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Assessing The Work Readiness of Students: The Role of Internships Experience and Soft Skill Competencies

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia continues to face challenges regarding the work readiness of university graduates, as many lack practical exposure and essential soft skills demanded by the labor market. In response, entrepreneurship-oriented higher education institutions, such as Ciputra School of Business Makassar, have integrated internship programs and soft skill development into their curriculum. This study examines the impact of internship experience and soft skill competencies on students' work readiness using the Human Capital Theory as a foundation. A quantitative approach was employed with data collected from 92 students at STIE Ciputra Makassar. Variance-based Structural Equation Modelling (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS 3.0 was utilized to analyze relationships among variables. Findings confirm that both internship experience and soft skills significantly enhance work readiness, with communication, teamwork, and adaptability being crucial in bridging the transition from academia to the workplace. The study contributes to human capital and employability literature by emphasizing the entrepreneurial context in developing work readiness. Universities should design structured, industry-aligned internship programs and integrate soft skill development systematically, while companies are encouraged to mentor interns through competency-based assessments. Limitations include single-institution scope; thus, future research should involve broader samples and qualitative exploration.

Keywords: Work Readiness, Internship Experience, Soft Skill Competencies, Human Capital Theory, Entrepreneurship Education.

ABSTRAK

Indonesia terus menghadapi tantangan terkait kesiapan kerja lulusan perguruan tinggi, karena banyak di antara mereka yang masih kurang memiliki pengalaman praktis dan keterampilan lunak (soft skills) yang dibutuhkan oleh pasar kerja. Sebagai tanggapan terhadap hal tersebut, institusi pendidikan tinggi yang berorientasi pada kewirausahaan, seperti Ciputra School of Business Makassar, telah mengintegrasikan program magang dan pengembangan keterampilan lunak ke dalam kurikulumnya.Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh pengalaman magang dan kompetensi keterampilan lunak terhadap kesiapan kerja mahasiswa dengan menggunakan Teori Modal Manusia (Human Capital Theory) sebagai landasan. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dengan pengumpulan data dari 92 mahasiswa di STIE Ciputra Makassar. Analisis hubungan antar variabel dilakukan menggunakan Structural Equation Modelling berbasis varians (SEM-PLS) melalui aplikasi SmartPLS 3.0. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa baik pengalaman magang maupun keterampilan lunak secara signifikan meningkatkan kesiapan kerja mahasiswa, di mana komunikasi, kerja sama tim, dan kemampuan beradaptasi menjadi faktor penting dalam menjembatani transisi dari dunia akademik ke dunia kerja. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada literatur tentang modal manusia dan keterkerjaan (employability) dengan menekankan konteks kewirausahaan dalam pengembangan kesiapan kerja. Perguruan tinggi disarankan untuk merancang program magang yang terstruktur dan selaras dengan kebutuhan industri, serta mengintegrasikan pengembangan keterampilan lunak secara sistematis, sementara perusahaan diharapkan dapat membimbing peserta magang melalui penilaian berbasis kompetensi. Keterbatasan penelitian ini terletak pada ruang lingkupnya yang hanya mencakup satu institusi; oleh karena itu, penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk melibatkan sampel

yang lebih luas dan pendekatan kualitatif.

Kata Kunci: *Kesiapan Kerja, Pengalaman Magang, Kompetensi Keterampilan Lunak, Teori Modal Manusia, Pendidikan Kewirausahaan.*

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INTRODUCTION

Student work readiness has become one of the most critical issues in higher education, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia, where the gap between academic preparation and industry expectations remains wide. Rapid globalization, digital transformation, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) have intensified the demand for graduates who possess not only technical expertise but also soft skills that enable adaptability, communication, teamwork, and innovation (Herbert et al., 2020). Employers are increasingly emphasizing behavioral competencies, such as problem-solving, integrity, and creativity, alongside cognitive and technical capabilities. Consequently, universities are challenged to produce graduates who can transition seamlessly into the professional world and demonstrate both competence and confidence in dynamic organizational settings (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021). Indonesia faces a persistent mismatch between graduate qualifications and labor market requirements. Data from the Ministry of Manpower and World Bank (2023) indicate that a significant proportion of Indonesian graduates remain unemployed or underemployed, primarily due to a lack of work readiness and insufficient practical exposure. While higher education institutions have expanded academic offerings, many graduates still struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into practical workplace performance. The transition from education to employment often exposes graduates to challenges in communication, teamwork, and decision-making, underscoring a deficiency in soft skill development during university years (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023).

In entrepreneurship-focused institutions such as STIE Ciputra Makassar, the expectation extends beyond employability; graduates are encouraged to become job creators rather than job seekers. This vision aligns with Indonesia's national agenda to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems through education. However, even within entrepreneurial institutions, students' readiness to engage in real-world professional contexts remains a concern. The question arises: how effectively do internship experiences and soft skill competencies prepare students for the demands of today's work environment? Addressing this question is vital to align entrepreneurship education with labor market realities and to bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace practice. Internships have long been recognized as a critical bridge between academic theory and professional practice. Through internships, students gain first-hand exposure to workplace routines, organizational structures, and real-world problem-solving (Hakiki et al., 2023). They develop practical understanding and professional habits that cannot be acquired solely through classroom instruction. According to Sobri et al. (2023), internships help students refine their skills, expand networks, and develop an understanding of

workplace culture, expectations, and ethics. These experiences increase self-efficacy and provide clarity about career paths.

However, not all internship programs deliver optimal outcomes. The effectiveness of internships depends heavily on their structure, supervision quality, and alignment with academic learning objectives. Poorly designed internships risk becoming administrative formalities rather than transformative learning experiences. Therefore, structured, industry-aligned internships are essential to ensure that students not only observe but also participate meaningfully in professional tasks (Puteri & Rozamuri, 2023). This study responds to that gap by evaluating how internship experiences contribute to students' overall work readiness, especially within entrepreneurship-based curricula that emphasize innovation, leadership, and initiative. Beyond technical ability, soft skills are increasingly seen as decisive factors in determining employability and career success (Tripathy, 2020). Soft skills encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal capabilities, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving. These skills allow graduates to function effectively in collaborative, fast-changing environments where innovation and resilience are critical (Deswarta et al., 2023). In entrepreneurship-oriented institutions, soft skills take on even greater importance. Entrepreneurial graduates must demonstrate initiative, negotiation ability, empathy, and strategic thinking—qualities that enable them to manage uncertainty, identify opportunities, and sustain ventures amid market volatility (Chen & Salleh, 2024).

The World Economic Forum (2024) highlights that the top 10 skills demanded by employers such as analytical thinking, active learning, resilience, flexibility, and leadership—are predominantly soft skills. Therefore, universities must integrate soft skill cultivation into formal curricula, experiential learning, and extracurricular activities. Yet, in Indonesia, soft skill development often remains implicit rather than systematically. This study emphasizes the necessity of measurable soft skill frameworks that can demonstrate tangible impacts on work readiness outcomes. The theoy in this study lies in Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1966; Teixeira, 2014), which conceptualizes education, training, and experience as investments that increase individuals' productivity and economic value. Human capital is accumulated not only through academic instruction but also through practical exposure and interpersonal competence. In this context, internships represent an applied form of human capital investment, enabling students to acquire job-specific skills, organizational knowledge, and behavioral readiness. Soft skills, constitute a form of social capital that enhances employability by improving interaction, collaboration, and leadership capabilities (Mahoney & Kor, 2015; Washor, 2015).

Extending Human Capital Theory to entrepreneurship education reveals an interesting dynamic: while traditional employability focuses on job acquisition, entrepreneurial human capital emphasizes innovation, autonomy, and opportunity recognition. Accordingly, this study situates work readiness within an entrepreneurial learning framework, proposing that both internship experiences and soft skills contribute synergistically to students' capacity to perform, adapt, and create value in diverse professional and entrepreneurial contexts. Empirical studies support this conceptualization. Pangaribuan et al. (2024) and Puteri & Rozamuri (2023) report that internship experience significantly enhances work readiness among university students. Falah & Marlena (2022) demonstrate that internship experience positively affects entrepreneurial intention among vocational students, suggesting that exposure to real work conditions fosters confidence and initiative. Similarly, Dewi & Kusuma (2024) find that soft skills substantially predict job preparedness among Generation Z students, while Cunha et al. (2023) highlight the mediating role of motivation and internship engagement. However,

most of these studies were conducted in general or vocational education contexts, not in entrepreneurship-oriented institutions. Thus, there remains limited understanding of how these dynamics operate in academic environments specifically designed to cultivate entrepreneurial behavior.

Despite the growing literature on employability and soft skills, three gaps persist. First, contextual gap: Few studies focus on entrepreneurship-driven institutions where the goals of education extend beyond employment to venture creation and innovation. Second, methodological gap: Many employability studies rely solely on descriptive or correlation analysis, lacking robust structural modeling that simultaneously evaluates multiple constructs influencing work readiness. Third, practical gap: Limited research connects empirical findings to curriculum design and policy implementation in Indonesian higher education. To address these gaps, the present study employs a variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) approach to empirically test the relationships between internship experience, soft skills, and work readiness among students of STIE Ciputra Makassar. The model integrates theoretical reasoning from Human Capital Theory with practical evidence from the field of entrepreneurship education.This study aims to: (1) Analyze the influence of internship experience on students' work readiness; (2) Examine the impact of soft skill competencies on students' work readiness; and (3) Provide empirical evidence on how both variables jointly enhance employability and entrepreneurial capability. This study enhances Human Capital Theory by integrating experiential learning and behavioral skills into entrepreneurship education. It fills a research gap in Indonesian employability by using SEM-PLS to analyze these factors' relationships. The findings provide practical guidance for developing internship and soft skill programs aligned with labor market needs, helping higher education institutions improve graduate employability and adaptability. Unlike prior studies that examined these factors separately, this research explores their combined impact to inform curriculum and institutional strategies for producing adaptable, innovative graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Capital Theory and Work Readiness

Human Capital Theory, first introduced by Becker (1966), conceptualizes education, training, and work experience as investments that enhance individual productivity and economic value. The theory posits that knowledge and skills acquired through formal education and practical exposure constitute a form of "capital" that yields future returns in the form of employability, career advancement, and income (Teixeira, 2014). In higher education contexts, internships and soft skill training serve as mechanisms through which students accumulate human capital that aligns with labor market demands (Mahoney & Kor, 2015). From a theoretical perspective, work readiness represents a tangible outcome of human capital accumulation. Graduates who possess a blend of cognitive knowledge, technical competence, and behavioral maturity are more likely to adapt effectively to organizational settings (Herbert et al., 2020). Thus, work readiness is not merely a function of academic success, but also of experiential learning and interpersonal capability. These elements collectively determine graduates' employability and their potential to contribute productively to the economy. According to Ismiarif et al. (2023), human capital investments—particularly through internships and experiential programs allow students to internalize workplace norms, develop applied skills, and gain exposure to professional standards. This process transforms theoretical understanding into practical competence, that enhancing job performance and retention. Within the framework of entrepreneurship-oriented institutions such as STIE Ciputra Makassar, human capital development takes on a distinctive character: it not only prepares students for employment but also cultivates entrepreneurial self-efficacy, opportunity recognition, and innovation

Internship Experience as a Driver of Work Readiness

Internship experience is a vital component of employability frameworks and an essential bridge between academic learning and workplace practice. It offers students the opportunity to apply theoretical concepts in authentic environments, interact with professionals, and adapt to organizational structures (Hakiki et al., 2023). Through internships, students acquire practical knowledge that reinforces both their confidence and competence, thus improving their readiness for professional engagement (Sobri et al., 2023). In line with Human Capital Theory, internships are regarded as direct investments in skill enhancement and professional identity formation. They provide students with exposure to job-specific tasks, real-time feedback from mentors, and an understanding of workplace ethics and expectations (Washor, 2015). These experiences foster not only technical proficiency but also adaptability and resilience—two attributes that employers consistently cite as critical for career success (Mitchell, 2023). Empirical research supports the significance of internship experience in predicting work readiness. Pangaribuan et al. (2024) and Puteri & Rozamuri (2023) demonstrate that internship participation positively influences students' self-efficacy, professional orientation, and job preparedness. Similarly, Falah & Marlena (2022) reveal that vocational internships strengthen entrepreneurial interest and initiative among high school students, suggesting that the value of experiential learning extends beyond employability to innovation. For entrepreneurship-based universities, internships have an added dimension. Chen & Salleh (2024) argue that exposure to business operations during internships nurtures entrepreneurial competencies such as risk-taking, opportunity identification, and strategic decision-making. These findings imply that structured internships—designed around reflection, mentoring, and skill evaluation—serve as an accelerator of both work readiness and entrepreneurial mindset.

Soft Skill Competencies and Employability

While technical knowledge forms the foundation of employability, soft skills increasingly define graduates' ability to thrive in contemporary workplaces (Tripathy, 2020). Soft skills encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal attributes such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, integrity, and emotional intelligence (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). They shape how individuals interact with colleagues, manage conflict, and respond to dynamic business environments. Human Capital Theory recognizes these behavioral competencies as complementary to cognitive and technical skills. They constitute an integral part of human capital formation, enabling employees to collaborate effectively, innovate, and maintain organizational cohesion. In a globalized economy, where automation and artificial intelligence are transforming job requirements, soft skills are increasingly viewed as "future-proof" assets (Dewi & Kusuma, 2024). The World Economic Forum (2024) identifies communication, critical thinking, and flexibility among the top ten skills essential for employability across industries. Research consistently affirms the impact of soft skills on employability and work readiness. Deswarta et al. (2023) found that communication and teamwork competencies significantly influence students' preparedness for professional roles. Mohd Puad et al. (2024) report that vocational graduates with higher levels of adaptability and leadership demonstrate superior career adaptability and job satisfaction. Furthermore, Cunha et al. (2023) suggest that soft skills mediate the relationship between internship experience and work readiness, reinforcing the idea that experiential learning and behavioral development are mutually reinforcing processes. In the entrepreneurship education context, soft skills play a dual role: they facilitate employability while simultaneously fostering entrepreneurial capability. Magasi (2025) emphasizes that skills such as resilience, creativity, and strategic thinking enable graduates to navigate uncertainty, initiate ventures, and lead innovation. For institutions like STIE Ciputra Makassar, this integration of soft skills into academic and co-curricular activities is crucial for producing graduates who can adapt not only as employees but also as entrepreneurs.

Integrating Human Capital, Internship, and Soft Skills

Drawing from Human Capital Theory and recent employability literature, internship experience and soft skill competencies can be viewed as interconnected components of an integrated learning model. Internships act as a platform for students to operationalize soft skills in real settings—communicating with supervisors, collaborating with teams, and managing real deadlines (Liu et al., 2023). In turn, the mastery of soft skills enhances the effectiveness of internships by improving interpersonal relations, self-regulation, and reflective learning. The synergy between these variables culminates in improved work readiness. Herbert et al. (2020) and Siddique et al. (2022) assert that students who combine hands-on experience with strong interpersonal abilities demonstrate higher performance during the transition from academia to the workplace. In entrepreneurship-based institutions, this synergy extends further, as students are trained to identify market opportunities, assess risks, and innovate—transforming traditional employability into entrepreneurial employability.

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical and empirical foundations discussed above, this study proposes a conceptual framework where both internship experience and soft skill competencies act as dimensions of human capital investment influencing work readiness

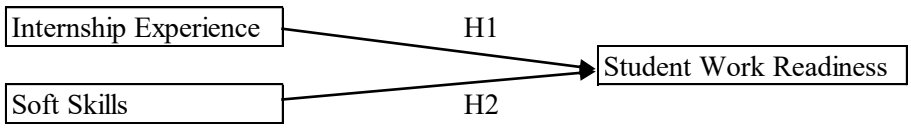

Figure 1: Empirical Model of Research

The model posits that students' internship experience enhances their understanding of workplace structures, industry expectations, and applied skills, and soft skill mastery—encompassing communication, teamwork, and adaptability—further strengthens students' capacity to integrate into professional environments. The relationship between internship experience, soft skill competencies, and work readiness continues to be an important topic in employability research. Recent studies (2022–2025) reaffirm that experiential learning and behavioral competencies play complementary roles in preparing students to meet workplace expectations. Guided by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1966; Teixeira, 2014), both factors represent critical investments in the formation of individual capability and professional adaptability. The following section presents the empirical foundation and reasoning for each hypothesis.

Internship Experience on Work Readiness

Internship experience serves as one of the most significant predictors of work readiness, as it allows students to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and real-world professional application. Through internships, students are exposed to organizational processes, workplace culture, and performance expectations that strengthen their technical and interpersonal competencies (Hakiki et al., 2023). Pangaribuan et al. (2024) confirmed that internship experience significantly enhances students' work readiness among participants of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program at Universitas Riau. The study demonstrated that internships promote self-efficacy and help students develop clearer career orientations. Puteri and Rozamuri (2023) further observed that internship participation positively influences professional adaptability and teamwork among students interning at PT Pelabuhan Indonesia (Persero). Their results underscore that mentorship and real project

involvement are key to developing practical readiness for employment. Supporting these findings, Sobri et al. (2023) and Herbert et al. (2020) found that internships build students' ability to internalize workplace norms and expectations, enhance communication with supervisors, and increase their confidence in professional settings. These experiences foster situational awareness the ability to assess, decide, and act in complex work environments. According to Human Capital Theory, internships constitute a form of experiential investment that generates tangible "returns" in the form of improved performance and employability (Mahoney & Kor, 2015). By integrating theoretical learning with workplace practice, internships strengthen both the technical and non-technical aspects of human capital. Therefore, based on the theoretical and empirical evidence above, the first hypothesis proposed:
H1: The Effect of Internship Experience on Work Readiness

Soft skill competencies on students' work readiness

While internships provide situational exposure, soft skill competencies determine how effectively students navigate professional environments. Soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and integrity—enable individuals to perform collaboratively and creatively in complex work settings (Tripathy, 2020; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). In today's digital and globalized economy, these competencies have become equally as important as technical expertise. Dewi and Kusuma (2024) found that communication, problem-solving, and time management skills strongly predict work readiness among Generation Z accounting students. Their findings emphasize that behavioral competencies complement cognitive knowledge in facilitating the transition from education to employment. Similarly, Deswarta et al. (2023) discovered that adaptability and motivation significantly enhance employability among students at Universitas Islam Riau, even under post-pandemic disruptions. Beyond Indonesia, Cunha et al. (2023) demonstrated that soft skills serve as both a direct and mediating factor linking internship experience to work readiness. Students with strong interpersonal and reflective abilities derive greater benefit from internship participation, translating practical exposure into higher readiness for professional engagement. Mohd Puad et al. (2024) also confirmed that vocational graduates with stronger adaptability and leadership show superior career adaptability and self-efficacy, reinforcing that soft skills represent a durable form of human capital in modern labor markets. Within entrepreneurship-oriented education, soft skills hold a strategic function. Magasi (2025) emphasized that creativity, resilience, and strategic thinking are essential for entrepreneurial graduates who must operate amid uncertainty and innovation-driven competition. Thus, in contexts such as STIE Ciputra Makassar, soft skill mastery not only improves employability but also cultivates entrepreneurial readiness—an advanced form of work readiness characterized by independence, initiative, and opportunity-seeking behavior. Drawing upon these theoretical arguments and empirical findings, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:
H2: Soft skill competencies positively influence students' work readiness.

METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory design to examine the causal relationships between internship experience, soft skill competencies, and student work readiness within the context of entrepreneurship-based higher education. The quantitative approach was selected because it enables the empirical testing of hypotheses derived from theory and prior research using objective and measurable indicators. The design is explanatory in nature since it aims not merely to describe relationships among variables but to test the direction and magnitude of their influence. Data were collected through an online survey in a single period, making this study cross-sectional. The research employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.0 as the analytical tool. The

selection of PLS-SEM was theoretically and statistically justified. As a variance-based method, PLS-SEM focuses on prediction and estimation of latent variable relationships, making it suitable for exploratory models and theory development. Compared with covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), PLS-SEM has fewer data assumptions and is robust in handling smaller sample sizes and non-normal data distributions. In this study, the choice of PLS-SEM was aligned with the model's predictive nature and its focus on assessing the simultaneous effects of internship experience and soft skills on work readiness constructs that are multidimensional and involve latent indicators difficult to observe directly.

The study population comprised undergraduate students of STIE Ciputra Makassar, an institution that integrates entrepreneurship and experiential learning into its academic system. The campus offers compulsory internship programs as part of its core curriculum, giving students the opportunity to immerse themselves in real business environments while developing behavioral competencies essential for future careers. Given this institutional context, STIE Ciputra Makassar represents an ideal setting for investigating how internship experiences and soft skills shape students' readiness for professional life. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants met predetermined inclusion criteria. Respondents were required to be fifth- or seventh-semester students who had completed their internship program with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.00. The duration of internships ranged between two and ten months, and students were required to have undergone an assessment of soft skills as part of their internship report. Based on these criteria, 92 valid responses were obtained through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The sample size met the adequacy requirements for PLS-SEM, which recommends at least ten times the number of maximum paths directed toward any latent construct in the model (Hair et al., 2022).

The data collection process was conducted between January and March 2024. Before administering the survey broadly, the instrument underwent a pilot test with ten students to evaluate clarity, reliability, and contextual suitability. Revisions were made to ensure that each item accurately reflected the intended construct. Participants provided informed consent before completing the survey, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and were informed that their participation was voluntary. The data collected were used exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with research ethics protocols approved by the institution. The research instrument was structured into four parts: demographic questions, internship experience, soft skill competencies, and work readiness. Each construct was treated as a latent variable and measured using multiple reflective indicators on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The items were adapted from previously validated instruments to ensure content validity and comparability with earlier research. The internship experience variable was adapted from Washor (2015), Hakiki et al. (2023), and Sobri et al. (2023). The items captured how closely students' internships related to their academic field, the alignment between assigned tasks and industry expectations, the quality of supervision and mentoring, and the extent to which the internship contributed to professional growth and career preparation.

The soft skill competencies variable was based on instruments developed by Hirudayaraj et al. (2021), Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023), and Dewi and Kusuma (2024). These items measured students' communication ability, teamwork, integrity, adaptability, and initiative. They also reflected behavioral dimensions such as openness to feedback, responsibility, and time management all of which are critical for employability and professional adaptability. The work readiness construct was measured using indicators adapted from Herbert et al. (2020), Siddique et al. (2022), and Nugroho et al. (2024). This variable assessed the extent to which students felt capable of making sound decisions, solving problems

independently, working in teams, and integrating into workplace culture. The indicators also measured self-motivation, confidence, and the alignment between academic learning and job performance expectations. All items were translated and back-translated between English and Bahasa Indonesia to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. Two academic experts and one industry practitioner reviewed the instrument to confirm face and content validity, ensuring that each indicator was contextually appropriate for Indonesian entrepreneurship education.

The data analysis was conducted in two major stages following the PLS-SEM procedure. The first stage involved testing the measurement model, which aimed to evaluate the validity and reliability of the constructs. Convergent validity was assessed using outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where loading values above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50 were considered satisfactory. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), both of which were expected to exceed 0.70. Discriminant validity was established through the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion, ensuring that correlations between constructs remained below 0.85. The second stage involved testing the structural model, which examined the relationships between variables and the predictive power of the model. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicated how much variance in work readiness could be explained by internship experience and soft skill competencies. The path coefficients (β) showed the strength and direction of the hypothesized relationships, while the effect size (f^2) assessed the magnitude of each predictor's contribution to the dependent variable, categorized as small (0.02), medium (0.15), or large (0.35). The predictive relevance (Q^2) of the model was evaluated using blindfolding procedures to confirm its predictive accuracy. To determine statistical significance, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was applied, using a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$) as the threshold for hypothesis acceptance.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants were guaranteed full confidentiality. The research adhered to the ethical standards of STIE Ciputra Makassar and conformed to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki for studies involving human participants. The framework combines rigorous theory with precise data collection, using validated tools and ethical standards to study how internships and soft skills affect students' work readiness in entrepreneurship education, ensuring reliable results aligned with real-world employability and policy goals.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the descriptive demographic statistics of the respondents. Among the total of 92 participants, the majority belong to the first-generation cohort (Gen 1), accounting for 83.7%. In terms of age distribution, most respondents fall within the 20–23 age range, representing 87% of the sample. Regarding gender composition, female respondents constitute the majority at 56.5%. With respect to specialization, the highest proportion of respondents are enrolled in the International Business Management (IBM) program (41.3%), followed by Digital Business Management (DBM) at 25%, Culinary Business Management (CBM) at 23.9%, and Communication Business Management (COM) at 9.8%. For career pathways, the largest share of respondents (51.1%) expressed a preference for the Corporate Entrepreneurship track, while 34.8% indicated interest in pursuing careers in start-ups, and 14.1% opted for family business ventures. Regarding internship experience, the most prevalent duration was four months (54.3%), followed by two months (39.1%). Only a small fraction of respondents completed internships lasting either eight months or more than ten months, each representing 3.3%. In terms of career opportunity access, 68.5% of respondents reported having favorable access, whereas

34.8% perceived their access as limited. Geographically, the majority of respondents originate from Makassar (89.1%), while the remainder are across other cities, including Jakarta (4.3%), as well as Sidoarjo, Sorowako, Gowa, Bali, Palu, and Tomohon, each contributing 1.1%.

Table 2 presents the results of various instrument tests for the structural model. First, all indicators for each variable are confirmed to be valid within the model, as their Outer Loading values exceed 0.5. Additionally, each variable has AVE value greater than 0.5, reinforcing th validity of these variables in the model. Second, all variables in the structural model achieve values above 0.7 in the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha tests, indicating that the indicators for each variable exhibit a high level of reliability. This section presents the results of data analysis and their interpretation in relation to the hypotheses formulated earlier. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 3.0 following the two-step approach recommended by Hair et al. (2022), which involves the evaluation of the measurement model and the structural model. The results are discussed not only from a statistical standpoint but also from a theoretical and managerial perspective, aligning the findings with the assumptions of Human Capital Theory and the empirical literature on work readiness, internship experience, and soft skill development. The measurement model was assessed to confirm the validity and reliability of the constructs used in this study. The first test involved convergent validity, which was evaluated through the magnitude of outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All indicators exhibited outer loading values greater than 0.70, confirming that each item reliably represented its respective latent construct. The AVE values for Internship Experience, Soft Skill Competencies, and Work Readiness were 0.83, 0.74, and 0.77 respectively—well above the threshold of 0.50, thereby establishing convergent validity.

Table 1: Respondent Demographic

Demography Profile	Frequency	%
	Batch	
Gen 1	77	83.7%
Gen 2	15	16.3%
Total	92	100%
	Age	
17 - 20	12	13%
>20 - 23	80	87%
>23 - 26	0	0
>26 - 29	0	0
>29	0	0
Total	92	100%
	Gender	
Male	40	43.5%
Female	52	56.5%
Total	92	100%
	Specialization	
IBM	38	41.3%
DBM	23	25.0%
COM	9	9.8%
CBM	22	23.9%
Total	92	100%
	Career Path	
Coorporate Enterpreneurship	47	51.1%
Start Up	32	34.8%
Family Business	13	14.1%
Total	92	100%
	Internship Duration	
2 Months	36	39.1%
4 Months	50	54.3%
8 Months	3	3.3%

10 Months	0	0
>10 Months	3	3.3%
Total	92	100%
	Career Access	
Yes	60	68.5%
No	32	34.8%
Total	92	100%
	City	
Makassar	82	89.1%
Jakarta	4	4.3%
Sidoarjo	1	1.1%
Sorowako	1	1.1%
Kab Gowa	1	1.1%
Bali	1	1.1%
Palu	1	1.1%
Tomohon	1	1.1%
Total	92	100%

This section presents the results of data analysis and their interpretation in relation to the hypotheses formulated earlier. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 3.0 following the two-step approach recommended by Hair et al. (2022), which involves the evaluation of the measurement model and the structural model. The results are discussed not only from a statistical standpoint but also from a theoretical and managerial perspective, aligning the findings with the assumptions of Human Capital Theory and the empirical literature on work readiness, internship experience, and soft skill development. The measurement model was assessed to confirm the validity and reliability of the constructs used in this study. The first test involved convergent validity, which was evaluated through the magnitude of outer loadings and AVE. All indicators exhibited outer loading values greater than 0.70, confirming that each item reliably represented its respective latent construct. The AVE values for Internship Experience, Soft Skill Competencies, and Work Readiness were 0.83, 0.74, and 0.77 respectively—well above the threshold of 0.50, thereby establishing convergent validity.

The next step involved internal consistency reliability, examined through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). The Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.94 to 0.97, while CR values ranged from 0.95 to 0.97, both exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.70. These results confirm that all constructs demonstrated high internal consistency, meaning the indicators within each construct were strongly correlated and measured the same underlying concept.Discriminant validity was also tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). All HTMT values were below 0.85, confirming that each construct was distinct from the others and captured unique aspects of the model. This result indicates that internship experience, soft skills, and work readiness are conceptually related yet empirically separable dimensions of human capital formation. The measurement model thus met all statistical requirements, confirming that the instrument used in this study was valid and reliable. The high reliability and validity of the constructs strengthen the credibility of the subsequent structural analysis and the interpretation of relationships among variables.

Table 2: Outer Loading, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability Tests

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Internship Experience					
IE 1	During my internship. I acquired knowledge that was directly relevant to my field of study.	0.873	0.829	0.975	0.970
IE 2	This internship enhanced my professional competencies by equipping me with the essential skills required in the workforce.	0.895			
IE 3	The tasks I performed during my internship were directly aligned with the responsibilities and duties of the workplace.	0.943			
IE 4	During my internship. I was actively engaged in productive tasks and made a tangible contribution to the company.	0.916			
IE 5	This internship program was conducted with a high level of professionalism and included adequate guidance from supervisors or mentors.	0.918			
IE 6	The facilities provided by the company during the internship effectively supported me in carrying out the assigned tasks.	0.880			
IE 7	During my internship. I had the opportunity to develop practical skills aligned with my field of work.	0.936			
IE 8	The skills I acquired during my internship were well-aligned with the demands of the industry I intend to pursue.	0.919			
Soft Skill					
SS 1	I was able to actively listen and effectively comprehend the information conveyed by my supervisor or colleagues throughout the internship.	0.111	0.736	0.968	0.964
SS 2	I actively cultivated professional relationships with colleagues and relevant stakeholders throughout the internship program.	0.107			
SS 3	I was able to articulate ideas and convey information clearly and effectively to my team or supervisor.	0.106			
SS 4	I consistently demonstrated respect toward colleagues. supervisors. and organizational regulations throughout my internship.	0.114			
SS 5	I upheld honesty and integrity in carrying out my internship responsibilities.	0.113			
SS 6	I consistently demonstrated a positive attitude when facing challenges or completing assigned tasks during my internship.	0.110			
SS 7	I maintained a humble attitude in receiving feedback and constructive criticism from my supervisor and colleagues throughout the internship.	0.107			
SS 8	I effectively managed my time to complete internship tasks within the assigned deadlines.	0.102			
SS 9	I proactively offered assistance and contributed new ideas throughout the internship program.	0.098			
SS 10	I took full responsibility for the tasks assigned to me throughout the internship program.	0.101			
SS 11	I demonstrated a strong sense of curiosity and actively sought information to support my tasks during the internship.	0.094			
Student Work Readiness					
SWR 1	I was able to assess situations and make logical and objective decisions in completing my work tasks.	0.893	0.769	0.952	0.940
SWR 2	I was able to identify workplace challenges and propose critical and constructive solutions.	0.857			
SWR 3	I was able to adapt to a new work environment. including organizational culture and team dynamics.	0.884			
SWR 4		0.883			

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
SWR 5	I possess a strong drive and ambition for continuous growth and the achievement of my professional goals. I am capable of working within my field of expertise and effectively utilizing my skills to their fullest potential.	0.879			
SWR 6	I am capable of collaborating effectively within a team to achieve shared objectives in the workplace.	0.865			

The research model, evaluated through Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares, is illustrated in Figure 2.

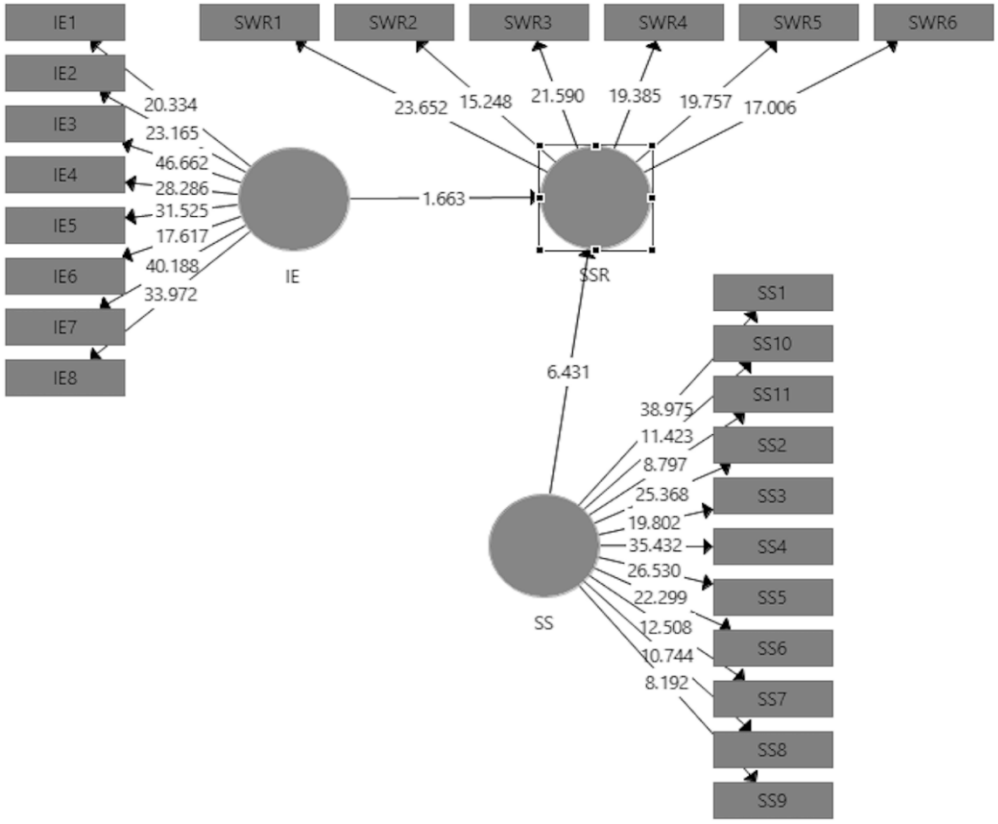

Figure 2: Empirical Model Estimation using SEM-PLS

This model elucidates the empirical framework of the study. As presented in Table 3, the adjusted R-squared value of 0.894 indicates that the variability in student work readiness can be explained by internship experience and soft skills by 89.4%, while the remaining 10.6% is attributed to predictors outside the empirical model. Furthermore, the estimation results reveal that the partial tests for both predictors demonstrate a positive and statistically significant influence on the dependent variable at the 5% significance level, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1) and Hypothesis 2 (H2).

Table 3. Parameter Significance Testing

Relationship	**R-Square**	**Std. B**	**St.Dev**	**T-stat**	**P-Value**	**Decision**
H1: Internship Experience -> Student Work Readiness	0.894	0.203	0.122	1.663	0.0485	Accept
H2: Soft Skill -> Student Work Readiness		0.752	0.117	6.431	<0.010	Accept

After validating the measurement model, the next step was to evaluate the structural model to test the proposed hypotheses. The model's coefficient of determination (R^2) for the dependent variable, Work Readiness, was 0.894. This indicates that 89.4% of the variance in students' work readiness can be explained jointly by internship experience and soft skill competencies. Such a high R^2 value demonstrates excellent model predictive accuracy and suggests that these two variables are powerful determinants of students' preparedness for professional engagement. The path coefficients and t-statistics derived from bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) provided evidence of the significance of the relationships. The path from Internship Experience to Work Readiness (H1) showed a standardized coefficient (β) of 0.203 with a t-statistic of 1.663 and a p-value of 0.048, indicating a positive and statistically significant effect at the 5% level. The path from Soft Skill Competencies to Work Readiness (H2) yielded a standardized coefficient (β) of 0.752 with a t-statistic of 6.431 and a p-value below 0.01, confirming a strong and significant influence.

The effect size (f^2) analysis revealed that soft skill competencies exerted a large effect ($f^2 = 0.68$), while internship experience had a small yet meaningful effect ($f^2 = 0.11$). This finding suggests that while both factors contribute to enhancing work readiness, soft skills play a more dominant role in determining students' ability to adapt and perform in professional environments. The predictive relevance (Q^2) value obtained through blindfolding was positive and substantial, confirming that the model possesses strong predictive validity. The results of this study support both hypotheses and reinforce the theoretical framework of Human Capital Theory, which posits that education, training, and experience are key investments that increase individual productivity and employability (Becker, 1966; Teixeira, 2014). The findings affirm that internship experience and soft skill competencies jointly shape students' work readiness, with soft skills emerging as the more powerful predictor.

The analysis reveals that internship experience positively influences students' work readiness. This finding aligns with previous studies conducted by Pangaribuan et al. (2024), Puteri and Rozamuri (2023), and Hakiki et al. (2023), all of which demonstrated that structured and industry-aligned internships enhance students' self-efficacy, professional awareness, and readiness for employment. Internships bridge academic learning and practical experience, especially in entrepreneurship education, by developing skills like initiative, creativity, and problem-solving. They boost students' confidence and prepare them to thrive in complex, dynamic work environments.The findings of this study echo those of Chen and Mohd Salleh (2024), who emphasized that internships embedded in entrepreneurial curricula promote self-directed learning and opportunity-seeking behavior. Students who engage in authentic work settings learn to manage challenges, adapt to feedback, and apply theoretical frameworks to solve real problems—abilities that reflect the core competencies of work readiness.

The article highlights that while internships can aid in preparing students for work, their impact is limited by their quality and structure. In contrast, soft skills such as interpersonal and behavioral abilities play a much more significant role in work readiness, emphasizing the need for higher education institutions to focus on developing these skills alongside well-designed internship programs.This result supports prior research by Dewi & Kusuma (2024), Deswarta et al. (2023), and Cunha et al. (2023), who found that communication, teamwork, adaptability, and integrity significantly determine students' employability and workplace integration. In an era of automation and digital transformation, technical knowledge alone is insufficient; employers demand graduates who can collaborate effectively, communicate across diverse teams, and respond flexibly to changing conditions.

The large effect size of soft skills in this study underscores their centrality in human capital formation. According to Magasi (2025), soft skills such as resilience, creativity, and critical thinking not only facilitate employability but also form the foundation of entrepreneurial capability. Within the STIE Ciputra Makassar ecosystem where the educational mission focuses on developing entrepreneurial graduates—soft skills take on dual importance: they equip students to succeed in employment while fostering leadership and innovation competencies that enable them to create new ventures.These findings further corroborate the view that soft skills represent transferable assets in the knowledge economy. They enhance communication across professional contexts and empower graduates to take initiative and exercise judgment. Mohd Puad et al. (2024) emphasized that graduates with strong adaptability and leadership demonstrate higher career adaptability, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction—traits consistent with the readiness indicators observed in this study. The findings emphasizes that integrating internships and soft skills development in higher education—especially in entrepreneurship-focused institutions—enhances students' work readiness. The study broadens Human Capital Theory by highlighting the equal importance of experiential learning and behavioral skills in preparing graduates. Practical recommendations include designing internships as active, collaborative learning experiences and incorporating soft skills training into curricula. Findings show that both elements significantly boost employability, with soft skills having a stronger effect, ultimately aiming to produce adaptable and resilient graduates suited for dynamic labor markets.

CONCLUSION

This study explores how internship experiences and soft skills affect students' workforce readiness in entrepreneurship higher education. The findings are consistent with Pangaribuan et al. (2024), Puteri and Rozamuri (2023), and Hakiki et al. (2023), which demonstrated internships serve as an important bridge connecting academic preparation and workplace adaptation. The study confirms that soft skill competencies have a stronger and more substantial impact on work readiness. Soft skills encompassing communication, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and integrity constitute the behavioral dimension of human capital that determines how effectively individuals operate within organizations. This finding supports the research emphasizing that success in the modern labor market depends not only on technical proficiency but also on interpersonal and problem-solving abilities (Deswarta et al., 2023; Dewi & Kusuma, 2024; Cunha et al., 2023). In entrepreneurship education, soft skills like creativity, resilience, and strategic decision-making are essential for innovation and handling uncertainty. The evolution of Human Capital Theory emphasizes that experiential learning develops behavioral competencies beyond technical skills. An integrated model combining technical, cognitive, and social skills especially through internships prepares adaptable and entrepreneurial graduates, improving their employability by fostering a comprehensive, experiential, and behavioral learning approach.

The study emphasizes that universities, especially entrepreneurial ones like STIE Ciputra Makassar, should integrate internship programs into broader soft skill development strategies. Internships should be structured as practical, outcome-focused experiences, with stronger industry partnerships providing authentic professional exposure, mentorship, and assessments. Curriculum enhancements such as project-based learning and teamwork activities are recommended with active collaboration between industry and education. Students are also encouraged to engage proactively and reflectively to boost their employability and career prospects. Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the sample was limited to a single institution STIE Ciputra Makassar which, although appropriate for an entrepreneurship-focused investigation, restricts the generalizability of the results to other types of higher education institutions. The future research directions in student work readiness and

employability, highlighting the need to study diverse regions, use longitudinal and mixed methods, explore factors like mentorship, emphasize digital soft skills, and combine practical and behavioural training especially in entrepreneurship to develop adaptable, innovative graduates capable of succeeding in a global economy.

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