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The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy in the Influence of Digital Literacy and Adaptability on Job Readiness among Generation Z Students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Main Objectives: This paper explores how digital literacy and adaptability influence job readiness in Generation Z students, emphasizing the role of self-efficacy in enhancing employability in a dynamic labor market. **Background Problems:** There is a gap between the skills Generation Z possesses and what the job market requires. This study addresses whether digital literacy and adaptability affect job readiness, and whether self-efficacy mediates these relationships. **Novelty:** This study uniquely integrates self-efficacy as a mediator and focuses on Generation Z in a specific regional context, offering insights beyond direct effects previously studied. **Research Methods:** A quantitative explanatory approach was used with 100 students from Pekalongan Regency. Data were analyzed using WarpPLS 8.0 to assess both direct and indirect effects. **Finding/Results:** Digital literacy and adaptability significantly impact job readiness, with self-efficacy partially mediating both relationships. Adaptability shows both direct and indirect effects. **Conclusion:** Self-efficacy strengthens the impact of skills on job readiness. Educational programs should build both technical abilities and students' confidence to face workforce challenges.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Digital literacy, Adaptability, Job Readiness, Self-Efficacy, Generation Z

1. Introduction

Technological transformation and globalization have fundamentally reshaped the structure of the modern workforce. In this dynamic environment, organizations no longer demand merely technical expertise, but also expect workers to demonstrate the ability to adapt quickly to change. Generation Z—those born between 1995 and 2010 (Alfikri, 2023)—emerges as the primary cohort expected to meet these challenges. As digital natives, they have been exposed to technology from an early age. However, their familiarity with digital tools does not necessarily translate into readiness for an increasingly competitive and fast-paced labor market.

According to the Central Statistics Agency of Central Java Province (BPS Jawa Tengah), based on the 2023 National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas), approximately 38.41% of youth aged 16 to 24 in Pekalongan Regency and 30.65% in Pekalongan City are categorized as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), indicating a significant gap between education and labor market absorption at the local level. This phenomenon reflects a growing mismatch between the competencies

Generation Z possesses and the actual needs of the labor market. Even among university students, who are expected to be the most prepared segment of Generation Z, many still face challenges in preparing for the transition from higher education to the professional world.

Job readiness is a crucial determinant of individual success in the professional world. It encompasses not only hard and soft skills, but also attitudes, confidence, flexibility, and sound decision-making (Novita et al., 2023). In this context, identifying the key factors influencing Generation Z's job readiness becomes imperative in shaping effective human resource development strategies.

Previous studies have highlighted the growing importance of digital literacy as a fundamental competence in the digital economy. Abdi (2024) asserted that "digital skills are no longer an added value but a basic necessity for Generation Z to thrive in a competitive future." Similarly, Karimah (2024) emphasized that education systems must adapt to technological advances in order to produce a workforce capable of navigating economic disruption. These views underscore that job readiness for Generation Z is increasingly shaped not just by traditional academic qualifications, but also by their ability to adapt and engage with evolving technologies.

Three factors are frequently cited as strategic in fostering job readiness: digital literacy, adaptability, and self-efficacy. Digital literacy, as defined by Pakpahan & Nikmah (2024), is not merely about operating digital devices, but includes the ability to access, evaluate, and use digital information critically and productively. Adaptability refers to the capacity to adjust to changing environments (Nurmasari, 2024), while self-efficacy pertains to the confidence individuals have in their ability to overcome tasks and work-related challenges (Wiharja MS et al., 2020).

Although prior research confirms the positive influence of digital literacy, adaptability, and self-efficacy on job readiness, much of the existing literature has not fully explored the internal psychological pathways that link these factors. Furthermore, the role of self-efficacy as a potential mediator has received limited attention in employability research targeting Generation Z university students.

Based on the aforementioned context, this study aims to examine the effect of digital literacy and adaptability on job readiness, with self-efficacy as a mediating variable. This approach is intended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of job readiness among Generation Z students and offer evidence-based insights for designing effective competency development programs tailored to their needs.

Problem Formulation

The increasingly dynamic and competitive world of work demands that Generation Z students possess not only cognitive and technical skills, but also soft skills that support their employability. Despite having access to digital technology since early ages, many students still show varying levels of digital literacy and adaptability. These disparities raise questions about how such competencies affect their job readiness. In addition, it is important to understand whether the psychological factor of self-efficacy plays a mediating role in enhancing job readiness. Thus, this study seeks to explore the following research questions: (1) Does digital literacy significantly influence job readiness among Generation Z students? (2) Does adaptability significantly influence job readiness among Generation Z students? (3) Does self-efficacy significantly influence job readiness among Generation Z students? (4) Does digital literacy significantly influence self-efficacy among Generation Z students? (5) Does digital literacy significantly influence self-efficacy among Generation Z students? (6) Does self-efficacy mediate the relationship between digital literacy and job readiness? and (7) Does self-efficacy mediate the relationship between adaptability and job readiness?

2. Literature Review

In the rapidly evolving digital era, job readiness has become a critical concern, especially for Generation Z students transitioning into the workforce. This generation, characterized by their digital nativity, faces unique challenges and opportunities in the labor market.

Digital Literacy and Its Influence on Job Readiness.

Digital literacy encompasses an individual's ability to access, understand, evaluate, and effectively utilize information based on digital technology. In the context of the modern workforce, digital literacy is crucial as it underpins task completion, professional communication, and collaboration. Pakpahan & Nikmah (2024) emphasize that digital literacy not only involves technical skills in using digital devices but also the critical thinking ability toward the information consumed. Zulfiqar et al. (2022) also state that workers with high digital literacy are better able to adapt to digital transformation in the workplace.

Several studies show that digital literacy directly or indirectly affects job readiness through competencies in communication and content creation. However, other studies indicate that digital literacy alone may not be significantly influential on job readiness, requiring additional factors such as self-efficacy to mediate this relationship.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Digital literacy has a positive effect on job readiness.

Adaptability and Its Role in Enhancing Job Readiness.

Adaptability refers to an individual's capacity to adjust to changes, including shifts in work environment, roles, and expectations. It reflects the mental and emotional flexibility needed to respond positively to workplace dynamics. Amri (2022) states that adaptability significantly determines how well individuals maintain work performance amid rapid changes. Employees or recent graduates with high adaptability levels are more prepared to face uncertainty, including post-pandemic workplace challenges.

In the context of Generation Z, adaptability is very important as they face a rapidly evolving labor market due to technological advances and global changes. Studies show that adaptability contributes to job readiness by enabling individuals to effectively handle new tasks and environments.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Adaptability has a positive effect on job readiness.

Self-Efficacy as a Mediating Variable.

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997). It influences how individuals think, feel, and behave, especially regarding their ability to face tasks and challenges at work. Wiharja MS et al. (2020) state that individuals with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident in confronting professional challenges and more capable of adapting to new job responsibilities. Additionally, self-efficacy acts as an internal motivational force playing a key role in shaping career planning and the readiness of young individuals.

Several studies highlight the mediating role of self-efficacy between external competencies and outcomes such as performance or job readiness. For example, Aprilian et al. (2024) examined self-efficacy as a mediator between adaptability and employee performance. While their findings show that adaptability positively affects self-efficacy, it does not significantly mediate the effect on performance. This suggests that although self-efficacy is important, the strength of its mediation may vary depending on context and population.

Conversely, other studies focusing on student populations provide stronger evidence for self-efficacy as a mediator. For instance, Winarno et al. (2024) demonstrate that digital literacy and critical thinking skills significantly influence job readiness through self-efficacy, confirming its role as a psychological mediating factor in student employability models. Similarly, Abdullah et al. (2023) found that self-efficacy mediates the effect of adaptability and motivation on students' intentions to pursue entrepreneurial careers, further emphasizing its function in educational and pre-professional contexts. Overall, these findings support placing self-efficacy in this research model as a mediator between digital literacy and job readiness, as well as between adaptability and job readiness, especially in the context of Generation Z students preparing to enter the workforce.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Self-efficacy has a positive effect on job readiness.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between digital literacy and job readiness.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between adaptability and job readiness.

The Influence of Digital Literacy and Adaptability on Self-Efficacy

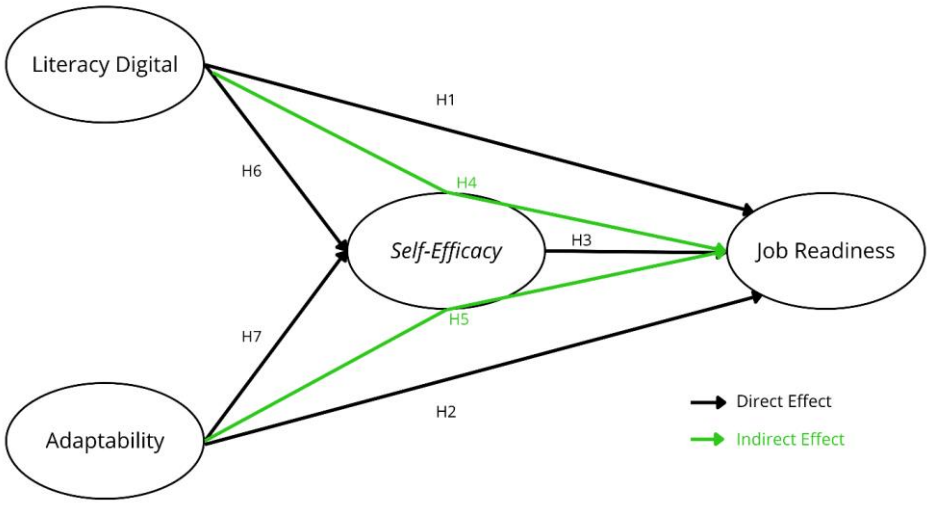
Research by Hanim et al. (2025) shows that digital literacy positively influences students' self-efficacy, which in turn affects their interest in entrepreneurship. This indicates that improving digital literacy can strengthen individuals' self-confidence in facing professional challenges.

Meanwhile, research by (Aprilian et al., 2024) found that adaptability positively affects employee self-efficacy, although it does not significantly mediate the effect on performance. However, in the student context, adaptability can play a more significant role in shaping self-efficacy, considering the challenges of transitioning from education to work.

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Digital literacy has a positive effect on self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 7 (H7): Adaptability has a positive effect on self-efficacy.

Figure 1. The proposed research model showing direct and indirect effects among digital literacy, adaptability, self-efficacy, and job readiness. Hypotheses H1 to H7 are labeled along the paths.



3. Method, Data, and Analysis

Research Method

This study used a quantitative causal-explanatory approach to test the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between digital literacy, adaptability, and job readiness among Generation Z students. Data analysis was performed using WarpPLS 8.0, suitable for small to medium samples and non-normal distributions.

Sampling

The population includes college students in Pekalongan Regency classified as Generation Z. A sample of 100 respondents was obtained using non-probability sampling. Demographics such as gender, semester level, and age were collected to describe the sample.

Data Collection

Data were collected via a Google Form-based questionnaire distributed online. Items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts for content validity and optimized for mobile access.

Measures

Each construct was measured using reflective indicators adopted and adapted from validated sources:

- **Digital Literacy (DL):** Indicators include (1) digital knowledge, (2) the ability to utilize technology constructively to solve problems, and (3) digital communication skills (Putri & Supriansyah, 2021).
- **Adaptability (AD):** Assessed through five dimensions: (1) career planning, (2) exploration, (3) information gathering, (4) decision-making, and (5) reality orientation (Kardafi, 2017).
- **Self-Efficacy (SE):** Measured with indicators including (1) self-confidence, (2) high aspirations, and (3) persistence in achieving goals (Mawaddah, 2019).
- **Job Readiness (JR):** Measured through indicators such as (1) responsibility, (2) critical thinking, and (3) ambition (Maulidiyah & Ubaidillah, 2024).

All constructs were tested for validity and reliability using the following criteria:

- Indicator loading > 0.40
- Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.50
- Composite Reliability > 0.70
- Cronbach's Alpha > 0.60
- Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) < 0.90

Data Analysis

The analysis used **WarpPLS 8.0**, applying a three-step approach:

1. **Measurement Model Assessment:** tested reliability and validity.
2. **Structural Model Assessment:** analyzed path coefficients, p-values, and R^2.
3. **Mediation Analysis:** checked significance of direct and indirect paths. Mediation is supported if indirect effect is significant and alters the direct effect.

4. Result and Discussion

Measurement Model Assessment

The first step in the analysis involved testing the measurement model to assess the reliability and validity of each construct. The loading factor values of all indicators were examined, and as shown in Table 1, all indicators exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.40, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. The construct validity was further confirmed by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, all of which surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Table 2), supporting convergent validity.

Table 1. Loading Factor of Each Indicator

	Loading Factor	P-Value
JR1	0,515	<0,001
JR2	0,622	<0,001
JR3	0,715	<0,001
JR4	0,61	<0,001
JR5	0,627	<0,001
JR6	0,764	<0,001
JR7	0,716	<0,001
JR8	0,68	<0,001
JR9	0,573	<0,001
JR10	0,442	<0,001
JR11	0,625	<0,001
JR12	0,618	<0,001
DL1	0,632	<0,001
DL2	0,72	<0,001
DL3	0,686	<0,001
DL4	0,736	<0,001
DL5	0,717	<0,001
DL6	0,672	<0,001
DL7	0,711	<0,001
DL8	0,413	<0,001
DL9	0,594	<0,001
DL10	0,538	<0,001
DL11	0,75	<0,001
AD1	0,57	<0,001
AD2	0,768	<0,001
AD3	0,734	<0,001
AD4	0,713	<0,001
AD5	0,491	<0,001
AD6	0,5	<0,001
AD7	0,539	<0,001
AD8	0,632	<0,001
AD9	0,613	<0,001
AD10	0,775	<0,001
AD11	0,722	<0,001
AD12	0,701	<0,001
AD13	0,686	<0,001
AD14	0,696	<0,001
AD15	0,679	<0,001
AD16	0,69	<0,001
AD17	0,686	<0,001
AD18	0,754	<0,001
AD19	0,663	<0,001
SE1	0,581	<0,001

	Loading Factor	P-Value
SE2	0,673	<0,001
SE3	0,65	<0,001
SE4	0,693	<0,001
SE5	0,604	<0,001
SE6	0,688	<0,001
SE7	0,615	<0,001
SE8	0,769	<0,001
SE9	0,727	<0,001
SE10	0,747	<0,001
SE11	0,631	<0,001
SE12	0,75	<0,001

Source: Output WarpPLS

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

	JR	DL	AD	SE
AVE	0,399	0,434	0,448	0,463

Source: Output WarpPLS

Composite Reliability (CR) values for Digital Literacy (0.81), Adaptability (0.89), Self-Efficacy (0.85), and Job Readiness (0.83) were all above 0.70, while Cronbach's Alpha values also exceeded 0.60. These results confirm the internal consistency of the measurement model (Table 3). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), and all values were below the critical value of 0.90, suggesting that the constructs were empirically distinct from each other (Table 4).

Table 3. Composite Reliability (CR) values and Cronbach's Alpha values

	JR	DL	AD	SE
Composite Reliability	0,886	0,892	0,938	0,911
Cronbach's Alpha	0,859	0,866	0,93	0,893

Source: Output WarpPLS

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Value

	JR	DL	AD
JR1	0,515	-0,146	-0,163
JR2	0,622	0,156	-0,322
JR3	0,715	0,249	-0,293
JR4	0,61	0,049	-0,295
JR5	0,627	0,081	0,207
JR6	0,764	0,194	-0,117
JR7	0,716	0,134	-0,244
JR8	0,68	0,058	0,094
JR9	0,573	-0,401	0,494
JR10	0,442	-0,137	0,353
JR11	0,625	-0,285	0,016
JR12	0,618	-0,153	0,479
DL1	0,301	0,632	-0,386
DL2	0,141	0,72	-0,059
DL3	-0,11	0,686	0,429
DL4	0,046	0,736	0,311

	JR	DL	AD
DL5	-0,197	0,717	-0,277
DL6	0,174	0,672	-0,228
DL7	0,033	0,711	0,008
DL8	0,254	0,413	-0,296
DL9	-0,17	0,594	-0,062
DL10	-0,076	0,538	0,072
DL11	-0,285	0,75	0,305
AD1	0,036	-0,573	0,57
AD2	0,166	-0,44	0,768
AD3	0,046	-0,234	0,734
AD4	0,143	-0,471	0,713
AD5	0,067	0,387	0,491
AD6	-0,136	0,298	0,5
AD7	-0,106	0,344	0,539
AD8	-0,189	-0,363	0,632
AD9	-0,239	0,019	0,613
AD10	0,031	-0,229	0,775
AD11	-0,15	0,216	0,722
AD12	0,047	-0,148	0,701
AD13	-0,249	0,005	0,686
AD14	0,094	0,306	0,696
AD15	0,376	-0,056	0,679
AD16	0,072	-0,028	0,69
AD17	-0,042	0,467	0,686
AD18	-0,103	0,372	0,754
AD19	0,05	0,348	0,663
SE1	0,068	0,365	-0,001
SE2	0,125	0,051	0,463
SE3	0,062	0,203	0,243
SE4	-0,073	-0,063	0,082
SE5	-0,203	-0,284	-0,336
SE6	-0,182	-0,398	-0,188
SE7	-0,079	-0,228	-0,296
SE8	0,133	0,145	-0,167
SE9	-0,03	0,086	-0,356
SE10	0,083	-0,08	0,177
SE11	0,106	0,131	0,024
SE12	-0,036	0,073	0,306

Source: Output WarpPLS

Structural Model Assessment

The second stage involved evaluating the structural model by estimating path coefficients, p-values, and R^2 values. As shown in Figure 1, Digital Literacy (DL) had a statistically significant direct effect on

Self-Efficacy (SE) (β = 0.25, p < 0.01), while the effect of Adaptability (AD) was marginally significant (β = 0.62, p < 0.10). Furthermore, Self-Efficacy demonstrated a strong and statistically significant effect on Job Readiness (JR) (β = 0.46, p < 0.01).

Regarding the direct effects on Job Readiness, Digital Literacy showed a marginally significant effect (β = 0.14, p = 0.08), while Adaptability had a significant direct effect (β = 0.27, p < 0.01). These results suggest that while Digital Literacy may contribute to Job Readiness, its impact is weaker and may be largely channeled through Self-Efficacy.

The model explained 47% of the variance in Job Readiness (R^2 = 0.47), indicating a moderate to strong explanatory power (Table 5).

Figure 2. Path Diagram with Coefficients

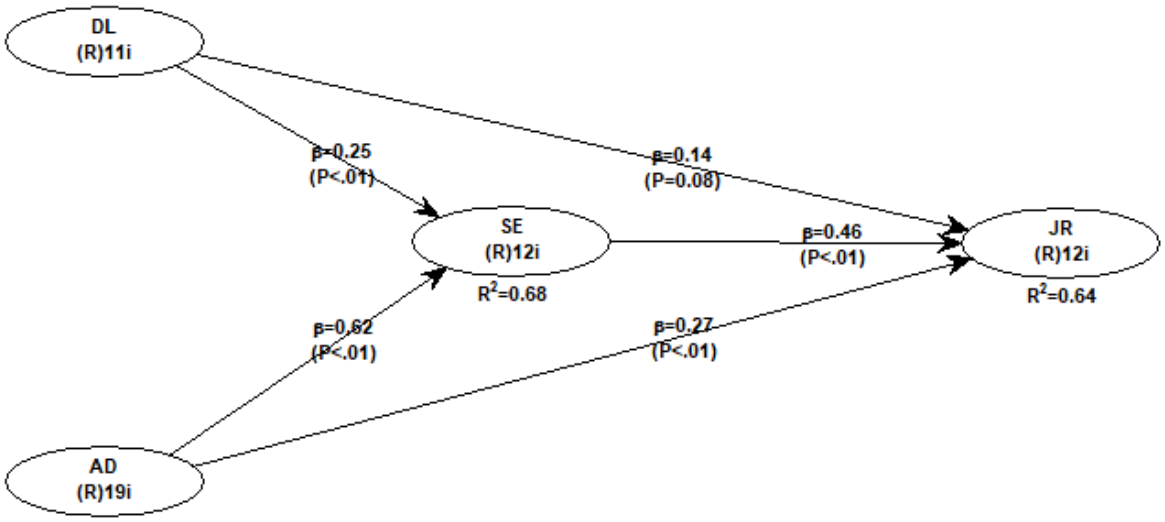


Table 5. Summary of Path Coefficients and Significance Values

Path Coefficient

	JR	DL	AD	SE
JR		0,136	0,268	0,463
DL				
AD				
SE		0,249	0,623	

P Value

	JR	DL	AD	SE
JR		0,081	0,002	<0,001
DL				
AD				
SE		0,005	<0,001	

Source: Output WarpPLS

Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether Self-Efficacy mediates the relationships between Digital Literacy and Job Readiness, as well as between Adaptability and Job Readiness. As

presented in Table 6, the indirect effect of Digital Literacy on Job Readiness through Self-Efficacy was statistically significant (β = 0.115, p = 0.048), suggesting partial mediation, given the marginally significant direct effect.

Similarly, the indirect effect of Adaptability on Job Readiness via Self-Efficacy was also significant (β = 0.289, p < 0.001), supporting partial mediation. These findings indicate that Self-Efficacy serves as an important psychological mechanism in translating both technical and adaptive competencies into job readiness.

Table 6. Indirect Effects and Mediation Analysis Results

Indirect effects for paths with 2 segments

	JR	DL	AD	SE
JR		0,115	0,289	
DL				
AD				
SE				

P values of indirect effects for paths with 2 segments

	JR	DL	AD	SE
JR		0,048	<0,001	
DL				
AD				
SE				

Source: Output WarpPLS

Discussion

The statistical analysis provides nuanced insights into the roles of digital literacy, adaptability, and self-efficacy in shaping job readiness among Generation Z students. Hypothesis 1 (H1), which posits a positive direct effect of digital literacy on job readiness, was not supported by the data (β = 0.14, p = 0.08). However, Hypothesis 6 (H6) was supported, as digital literacy showed a significant positive effect on self-efficacy, which in turn influenced job readiness. This confirms that digital skills must be internalized through psychological belief in one's capabilities in order to contribute meaningfully to job readiness. The result reinforces Bandura's (1997) theory, which states that confidence in one's ability mediates between knowledge and action. It also aligns with Winarno et al. (2024), who emphasized that digital competence must be psychologically activated to impact employability.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) was supported, with adaptability showing a significant direct effect on job readiness (β = 0.27, p < 0.001). At the same time, Hypothesis 7 (H7) was also confirmed, as adaptability significantly influenced self-efficacy, supporting the idea that adaptive individuals are more psychologically equipped to face challenges. The indirect pathway from adaptability to job readiness through self-efficacy was also significant (β = 0.289, p < 0.001), thus confirming Hypothesis 5 (H5). This dual influence of adaptability—direct and indirect—emphasizes its role not only as a practical skill but also as a driver of self-confidence and resilience (Abdullah et al., 2023).

Regarding Hypothesis 3 (H3), the results clearly show that self-efficacy significantly affects job readiness, indicating that belief in one's abilities is a strong predictor of employability. This confirms previous findings that internal psychological readiness is key in translating skills into workplace success (Wiharja MS et al., 2020).

Finally, Hypothesis 4 (H4)—which posited the mediating role of self-efficacy between digital literacy and job readiness—was supported by the significance of the indirect effect and non-significance of the direct path. This underscores that digital skills only become employability assets when students believe in their capacity to utilize them effectively.

Overall, these findings confirm five out of seven hypotheses (H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7), partially support the model's assumptions, and provide a more psychologically informed view of job readiness. They highlight the importance of self-efficacy as a central link that integrates both digital and adaptive skills into meaningful readiness outcomes for Generation Z.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study concludes that self-efficacy serves as a crucial psychological mechanism mediating the impact of digital literacy and adaptability on job readiness among Generation Z students. While digital literacy does not directly influence job readiness, it significantly enhances self-efficacy, which subsequently promotes job readiness. Adaptability, in contrast, exerts both direct and indirect effects, affirming its importance as both a core employability skill and a psychological enabler. These findings demonstrate that job readiness is not determined solely by the possession of skills, but more importantly, by one's belief in their ability to apply those skills in real-world settings.

Theoretically, this study contributes to employability literature by embedding self-efficacy as a cognitive bridge between competencies and readiness. It addresses previous gaps by explicitly modeling the internal pathway—how confidence activates competencies for actual workplace performance.

Practically, these findings suggest that higher education institutions must prioritize psychological development alongside technical training. Programs should incorporate initiatives such as structured feedback, peer mentoring, real-world simulations, and reflective activities aimed at building students' confidence and sense of self-efficacy. Career services and academic advisors are encouraged to offer goal-setting strategies, resilience training, and encouragement for proactive career planning.

For future research, it is recommended to explore how institutional environments and social support may strengthen or weaken these pathways. Comparative studies across educational levels, or longitudinal studies that track changes in self-efficacy over time, would provide deeper insight into how students grow into work-ready individuals. Additionally, future models could include variables such as motivation, personality, or learning environment to further elaborate the internal mechanisms behind job readiness.

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