

The Influence of Problem Solving and Persuasive Communication on the Work Readiness of 2022 Cohort Students at STABN Sriwijaya

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Abstract: *The advancement of the Society 5.0 era requires university graduates to possess work readiness supported by various soft skills. However, preliminary findings indicate that the work readiness of 2022 cohort students at Sriwijaya State Buddhist College remains suboptimal. In addition, previous studies on the influence of problem solving and communication skills on work readiness have produced inconsistent results, necessitating further investigation. This study aims to analyze the influence of problem solving and persuasive communication skills on students' work readiness. A quantitative approach with an associative research design was employed. The study involved a population of 91 students, with 30 students allocated to instrument piloting and the remaining 61 students included in the main data analysis. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed through multiple linear regression, supported by validity, reliability, classical assumption, and hypothesis tests. The findings reveal that problem solving and persuasive communication skills have a positive and significant effect on work readiness, both simultaneously and partially, together explaining 75.5% of its variation. Persuasive communication skills emerged as the most dominant variable. The study highlights the importance of strengthening these competencies to enhance students' work readiness.*

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INTRODUCTION

The development of the Society 5.0 era, in line with the Industrial Revolution 4.0, has brought significant changes to workforce competency requirements. Today's world of work demands not only mastery of hard skills but also soft skills that help individuals adapt to a dynamic work environment (OECD, 2018). Higher education institutions bear the responsibility of preparing graduates who are not only academically excellent but also ready to meet professional demands, given that soft-skills development is closely linked to perceived work readiness among recent graduates (Aprilita & Pritasari, 2024). However, data from Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025) show that the unemployment rate among university graduates remains relatively high, indicating a gap between graduates' competencies and labor market needs. This condition shows that students' work readiness remains an important issue that requires attention. One effort that can be made is to identify the factors that contribute to students' work readiness so that universities can design more effective and relevant competency development strategies to meet current labor market needs.

Work readiness is an individual's ability to integrate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experience needed to enter and adapt to the work environment (Pool & Sewell, 2017; Peersia et al., 2024), and a range of assessment methods has been developed to measure this readiness among

graduates (Caballero & Walker, 2010). Within Pool and Sewell's (2017) CareerEDGE model, work readiness is theorized to emerge from the interaction of career-related skills, experience, degree subject knowledge, generic employability skills, emotional intelligence, and reflective self-evaluation; problem solving and persuasive communication skills correspond most directly to the generic employability-skills component of this model, providing a theoretical rationale for expecting both to influence work readiness. From the problem-solving side, Heppner et al.'s (2017) appraisal framework holds that individuals who perceive themselves as capable problem solvers exhibit greater approach-oriented coping and decision-making confidence, competencies that plausibly translate into stronger self-assessed work readiness. From the communication side, persuasion theory (Larson, 2019; Perloff, 2017) explains persuasive competence as the coordinated use of source credibility, message quality, and audience adaptation to influence attitudes and behavior—skills that are directly transferable to workplace interactions such as job interviews, teamwork negotiation, and professional self-presentation. Various previous studies show that problem-solving ability and communication skills are important factors in improving work readiness. Research conducted by Pasha (2023) found that problem solving has a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness. In addition, Mulyono et al. (2023) reported that communication ability makes a significant contribution to graduates' work readiness. These findings indicate that mastery of soft skills is an important indicator in preparing students to face the world of work. However, findings regarding these two variables still show variation depending on the context, object, and characteristics of respondents, so further examination is needed.

Although a number of studies have discussed the relationship between problem solving, communication, and work readiness, several research gaps still need attention. Faisal et al. (2024) found that problem solving had no significant effect on students' work readiness, while Ingsih and Suhana (2023) similarly reported that communication ability had no significant effect on work readiness. These findings contrast with Pasha (2023) and Mulyono et al. (2023), who found significant positive effects for the same variables. A closer examination of these studies suggests that the inconsistency may be associated with differences in measurement approach, sampling context, and respondent characteristics rather than with the variables themselves: Faisal et al. (2024) and Ingsih and Suhana (2023) sampled general Gen-Z university populations using broader, less context-specific instruments, whereas Pasha (2023) and Mulyono et al. (2023) focused on more homogeneous vocational cohorts with instruments tailored to a specific occupational context. This pattern suggests that differences in institutional context and instrument specificity may partly contribute to the variation in observed relationships across studies, although this explanation has not been directly tested in prior research. In addition, most previous studies were conducted among students at general or vocational higher education institutions, while research examining students at religious higher education institutions, particularly state Buddhist colleges, remains very limited. Therefore, further research is needed to provide new empirical evidence regarding the influence of problem-solving and persuasive communication skills on work readiness in a different context.

The novelty of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it tests whether the inconsistent effects reported in prior literature can be explained by contextual and instrumental specificity, by applying a purpose-built, context-adapted instrument within a single, well-defined religious higher-education cohort rather than relying on generic scales applied across heterogeneous populations. Empirically, this study provides new empirical evidence on the joint and relative influence of problem-solving and

persuasive communication skills on work readiness among students at a state Buddhist college, a population for which empirical evidence on work readiness remains limited despite facing the same Society 5.0 labor market pressures as their peers in general and vocational higher education.

This research is important because students' work readiness is one indicator of higher education's success in producing graduates who are able to compete in the labor market. Students with good problem-solving abilities will be better able to face challenges, make decisions, and resolve problems effectively. Meanwhile, persuasive communication skills allow individuals to convey ideas, build cooperation, and influence others professionally. Both abilities are becoming increasingly important in facing a complex and competitive work environment, alongside career management and relevant work experience as predictors of perceived employability (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). In addition, the results of preliminary research conducted among 2022 cohort students at Sriwijaya State Buddhist College show that most students still have relatively low levels of work readiness, problem-solving ability, and persuasive communication skills. This condition reinforces the urgency of this research.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the influence of problem solving and persuasive communication skills on the work readiness of 2022 cohort students at Sriwijaya State Buddhist College, Tangerang, Banten. Specifically, this study examines the effect of problem solving on work readiness, the effect of persuasive communication skills on work readiness, and the simultaneous effect of both variables on students' work readiness. The hypothesis proposed in this study is that problem solving and persuasive communication skills have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness. The findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of communication and work-readiness studies, as well as serve as a consideration for universities in designing soft-skills development programs that support the improvement of graduates' work readiness.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical review above, this study adopts a deductive framework that links problem solving and persuasive communication skills, as two soft-skill competencies, to students' work readiness. Problem solving and persuasive communication skills are positioned as independent variables that are hypothesized to influence work readiness, both partially and jointly, as illustrated in Figure 1.

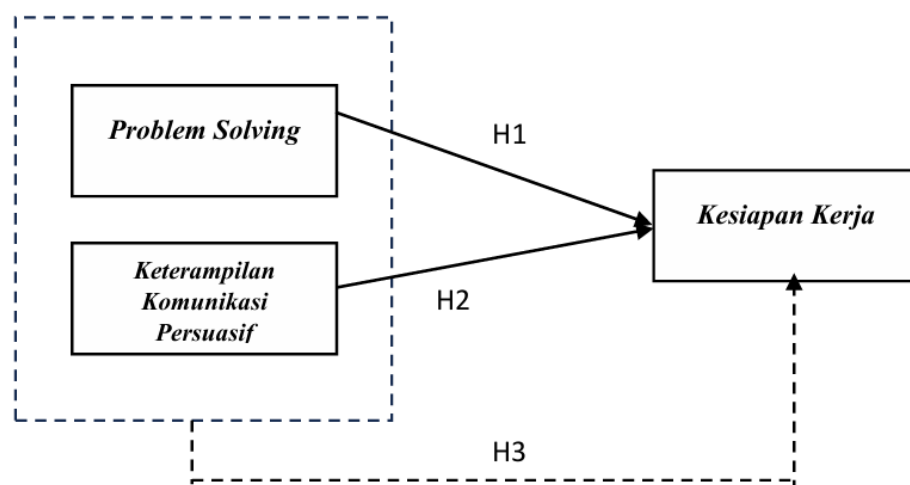


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Problem solving has a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.

H2: Persuasive communication skills have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.

H3: Problem solving and persuasive communication skills simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on students' work readiness as one of the competencies required to meet the demands of the world of work in the Society 5.0 era. The increasingly competitive nature of the labor market requires higher education graduates to possess not only academic ability but also adequate problem-solving and communication skills. Based on the results of preliminary research conducted among 2022 cohort students at Sriwijaya State Buddhist College, Tangerang, Banten, some students still felt unprepared to enter the workforce. This condition highlights the importance of identifying the factors that influence students' work readiness. This study uses a quantitative approach with an associative research design, as it aims to examine the influence between variables formulated in the research hypotheses. According to Sugiyono (2022), associative research aims to determine the relationship or influence between two or more variables. The data used in this study are primary data obtained directly from respondents through the distribution of questionnaires.

The population in this study consisted of all 2022 cohort students across the study programs at Sriwijaya State Buddhist College, Tangerang, Banten, totaling 91 students. They were selected because they were in their final year and facing the transition from higher education into the labor market. The study involved the entire accessible population of 91 students through a census-based recruitment procedure (Sugiyono, 2022). To avoid overlap between instrument piloting and the main analysis, the 91 students were divided into two non-overlapping groups: 30 students for instrument piloting and 61 students for the main hypothesis-testing analysis. The 30 pilot students were drawn proportionally from the Buddhist Communication Studies (4), Buddhist Business Management (9), Elementary School Teacher Education (6), Buddhist Extension Studies (7), Buddhist Religious

Education (3), and Buddhist Psychology and Counseling Education (1) study programs. These students participated exclusively in the instrument-piloting stage and provided data for face validity, construct (Pearson) validity, and reliability testing, but were not included in the main hypothesis-testing analysis. After the instrument was declared valid and reliable, the remaining 61 students, who had not participated in the piloting stage, were involved in the main data collection and hypothesis-testing analysis. Thus, the total population remained 91 students ($30 + 61 = 91$), while each respondent participated in only one stage of the study. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale consisting of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. According to Widoyoko (2021), the Likert scale is used to measure respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions toward a research object. In addition, a literature study was conducted to obtain supporting data in the form of relevant theories and previous research findings.

Characteristics of the Study Population

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the entire 91-member study population recruited through the census procedure described above, covering gender, organizational experience, and prior soft-skill training participation, before the population was divided into the 30-member instrument-piloting group and the 61-member main-analysis group. These characteristics provide general context for interpreting the work-readiness findings.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Study Population (N = 91)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	46	51.1
	Female	45	48.9
Organizational experience	Has experience	75	82.6
	No experience	16	17.4
Soft-skill training	Has participated	67	73.9
	Has not participated	24	26.1

Note: Data collected from the full study population (N = 91) prior to the division into the instrument-testing (n = 30) and main-analysis (n = 61) subsamples.

The gender distribution was relatively balanced (51.1% male, 48.9% female), indicating that the findings are not driven by a single gender group. A large majority of respondents (82.6%) reported prior organizational experience, which is theoretically relevant because organizational involvement is considered a practical avenue through which students develop problem-solving and interpersonal communication skills through teamwork, discussion, and conflict resolution (Salmany, 2023). Similarly, most respondents (73.9%) had previously participated in soft-skill training, suggesting that the sample had at least some prior exposure to structured soft-skill development before completing the study questionnaire.

Instrument Development and Validation

The three research variables were operationalized into measurable dimensions and indicators prior to item construction. Work readiness (Y) was operationalized across four dimensions adapted from the work-readiness assessment framework of Caballero and Walker (2010): personal characteristics, organizational acumen, work competence, and social intelligence. These dimensions covered indicators such as work-related self-confidence, resilience under pressure, compliance with organizational rules, adaptability to workplace culture, competence mastery, effective workplace

communication, and teamwork. Problem solving (X1) was operationalized across three dimensions adapted from the problem-solving appraisal framework of Heppner et al. (2017): problem-solving confidence, approach-avoidance style, and personal control. Persuasive communication skills (X2) were operationalized across three dimensions derived from persuasion theory (Perloff, 2017): communicator credibility, message clarity and strength, and audience and message adaptation. All items were self-constructed by the researchers based on these theoretical dimensions rather than adopted from pre-existing published scales. The items were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) for positively worded items, with reverse scoring applied to negatively worded items.

The initial item pool consisted of 24 items for work readiness, 14 items for problem solving, and 25 items for persuasive communication skills, resulting in 63 items in total. The item pool was first evaluated through face validity testing involving the 30 pilot respondents described above. The respondents assessed each item in terms of clarity and comprehensibility using a four-point scale. The responses were subsequently dichotomized, with scores of 3–4 coded as 1 (agree) and scores of 1–2 coded as 0 (disagree), to calculate the Item-level Face Validity Index (I-FVI) and Scale-level Face Validity Index (S-FVI), following the procedure proposed by Yusoff (2019). An item was retained if it achieved $I-FVI \geq 0.83$, and the overall scale was retained if it achieved both $S-FVI/Ave \geq 0.90$ and $S-FVI/UA \geq 0.90$. All 63 items achieved an I-FVI of 1.00, indicating unanimous agreement regarding their clarity and comprehensibility. Therefore, all items were retained for subsequent construct validity testing.

Because the pilot and main-analysis groups were intentionally non-overlapping, construct validity and reliability were assessed using the 30 pilot respondents before the final instrument was administered to the 61 main-analysis respondents. An item was considered valid if its calculated r -value exceeded the critical r -value (r -table = 0.361 at $\alpha = 0.05$), following Ghazali (2021). This procedure identified items that, despite demonstrating adequate face validity, did not sufficiently represent their respective constructs empirically. As a result, six items were removed from the work-readiness instrument, two items from the problem-solving instrument, and six items from the persuasive communication skills instrument. The final instruments therefore consisted of 18 items for work readiness, 12 items for problem solving, and 19 items for persuasive communication skills, which were subsequently administered to the 61 main-analysis respondents. Table 2 summarizes the item-reduction process.

Table 2. Instrument Item Reduction Following Validity Testing

Variable	Initial Items	Items Removed	Final Valid Items
Problem Solving (X1)	14	2	12
Persuasive Communication Skills (X2)	25	6	19
Work Readiness (Y)	24	6	18

For illustration, one retained positively worded item per variable is presented as an example: for problem solving, “I feel challenged to look for a solution when facing a difficult problem”; for persuasive communication skills, “I try to convey my ideas in a logical sequence so that they are easy for others to understand”; and for work readiness, “I am confident in my ability to work professionally.” Reliability was then assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, with values above 0.60 considered acceptable, 0.60–0.79 acceptable-to-good, and 0.80 or above indicating high reliability (Ghozali, 2021). The final instruments

achieved Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.770 (problem solving, acceptable), 0.885 (persuasive communication skills, high), and 0.864 (work readiness, high), confirming that all three instruments were internally consistent and suitable for the main data collection.

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 (Kurniawan & Yuniarto, 2016). The initial stage of the analysis involved validity and reliability testing to ensure that the research instrument could measure the variables accurately and consistently (Ghozali, 2021). This was followed by descriptive statistical analysis to describe the characteristics of the respondents and the research variables. Before hypothesis testing, the data were tested using classical assumption tests, including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation tests, to ensure that the regression model met the analytical requirements (Ghozali, 2021). Hypothesis testing was carried out using multiple linear regression analysis to determine the influence of problem solving and persuasive communication skills on students' work readiness. In addition, the t-test was used to examine the partial effect of each independent variable, the F-test was used to examine the simultaneous effect, and the coefficient of determination was used to determine the extent of the independent variables' contribution in explaining the variation in students' work readiness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Validity and Reliability Test

A validity test was conducted to measure the accuracy of the research instrument (Gregory, 2015), with the criterion that an item is considered valid if the calculated r-value (r_{hitung}) is greater than the table r-value (r_{tabel}), consistent with standard procedures for validity index calculation (Yusoff, 2019). Based on a trial involving 30 respondents at a 5% significance level ($r_{\text{table}} = 0.361$), most items on the Problem Solving (X1), Persuasive Communication Skills (X2), and Work Readiness (Y) variables had calculated r-values greater than 0.361 and were therefore declared valid. Items that did not meet the validity criteria were removed from the instrument, resulting in 12 valid items for the Problem Solving variable, 19 valid items for the Persuasive Communication Skills variable, and 18 valid items for the Work Readiness variable. The reliability test, using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, showed that all variables had values above 0.70: Problem Solving at 0.770, Persuasive Communication Skills at 0.885, and Work Readiness at 0.864. These results indicate that all research instruments met the criteria for validity and reliability and were therefore suitable for use in data collection.

Classical Assumption Test

Before conducting multiple regression analysis, a classical assumption test was performed to ensure that the regression model met the criteria of a Best Linear Unbiased Estimator (BLUE). According to Ghozali (2021), classical assumption testing is necessary to ensure that the regression estimation results are unbiased and can be used to draw accurate conclusions. In this study, the classical assumption tests included normality, linearity, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation tests. A summary of the results is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Classical Assumption Test Results

Classical Assumption	Indicator	Result	Criterion	Conclusion
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Normality	Asymp. Sig. (K-S)	0.200	> 0.05	Data normally distributed
Linearity (X1→Y)	Sig. Linearity	0.000	< 0.05	Linear relationship
Linearity (X2→Y)	Sig. Linearity	0.000	< 0.05	Linear relationship
Multicollinearity	Tolerance = 0.534; VIF = 1.873	Meets requirement	Tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10	No multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity (X1)	Sig. Glejser	0.277	> 0.05	No heteroscedasticity
Heteroscedasticity (X2)	Sig. Glejser	0.589	> 0.05	No heteroscedasticity
Autocorrelation	Durbin-Watson	1.873	dU < DW < 4-dU	No autocorrelation

Note: Data processed using SPSS 26.

Based on Table 3, all classical assumptions in this study were met. The data are normally distributed, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is linear, and there are no indications of multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, or autocorrelation. Thus, the regression model used meets the BLUE criteria and is suitable for multiple linear regression analysis and hypothesis testing (Ghozali, 2021).

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the influence of problem solving and persuasive communication skills on students' work readiness. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	7.662	3.823	–	2.004	.050
Problem Solving	.634	.141	.393	4.494	.000
Persuasive Communication Skills	.446	.070	.556	6.354	.000

Note: Dependent Variable: Work Readiness.

$$Y = 7.662 + 0.634X_1 + 0.446X_2$$

The analysis shows that problem solving and persuasive communication skills have a positive effect on students' work readiness. The problem-solving variable has a regression coefficient of 0.634 with a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that an increase in problem-solving ability significantly improves students' work readiness. In addition, persuasive communication skills have a regression coefficient of 0.446 with a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating a positive and significant effect on work readiness. Therefore, the better students' problem-solving ability and persuasive communication skills, the higher their level of work readiness. In substantive terms, each one-point increase in the problem-solving score is associated with a 0.634-point increase in the work-readiness score, holding persuasive communication skills constant, while each one-point increase in the persuasive-communication-skills score is associated with a 0.446-point increase in work readiness, holding problem solving constant. Because problem solving carries the larger unstandardized coefficient (0.634 versus 0.446), a unit change in problem solving produces a comparatively larger absolute change in work readiness; however, when compared on a common scale, the standardized

coefficients (Beta = 0.393 for problem solving and 0.556 for persuasive communication skills) show that persuasive communication skills exert the stronger relative influence once differences in each variable's measurement scale are accounted for, indicating that, practically, strengthening students' ability to communicate persuasively yields a comparatively greater improvement in perceived work readiness than an equivalent improvement in problem-solving ability.

Partial Test (t-Test)

The t-test was conducted to determine the effect of each independent variable on students' work readiness. The results show that the problem-solving variable has a calculated t-value of 4.494 with a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that problem solving has a positive and significant effect on work readiness. Furthermore, the persuasive communication skills variable obtained a calculated t-value of 6.354 with a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that persuasive communication skills also have a positive and significant effect on work readiness. The higher calculated t-value for persuasive communication skills compared to problem solving indicates stronger statistical evidence of its partial effect on work readiness. Furthermore, persuasive communication skills showed a larger standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.556$) than problem solving ($\beta = 0.393$), indicating a stronger relative contribution to work readiness within the regression model.

Simultaneous Test (F-Test)

The F-test was conducted to determine the simultaneous effect of problem solving and persuasive communication skills on work readiness. The results show a calculated F-value of 93.264 with a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05). This value indicates that the regression model used is significant and appropriate for explaining the relationship between variables. In conclusion, problem solving and persuasive communication skills jointly have a significant effect on the work readiness of 2022 cohort students at Sriwijaya State Buddhist College.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination analysis shows an Adjusted R Square value of 0.755. This value indicates that 75.5% of the variation in students' work readiness can be explained by the problem-solving and persuasive communication skills variables, while the remaining 24.5% is influenced by other factors outside the scope of this study. The Adjusted R Square is therefore the primary indicator of the model's explanatory power, while the standardized Beta coefficients reported above (0.393 for problem solving and 0.556 for persuasive communication skills) indicate each predictor's relative contribution within the model. As a supplementary effect-size indicator, Cohen's (1988) f^2 statistic can be derived from R^2 using the formula $f^2 = R^2/(1-R^2)$; applying this formula to the model's R^2 of 0.755 yields an f^2 of approximately 3.08, which exceeds Cohen's (1988) conventional threshold of 0.35 for a large effect. Because this f^2 value is mathematically derived from the same R^2 already reported rather than from an independent effect-size calculation, it should be interpreted cautiously as corroborating evidence that the combined influence of problem solving and persuasive communication skills on work readiness is substantively—and not merely statistically—meaningful, rather than as the primary basis for judging the strength of the relationship. These results indicate that the research model has strong explanatory power for the variation in students' work readiness.

Discussion

The results show that problem solving and persuasive communication skills have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness. Partially, the problem-solving variable has a calculated t-value of 4.494 with a significance level of 0.000, while persuasive communication skills have a calculated t-value of 6.354 with a significance level of 0.000. Simultaneously, both variables also have a significant effect on work readiness, with a calculated F-value of 93.264 and a significance level of 0.000. In addition, the Adjusted R Square value of 0.755 shows that problem solving and persuasive communication skills are able to explain 75.5% of the variation in students' work readiness, while the remaining 24.5% is influenced by other factors outside the research model. These findings indicate that the better students' problem-solving ability and persuasive communication skills, the higher their level of readiness to face the world of work.

This effect may occur because problem solving and persuasive communication skills are two complementary competencies in shaping work readiness. Problem-solving ability helps students identify, analyze, and determine solutions to various problems they face (Heppner et al., 2017; Jonassen, 2021), while persuasive communication skills enable students to convey ideas, build cooperation, and effectively influence others (Gass & Seiter, 2021; Larson, 2019). Preliminary research conducted among STABN Sriwijaya students shows that students with good critical thinking and communication skills tend to be more confident in facing the demands of the workforce. This condition indicates that work readiness may be associated not only with academic knowledge but also with the ability to manage problems and interact professionally within the work environment.

These findings imply that the development of students' work readiness needs to be carried out through the simultaneous strengthening of cognitive and interpersonal abilities. From the perspective of the work-readiness theory proposed by Pool and Sewell (2017), work readiness is influenced by skills, self-confidence, experience, and adaptability that are integrated within the individual. Problem solving contributes to critical thinking and decision-making ability, a competency that is also more evident among students who are actively involved in organizational activities (Salmany, 2023), while persuasive communication skills contribute to the ability to build relationships and collaboration through the symbolic and persuasive processes central to communication theory (Child, 2019; Littlejohn & Foss, 2018; West & Turner, 2020; Perloff, 2017). Interestingly, this study also shows that persuasive communication skills have a more dominant influence than problem solving, as reflected in the higher calculated t-value. This indicates that the ability to convey ideas and build effective communication is becoming an increasingly important requirement in facing the dynamics of today's world of work.

These findings are in line with Wahyuni et al. (2025), who found that internship experience and soft skills have a positive and significant effect on students' work readiness. This finding also supports Salsa et al. (2025), who showed that soft skills make an important contribution to work readiness in the Society 5.0 era. In addition, Mulyono et al. (2023) found that communication skills have a positive effect on graduates' work readiness, reinforcing the finding that persuasive communication skills are an important factor in improving students' work readiness. However, these findings differ from those of Faisal et al. (2024) and Ingsih and Suhana (2023), who reported that neither problem solving nor communication had a significant effect on work readiness. As anticipated in the research-gap synthesis above, this divergence appears attributable less to the constructs themselves than to methodological

differences: Faisal et al. (2024) and Ingsih and Suhana (2023) both sampled broad, heterogeneous Gen-Z populations using generic instruments not tailored to a specific institutional context, whereas the present study used a purpose-built, face- and construct-validated instrument administered within a single, homogeneous religious higher-education cohort. This contrast provides one plausible explanation for why significant effects were detected in the present study, although the relative contribution of population characteristics and instrument specificity was not directly tested. This possibility may contribute to understanding the mixed findings reported in the existing literature.

These findings provide empirical support for the relevance of Pool and Sewell's (2017) CareerEDGE model within a religious higher education context in which the model has rarely been examined. Specifically, the findings indicate that generic employability skills, operationalized in this study as problem-solving and persuasive communication skills, explain a substantial proportion of the variance in perceived work readiness (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.755$). This finding is consistent with the model's core premise that employability skills constitute an important component of work readiness. The findings also provide empirical support for the relevance of Heppner et al.'s (2017) problem-solving appraisal framework by indicating that self-appraised problem-solving confidence is significantly associated with work readiness in a higher education context beyond the occupational or clinical settings in which problem-solving appraisal has commonly been examined. Similarly, the findings extend the application of persuasion theory (Larson, 2019; Perloff, 2017) to an employability context by demonstrating that persuasive communication skills are significantly associated with work readiness and represent the stronger predictor in standardized terms.

Based on these findings, universities, particularly STABN Sriwijaya and institutions with comparable religious education profiles, may consider strengthening students' soft-skill development through learning activities, training programs, student organizations, and career-development initiatives. Several practical recommendations can be derived from the findings. First, because persuasive communication skills demonstrated the stronger standardized effect, curricula could incorporate structured communication activities, such as public-speaking practice, negotiation simulations, and persuasive-writing assignments, across relevant courses rather than treating communication as a single stand-alone subject. Second, given the significant contribution of problem-solving skills, problem-based learning, case-study analysis, and scenario-based decision-making exercises could be integrated systematically across study programs, including those that are not traditionally categorized as technical or vocational. Third, career-development units could provide job-interview simulations and workplace-negotiation role-plays that allow students to practice both competencies simultaneously, reflecting workplace situations in which problem solving and communication are often required together. Fourth, because most respondents reported prior organizational experience (82.6%) and participation in soft-skill training (73.9%), institutions could further structure and recognize these existing learning experiences as part of students' employability development. For example, organizational leadership activities could be linked to formal soft-skill certification or competency recognition. At the institutional level, STABN Sriwijaya could consider developing professional communication training, structured problem-solving workshops, career-development programs, and job-interview simulations as complementary initiatives to support students' transition into the workforce.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that problem solving and persuasive communication are positively and significantly associated with students' work readiness within the context of Buddhist religious higher education. Problem solving shows a significant positive association with work readiness, while persuasive communication demonstrates a comparatively stronger standardized association. When considered simultaneously, the two competencies provide substantial explanatory power for variations in students' perceived work readiness. These findings support the relevance of Pool and Sewell's CareerEDGE model, Heppner et al.'s problem-solving appraisal framework, and persuasion theory in explaining the contribution of generic employability competencies to students' work readiness. The study also contributes empirical evidence from an understudied context by demonstrating the relevance of problem solving and persuasive communication among students at STABN Sriwijaya. Practically, the findings suggest that higher education institutions can strengthen students' work readiness by integrating problem-solving development and persuasive communication training into learning activities and career preparation programs. However, the findings should be interpreted within the study's limitations. The cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions, while the use of self-report measures may introduce social desirability and common method bias. In addition, the sample was limited to the 2022 cohort at a single institution, which restricts generalizability to other student populations and higher education contexts. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal or intervention-based designs, incorporate behavioral or peer- and supervisor-rated measures, replicate the study across multiple institutions and cohorts, and examine additional predictors such as self-efficacy, digital literacy, work motivation, and internship experience. Overall, the study indicates that problem solving and persuasive communication are important competencies associated with students' perceived work readiness in the study context.

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