

The Influence of Self-Efficacy and Soft Skills on Work Readiness of Students in the Indonesia-Timor Leste Border Region

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Received: 02/12/2025; **Accepted:** 02/12/2025; **Published:** 31/03/2025

Abstract: Graduate unemployment in Indonesia remains critically high despite increasing university enrollment, particularly in border regions where limited industrial access intensifies the education-employment gap. This study examines the influence of self-efficacy and soft skills on work readiness among 95 students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Timor University, located at the Indonesia-Timor Leste border. Using a quantitative explanatory design with simple random sampling and multiple linear regression analysis via SPSS, data were collected through validated questionnaires with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 for all constructs, and classical assumption tests confirmed normality, absence of multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Results reveal that soft skills significantly and positively influence work readiness ($\beta = 0.524$, $t = 4.141$, $p < 0.001$), while self-efficacy shows no significant effect ($\beta = 0.089$, $t = 0.780$, $p = 0.437$). The simultaneous model demonstrates significance ($F = 10.085$, $p < 0.001$) with $R^2 = 0.424$, indicating that 42.4% of the variance in work readiness is explained by the two predictors. This study contributes novel empirical evidence from a border-region university, challenging conventional assumptions that self-efficacy consistently predicts work readiness and highlighting the primacy of soft skills in resource-constrained labor markets. The findings imply that universities in peripheral areas should prioritize project-based and internship-linked soft skills training over purely motivational interventions to enhance graduate employability.

Keywords: *Self-Efficacy; Soft Skills; Work Readiness; Border Region Students; Employability.*

1. Introduction

Global labor market competition demands that university graduates possess competencies extending beyond formal academic achievement, including interpersonal skills, adaptability, and problem-solving capacity (Febiola et al., 2025). In Indonesia, educated unemployment remains relatively high, while the expansion of higher education has not been fully matched by graduate work readiness, especially in border regions such as North Central Timor Regency (TTU), which has limited access to industries and formal internship opportunities (Kirana & Septyarini, 2025). Work readiness has become a critical issue in higher education because universities are expected to produce graduates who are not only academically excellent but also capable of meeting labor market demands (Rusdarti & Ambarwati, 2020).

Previous research has identified self-efficacy and soft skills as two important factors affecting work readiness, yet empirical evidence remains inconsistent (Yasinta & Irfani, 2022). Several studies found that self-efficacy serves as a strong predictor of work readiness (Astuti et al., 2023), while others reported no significant effect when practical competencies and work experience were considered, particularly among young students facing digital labor market transformations (Nuraini & Usman, 2022; Putri, 2024). Moreover, the majority of research has been conducted in large cities with more developed internship and industrial infrastructure, so the context of universities in border regions remains underrepresented (Turangan et al., 2025). This gap indicates the need to re-examine the role of self-efficacy and soft skills in different socio-economic contexts, namely border environments with limited access to practical learning resources.

This study aims to analyze the influence of self-efficacy and soft skills on work readiness among students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Timor University, located at the Indonesia-Timor Leste border. Specifically, this study tests the partial effect of each variable and their simultaneous effect on work readiness, with the hope of providing empirical contributions regarding which factor is more dominant in preparing students in border regions to enter the workforce (Salsa & Nurbaya, 2025). The research findings are expected to enrich the development of Social Cognitive Theory in new contexts while serving as a basis for formulating curriculum policies that are more responsive to regional labor market needs.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

Establish This study is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes reciprocal interactions among personal factors, behavior, and environment in shaping individual performance, including work readiness (Bandura, 2019). Within this framework, self-efficacy is positioned as personal belief in one's capabilities, while soft skills represent the behavioral dimension manifest in work contexts, and the border environment becomes the context that moderates the utilization of both factors (Rusdarti & Ambarwati, 2020).

Work readiness is defined as the condition when individuals possess an adequate combination of attitudes, knowledge, and skills to enter and adapt productively in the workforce (Pool & Sewell, 2007, as cited in Rusdarti & Ambarwati, 2020). Indicators of work readiness in this study include work attitudes, skills, and knowledge relevant to job demands in both formal and informal sectors, consistent with contemporary employability concepts (Febiola et al., 2025).

2.2. Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions necessary to achieve specific performance, formed through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological-emotional states (Bandura, 2019). In the student context, self-efficacy is reflected in confidence when facing academic tasks, work challenges, and ability to adapt to professional environment demands (Yasinta & Irfani, 2022). Previous research found that self-efficacy is positively related to work readiness and intention to enter the workforce, although the strength of this relationship varies across contexts and sample types (Astuti et al., 2023).

In this study, self-efficacy is measured using indicators of level, strength, and generality, reflecting the breadth of tasks believed to be manageable, strength of conviction, and consistency across various situations (Bandura, 2019). Theoretically, students with high self-efficacy are expected to be more proactive in seeking information, participating in training, and preparing themselves for transition to the workforce, thus assumed to have higher levels of work readiness (Rusdarti & Ambarwati, 2020).

- **H1: Self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.**

2.3. Soft Skills and Work Readiness

Soft skills refer to a set of interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities such as communication, teamwork, responsibility, integrity, and adaptability that support work effectiveness in various contexts (Rofifah, 2020). The modern workforce positions soft skills as crucial elements in recruitment and promotion processes, often serving as the primary differentiator among applicants with similar academic qualifications (Salsa & Nurbaya, 2025). In Indonesia, various studies show that soft skills honed through organizational experience, collaborative projects, and internship programs contribute significantly to graduate employability (Febiola et al., 2025).

The soft skills instrument in this study was adapted from Sharma's indicators, encompassing communication, cooperation, responsibility, honesty, and adaptability (Sharma, 2009, as cited in Juariah, 2019). Students with strong soft skills are deemed more ready to face work dynamics, capable of working in cross-cultural teams, and possess good problem-solving abilities, thus assumed to have higher work readiness compared to students with low soft skills (Lie & Darmasetiawan, 2018).

- **H2: Soft skills have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.**

2.4. Hypothesis Development

Based on Social Cognitive Theory, work performance and readiness to enter the workforce are influenced by a combination of self-belief and skills possessed by individuals (Bandura, 2019). Although some research found that self-efficacy alone is insufficient without support from real skills, other studies indicate that the combination of self-efficacy and soft skills can explain greater variation in work readiness compared to each factor separately (Turangan et al., 2025). In the context of border regions with limited industrial access, the interaction between self-efficacy and soft skills becomes increasingly important, as students must utilize both aspects to overcome structural barriers (Kirana & Septyarini, 2025).

Thus, this study proposes that self-efficacy and soft skills simultaneously make a significant contribution to students' work readiness, both through psychological belief and behavioral competency pathways (Rusdarti & Ambarwati, 2020).

- **H3: Self-efficacy and soft skills simultaneously have a significant effect on students' work readiness.**

2.5. Conceptual Framework

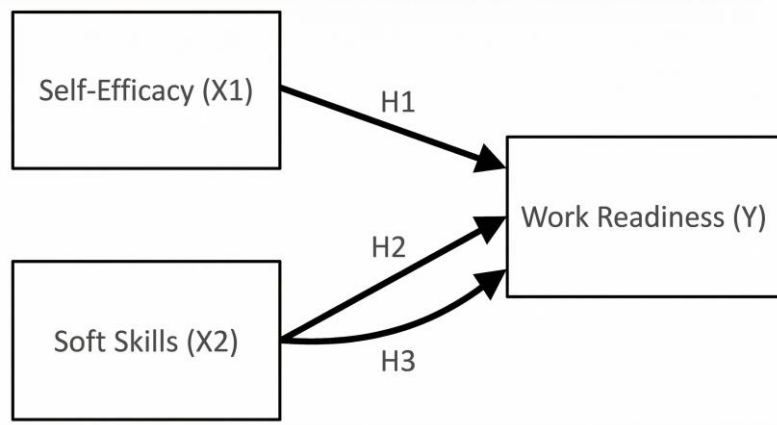


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to test causal relationships among self-efficacy, soft skills, and students' work readiness. The study was conducted cross-sectionally among active students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Timor University, allowing empirical hypothesis testing within a single data collection period.

3.2. Population and Sample

The research population consisted of all 1,874 active students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Timor University, distributed across several study programs. Sample size was determined using Slovin's formula with a 10% margin of error, yielding 95 respondents considered adequate for multiple linear regression analysis: $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{1874}{1 + 1874(0.12)^2} = 95$

The sampling technique employed probability sampling with simple random sampling to ensure every population member had equal selection probability and enhance generalizability of findings. Respondent selection was conducted by randomizing student identification numbers using software assistance to minimize selection bias.

3.3. Data Collection

Primary data were collected using closed questionnaires with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) distributed directly to respondents on campus. The data collection process was conducted from May to November 2025 with approval from study programs and course lecturers, achieving a 100% response rate. Respondents were given brief explanations regarding research purposes and assured of identity confidentiality as part of research ethics.

3.4. Measurement Instruments

The self-efficacy variable was measured using indicators of level, strength, and generality adapted from Bandura's concept, with several items reflecting students' confidence in completing tasks and facing academic and work

challenges (Bandura, 2019). Soft skills were measured based on indicators of communication, cooperation, responsibility, honesty, and adaptation adapted from Sharma and previous research on student employability (Sharma, 2009, as cited in Juariah, 2019). Work readiness was measured through indicators of work attitudes, skills, and knowledge relevant to workforce needs, referring to readiness and employability concepts (Pool & Sewell, 2007, as cited in Rusdarti & Ambarwati, 2020).

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Validity testing was conducted using Pearson correlation between item scores and total scores, with the criterion that items are valid if the calculated r -value is greater than the r -table at a 0.05 significance level. Test results showed that all items for self-efficacy, soft skills, and work readiness variables met validity criteria, with item correlation ranges above the minimum threshold. Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and all variables had alpha values above 0.70, indicating that instruments were reliable and consistent for use in research. (Huda, et al. 2025)

3.6. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed using SPSS through several stages: classical assumption tests (normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity), multiple linear regression analysis, and hypothesis testing using t -tests and F -tests. Normality testing was conducted using Kolmogorov–Smirnov, multicollinearity was assessed from Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, and heteroscedasticity was tested through residual scatter patterns. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the magnitude of the simultaneous contribution of self-efficacy and soft skills to students' work readiness.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Present Measurement Model Evaluation

Validity test results showed that all statement items for self-efficacy, soft skills, and work readiness variables had item-total correlation values exceeding the r -table, thus validly measuring their respective constructs. Cronbach's alpha values for self-efficacy, soft skills, and work readiness variables were all above 0.70, indicating good instrument reliability and adequate internal consistency.

Classical assumption tests showed that data were normally distributed with Kolmogorov–Smirnov test significance values above 0.05, no multicollinearity occurred with VIF values below 10, and no indication of heteroscedasticity from random residual scatter patterns. Thus, data met prerequisites for conducting multiple linear regression analysis to test research hypotheses.

4.2. Structural Model Evaluation

Hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple linear regression with self-efficacy (X1) and soft skills (X2) as independent variables, and work readiness (Y) as the dependent variable. T -test results showed that self-efficacy had no significant effect on work readiness, with a calculated t -value of 0.780 less than the t -table of 1.662 and a significance value of 0.437 greater than 0.05, thus H1 was rejected. Conversely, soft skills had a positive and significant effect on work readiness with a calculated t -value of 4.141 greater than the t -table of 1.662 and a significance value of 0.000 less than 0.05, thus H2 was accepted.

Simultaneously, F -test results showed that self-efficacy and soft skills together had a significant effect on students' work readiness, with a calculated F -value of 10.085 greater than the F -table of 3.10 and significance of 0.000. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.424 indicated that 42.4% of the variation in work readiness could be explained by the combination of self-efficacy and soft skills, while the remainder was influenced by other factors outside the model such as internship experience, digital literacy, and social environment support (Turangan et al., 2025).

4.3. Discussion

The finding that self-efficacy had no significant effect on students' work readiness contradicts some literature positioning self-efficacy as a primary predictor of performance and readiness but aligns with studies stating that confidence without support from experience and real skills only produces optimism without strong foundation (Nuraini & Usman, 2022; Putri, 2024). In the Timor University context, many students possess self-efficacy formed from academic success in classrooms but not yet balanced with direct exposure to the workforce, so their confidence is not fully relevant to professional work environment demands (Astuti et al., 2023). This explains why self-efficacy did not emerge as a significant factor partially, although it still contributed when tested together with soft skills.

Conversely, soft skills proved to be the dominant predictor of work readiness, reinforcing the view that communication abilities, cooperation, responsibility, and adaptability constitute the main foundation of employability across various sectors, including in border regions (Salsa & Nurbaya, 2025). Students active in student organizations, group activities, and project-based assignments tended to have higher soft skill and work readiness scores, demonstrating the important role of practical experience in shaping readiness to enter the workforce (Febiola et al., 2025). In border labor markets dominated by small and medium enterprises with high flexibility demands, soft skills become key capital enabling graduates to adapt to various job types and work situations (Lie & Darmasetiawan, 2018).

Simultaneously, the significant combination of self-efficacy and soft skills on work readiness supports Social Cognitive Theory's assumption that self-belief and behavioral skills complement each other in forming readiness to face complex tasks (Bandura, 2019). However, this research also shows that in resource-limited contexts such as border regions, soft skill contribution is more dominant than pure self-efficacy, making educational interventions emphasizing strengthening real competencies more urgent than merely increasing motivation or self-confidence (Rusdarti & Ambarwati, 2020)

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This study concludes that work readiness of students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Timor University in the Indonesia–Timor Leste border region is more determined by mastery of soft skills than merely self-efficacy. Self-efficacy had no significant partial effect on work readiness ($t = 0.780$; $p = 0.437$), while soft skills had a positive and significant effect ($t = 4.141$; $p = 0.000$), and simultaneously both variables explained 42.4% of work readiness variation through a significant regression model ($F = 10.085$; $p = 0.000$).

5.2. Theoretical Implications

This finding provides important input for developing Social Cognitive Theory in the education-to-work transition context, demonstrating that self-efficacy is not always a strong predictor of work readiness when not supported by experience and relevant behavioral skills (Nuraini & Usman, 2022). The research also enriches employability literature by confirming that in border region contexts, soft skills play a more central role than self-belief alone, so conceptual models of work readiness need to include geographic context factors and availability of practical learning infrastructure as variables moderating relationships among constructs (Turangan et al., 2025).

5.3. Practical Implications

For higher education administrators, particularly Timor University, this research suggests that student development programs should focus more on strengthening soft skills through project-based activities, organizations, and structured internships rather than relying solely on motivational seminars to increase self-efficacy (Salsa & Nurbaya, 2025). The curriculum needs to be integrated with learning activities simulating real work situations, such as cross-curricular projects, collaboration with local business actors, and utilization of digital platforms for professional communication practice (Febiola et al., 2025). Local governments and businesses in the TTU region can also contribute by providing short-term internship opportunities and mentoring programs for students so their soft skills develop in line with regional labor market needs.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations, including a cross-sectional design that does not allow tracking changes in self-efficacy, soft skills, and work readiness longitudinally throughout the study period. The research scope limited to one faculty and one university in a border region also limits generalization of findings to other contexts, so follow-up studies are recommended to involve several universities in East Nusa Tenggara and other border regions. Additionally, 57.6% of work readiness variation remains unexplained, indicating the importance of including additional variables such as internship experience, digital literacy, family support, and quality of campus career services in subsequent research models (Turangan et al., 2025).

Acknowledgment

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Faculty of Economics and Business, Timor University, for institutional support and facilitation of this research. Special appreciation is extended to all student respondents who voluntarily participated in this study and contributed valuable data for advancing knowledge in employability research in border regions.

AI Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge the use of Perplexity AI and ChatGPT to improve grammar, punctuation, fluency, and translation of selected manuscript sections from Indonesian to English. The prompts used include “translate this paragraph to English maintaining academic tone,” “check grammar and punctuation,” and “suggest improvements for clarity in this sentence.” The output from these prompts was used to refine language quality and ensure adherence to APA 7th edition standards. While the authors acknowledge the usage of AI, they maintain that they are the sole authors of this article and take full responsibility for the content therein, as outlined in COPE recommendations.

Informed Consent

The authors have obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Maria Ivonia Bona Funan: Conceptualization, literature review, research design, data collection, data analysis, original draft writing, project supervision, theoretical framework guidance, critical review of analysis, final approval of manuscript, revision and final approval.

Yesus Armiro Korbaffo: Hypothesis development, questionnaire development, statistical analysis assistance, manuscript review and editing.