



The Influence of Career Anxiety and Career Exploration on Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy with Self-Esteem as a Mediating Variable among Final-Year Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This study is titled "Analysis of the Influence of Career Anxiety and Career Exploration on Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy with Self-Esteem as a Mediating Variable in Final Year Students." This study aims to analyze the mediating role of Self-Esteem in the relationship between Career Anxiety and Career Exploration on career decision-making self-efficacy in final year students. This study uses a quantitative approach with data collection techniques through online questionnaires. The sampling method used is convenience sampling, with a sample size of 130 final year students. Data analysis was performed using t-tests, F-tests, simple linear regression and multiple linear regression analyses, as well as path analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from the world of education to the world of work is a crucial developmental phase for students, particularly those in their final year. In today's era of global competition, college graduates face the challenges of an increasingly competitive and dynamic labor market. This phenomenon is supported by data from the Central Statistics Agency (2025) showing that the open unemployment rate for bachelor's degree holders reached 6.23%; this high figure indicates that an academic degree alone is insufficient.

Students are required to possess mature career readiness, understand their own potential, and have the ability to make appropriate career decisions to avoid falling into educated unemployment (Isnaini & Lestari, 2015). This aligns with the findings of Pertiwi & Linando

(2024), which emphasize that amid increasingly fierce job market competition, university graduates face high expectations from companies that evaluate more than just academic ability. The lack of practical skills and mental readiness, as depicted in the study, is a crucial factor that makes it difficult for graduates to compete for limited job opportunities.

A psychological phenomenon frequently observed among senior students is Career Anxiety (Jannah & Cahya Wulan, 2023). Career Anxiety refers to feelings of anxiety, worry, and stress experienced by individuals when contemplating their future careers and the job opportunities they will face (Pisarik, 2017). This is supported by findings from Zahro (2023), which reveal that as many as 51.9% of senior students and recent graduates fall into the high-anxiety category when facing job competition. A direct impact of this high anxiety is the disruption of students' self-confidence in making career decisions, or what is known as Career Decision-Making Self-efficacy (CDMSE). CDMSE refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks related to career decisions, such as self-evaluation, information gathering, and goal-setting (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

To build confidence in making such decisions, active efforts from students are required, one of which is through Career Exploration. Career Exploration is the process of searching for and gathering information about oneself (interests, talents, values) and the work environment (opportunities, job requirements) (Stumpf, 1983). In-depth exploration activities will provide students with sufficient information, thereby minimizing doubts stemming from a lack of knowledge. In addition to anxiety and exploration activities, the internal aspect that serves as the primary foundation for building self-confidence is Self-Esteem. Rosenberg (1989) defines Self-Esteem as an individual's evaluation of their own worth. In the context of a career, Self-Esteem functions as an internal filter; students with high Self-Esteem tend to view the challenges of job hunting optimistically and have better resistance to anxiety Crocker & Park (2004).

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with data collection conducted via an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The sampling method used is convenience sampling, with a sample size of 130 senior-level students. Data analysis was performed using simple linear regression and multiple linear regression, as well as path analysis. This study utilized a five-point Likert scale.

Career Anxiety in this study was measured using a questionnaire developed by Tsai (2017) and reused in the study (Yurcu & Akinci, 2024). The Career Anxiety Scale in this study consists of 5 statements designed to measure an individual's level of anxiety regarding their career future, particularly concerning job uncertainty, concerns about career failure, and doubts about their readiness to enter the workforce. Career Exploration in this study was measured using a questionnaire developed by (Stumpf, 1983) through the Career Exploration Survey (CES). The Career Exploration instrument in this study consists of 10 statements covering self-exploration activities, such as identifying personal interests, abilities, and values, as well as environmental exploration, such as seeking information about job types, job requirements, and career opportunities.

Self-Esteem in this study was measured using a questionnaire adapted from the Brief Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale developed by (Monteiro, 2022). The Self-Esteem instrument in this study consists of 5 statements representing positive and negative aspects of self-evaluation. Of these five statements, two items are reverse-scored to control for respondents' tendency to provide

monotonous or agreement-biased answers. Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) in this study was measured using a questionnaire adapted from the instrument developed by (Bandura, 1995) and used in the study by Kholifah (2025). This scale is used to measure an individual's belief in their ability to perform tasks related to career decision-making. The CDMSE instrument in this study consists of 6 statements reflecting students' ability to self-motivate, determine career choices, and assess their own abilities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability Test

Table 1 Reliability Test Results

No	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Value	Sig.	Description
1.	<i>Career Anxiety</i> (X_1)	0.825	>0,70	Reliable
2.	<i>Career Exploration</i> (X_2)	0.775	>0,70	Reliable
3.	CDMSE (Y)	0.813	>0,70	Reliable
4.	<i>Self-Esteem</i> (Z)	0.710	>0,70	Reliable

Based on Table 1, it is shown that Cronbach's alpha values for the variables Career Anxiety, Career Exploration, CDMSE, and Self-Esteem are greater than the significance threshold of 0.70. It can be concluded that the variables Career Anxiety, Career Exploration, CDMSE, and Self-Esteem are reliable.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Result

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Career Anxiety</i>	130	5.00	25.00	19.8692	3.65867
<i>Career Exploration</i>	130	26.00	45.00	35.8615	4.25132
<i>Self-Esteem</i>	130	8.00	25.00	17.3462	3.62102
CDMSE	130	15.00	30.00	24.4462	3.30858
Valid N (listwise)	130				

Based on the descriptive statistics in Table 2 above, all variables in this study had a total of 130 respondents with no missing data. The Career Anxiety variable showed a mean score of 19.87 with moderate data dispersion, indicating a relatively high level of Career Anxiety. The Career Exploration variable had a mean score of 35.86, indicating a high level of Career Exploration.

Meanwhile, Self-Esteem had a mean of 17.35, indicating a moderate level. As for career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), it had a mean of 24.45, indicating a fairly high level of confidence in career decision-making. Overall, these results suggest that the respondents have high levels of Career Exploration and decision-making confidence, although accompanied by relatively high Career Anxiety and Self-Esteem at a moderate level.

Hypothesis Testing

Career Anxiety on Self-Esteem

The Career Anxiety variable (X_1) has a regression coefficient of $-.369$ with a significance level of $<.001$ (<0.05). This indicates that Career Anxiety (X_1) has a negative and significant effect on Self-Esteem (Z). Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted.

Career Exploration on Self-Esteem

The Career Exploration variable (X_2) has a regression coefficient of $.395$ with a significance level of $<.001$ (<0.05). This indicates that Career Exploration (X_2) has a positive and significant effect on Self-Esteem (Z). Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Career Anxiety on CDMSE

The variable Career Anxiety (X_1) has a regression coefficient of 0.34 with a p-value of 0.605 (>0.05). This indicates that Career Anxiety (X_1) does not have a significant effect on CDMSE. Therefore, the third hypothesis is rejected.

Career Exploration on CDMSE

The Career Exploration variable (X_2) has a regression coefficient of 0.460 with a significance level of $<.001$ (<0.05). This indicates that Career Exploration (X_2) has a positive and significant effect on CDMSE. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is accepted.

Self-Esteem on CDMSE

The Self-Esteem (Z) variable has a regression coefficient of $.434$ with a significance level of $<.001$ (<0.05). This indicates that Self-Esteem (Z) has a positive and significant effect on CDMSE. Thus, the fifth hypothesis is accepted.

Self-Esteem Mediates the Relationship Between Career Anxiety and CDMSE

Based on the calculated t-statistic, it is found that the calculated t_{value} of -2.986 is greater than the critical t_{value} of 1.979 at a significance level of 0.05 . The mediation coefficient is -0.137 . Thus, it can be concluded that Self-Esteem acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between Career Anxiety and CDMSE. Accepted

Self-Esteem Mediates the Relationship Between Career Exploration and CDMSE

Based on the obtained t statistic value, it is found that the calculated t_{value} of 3.381 is greater than the critical t_{value} of 1.979 at a significance level of 0.05 . The mediation coefficient shows a value of 0.085 . Thus, it can be concluded that *Self-Esteem* acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between *Career Exploration* and CDMSE. Accepted

Table 3 Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Hypothesis	Description
H1	There is a negative and significant effect of Career Anxiety on Self-Esteem	Accepted
H2	There is a positive and significant effect of Career Exploration on Self-Esteem	Accepted
H3	There is a significant negative effect of Career Anxiety on career decision-making self-efficacy	Rejected
H4	There is a positive and significant effect of Career Exploration on CDMSE	Accepted
H5	There is a positive and significant effect of Self-Esteem on CDMSE	Accepted
H6	Self-Esteem mediates the relationship between Career Anxiety and CDMSE	Accepted
H7	Self-Esteem mediates the relationship between Career Exploration and CDMSE	Accepted

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that Career Anxiety has a negative effect on Self-Esteem among senior students. This means that the higher the level of Career Anxiety experienced, the lower the self-esteem. During the transition to the workforce, pressure and uncertainty often lead to doubts about one's abilities, causing students to focus more on their shortcomings rather than their potential. This situation fosters negative self-evaluation and results in a decline in Self-Esteem (Effendi, 2025). These findings align with the Self-Determination Theory proposed by (Ryan & Deci, 1985), which states that psychological well-being is significantly influenced by the fulfillment of basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When the need for competence is disrupted due to the emergence of self-doubt, an individual's self-evaluation also tends to decline.

On the other hand, this study also found that Career Exploration has a positive effect on Self-Esteem. The higher the students' engagement in the Career Exploration process, the higher their Self-Esteem. Activities such as identifying interests, seeking information, and trying out various opportunities allow students to discover their potential and strengths. This process helps foster a sense of competence in managing one's career future and fosters a more positive self-evaluation (Khadijah & Zainuddin, 2025). This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory from (Ryan & Deci, 1985), which explains that an increase in Self-Esteem occurs when basic psychological needs particularly competence and autonomy are met.

Furthermore, the research results indicate that Career Anxiety does not have a significant effect on Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE). This finding suggests that the Career Anxiety experienced by students does not directly determine their level of confidence in making career decisions. From the perspective of (Ryan & Deci, 1985) Self-Determination Theory, an individual's confidence and motivation develop when the needs for competence and autonomy remain fulfilled. Thus, even though students experience anxiety, as long as they still possess a sufficient perception of competence and feel they have control over their choices, their confidence in making career decisions does not necessarily decline (Akhnaf, 2022).

In contrast, Career Exploration has been shown to have a positive effect on CDMSE. This means that the more actively students engage in Career Exploration, the higher their confidence in making career decisions. The exploration process, which involves information gathering, hands-on experience, and reflection on personal interests and abilities, helps students gain clarity regarding their career direction. This clarity reduces uncertainty while boosting self-confidence in making choices (Zhao, 2022). Within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985), this active engagement strengthens feelings of competence and autonomy; thus, the more intensive the exploration, the stronger the resulting CDMSE.

Furthermore, this study also indicates that Self-Esteem has a positive influence on CDMSE. Students with positive self-perceptions tend to have greater confidence in making career decisions. Individuals with high Self-Esteem generally view themselves as capable and valuable, thereby exhibiting greater self-confidence in evaluating various alternatives and facing risks during the decision-making process (Rosenberg, 1989). From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985), positive Self-Esteem reinforces perceptions of competence and a sense of control over choices, which ultimately fosters increased self-efficacy in career decision-making. During the transition phase into the workforce, this serves as a crucial psychological foundation for building students' readiness and self-confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Furthermore, research findings indicate that Self-Esteem acts as a mediator in the relationship between Career Anxiety and CDMSE. This suggests that Career Anxiety does not directly reduce confidence in decision-making but operates through a decline in Self-Esteem. When students experience anxiety about their future careers, doubts about their abilities and self-worth arise, which then weaken their confidence in evaluating alternatives and making career choices (Rossier, 2022). Thus, although the direct effect of Career Anxiety on CDMSE is not significant, the indirect effect through Self-Esteem remains crucial. These findings reaffirm the relevance of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985), which posits that disruptions in the fulfillment of competence and autonomy needs lead to reduced Self-Esteem, which in turn affects confidence in decision-making.

Finally, Self-Esteem was also found to mediate the relationship between Career Exploration and CDMSE. This means that Career Exploration not only directly enhances confidence in decision-making but also reinforces it through improved self-evaluation. Through exploratory activities such as seeking information, trying various experiences, and reflecting on interests and abilities, students increasingly recognize their own potential, thereby forming a more positive self-evaluation (Min, 2021). In accordance with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985), these experiences reinforce perceptions of competence and autonomy. Thus, the increased Self-Esteem resulting from the Career Exploration process will further strengthen students' confidence in making career choices.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn: There is a significant negative effect of Career Anxiety on Self-Esteem, there is a significant positive effect of Career Exploration on Self-Esteem, There is no significant effect of Career Anxiety on CDMSE, there is a positive and significant effect of Career Exploration on CDMSE, there is a positive and significant effect of Self-Esteem on CDMSE, Self-Esteem mediates the relationship between Career Anxiety and CDMSE, Self-Esteem mediates the relationship between Career Exploration and CDMSE.

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