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The Effect of Motivation, Self-Efficacy and Soft Skills on Students' Work Readiness as Generation Z in Facing the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of motivation, self-efficacy, and soft skills on the work readiness of students as Generation Z in facing the digital era. The population in this study consists of 436 students from the Faculty of Economics and Business, class of 2021, at Universitas Mercu Buana Jakarta. The sample used was 81 students, determined using the Slovin formula. The sampling method applied was probability sampling. Data collection was conducted through a survey using a questionnaire as the research instrument. This study employs a Structural Equation Model (SEM) approach with SmartPLS as the analytical tool. The results show that motivation has a positive and significant influence on work readiness. Self-efficacy also has a positive and significant influence on work readiness. Similarly, soft skills have a positive and significant influence on work readiness.

Keywords: Motivation; Self-Efficacy; Soft Skills; Work Readiness; Generation Z; Digital.

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INTRODUCTION

Technological development in the digital era has rapidly advanced, with electronic devices dominating daily life and becoming integral to human activities (Suruwaky et al., 2021). This transformation has elevated civilization, fostering innovation and creating sophisticated digital technologies (Asriandi, 2020). Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012 (Hastini et al., 2020), has grown up immersed in technology, viewing it as essential rather than novel. However, the digital era represents a double-edged sword, offering opportunities for skill and knowledge development while posing risks if misused (Pertiwi et al., 2021). The labor market now demands highly skilled, innovative, and adaptable graduates (Sari & Arabian, 2020). At Universitas Mercu Buana (UMB), tracer study data (2024) shows that only 67.06% of students have high-level English proficiency, and 87% demonstrate strong field expertise, highlighting gaps in workforce readiness. Addressing these gaps early is crucial to preparing students for the competitive digital workplace.

Table 1. UMB Graduate Competency Level

Type of Competency	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Ethics	61.40%	34.73%	3.80%	0.04%	0.02%
Expertise Based on Field of English Proficiency	36.85%	50.94%	11.82%	0.39%	0.00%
Use of Information Technology	20.59%	46.47%	29.86%	2.84%	0.25%
Communication	42.49%	48.82%	8.22%	0.47%	0.00%
Teamwork	49.67%	41.41%	8.52%	0.37%	0.02%
Self-Development	56.28%	38.70%	4.68%	0.32%	0.02%
	52.49%	41.35%	5.90%	0.23%	0.02%

Source: UMB Tracer Study 2024

Based on the results of a 2024 Mercu Buana University tracer study, only 57% found employment within 6 months of graduation, and 19% were unemployed after 18 months, with a field of study matching rate of 85.5%. Although the majority of graduates are employed, 14.5% still find work unrelated to their field. This highlights the need to improve student job readiness during their studies.

Work readiness is a critical challenge for Generation Z, who are entering a rapidly evolving digital workforce. Born between 1997 and early 2012, this generation faces a labor market shaped by technological disruption, requiring students to continuously develop their skills and competencies. Work readiness is characterized by critical thinking, effective communication, responsibility, ambition, and adaptability to advancements in one's field (Pangastuti & Khafid, 2019). University graduates are expected to possess competencies aligned with their disciplines, enabling them to apply knowledge and skills as tools to navigate increasing workplace competition (Baiti et al., 2020). Graduates with strong work readiness demonstrate mastery of both technical and soft skills essential for professional success. Moreover, achievement-oriented motivation plays a significant role in shaping both academic and non-academic performance, emphasizing the need for extracurricular engagement and effective time management strategies to strengthen employability.

Work readiness refers to an individual's personal characteristics that meet the requirements

to both secure and maintain employment (Angraini et al., 2021). It involves deliberate preparation to achieve optimal work outcomes and effective teamwork in professional settings. Factors influencing work readiness are generally divided into internal factors such as talent, intelligence, interests, skills, and aspirations and external factors, including learning environments and supportive social interactions (Pratiwi et al., 2022). Strengthening knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values is therefore essential for optimal workforce entry and productivity, enabling graduates to become self-reliant, innovative, and adaptable contributors to society.

Empirical studies have identified multiple determinants of work readiness: soft skills, hard skills, and motivation (Maulidiyah & Ubaidillah, 2024); internship experience (Sofa et al., 2020); abilities, digital and Industry 4.0 skill sets, and soft skills (Deswarta et al., 2024); organizational involvement, academic performance, and learning environment (Labiرو & Widjaja, 2024); career adaptability (F. A. Putri et al., 2024); and the role of career planning, self-efficacy, and quotient in shaping readiness (Violinda et al., 2023). Given these findings, it is essential to identify the key factors influencing students' preparedness for the labor market.

The high level of student participation and satisfaction in certification programs provides a strong foundation for further investigation into student competency assessments. Competency tests serve as evaluation instruments designed to measure the alignment between students' skills and the standards required by industries or workplaces. Given students' enthusiasm for certification initiatives, developing a comprehensive competency assessment system is a strategic step to bridge the gap between higher education and employment demands.

The interaction between motivation, self-efficacy, and soft skills creates a robust framework for evaluating work readiness. Integrating these elements establishes a critical foundation for assessing students' preparedness for the labor market, particularly within the context of certification and competency testing. Effective programs should not only measure technical expertise but also evaluate intrinsic motivation, confidence in one's abilities, and proficiency in communication, collaboration, and adaptability to workplace changes.

The author identified a gap in the research, known as a "research gap." According to Hanifah et al., 2022, a research gap is a gap in the topic of discussion identified by researchers in previous research. The following are some research findings from several researchers related to the variables of motivation, self-efficacy, and soft skills.

Table 2. Research Gap

	Variabel Researcher (s)	Title	Findings
Motivation	Dwi Yuni Sendari Hasibuana & Alim Murtani (2024)	The Effect of Soft Skills and Motivation on the Work Readiness of Students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Potensi Utama, for Careers in Islamic Banking The Effect of Internship	Motivation has a positive and significant effect on work readiness. Motivation has no positive or significant effect on work readiness.
Efficacy	Khusnul Chotimah & Nanik Suryani (2020)	Experience, Motivation to Enter the Workforce,	Self-efficacy has a positive and

	Yunia R. G. Ratuella et al. (2022)	and Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness The Effect of Hard Skills, Soft Skills, and Self-Efficacy on the Work Readiness of Final-Year Management Students at FEB UNSRAT Manado	significant effect on students' work readiness.
	Kristin Violinda et al. (2023)	The Effect of Career Planning, Self-Efficacy, and Adversity Quotient on the Work Readiness of Undergraduate Students in Semarang	Self-efficacy has no significant effect on students' work readiness.
Soft Skills	Deswarta et al. (2024)	The Effect of Soft Skills, Hard Skills, and Work Motivation on the Work Readiness of Students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Islam Riau, During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Soft skills have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.
	Nurbaiti & Alvira Devita Putri (2024)	Hard Skills, Soft Skills, and Self-Efficacy on the Work Readiness of Final-Year FEB Students at Universities in Bandar Lampung	Soft skills have no significant effect on students' work readiness.

Source: Previous research

Previous research has yielded mixed results. There are gaps in the results of studies examining the variables of motivation, self-efficacy, and soft skills among students regarding their work readiness in the digital age. Therefore, researchers will conduct further research to determine the impact of these variables by conducting further research to produce updated findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human resource management (HRM) is a strategic approach to managing key aspects of an organization's workforce, encompassing activities such as recruitment, selection, training, development, performance evaluation, and compensation management. HRM views employees not merely as costs but as valuable assets for achieving organizational objectives. According to Edison et al. (2020), HRM focuses on maximizing employee capabilities through strategic measures to enhance performance and optimize organizational goals. Irmayanti et al. (2022) define HRM as a discipline or method for efficiently and effectively managing relationships and the roles of human resources, enabling their optimal use to achieve shared goals of companies, employees, and society. Sutono et al. (2021) further emphasize HRM as the directed utilization of individual effort, knowledge, skills, and behavior to contribute and coordinate under company authority, often through contractual or temporary agreements, in a way that ensures the organization's sustainable future.

According to Wibowo (2018), work readiness reflects an individual's ability to perform a job based on their skills and knowledge, supported by professional attitudes and the necessary work aptitude. Slameto, as cited in Genita et al. (2022), defines work readiness as a general condition that prepares individuals to respond effectively, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional states, as well as needs, motivation, goals, skills, knowledge, and acquired understanding.

Juriah (2020), in Belay (2022), emphasizes that work readiness refers to the skills and competencies aligned with a graduate's potential, enabling them to enter the workforce immediately without requiring a lengthy adaptation period, supported by maturity in knowledge and mental preparation. In summary, work readiness can be understood as a student's potential to transition into the professional environment seamlessly, underpinned by knowledge maturity, relevant experience, and strong mental preparation.

According to Afandi (2021), motivation is a desire that arises within an individual, driven by internal impulses to engage in activities sincerely and enthusiastically, resulting in high-quality outcomes. Sutrisno (2016) defines motivation as a factor that encourages a person to undertake certain actions, often described as the driving force behind behavior. Similarly, Hasibuan (2020) emphasizes that motivation is a driving power that fosters enthusiasm for work, encouraging individuals to collaborate effectively and efficiently in pursuit of satisfaction and success. In summary, motivation can be understood as an internal drive that inspires individuals to act willingly, passionately, and with sincerity to achieve specific goals while enhancing the quality and effectiveness of their efforts.

According to Badeni, as cited in Sutansi and Widayati (2022), self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to perform and complete tasks or activities required to respond effectively to various situations. People with strong self-belief tend to succeed, whereas those who constantly doubt themselves are more likely to fail; thus, individuals with high self-efficacy demonstrate strong confidence in their performance, supported by intrinsic motivation. Aprian, as cited in Andre and Santoso (2022), explains that self-efficacy is analyzed through three dimensions: magnitude, referring to the difficulty level of tasks; generality, reflecting one's belief in successfully completing specific tasks thoroughly; and strength, indicating the degree and stability of this belief. Similarly, Sumaila and Rossanty (2022) describe self-efficacy as a sense of confidence inherent in every individual, enabling them to achieve strong performance outcomes and reach desired goals, as confidence is a key driver of success.

Hendrian, as cited in Hardi (2020), defines soft skills as an individual's ability to interact with others (interpersonal skills) and manage oneself (intrapersonal skills) to achieve optimal

performance. Similarly, Mujayana (2020) explains that soft skills involve interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities that can be developed to support professional success. Molan, as cited in Cahyanti et al. (2022), emphasizes that soft skills are essential for building effective collaborative relationships. In summary, soft skills refer to interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies that can be maximized and are crucial for career success in today's workforce.

METHOD

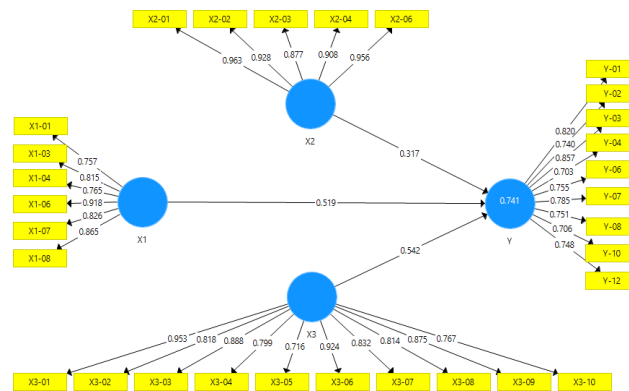
This study was conducted from March 2024 to July 2025 at Universitas Mercu Buana Jakarta, located at Jl. Raya, RT.4/RW.1, Meruya Selatan, Kembangan District, Jakarta, Special Capital Region of Jakarta, 11650. The research design employed a causal approach with a quantitative methodology. According to Nursalam (2020), a research design is a strategy used to identify problems prior to finalizing data collection plans and provides a framework for conducting the study. Sugiyono (2022) defines associative-causal research as an investigation that examines cause-and-effect relationships between two or more variables, consisting of independent (influencing) and dependent (influenced) variables. This study aimed to examine the effects of motivation, self-efficacy, and soft skills on students' work readiness as Generation Z in the digital era.

Data were measured using a Likert scale with ordinal measurement to rank responses from lowest to highest without considering interval distances. Sugiyono (2022) emphasizes that the Likert scale measures attitudes, opinions, and perceptions toward specific social phenomena determined by the researcher. The population consisted of 436 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Mercu Buana, class of 2021. Sampling was carried out using a probability sampling technique, ensuring equal selection opportunities for every population member (Sugiyono, 2022), with a simple random sampling method that randomly selects participants regardless of strata (Sugiyono, 2022). Using the Slovin formula (Hastuti et al., 2020), a sample size of 81 respondents was determined for the study. Data collection was conducted through surveys using structured questionnaires to gather primary data. According to Sugiyono (2022), primary data refers to information obtained directly from respondents, and questionnaires are an effective technique when researchers are clear about the variables to be measured. The data analysis method used was Partial Least Squares (PLS), a component-based structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, processed using SmartPLS version 3.0. PLS allows simultaneous evaluation of complex relationships between variables and is considered a "soft modeling" technique because it does not assume data normality and is suitable for small sample sizes of fewer than 100 respondents (Ghozali, 2020; Asbari et al.).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Convergent validity testing of the measurement model with reflective indicators was assessed based on the correlation between item scores or component scores and construct scores calculated using PLS. An individual indicator is considered valid if it has a correlation value above 0.50, as shown in the output table and structural model diagram below.



Source : SmartPLS Output, 2025

Table 3. Convergent Validity

Variable	Indicator	Outer Model	Information	
Motivation	M1	0,757	Valid	
	M3	0,815	Valid	
	M4	0,765	Valid	
	M6	0,918	Valid	
	M7	0,826	Valid	
	M8	0,865	Valid	
	Self-Efficacy	ED1	0,963	Valid
		ED2	0,928	Valid
ED3		0,877	Valid	
ED4		0,908	Valid	
ED6		0,956	Valid	
Soft Skill		SS1	0,953	Valid
	SS2	0,818	Valid	
	SS3	0,888	Valid	
	SS4	0,799	Valid	
	SS5	0,716	Valid	
	SS6	0,924	Valid	
	SS7	0,832	Valid	
	SS8	0,814	Valid	

	SS9	0,875	Valid
	SS10	0,767	Valid
Work Readiness	KK1	0,820	Valid
	KK2	0,740	Valid
	KK3	0,857	Valid
	KK4	0,703	Valid
	KK6	0,755	Valid
	KK7	0,785	Valid
	KK8	0,751	Valid
	KK10	0,706	Valid
	KK12	0,748	Valid

Source : SmartPLS Output, 2025

All indicators (motivation, self-efficacy, soft skills, and work readiness) show an outer loading above 0.70, so the variables can be said to be valid. In discriminant validity testing, reflective indicators can be seen in the cross-loading between the indicator and its construct. An indicator is considered valid if it has a factor loading on another construct. Thus, latent constructs predict indicators in their block better than indicators in other blocks.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

	Motivation	Self-Efficacy	Soft Skill	Work Readiness
M1	0,757	-0,100	0,048	0,400
M3	0,815	-0,144	0,046	0,410
M4	0,765	-0,050	0,121	0,357
M6	0,918	0,013	0,115	0,583
M7	0,826	-0,010	0,125	0,510
M8	0,865	-0,059	0,121	0,479
ED1	-0,029	0,963	0,083	0,349
ED2	-0,049	0,928	0,052	0,303
ED3	-0,090	0,877	0,016	0,220
ED4	-0,072	0,908	0,145	0,297
ED6	-0,065	0,956	0,112	0,352
SS1	0,111	0,146	0,953	0,643
SS2	0,055	0,102	0,818	0,464
SS3	0,088	0,052	0,888	0,537
SS4	-0,044	0,152	0,799	0,454
SS5	0,148	-0,075	0,716	0,444
SS6	0,192	0,146	0,924	0,680

	Motivation	Self-Efficacy	Soft Skill	Work Readiness
SS7	0,078	0,032	0,832	0,505
SS8	-0,017	0,037	0,814	0,435
SS9	0,162	0,108	0,875	0,617
SS10	0,162	0,015	0,767	0,440
KK1	0,493	0,244	0,552	0,820
KK2	0,348	0,289	0,506	0,740
KK3	0,498	0,420	0,572	0,857
KK4	0,335	0,223	0,430	0,703
KK6	0,486	0,203	0,485	0,755
KK7	0,384	0,142	0,506	0,785
KK8	0,526	0,335	0,397	0,751
KK10	0,255	0,243	0,479	0,706
KK12	0,491	0,150	0,407	0,748

Source : SmartPLS Output, 2025

The table above shows good discriminant validity. This is because the correlation value of the indicator with its construct is higher than the values of the other constructs. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is used to measure the degree of variance in a construct that is captured by its indicators while accounting for measurement error. AVE testing is considered more rigorous than composite reliability, with a recommended minimum value of 0.50. Additionally, if all latent variables demonstrate composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha values greater than 0.70, it indicates that the construct has good reliability, and the questionnaire employed as a research instrument is consistent.

Table 5. Average Variance Extracted, Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Information
Motivation (M)	0.906	0.928	0.683	Valid
Self-Efficacy (ED)	0.959	0.968	0.859	Valid
Soft Skills (SS)	0.953	0.960	0.708	Valid
Work Readiness (KK)	0.910	0.926	0.584	Valid

Source : SmartPLS Output, 2025

The table shows that all AVE values exceed 0.50, indicating that each indicator meets the required criteria and demonstrates strong potential reliability for further testing. Additionally, both Composite Reliability and Cronbach’s Alpha results are satisfactory, with all latent variables scoring above 0.70, confirming that the constructs are reliable. Therefore, the questionnaire used as the research instrument is deemed reliable and consistent. Inner model testing is the development of a concept-based model from theory in order to analyze the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables that have been described in the conceptual framework.

Table 6. R Square

Endogenous Variables	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
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Work Readiness	0,741	0,731
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Source : SmartPLS Output, 2025

Based on table above, the R-Square value of 0.741 indicates that 74.1% of the variance in work readiness is explained by the independent variables in the research model. This relatively high value demonstrates that the model has strong predictive capability. Furthermore, the adjusted R-Square value of 0.731 shows that, after accounting for the number of independent variables and sample size, 73.1% of the variance in work readiness remains explained by the model. The Goodness of Fit test for the structural model (inner model) was evaluated using the predictive relevance (Q²) value. A Q-Square value greater than zero indicates that the model has predictive relevance. The results of the Q-Square test in this study are presented in the following calculation:

Table 7. Predictive-Relevance

	Q²
Work Readiness	0.415

Source : SmartPLS Output, 2025

Based on the table above, the Q-Square value is 0.415, indicating that 41.5% of the variance in the research data can be explained by the model, while the remaining 58.5% is influenced by factors outside the scope of this study. Therefore, these results demonstrate that the research model possesses a satisfactory level of Goodness of Fit. The estimated path coefficients in the structural model must be statistically significant. This significance is determined through the Bootstrapping procedure by examining the parameter coefficients and the t-statistic values provided in the Bootstrapping algorithm report.

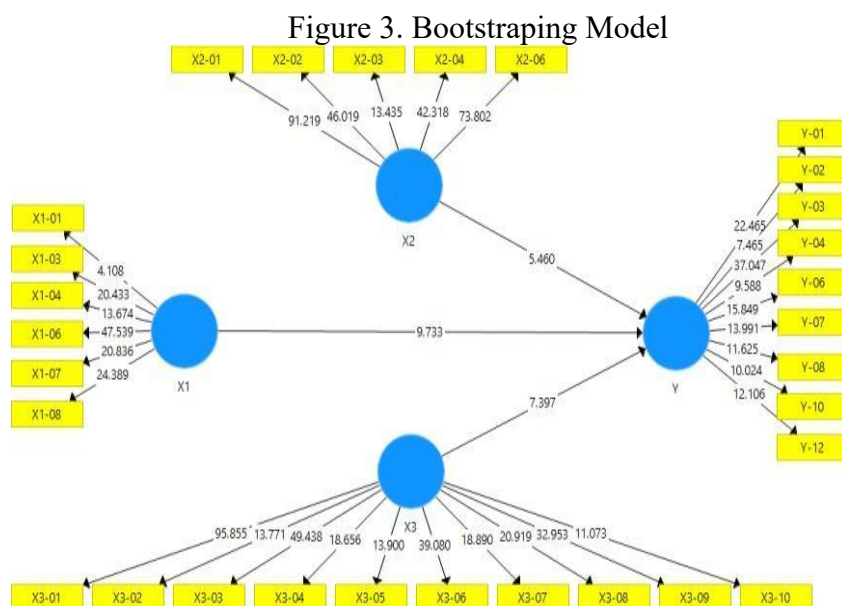
Table 8. Hypothesis

	<i>Original Sample (O)</i>	<i>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</i>	<i>T Statistics (O/STDEV)</i>	<i>P Values</i>	Information
Motivation -> Work readiness	0.519	0.056	9.191	0,000	Significant Positive
Self-Efficacy -> Work Readiness	0.317	0.060	5.251	0,000	Significant Positive
Soft Skills -> Job Readiness	0.542	0.068	7.922	0,000	Significant Positive

Source : SmartPLS Output, 2025

The probability value, or p-value, is used to determine whether the effect of one variable on another is strong enough to be considered significant. If the p-value is less than 0.05, the effect is deemed significant, indicating that the relationship between the variables is strong enough to support the hypothesis. Conversely, if the p-value is greater than 0.05, the effect is considered insignificant or too weak to support the hypothesis. Based on the table above, all variables have

p-values below 0.050, demonstrating that their effects are significant and that the hypotheses in the direct effect testing are accepted. Furthermore, the positive “original sample” values indicate that the relationships between these variables are in the same direction, meaning that an increase in one variable tends to be accompanied by an increase in the others.



Discussion

The hypothesis testing results demonstrate that motivation has a positive and significant effect on work readiness, supported by a T-statistic of 9.191, an original sample value of 0.519, and a p-value of 0.000, all exceeding the required thresholds. This indicates that students with higher motivation are more likely to actively pursue career goals and prepare themselves for the workforce. These findings are consistent with Hasibuan and Murtani (2024), who found a positive relationship between motivation and work readiness, and Deswarta et al. (2023), who similarly confirmed that motivation enhances students’ readiness to enter the labor market.

Self-efficacy was also found to significantly and positively influence work readiness, with a T- statistic of 5.251, an original sample value of 0.317, and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that students with strong confidence in their abilities are better equipped to handle tasks, adapt to challenges, and excel in professional settings. The result supports the findings of Ratuela (2022), who identified a positive link between self-efficacy and work readiness, and is further reinforced by Fauzita (2022), who emphasized that high self-efficacy enables graduates to transition smoothly into the workforce.

Similarly, soft skills exhibited a significant positive relationship with work readiness, evidenced by a T-statistic of 7.922, an original sample value of 0.542, and a p-value of 0.000. Students with strong interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities demonstrate greater adaptability to dynamic work environments, underscoring the importance of soft skills in career preparation. This finding is in line with Nurbaiti and Putri (2024), who highlighted the contribution of soft skills to students’ professional readiness, and is supported by Wiharja et al. (2020), who confirmed their role in improving employability outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the problem formulation, data analysis, and discussion presented in the previous

chapters, this study concludes that work readiness has a positive and significant effect on motivation, self-efficacy, and soft skills. High motivation encourages individuals to proactively seek career information, pursue learning opportunities, and remain persistent in preparing for the workforce. Likewise, strong work readiness enhances self-efficacy, enabling individuals to feel more confident in navigating job selection processes, performing tasks, adapting to new environments, and taking initiative in problem-solving. Furthermore, work readiness positively influences the development of soft skills, reflected in emotional regulation, maturity, and critical thinking, all of which are essential for professional success.

Based on the findings of this study on the influence of motivation, self-efficacy, and soft skills on the work readiness of Generation Z students at Universitas Mercu Buana Meruya Jakarta, several recommendations can be made. For Universitas Mercu Buana, the results highlight the importance of creating a supportive and conducive learning or internship environment to strengthen student motivation, while also fostering internal factors such as career goal setting, achievement orientation, and confidence. Furthermore, the low self-efficacy scores indicate the need for greater exposure to practical experiences, technical training, and competency-based projects to enhance confidence in specific fields. Similarly, improvements in teamwork skills should be prioritized through explicit soft skill training, collaborative activities, and team-based learning to prepare students for a competitive and team-oriented workforce. For future researchers, this study encourages the inclusion of additional variables, such as internship experience, digital literacy, and organizational involvement, and recommends expanding the respondent pool across faculties or universities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of work readiness factors.

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