

ABSTRACT

Increasingly competitive labor market conditions have made work readiness a critical issue among university students, as graduate unemployment remains a persistent challenge. This suggests that academic competence alone is insufficient to ensure a successful transition into the workforce without adequate self-development strategies. This study aims to analyze the effect of personal branding on work readiness among final-year students at Diponegoro University, with Self-Efficacy as a mediating variable. The research is motivated by the rising unemployment rate among university graduates and the growing gap between academic competencies and actual labor market demands.

A quantitative approach was employed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The sample consisted of 145 final-year students from various academic programs at Diponegoro University, selected through purposive sampling. The results indicate that: (1) personal branding has a positive and significant effect on work readiness ($\beta = 0.548$; $p = 0.000$); (2) personal branding has a positive and significant effect on Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.512$; $p = 0.001$); (3) Self-Efficacy has a positive and significant effect on work readiness ($\beta = 0.338$; $p = 0.002$); and (4) Self-Efficacy partially mediates the effect of personal branding on work readiness ($\beta = 0.173$; $p = 0.023$). The model explains 60.5% of the variance in student work readiness. These findings suggest that enhancing work readiness requires not only the development of technical competencies, but also the building of a professional identity through personal branding and the strengthening of self-belief through Self-Efficacy.

Keywords: *personal branding, work readiness, Self-Efficacy, partial mediation, final-year students*