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MEMAHAMI KESUKSESAN KARIER AWAL DI ERA DIGITAL: PERAN KOMPETENSI DIGITAL, KESIAPAN KARIER, DAN EFIKASI DIRI KARIER

Understanding Early Career Success in the Digital Era: The Roles of Digital Competencies, Career Readiness, and Career Self-Efficacy

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Abstract. *This study investigates how digital competencies and career readiness contribute to career success among fresh graduates, with career self-efficacy serving as a mediator. A quantitative causal design was applied to questionnaire data from 200 employed fresh graduates in Indonesia with six months to two years of work experience. Data were analyzed using SEM-PLS through SmartPLS. The results show that digital competencies and career readiness significantly enhance both career self-efficacy and career success. Career self-efficacy also has a significant positive effect on career success and mediates the relationships of digital competencies and career readiness with career success. The findings emphasize the importance of developing graduates' digital capabilities, career preparedness, and confidence in managing career demands during the early employment stage.*

Abstrak. *Penelitian ini menganalisis kontribusi kompetensi digital dan kesiapan karier terhadap kesuksesan karier pada fresh graduate, dengan efikasi diri karier sebagai variabel mediasi. Penelitian menggunakan desain kuantitatif kausal dengan data kuesioner dari 200 fresh graduate di Indonesia yang telah bekerja selama enam bulan hingga dua tahun. Data dianalisis menggunakan SEM-PLS melalui SmartPLS. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi digital dan kesiapan karier berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap efikasi diri karier maupun kesuksesan karier. Efikasi diri karier juga berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kesuksesan karier serta memediasi hubungan kompetensi digital dan kesiapan karier dengan kesuksesan karier. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya pengembangan kompetensi digital, kesiapan karier, dan keyakinan individu dalam menghadapi tuntutan karier pada tahap awal memasuki dunia kerja.*

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INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of work has altered the skills, resources, and forms of preparedness that individuals need to develop successful careers. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, big data, and digital platforms are increasingly embedded in organizational and professional activities, requiring graduates to move beyond conventional academic qualifications (Hu et al., 2025). As workplace requirements continue to change, individuals entering the workforce need to develop the ability to leverage digital technologies, adapt to technological advancements, and strengthen their capabilities on an ongoing basis (Chatterjee et al., 2023). This condition creates a particular challenge for higher education institutions because preparing graduates for employment increasingly involves developing capabilities that remain relevant in uncertain and technology-intensive labor markets. Accordingly, understanding the factors that enable graduates to establish and sustain positive career outcomes has become increasingly important (Ahmed et al., 2024; Mishchuk et al., 2025; Raut et al., 2023).

Career success provides an important lens for evaluating how individuals progress in their professional lives (Le et al., 2023). Although conventional indicators such as income and promotion remain relevant, career success also encompasses subjective evaluations, including satisfaction with one's career, perceptions of achievement, opportunities for professional development, and a sense of fulfilment (Seibert et al., 2024). This broader perspective suggests that career advancement cannot be explained solely by employment tenure or formal qualifications. Instead, individuals' ability to mobilize transferable capabilities may increasingly determine how successfully they respond to changing career environments. Within this context, competence in using information and digital technologies represents an increasingly valuable career resource because digitalization now influences professional activities across a wide range of sectors (Lasisi et al., 2023; Papageorgiou et al., 2024; Raut et al., 2023).

Digital competencies are therefore particularly relevant when examining the early career experiences of graduates. They encompass more than the technical ability to operate digital tools; they involve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to locate and evaluate information, communicate, create digital content, and address problems through technology (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2025). Graduates who possess these capabilities may be better positioned to respond to digitally mediated work practices and obtain favorable employment outcomes. Previous evidence has associated stronger digital competencies with improved employment quality, more effective performance in digital work settings, and more favorable career outcomes (Siregar & Syahrizal, 2024). Nevertheless, digital capability alone may not fully explain differences in how graduates experience their careers.

Another factor that deserves attention is career readiness, particularly because the transition from higher education to employment requires individuals to translate their academic preparation into workplace behavior. Career readiness reflects the extent to which individuals are prepared to make career decisions, plan their career paths, adapt to changing circumstances, understand professional expectations, and respond to workplace demands (Wu et al., 2020). It is consequently relevant not only at the point of entering employment but also to the subsequent process of navigating and developing within the labor market. The continuing gap between what graduates possess and what employers expect has been identified as one of the challenges contributing to difficulties in the transition into employment, reinforcing the need for higher education to develop

graduates who are adequately prepared for contemporary careers (Marciniak et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2024; Raut et al., 2023; S & Umamy, 2024).

However, the possession of digital competencies and career-related capabilities does not necessarily result in comparable career outcomes for every individual. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a useful explanation for this issue by emphasizing the role of individuals' beliefs about their capabilities in shaping career-related behavior and outcomes (Brown & Lent, 2019). One construct that is particularly relevant within this perspective is career self-efficacy, referring to individuals' confidence in their ability to make career decisions, deal with occupational difficulties, pursue career objectives, and manage their professional development (Wang et al., 2023). Thus, two graduates with relatively similar competencies may nevertheless experience different career outcomes because they differ in their confidence to apply those capabilities in actual career situations (Cheng et al., 2024; Z. Zhang et al., 2024).

The potential role of self-efficacy is also supported by previous empirical evidence. For example, Sutiadiningsih et al. (2025) showed that digital competencies can contribute indirectly to entrepreneurial intention through entrepreneurial self-efficacy. This finding indicates that competencies may need to be accompanied by a psychological mechanism that enables individuals to convert what they know and can do into purposeful career-related action (R. K. Ibrahim & Aldawsari, 2023; Sutiadiningsih et al., 2025; Z. Zhang et al., 2024). From this perspective, career self-efficacy may function as a mechanism through which digital capabilities and career preparedness become translated into career-related outcomes.

Despite the growing literature surrounding digital competence, career readiness, self-efficacy, and career development, the relationships among these constructs remain insufficiently integrated. First, prior studies have frequently examined digital competencies in relation to employability, academic performance, entrepreneurial intention, or career sustainability, whereas their role in explaining career success as a broader outcome remains comparatively less explored (Mishchuk et al., 2025; Z. Zhang et al., 2024). Second, career readiness has often been discussed in terms of educational preparation and interventions, while its potential contribution to subsequent career success has received less direct attention (Raut et al., 2023; S & Umamy, 2024). Third, although self-efficacy has been examined as an explanatory or mediating mechanism in career-related research, fewer studies have brought together digital competencies, career readiness, career self-efficacy, and career success within an integrated SCCT-based model, particularly among students and recent graduates in developing-country contexts (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2025; Zhan et al., 2024).

This study addresses these gaps by examining digital competencies and career readiness as antecedents of career success, while positioning career self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism. By integrating these constructs within the SCCT perspective, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how graduates' capabilities and career preparedness are translated into positive career outcomes.

Digital Competencies and Career Self-Efficacy

Digital competencies provide graduates with the ability to perform and adapt to technology-based tasks. Successful experiences in using digital technologies can strengthen

individuals' confidence in managing career-related challenges (Lent & Brown, 2019). Previous studies have also reported a positive association between digital competence and self-efficacy (Paredes-aguirre et al., 2024; Zhan et al., 2024).
H1: Digital competencies positively influence career self-efficacy.

Career Readiness and Career Self-Efficacy

Career readiness reflects graduates' preparedness to make career decisions, adapt to workplace demands, and manage career transitions. Such preparation can strengthen individuals' confidence in their ability to deal with career-related tasks. (Raut et al., 2023) emphasized that competency development contribute to career readiness and confidence in career management.
H2: Career readiness positively influences career self-efficacy.

Digital Competencies and Career Success

Digital competencies can facilitate adaptation to technological change, effective workplace performance, and access to career opportunities. These capabilities may therefore contribute directly to favorable career outcomes. (Mishchuk et al., 025) found that higher digital competence was associated with better career outcomes among graduates.
H3: Digital competencies positively influence career success.

Career Readiness and Career Success

Career readiness enables graduates to respond more effectively to employment demands, identify opportunities, and adapt during career transitions. Evidence from (Dahri et al.,2024) indicates that career readiness is associated with favorable academic and career-related outcomes.
H4: Career readiness positively influences career success

Career Self-Efficacy and Career Success

Career self-efficacy reflects confidence in one's ability to manage career decisions, challenges, and professional goals. Within SCCT, stronger efficacy beliefs encourage individuals to engage persistently in career-related activities. Previous studies have linked career self-efficacy with employability and career sustainability (Zhan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Therefore:
H5: Career self-efficacy positively influences career success

Career Self-Efficacy as a Mediator between Digital Competencies and Career Success

Career self-efficacy may explain how competencies and career preparedness are translated into career outcomes. Digital competencies can generate mastery experiences that strengthen self-efficacy, while career readiness can provide the resources and experiences necessary to build confidence in managing career demands. Previous research supports the mediating role of self-efficacy in relationships involving digital capabilities and career-related outcomes (Ibrahim & Aldawsari, 2023; Zhan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Thus:
H6: Digital competencies influence career success indirectly through career self-efficacy.
H7: Career readiness contributes to career success indirectly through career self-efficacy.

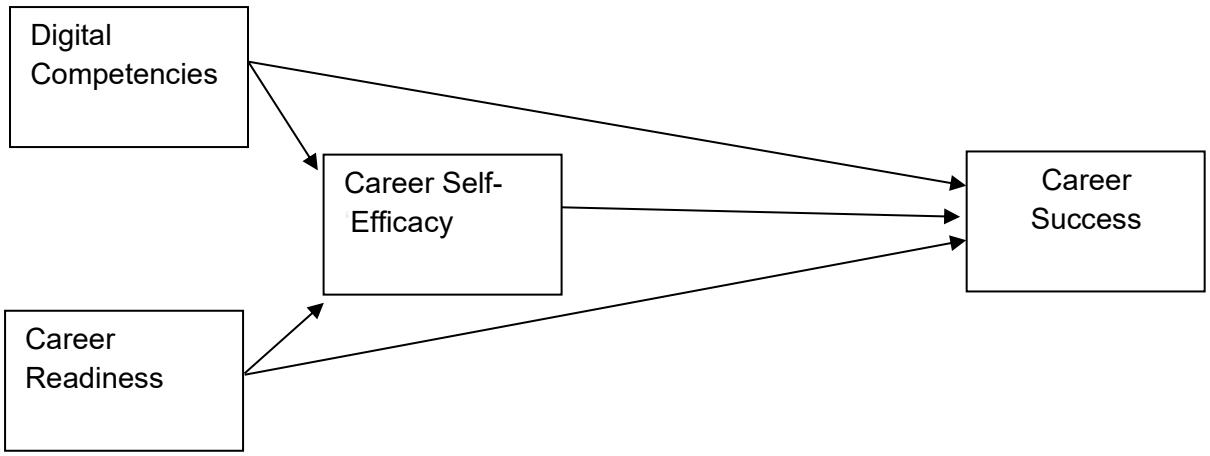


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among digital competencies, career readiness, career self-efficacy, and career success. The hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling with the Partial Least Squares approach (PLS-SEM). Data were collected from 200 employed fresh graduates in Indonesia using purposive sampling. Eligible participants were individuals with at least six months but no more than two years of work experience, ensuring that the sample represented professionals in the early stages of their careers. Regarding demographic characteristics, 53% of respondents were male, while 48.5% were aged between 25 and 30 years. Most respondents held bachelor's degrees (60.5%), and 72% had accumulated between one and two years of professional experience. Furthermore, 32% were employed in education-related startup companies, while the remaining respondents worked across other industries.

Measurement

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The measurement items were adapted from established instruments and contextualized to the experiences of recently employed graduates.

Table 1. Measurement of Variable

Variable	Source	scale

Digital Competencies	(Tzafilkou et al., 2022)	Likert
Career Self-Efficacy	(Chan, 2018)	Likert
Career Readiness	(Dodd et al., 2022)	Likert
Career Success	(Kundi et al., 2021)	Likert

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The adequacy of the measurement model was assessed by examining indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The results presented in Table 2 show all constructs achieved satisfactory levels of internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding 0.70. The AVE values were also greater than 0.50 across all constructs, thereby demonstrating sufficient convergent validity. Discriminant validity was further evaluated using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). As reported in Table 3, the HTMT values ranged from 0.426 to 0.833, with all values remaining below the recommended threshold of 0.85. The highest value was observed between career success and career self-efficacy (0.833). These results indicate that discriminant validity was established, confirming that the four constructs are empirically distinct from one another.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability

Construct	**CA**	**CR**	**AVE**
Digital Competencies	0.949	0.959	0.796
Career Success	0.996	0.997	0.979
Career Self-Efficacy	0.981	0.984	0.912
Career Readiness	0.943	0.955	0.780

Table 3. HTMT

	CR	**CS**	**CSE**	**DC**
Career Readiness				
Career Success	0.735			
Career Self-Efficacy	0.713	0.833		
Digital Competencies	0.426	0.702	0.785	

Table 4. R-Square

	R-square	**R-square adjusted**
Career Success	0.740	0.737
Career Self-Efficacy	0.747	0.745

The coefficient of determination results indicate that the model explains 74.0% of the variance in career success and 74.7% of the variance in career self-efficacy. The adjusted R^2 values of 0.737 and 0.745, respectively, are close to the original R^2 values, indicating consistent explanatory

power after adjustment for the number of predictors. Overall, the model demonstrates strong explanatory power for both endogenous constructs.

Table 5. Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Path	Coefficients	T Statistics	P Value
H1	Digital Competencies -> Career Self-Efficacy	0.574	10.471	0.000
H2	Career Readiness -> Career Self-Efficacy	0.455	7.557	0.000
H3	Digital Competencies -> Career Success	0.228	2.671	0.008
H4	Career Readiness -> Career Success	0.328	4.174	0.000
H5	Career Self-Efficacy -> Career Success	0.426	4.277	0.000
H6	Digital Competencies -> Career Self-Efficacy -> Career Success	0.245	3.883	0.000
H7	Career Readiness -> Career Self-Efficacy -> Career Success	0.194	3.769	0.000

The structural model results indicate that all hypothesized direct relationships were positive and significant. digital competencies and career readiness positively influenced career self-efficacy and career success, while career self-efficacy also positively influenced career success. The model demonstrated strong explanatory power for both endogenous constructs. The mediation analysis further confirmed that career self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationships between digital competencies and career success, as well as between career readiness and career success. Since both the direct and indirect effects were positive and significant, the findings indicate partial mediation for H6 and H7. Therefore, both hypotheses were supported.

The findings demonstrate that Digital Competencies positively influence Career Self-Efficacy (H1). Graduates with stronger digital capabilities tend to feel more confident in managing career-related tasks and challenges (A. Ibrahim et al., 2026). This relationship can be explained through mastery experiences in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), whereby successful experiences in using digital technologies strengthen individuals' beliefs in their capabilities (Rino et al., 2023; Siregar & Syahrizal, 2024). The result is consistent with R. K. Ibrahim and Aldawsari (2023), who reported a substantial positive relationship between digital capabilities and self-efficacy. Beyond technical proficiency, digital competencies may provide graduates with opportunities to solve problems, access career information, and navigate technology-enabled work environments. Successfully performing these activities can reinforce their confidence in handling unfamiliar professional demands.

Career Readiness also enhances Career Self-Efficacy (H2). Individuals who are better prepared for their careers tend to have greater confidence in managing career demands (Hu et al., 2025). This finding supports previous research emphasizing competency development and

relevant experiences as important foundations of career readiness (Makki et al., 2023; Raba et al., 2021), particularly in preparing individuals to participate effectively in the labor market (Segun et al., 2025). From an SCCT perspective, career preparation can provide individuals with resources and experiences that strengthen their perceived ability to perform career-related activities. For fresh graduates, who are still adjusting to professional expectations, this preparation may reduce uncertainty about their ability to meet workplace demands. Career readiness therefore represents not only preparedness for employment but also a potential foundation for developing confidence in managing early career transitions.

Both Digital Competencies and Career Readiness significantly contribute to Career Success (H3 and H4). Digital competencies enable individuals to adapt to technological changes, access career information, maintain professional networks, and perform technology-related tasks. This is consistent with R. K. Ibrahim and Aldawsari (2023), who linked digital capabilities with performance and future success. Meanwhile, career readiness provides broader resources for career development, including technical, digital, interpersonal, and career-management competencies (Marciniak et al., 2020; Dodd et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). The integration of digital capabilities with communication, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving further supports employability and workforce readiness (Raut et al., 2023).

The contribution of Career Readiness to Career Success can be understood in terms of how effectively fresh graduates translate their preparation into workplace performance and career development. Being ready for a career may help individuals adjust to organizational expectations, respond constructively to challenges, collaborate with colleagues, and identify opportunities for professional growth. These capabilities are particularly relevant during the early stages of employment, when graduates are developing their professional identities and learning how to navigate organizational environments. Career readiness may therefore support career success by helping graduates move beyond the initial transition into employment toward sustained progress in their careers. Similarly, digital competencies can expand access to information, professional networks, and technology-enabled work opportunities. Nevertheless, possessing these resources does not automatically guarantee career success; their contribution also depends on how individuals apply them within their specific work environments.

The findings for H5 reveal that Career Self-Efficacy is a significant predictor of Career Success, highlighting its importance within the SCCT framework. Individuals with stronger confidence in managing career-related activities are more likely to approach challenges constructively, persist in seeking career opportunities, and attain favorable outcomes (Erlin et al., 2025; Hall et al., 2018). This finding is further consistent with Siregar and Kelara (2026), who identified a positive association between self-efficacy and performance. The relationship can be explained by the role of self-efficacy in influencing how individuals interpret and respond to career challenges. Fresh graduates with stronger career self-efficacy may be more willing to take initiative, seek feedback, develop new skills, and persist when their initial efforts do not produce the expected results. Such behaviors can help them make better use of available career opportunities and pursue meaningful career goals. Career self-efficacy is therefore important not simply because it reflects confidence, but because it may influence the effort, persistence, and career-related actions through which individuals seek success.

The mediation results provide an important contribution. Career Self-Efficacy mediates the relationships between Digital Competencies and Career Success (H6), as well as between Career Readiness and Career Success (H7). Digital competencies can generate mastery experiences that build confidence, enabling individuals to transform digital capabilities into career outcomes (R. K. Ibrahim & Aldawsari, 2023; G. Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, career readiness can contribute to success not only directly but also by strengthening individuals' confidence to apply their preparation in real career situations (Arghode et al., 2021). This is consistent with SCCT, which emphasizes the role of capability beliefs in shaping responses to career opportunities and challenges (Baluku et al., 2020). Thus, career preparation alone may not be sufficient; its effectiveness depends partly on individuals' confidence in applying their competencies effectively (Borg et al., 2023).

Importantly, the significant direct and indirect effects indicate complementary partial mediation. Career Self-Efficacy explains part of the relationships between Digital Competencies and Career Success and between Career Readiness and Career Success, while the remaining direct relationships suggest that these competencies and resources may also contribute to success through other pathways. This pattern provides a more nuanced interpretation than assuming that career-related capabilities influence success exclusively through confidence. Digital Competencies may facilitate task performance and access to professional opportunities directly, while Career Readiness may support workplace adjustment and the application of relevant competencies. Career Self-Efficacy complements these resources by influencing graduates' confidence in mobilizing them to pursue career goals.

The study contributes empirically to SCCT by examining Digital Competencies and Career Readiness as complementary resources associated with Career Self-Efficacy and Career Success in an integrated model. The findings support the relevance of capability beliefs in explaining early career outcomes while extending the empirical application of SCCT to the digital competencies and employment-readiness demands faced by fresh graduates in Indonesia. In this context, career success may depend not only on what graduates know or can do, but also on their readiness to respond to workplace demands and their confidence in applying their capabilities. The mediation results further indicate that Career Self-Efficacy is an important explanatory mechanism linking these resources to career outcomes, although it does not fully account for their relationships with Career Success. This contextual evidence highlights the value of considering both individual capabilities and psychological beliefs when examining early career development in an increasingly digital labor market. Future research could build on these findings by examining contextual factors, such as organizational support, access to career development opportunities, and labor-market conditions, that may strengthen or constrain these relationships.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that Digital Competencies and Career Readiness positively contribute to both Career Self-Efficacy and Career Success. Career Self-Efficacy also emerges as a significant predictor of Career Success and serves as a mediating mechanism linking both Digital

Competencies and Career Readiness to career outcomes. These results further support and extend Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by highlighting the role of self-efficacy in converting individuals' digital capabilities and career preparedness into successful career outcomes.

From a practical perspective, higher education institutions should integrate digital competency development and career readiness into their curricula and career development initiatives to better prepare graduates for the evolving demands of the labor market. Career development programs may incorporate experiential learning, career planning, mentoring, and constructive feedback to strengthen graduates' confidence in applying their competencies to professional challenges. Fresh graduates should also engage in continuous skill development and proactive career management to enhance their ability to navigate career transitions and pursue sustainable career success.

This study is limited by its purposive sample of 200 Indonesian fresh graduates and cross-sectional design, which may restrict generalizability and the assessment of career development over time. Future studies should use longitudinal designs, broader samples, and consider factors such as organizational support, career adaptability, digital leadership, and employability.

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Data management and formal analysis: Tika Rahma Yani Siregar
Critical review and manuscript editing: Tika Rahma Yani Siregar, Wirda Mardyaningsih

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