regression model. These results also differ from the study by (Patricia Aprilita et al., 2024), which found a significant positive relationship between adaptability skills and perceived work readiness. This discrepancy suggests that although adaptability is conceptually important, in the context of senior undergraduates in this study, this ability has not yet emerged as a primary factor distinguishing their perceptions of work readiness. Thus, adaptability remains relevant but has not been proven to be a dominant partial determinant.

Gender as a Moderator Variable

The results of the moderation test indicate that gender does not moderate the relationship between communication skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, time management skills, or adaptability skills and perceived work readiness. All interaction coefficients had significance levels above 0.05, and the Adjusted R^2 value in the moderation model was actually slightly lower than that in the multiple regression model. This implies that the strength of the influence of soft skills on perceived work readiness tends to be consistent among both male and female students in this study's sample.

These findings do not entirely refute Gender Role Theory, but they do indicate that the effect of gender on the relationship between soft skills and work readiness is not strong enough in the context of this study. One plausible explanation is the balanced gender composition, which prevented significant structural bias from emerging. Another explanation relates to the increasingly egalitarian social context among Indonesian college students, in which soft skills are largely viewed as general competencies that all students should possess, rather than abilities that are sharply distinguished by gender. Thus, gender in this study is best understood as a demographic characteristic that is not strong enough to alter the primary relationship between soft skills and perceived work readiness.

Empirically, these results differ from several previous studies that indicated differences in employability or career readiness based on gender. However, the findings of this study actually reinforce the idea that, in the context of senior students with a balanced gender distribution, the influence of soft skills on work readiness is relatively universal. Therefore, soft skills development programs in higher education do not need to be differentiated by gender but can be designed generally for all students.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examines the effects of communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, time management skill, and adaptability skill on final-year students' perceived work

readiness, as well as the moderating role of gender. The findings indicate that problem-solving skill, teamwork skill, and time management skill have positive and significant effects on perceived work readiness, while communication skill and adaptability skill do not show significant effects. Furthermore, gender does not moderate the relationship between any soft skill dimensions and perceived work readiness, indicating that these relationships are consistent across male and female students. These findings suggest that soft skills development should focus more on competencies that directly support students' readiness to enter the workforce, particularly problem-solving, teamwork, and time management skills. However, this study has several limitations, including the limited number of variables, the use of final-year students as the research population, and the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data, which may lead to subjective bias. Therefore, future research is recommended to include additional factors such as career self-efficacy, internship experience, organizational experience, and career adaptability, while also expanding the research population to include students from different academic levels, recent graduates, and young employees. Future studies may also apply qualitative or mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights into the development of work readiness. In addition, higher education institutions are encouraged to strengthen students' problem-solving, teamwork, and time management skills through academic and extracurricular programs to better prepare graduates for workplace demands.

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