

A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Work Readiness among Undergraduate Students

Nur Amirah Abd Maskadiron¹, *Rosintansafinas Munir², Hairunnisa Ma'amor²

¹Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara, Shah Alam, Malaysia

²Universiti Teknologi Mara, Cawangan Selangor, Puncak Alam,

Email: amirah@yahoo.com, *rosint2778@uitm.edu.my, hairun2952@uitm.edu.my

Corresponding Author: Rosintansafinas Munir

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify the determinants of work readiness among undergraduate business students at the Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Selangor Campus. This research seeks to identify whether self-efficacy, salary expectations, people qualities, and individual experiences are vital to business and management students when entering the working environment in the future. A simple random technique will be conducted, and a total of 331 respondents will participate in this study. The multiple regression analysis will be employed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Some limitations will be observed, in which the number of responses is rather moderate, and it might not be able to capture and generalize in this context. In addition, the work readiness factors only focus on self-efficacy, salary expectations, people's qualities, and individual experiences. By exploring these factors, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for curriculum enhancement, career counseling, and policy development, ultimately contributing to improved graduate outcomes. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to offer valuable perspectives for academia and industry in fostering a collaborative approach to address marketability challenges in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Work Readiness, Self-Efficacy, Salary Expectations, Experience, Undergraduate Students.*

1. Introduction and Background

Graduate employability has become a focal point in higher education, particularly in nations aiming to position themselves as regional hubs for talent development. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education's Graduate Tracer Study reported a Graduate Employability (GE) rate of 89.8% in 2023. Further, the employment status breakdown shows that 67.5% of graduates are employed, 18.9% are pursuing further studies, 1.9% are improving their skills, and 3.5% are waiting for job placement. On top of that, graduates from certain disciplines, particularly in education (7.3%), humanities (5.7%), and social sciences (8.6%), face greater challenges in securing employment compared to those in technical fields like engineering (11.2%) and information technology (7.0%). Furthermore, Malaysian graduates exhibit lack of work readiness and deficiency in essential skills (Abdullah, Al-Dubai, & Ateik, 2023; Mohd Salleh, Mapjabil, Legino, 2019). For instance, graduates were reported to make up 23% of the youth unemployment rate. One key factor contributing to this issue is the inadequacy of the Malaysian tertiary education curriculum in equipping students with the necessary skills, attributes, and professional qualities sought by employers (Ibrahim, Ali, Fangling, Ahmed, Abdullahi, Ali, 2018). Therefore, it shows a warning sign in ensuring that graduates possess the work readiness skills demanded by an increasingly dynamic and competitive labor market. This gap highlights the urgency for educational institutions to align academic programs with industry expectations.

At Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), initiatives aimed at enhancing work readiness among students have gained momentum, particularly in programs within the Faculty of Business & Management. Talentbank announced that UiTM is one of the Employers' Preferred Universities in the 2023 National Graduate Employability Index. Furthermore, the business management program received a 6-star rating. As one of Malaysia's largest public universities, UiTM's commitment to fostering employability is evident through its robust curriculum, industry partnerships, and focus on experiential learning.

Work readiness refers to a state in which an individual possesses the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and both physical and mental well-being necessary to perform tasks effectively (Putri & Violinda, 2024). Student work-readiness also refers to the ability of graduates to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. University-level student organizations serve as a valuable platform for developing both soft skills and work readiness (Kristiana et al., 2025). The development of work readiness is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include self-efficacy and students' skills; meanwhile, the external factors are

salary expectations and work experience. In this context, universities play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic preparation and real-world application, ensuring students are well-equipped for the challenges ahead.

Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to execute tasks effectively, has emerged as a key determinant of work readiness (Lusyiana and Wolor, 2023). Unfortunately, Makki, Feng, Waqar and Adhikari (2023) found that self-efficacy among graduates contributes to a shortage of competent workers and a higher unemployment rate in Malaysia." Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to approach job challenges confidently and demonstrate resilience in professional settings (Tentama et al., 2019). Similarly, salary expectations shape graduates' perceptions of job opportunities, influencing their willingness to accept roles and their overall career satisfaction (Brown & Souto-Otero, 2020). Nevertheless, salary expectations have contributed little to youth unemployment rates (Jamil & Zakaria, 2019).

Previous studies highlighted that the value of practical experiences and gaining working experience during students' academic programs significantly enhances their readiness to enter the workforce (Neesya & Hadi, 2025; Hidayatulloh et al., 2024). According to Kristiana, Syamsuddin, Giovanni, and Meitiana (2025) mentioned that 70 percent lack essential skills and experience, indicating a significant gap in students' preparedness for employment. In addition, Wong and Beh (2024) mentioned that a major concern is the mismatch between the skills graduates possess and those required by employers, which further intensifies employability challenges.

Work readiness has been extensively studied in various global contexts and across different academic disciplines (Kristiana et al., 2025; Neesya & Hadi, 2025; Putri & Violinda, 2024). However, research on the determinants of work readiness has received little attention (Li, Huang, Fong, Chen & Song, 2022), particularly among undergraduate business students (Orr et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aims to understand the students' preferences for work readiness among the undergraduate students in the Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM, Selangor Campus.

2. Literature Review

Work Readiness: Work readiness is a multidimensional concept involving technical skills, soft skills, and personal attributes that collectively prepare individuals for effective workplace performance. Herbert et al. (2020) describe work readiness as encompassing not only technical proficiency but also interpersonal and problem-solving skills, making it a critical determinant of employability. They argue that integrating these components into the educational curriculum can improve graduates' ability to meet industry demands.

Alam and Parvin (2021) extend this perspective by highlighting the increasing importance of adaptability and digital competence due to rapid technological advancements and challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. They emphasize that work readiness should also address resilience and emotional intelligence to prepare graduates for evolving work environments. This underscores the need for a holistic approach in higher education. Further, Phan, Yapa, and Nguyen (2020) note that many educational institutions are actively incorporating internships and practical experiences into their programs to enhance work readiness. Such initiatives allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, thereby bridging the gap between academia and industry. This practical exposure is crucial in developing job-specific and transferable skills that improve career outcomes.

Self-Efficacy: Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (2023), refers to an individual's belief in their ability to execute tasks successfully. Fitriyana et al. (2021) assert that self-efficacy significantly influences students' confidence and preparedness for the workforce, making it a vital predictor of work readiness. In addition, Putri and Violinda (2024) mentioned that students who believe in their abilities are more confident and prepared to enter the workforce. Tentama et al. (2019) examine the development of self-efficacy through educational experiences, emphasizing the vital role of supportive learning environments. They argue that mentorship and hands-on opportunities like internships and project-based work can strengthen self-efficacy, ultimately improving students' readiness for the workforce.

Lusyiana and Wolor (2023) investigate the cyclical relationship between self-efficacy and professional success.

They contend that as students accumulate experience and achieve small successes through internships or part-time work, their self-efficacy grows, which in turn boosts their employability. This positive feedback loop indicates that offering students opportunities for incremental achievements can lead to continuous enhancement of their work readiness. Therefore, the first hypothesis was developed:

H1: There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness.

Salary Expectations: Salary expectations significantly impact graduates' job search behavior and early career decisions. Hirschi (2020) notes that realistic salary expectations align graduates' aspirations with labor market conditions, leading to more effective job placement and satisfaction. Conversely, unrealistic expectations often result in prolonged job searches and dissatisfaction, which can hinder career progression. Dudley et al. (2020) emphasize that salary expectations are influenced by factors such as educational background, industry standards, and individual self-perception. They suggest that career counseling services should incorporate market trend analyses to help students develop realistic expectations. This alignment can enhance work readiness by preparing graduates for negotiations and professional interactions.

Additionally, Bubou and Job (2022) argue that salary expectations reflect graduates' perceived value in the job market. Their research highlights the importance of transparent communication between educational institutions and students regarding salary benchmarks. This transparency helps students set achievable goals and fosters a pragmatic approach to career planning. Thus, the second hypothesis was formulated:

H2: There is a significant relationship between salary expectations and work readiness.

People Qualities and Skills: People's qualities and soft skills are increasingly recognized as critical for employability in modern workplaces. People's qualities and skills refer to the interpersonal and soft skills that enable effective interaction, communication, and collaboration with others in a professional setting (Febriantina et al., 2024). According to Ahmad, Salamuddin, and Surat (2021), employers are looking for graduates who have added value, where strong skills and qualities are in line with the market demand. Suroto et al. (2024) studied that individual factors, including soft skills and interpersonal skills, are influencing factors in shaping students' career readiness. Fatima et al. (2020) highlight communication, teamwork, and adaptability as essential qualities valued by employers. They suggest that these skills help graduates transition smoothly into the workplace and play a meaningful role in achieving team goals.

Moreover, Sudarsono et al. (2024) support experiential learning as an effective approach to cultivating personal attributes and skills. They highlighted that through involvement in group projects and case studies, students acquire hands-on experience in understanding and managing workplace dynamics. This practical approach not only strengthens their soft skills but also increases their confidence and prepares them to face professional challenges effectively. In a nutshell, students' qualities and skills are essential for preparing them to thrive in a dynamic and evolving job market. Therefore, the third hypothesis was developed for this study:

H3: There is a significant relationship between people's qualities and skills towards work readiness.

Individual Experience: Practical experience is a cornerstone of work readiness, providing students with insights into workplace dynamics and expectations. Individual experience encompasses the practical knowledge, skills, and insights gained through participation in work-related activities, internships, or part-time jobs during the course of one's education (Hidayatulloh et al., 2024). According to Neesya and Hadi (2025), by undertaking work experience during their studies, students are better equipped to face future professional demands. Herbert et al. (2020) emphasize that internships and part-time jobs offer students opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, bridging the gap between academia and industry. Dudley et al. (2020) highlight the competitive advantage gained through relevant work experience, noting that employers often prefer candidates who require minimal on-the-job training. They argue that practical experience not only improves technical skills but also fosters essential soft skills like time management and communication.

Adnan et al. (2021) explore the broader implications of experiential learning, suggesting that it shapes career aspirations and professional identity. Kristiana et al. (2025) added that extensive organizational experience tends to exhibit greater confidence in completing academic tasks and facing professional challenges. In conclusion, universities should offer platforms that enable students to engage in diverse work experiences,

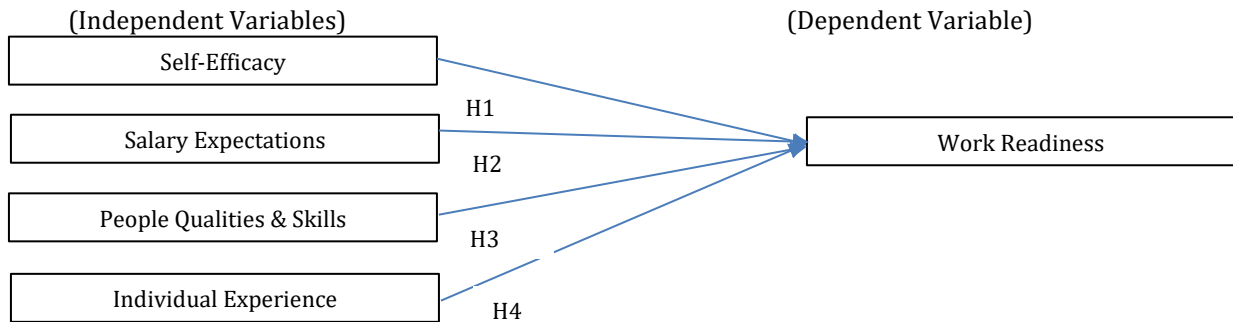
better preparing them to make informed career decisions, enhance their work readiness, and improve long-term employability. Thus, the fourth hypothesis was formulated for this study:

H4: There is a significant relationship between individual experience and work readiness.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is presented in Figure 1. It illustrates the proposed relationships between the independent variables (self-efficacy, salary expectations, people qualities & skills, and individual experience) and the dependent variable (work readiness). The framework serves as a visual representation of the hypothesized relationships and guides the research design and analysis.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework [Source: (Allysya et al., 2024), (Hirschi, 2020)]



3. Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate the factors of work readiness among final-year students in the Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Selangor. The study specifically examines self-efficacy, salary expectations, people's qualities, and individual experience as predictors of work readiness.

This study will be conducted quantitatively using a questionnaire survey. A total of 331 final year students will be selected using simple random sampling, as it allows investigation of the different perceptions of UiTM Selangor business and management students. The instruments will be adopted from validated instruments in previous studies. For instance, the self-efficacy scale is adapted from Bandura (1997), while the salary expectation and people's qualities scales are adapted from Hirschi (2020) and Fatima et al. (2020), respectively. Moreover, the individual experience will be adapted from Kamaruddin et al. (2021). Respondents will evaluate their level of agreement based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

A pilot test will be conducted to ensure reliability; meanwhile, an expert from industry will be identified to validate the instrument. Necessary adjustments will be addressed before distribution. The collected data will be analyzed and interpreted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. Conclusion

In essence, this study proposes a framework for understanding the students' preferences for work readiness among final-year business students at UiTM Selangor. The findings of this study may contribute to improving the alignment between educational programs and industry needs by highlighting the importance of self-efficacy, salary expectations, interpersonal skills, and personal experiences. By focusing on these elements, universities can more effectively prepare students for their careers, enhancing employability and long-term success.

One limitation of this study is that the framework is designed to examine the relationship between self-efficacy, salary expectations, interpersonal qualities and skills, and individual experience in relation to work readiness. Additionally, the study will be conducted exclusively with undergraduate students at the UiTM Selangor

Campus. It is recommended that future studies expand the sample size to a wider population by having business and management students from other UiTM campuses in Malaysia. Notably, the Faculty of Business and Management is the biggest in UiTM, hence the future studies can generalize the results. Additionally, future research could investigate other factors, such as digital readiness. Mkhize and Reddy (2025) emphasize that the shift brought about by Industry 4.0 demands that individuals develop digital skills and competencies to adapt and succeed in the evolving workplace.

Ultimately, such initiatives can help close the gap between academic learning and employment, ensuring that graduates are better prepared to succeed in a rapidly changing job market. These insights can serve as valuable guidance for policymakers, including the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), in developing well-informed educational strategies, curriculum design, and employment policies. Furthermore, this research may provide a strong foundation for addressing graduates' skill deficiencies and enhancing their prospects for future employment.

References

- Abdullah, M. S. Al-Dubai, M. M. M., & Ateik, A. A. M. (2023). Self-efficacy mediates work ethics and work readiness. *International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management (IJAEM)*, 5(5), 881-895.
- Adnan, A. H. M., Rahmat, A. M., Mohtar, N. M., & Anuar, N. (2021, February). Industry 4.0 critical skills and career readiness of ASEAN TVET tertiary students in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. *In Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1793 (1), 012004. IOP Publishing.
- Ahmad, M. F., Salamuddin, N., & Surat, S. (2021). The marketability of UiTM products: a study of employability skills among UiTM Perlis sports graduates. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(1), 195-207.
- Alam, G. M., & Parvin, M. (2021). Can online higher education be an active change agent?—Comparison of academic success and job-readiness before and during COVID-19. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 172, 121008.
- Bandura, A. (2023). Cultivate self-efficacy for personal and organizational effectiveness. *Principles of Organizational Behavior: The Handbook of Evidence-Based Management 3rd Edition*, 113–135.
- Brown, P., & Souto-Otero, M. (2020). The end of the credential society? An analysis of the relationship between education and the labor market using big data. *Journal of Education Policy*, 35(1), 95-111.
- Bubou, G. M., & Job, G. C. (2022). Individual innovativeness, self-efficacy, and e-learning readiness of students of Yenagoa study centre, National Open University of Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, 15(1), 2-22.
- Dudley, M., Khaw, D., Botti, M., & Hutchinson, A. F. (2020). The relationship between the undergraduate clinical learning environment and work readiness in new graduate nurses: A pre-post survey study. *Nurse Education Today*, 94, 104587.
- Fatima, M., Riaz, A., Mahmood, H. Z., & Usman, M. (2020). Linking employees' change-related self-efficacy, change readiness, and commitment to change. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS)*, 14(1), 334-367.
- Febriantina, S., Widyastuti, U., & Bilqiis, A. L. (2024). The Influence of Mastering Soft Skills and Digital Literacy on the work readiness of class xii students at smkn 30 Jakarta. *Neraca: Jurnal Ekonomi, Manajemen dan Akuntansi*, 2(8), 121-133.
- Fitriyana, A. N., Kurjono, K., & Santoso, B. (2021). The influence of self-efficacy on students' readiness. *Jurnal Konseling Pendidikan Islam*, 2(2), 233-238.
- Herbert, I. P., Rothwell, A. T., Glover, J. L., & Lambert, S. A. (2020). Graduate employability, employment prospects, and work-readiness in the changing field of professional work. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 18(2), 100378.
- Hidayatulloh, M. K. Y., Ekohariadi, E., Suparji, S., & Çobanoğlu, Ö. (2024). The Influence of Locus of Control and Internship Experience on the Work Readiness of Vocational Education Students. *International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science*, 3(02), 184-195.
- Hirschi, A. (2020). Whole-life career management: A counseling intervention framework. *The career development quarterly*, 68(1), 2-17.

- Ibrahim, M. F., Ali, A. J., Fangling, B., Ahmed, Z., Abdullahi, N., & Ali, S. (2018). Graduate Employability in Malaysia: Analyzing Students' Level of Study and Fields of Study in Relation to their Employability. *13*(4), 1095-1116.
- Jamil, R., & Zakaria, Z. (2019). Analyzing Work and Salary Expectations of Unemployed Youths. *Malaysian Journal of Youth Studies*, 20, 80-99.
- Kamaruddin, M. I. H., Ahmad, A., Husain, M. A., & Abd Hamid, S. N. (2021). Graduate employability post-COVID-19: the case of a Malaysian public university. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 11(3), 710-724.
- Kristiana, J., Syamsuddin, A., Giovanni, J., & Meitiana, M. (2025). Bridging soft skills and work readiness: The strategic role of self-efficacy and organizational experience in final-year students. *JSM: Jurnal Sains Management*, 14(1), 1-15.
- Li, J., Huang, Y., Fong, D. Y. T., Chen, J. & Song, Y. (2022). Work readiness: Its determinants and association with work-related outcomes among new graduate nurses. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 30(7), 2968-2981.
- Lusyiana, A., & Wolor, C. W. (2023). The Influence of Secretarial Competence, Self-Esteem & Self-Efficacy on the Work Readiness of Final Year Students. *Business and Investment Review*, 1(6), 63-72.
- Makki, B. I., Feng, F., Waqar, M. A., & Adhikari, I. M. (2023). Work Readiness, Decision-Making Self-Efficacy, and Career Exploration among Engineering Students: A Two-Step Framework. *Mathematical Problems in Engineering*, 2023(1), 816-825.
- Mkhize, S., & Reddy, T. (2025). Work Readiness in an Emergency Digital Learning Environment: Students' Self-Perception and Employer Expectation. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 7(si1), 1-15.
- Mohd Salleh, N., Mapjabil, J., Legino, R. (2019). Graduate Work-Readiness in Malaysia: Challenges, Skills and Opportunities. In: Dhakal, S., Prikshat, V., Nankervis, A., Burgess, J. (eds) *The Transition from Graduation to Work. Work, Organization, and Employment*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0974-8_8.
- Neesya, M. P., & Hadi, W. (2025, April). The Influence Of Maturity And Work Experience On The Work Readiness Of Students In The Study Abroad Program In Taiwan. In *International Student Conference on Business, Education, Economics, Accounting, and Management (ISC-BEAM)* (Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1557-1571).
- Orr, P., Forsyth, L., Caballero, C., Rosenberg, C., & Walker, A. (2023). A systematic review of Australian higher education students' and graduates' work readiness. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 42(7), 1714-1731.
- Phan, D., Yapa, P., & Nguyen, H. T. (2020). Accounting graduate readiness for work: a case study of South East Asia. *Education+ Training*, 63(3), 392-416.
- Putri, S. D., & Violinda, Q. (2024). The Influence of Competency, Career Guidance, and Self-Efficacy on Work Readiness. *Value Management Research*, 1(2), 75-86.
- Sudarsono, B., Listyaningrum, P., Tentama, F., & Ghozali, F. A. (2024). Developing learning and training within an industry model to improve the work readiness of vocational high school students. *Int J Eval & Res Educ*, 13(3), 1731-1739.
- Suroto, S., Sunyono, S., Sukirlan, M., Winatha, I. K., Yuliyanto, R., & Rahmawati, F. (2024). Factors Affecting the Work Readiness of Vocational School Students: A Systematic Literature Review. *Jurnal Pendidikan Progresif*, 14(3), 1831-1846.
- Tentama, F., Merdiaty, N., & Subardjo, S. (2019). Self-efficacy and work readiness among vocational high school students. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 13(2), 277-281.
- Wong, S. Y., & Beh, C. Y. (2024). Malaysian Graduates' Employability in Post-COVID-19: A Swot Analysis. *Journal of International Business, Economics and Entrepreneurship*, 9(2), 29-40.