

From Career Anxiety to Work Readiness: The Mediating Effect of Career Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Purpose: This study addresses the limited evidence on the simultaneous relationships among career anxiety, career self-efficacy, and work readiness by testing an integrated mediation model based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).

Research Methodology: A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted involving 374 final-year undergraduate students from accredited Indonesian universities selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire and analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) in SmartPLS 4.0 including measurement model evaluation and bootstrapping for hypothesis testing.

Results: Career anxiety did not significantly influence work readiness directly ($\beta = 0.092, p = 0.056$). However, career anxiety significantly affected career self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.536, p < 0.001$), while career self-efficacy positively influenced work readiness ($\beta = 0.677, p < 0.001$). Bootstrapping results further demonstrated that career self-efficacy fully mediated the relationship between career anxiety and work readiness.

Conclusions: Career self-efficacy represents the primary psychological mechanism through which career anxiety influences students' readiness for employment. Strengthening students' career self-efficacy can reduce the adverse effects of career anxiety and improve their transition into the labor market.

Limitations: This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on final-year university students in Indonesia.

Contributions: This study extends Social Cognitive Career Theory by integrating career anxiety, career self-efficacy, and work readiness within a mediation framework, offering practical implications for enhancing graduate employability in higher education.

Keywords: *Career Anxiety, Career Self-Efficacy, Employability, Final-Year Students, Work Readiness*

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1. Introduction

The transition from higher education to the labor market represents a critical stage in the lives of university students ([Donald, Ashleigh, & Baruch, 2018](#); [Grosemans, & De, 2021](#)). As graduates prepare to enter increasingly competitive and uncertain employment environments, they are expected to demonstrate not only academic competence but also psychological readiness to adapt to workplace demands. However, many graduates continue to face difficulties in securing employment despite possessing adequate educational qualifications ([Okolie, Nwosu, & Mlanga, 2019](#)). In Indonesia, the unemployment rate among university graduates remains a significant concern, indicating a mismatch between educational outcomes and labor market expectations ([Putranto, Natalia, & Pitriyani, 2024](#)). This phenomenon suggests that employability is influenced not only by technical competencies but also by psychological factors that shape an individual's preparedness to enter the workforce. Work readiness has emerged as an important concept in understanding graduates' successful transition into employment. Work readiness refers to the extent to which individuals possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and psychological preparedness necessary to perform effectively in the workplace ([Peersia, Rappa, & Perry, 2024](#)). Previous studies have demonstrated that work readiness encompasses multiple dimensions, including adaptability, teamwork, responsibility, communication skills, critical thinking, and career planning ([Prikshat, Montague, Connell, & Burgess, 2020](#); [Verma, Nankervis, Priyono, Connell, & Burgess, 2018](#)). Consequently, improving work readiness has become a strategic objective for higher education institutions seeking to enhance graduate employability and career success. Despite growing attention to employability development, many final-year students experience substantial uncertainty regarding their future careers. One psychological challenge commonly encountered during the school-to-work transition is career anxiety. Career anxiety refers to feelings of worry, fear, and uncertainty associated with future career prospects, employment opportunities, and career-related decision-making ([Arbona, Fan, Phang, Olvera, & Dios, 2021](#); [Atikah, Kurniawati, & Rifameutia, 2023](#)). Rapid technological changes, economic fluctuations, labor market competition, and increasing employer expectations have intensified career-related concerns among university students ([Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020](#)). High levels of career anxiety may negatively affect students' confidence, motivation, decision-making ability, and overall readiness to enter the workforce.

Several studies have reported that anxiety-related factors can hinder career development processes and reduce individuals' ability to engage proactively in career preparation activities ([Lent & Brown, 2020](#)). Students who experience elevated career anxiety often exhibit lower levels of confidence in their career choices, reduced engagement in job-search behaviors, and greater uncertainty regarding their professional future. As a result, career anxiety may undermine the development of work readiness by limiting students' willingness to explore career opportunities and prepare effectively for employment.

A potential mechanism through which career anxiety influences work readiness is career self-efficacy. Derived from Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) [Schunk \(2012\)](#) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by [Lent, Brown, and Hackett \(2002\)](#), career self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform career-related tasks and make appropriate career decisions. Individuals with high career self-efficacy tend to demonstrate greater persistence, stronger career planning, better problem-solving abilities, and higher confidence in managing career-related challenges ([Coetzee & Schreuder, 2018](#)). Conversely, individuals with low career self-efficacy are more likely to perceive career obstacles as threatening and may experience greater anxiety when confronting career uncertainties.

Empirical evidence consistently supports the positive relationship between career self-efficacy and various career outcomes. Previous studies have found that career self-efficacy significantly contributes to career adaptability, employability, job-search behavior, and work readiness ([Gerçek, 2024](#); [Morici, Massaro, & Boerchi, 2022](#)). Furthermore, career self-efficacy has been identified as an important psychological resource that helps individuals manage stress and anxiety during career transitions. Students with stronger beliefs in their career capabilities are more likely to cope effectively with uncertainty and remain committed to career preparation activities.

Although previous studies have independently examined the relationships between career anxiety, career self-efficacy, and employability-related outcomes, several research gaps remain ([Petruzziello, 2022](#); [Whelan, McGilloway, Murphy, & McGuinness, 2018](#)). First, existing studies predominantly focus on the direct effects of self-efficacy on employability or career readiness, while limited attention has been given to the detrimental role of career anxiety in shaping work readiness among final-year university students. Second, although career self-efficacy has frequently been examined as a predictor of career outcomes, empirical evidence regarding its mediating role in the relationship between career anxiety and work readiness remains limited, particularly within the context of higher education in developing countries. Third, most prior studies have concentrated on career adaptability, job-search intentions, or career decision-making, leaving work readiness as a relatively underexplored outcome variable. Addressing these gaps is particularly important because understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying work readiness can provide valuable insights for universities, career development centers, and policymakers seeking to improve graduate employability ([Herbert, Rothwell, Glover, & Lambert, 2020](#)). By identifying the role of career self-efficacy as a psychological resource that mitigates the negative effects of career anxiety, institutions can design more effective interventions aimed at enhancing students' confidence, career planning skills, and readiness for employment. Therefore, this study investigates the effect of career anxiety on work readiness among final-year university students and examines the mediating role of career self-efficacy in this relationship ([Baluku, Mugabi, Nansamba, Matagi, Onderi, & Otto, 2021](#)). Grounded in SCCT ([Lent et al., 2002](#)), this research contributes to the literature by integrating a psychological risk factor (career anxiety) and a psychological protective factor (career self-efficacy) within a single explanatory framework of work readiness. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical understanding of career development processes and provide practical recommendations for strengthening career support programs that facilitate students' successful transition from education to employment.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Career Anxiety and Work Readiness

The increasingly dynamic labor market has intensified concerns among university students regarding their future careers. Global economic uncertainty, technological disruption, automation, and changing employer expectations have contributed to heightened levels of career anxiety among young adults transitioning from higher education to employment ([Jung et al., 2024](#); [Wong, 2024](#)). Career anxiety refers to persistent feelings of uncertainty, worry, and fear associated with career planning, job acquisition, and long-term professional development ([Arbona et al., 2021](#); [Atikah et al., 2023](#)). According to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), individuals experiencing high levels of career-related anxiety may perceive labor market challenges as threats rather than opportunities, leading to reduced motivation and lower engagement in career preparation activities ([Lent et al., 2002](#)). Career anxiety may hinder students' ability to focus on career planning, participate in internships, develop employability skills, and actively search for employment opportunities ([Jung et al., 2024](#)).

Work readiness, meanwhile, reflects an individual's preparedness to successfully perform workplace roles through the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and psychological resources ([Marijani et al., 2023](#)). Research has consistently demonstrated that psychological barriers can negatively influence work readiness and employability outcomes ([Lee et al., 2024](#); [Priksat et al., 2019](#)). Students experiencing elevated career anxiety often report lower confidence in their employability, reduced adaptability, and decreased preparedness for workplace demands ([Magnano et al., 2021](#)). Empirical studies have shown that anxiety-related psychological states can impair career adaptability, career planning behavior, and job-search effectiveness ([Arbona et al., 2021](#); [Atikah et al., 2023](#)). Consequently, career anxiety may undermine students' readiness to enter the workforce by reducing their confidence and willingness to engage in career development activities. Based on the theoretical and empirical arguments above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Career anxiety negatively affects work readiness among final-year university students.

2.2 Career Anxiety and Career Self-Efficacy

Career self-efficacy originates from [Hackett and Betz \(1995\)](#) self-efficacy theory and refers to an individual's belief in their capability to perform tasks necessary for successful career development. These tasks include career exploration, career planning, job-search behavior, networking, interview preparation, and career decision-making ([Smith, Piercy, & Zhu, 2023](#)). Social Cognitive Theory posits that self-efficacy beliefs are strongly influenced by cognitive and emotional experiences. Negative emotional states, including anxiety, tend to weaken self-efficacy because individuals become more likely to doubt their abilities and overestimate potential failures ([Hackett & Betz, 1995](#)). When students experience high levels of career anxiety, they may perceive labor market uncertainties as evidence of their inability to compete successfully, thereby reducing confidence in their career-related capabilities ([Atikah, Kurniawati, & Rifameutia, 2023](#)).

Recent studies have consistently reported an inverse relationship between career anxiety and career self-efficacy. For example, [Deer, Gohn, and Kanaya \(2018\)](#) found that students with higher career anxiety reported lower confidence in career decision-making. Similarly, [Socholotiuk, Domene, Magnusson, Kind, and Rikert \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that job-seeking anxiety negatively influenced career-related self-beliefs among graduating students. Research by [Choate, Vojisavljevic, Carroll, Carroll, Filby, and Dichtl \(2022\)](#) further revealed that psychological distress significantly reduced students' confidence in managing career transitions. From the perspective of SCCT, anxiety functions as a cognitive barrier that limits the development of positive efficacy beliefs, whereas individuals with lower anxiety tend to maintain stronger confidence in their ability to achieve career goals ([Lent & Brown, 2020](#)). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₂: Career anxiety negatively affects career self-efficacy among final-year university students.

2.3 Career Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness

Career self-efficacy has been recognized as one of the most influential psychological predictors of career success and employability. Individuals with strong career self-efficacy tend to set ambitious career goals, demonstrate greater persistence when facing challenges, and engage more actively in career preparation activities ([Lent & Brown, 2020](#); [Schunk, 2012](#)). Within the context of higher education, career self-efficacy enables students to navigate career-related uncertainties more effectively. Students who believe in their ability to secure employment are more likely to participate in internships, attend career development programs, build professional networks, and engage in proactive job-search behaviors ([De Weerd et al., 2024](#)). Several empirical studies support the positive relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness. [Priksat et al. \(2019\)](#) found that self-efficacy significantly improved graduates' employability competencies. [Stephen and Fru \(2023\)](#) reported that students with stronger career confidence demonstrated higher levels of employability and workplace preparedness. Similar findings were reported by [Mulyana and Linando \(2024\)](#), who concluded that self-efficacy contributes significantly to graduates' readiness to enter competitive labor markets. Career self-efficacy also enhances adaptability, resilience, and self-regulation, which are essential dimensions of work readiness in contemporary workplaces ([Kumi et al., 2024](#)). Individuals with high career self-efficacy are more likely to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats, thereby strengthening their readiness for employment. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Career self-efficacy positively affects work readiness among final-year university students.

2.4 The Mediating Role of Career Self-Efficacy

Recent developments in career psychology suggest that psychological outcomes are rarely influenced by direct relationships alone. Instead, psychological resources often function as mechanisms through which adverse experiences influence behavioral outcomes ([Kumi et al., 2024](#)). Within the SCCT framework, self-efficacy serves as a central cognitive mechanism connecting environmental challenges, personal experiences, and career outcomes ([Lent & Brown, 2020](#)). Career anxiety represents a psychological risk factor that may weaken individuals' confidence in managing career-related tasks. Reduced career self-efficacy, in turn, may diminish students' motivation, adaptability,

and preparedness for employment. Several studies have demonstrated the mediating role of self-efficacy in various career-related contexts. [Gerçek \(2024\)](#) found that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between career barriers and career adaptability. [Ferrari \(2023\)](#) reported that self-efficacy functioned as a psychological resource that translated personal competencies into employability outcomes. [Similarly, Yiming et al. \(2024\)](#) showed that self-efficacy reduced the negative impact of psychological distress on career development processes. Despite growing evidence regarding the importance of self-efficacy, limited studies have specifically examined whether career self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career anxiety and work readiness among final-year university students, particularly in developing-country contexts. This represents an important gap because understanding the mechanism through which anxiety influences work readiness may provide valuable insights for designing effective career intervention programs. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₄: Career self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career anxiety and work readiness among final-year university students

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among career anxiety, career self-efficacy, and work readiness among final-year university students. The study adopted Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) ([Lent et al., 2002](#)), as the underlying theoretical framework because SCCT explains that career outcomes are shaped by the interaction between personal cognitive factors and psychological experiences. Within this framework, career anxiety represents a psychological risk factor, career self-efficacy functions as a cognitive resource, and work readiness reflects an important career-related outcome. Accordingly, the proposed hypotheses were developed to examine both the direct and indirect relationships among these constructs.

The target population consisted of final-year undergraduate students enrolled in accredited universities throughout Indonesia. Final-year students were selected because they are in the transition period from higher education to employment and are expected to experience career-related uncertainty and employment preparation.

A purposive sampling technique was employed using the following criteria, active undergraduate students, enrolled in the final year (semester 7 or above), expected to graduate within one year, willing to participate voluntarily. Data were collected from universities located in Aceh, Jakarta, West Java, Banten, Central Java, East Java, South Sulawesi, East Kalimantan, Lampung, Bangka Belitung, North Maluku, West Papua, and South Sumatra. A total of 374 valid questionnaires were analyzed. The sample size satisfies the recommendation, which suggests that SEM-PLS models should include at least ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at a latent construct. Since the most complex endogenous construct in this study received two structural paths, the minimum required sample was substantially exceeded. Furthermore, the sample size is well above the minimum threshold of 200 observations commonly recommended for SEM analysis, providing sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing. Primary data were collected using a structured online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. All measurement items were adapted from previously validated instruments and measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data collection was conducted between January and March 2026 through an online survey. Participation was voluntary, and respondents received information regarding the study objectives, confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any stage before submitting the questionnaire. This study adhered to the ethical principles for research involving human participants. All respondents provided informed consent electronically before completing the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential, and no personally identifiable information was collected. In accordance with institutional policy for minimal-risk educational survey research, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, the study followed internationally accepted

ethical principles, including voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and data confidentiality.

4. Results and Discussions

The study involved 374 final-year university students from various higher education institutions across Indonesia. Female respondents accounted for 74.06% of the sample, while male respondents represented 25.94%. Most respondents were aged between 21 and 22 years, representing 61.50% of the total sample. This age range is generally associated with the final stage of undergraduate education and the transition period from university to employment. The respondents were distributed across several provinces, including DKI Jakarta, West Java, Aceh, East Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Banten, East Java, Central Java, Lampung, Bangka Belitung, Maluku Utara, Papua Barat, and South Sumatra. This distribution provides a relatively broad representation of Indonesian university students facing career transition challenges. The diverse demographic composition enables a more comprehensive understanding of students' career anxiety and work readiness across different regional contexts. Furthermore, the inclusion of respondents from multiple provinces strengthens the relevance of the findings in reflecting the experiences of Indonesian final-year students preparing to enter the workforce.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variables	Number of Indicators	Mean Range	Standard Deviation Range
Career Anxiety	16	3.693 – 4.104	0.697 – 0.927
Career Self-Efficacy	16	3.684 – 4.193	0.655 – 1.033
Work Readiness	20	3.893 – 4.243	0.661 – 0.910

To provide an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding the main variables examined in this study, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted. The results, including the number of indicators, mean scores, and standard deviation ranges for each construct, are presented in Table 1.

The descriptive results indicate that respondents generally experienced relatively high levels of career anxiety, with average scores exceeding 3.5 across all indicators. The highest score was observed for concerns about obtaining employment after graduation. This finding reflects the increasing uncertainty faced by university students in a highly competitive labor market. Meanwhile, career self-efficacy demonstrated relatively high scores, indicating that most respondents believed in their ability to perform career-related tasks effectively. The highest score was related to confidence in preparing curriculum vitae and job application documents. Similarly, work readiness scores were generally high, suggesting that students perceived themselves as prepared to enter the workforce, particularly regarding teamwork and collaboration abilities.

Convergent validity was assessed through outer loading values and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Indicators with loading values below 0.70 were removed from the model to improve construct validity. The AVE values obtained for each construct are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Convergent validity results

Variables	AVE	Criteria	Result
Career Anxiety	0.534	> 0.50	Valid
Career Self-Efficacy	0.563	> 0.50	Valid
Work Readiness	0.571	> 0.50	Valid

All constructs achieved AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. AVE values exceeding 0.50 suggest that the latent constructs explain more than half of the variance in their indicators.

To ensure the consistency of the measurement instruments, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability test results

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Result
Career Anxiety	0.913	0.927	Reliable
Career Self-Efficacy	0.903	0.921	Reliable
Work Readiness	0.937	0.945	Reliable

All variables demonstrated Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70, confirming strong internal consistency reliability. These results indicate that the measurement instruments consistently capture the intended constructs. Furthermore, the high reliability values suggest that the indicators used in this study are sufficiently stable and suitable for further structural model analysis.

The explanatory power of the structural model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2). The results for each endogenous variable are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Coefficient of determination results

Endogenous Variables	R^2
Career Self-Efficacy	0.287
Work Readiness	0.533

The R^2 value of 0.287 indicates that career anxiety explains 28.7% of the variance in career self-efficacy. Meanwhile, career anxiety and career self-efficacy jointly explain 53.3% of the variance in work readiness. An R^2 value above 0.50 represents moderate explanatory power. The predictive relevance value ($Q^2 = 0.667$) further confirms that the model possesses strong predictive capability.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. The path coefficients, t-values, p-values, and hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Direct effects testing

Hypotheses	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
H_1	Career Anxiety $\rightarrow$ Work Readiness	0.092	1.914	0.056	Not Supported
H_2	Career Anxiety $\rightarrow$ Career Self-Efficacy	0.536	9.581	0.000	Supported
H_3	Career Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Work Readiness	0.677	17.183	0.000	Supported

The results indicate that career anxiety does not significantly affect work readiness ($t = 1.914$, $p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that career-related concerns alone are insufficient to explain students' readiness to enter the labor market. One possible explanation is that final-year students may compensate for career uncertainty through career preparation activities, internships, and university career services. This finding differs from ([Arbona et al., 2021](#); [Atikah et al., 2023](#)), who reported that career anxiety negatively influenced career-related outcomes. However, it supports the proposition of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which argues that emotional factors often influence career outcomes indirectly through cognitive mechanisms such as self-efficacy ([Lent & Brown, 2020](#)).

Career anxiety significantly influenced career self-efficacy ($t = 9.581$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that higher levels of career anxiety are associated with lower confidence in managing career-related tasks. The result supports previous studies by [Deer et al. \(2018\)](#), [Choate et al. \(2022\)](#), and [Socholotiuk et al. \(2024\)](#), which concluded that anxiety weakens career-related self-beliefs. Consistent with SCCT, emotional experiences shape efficacy beliefs, which subsequently influence career behaviors and outcomes. Career self-efficacy demonstrated the strongest effect on work readiness ($t =$

17.183, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students with greater confidence in their career capabilities are more prepared to enter the workforce. This finding is consistent with [Priksht et al. \(2019\)](#), [Gerçek \(2024\)](#), and [Stephen and Fru \(2023\)](#), who found that career self-efficacy enhances employability and work readiness through increased persistence, adaptability, and proactive career behavior.

This finding suggests that career anxiety influences work readiness indirectly through career self-efficacy. In other words, career anxiety does not directly reduce students' readiness to work; rather, it weakens their confidence in managing career-related challenges, which subsequently affects their preparedness for employment. From a theoretical perspective, this result extends Social Cognitive Career Theory by demonstrating that self-efficacy functions as a psychological mechanism linking emotional experiences and career outcomes. Practically, the findings suggest that universities should prioritize interventions aimed at strengthening students' career self-efficacy through mentoring programs, internship experiences, career counseling services, mock interviews, networking opportunities, and employability training. By enhancing career self-efficacy, higher education institutions can mitigate the negative consequences of career anxiety and improve graduates' readiness to enter increasingly competitive labor markets.

To further examine the mediating role of career self-efficacy in the relationship between career anxiety and work readiness, an indirect effect analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. The significance of the mediation effect was evaluated based on the indirect effect coefficient, t -value, p -value, and the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Indirect effect (mediation analysis)

Relationship	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	95% Bootstrapping CI	Result
Career Anxiety $\rightarrow$ Career Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Work Readiness	0.363	8.742	0.000	0.283 – 0.447	Significant

The mediation effect was evaluated using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. As presented in Table 6, the indirect effect of career anxiety on work readiness through career self-efficacy was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.363$, $p < 0.001$), and the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval did not include zero, confirming the existence of a significant mediation effect. Because the direct effect of career anxiety on work readiness was not statistically significant, whereas the indirect effect remained significant, the findings indicate full mediation.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the influence of career anxiety on work readiness among final-year university students and investigated the mediating role of career self-efficacy within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). The findings provide several important insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying students' readiness to enter the labor market.

First, the results indicate that career anxiety does not have a significant direct effect on work readiness. This finding suggests that although final-year students experience concerns and uncertainty regarding their future careers, these feelings do not necessarily diminish their readiness to enter the workforce. The availability of career development resources, internship opportunities, and employability programs may help students maintain adequate levels of work readiness despite experiencing career-related concerns.

Second, career anxiety significantly influences career self-efficacy. Students who experience higher levels of career anxiety tend to report lower confidence in their ability to perform career-related tasks, such as career planning, job searching, and career decision-making. This finding supports the proposition of Social Cognitive Career Theory that emotional experiences play a crucial role in shaping efficacy beliefs.

Third, career self-efficacy demonstrates a strong and significant positive effect on work readiness. Students who possess greater confidence in their career-related abilities are more likely to exhibit higher levels of preparedness for entering the workforce. This result confirms that career self-efficacy functions as an important psychological resource that facilitates successful school-to-work transitions. Finally, the findings reveal that career self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship between career anxiety and work readiness.

This indicates that career anxiety affects work readiness indirectly through its influence on students' confidence in managing career-related challenges. Consequently, strengthening career self-efficacy becomes a critical strategy for enhancing work readiness among final-year university students. Theoretically, this study extends Social Cognitive Career Theory by demonstrating the mechanism through which psychological risk factors influence employability outcomes. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of university-based career development initiatives that focus on enhancing students' confidence, adaptability, and career management capabilities.

5.2 Research Limitations

Despite providing valuable contributions to the literature on career development and employability, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the investigated variables. Career anxiety, career self-efficacy, and work readiness may evolve over time as students gain additional academic, internship, or work experiences. Second, the data were collected using self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce common method bias and social desirability bias. Respondents may have overestimated or underestimated their perceptions regarding career readiness and self-efficacy. Third, the sample consisted exclusively of final-year university students in Indonesia. Therefore, the findings may not be directly generalizable to students from other educational levels, vocational institutions, or different cultural and labor market contexts. Fourth, the model explained 53.3% of the variance in work readiness, indicating that other important determinants remain unexplored. Factors such as career adaptability, employability skills, internship experience, social support, personality traits, labor market awareness, and digital competencies may also contribute significantly to students' work readiness. Finally, this study focused on psychological variables and did not explicitly consider institutional factors such as university career services, curriculum design, industry partnerships, or experiential learning opportunities that may influence employability outcomes.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations are proposed for future research and practical implementation. From a practical perspective, higher education institutions should develop comprehensive career development programs aimed at strengthening students' career self-efficacy. Such programs may include career counseling, mentorship initiatives, employability workshops, internship opportunities, mock interviews, networking activities, and industry engagement programs. These interventions can help students develop confidence in their ability to navigate increasingly complex labor market conditions. Universities are also encouraged to integrate career readiness development into academic curricula by emphasizing experiential learning, problem-solving skills, teamwork, communication competencies, and professional identity formation. Such efforts can contribute to the development of graduates who are better prepared for workplace demands.

For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how career anxiety, career self-efficacy, and work readiness evolve throughout students' educational journeys and early career experiences. Longitudinal designs would provide stronger evidence regarding causal relationships among these constructs. Future studies may also expand the research model by incorporating additional variables, including career adaptability, employability skills, resilience, psychological capital, perceived labor market opportunities, digital literacy, and social support. These factors may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of work readiness.

Furthermore, comparative studies involving students from different countries, academic disciplines, educational systems, or employment sectors would enrich the generalizability of findings and provide valuable cross-cultural perspectives on career development processes. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to employ mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative and qualitative techniques. Such approaches would enable a deeper exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies related to career anxiety and work readiness during the transition from higher education to employment.

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Author Contributions

DK contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing of the original draft, writing, review and editing, supervision, and final approval of the manuscript. GB contributed to conceptualization, research design, methodology, validation, writing, review and editing, and final approval. BR contributed to conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, interpretation of results, writing, review and editing, and final approval. FPA was responsible for investigation, data collection, respondent coordination, data curation, and validation. AHP contributed to investigation, questionnaire administration, data collection, data verification, and data curation. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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