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The Influence of Artificial Intelligence Knowledge and Job Market Awareness on Fresh Graduates' Quality : The Mediating Role of Employability Skill

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Abstract

In Indonesia, rapid AI adoption and digital transformation in various sectors have created new demands for graduates to possess both technological literacy and employability skills. Many fresh graduates face a skills mismatch, as traditional curricula lag behind industry needs, requiring not only technical knowledge but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. This study aims to analyze the effects of AI Knowledge and Job Market Awareness on Fresh Graduates' Quality with Employability Skills as a mediating variable. This research adopts a quantitative approach using a survey method. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among the research variables. This study finds that AI Knowledge and Job Market Awareness positively and significantly influence Employability Skills and Fresh Graduates' Quality. Employability Skills have a direct effect on graduate quality and also mediate the effects of AI Knowledge and Job Market Awareness, indicating that skill development is the main pathway through which technological understanding and labor market awareness enhance graduates' work readiness and overall quality. Based on the findings, students are encouraged to strengthen their critical evaluation skills when using AI tools, develop a more realistic understanding of job market conditions, enhance their ability to assess the accuracy and relevance of digital information, and consistently demonstrate ethical and responsible behavior in academic and professional activities. Future research is recommended to involve broader samples and additional variables to improve generalizability and to further examine factors influencing fresh graduates' quality in AI-driven labor markets.

Keywords: *AI Knowledge, Job Market Awareness, Employability Skills, Fresh Graduates' Quality, Skills Development.*

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a central driver of digital transformation in Indonesia, influencing key sectors such as education, public services, and industry. National initiatives, including the National AI Strategy 2020–2045 and Making Indonesia 4.0, signal a strategic shift toward an AI-enabled economy, placing increasing pressure on higher education institutions to prepare graduates for rapidly evolving labor market demands (Junaedi et al., 2024). However, this transition occurs amid persistent challenges, including uneven infrastructure development, delayed curriculum adaptation, and limited institutional readiness, which collectively constrain graduates' ability to fully benefit from technological advancements.

At the same time, Indonesia faces a growing mismatch between the competencies developed in higher education and those required by increasingly digitalized industries. National labor statistics indicate that a substantial proportion of open unemployment consists of diploma and university graduates, underscoring persistent employability challenges despite expanded access to higher education. This situation is exacerbated by automation and AI-driven systems that are reshaping job structures and intensifying competition between human labor and intelligent technologies (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2019; Frey & Osborne, 2017).

Recent studies emphasize that graduates' success in this environment depends not only on academic qualifications, but also on their ability to engage effectively with AI technologies and to understand evolving labor market expectations. AI knowledge has been associated with enhanced productivity, adaptability, and career readiness, while job market awareness enables graduates to align skill development with industry needs and recruitment practices (Nguyen et al., 2023). Nevertheless, empirical research has largely examined these factors in isolation or focused on internal characteristics such as technological readiness or entrepreneurial orientation.

Importantly, limited attention has been given to how AI knowledge and job market awareness jointly influence fresh graduates' quality through the development of employability skills, particularly within emerging economies such as Indonesia, where digital transformation and labor market volatility coexist. Prior studies suggest that employability skills may function as a critical mediating mechanism linking technological and informational resources to graduate outcomes, yet this integrated relationship remains underexplored (Arooje et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2024).

Addressing this gap, the present study proposes and empirically tests an integrated model examining the effects of AI knowledge and job market awareness on fresh graduates' quality, with employability skills serving as a mediating variable. By situating the analysis within the Indonesian context, this study contributes to the literature by providing context-sensitive evidence on graduate preparedness in an AI-driven labor market.

2. Research Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research design and was conducted at universities in Bali, a region whose service- and tourism-oriented economy is increasingly influenced by digitalization and AI-based systems. The population consisted of final-year students and fresh graduates who had completed their studies within the past two years, as this group is directly exposed to labor market dynamics and technological change. A minimum sample size of 102 respondents was determined based on 17 observed indicators, applying a conservative ratio of six observations per indicator. Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire measuring AI Knowledge, Job Market Awareness, Employability Skills, and Fresh Graduates' Quality using a five-point Likert scale adapted from validated instruments, while secondary data were sourced from relevant scholarly literature. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4, encompassing measurement model evaluation (convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability) and structural model assessment, including direct and indirect effects, mediation analysis, explanatory power (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and overall model fit (SRMR).

3. Results and Discussions

This research was conducted in universities in Bali Province, a region whose economy is largely dominated by the tourism and service sectors that are increasingly influenced by digitalization and AI-based systems. Based on this research context, data were collected using a structured questionnaire. At the beginning of the questionnaire, screening questions were used to ensure that participants met the criteria required for the study. This was followed by questions related to respondent characteristics, including name, gender, and age, as presented in the following table:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Total	Percentage
Gender		
Female	68	67%
Male	34	33%
Total	**102**	**100%**
Age Group		
18 – 21 Years Old	42	41%
22 – 25 Years Old	48	47%
26 – 30 Years Old	12	12%
Total	**102**	**100%**

The screening results confirm that all respondents met the eligibility criteria for inclusion in this study. The final sample consisted of 102 respondents (100%). The gender distribution indicates a predominance of female participants, with 68 respondents (67%), compared to 34 male respondents (33%), suggesting higher representation of female students and graduates in the sample. Regarding age, the majority of respondents were within the early-career and productive age range. Respondents aged 22–25 years constituted the largest proportion (48 individuals; 47%), followed by those aged 18–21 years (42 respondents; 41%), while respondents aged 26–30 years accounted for 12 individuals (12%). This age distribution indicates that the sample primarily represents final-year students and recent graduates who are transitioning from higher education into the labor market.

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Result

Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Table 2. Outer Loading Test

No	Variable	Statement Item	Item–Total Correlation	Description
1	AI Knowledge (X_1)	X1.1	0,926	Valid
		X1.2	0,937	Valid
		X1.3	0,889	Valid
2	Job Market Awareness (X_2)	X2.1	0,850	Valid
		X2.2	0,923	Valid
		X2.3	0,937	Valid
		X2.4	0,900	Valid
3	Employabillity Skills (Z)	Z1	0,818	Valid
		Z2	0,940	Valid
		Z3	0,925	Valid
		Z4	0,882	Valid
		Z5	0,759	Valid
		Z6	0,947	Valid
4	Fresh Graudates' Quality (Y)	Y1	0,896	Valid
		Y2	0,885	Valid
		Y3	0,812	Valid
		Y4	0,951	Valid

All outer loading values exceed the threshold of 0,70 and are statistically significant. This confirms that the indicators used successfully capture the intended constructs accurately and consistently.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker Test

	AI Knowledge (X_1)	Employability Skills (Z)	Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	Job Market Awareness (X_2)
AI Knowledge (X_1)	0,918			
Employability Skills (Z)	0,638	0,881		
Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,603	0,674	0,887	
Job Market Awareness (X_2)	0,629	0,989	0,641	0,903

Based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs. This indicates that all constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity and are empirically distinct from one another.

Table 4. HTMT Test

	AI Knowledge (X_1)	Employability Skills (Z)	Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	Job Market Awareness (X_2)
AI Knowledge (X_1)				
Employability Skills (Z)	0,690			
Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,664	0,734		
Job Market Awareness (X_2)	0,685	0,575	0,699	

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The highest HTMT value is observed in the relationship between Employability Skills and Fresh Graduates' Quality (0.734), which remains below the recommended threshold. These results indicate that all constructs in the research model are empirically distinct, suggesting that no significant conceptual overlap exists among the constructs.

Table 5. AVE Values

Variable	*Average Variance Extracted* (AVE)
AI Knowledge (X_1)	0,842
Job Market Awareness (X_2)	0,815
Employabillity Skills (Z)	0,777
Fresh Graudates' Quality (Y)	0,787

That the AVE values for the variables AI Knowledge (X1), Job Market Awareness (X2), Employabillity Skills (Z), Fresh Graudates' Quality (Y) all exceed the threshold value of 0,50. Therefore, the measurement model can be considered to have good convergent validity.

Table 6. Composite Reliability Test

Variable	*Composite Reliability*	*Cronbach's Alpha*	Description
AI Knowledge (X_1)	0,941	0,906	Reliabel
Job Market Awareness (X_2)	0,946	0,924	Reliabel
Employabillity Skills (Z)	0,954	0,941	Reliabel
Fresh Graudates' Quality (Y)	0,937	0,909	Reliabel

The composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha output for the variables AI Knowledge (X1), Job Market Awareness (X2), Employabillity Skills (Z), Fresh Graudates' Quality (Y) all exceed the threshold value of 0,60. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables demonstrate good reliability.

Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

Table 7. R-Square Test Results

Variable	*R-Square*
Employability Skill (Z)	0,978
Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,533

The R-square (R^2) value indicates the proportion of variance in the endogenous variables explained by the exogenous variables in the structural model. The results show that Employability Skills (Z) has an R^2 value of 0.978, indicating that 97.8% of the variance in Employability Skills is explained by the predictor variables included in the model, while the remaining 2.2% is explained by factors outside the model. This value reflects a very strong (substantial) explanatory power, suggesting that the model has an excellent predictive capability for Employability Skills.

Furthermore, Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y) records an R^2 value of 0.533, meaning that 53.3% of the variance in Fresh Graduates' Quality is explained by the independent variables in the model, while 46.7% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study. This R^2 value can be classified as moderate to substantial, indicating an adequate level of explanatory power.

Table 8. Q-Square Test Results

Variable	*Q-Square*
Employability Skill (Z)	0,746
Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,410

A Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model has predictive capability. Based on the results, Employability Skills (Z) shows a Q^2 value of 0.746, indicating that the model has very strong predictive relevance for Employability Skills. This suggests that the exogenous variables included in the model are highly effective in predicting Employability Skills.

Furthermore, Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y) records a Q^2 value of 0.410, which also exceeds the recommended threshold of zero. This result indicates that the model demonstrates moderate to strong predictive relevance in explaining Fresh Graduates' Quality.

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Table 9. SRMR Test Results

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0,067	0,067

The model fit assessment shows that the SRMR value of the estimated model is 0.067, which is below the recommended threshold of 0.08. This indicates that the proposed model demonstrates a good overall fit and adequately represents the empirical data.

Direct and Indirect Effect Test Result

Table 10. Direct and Indirect Effect Test Result

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Description
AI Knowledge (X_1) -> Employability Skills (Z)	0,268	2,179	0,019	Positive and Significant
AI Knowledge (X_1) -> Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,289	2,893	0,004	Positive and Significant
Employability Skills (Z) -> Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,601	3,364	0,001	Positive and Significant
Job Market Awareness (X_2) -> Employability Skills (Z)	0,972	64,251	0,000	Positive and Significant
Job Market Awareness (X_2) -> Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,124	2,268	0,024	Positive and Significant
AI Knowledge (X_1) -> Employability Skills (Z) -> Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	0,229	2,011	0,013	Positive and Significant
Job Market Awareness (X_2) -> Employability Skills (Z) -> Fresh Graduates' Quality (Y)	1,556	3,381	0,001	Positive and Significant

Discussions

The results of this study demonstrate that AI Knowledge has a positive and statistically significant effect on Employability Skills, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0,268, a t-statistic of 2,179, and a p-value of 0,019. This finding suggests that students and fresh graduates who possess a stronger understanding of AI tools and their applications tend to exhibit higher levels of employability skills. These findings are consistent with Human Capital Theory, which views knowledge and skills as strategic investments that enhance individual productivity and long-term employability (Becker, 1964). From this perspective, AI knowledge represents a form of modern human capital that increases graduates' capacity to perform effectively in technology-driven work contexts. The results of this study are also aligned with previous empirical research examining the relationship between AI and employability. Rakowska & de Juana-Espinosa (2021); Babashahi et al. (2024); Jumaev (2024) and Ugwuozor & Egenti (2024) found that employers increasingly prioritize graduates who combine digital competence with strong generic skills, such as adaptability and problem-solving, rather than relying solely on academic credentials.

Building on this, Job Market Awareness is also found to have a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on Employability Skills, with a path coefficient of 0,972, a t-statistic of 64,251, and a p-value of 0,000. This result suggests that students and fresh graduates who possess a clear understanding of labor market conditions such as employment opportunities, competition levels, salary expectations, and the geographic distribution of jobs are more likely to actively develop employability-related competencies. These findings are consistent with Human Capital Theory, which posits that individuals improve their productivity and employment prospects by investing in relevant knowledge and skills (Becker, 1964). Previous studies similarly highlight the role of job market awareness in shaping employability skills (Berniak-Woźny et al., 2023; Mainga et al., 2022; Zisk-Rony et al., 2023).

In terms of graduate outcomes, AI Knowledge also has a positive and significant effect on Fresh Graduates' Quality, with a path coefficient of 0,289, a t-statistic of 2,893, and a p-value of 0,004. This finding suggests that students and fresh graduates who possess higher levels of AI knowledge are better prepared to demonstrate professional competence in academic and work-related contexts. This aligns with Human Capital Theory, reinforcing that knowledge functions as a strategic asset to improve productivity and career outcomes (Becker,

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1964). AI knowledge represents a contemporary form of human capital that strengthens graduates capacity to perform effectively in digitally driven work environments. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research highlighting the contribution of AI literacy to graduate quality and career readiness (Kot et al., 2021; Marwan, 2020; Wang et al., 2024).

Similarly, Job Market Awareness has a positive and statistically significant effect on Fresh Graduates' Quality, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0,124, a t-statistic of 2,268, and a p-value of 0,024, which is below the established significance level of 0,05. Although the magnitude of the effect is moderate, the results suggest that a stronger understanding of labor market conditions contributes meaningfully to the overall quality of fresh graduates. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, these findings support the argument that knowledge and awareness related to labor market dynamics constitute an important form of human capital that enhances individual productivity and employability (Becker, 1964). Human Capital Theory emphasizes that individuals who invest in developing relevant knowledge and skills are better positioned to adapt to changing labor market conditions and secure sustainable employment opportunities (Regmi, 2015; Wang et al., 2024). The results of this study are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the role of job market awareness in enhancing graduate quality and employability (Deschênes et al., 2024; Junaedi et al., 2024).

The results of this study demonstrate that Employability Skills have a positive and statistically significant effect on Fresh Graduates' Quality, as reflected by a path coefficient of 0,601, a t-statistic of 3,364, and a p-value of 0,001, which is well below the significance threshold of 0,05. This finding demonstrates that employability skills play a substantial role in shaping the overall quality of fresh graduates. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, the strong influence of employability skills on fresh graduates' quality aligns with the view that skills and competencies represent valuable forms of human capital that generate long-term individual and economic benefits (Becker, 1964). Human Capital Theory emphasizes that investments in practical abilities, lifelong learning, and adaptability enhance individual productivity and employability in a changing labor market (Wang et al., 2012; Regmi, 2015). The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that highlights the central role of employability skills in enhancing fresh graduates' quality (Mainga et al., 2022; Mgaiwa, 2021; Perera et al., 2018).

The results of this study demonstrate that Employability Skills significantly mediate the relationship between AI Knowledge and Fresh Graduates' Quality, as indicated by a mediation effect value of 0,229, a t-statistic of 2,011, and a p-value of 0,013, which is below the significance level of 0,05. This finding indicates that AI knowledge contributes to graduate quality not only through a direct pathway, but also indirectly by enhancing employability skills. This mediating relationship can be explained through the lens of Human Capital Theory, which views knowledge and skills as strategic investments that enhance individual productivity and long-term career outcomes (Becker, 1964). AI knowledge represents a form of advanced human capital that enables graduates to continuously update their competencies in response to technological change. The findings of this study are consistent with prior research highlighting the role of employability skills as a key link between technological knowledge and graduate outcomes (Berniak-Woźny et al., 2023; Marwan, 2020; Perera et al., 2018).

The results of this study demonstrate that Employability Skills significantly mediate the relationship between Job Market Awareness and Fresh Graduates' Quality, as indicated by a mediation effect value of 1,556, supported by a t-statistic of 3,381 and a p-value of 0,001, indicates a strong and statistically significant indirect effect. This finding suggests that job market awareness alone does not automatically translate into higher graduate quality. This mediating effect can be explained through the perspective of Human Capital Theory, which views knowledge, skills, and abilities as productive assets that generate long term returns for individuals and society (Becker, 1964). From this theoretical standpoint, job market awareness represents an initial form of informational capital that helps individuals understand where and how to invest in their personal development. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of employability skills as a critical link between job market awareness and graduate outcomes (Bancoro, 2024; Deschênes et al., 2024; Junaedi et al., 2024).

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that both AI knowledge and job market awareness have a positive and significant impact on employability skills. Graduates with higher levels of AI knowledge are better able to develop essential employability skills, such as critical thinking, adaptability, and effective use of digital tools. Similarly, awareness of labor market conditions, job competition, and required skills encourages graduates to align their skill development with industry expectations, further enhancing their employability skills.

Furthermore, AI knowledge and job market awareness also have a positive and significant effect on the overall quality of fresh graduates. Graduates with strong AI knowledge demonstrate higher quality through improved

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work readiness, ethical behavior, and effective use of technology, while those with better understanding of labor market dynamics are more prepared to meet professional demands. Employability skills play a crucial role in this process, not only directly improving graduate quality but also serving as a mediator that translates AI knowledge and job market awareness into professional readiness, highlighting the importance of skill development in preparing graduates for the workforce.

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