Generation Z Job Interest in Startup Companies: Effects of Digital Skills Readiness and Perceived Capability

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of digital skills readiness and self-efficacy on Generation Z students' interest in pursuing careers in startup companies, focusing on the role of technological competencies and perceived capabilities in shaping career preferences. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed involving 100 students from the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business (FEBI), State Islamic University of North Sumatra, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed through multiple linear regression using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Digital skills readiness ($\beta = 0.372$, $t = 4.490$, $p < 0.001$) and self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.492$, $t = 5.951$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated positive and statistically significant relationships with job interest. Both variables jointly showed a significant relationship with job interest ($F = 77.393$, $p < 0.001$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.609. Digital skills readiness and self-efficacy are important predictors of startup career interest, with self-efficacy demonstrating a stronger standardized relationship. The cross-sectional design, purposive sampling technique, single-faculty setting, and limited number of independent variables restrict causal interpretation and generalizability. This study provides empirical evidence supporting the relevance of technological preparedness and self-efficacy within Social Cognitive Career Theory and offers practical insights for universities developing digital competency and career preparation programs.

Keywords: *Digital Skills Readiness, Generation Z, Job Interest, Self-Efficacy, Startup Companies*

1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment remains a major employment-related challenge in Indonesia. The government has undertaken various efforts to expand employment opportunities, however, the number of unemployed people remains relatively high, including among university graduates. According to Statistics Indonesia (*Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS*), the number of unemployed people in Indonesia reached approximately 7.28 million in August 2025. This indicates that the growing number of university graduates has not yet been fully aligned with the availability of employment opportunities capable of optimally absorbing the workforce. Amid an increasingly competitive labor market, university students, as prospective workers, need to possess adequate preparation and competencies to meet workplace demands.

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the world of work. Various industrial sectors are increasingly adopting digital technologies in their operational activities and business processes, which has increased the demand for workers with digital competencies (Agung, Marliyah, & Aisyah, 2024). According to a 2023 world economic forum report, digital transformation is a key factor driving changes in professional qualification requirements across countries. The ability to utilize technology, adapt to digital developments, and manage information effectively has become an essential competency required by industries (Puspita, & Nasution, 2024; Aini, & Nasution, 2025). Therefore, university students are expected to possess academic knowledge and develop digital competencies relevant to the current demands and developments of the labor market.

In line with these technological developments, startup companies have become one of the sectors experiencing relatively rapid growth. Startups are generally companies that utilize technology and place innovation at the core of their business activities (Clarke, 2018; Fitriani, 2023). In addition to contributing to the development of the digital economy, the presence of startups also creates various new employment opportunities for young people. Startup (2023) reported that Indonesia has one of

the growing startup ecosystems in Southeast Asia. The flexible, innovative, and dynamic characteristics of startup work environments make startup companies increasingly attractive career options for university students and graduates.

Students' interest in startup companies is also related to the characteristics of Generation Z, which is increasingly becoming a dominant group in the working-age population (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). According to the 2020 population census, Generation Z accounted for approximately 27.94% of Indonesia total population. This generation has grown up in an environment closely associated with the Internet and digital technological developments, resulting in work preferences and career orientations that tend to differ from those of previous generations. Generation Z generally considers opportunities for learning and development, workplace flexibility, personal development, and an environment that supports innovation to be important (Guan, Deng, Sun, Wang, Cai, Ye, & Li, 2020; Hasanah, Aslami, & Nasution, 2025). These characteristics make startup companies a relevant career option for Generation Z students when determining their career path.

Job interest is one aspect that can play a role in determining an individual's career path. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) explained that interest develops through the interaction of individual factors, environmental conditions, learning experiences, and beliefs regarding one's capabilities. In the context of employment, job interest reflects an individual's attraction to a particular field or type of work, which may encourage them to seek information, develop relevant competencies and pursue employment opportunities that align with their interests. Nasution and Suryono (2021) found that the educational context positively and significantly affects students' entrepreneurial intentions. This finding indicates that the educational environment can serve as a context associated with the development of students' interests and tendencies. Therefore, higher education institutions represent an important environment for examining how students' interests develop and determine their career choices (Salim, Istiasih, Rumalutur, & Situmorang, 2023).

Technological development has also made digital competence an important aspect of students' readiness to enter the workforce (Iqbal, Iskandarini, & Rahmadhani, 2025). Digital competence is associated with an individual's ability and readiness to use digital technologies effectively to support academic and professional activity. Laar et al. (2017) explained that digital competence extends beyond technical skills, as it encompasses critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. This condition is particularly relevant to startup companies, where technology plays an essential role in business. Students with strong digital competencies are expected to be better prepared to meet the demands of technology-based work, potentially developing a greater interest in career opportunities within startup companies (Iskandar, Kusmilawaty, & Marliyah, 2025).

In addition to digital competence, self-efficacy is another aspect associated with individuals' interests in determining their occupational choices. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions required to achieve specific goals. Such beliefs can influence how individuals respond to challenges, sustain their efforts, and utilize the available opportunities. In preparing for the workforce, students with strong self-efficacy tend to have greater confidence in their ability to cope with workplace demands and competition (Sabilah, Riyanti, & Saputra, 2021). This condition may encourage students to become more receptive to work environments characterized by dynamism and continuous change, including in startup companies.

Nevertheless, empirical conditions indicate that high levels of digital competence and self-efficacy are not always accompanied by high levels of job interest in startup companies. World (2023) reported that approximately 60% of young people possess basic digital skills, yet only around 38% feel prepared to work in digital-based environments. In addition, the LinkedIn Workforce Confidence Index survey indicated that approximately 45% of young people still lacked confidence in entering the workforce despite possessing adequate skills. Meanwhile, Startup (2023) reported that approximately 55% of young people expressed an interest in working for startup companies. These findings indicate that digital competence and self-confidence do not necessarily directly lead to higher levels of job interest in startup companies.

Several previous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between digital skills readiness, self-efficacy, and job interest. Zhao, Chen, Yu, Zheng, Lin, and Yan (2025) found that digital skills readiness and self-efficacy had positive effects on job interest in the digital field. Husniah, Ulfa, and Aulia (2026) found a positive relationship between digital competence and students' career planning. Nabil and Mubarrok (2025) found that self-efficacy had a positive effect on students' career interest, while Ramadhan and Heng (2024) demonstrated that the stronger individuals' beliefs in their own abilities, the greater their interest in employment. However, these previous studies did not specifically examine the joint effects of digital skills readiness and self-efficacy on job interest among Generation Z students in the context of startup companies. This gap provides the basis for the present study.

This study aims to analyze the effects of digital skills readiness and self-efficacy on job interest among Generation Z students of the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra who are interested in pursuing careers in startup companies. This study is expected to contribute to the development of human resource management literature, particularly concerning digital skills readiness, self-efficacy, and job interest. In addition, the findings are expected to provide useful information for higher education institutions in preparing students with the competencies and readiness required to meet the demands of a digital-based workplace.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between digital competencies, self-efficacy, and career-related interests from different perspectives. Zhao et al. (2025) reported the positive effects of digital skills readiness and self-efficacy on job interest in the digital field, while Husniah et al. (2026) highlighted the relationship between digital competence and students' career planning. Nabil and Mubarrok (2025) and Ramadhan and Heng (2024) emphasized the role of self-efficacy in shaping students' career interests and employment preferences. Although these studies provide evidence of the relevance of digital competencies and self-efficacy in career development, they differ in their research contexts and outcomes. In particular, career planning, general employment interest, and interest in digital occupations do not necessarily reflect students' specific interest in pursuing careers in startup companies. Furthermore, the combined influence of digital skills readiness and self-efficacy on startup career interest among Generation Z university students remains insufficiently examined in the specific context of higher education institutions in Indonesia (Tiyanti, Marsofiyati, & Wolor, 2025).

This study addresses this gap by investigating the effects of digital skills readiness and self-efficacy on job interest among Generation Z students at the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business (FEBI), State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), in pursuing careers in startup companies. This context is relevant because students' readiness to enter technology-driven work environments may vary according to their digital competencies, confidence in their abilities, and educational experiences. By examining both variables simultaneously within a specific student population and career context, this study extends previous research beyond general career interest to focus on interest in startup employment. The findings are expected to provide context-specific empirical evidence that contributes to the literature on digital competencies, self-efficacy, and career interest, while offering practical insights for higher education institutions in preparing students for employment opportunities in the startup ecosystem.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Job Interest

Job interest refers to an individual's attraction toward a particular occupation that motivates career exploration, preparation, and the pursuit of employment opportunities. According to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explains that career interests develop through the interaction of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and learning experiences. These factors influence how individuals evaluate career opportunities and formulate career goals. In the context of startup employment, job interest reflects students' willingness to explore and pursue careers in innovative, technology-driven, and dynamic work environments (Lubis, Marliyah, & Syahbudi, 2025).

SCCT provides a theoretical basis for understanding how individual competencies and psychological beliefs relate to career interests. Digital skills readiness may represent a relevant competency that supports students' learning experiences and perceived preparedness for technology-based work, whereas self-efficacy reflects their beliefs about their ability to meet career-related demands (Jackson, & Wilton, 2017; Mugiaji, & Budiman, 2026). Accordingly, students who possess relevant digital competencies and confidence in their capabilities may be more inclined to consider startup employment as a viable career option (Sari, & Anggraini, 2026; Hidayat, Nurhatisyah, Elkarima, & Rumengan, 2026).

2.2 Digital Skills Readiness

Digital skills readiness refers to an individual's preparedness to use digital technologies effectively in academic and professional contexts. It encompasses information and data literacy, digital communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving (Carretero et al., 2017). These competencies are particularly relevant to startup companies, where digital technologies often support business operations, innovation, communication, and decision-making. From an SCCT perspective, digital skills readiness may contribute to career interest by providing students with relevant learning experiences and a stronger basis for evaluating their preparedness for technology-driven occupations (Winarno, Ninghardjanti, Subarno, & Umam, 2024). Students who can access information, collaborate through digital platforms, and solve problems using technology may perceive startup employment as more accessible and compatible with their skills than traditional employment. However, digital competence cannot be equated with digital self-efficacy. While digital skills readiness concerns an individual's knowledge, skills, and preparedness to use technology, self-efficacy concerns their belief in their ability to perform specific tasks, successfully @mugi. Therefore, digital skills readiness may be associated with startup career interest through perceived occupational preparedness and the evaluation of available career opportunities (Maulidia, Aslami, & Imsar, 2026).

2.3 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1997). It influences how individuals approach challenges, regulate their efforts, and persist when facing difficulties. In career development, self-efficacy is important because students' beliefs about their capabilities can shape their willingness to explore occupations, consider alternative career paths, and pursue employment opportunities (Moreno, Fhadia, Nabila, Ariska, & Nurbaiti, 2026; Nawawi, Pasaribu, & Atika, 2026). Within SCCT, self-efficacy is a central mechanism in the development of career interests. Students who believe that they can adapt to unfamiliar tasks, overcome professional challenges, and meet workplace expectations may evaluate startup careers more positively. This is particularly relevant to startup environments, which may involve changing responsibilities, uncertainty, and continuous learning. Unlike digital skills readiness, which emphasizes actual competencies and preparedness, self-efficacy concerns perceived capability (Kurniawati, Baharuddin, Retno, Agayha, & Helmaliana, 2026). Consequently, even when students possess similar digital skills, differences in their confidence may lead to different levels of interest in pursuing startup careers.

2.4 Conceptual Relationship and Hypothesis Development

Digital skills readiness and self-efficacy represent distinct but potentially complementary factors associated with startup career interests (Putra, Siradjuddin, & Lutfi, 2024). Digital skills readiness provides students with relevant competencies and preparedness for technology-based work, whereas self-efficacy influences how confidently they evaluate their ability to meet occupational demands (Zahira & Nasution, 2025). Within the SCCT framework, these factors may independently contribute to career interest through learning experiences, perceived capabilities, and expectations regarding career-related outcomes (Puspitaningsih & Wulandari, 2025). Students with stronger digital readiness may view startup employment as more attainable, whereas those with higher self-efficacy may be more willing to explore and pursue such opportunities. Examining both constructs simultaneously therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of startup career interest among Generation Z students (Qadisyah, Nurbaiti, & Tambunan, 2024).

2.5 Research Hypothesis

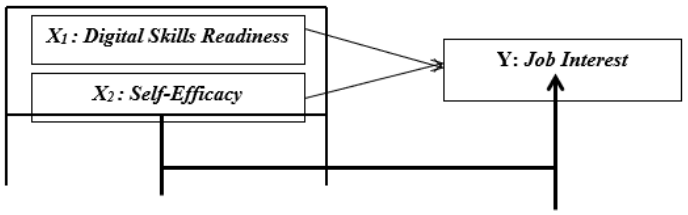


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study, showing the relationships between digital skills readiness (X_1), self-efficacy (X_2), and job interest (Y). Both independent variables are hypothesized to influence job interest individually and simultaneously. This framework provides the basis for examining the proposed relationships through multiple linear regression analysis. Grounded in the conceptual basis and earlier studies, this study develops the following hypotheses:

H_1: Digital skills readiness significantly affects job interest among Generation Z students of FEBI UIN North Sumatra in careers in startup companies

H_2: Perceived capability significantly affects job interest among FEBI UIN North Sumatra Gen Z learners in relation to careers in startup companies

H_3: Digital skills readiness and perceived capability collectively have a notable influence on job interest among Generation Z students of FEBI UIN North Sumatra toward careers in startup companies

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This investigation employed a numerical approach to assess the effects of digital skills readiness and self-efficacy on job interest among Generation Z students of FEBI State Islamic Of North Sumatra, toward careers in startup companies. The study conducted a cross-sectional survey using a structured questionnaire with predetermined response options (Sugiyono, 2023; Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). The population comprised 4,523 active Generation Z students of FEBI UIN North Sumatra in the 2025/2026 academic year. Based on the Slovin formula with a 10% tolerance level, the minimum participant group was 98 participants; therefore, 100 students' participants were not chosen at random but through purposive sampling. Respondents met the criteria of being Generation Z students who had an interest in employment and startup companies. The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	42
	Female	58	58
Age	19–20 years	13	13
	21–23 years	77	77
	Above 24 years	10	10
Study Program	Management	37	37
	Islamic Insurance	13	13
	Islamic Accounting	13	13
	Islamic Banking	16	16
	Islamic Economics	21	21

This study involved 100 respondents who met the predetermined criteria. Table 1 presents the respondents' individual attributes. Among 100 respondents, 58% were female and 42% were male. Most respondents were aged 21–23 years (77%). By study program, management had the highest proportion (37%), followed by Islamic economics (21%), Islamic banking (16%), and Islamic accounting and Islamic insurance (13% each).

4.2 Validity Test

Table 2. Digital skills readiness validity test results

Variable	Statement Item	Item-Total Correlation	Critical *r*-Value (*r*-Table)	Result
Digital Skills Readiness (X_1)	X_1.1	0.792	0.1966	Valid
	X_1.2	0.684	0.1966	Valid
	X_1.3	0.766	0.1966	Valid
	X_1.4	0.740	0.1966	Valid
	X_1.5	0.755	0.1966	Valid
	X_1.6	0.782	0.1966	Valid
	X_1.7	0.722	0.1966	Valid
	X_1.8	0.802	0.1966	Valid

Table 2 shows that all digital skills readiness (X_1) items were valid, with *r*-values exceeding 0.1966. Corrected Item–Total Correlations ranged from 0.684 to 0.802, indicating that no items were excluded and all were suitable for analysis. These findings demonstrate that all eight questionnaire items adequately measure the digital skills readiness construct and can be retained for subsequent statistical analysis.

Table 3. Self-efficacy validity test results

Variables	Statement Item	Item-Total Correlation	Critical *r*-Value (*r*-Table)	Result
Self-Efficacy (X_2)	X_2.1	0.738	0.1966	Valid
	X_2.2	0.754	0.1966	Valid
	X_2.3	0.735	0.1966	Valid
	X_2.4	0.668	0.1966	Valid
	X_2.5	0.753	0.1966	Valid
	X_2.6	0.779	0.1966	Valid
	X_2.7	0.660	0.1966	Valid
	X_2.8	0.809	0.1966	Valid

Table 3 shows that all self-efficacy (X_2) items were valid, with correlation coefficients exceeding the critical *r*-value of 0.1966. The item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.660 to 0.809, indicating that all eight items satisfied the validity criterion and were suitable for analysis. These findings suggest that the questionnaire items adequately represent the self-efficacy construct and can be retained for subsequent statistical analysis.

Table 4. Job interest validity test results

Variable	Statement Item	Item-Total Correlation	Critical *r*-Value (*r*-Table)	Result
Job Interest (Y)	Y_1.1	0.777	0.1966	Valid
	Y_1.2	0.800	0.1966	Valid
	$Y_1$3	0.879	0.1966	Valid
	Y_1.4	0.797	0.1966	Valid
	Y_1.5	0.847	0.1966	Valid

Variable	Statement Item	Item-Total Correlation	Critical *r*-Value (*r*-Table)	Result
Job Interest (*Y*)	Y_1.6	0.755	0.1966	Valid
	Y_1.7	0.732	0.1966	Valid
	Y_1.8	0.762	0.1966	Valid

Table 4 shows that all job interest (*Y*) items obtained correlation coefficients exceeding the critical *r*-value of 0.1966. The item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.732 to 0.879, with the highest value recorded for Y_1.3 (0.879) and the lowest for Y_1.7 (0.732). These findings indicate that all eight questionnaire items satisfied the validity criterion and were suitable for subsequent statistical analysis.

4.3 Reliability

Table 5. Reliability test results

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha	Result
Digital Skills Readiness (X_1)	8 statement items	0.892	Reliable
Self-Efficacy (X_2)	8 statement items	0.880	Reliable
Job Interest (*Y*)	8 statement items	0.916	Reliable

Based on Table 5, digital skills readiness (X_1), self-efficacy (X_2), and job interest (*Y*) obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.892, 0.880, and 0.916, respectively. All values exceeded the minimum reliability threshold of 0.60, indicating that the three variables demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. These findings confirm that the questionnaire items consistently measure their respective constructs and are suitable for subsequent statistical analysis.

4.4 Classical Assumption Tests

4.4.1 Normality Test

Table 6. Normality test results

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test			
			Unstandardized Residual
N			100
Normal Parametersa,b	Mean		.0000000
	Std. Deviation		2.79257912
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.074
	Positive		.074
	Negative		-.057
Test Statistic			.074
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)c			.200d
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)e	Sig.		.192
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.182
		Upper Bound	.202
a. The test distribution was normal			
b. Calculated from data			
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction			
d. This is the lower bound of the true significance			
e. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with a starting seed of 2000000			

As presented in Table 6, the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded an asymptotic significance value (2-tailed) of 0.200, which exceeds the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. The Monte Carlo significance value of 0.192 further supports this result, indicating that the null hypothesis of normally distributed residuals cannot be rejected. Therefore, the regression residuals do

not show a statistically significant deviation from normality, suggesting that the normality assumption required for subsequent regression analysis is satisfied.

4.4.2 Multicollinearity Test
Table 7. Multicollinearity test results

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.917	1.592		3.088	.003
	X_1	.056	.057	.127	.982	.329
	X_2	-.142	.057	-.323	-2.500	.014
a. Dependent Variable: ABS_RES						

Table 8. Multicollinearity test results

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	X_1	.582	1.718
	X_2	.582	1.718
a. Dependent Variable: *Y*			

As presented in Table 7 and Table 8, both digital skills readiness (X_1) and self-efficacy (X_2) obtained tolerance values of 0.582 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values of 1.718. Since the tolerance values exceed 0.10 and the VIF values are below 10, the results indicate that the regression model does not exhibit problematic multicollinearity. These findings suggest that both independent variables can be included in the regression model without substantial concerns regarding linear dependence between predictors.

4.5 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis
Table 9. Multiple linear regression analysis results

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.679	2.517		1.064	.290
	X_1	.402	.090	.372	4.490	.000
	X_2	.536	.090	.492	5.951	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Job Interest						

As presented in Table 9, the multiple linear regression equation as follow in Formula 1:

$$Y = 2.679 + 0.402X_1 + 0.536X_2 \quad (1)$$

Digital skills readiness (X_1) has a positive and statistically significant regression coefficient (B = 0.402, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher digital skills readiness is associated with greater job interest, holding self-efficacy constant. Similarly, self-efficacy (X_2) demonstrates a positive and significant coefficient (B = 0.536, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students with higher self-efficacy tend to exhibit greater interest in pursuing careers in startup companies. Furthermore, the standardized coefficients indicate that self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.492$) has a stronger relationship with job interest than digital skills readiness ($\beta = 0.372$).

4.6 T-Test (Model 1)

Table 10. T-test results (partial significance test)

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.679	2.517		1.064	.290
	X_1	.402	.090	.372	4.490	.000
	X_2	.536	.090	.492	5.951	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Job Interest						

Based on Table 10, the reference t-table at 5% significance with df = 97 is 1.985. Digital skills readiness (X_1) has a t-table of 4.490 and a significance value of 0.000, indicating a positive and significant effect on job interest, thus, H_1 is accepted. Self-efficacy (X_2) has a t-value of 5.951 and a significance value of 0.000, indicating a positive and significant effect on job interest, thus, H_2 is accepted.

4.7 F-Test (Simultaneous Significance Test)

Table 11. F-test results

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1232.252	2	616.126	77.393	.000b
	Residual	764.253	96	7.961		
	Total	1996.505	98			
a. Dependent Variable: Job Interest						
b. Predictors: (Constant), X_2, X_1						

As presented in Table 11, the ANOVA results indicate an F-statistic of 77.393 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, which is below the conventional threshold of 0.05. This finding demonstrates that digital skills readiness (X_1) and self-efficacy (X_2) jointly contribute significantly to explaining variations in job interest (Y) among Generation Z students. Therefore, the H_3 is supported, confirming the overall statistical significance of the regression model.

4.8 R-Squared Test

Table 12. Coefficient of determination (R-Squared) test results

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.786a	.617	.609	2.82152
a. Predictors: (Constant), Self Efficacy, Digital Skills Readiness				

Based on Table 12, the regression model obtained an R Square value of 0.617 and an adjusted R Square value of 0.609. The adjusted R Square indicates that digital skills readiness and self-efficacy collectively explain approximately 60.9% of the variation in Job Interest among Generation Z students, while the remaining 39.1% is associated with factors not included in the research model. These findings suggest that the two independent variables provide substantial explanatory power in understanding students' interest in pursuing careers in startup companies.

4.9 Discussion

4.9.1 The Effect of Digital Skills Readiness on Job Interest

The findings indicate that digital skills readiness has a positive and statistically significant effect on job interest among Generation Z students of the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business (FEBI), State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), in pursuing careers in startup companies ($t = 4.490$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that students who are better prepared to use digital technologies tend to demonstrate greater interest in startup employment. Digital competencies may help students perceive technology-oriented occupations as more accessible and compatible with their

existing capabilities. In the context of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), digital skills readiness can be understood as a relevant personal competency that supports learning experiences and shapes students' evaluations of career opportunities (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Nevertheless, the relationship between digital skills readiness and job interest should not be interpreted as evidence that technical competence alone determines career preferences. Although digital skills can help students meet the technological demands of startup companies, possessing these skills does not necessarily guarantee confidence in navigating uncertain work environments or pursuing particular career opportunities. This distinction helps explain why digital skills readiness may be positively associated with job interest, while exhibiting a weaker standardized relationship than self-efficacy. This finding is consistent with Zhao et al. (2025), who reported a positive relationship between digital skills readiness and career-related interest, and with Husniah, Ulfa, and Aulia (2026), who linked digital competence to students' career planning. However, the present study extends this discussion by examining interest in startup employment specifically, rather than career development more generally.

4.9.2 The Effect of Self-Efficacy on Job Interest

The findings demonstrate that self-efficacy has a positive and statistically significant effect on job interest among Gen Z students of FEBI UINSU toward startup companies ($t = 5.951$, $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that students' beliefs in their ability to manage challenges and fulfill occupational demands are associated with their willingness to consider startup careers. Within SCCT, self-efficacy is a central cognitive mechanism in career development because it influences how individuals interpret their capabilities, respond to challenges, and develop interests in particular occupational activities (Lent et al., 1994). Students who believe they can learn unfamiliar tasks, adapt to changing responsibilities, and overcome workplace difficulties may be more willing to explore startup employment.

The stronger standardized relationship between self-efficacy and job interest, compared with digital skills readiness, may reflect the distinctive characteristics of startup environments. Although digital competencies are relevant to technology-driven work, startup careers may also involve uncertainty, evolving responsibilities, demanding performance expectations, and continuous learning. Under these conditions, students' confidence in their ability to handle unfamiliar situations may be particularly relevant to their career preferences. Digital skills readiness concerns preparedness to use technology, whereas self-efficacy concerns perceived capability to perform specific tasks or meet particular demands. Consequently, students with comparable digital competencies may nevertheless differ in their interest in startup careers because they evaluate their ability to succeed in those environments differently.

This interpretation is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes the role of capability beliefs in shaping individuals' motivation, effort, and persistence. It also aligns with SCCT, in which self-efficacy and outcome expectations contribute to the development of career interests. When students believe that they can perform successfully in a startup environment, they may be more likely to anticipate favorable career outcomes and develop a stronger interest in pursuing such employment. Nabil and Mubarrok (2025) and Ramadhan and Heng (2024) similarly reported positive relationships between self-efficacy and career-related interest. However, the present findings should be interpreted as context-specific evidence rather than proof that self-efficacy is universally more important than digital competence across all occupational settings.

4.9.3 The Joint Effects of Digital Skills Readiness and Self-Efficacy on Job Interest

The simultaneous testing results indicate that digital skills readiness and self-efficacy jointly have a statistically significant relationship with Job Interest ($F = 77.393$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that considering both technological preparedness and perceived capability provides a more comprehensive explanation of students' interest in startup employment than examining either factor alone. Digital skills readiness represents students' preparedness to engage in technology-based tasks,

whereas self-efficacy reflects their confidence in meeting occupational demands. Together, these factors capture the complementary aspects of career preparation.

From an SCCT perspective, students' career interests develop through interactions among personal beliefs, learning experiences, and expectations regarding the consequences of pursuing particular career paths (Lent et al., 1994). Students with relevant digital competencies may view startup work as a viable option, while those with higher self-efficacy may feel more capable of adapting to its challenges. When both conditions are present, students may be more inclined to consider startup employment a viable career choice. Nevertheless, the significant F-test establishes the joint statistical significance of the predictors; it does not, by itself, demonstrate a synergistic interaction between them.

Although previous research by Nabil and Mubarrok (2025) emphasized the relevance of self-efficacy to career interest, the present study contributes by examining self-efficacy alongside digital skills readiness within a specific occupational context. Rather than treating career interest as a general preference, this study focuses on Generation Z students' interest in working for startup companies. This contextual focus provides additional insights into how technological preparedness and psychological beliefs are associated with the career preferences of university students.

4.9.4 Alternative Explanations and Study Limitations

Despite these findings, other factors not included in the research model may also contribute to students' job interest. These may include expected salary and benefits, perceived job security, opportunities for professional development, organizational culture, entrepreneurial orientation, previous internship experience, family expectations, and perceived risks associated with startup employment. For example, students may possess strong digital skills and confidence in their abilities but prefer established companies because they perceive them as offering greater employment stability. Conversely, students who value flexibility, innovation, and rapid professional growth may be attracted to startups for reasons that extend beyond their digital competencies and self-efficacy.

These alternative explanations suggest that the relative strength of self-efficacy may partly reflect the particular variables included in the model and the characteristics of the respondents. The observed association should therefore not be interpreted as establishing that self-efficacy is the sole or universally dominant determinant of startup career interest. Future studies could incorporate occupational outcome expectations, perceived organizational attractiveness, employment security, and prior work experience to examine whether these factors explain additional variation in job interest. Research involving different universities, larger samples, and longitudinal designs could also help establish whether these relationships remain consistent across student populations and over time

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that digital skills readiness and self-efficacy have positive and statistically significant effects on job interest among Generation Z students of the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business (FEBI), State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), in pursuing careers in startup companies, both partially and simultaneously. The partial test results indicate that digital skills readiness ($t = 4.490$, $p < 0.001$) and self-efficacy ($t = 5.951$, $p < 0.001$) are significant predictors of job interest. Self-efficacy demonstrates a higher t-value than digital skills readiness, suggesting a stronger statistical signal in the partial test; however, the relative magnitude of their effects should be established by comparing their standardized regression coefficients. The simultaneous test also confirms that both variables jointly contribute significantly to explaining students' job interest ($F = 77.393$, $p < 0.001$).

This study theoretically extends the application of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by examining digital skills readiness and self-efficacy as distinct factors associated with interest in startup employment. The findings highlight the relevance of both technological preparedness and perceived capability in understanding students' career interests within a technology-driven

occupational context. Practically, higher education institutions may consider integrating digital competency development with activities that strengthen students' confidence in addressing professional challenges. Future research should examine additional factors, such as outcome expectations, perceived job security, and career development opportunities, to provide a broader understanding of students' interest in startup employment.

5.2 Research Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the sample comprises only 100 Generation Z students enrolled at FEBI UIN Sumatera Utara, limiting the generalizability of the results. Second, the use of purposive sampling means that the findings are applicable only to respondents who satisfy the study's specific criteria. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes the observation of temporal changes in Job Interest, as data were gathered at a single time point. Finally, the present model investigates only digital skills readiness and self-efficacy as influencing factors. The adjusted R-square value of 0.609 suggests that 39.1% of the variance in Job Interest is explained by variables outside the scope of this study.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

The findings suggest that FEBI UIN Sumatera Utara students should continue strengthening their digital skills readiness and self-efficacy to better prepare themselves for the job market, especially in startup environments. These results can also guide FEBI UIN Sumatera Utara in developing learning strategies and student activities that support digital competence and self-assurance. Future studies should include broader geographic coverage and larger sample sizes. Furthermore, researchers may extend the current model by examining additional predictors of job interest and using longer observation periods to observe how students' career interests evolve over time.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

PA was responsible for the research conceptualization, data collection, statistical analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. K contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, research methodology, supervision, and critical review of the manuscript. AILN contributed to the literature review, interpretation of the research findings, and manuscript revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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