



From Internship to Employment: The Role of Career Adaptability in Enhancing Students' Work Readiness

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ABSTRACT

College graduates often face challenges when entering the workforce, particularly in terms of their readiness for the job. This study aims to evaluate the impact of internship experiences on their work readiness and to examine the role of career adaptability as a mediating variable. The method used is a quantitative approach via a survey involving 120 students from the Faculty of Economics and Business at Padang State University who have completed an internship program, selected using purposive sampling with three selection criteria. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 4.1.1.8. The results of this study indicate that: (1) Internship experience has been shown to significantly improve work readiness; (2) In addition, internship experience also helps improve an individual's ability to adapt to career developments; (3) A person's level of work readiness is also influenced by how well they are able to adapt in their career; and (4) career adaptability partially mediates the relationship between internship experience and work readiness. This study reinforces Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), which states that experiences in professional environments shape an individual's psychosocial ability to adapt and be prepared to face changes in their career. Educational institutions are advised to strengthen their programs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions play a strategic role in national development as producers of competent human resources who are globally competitive. The transition from education to the workforce is a crucial stage that determines how well an individual can adapt to professional demands. Work readiness has become a key topic due to its importance for a successful transition from an academic environment to the workforce (Magnano et al., 2021). However, reality shows that a significant gap still exists between graduates' competencies and the needs of the workforce. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2025) notes a surge in the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) among higher education graduates (Diploma IV/Bachelor's/Master's/Doctorate) of 0.60 percentage points over the past year, reaching 6.23% in February 2025—higher than the OUR changes observed in other educational groups. This situation is deeply concerning because the group that should possess the highest intellectual capital is actually showing instability in job placement.

This national trend aligns with conditions at the regional level. In West Sumatra Province, the unemployment rate among graduates with Diploma IV, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees reached 10.12% in February 2025—the highest rate compared to all other educational groups (BPS, 2025). The impact is also felt by the University of Padang (UNP), one of the institutions with the highest number of graduates in West Sumatra. Data from the 2024 Tracer Study of the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) at UNP indicates that approximately 10% to 17% of alumni across various programs, particularly in Management and Accounting, took more than six months to secure their first job. This lengthy waiting period reflects students' unpreparedness when transitioning from the academic world to the real-world workplace (Alruwaili et al., 2024).

One key strategy institutions have implemented to address this issue is the implementation of structured internship programs. Academically, an internship is defined as an organized work placement program integrated into the curriculum, aimed at providing opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world industrial situations (Luk & Chan, 2020). Internships play a crucial role in enhancing an individual's work readiness as they serve as a bridge between the academic and professional worlds. Sekiguchi et al., (2023) explain that internships provide a realistic picture of the job, thereby helping students understand the actual tasks they will perform in the professional world and making them better prepared to enter the workforce. Liu et al., (2025) also state that direct interaction with the work environment and performing real-world tasks can enhance students' technical skills, work attitudes, and self-confidence, all of which are components of work readiness. Findings by Pan et al., (2018) further indicate that students with high-quality internship experience have a higher level of work readiness compared to those who have never participated in one. Based on these theoretical and empirical arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed: **H1: Internship experience has a positive effect on work readiness.**

Internship experiences are one of the most important factors in enhancing an individual's ability to adapt to the workplace. Ocampo et al., (2020) explain that student participation in systematically structured internship activities can enhance the four key dimensions of adaptability (the 4Cs). This involvement strengthens the "concern" dimension by increasing students' awareness of professional demands, as well as the "control" dimension, which develops alongside students' responsibility for handling organizational tasks independently. Experiences in diverse work environments foster the "curiosity" dimension by encouraging exploration of various professional roles, while success in overcoming real-world work challenges cultivates the "confidence" dimension. Wang et al., (2025) also found that

internship experiences predicted significant increases in concern, control, and curiosity over time in their longitudinal study. Based on this empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed: **H2: Internship experiences have a positive effect on career adaptability.**

However, not all internship experiences provide equal benefits. Tanius et al., (2019)) revealed that business graduates often fail to meet industry expectations despite having completed field placements. Research by Alruwaili et al., (2024) further indicates that the readiness level of students undergoing internships remains in the moderate category, influenced by external factors such as the quality of mentoring. Pan et al., (2018) also found that most students tend to adopt a passive attitude during internships and are under-engaged in various organizational activities, thereby failing to fully capitalize on the benefits of practical experience. The inconsistency of these findings suggests that there are psychological mechanisms linking internship experiences to work readiness.

Career adaptability plays a crucial role in helping individuals cope with changes in the workplace and directly influences their employability. The Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013) states that career adaptability enables individuals to respond to change, make career decisions, and tackle workplace challenges more effectively. Magnano et al. (2021) demonstrate that career adaptability enhances problem-solving skills, mental resilience, and self-control, all of which are directly linked to work readiness. Peng et al., (2023) found that students with high adaptability tend to be more professional and confident when facing new work situations. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed: **H3: Career adaptability has a positive effect on work readiness.**

The relationship between internship experiences and work readiness is viewed as a psychosocial transformation process in which external experiences are transformed into internal capacities. Based on Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), internships serve as a stimulus that encourages individuals to activate their adaptability resources so they can adjust to environmental demands. In this framework, career adaptability acts as a psychological mechanism ensuring that exposure to the workplace during an internship is effectively transformed into professional development or work readiness.

Ocampo et al., (2020) detail this mechanism through the reinforcement of the four dimensions of adaptability (4Cs) during the internship period. Through direct interaction, students develop a sense of concern by beginning to plan their future based on industry realities, and enhance their sense of control through the responsibility of independently completing organizational tasks. The dynamics of the work environment foster students' curiosity to explore various professional roles, while successfully overcoming work challenges builds their confidence. These four dimensions serve as internal resources that transform technical internship experiences into the self-regulation skills necessary for work readiness. Magnano et al., (2021) support this argument by stating that the ability to adapt in one's career is always linked to work readiness during the transition from education. Based on this argument, the following hypothesis is proposed: **H4: Career adaptability mediates the effect of internship experience on work readiness.**

Therefore, this study focuses on examining how internship experiences influence work readiness, taking into account the mediating role of career adaptation among FEB UNP students who have completed internships. Figure 1 presents a Research Model of the study that illustrates the relationship between internships, career adaptability, and work readiness:

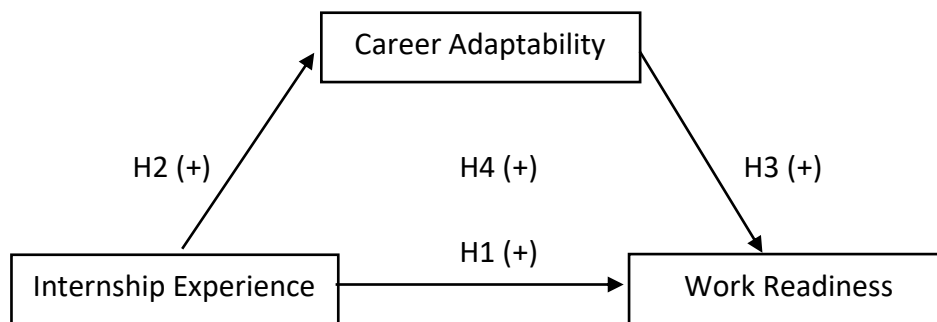


Figure 1 Research model

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the causal relationships among the variables. The purpose of this approach is to examine the causal relationship between internship experience (X), career adaptability (M), and work readiness (Y). Data were collected through a survey using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from “Strongly Disagree (1)” to “Strongly Agree (5).”

2.2 Population and Sample

The population in this study consists of active students from the Faculty of Economics and Business at Padang State University who have completed an academic internship. The Faculty of Economics and Business was selected as the study population because students in this environment share relatively similar work demands, thereby simplifying the measurement of variables.

Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling. To ensure that the collected data was truly relevant to the variables under study, the researcher established three sampling criteria, namely: (1) Respondents were active undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) at Padang State University; (2) Respondents have completed or are nearing the end of an academically recognized internship; and (3) The internship location is in the industrial, corporate, banking, or professional (non-educational) sectors. The sample size was set at 120 respondents, calculated based on the formula by Hair et al. (2010) by multiplying 12 indicators by the number 10.

2.3 Measurement

All variables were measured using a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) that has been internationally validated. The work readiness variable (Y) was measured using the Work Readiness Inventory developed by Caballero et al., (2011), covering four main dimensions: Personal Characteristics, Organizational Acumen, Work Competence, and Social Intelligence. The internship experience variable (X) was measured using an instrument adapted from Luk & Chan, (2020) based on the Work Experience Questionnaire (WEQ), focusing on four indicators: Clear Objectives, Workplace Support, University Support, and Generic Competencies. The mediating variable of career adaptability (M) was assessed using the brief version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) developed by Savickas & Porfeli, (2012)), covering four dimensions of psychosocial resources: Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM method with the assistance of the SmartPLS software version 4.1.1.8. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for complex causal models with mediating variables, does not require a normal data distribution, and is appropriate for medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2010). The analysis was conducted in two stages: (1) evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to test validity and reliability, and (2) evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to test the hypotheses.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Results

a. Convergent Validity

Convergent validity testing was conducted to ensure that each indicator truly represents the same construct through strong relationships among the indicators. The criteria used refer to Hair et al. (2019), namely an outer loading value of ≥ 0.60 for exploratory studies and an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of ≥ 0.50 . In the initial outer loading test, several indicators showed values below the 0.60 threshold. For the career adaptability variable (M), indicators AK1, AK2, AK6, AK7, and several others had outer loading values less than 0.60 and thus needed to be eliminated. The elimination process was conducted in stages until all remaining indicators met the minimum criteria.

After elimination, the final model yielded 12 appropriate indicators for the career adaptability variable, 8 indicators for work readiness, and 9 indicators for internship experience. All retained indicators had outer loadings > 0.60 , with the highest values. All AVE values for these variables were > 0.50 , as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Output AVE

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Career Adaptability (M)	0.507
Work Readiness (Y)	0.513
Internship Experience (X)	0.541

The results in Table 1 show that the AVE values for career adaptability are 0.507, work readiness 0.513, and internship experience 0.541. All three values are greater than 0.50, so convergent validity for all constructs is considered to have been met (Hair et al., 2019).

b. Reliability

Reliability testing was conducted using two methods: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (ρ_a). A construct is considered reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.60 and the Composite Reliability is greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). The test results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (ρ_a)
Career Adaptability (M)	0.911	0.913

Work Readiness (Y)	0.864	0.867
Internship Experience (X)	0.894	0.904

Table 2 shows that all three variables met the reliability standards. The Cronbach’s Alpha values for career adaptability (0.911), work readiness (0.864), and internship experience (0.894) were all > 0.60. The Composite Reliability values also range from 0.867 to 0.913, all of which far exceed the minimum threshold of > 0.70.

c. Structural Model and R-Square

Structural model testing was conducted after all indicators were deemed valid and reliable. The R² value was used to determine the extent to which the independent variables could explain the dependent variable in the research model.

Table 3 R Square

	<i>R-square</i>	<i>R-square adjusted</i>
Career Adaptability (M)	0.421	0.416
Work Readiness (Y)	0.66	0.654

The R² value for career adaptability was 0.416, while that for work readiness was 0.654. This indicates that internship experience and career adaptability account for more than 65% of the variation in students’ work readiness. The analysis conducted shows that the model meets all validity and reliability criteria.

d. hypothesis test

Table 4 presents the results of the hypothesis testing, which reveal the relationships among the variables in this study. These results are used to determine whether the proposed hypotheses are accepted or rejected based on the coefficient values and significance levels obtained.

Table 4 Hypothesis test

Relationships Among Variables	Original Sample	T-Statistic	P-Value	Description
Internship Experience → Work Readiness	0.349	4.433	0.000	significant
Internship Experience → Career Adaptability	0.649	9.430	0.000	significant
Career Adaptability → Work Readiness	0.541	8.261	0.000	significant
Internship Experience → Career	0.351	5.187	0.000	significant mediation

Adaptability→ Work Readiness				
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1. Internship Experience Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Work Readiness

The results of the hypothesis test show that the T-statistic value of $4.433 > 1.96$, the P-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, and the original sample of 0.349 indicate a positive relationship. Thus, it can be concluded that the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted, meaning that internship experience plays a role in enhancing students' work readiness. Substantively, these results indicate that internship programs offer benefits beyond merely introducing individuals to the work environment. This experience directly enhances their personal readiness, organizational skills, technical expertise, and social skills—the four main aspects of work readiness according to (Caballero et al., 2011). The original sample value of 0.349 indicates a fairly significant yet not overly high direct effect, consistent with the nature of internships as one of several factors contributing to work readiness.

These findings align with the research by Beno et al., (2025), which indicates that internship experiences are crucial in fostering work readiness because they bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world workplace demands. Hands-on workplace experience helps students develop both technical and non-technical skills, such as the ability to communicate with others, collaborate in teams, and solve emerging problems. Additionally, research conducted by Ocampo et al., (2020) also indicates that students who have prior work experience, such as internships, are generally better prepared for the workforce compared to those without such experience. Overall, these findings underscore that high-quality internship programs serve not only as formal academic requirements but also as a form of transformational learning that helps prepare students to navigate a competitive job market.

2. Internship Experience Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Career Adaptability

The results of the hypothesis testing show that the T-statistic value is $9.43 > 1.96$, the P-value is $0.000 < 0.05$, and the original sample value is 0.649 , indicating a positive relationship. Thus, it can be concluded that the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted, meaning that internship experience plays an important role in improving students' career adaptability. The original sample value of 0.649 is the highest among the other model paths, the analysis results indicate that the strongest influence in this study lies in the relationship between internship experience and career adaptation. This influence is quite substantial, and it can be explained through the psychological processes that occur during an internship. When students face real-world work conditions that are irregular and full of uncertainty, they are forced to learn to plan for the future (concern), make their own decisions (control), explore various opportunities (curiosity), and build self-confidence (confidence) to face challenges. This process gradually builds strong career adaptability resources within the students.

These findings align with the research by Ocampo et al., (2020) which indicates that early work experiences, such as internships, are crucial in shaping several aspects of career adaptability, namely concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Additionally, research by Liu et al., (2025) indicates that internship experiences help students understand the differences between theories taught on campus and real-world workplace practices, thereby better preparing them to face future workplace challenges. This

facilitates easier adaptation as students become accustomed to dealing with constantly changing conditions.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be explained using Mark Savickas's Career Construction Theory (CCT) from 2013. This theory emphasizes that career adaptability is a psychological and social resource that continues to develop alongside an individual's experiences. In this context, internship experiences serve as a learning method that helps students develop the ability to adapt to the work environment through direct interaction. Overall, the results of this study indicate that internship experiences play a crucial role in helping students enhance their adaptability in facing career changes.

3. Career Adaptability Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Work Readiness

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that the T-statistic value reached $8.261 > 1.96$, the P-value was $0.000 < 0.05$, and the original sample value was 0.541 , indicating a positive relationship. Thus, the third hypothesis (H3) is accepted, meaning that career adaptability plays a significant role in enhancing students' work readiness. The results of this study indicate that students who are able to adapt to career changes tend to be better prepared to face the workforce. This finding aligns with the research by Magnano et al., (2021) which demonstrated that career adaptability has a positive correlation with work readiness. This is because more adaptive individuals typically solve problems more effectively, possess stronger mental resilience, and manage themselves more effectively.

Additionally, research by Al-Waqfi et al., (2023) also indicates that students with the ability to adapt in their careers are better prepared for work compared to those who struggle to adapt. This occurs because individuals who can adapt quickly are better able to meet workplace expectations and exhibit higher self-confidence when performing tasks in the workplace. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study can be explained by Mark Savickas's Career Construction Theory (CCT) (2013) career adaptation is understood as an individual's mental ability to respond to change in a flexible and positive manner. Individuals who are able to adapt quickly are usually better prepared to face the working world because they can cope with various demands and uncertainties.

Overall, the results of this study emphasize the importance of internship experience in shaping students' career adaptation abilities. Therefore, students are advised to make the most of internship programs by actively engaging in the various tasks and responsibilities assigned to them.

4. Career Adaptability Mediates the Effect of Internship Experience on Work Readiness

The results of the indirect effect test show that the T-statistic value reached $5.187 > 1.96$, the P-value was $0.000 < 0.05$, and the original sample value was 0.351 , indicating a positive relationship. Thus, it can be concluded that the fourth hypothesis (H4) is accepted, meaning that career adaptability acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between internship experience and students' work readiness.

This study shows that internship experiences not only directly influence work readiness but also amplify this effect by enhancing students' ability to adapt to their careers. Thus, the internship experiences students gain during their studies will better prepare them for the workforce if they can develop the ability to adapt to their careers. In this context, career adaptability serves as a psychological mechanism linking real-world experiences to an individual's ability to navigate the professional world. These findings align with the research by Ocampo et al., (2020) which demonstrates that early work

experiences, such as internships, can enhance various aspects of career adaptability—namely, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence—ultimately helping individuals become better prepared for their careers. Additionally, research by Alharethi et al., (2025) also indicates that high-quality internship experiences can enhance students' ability to engage in self-reflection and adaptive learning.

Furthermore, improving employability requires more than just internship experience; it must also be supported by the ability to adapt to changes in one's career. This suggests that while internships are important, their impact is enhanced when students possess strong adaptive abilities. Overall, these findings suggest that improving students' work readiness cannot be achieved solely by providing internship experiences but must also be supported by the development of adaptability skills in navigating career changes. Therefore, students are encouraged to view internships not merely as an academic requirement but also as an opportunity to learn, reflect, and enhance their personal capabilities.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the employability of FEB UNP students is influenced by their internship experience as well as their ability to adapt to the workplace. All four hypotheses tested received support from empirical evidence. First, internship experiences have a positive and significant impact on work readiness. Second, internship experiences have a positive and significant impact on career adaptability. Third, career adaptability significantly strengthens and enhances work readiness. Fourth, career adaptability partially mediates the relationship between internship experiences and work readiness.

Furthermore, career adaptability plays a crucial mediating role: internship experiences have a greater impact on work readiness when students internalize these experiences into adaptive attitudes or behaviors—such as a sense of concern, self-control, curiosity, and self-confidence—in navigating their careers. This study reinforces Career Construction Theory (CCT), which states that experiences in the workplace help individuals develop psychosocial abilities to adapt and be prepared to face changes in the course of their careers.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that educational institutions continue to improve the quality of their internship programs by fostering broader collaborations with the industry and implementing structured adaptive reflection. Students are also encouraged to be more proactive in understanding their professional roles during their internships so that they can be better prepared to develop their adaptability in the workplace. Future researchers should expand the variables studied, such as self-efficacy or support from others, and broaden the research sample group so that the results obtained can be more widely applied in the context of work readiness for undergraduate graduates in Indonesia.

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