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Social Capital and Learning Environment on Career Readiness: The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital

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Abstract: *Career readiness has become an important concern for university graduates in an increasingly competitive labor market. Beyond academic competence, students' readiness for employment is influenced by social resources, the learning environment, and psychological capacities. This study examines the effects of social capital and the learning environment on the career readiness of final-year students in Cirebon, with psychological capital as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was employed using data collected from 200 final-year students at several universities in Cirebon, which were analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that social capital and the learning environment positively and significantly influence career readiness, through direct effects and mediated effects via psychological capital. Psychological capital also partially mediates the relationships between social capital, the learning environment, and career readiness. Career readiness is influenced by the combined effects of shaped by the interaction of external resources and internal psychological strengths. This study enriches the career development literature by integrating these variables into a single framework and offers practical guidance for higher education institutions in strengthening students' career readiness.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of the labor market, driven by digitalization, automation, and increasing competency requirements, has positioned career readiness as a key concern in higher education. University graduates are expected not only to demonstrate strong academic competence but also to possess the adaptability and practical readiness needed to respond to evolving workplace demands. However, evidence indicates that many final-year students in Indonesia continue to experience a mismatch between the competencies acquired through higher education and those expected by industry. This gap contributes to insufficient career readiness and is reflected in the relatively high unemployment rate among highly educated young people

(Natalia & Putranto, 2024; Sitio & Roswiyani, 2023) These circumstances highlight the need to identify the factors that can effectively strengthen students' career readiness from a comprehensive perspective.

Within the framework of career readiness, social capital and the learning environment are widely recognized as key external determinants. Social capital, reflected in social networks, trust, and interpersonal support, enables students to gain broader access to career-related information and employment opportunities (Letnar & Širok, 2025; Pudyanti et al., 2022) Likewise, a supportive learning environment plays a significant role in fostering the knowledge, competencies, and skills required to meet labor market expectations (Adinda Putri et al., 2025; Liu & Zhang, 2025) . In addition to these external influences, psychological capital comprising self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience has been identified as an important internal resource that promotes career engagement and enhances students' readiness for employment (Baluku et al., 2021; Cabungcag et al., 2025). Despite these findings, limited research has examined how social capital, the learning environment, and psychological capital jointly influence career readiness, particularly among university students in Indonesia.

Based on the issues outlined above, this study addresses several research questions. It examines whether social capital and the learning environment influence the career readiness of final year students, whether these factors affect psychological capital, whether psychological capital contributes to career readiness, and whether psychological capital mediates the relationships between social capital, the learning environment, and career readiness. Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate the direct effects of social capital and the learning environment on career readiness, assess their influence on psychological capital, and examine the mediating role of psychological capital in explaining how external factors contribute to students' career readiness.

The present study provides contributions from both theoretical and practical perspectives by addressing the limitations of previous research, which has generally examined social, environmental, and psychological factors separately. By integrating these variables into a unified structural model grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory, the study seeks to expand the literature on graduate capital and career readiness among university students. From a practical standpoint, the findings are expected to provide guidance for higher education institutions in designing student development initiatives that strengthen social networks, improve the learning environment, and foster psychological capacities to enhance graduates' ability to address the challenges and expectations of the labor market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Capital

Social capital is conceptualized as the set of resources accessible through social networks, reciprocal trust, interpersonal ties, and interpersonal relationships that facilitate access to information and career related support. For university students, these resources contribute to the development of academic and professional connections that strengthen self-efficacy and enhance career readiness. Previous research has demonstrated that social capital significantly improves career readiness by fostering psychological capital and providing social support that promotes students' career development (Truța et al., 2023).

Learning Environment

The learning environment reflects the standard of the academic climate, student lecturer interactions, institutional support, and educational facilities that shape students' learning experiences. A supportive learning environment contributes to the development of competencies,

learning motivation, and the readiness required to enter the workforce. Previous studies have consistently reported that the learning environment positively influences career readiness by enriching learning experiences and strengthening students' career adaptability (Isaias et al., 2020).

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital encompasses a set of positive psychological resources encompassing self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, enabling individuals to achieve success when facing career related challenges. As an internal resource, psychological capital enhances students' learning engagement and career readiness by strengthening their adaptive capabilities and future orientation. Previous research has demonstrated that psychological capital makes a significant contribution to career readiness and plays a key role in supporting students during their transition from higher education to the workforce(Webster & Paquette, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024).

Career Readiness

Career readiness encompasses an individual's ability to prepare for the transition into the workforce through effective career planning, exploration of career opportunities, and adaptation to professional demands. This concept suggests that readiness for employment is influenced not only by individual competencies but also by social resources and psychological conditions. Previous studies have reported that career readiness is strengthened by psychological capital and support from social networks, both of which enhance students' confidence and career orientation (Boat et al., 2021a; Truța et al., 2023)

Hypothesis

H_1: It is suspected that there is a positive and significant influence between social capital on the career readiness of final students.

H_2: It is suspected that there is a positive and significant influence between the learning environment on the career readiness of final students.

H_3: It is suspected that there is a positive and significant influence between social capital and the psychological capital of final students.

H_4: It is suspected that there is a positive and significant influence between the learning environment on the psychological capital of final students.

H_5: It is suspected that there is a positive and significant influence between psychological capital on the career readiness of final students.

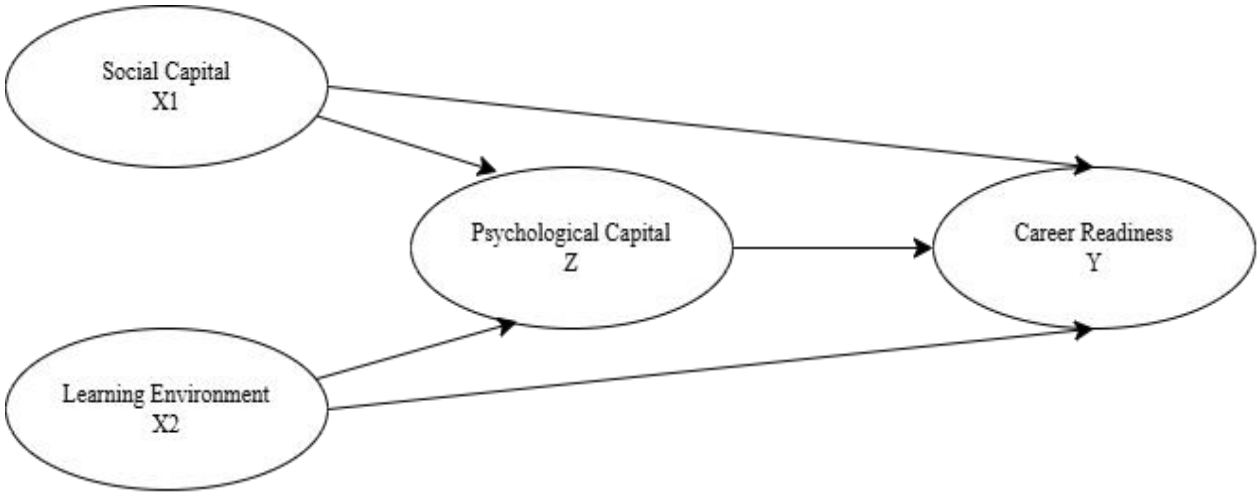
H_6: Psychological capital mediates the relationship between social capital and career readiness of final students.

H_7: Psychological capital mediates the relationship between the learning environment and the career readiness of final students.

METHOD

A quantitative research approach employing an associative design was adopted to investigate the effects of social capital and the learning environment on career readiness, with psychological capital functioned as an intervening variable. The target population consisted of 200 final year students in Cirebon City, and a sample of 171 respondents was selected using Slovin's formula and a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five poin Likert scale based on the indicators of each research variable. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The measurement model was assessed through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability using the Average Variance Extracted, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha. Subsequent analysis focused on evaluating the structural model using the

R^2, Q^2, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual values, followed by bootstrapping to



investigate the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects among the variables (Hair et al., 2019).

Figure 1. Associative Research Design

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Convergent Validity

Table 1. Convergent Validity Test Results

Variabel	Item's	Outer Loadings	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Career Readiness	CR1	0.763	0.933	0.635
	CR2	0.789		
	CR3	0.763		
	CR4	0.828		
	CR5	0.82		
	CR6	0.822		
	CR7	0.803		
	CR9	0.785		
Learning Environment	LE1	0.828	0.932	0.632
	LE2	0.751		
	LE3	0.811		
	LE4	0.796		
	LE5	0.809		
	LE6	0.787		
	LE7	0.786		
	LE9	0.79		

Psychological Capital	**PC1**	0.771	0.937	0.622
	PC11	0.803		
	PC12	0.793		
	PC2	0.785		
	PC3	0.799		
	PC4	0.754		
	PC6	0.809		
	PC7	0.794		
	PC8	0.791		
Social Capital	**SC1**	0.791	0.926	0.641
	SC2	0.78		
	SC3	0.826		
	SC5	0.803		
	SC6	0.791		
	SC7	0.814		
	SC8	0.799		

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 4 2026

The evidence obtained from the measurement model assessment provide evidence that all indicators across the variables demonstrate satisfactory convergent validity. The career readiness construct exhibits outer loading coefficients ranging from 0.763 to 0.828, a composite reliability of 0.933, with the AVE reaching of 0.635. The learning environment construct shows outer loadings between 0.751 and 0.828, with composite reliability of 0.932 and the construct achieved an AVE of 0.632. For psychological capital, the construct exhibits outer loading values ranging from 0.754 to 0.809, with a composite reliability of 0.937 and with the AVE reaching of 0.622. Meanwhile, social capital presents outer loadings between 0.780 and 0.826, a composite reliability of 0.926, and with the AVE reaching of 0.641. All indicators exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 for outer loadings, while composite reliability values are above 0.70 and average variance extracted values are above 0.50. These results confirm that all constructs all constructs exhibit satisfactory convergent validity and reliability, indicating that the measurement model is robust thereby enabling the next stage of structural analysis.

Discriminant Validity

Table 2. Discriminant Validity – HTMT

	Y	X2	Z	X1
Career Readiness				
Learning Environment	0.582			
Psychological Capital	0.885	0.577		
Social Capital	0.652	0.11	0.579	

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 4 2026

The results of the Heterotrait Monotrait ratio assessment presented in Table 2 indicate that the constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity. The relationship between learning

environment and career readiness is 0.582. Psychological capital shows a correlation of 0.885 with career readiness and 0.577 with learning environment. Social capital exhibits correlations of 0.652 with career readiness, 0.110 with learning environment, and 0.579 with psychological capital. These results suggest that each construct is sufficiently distinct in representing its respective variable, confirming These findings confirm that the measurement model demonstrates adequate discriminant validity and is appropriate for further structural analysis.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity – Fornell Larcker

Variabel	Y	X2	Z	X1
Career Readiness	0.797			
Learning Environment	0.536	0.795		
Psychological Capital	0.816	0.533	0.789	
Social Capital	0.597	-0.028	0.532	0.801

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 4 2026

Based on the Fornell Larcker criterion reported in Table 3, each construct exhibits square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs. The values for career readiness, learning environment, psychological capital, and social capital are 0.797, 0.795, 0.789, and 0.801 respectively. The evidence suggests that each construct demonstrates adequate the Fornell–Larcker criterion for discriminant validity, indicating that all variables are empirically distinct within the measurement model.

These values indicate numbers that are higher than the correlation relationships between the results further indicate the correlations among constructs under the Fornell Larcker criterion. The correlation between learning environment and career readiness is 0.536. Psychological capital shows a correlation of 0.816 with career readiness and 0.533 with learning environment. Social capital presents correlations of 0.597 with career readiness, negative 0.028 with learning environment, and 0.532 with psychological capital. Overall, the findings show that each construct is empirically unique across constructs, providing evidence of adequate the Fornell–Larcker criterion for discriminant validity**.**

Reliability Test

Table 4. Reliability Test

Variabels	Cronbach's alpha	Rho A	Composite reliability
Career Readiness	0.918	0.918	0.933
Learning Environment	0.917	0.919	0.932
Psychological Capital	0.924	0.924	0.937
Social Capital	0.907	0.908	0.926

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 4 2026

The findings of the reliability assessment presented in Table 3 indicate that all constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency. The career readiness construct yields a Cronbach's alpha of 0.918, a rho A of 0.918, and a composite reliability of 0.933. The learning environment

construct records a Cronbach's alpha of 0.917, a rho A of 0.919, and a composite reliability of 0.932. The psychological capital construct shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.924, a rho A of 0.924, and a composite reliability of 0.937, while the social capital construct reports a Cronbach's alpha of 0.907, a rho A of 0.908, and a composite reliability of 0.926. All reliability coefficients are above the commonly accepted benchmark of 0.70, indicating that the constructs demonstrate adequate internal consistency and are suitable for structural model testing.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination

Variabel	R-square	R-square adjusted
Career Readiness	0.753	0.749
Psychological Capital	0.584	0.58

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 4 2026

The coefficient of determination analysis shows that the career readiness construct recorded an R square value of 0.753 and an adjusted R square value of 0.749, meaning that 75.3 percent of the variance in career readiness can be explained by the independent variables in the model. Meanwhile, psychological capital yields an R square value of 0.584 and an adjusted R square value of 0.580, indicating that 58.4 percent of the variance is explained by the exogenous constructs in the model. Overall, the model demonstrates strong explanatory capability for career readiness and moderate explanatory capability for psychological capital.

Predictive Pelevance (Q^2)

Table 6. Predictive Pelevance

Variabel	Q^2predict
Psychological Capital	0.573
Career Readiness	0.651

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 4 2026

Based on the predictive relevance assessment presented in Table 8, psychological capital yields a Q square predict value of 0.573, while career readiness shows a Q square predict value of 0.651. Since both values are higher than zero, the analysis provides evidence of The results reflect the model's ability to predict both endogenous variables effectively.

Hypotesis Test

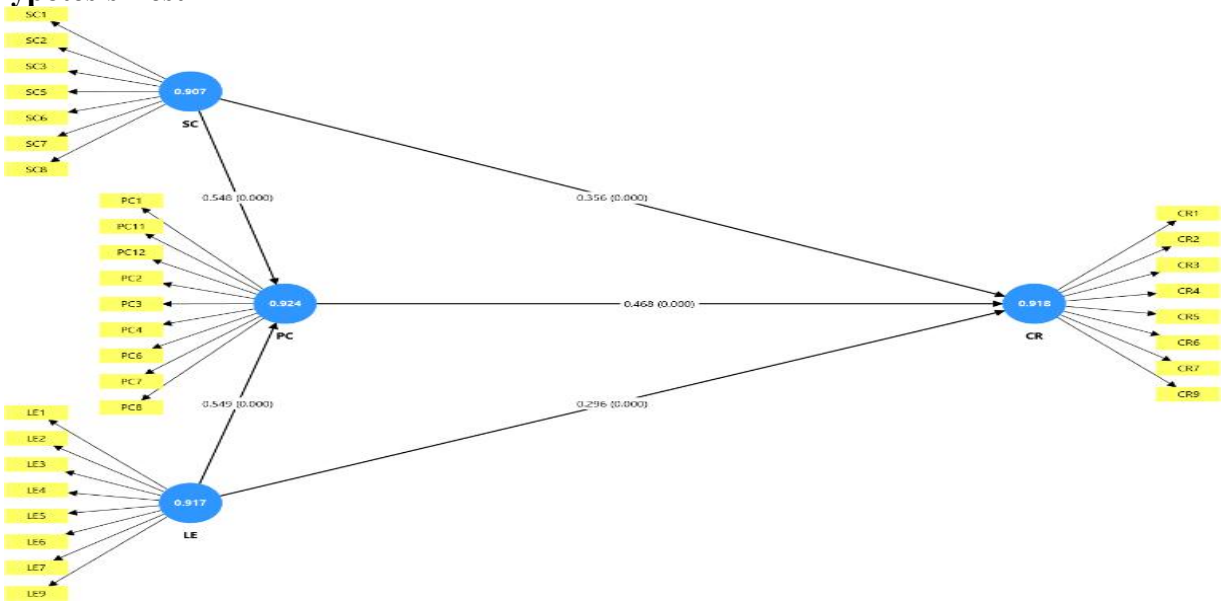


Figure 2. Bootstraping Test

Table 7. Bootstraping Test

Hypotesis	Direction Of Influence	Sampel Original	T statistik	P values	Decision
H1	Social Capital -> Career Readiness	0.356	7.557	0	Accepted
H2	Learning Environment -> Career Readiness	0.296	6.02	0	Accepted
H3	Social Capital -> Psychological Capital	0.548	12.69	0	Accepted
H4	Learning Environment -> Psychological Capital	0.296	6.02	0	Accepted
H5	Psychological Capital -> Career Readiness	0.468	8.6	0	Accepted
H6	Social Capital -> Psychological Capital -> Career Readiness	0.256	6.888	0	Accepted
H7	Learning Environment -> Psychological Capital -> Career Readiness	0.257	7.408	0	Accepted

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 4 2026

The hypothesis testing the empirical findings support all hypothesized relationships

specified in the research model. Career readiness is positively influenced by social capital, with a path coefficient of 0.356, a T statistic of 7.557, and a p value of 0.000. The learning environment also shows a positive effect on career readiness with a coefficient of 0.296, a T-statistic of 6.020, and a p value of 0.000. In addition, the analysis reveals that social capital positively contributes to psychological capital with a coefficient of 0.548, a T-statistic of 12.690, and a p value of 0.000, while the learning environment positively influences psychological capital with a coefficient of 0.296, a T-statistic of 6.020, and a p value of 0.000. Psychological capital is also found to have a positive effect on career readiness with a coefficient of 0.468, a T-statistic of 8.600, and a p-value of 0.000.

Regarding the indirect effects, psychological capital is confirmed to act as a mediating mechanism between social capital and career readiness. with an indirect effect coefficient of 0.256, a T statistic of 6.888, and a p value of 0.000. It also mediates the relationship between the learning environment and career readiness with a coefficient of 0.257, a T statistic of 7.408, and a p value of 0.000. Overall, all hypotheses in this study are supported.

The Influence of Social Capital on Career Readiness

The research shows that social capital contributes positively and significant effect on career readiness, with a path coefficient of 0.356, a t statistic of 7.557, and a p value of 0.000. These findings suggest that social networks, professional relationships, and social support play an important role in broadening students' access to career related information and employment opportunities. From a conceptual perspective, social capital represents external resources that facilitate the development of students' readiness to transition into the workforce.

The results corroborate the findings of (Boat et al., 2021) which found that social support and individuals' interconnectedness within social networks act as external factors that enhance students' work readiness by providing access to career resources and competency development opportunities. Furthermore, recent studies (Saraswati et al., 2022) also confirm that social skills, as a part of social capital, have been shown to help improve work readiness through the strengthening of students' soft skills.

The Influence of Learning Environment on Career Readiness

The analysis reveals that the learning environment exerts a positively and significantly influences career readiness, with a path coefficient of 0.296, a t statistic of 6.020, and a p value of 0.000. These results indicate that the quality of the learning process, teaching approaches, and academic interactions contribute to the development of student competencies that are aligned with labor market demands.

The findings are consistent with previous research (Imjai et al., 2025) which describe that an adequate learning environment and facilities are capable of encouraging increased motivation, mastery of competencies, as well as individual readiness in facing the challenges of the workforce. An academic environment that provides social support and opportunities for competence development has been proven to strengthen individual readiness in facing career changes.

The Influence of Social Capital on Psychological Capital

The analysis reveals that social capital has a positively and significantly influence psychological capital, with a path coefficient of 0.548, a t statistic of 12.690, and a p value of 0.000. These findings indicate that strong social relationships can enhance students' positive psychological states, including self-confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience.

These results are align with those reported by previous studies (Huang & Zhang, 2022; Qi et al., 2021) which suggest that social interactions and social environmental support play a role in

reinforcing individuals' psychological resources, ultimately supporting career readiness and the ability to face work challenges. Recent research by (Tong et al., 2025) affirms that social capital functions as an enabling resource that strengthens students' psychological capital, particularly in facing academic demands and career transitions.

The Influence of Learning Environment on Psychological Capital

This study shows that the learning environment has a positively and significantly influence psychological capital, with a path coefficient of 0.296, a t statistic of 6.020, and a p value of 0.000. These findings suggest that a supportive and conducive learning environment can strengthen students' self-confidence and psychological resilience.

This finding is reinforced by the results of research (Li et al., 2023) which states that a learning environment that provides social support and meaningful learning experiences can foster the development of psychological capital, especially in enhancing individuals' motivation and self-confidence.

The Influence of Psychological Capital on Career Readiness

The findings demonstrate that psychological capital positively and significantly influences career readiness, with a path coefficient of 0.468, a t statistic of 8.600, and a p value of 0.000. These findings suggest that students with higher levels of optimism, self-efficacy, hope, and resilience tend to demonstrate greater readiness to embark on their professional careers.

These results are in line with the findings of the study (Azky & Mulyana, 2024) which reported a robust relationship between psychological capital and students work readiness, where an increase in psychological capital contributes to individuals' preparedness to face the demands of the workforce. In addition, the study (Shen et al., 2025a) also indicates that psychological capital significantly enhances students' employability through increased learning motivation and career values.

The Role of Psychological Capital Mediation

The results indicate that psychological capital serves as mediating mechanism in the pathway between social capital and career readiness, with an indirect effect coefficient of 0.256, a t statistic of 6.888, and a p value of 0.000. Similarly, psychological capital also serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between the learning environment and career readiness, with an indirect effect coefficient of 0.257, a t statistic of 7.408, and a p value of 0.000. These findings suggest that the influence of both social capital and the learning environment on career readiness is partially transmitted through psychological capital.

Findings (Shen et al., 2025) demonstrate that the influence of external factors such as social networks and learning environments not only contributes directly to career readiness but also affects it through the strengthening of students' psychological aspects. Several previous studies have also revealed that psychological capital can act as an intervening mechanism in enhancing employability through the reinforcement of individual learning motivation and career values.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that social capital and the learning environment positively and significantly influences career readiness among final year students, through both direct and indirect effects via psychological capital functioning as a mediating variable. The analysis reveals that also confirm that social capital and the learning environment significantly influence psychological capital, while psychological capital is a key contributor to enhancing students career readiness. The evidence from this study align with the research objective of examining the

relationship between social factors, learning environments, and psychological resources in shaping students' preparedness for entering the workforce.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study highlights the amalgamation of Social Cognitive Career Theory and the concept of graduate capital, demonstrating that career readiness emerges from the interaction between external environmental influences and individuals' internal psychological conditions. From an applied perspective standpoint, the current findings emphasize the key importance of higher education institutions in strengthening students' social networks, fostering a supportive learning environment, and developing psychological capital through career development programs and experiential learning.

The limitations of this study are related to the characteristics of the respondents, who were limited to final year university students in Cirebon City, which limits the broader relevance of the findings to similar contexts. In addition, the use of a survey based quantitative approach does not fully capture the subjective experiences of students in preparing for career readiness. Future research is recommended to broaden the geographical scope, apply mixed methods or longitudinal designs, and incorporate additional variables such as internship experience, digital readiness, or institutional support to establish a more holistic to gain deeper insight into students career readiness development.

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