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Linkage of Higher Education Competencies with Job Readiness: Case Study of Economics and Business Graduates

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***Abstract*— Work readiness is a critical priority for higher education institutions as they strive to align graduate competencies with the evolving demands of the labor market. This study explores the relationship between generic and specific competencies developed through higher education and their influence on the employability of economics and business graduates. Employing a systematic literature review, the research identifies key gaps between employer expectations and the competencies imparted by higher education institutions. Generic competencies—such as critical thinking, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving—are found to enhance workplace adaptability, while specific competencies, including technical skills and domain-specific knowledge, directly contribute to job performance and operational efficiency. The study underscores the role of targeted training programs, such as Professional Project Manager Training and Brevet Tax Training, alongside professional certifications like Certified Accurate Professional (CAP) and Associate Certified Public Accountant (ACPA), in bridging these competency gaps. Recommendations include embedding industry-relevant skills into academic curricula, strengthening collaborations between academia and industry, and promoting continuous professional development initiatives to enhance graduate readiness for the labor market. This research contributes to the discourse on employability by offering actionable insights for higher education institutions and policymakers aiming to close competency gaps. While the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and focus on specific sectors, future research should prioritize empirical data collection and cross-sectoral analyses to validate and expand upon these findings.**

Keywords— ***Generic competencies; Specific competencies; Employability; Higher education; Professional certifications***

I. INTRODUCTION

Work readiness has become a pivotal determinant of graduate employability in today's dynamic and competitive global labor market. Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to prepare graduates who not only excel in domain-specific knowledge but also possess the practical skills and competencies required to meet the evolving expectations of employers. The rapid pace of technological advancements and globalization has further emphasized the necessity for graduates to demonstrate agility and adaptability across diverse professional environments [1].

The concept of work readiness is multifaceted, encompassing both generic competencies—such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving—and specific technical skills aligned with particular fields of study [2]. Employers frequently report a disparity between academic preparation and workplace demands, underscoring the need for curricula that align closely with the realities of the labor market [3]. This gap highlights a critical challenge

for higher education institutions: to design and implement educational programs that simultaneously cultivate transferable skills and technical expertise.

In Indonesia, the misalignment between educational outcomes and labor market demands remains a critical issue, particularly in the fields of economics and business. Many graduates struggle to meet industry expectations due to gaps in both technical expertise and soft skills. Efforts such as the Kampus Merdeka initiative have sought to bridge this gap by integrating industry-relevant training, internships, and project-based learning into university curricula. However, ensuring that graduates possess both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills required for employment remains an ongoing challenge.

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in preparing students for not only immediate employment but also long-term adaptability in an evolving job market. A balanced approach that integrates generic competencies—such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving—with specific competencies—such as financial analysis, strategic planning, and market research—is essential to improving graduate employability. While generic competencies enhance workplace adaptability, specific competencies ensure technical proficiency in specialized tasks [2].

Studies indicate that Indonesian graduates often face an employability gap due to the disproportionate emphasis on technical expertise over transferable skills [1]. Employers consistently emphasize the need for graduates who not only possess domain-specific knowledge but also have the ability to collaborate, communicate effectively, and solve problems in dynamic work environments [4]. The current higher education system, despite various reforms, still struggles to incorporate these competencies effectively.

To address this challenge, integrative learning models such as internships, competency-based training, and industry-academic collaborations have been proposed (Shah et al., 2017). Several universities in Indonesia have begun adopting these strategies, inspired by successful international models such as the dual education systems in Germany and the United States, which combine academic learning with hands-on industry training [4]. However, more systematic implementation is needed to ensure that Indonesian graduates are fully equipped to navigate both local and global labor markets.

This study aims to explore the relationship between higher education competencies and job readiness among economics and business graduates in Indonesia. Specifically, this research is guided by the following objectives:

1. Examine the Relationship Between Generic and Specific Competencies and Work Readiness.

This study assesses how competencies developed in higher education influence graduate employability, focusing on critical skills such as teamwork, communication, and technical proficiency.

2. Identify Gaps Between Academic Training and Labor Market Expectations.

The study highlights discrepancies between the competencies taught in universities and those required by employers, addressing the persistent skills gap in Indonesia.

3. Provide Evidence-Based Recommendations for Curriculum Development.

By analyzing local and international best practices, this research proposes strategies for improving curriculum design to better align educational outcomes with market demands.

By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on employability and offers practical insights for higher education institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders in Indonesia. Enhancing the connection between academic training and workforce readiness is essential for producing graduates who are not only technically skilled but also adaptable and competitive in the modern labor market.

II. METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine the relationship between higher education competencies and graduate work readiness. The SLR method ensures a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of existing research, focusing on identifying patterns, relationships, and gaps in the development of generic and specific competencies within higher education in Indonesia.

Literature Selection Process

The literature selection process follows a structured protocol to identify high-quality and relevant sources based on predefined inclusion criteria. These criteria ensure that the selected studies are directly aligned with the research objectives and contribute significantly to understanding how competencies shape work readiness.

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Relevance to the Topic: Only studies explicitly addressing competencies, work readiness, or higher education outcomes in Indonesia or comparable Southeast Asian countries are included.
2. Credibility of Sources: Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, policy documents, and reports from reputable organizations such as the Indonesian Ministry of Education, World Bank, and ASEAN studies are prioritized to ensure reliability and validity.
3. Recency of Publications: Preference is given to literature published within the last decade (2013–2023) to reflect current trends, challenges, and advancements in the field.

The systematic search was conducted using academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and SINTA (Indonesian Science and Technology Index), supplemented by the review of policy frameworks relevant to Indonesian higher education and international best practices. Articles were

screened based on their abstracts and keywords, followed by a detailed evaluation of methodological rigor and thematic relevance. This process ensures that only high-quality studies are included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis phase focuses on synthesizing the selected literature to evaluate the role of generic and specific competencies in fostering graduate work readiness. A qualitative thematic analysis approach is employed, involving coding and categorization of key findings. This method enables the identification of common themes, patterns, and relationships across the studies.

Key Analytical Dimensions:

1. Generic Competencies: Transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. The analysis examines their contribution to adaptability and long-term career success across diverse industries in Indonesia.
2. Specific Competencies: Domain-specific knowledge and technical skills essential for immediate job performance. Examples include financial modeling, market analysis, digital marketing, and strategic planning within economics and business fields.

Comparative Analysis

To provide a nuanced understanding, the study conducts a comparative analysis across two perspectives:

- Local Insights from Indonesia: Analyzing literature on Indonesian higher education and its alignment with national labor market needs. This includes reports on the effectiveness of Kampus Merdeka programs, industrial partnerships, and the role of vocational training in economics and business education.
- Global Perspectives: Examining studies from other regions with advanced education systems (e.g., Germany, Singapore, the United States) to identify best practices and universal trends that could be adapted to the Indonesian context.

This dual approach highlights unique challenges faced by Indonesian graduates while identifying successful strategies that have been implemented internationally. The synthesis of these findings facilitates the formulation of actionable recommendations for curriculum development.

Contributions of the Methodology

This systematic approach ensures that the study generates a robust and comprehensive body of knowledge regarding the development of competencies in higher education. By integrating insights from local and international perspectives, the methodology provides a solid foundation for making evidence-based recommendations that can enhance the employability of Indonesian graduates, particularly in economics and business.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Generic Competencies Support Workplace Adaptability

Generic competencies such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are essential in enhancing adaptability within workplace environments. These skills empower employees to navigate complex and dynamic work settings effectively, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation that drives organizational success.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking enables employees to analyze situations, evaluate options, and make informed decisions in the face of change. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, critical thinking proved crucial for workers to adapt rapidly to evolving roles and environments, demonstrating its value in maintaining productivity under pressure [5]. Case-based learning frameworks, as highlighted by [6] further emphasize the importance of critical thinking in preparing students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges, enhancing their workplace adaptability.

Communication Skills

Effective communication is fundamental for adaptability as it facilitates the exchange of ideas and collaboration in diverse environments. Organizations that prioritize open communication report higher employee satisfaction and engagement, contributing to improved adaptability [7]. Strong communication skills also help resolve conflicts and foster teamwork, essential for addressing workplace challenges collaboratively [8].

Teamwork

Teamwork enhances adaptability by integrating diverse skills and perspectives in problem-solving processes. Research by [9] illustrates that cooperative learning activities improve critical thinking and teamwork, creating a synergy that enhances organizational resilience. Effective teamwork not only supports individual performance but also strengthens collective problem-solving capabilities, vital in dynamic work settings [10].

Problem-Solving

Problem-solving skills are indispensable for navigating workplace complexities. Employees adept at identifying issues and developing effective strategies enhance organizational responsiveness to challenges [11]. A systematic and creative approach to problem-solving is linked to higher job satisfaction and performance, making it a cornerstone of adaptability [12].

Case Studies

Case studies provide empirical evidence of the interplay between critical thinking and teamwork in fostering adaptability. For instance, client-sponsored projects improve students' teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution skills, which are directly transferable to workplace scenarios [13]. Furthermore, adaptive scenarios explored by [14] demonstrate how critical thinking and teamwork frameworks prepare organizations for future challenges.

B. Specific Competencies Determine Technical Efficiency in the Workplace

Specific competencies, including technical skills, domain-specific knowledge, and industry expertise, are fundamental in

enhancing workplace efficiency and job performance. These competencies allow employees to execute tasks effectively, adapt to changes, and contribute to the overall success of their organizations.

Technical Skills

Technical skills are essential for employees to operate tools, software, and systems relevant to their roles. For instance, technical skills in analytics, customer relationship management (CRM), and business intelligence (BI) are increasingly critical in the marketing field, directly impacting productivity and enabling data-driven decision-making [15]. In the engineering sector, the demand for continuous technical skill updates is vital for adapting to emerging technologies, as noted by [16] Similarly, in IT, technical expertise combined with project management skills facilitates collaboration and improves project outcomes [17]. Across industries, organizations investing in technical training see significant improvements in employee adaptability and operational efficiency.

Domain-Specific Knowledge

Domain-specific knowledge is pivotal for understanding complex concepts, solving industry-specific challenges, and fostering innovation. Employees with strong knowledge foundations in their fields are better positioned to navigate work complexities and contribute to organizational success. Research [18] highlights that cognitive competencies associated with domain expertise significantly enhance employability and job performance. Furthermore, industries such as healthcare and education demonstrate that integrating domain-specific knowledge into operations can lead to better outcomes, such as improved service delivery and innovation [19].

Industry Expertise

Industry expertise enables employees to leverage insights into market trends, regulatory frameworks, and best practices. This knowledge is crucial for aligning job performance with organizational goals and industry standards. For example, banking professionals with strong technical skills and industry-specific knowledge contribute to customer satisfaction and organizational growth by addressing client needs effectively [20]. Similarly, micro-enterprises benefit from technical knowledge to remain competitive, as highlighted by [21].

Case Studies in Specific Industries

Case studies further illustrate the impact of specific competencies across various sectors:

- In retail, operational employees with strong technical and communication skills enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty [22].
- In banking, employees with domain-specific knowledge improve client relationships and business outcomes [20]
- In engineering, ongoing training ensures employees keep pace with technological advancements, enhancing project execution.

Training in Technical Skills

Training plays a vital role in strengthening specific competencies. Structured programs tailored to organizational needs lead to enhanced productivity and job performance [23]. For example, refinery training programs have been shown to improve technical employees' visualization skills, leading to operational efficiency [24]. Similarly, targeted training initiatives in industries like insurance and education demonstrate that technical skills directly influence workplace performance [25].

COMPETENCY GAP

A. Differences in Employer Expectations of Graduates

The misalignment between employer expectations and graduate competencies remains a critical issue affecting employability and education effectiveness. Despite various efforts, a significant skills gap persists, particularly in economics and business graduates.

Mismatch in Competencies

Employers prioritize soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, whereas HEIs emphasize theoretical knowledge and technical expertise. This gap impacts employability, career growth, and salary potential [25]. Similarly, research [26] indicates that deficiencies in writing and communication skills hinder workplace readiness, even when graduates possess adequate ICT skills.

Specific Employer Preferences

Finance and data-driven industries prioritize numeracy and digital skills for enhanced workplace performance[27],[28] As technology evolves, digital competencies have become essential for employability.

Feedback Loops and Curriculum Alignment

Studies highlight the need for closer alignment between academia and industry. Employers seek graduates with business, management, and leadership skills, yet these are often underdeveloped in university curricula [29],[30]. Establishing feedback loops between HEIs and industries can help integrate critical thinking, leadership, and digital competencies into curricula.

Challenges in Diverse Sectors

Alignment challenges vary by industry:

- Entrepreneurship Education: Graduates lack practical entrepreneurial skills, despite high aspirations [31]
- Accounting and Finance: Opinions differ on whether HEIs adequately prepare graduates for industry needs [32]
- Global Business: Graduates must navigate multicultural environments requiring both technical and interpersonal skills [30]

Implications for HEIs

To address these gaps, HEIs should adopt competency-based learning, enhance teaching strategies, and improve career services. Integrating digital skills, leadership training, and

interpersonal development into curricula can better prepare graduates for evolving workforce demands.

B. Curricula Are Not Fully Responsive to Labor Market Dynamics

Higher education institutions (HEIs) face challenges in adapting curricula to meet rapidly evolving labor market demands. Despite advancements in teaching methods and employer engagement, university curricula often fail to keep pace with industry changes, hindering graduate employability.

Emphasis on Theoretical Knowledge Over Practical Application

Many HEIs prioritize theory over practical skills, leaving graduates underprepared for hands-on tasks [33]. This misalignment results in a workforce that struggles to adapt to real-world demands.

Limited Integration of Emerging Trends

Technological advancements require digital literacy, data analytics, and cross-cultural communication, yet many curricula do not incorporate these skills [34]. As industries evolve, HEIs must update course content to reflect modern workplace requirements.

Insufficient Soft Skill Development

Soft skills like communication, teamwork, and adaptability are critical for workplace success but remain underrepresented in academic programs [35]. This gap leaves graduates ill-equipped to navigate collaborative work environments.

Challenges in Entrepreneurial Education

Entrepreneurial skills are increasingly valued, but education systems still focus on theory rather than practical application [36]. Graduates lack mentorship and real-world training, limiting their ability to launch successful ventures.

Inadequate Feedback Mechanisms Between HEIs and Industries

Poor collaboration between HEIs and industries worsens curriculum misalignment. Employers should play a more active role in curriculum updates to ensure graduates meet market expectations [37]. Without such feedback loops, HEIs risk producing graduates who are mismatched with industry needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLOSING THE COMPETENCY GAP

A. Promotion of Training Programs to Bridge Competency Gaps

To address the competency gaps between higher education outcomes and labor market demands, the promotion of targeted training programs is essential. These programs, offered by Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, are designed to equip graduates with both specific and generic competencies, ensuring they are prepared to meet the challenges of modern workplaces. Below are examples of effective training initiatives tailored to enhance graduate employability:

1. Professional Project Manager Training

This program focuses on developing project management competencies, including planning, execution, monitoring, and communication. Participants learn to manage resources efficiently, lead diverse teams, and ensure the timely delivery of projects. Project management skills are in high demand across various industries, making this training a valuable asset for graduates.

2. Brevet Tax Training (A & B Levels)

This taxation training is essential for graduates entering finance, accounting, or business fields. The Brevet program offers comprehensive knowledge of tax regulations, compliance requirements, and reporting standards. Graduates who complete this training are better equipped to handle tax-related tasks, enhancing their employability in finance and accounting sectors.

3. Account Officer Training

This program aims to develop competencies in financial analysis, customer relationship management, and risk assessment. Account officers play a critical role in banking and finance, and specialized training ensures graduates have the technical skills required to excel in these roles.

4. Accounting Cycle Training

Understanding the full cycle of accounting—from journal entries to financial reporting—is critical for graduates pursuing careers in accounting or business management. This training provides hands-on experience with accounting software and tools, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application.

5. Internal Audit Training

This program equips participants with the skills to assess organizational processes, ensure compliance, and identify areas for improvement. Internal auditing is a critical function across various industries, and graduates trained in this area are better prepared to contribute to organizational transparency and efficiency.

6. Computer Applications Training

Proficiency in software applications such as Microsoft Office, accounting software, and data visualization tools is a fundamental requirement in many professions. This training enhances graduates' technical proficiency, enabling them to perform tasks more efficiently and meet workplace demands.

B. Offering Professional Certifications to Enhance Employability

In addition to training programs, Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati offers professional certification programs that equip graduates with industry-recognized credentials. These certifications validate specific technical competencies, enhancing employability and aligning graduate qualifications with market expectations. Below are examples of professional certifications offered:

1. Certified Accurate Professional (CAP)

This certification focuses on mastery of accounting software, enabling graduates to perform advanced tasks in

financial reporting, data analysis, and bookkeeping. CAP-certified individuals are well-equipped to handle the technical demands of accounting and finance roles, making them highly competitive in the job market.

2. Associate Certified Public Accountant (ACPA)

Designed for aspiring public accountants, the ACPA certification provides a foundational understanding of public accounting practices, ethics, and regulatory compliance. This certification prepares graduates to embark on careers in accounting firms and enhances their prospects for career advancement in the financial sector.

3. Certified Tax Technician (CTT)

The CTT certification emphasizes expertise in taxation, covering areas such as tax computation, compliance, and planning. This credential is highly valued by employers in finance, accounting, and legal industries, as it demonstrates a graduate's ability to navigate complex tax regulations effectively.

Integration with Educational Programs

Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati integrates these certification programs into its curriculum, allowing students to pursue certifications alongside their academic studies. This approach ensures that graduates leave the university with both academic qualifications and practical credentials, providing a comprehensive foundation for professional success.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the relationship between higher education competencies and graduate work readiness, particularly in the fields of economics and business. The findings highlight the need to bridge the gap between academic training and labor market demands by emphasizing both generic and specific competencies. The conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations are summarized as follows:

Key Findings and Implications

1. Generic Competencies and Workplace Adaptability

Critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving enhance graduate adaptability, supporting organizational resilience and career success.

2. Specific Competencies and Technical Efficiency

Technical expertise, domain knowledge, and industry-specific skills improve job performance, particularly in finance, digital marketing, and business management.

3. Competency Gaps and Curricular Misalignment

Employers emphasize soft skills and practical experience, yet curricula remain theory-heavy, creating an employability gap.

4. Role of Training Programs and Certifications

Programs like Kampus Merdeka, Brevet Tax, Certified Accurate Professional (CAP), and Associate Certified Public Accountant (ACPA) help bridge competency gaps by equipping graduates with industry-relevant skills.

Contributions of the Research

- Theoretical Contribution:

This study highlights the role of generic and specific competencies in work readiness, stressing the importance of aligning curricula with industry needs.

- Practical Contribution:

The research provides insights for higher education institutions (HEIs), policymakers, and industry stakeholders to implement competency-based training and stronger academia-industry collaboration.

Limitations of the Research

1. Scope of Literature:

   Findings may not generalize beyond economics and business fields.

2. Contextual Bias:

   The study focuses on Indonesian labor market trends, limiting its global applicability.

3. Empirical Evidence:

   The research is based on secondary literature; empirical data is needed for further validation.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Empirical Studies. Future research should collect primary data via surveys and interviews to assess competency gaps and employability impact.
2. Discipline Expansion. Expanding the study to fields like healthcare, engineering, and digital technology will provide broader insights.
3. Longitudinal Research. Assessing the long-term effects of training programs and certifications on career progression will offer deeper insights.

Aligning higher education with labor market demands is essential for improving graduate employability and national economic growth. This study highlights the need for competency-based learning, industry collaboration, and continuous curriculum development. By adopting a proactive approach, HEIs can better prepare graduates to succeed in an evolving workforce.

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