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INTRODUCTION

Changes in the global economy and rapid digital transformation are altering the labor market landscape, requiring individuals to have skills beyond technical competencies. In Indonesia, by 2024, 46,240 employees are projected to experience layoffs, with high turnover of entry-level employees [1]. Approximately 72% of young workers seek new jobs due to skill mismatch, indicating low career adaptability [2]. Career adaptability enables individuals to manage work-related transitions and uncertainty. It has emerged as an important competency in this context [3]. At the same time, Indonesia faces a substantial education-to-work mismatch. According to [4], 53.33% of employees work outside their academic field, indicating a mismatch between education and industry needs.

Employability skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, and adaptability, are essential for job readiness and career success across industries [5]. Even within the next 5 years, there will be a 44% change in workforce skills [6], mastering these competencies is essential [7]. Critical thinking skills are needed, however, only 23% of entry-level employees in Indonesia have these skills [8]. This proves that there is a significant skills gap and many also struggle with interpersonal communication, emotional readiness, and career planning [3].

Career adaptability is influenced not only by skills but also by social and psychological support, such as motivation, engagement, and resilience and a sense of preparedness fostered by the work environment [9]. As many as 91% of young workers worldwide experience work-related stress due to a lack of preparedness and confidence [10], and 74% of entry-level employees in Indonesia now prioritize mental health [11]. These findings suggest that career adaptability depends not only on technical skills, but also on psychological resilience.

This research examines entry-level employees in Bandung, Indonesia, with 1–2 years of work experience, in the context of a skills mismatch and low career adaptability amidst a youth unemployment rate of 16.85% [12]. While previous research has linked employability skills [7] and social support [13] to improved adaptability, most of these studies focused on recent graduates. This research fills the gap by exploring how employability skills, social support and workplace dynamics influence early career adaptability. Despite the growing importance of skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and digital literacy [5], [6], many entry-level employees still lack interpersonal skills and career planning.