

BEYOND GUIDANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CAREER ADAPTABILITY IN LINKING PERCEIVED MENTORING TO WORK READINESS AMONG INDONESIAN GEN Z STUDENTS

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Abstrak

Dalam lanskap ketenagakerjaan Indonesia yang dinamis, Generasi Z menghadapi tantangan signifikan dalam transisi dari universitas ke dunia kerja. Upaya nasional untuk meningkatkan kesiapan kerja telah dilakukan, namun banyak lulusan tetap merasa kurang siap menghadapi tuntutan karier. Berlandaskan teori *career construction* dan *mentoring*, penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana persepsi terhadap fungsi *mentoring* memengaruhi *career adaptability* dan *work readiness* pada mahasiswa tingkat akhir yang telah memiliki mentor sejak tahun pertama kuliah. Model mediasi diajukan dengan *career adaptability* yang mencakup kapasitas regulasi diri berupa *concern*, *control*, *curiosity*, dan *confidence* sebagai mekanisme psikologis yang menghubungkan *mentoring* dengan kesiapan kerja. Sebanyak 200 mahasiswa ($M = 21.1$, $SD = 0.6$) melengkapi kuesioner terkait persepsi *mentoring*, *career adaptability*, dan *work readiness*. Analisis *structural equation modeling* menunjukkan bahwa persepsi *mentoring* berpengaruh signifikan terhadap *career adaptability* ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$) dan *work readiness* ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$), sementara *career adaptability* juga memprediksi kuat *work readiness* ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$). Analisis mediasi *bootstrapped* mengonfirmasi efek tidak langsung yang signifikan, mendukung model mediasi parsial. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya dukungan *mentor* dan kapasitas adaptif dalam mempersiapkan pemuda menghadapi pasar kerja yang tidak pasti, sekaligus memperluas teori *mentoring* pada konteks kolektivistik non-Barat serta memberi implikasi praktis bagi pendidik dan pembuat kebijakan.

Keywords: adaptabilitas karir; generasi Z; kesiapan kerja; ketenagakerjaan Indonesia; *mentoring*

Abstract

In Indonesia's dynamic employment landscape, Generation Z faces considerable challenges in transitioning from university to the workforce. Despite national initiatives to enhance employability, many graduates still feel underprepared for early career demands. Guided by career construction and mentoring theory, this study examines how perceived mentoring functions shape career adaptability and work readiness among final-year university students who have had mentors since their freshman year. A mediation model was proposed in which career adaptability—defined by the self-regulatory capacities of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence—serves as the mechanism linking mentoring to work readiness. Data was collected from 200 students ($M = 21.1$, $SD = 0.6$) using standardized questionnaires on perceived mentoring, career adaptability, and work readiness. Structural equation modeling showed that perceived mentoring significantly predicted career adaptability ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$) and work readiness ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$), while career adaptability strongly predicted work readiness ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$). Bootstrapped mediation analysis confirmed a significant indirect effect, supporting partial mediation. These findings underscore the importance of sustained mentoring and adaptive capacities in preparing youth for uncertain labor markets, while extending mentoring theory to collectivist, non-Western contexts and offering practical implications for educators and policymakers.

Keywords: career adaptability; generation Z; work readiness; Indonesia's employment landscape; mentoring

INTRODUCTION

The transition from education to employment represents a critical milestone in emerging adulthood, and for Generation Z (Gen Z) in Indonesia, this period is fraught with challenges.

Born between 1997 and 2012, this generation is entering the workforce amidst global instability, technological disruption, and deepening socioeconomic uncertainty. In the Indonesian context, these pressures are intensified by persistently high rates of youth unemployment—exceeding 15% in 2024 (Statistics Indonesia, 2024)—as well as underemployment and skill mismatch (International Labour Organization, 2019). Despite expanded access to higher education, many graduates report feeling unprepared for the labor market due to limited practical experience, insufficient soft skills, and unclear career direction (Priyono & Nankervis, 2017, 2020; Ollivaud, 2021; Sakitri et al., 2025). Scholars have described this situation as a crisis of work readiness among university graduates (Priyono & Nankervis, 2019; Sakitri et al., 2025). These challenges are further amplified by Indonesia's ongoing economic and political transformation. Following the 2024 general elections, national initiatives have emphasized youth entrepreneurship and digital talent development. However, most interventions remain focused on technical competencies, overlooking the relational and psychological needs of young job seekers, such as guidance, self-regulation, and adaptive confidence (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Addressing these dimensions is particularly urgent for final-year students, those in their seventh or eighth semesters who are completing capstone projects, theses, or internships as graduation requirements. This stage represents the bridge between academic life and professional identity formation, where students must integrate academic learning into real-world employability skills. Research shows that Indonesian students at this stage often experience heightened anxiety, self-doubt, and uncertainty about their post-graduation prospects (Sakapurnama & Hasan, 2023; Abdullahi et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025). This study focuses on students in the Jabodetabek region (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi)—Indonesia's largest metropolitan area and the country's educational and economic hub. Jabodetabek hosts a dense concentration of universities, industries, and start-up ecosystems that expose students to competitive and rapidly evolving labor markets (Sakapurnama & Hasan, 2023). Universities in this region typically offer more structured mentoring and internship programs than those in peripheral areas, making it a strategic site to examine how students prepare psychologically for career transitions (Isbah et al., 2023). Moreover, this region reflects the cultural complexity of Indonesia's urban Gen Z—balancing collectivist values of interdependence and respect for hierarchy with modern aspirations for autonomy and self-expression (Yilmaz et al., 2024). Studying this population thus provides insight into how mentoring operates within a collectivist yet urbanized educational context.

The pressures of this environment are compounded by lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified academic stress and career apprehension among students worldwide (Abdullahi et al., 2025). Indonesian graduates have reported increased anxiety and diminished confidence in their employability (Yang et al., 2025). Insufficient internship exposure and limited career guidance exacerbate these concerns, creating a sense of urgency to secure employment post-graduation (Anafarta & Apaydin, 2016; Sakapurnama & Hasan, 2023). To address such psychological and developmental barriers, educational institutions must implement targeted interventions that foster adaptability, confidence, and future orientation (Isbah et al., 2023).

One promising developmental mechanism is *mentorship*—a relational process that supports personal and professional growth. Kram's (1985) seminal framework identifies two mentoring functions: career functions (e.g., sponsorship, coaching, exposure) and psychosocial functions (e.g., acceptance, counseling, role modeling). These functions help students acquire both competencies and emotional stability during times of uncertainty. For Gen Z—who value

personalization, transparency, and authenticity in relationships (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Said et al., 2020; Aksakal & Ulucan, 2024; Yilmaz et al., 2024)—effective mentoring must align with these relational expectations. Yet, mentoring effectiveness depends not merely on its presence, but on *mentees' perception* of the mentoring functions they receive (Ragins & Kram, 2007). In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, mentoring interactions are further shaped by hierarchical respect, indirect communication, and high power distance (Setyaningrum et al., 2022).

Another key psychological resource is *career adaptability*, defined by Savickas and Porfeli (2012) as a set of self-regulatory capacities—concern, control, curiosity, and confidence—that enable individuals to manage vocational tasks, transitions, and traumas. Within *career construction theory* (Savickas, 2005), adaptability serves as the psychological mechanism by which individuals actively shape their career trajectories in unpredictable environments. For Gen Z, whose career paths are increasingly nonlinear and technology-driven, adaptability functions as a crucial “psychological toolkit” for navigating uncertainty. Mentorship can strengthen this adaptability by modeling control, providing feedback that enhances confidence, and encouraging curiosity and exploration. Empirical studies have shown that mentoring experiences enhance career adaptability, which in turn supports work readiness, career optimism, and goal clarity (Chui et al., 2022; Teo et al., 2024; Wetstone & Rice, 2023; Kumar & Gupta, 2024).

Despite the growing global literature on these constructs, few studies have examined the interplay between perceived mentoring, career adaptability, and work readiness in collectivist, non-Western contexts. Even fewer have focused on Gen Z university students in Indonesia, whose career development reflects both traditional cultural values and globalized aspirations. This research addresses that gap by investigating how perceived mentoring functions predict career adaptability and, subsequently, perceived work readiness among final-year students in the Jabodetabek region. Grounded in career construction and mentoring theory, the study tests a mediation model in which career adaptability serves as a psychological pathway linking perceived mentoring to work readiness. This research holds both theoretical and applied significance. Theoretically, it expands the mentoring–adaptability framework within Southeast Asia’s collectivist context, emphasizing mentees’ perception of support as a key psychological mechanism. Practically, it informs Indonesia’s ongoing *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* policy by highlighting the need for structured, relationally sensitive mentoring programs that not only transmit skills but also cultivate adaptive capacities critical for employability. The findings are expected to provide theoretical insights into mentoring processes within collectivist educational settings and practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to bridge the gap between higher education and employability in Indonesia.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 200 final-year undergraduate students (7th–8th semester and currently working on their final projects) from various disciplines, including psychology (20%), business (25%), engineering (15%), medicine and health sciences (15%), communication and arts (15%), and law (10%), across public and private universities in the JABODETABEK (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, & Bekasi) area. Participants were currently enrolled as active students at their respective universities. Participants were recruited through university mailing lists and social media groups using convenience sampling. Incentives in the form of e-money valued at Rp25,000.00 were provided to participants. The response rate was approximately

82% of those invited. The sample was balanced by gender (52% female, 48% male) with an average age of 21.1 years ($SD = 0.6$). These participants were chosen because their universities assign faculty mentors starting in their freshman year, allowing consistent mentoring experiences to be assessed at the final-year stage.

Measures

Perceived Mentoring Functions. Mentees' perceptions of their mentors' career and psychosocial support were measured using a 33-item scale known as the Mentor Role Instrument (MRI), developed by Ragins and McFarlin (1990) based on the mentoring functions framework originally proposed by Kram (1985). A sample item is: "My mentor helps me understand how the organization works." Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each item was translated into Bahasa Indonesia using a standardized forward-back translation procedure. Two bilingual experts conducted independent translations and reconciliations, followed by back translation and pilot testing with 20 students for clarity prior to the field data collection to ensure linguistic equivalence and cultural relevance of all measurement instruments. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to assess construct validity. The Mentor Role Instrument (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990) yielded acceptable model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.41$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .056).

Career Adaptability. The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) was used to assess concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (24 items). Sample items are: "Exploring my surroundings", "Becoming curious about new opportunities". Responses ranged from 1 (Not strong) to 5 (Strongest). Each item was translated into Bahasa Indonesia using a standardized forward-back translation procedure. Two bilingual experts conducted independent translations and reconciliations, followed by back translation and pilot testing with 20 students for clarity prior to the field data collection to ensure linguistic equivalence and cultural relevance of all measurement instruments. Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$ indicating excellent internal consistency. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to assess construct validity. The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) showed strong fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.18$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .049).

Perceived Work Readiness. A 10-item scale based on Caballero et al. (2011) measured students' self-assessment of work readiness (e.g., "I feel prepared to enter the workforce"). Responses ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). A standardized forward-back translation procedure was conducted prior to the field data collection to ensure linguistic equivalence and cultural relevance of all measurement instruments. Each item was translated into Bahasa Indonesia using a standardized forward-back translation procedure. Two bilingual experts conducted independent translations and reconciliations, followed by back translation and pilot testing with 20 students for clarity prior to the field data collection to ensure linguistic equivalence and cultural relevance of all measurement instruments. Cronbach's α coefficient reached .87 indicating excellent internal consistency. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to assess construct validity and the Work Readiness Scale (Caballero et al., 2011) demonstrated good construct validity ($\chi^2/df = 2.33$, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .053).

Data Analysis

Data was collected through online surveys administered via the Google Forms platform and distributed across university networks in the Jabodetabek area. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation. Data obtained were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 25 for descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations. Structural equation modeling

(SEM) was performed using AMOS to test the hypothesized mediation model. Bootstrapping (5000 samples) was used to assess the significance of indirect effects.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
Perceived Mentoring	3.87	0.54	—		
Career Adaptability	3.92	0.48	.62**	—	
Work Readiness	3.85	0.52	.55**	.68**	—

Note. *N* = 200. All correlations are Pearson's *r*. *p* < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Perceived mentoring (*M* = 3.87, *SD* = 0.54), career adaptability (*M* = 3.92, *SD* = 0.48), and work readiness (*M* = 3.85, *SD* = 0.52) were all rated at relatively high levels, suggesting that students generally perceived strong mentoring support and reported adaptive capacities and readiness for work. Correlational analyses indicated that perceived mentoring was positively and significantly associated with both career adaptability (*r* = .62, *p* < .01) and work readiness (*r* = .55, *p* < .01). Moreover, career adaptability demonstrated a strong positive correlation with work readiness (*r* = .68, *p* < .01). These findings suggest that students who perceive greater mentoring support tend to report higher adaptability in managing career-related challenges, which in turn is closely linked to their readiness to enter the workforce. The strong relationship between career adaptability and work readiness further highlights the critical role of adaptive capacities as a key psychological resource in career development.

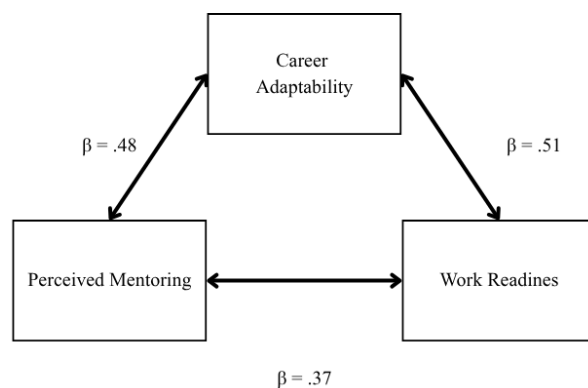


Figure 1. Hypothesized mediation model tested in this study.

Figure 1 illustrates the structural equation model testing the mediating role of career adaptability between perceived mentoring and work readiness. The model demonstrated acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2(84) = 114.56$, *p* = .01, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .045). Perceived mentoring had a significant positive effect on career adaptability ($\beta = .48$, *p* < .001), indicating that students who perceived stronger mentoring reported higher levels of adaptive capacities. Career adaptability, in turn, significantly predicted work readiness ($\beta = .51$, *p* < .001), suggesting that students with greater adaptability felt more prepared to enter the workforce. Perceived mentoring also directly predicted work readiness ($\beta = .37$, *p* < .001), supporting a partial mediation model. These results provide evidence that mentoring contributes to work readiness both directly and indirectly through enhanced adaptability. Thus, mentoring relationships not only offer immediate support for students' transition to

employment but also foster adaptive capacities that serve as critical psychological resources for career development.

Discussion

The findings of this study can be understood through several theoretical lenses that frame career development as both a psychological and relational process. Central to this perspective is career construction theory (Savickas, 2005), which positions career adaptability as a critical set of psychosocial resources that individuals mobilize in response to career tasks, transitions, and traumas. The theory posits that people build their careers by imposing meaning on their vocational behavior and experiences, making adaptability not merely a coping skill but a dynamic process of identity construction. Within this framework, mentoring serves as a social context that facilitates meaning-making—helping mentees align their personal values, capabilities, and aspirations with emerging career identities. Another relevant theoretical lens is social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994), which underscores the interplay of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals in career development. Mentoring, particularly when perceived as supportive and empowering, likely enhances self-efficacy and fosters proactive goal-setting—both of which are foundational to career adaptability. Moreover, the findings echo principles of relational cultural theory which emphasizes that growth-fostering relationships (such as mentoring) promote psychological resilience, especially in collectivist cultures (Jordan, 2017). The partial mediation effect observed in this study may, therefore, reflect not only the development of individual agency but also the internalization of socially situated resources—validating mentoring as both a relational and developmental tool.

This study demonstrates that perceived mentoring significantly predicts both career adaptability and perceived work readiness among Generation Z students in Indonesia. More importantly, career adaptability acts as a partial mediator in this relationship, revealing its pivotal role in the developmental pathway from mentorship to work readiness. The use of structural equation modeling and bootstrapping provided robust empirical support for these pathways, with the model showing strong fit indices (CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .045). These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating the impact of perceived mentoring on adaptive career outcomes (Chui et al., 2022; Wetstone & Rice, 2023; Teo et al., 2024). In the context of Indonesia's current youth employment landscape, where youth unemployment rates exceed 15% (Statistics Indonesia, 2024), the ability to adapt, explore career options, and gain support through mentorship becomes critically important. With over 3 million graduates entering the Indonesian labor market annually (OECD, 2023), the pressure on higher education institutions to produce work-ready graduates is immense. Yet, many graduates report mismatches between their qualifications and labor market demands (International Labor Organization, 2019).

By confirming that career adaptability mediates the effect of mentoring on work readiness, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting career construction theory (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). It also reinforces the idea that mentoring—when perceived positively—equips students with psychological resources to navigate a volatile and competitive job market. Given that career adaptability encompasses concern (future orientation and planning), control (self-regulation and responsibility), curiosity (exploration and openness), and confidence (self-efficacy and persistence), mentors may serve as catalysts for developing these capacities. Within academic settings where personalized career guidance is often limited, mentoring provides a critical platform for modeling adaptability and fostering agency in career decision-making.

Additionally, this research highlights the cultural nuances of mentoring in Indonesia. As a collectivist society with high power distance (Setyaningrum et al., 2022), students may rely more heavily on relational cues and hierarchical guidance. When compared with findings from other collectivist Asian societies, similar patterns emerge (Teo et al., 2024). Studies conducted in China (Chui et al., 2022) and South Korea (Woo et al., 2022) also found that mentoring enhances career adaptability by fostering self-regulation and confidence among young adults transitioning to the workforce. Likewise, Malaysian research (Lee et al., 2016) reported that relational harmony and guidance from mentors play a central role in shaping work readiness among university students. These parallels suggest that the mediating role of career adaptability may be a culturally robust mechanism across collectivist contexts, though relational hierarchies and communication styles can influence how mentoring is perceived and enacted. Thus, effective mentorship programs must be both relationally sensitive and culturally attuned. Informal mentoring—common in Indonesian universities—must be strengthened by institutionalized systems that recognize and train mentors across faculties.

The implications are not only academic but also policy relevant. For instance, Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek) has launched the *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* initiative, which emphasizes internships and industry mentoring as part of higher education transformation. Findings from this study offer empirical backing for embedding structured mentoring programs into this national framework, ensuring that they target not only skills transfer but also psychosocial development and career adaptability. This study provides empirical support for a mediation model in which career adaptability partially mediates the relationship between perceived mentoring and work readiness among Indonesian Gen Z university students. These findings contribute to mentoring theory by highlighting how mentees' perception of support, rather than just the presence of mentors, plays a critical role in shaping adaptive career resources.

The strong association between mentoring and career adaptability echoes findings from Wetstone and Rice (2023) and Teo et al. (2024), suggesting that mentors help students cultivate future-oriented thinking, control over career paths, and confidence in facing workplace challenges. Furthermore, career adaptability emerged as the strongest predictor of work readiness, supporting the view that adaptive psychological capacities are essential in today's volatile labor market. From a practical standpoint, higher education institutions and career centers should institutionalize mentoring-based interventions that integrate relational, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Training faculty, alumni, and senior students to act as mentors capable of fostering adaptability and self-regulated career behaviors could significantly enhance graduates' work readiness. Beyond immediate employability, such interventions may also promote sustainable career development, lifelong learning, and psychological well-being—hallmarks of thriving in an uncertain world of work.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations include the reliance on self-report data and the focus on a single geographic area. Future research could expand to other regions and include longitudinal data. In conclusion, fostering perceived mentoring and building career adaptability are promising strategies to prepare Indonesian youth for a dynamic workforce. This research provides both theoretical validation and empirical clarity on the psychological mechanisms that shape work readiness among Generation Z. Institutions of higher education and policymakers are encouraged to develop structured mentoring interventions that not only address skill acquisition but also promote adaptability and self-efficacy among students.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pivotal role of perceived mentoring in shaping career adaptability and work readiness among Indonesian Gen Z students. Findings demonstrate that mentoring not only directly enhances students' preparedness for the workforce but also indirectly strengthens it by cultivating adaptability resources—concern, control, curiosity, and confidence—that are essential in navigating career transitions. By highlighting the mediating role of career adaptability, this research advances career construction and mentoring theory within a collectivist, non-Western context and provides timely implications for higher education and policy reforms. Structured and culturally sensitive mentoring interventions, integrated into national initiatives such as Kampus Merdeka, may serve as developmental bridges that equip graduates with both technical competencies and adaptive psychological resources to thrive in uncertain labor markets.

Future research should build upon these findings by employing longitudinal designs to capture developmental changes in adaptability and readiness across the education-to-work transition. Comparative studies across diverse Indonesian regions or Southeast Asian contexts would also illuminate cultural variations in mentoring dynamics. In addition, integrating mixed-methods approaches—including qualitative narratives of mentees—could enrich understanding of how relational, cultural, and institutional factors interact to shape mentoring effectiveness. Finally, future studies should explore how digital and peer mentoring models, increasingly relevant for Gen Z, contribute to fostering adaptability and sustainable career readiness in rapidly evolving labor markets.

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