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Cultivating Work Readiness Through Psychological Capital and Social Support: A Transformational Learning Perspective

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Abstract

The transition from higher education to employment remains difficult in Indonesia, where persistent educated unemployment signals that academic credentials alone no longer guarantee work readiness, and where the psychological and social resources that shape this readiness are still examined separately rather than together. This study aims to analyze the influence of psychological capital and social support on the work readiness of final-year students in Medan, both partially and simultaneously. Employing a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected through a cross-sectional survey of 120 students selected by purposive sampling and analyzed using multiple linear regression with IBM SPSS Statistics. The results show that psychological capital and social support simultaneously exert a positive and significant effect on work readiness ($F = 529.857$; $p < 0.001$), with psychological capital the dominant predictor ($\beta = 0.750$) compared to social support ($\beta = 0.231$). The implication is that transformational education and learning should deliberately cultivate students' internal psychological resources, positioning resilience and self-efficacy as engineered outcomes of institutional strategy rather than incidental byproducts.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from higher education to employment has become one of the most demanding passages in a graduate's life, and in Indonesia it remains stubbornly difficult. Educated unemployment persists even as enrollment expands, revealing that a diploma alone no longer secures a place in the labor market of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0. Employers now expect graduates to demonstrate adaptability, resilience, communication, and the psychological composure to navigate selection processes and shifting job demands, capacities that formal curricula rarely cultivate directly. Work readiness, understood as the constellation of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that allow graduates to enter and succeed in the workplace, has therefore emerged as a decisive predictor of a successful transition (Okolie, 2022) and (Tawash et al., 2024). What makes the Indonesian case pressing is the gap between rising academic attainment and the persistent unpreparedness of final-year students, many of whom enter the job market burdened by anxiety, self-doubt, and uncertainty about their own competence.

This unpreparedness is not adequately explained by academic ability. A growing body of research locates the missing element in graduates' internal psychological resources, captured in the construct of psychological capital, a positive psychological state composed of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2022). Students who possess these resources approach recruitment with greater confidence, sustain motivation in the face of rejection, and adapt more readily to the demands of the workplace. Studies conducted with final-year and vocational students have repeatedly linked psychological capital to employability and career outcomes (Finch et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2025; Sulistiobudi & Kadiyono, 2023). Yet psychological strength rarely develops in isolation. Social support, the perceived emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal

assistance received from family, peers, and lecturers, functions as an external resource that lowers career anxiety and strengthens decision-making during the transition (Raditya & Salim, 2025; Söner & Yılmaz, 2025; Wang & Jiao, 2023). The two resources, one internal and one external, plausibly operate together in shaping how ready a student feels to enter the world of work.

The difficulty is that the literature has largely kept these two determinants apart. Research on psychological capital has concentrated on organizational and employee samples, where the outcome of interest is job performance or well-being rather than the readiness of students yet to be employed (Anwar & Sarfraz, 2023; Donaldson et al., 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2021). Studies of social support, in turn, have often examined it in isolation or within secondary and vocational school populations, leaving its interaction with internal psychological resources underexplored at the university level (Barratt & Duran, 2021; Hyseni Duraku et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2025). Where the two have been considered together in Indonesian settings, social support has typically been positioned as a mediator rather than a direct predictor estimated alongside psychological capital (Utami et al., 2021; Zeeshan et al., 2023). Consequently, the question of how internal and external resources jointly and comparatively shape the work readiness of Indonesian undergraduate students, and which of the two exerts the stronger influence, has not been directly answered.

This study addresses that gap by modeling psychological capital and social support as simultaneous predictors of work readiness among final-year students in Medan, a rapidly expanding higher education hub where graduate competition is intensifying. Its contribution is threefold. Empirically, it estimates the joint and partial effects of an internal and an external resource within a single regression model rather than studying either alone. (Anselmus Dami et al., 2024; Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2021). Theoretically, it clarifies the relative weight of internal versus external resources in the transition to work, an issue of practical consequence for how universities design career guidance, counseling, and self-development programs. Understanding which resource matters more, and by how much, allows interventions to be targeted rather than diffuse.

Building on this reasoning, the present study advances three hypotheses. First, psychological capital is expected to exert a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness (H1). Second, social support is expected to exert a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness (H2). Third, psychological capital and social support together are expected to have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness (H3). By testing these hypotheses, the study aims to determine not only whether each resource contributes to work readiness but also how their combined influence can inform efforts to prepare graduates who are academically capable, psychologically resilient, and socially supported as they enter an increasingly competitive labor market.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design intended to analyze the influence of psychological capital and social support on students' work readiness. An explanatory design was appropriate because the objective was not merely to describe the variables but to test causal relationships among them and to establish the direction and magnitude of each predictor's effect. Data were gathered through a survey using a cross-sectional method, meaning that information was collected at a single point in time to capture the relationships among the variables under study. The population comprised final-year active undergraduate students enrolled at several universities in Medan, Indonesia, a setting chosen for its dense and growing student population and its increasingly competitive graduate labor market. From this population, 120 students were drawn through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique in which participants are selected according to criteria aligned with the research objectives. Three inclusion criteria governed selection, as summarized in **Table 1** respondents had to be active undergraduate students, enrolled in their final semester, and actively preparing to enter the workforce.

Table 1. Respondent Criteria and Sample Composition

No.	Criterion	Description	Sample (n)
1	Academic status	Active undergraduate students	120
2	Study stage	Enrolled in the final semester	120
3	Career stage	Preparing to enter the workforce	120
	Total		120

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2026.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire constructed from the operational indicators of each of the three variables. Psychological capital was measured through the four dimensions of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience; social support was measured through emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support received from family, peers, lecturers, and significant others; and work readiness was measured through the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and psychological preparedness required to enter the workforce. Every item was rated on a Likert scale, and the instrument was tested for validity and reliability before full administration. The reliability analysis returned Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.944 for psychological capital, 0.927 for social support, and 0.952 for work readiness, with all values exceeding the 0.70 threshold and confirming that the instrument measured each construct consistently. **Table 2** reports the operational structure of the three variables and the number of items used to measure each.

Table 2. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Role	Dimensions Measured	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Psychological Capital (X_1)	Independent	Self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience	23	0.944
Social Support (X_2)	Independent	Emotional, instrumental, informational, appraisal	12	0.927
Work Readiness (Y)	Dependent	Knowledge, skills, attitudes, psychological readiness	27	0.952

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Data analysis was conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics and proceeded through a sequence of stages designed to ensure that the regression estimates were valid. Descriptive statistics were computed first to characterize the distribution of responses, after which the classical assumption tests of normality and multicollinearity were performed. Although the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the residuals departed from normality, the analysis proceeded on the basis of the Central Limit Theorem, which holds that a sufficiently large sample, here 120 respondents, yields a sampling distribution that approximates normality. Multiple linear regression then served as the principal analytical technique for testing the hypotheses. The partial test (t-test) examined the individual effect of each independent variable on work readiness, the simultaneous test (F-test) evaluated their combined effect, and the coefficient of determination quantified the proportion of variance in work readiness explained by the model. All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of 5 percent ($\alpha = 0.05$). The full analytical sequence is depicted in **Figure 1**.

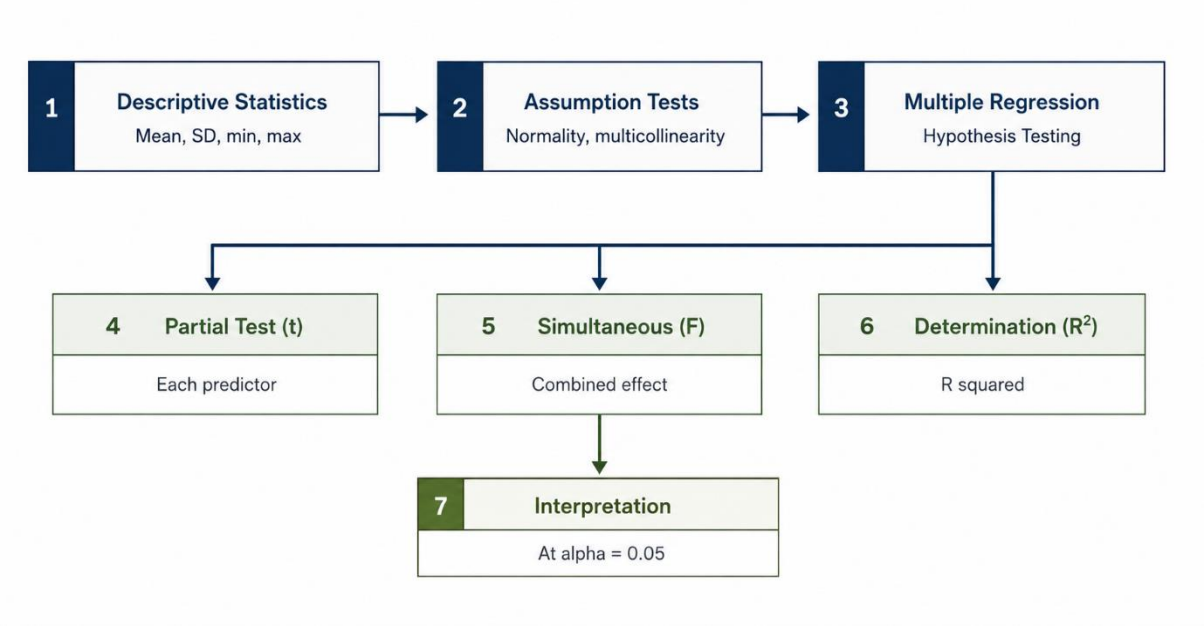

Figure 1. Data Analysis Flow
Source: Authors' elaboration, 2026.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Reliability Test

Reliability testing was conducted to assess the internal consistency of each research instrument in measuring its intended variable. Following the conventional criterion, an instrument is regarded as reliable when its Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeds 0.70. As presented in Table 1, all three instruments surpassed this threshold by a considerable margin. The work readiness scale recorded the highest coefficient at 0.952, followed by psychological capital at 0.944 and social support at 0.927. These values place every instrument in the excellent reliability category and confirm that the measurement tools produced consistent responses, making the data suitable for subsequent analysis.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Interpretation
Psychological Capital	0.944	23	Highly Reliable
Social Support	0.927	12	Highly Reliable
Work Readiness	0.952	27	Highly Reliable

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to characterise the distribution of responses across the three variables, with the results summarised in **Table 4**. Psychological capital recorded a mean of 69.75 with a standard deviation of 12.72, indicating generally high levels of psychological resources among respondents. Social support produced a mean of 38.93 with a standard deviation of 7.53, the smallest dispersion of the three variables and a sign of relatively homogeneous perceptions of support. Work readiness yielded a mean of 83.38 with a standard deviation of 15.01 and the widest range of scores, from 37.00 to 107.00. This greater variability indicates that respondents differed substantially in their perceived readiness to enter the workforce, which is precisely the variation the present model seeks to explain.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychological Capital	120	32.00	87.00	69.75	12.72
Social Support	120	17.00	48.00	38.93	7.53
Work Readiness	120	37.00	107.00	83.38	15.01

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Normality Test

The normality of the regression residuals was examined using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, under the decision rule that residuals are normally distributed when the asymptotic significance (2-tailed) exceeds 0.05. As shown in Table 3, the test produced a Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z of 1.651 with a significance value of 0.009. Because this value falls below 0.05, the residuals are not normally distributed in the strict statistical sense, and the normality assumption is therefore not formally satisfied. This outcome does not invalidate the analysis. With a sample of 120 respondents, the Central Limit Theorem holds that the sampling distribution of the estimates approaches normality as sample size increases, so multiple linear regression remains appropriate. The histogram and the normal probability plot (P-P Plot) were inspected as supporting diagnostics and showed residuals dispersed closely around the diagonal, reinforcing the decision to proceed with the regression analysis.

Table 5. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test Results

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
Unstandardized Residual	1.651	0.009	Not Normally Distributed

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test was performed to determine whether the two independent variables were excessively correlated, a condition that would distort the estimation of the regression coefficients. The diagnosis relied on Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, with the model considered free of multicollinearity when Tolerance exceeds 0.10 and VIF remains below 10 (Kim, 2019). As reported in Table 4, both psychological capital and social support returned a Tolerance of 0.330 and a VIF of 3.034. Since both values fall well within the acceptable range, no multicollinearity was detected, confirming that the two predictors capture distinct constructs and can be entered simultaneously into the regression model.

Table 6. Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Interpretation
Psychological Capital	0.330	3.034	No Multicollinearity Detected
Social Support	0.330	3.034	No Multicollinearity Detected

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination was examined to assess the proportion of variance in work readiness explained by the two predictors jointly. The model produced a correlation coefficient of $R = 0.949$ and a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.901$, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.899. These figures indicate that psychological capital and social support together account for 90.1 percent of the variance in students' work readiness, while the remaining 9.9 percent is attributable to factors beyond the scope of this model. The closeness of R^2 and adjusted R^2 confirms that the explanatory power is stable rather than inflated by the number of predictors. While this proportion is notably high, it is consistent with the strong bivariate associations between the variables and signals a substantial conceptual overlap between students' internal psychological resources and their perceived readiness for work.

Table 7. Coefficient of Determination

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.949	0.901	0.899	4.772

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Partial Test (t-Test)

The partial test was conducted to evaluate the individual contribution of each independent variable to work readiness, with a hypothesis accepted when the significance value falls below 0.05 (Emmert-Streib, 2024). As Table 6 shows, psychological capital (X_1) produced an unstandardised coefficient of 0.885, a t-value of 14.780, and a significance value of 0.000. Because this value is below 0.05, H_1 is accepted: psychological capital exerts a positive and significant effect on work readiness, such that every increase in psychological capital raises students' work readiness when other variables are held constant. Social support (X_2) yielded a coefficient of 0.461, a t-value of 4.552, and a significance value of 0.000, leading to the acceptance of H_2 and confirming that social support likewise contributes positively and significantly to work readiness. A comparison of the standardised coefficients clarifies the relative weight of each predictor: psychological capital (β = 0.750) exerts a markedly stronger influence than social support (β = 0.231), establishing it as the dominant determinant of students' work readiness in this model.

Table 8. Partial Test (t-Test) Results

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.713	2.492	–	1.490	0.139
Psychological Capital (X_1)	0.885	0.060	0.750	14.780	0.000
Social Support (X_2)	0.461	0.101	0.231	4.552	0.000

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Drawing on the unstandardised coefficients, the regression equation can be expressed as:

$$Y = 3.713 + 0.885\ X_1 + 0.461\ X_2$$

where Y denotes work readiness, X_1 psychological capital, and X_2 social support. The equation indicates that, holding social support constant, a one-unit rise in psychological capital increases work readiness by 0.885 units, while a one-unit rise in social support raises it by 0.461 units when psychological capital is held constant.

Simultaneous Test (F-Test)

The simultaneous test assessed whether the two predictors jointly exert a significant effect on work readiness, with significance established at the 0.05 level. As presented in Table 7, the analysis produced an F-value of 529.857 with a significance value of 0.000. Since this value is well below 0.05, H_3 is accepted, confirming that psychological capital and social support together have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness. The magnitude of the F-value demonstrates that the model possesses strong explanatory capacity, indicating that the two variables in combination make a substantial contribution to work readiness and that the regression model is well specified for explaining the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Table 9. Simultaneous Test (F-Test) Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	24,132.021	2	12,066.011	529.857	0.000
Residual	2,664.345	117	22.772	–	–
Total	26,796.367	119	–	–	–

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2026.

Discussion

The findings of this study converge on a single proposition: students' readiness to enter the workforce is governed more by the resources they carry within than by the support they receive from without, though both matter and operate together (Akos et al., 2021; Leonard et al., 2021). The regression model confirmed all three hypotheses, with psychological capital and social support jointly explaining a substantial share of the variance in work readiness, and with psychological capital emerging as the markedly stronger predictor (Dudasova et al., 2024; Gustina et al., 2024). This pattern invites a closer reading of why an internal resource should outweigh an external one in a transitional moment that is, on its surface, intensely social. The paragraphs that follow examine each predictor against the existing literature before turning to the relative dominance of the two, the limits of the present evidence, and the study's specific contribution to educational management.

Psychological capital exerted a positive and significant effect on work readiness ($\beta = 0.750$, $t = 14.780$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H1 and establishing it as the dominant determinant in the model. This result aligns with the foundational argument of Luthans, (Youssef-Morgan, 2024) that self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience function together as a higher-order psychological resource that sustains motivation and adaptive behavior under pressure. It also corroborates evidence from final-year and university samples linking psychological capital to employability and career outcomes (Sulistiobudi & Kadiyono, 2023; Tung & Huong, 2023; Van Vuuren et al., 2024). Where the present study extends this body of work is in its setting and specificity: rather than measuring performance or employability among those already in or near employment, it isolates work readiness as a distinct pre-employment outcome among Indonesian undergraduates, a population for which the construct has been less frequently tested. The finding suggests that the psychological foundation employers reward is already observable, and measurable, before graduation.

Social support likewise produced a positive and significant effect on work readiness ($\beta = 0.231$, $t = 4.552$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H2 and affirming that the external environment retains genuine explanatory power. This is consistent with research positioning support from family, peers, and lecturers as a buffer that reduces career anxiety and strengthens decision-making during the school-to-work transition (Carkit, 2025; Raditya & Salim, 2025; Söner & Yılmaz, 2025). Yet the present study refines that picture in an important way. Much prior work has examined social support either in isolation or among secondary and vocational students, or has cast it as a mediator channeling other influences (Chang & Wang, 2025; Jiang et al., 2022; Suyitno et al., 2024). By estimating it as a direct predictor alongside psychological capital within a single model, this study shows that social support contributes in its own right, but that its contribution is secondary to internal resources once both are accounted for simultaneously. The external scaffold matters, but it does not substitute for internal strength.

The contrast between the two standardized coefficients is the study's most analytically interesting result. That psychological capital outweighs social support by a factor of roughly three suggests that the decisive work of preparing for employment is internal rather than relational. This is intelligible when one considers the nature of the transition itself: entering the labor market demands that the individual, and not the support network, make decisions, absorb rejection, and adapt to unfamiliar demands. Support from others can lower the emotional cost of these tasks, but it cannot perform them. The result echoes the logic of resource-based accounts of coping, in which individuals well endowed with internal psychological resources are better positioned to mobilize and benefit from external ones, rather than the reverse. Read this way, social support may operate partly by reinforcing psychological capital, a possibility the present cross-sectional design cannot test but which future mediation or longitudinal work could productively pursue.

These contributions should be weighed against several limitations that temper the strength of the conclusions. The coefficient of determination was unusually high, with the two predictors explaining roughly ninety percent of the variance in work readiness, a figure that, while derived directly from the data, warrants caution. Such magnitude may reflect conceptual overlap between

the measures of psychological capital and work readiness, since both draw on adjacent psychological dispositions, and it may be inflated by common-method variance arising from the exclusive use of self-report instruments administered at one time. The cross-sectional design further precludes any causal claim, and the sample, drawn from students in a single city, limits generalizability to the wider Indonesian student population. The departure of the residuals from normality, addressed here through the Central Limit Theorem, also invites replication with alternative estimation strategies. None of these caveats negates the findings, but each marks a boundary the reader should keep in view and a direction subsequent research should address.

For educational management, the study offers a contribution that is both specific and actionable. Because work readiness proves to be predominantly a function of malleable internal resources, the responsibility for cultivating it falls squarely within the strategic remit of higher education institutions rather than outside it. Educational managers can treat psychological capital as a measurable institutional outcome, embedding self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience into the design of career services, counseling units, and student development programs rather than leaving these qualities to chance. The evidence that internal resources outweigh external support implies a clear allocation principle: programs that build students' psychological capacities, such as resilience training, recruitment simulations, and structured career mentoring, should be prioritized in planning and budgeting, while social support structures are best designed to reinforce rather than replace that internal work. Positioning the development of psychological capital as a deliberate, governed, and evaluable component of institutional strategy, rather than an incidental byproduct of campus life, is the practical reform this study most directly supports, and it reframes graduate work readiness as an outcome that educational management can purposefully engineer.

CONCLUSION

For transformational education and learning, the study offers a contribution that is both specific and actionable. Transformational education rests on the premise that learning should reshape the whole person rather than transmit knowledge alone, and the evidence here locates the lever for that transformation in students' malleable internal resources. Because work readiness proves to be predominantly a function of psychological capital, the cultivation of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience belongs at the center of the learning experience rather than at its margins, embedded in the curriculum and pedagogy rather than confined to peripheral career services. Educators can treat these psychological capacities as transformative learning outcomes in their own right, designing experiences such as reflective practice, resilience-building tasks, recruitment simulations, and structured mentoring that change how students perceive their own agency and possibility. The evidence that internal resources outweigh external support implies a clear pedagogical principle: transformational learning should prioritize the development of the learner's inner capacities, while social support is best designed to reinforce rather than substitute for that internal growth. Positioning the formation of psychological capital as a deliberate aim of transformational education, rather than an incidental byproduct of campus life, is the reform this study most directly supports, and it reframes graduate work readiness as a transformative learning outcome that institutions can purposefully cultivate.

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