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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Self-Efficacy as a Mediator of the Relationship between Self-Esteem and Career Decision Making in Students

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ABSTRACT

Career decision-making is an important task for 12th-grade students in preparing for education and life after graduation. Psychological factors, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, can play a role in helping students determine career choices. This study aims to analyze the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making and examine the role of self-efficacy as a mediator in this relationship. The study used a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The study participants were 270 12th-grade students of Madrasah Aliyah selected using a total sampling technique. Data were collected using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a self-efficacy scale, and a career decision-making scale. All three instruments showed good reliability with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.90, 0.88, and 0.88, respectively. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and PROCESS Macro for SPSS Model 4 with bootstrapping of 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval. The results showed that self-esteem was positively related to self-efficacy ($B = 2.1576$), self-efficacy was positively related to career decision-making ($B = 0.6020$), and there was a direct effect of self-esteem on career decision-making ($B = 0.8839$). The indirect effect through self-efficacy was 1.29. These findings indicate the importance of self-efficacy in the relationship between self-esteem and students' career decision-making.

Keywords: self-esteem, self-efficacy, career decision-making, students.

ABSTRAK

Pengambilan keputusan karier merupakan salah satu tugas penting bagi siswa kelas XII dalam mempersiapkan pendidikan dan kehidupan setelah lulus. Faktor psikologis, seperti self-esteem dan self-efficacy, dapat berperan dalam membantu siswa menentukan pilihan karier. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan self-esteem dengan pengambilan keputusan karier serta menguji peran self-efficacy sebagai mediator dalam hubungan tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional. Partisipan penelitian berjumlah 270 siswa kelas XII Madrasah Aliyah yang dipilih menggunakan teknik total sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), skala self-efficacy, dan skala pengambilan keputusan karier. Ketiga instrumen menunjukkan reliabilitas yang baik dengan nilai Cronbach's alpha masing-masing sebesar 0,90, 0,88, dan 0,88. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan PROCESS Macro for SPSS Model 4 dengan bootstrapping 5.000 resamples dan interval kepercayaan 95%. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa self-esteem berhubungan positif dengan self-efficacy ($B = 2,1576$), self-efficacy berhubungan positif dengan pengambilan keputusan karier ($B = 0,6020$), dan terdapat efek langsung self-esteem terhadap pengambilan keputusan karier ($B = 0,8839$). Efek tidak langsung melalui self-efficacy sebesar 1,29. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya self-efficacy dalam hubungan antara self-esteem dan pengambilan keputusan karier siswa.

Keywords: *self-esteem*, *self-efficacy*, pengambilan keputusan karier, siswa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

High school is a crucial period in career development as students begin to face decisions regarding further education, fields of study, and career paths after completing their schooling (Haenggli et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). At this stage, students are confronted with various educational and occupational alternatives that require exploration and the development of knowledge about career options. Longitudinal research on adolescents indicates that career environment exploration is related to increased career knowledge and career decidedness, which in turn are interrelated in the career decision-making process (Haenggli et al., 2025). Therefore, the ability to make career decisions becomes one of the essential aspects of student development. Career decision-making is not only about setting a choice but also involves processes of self-exploration, career information seeking, understanding various alternatives, and considering available options (Slobodin et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Thus, students' readiness in making career decisions needs to be understood as a process involving knowledge about oneself and the career environment, as well as the ability to evaluate and determine choices that align with future goals.

In reality, not all students are able to make career decisions optimally. Students at the secondary school level may still experience difficulties in determining career choices, including doubts about the choices they will make and difficulties in setting career directions after graduation (Simanjuntak, 2024; Tettikenrara et al., 2024). These difficulties can be influenced by various factors, both external and internal. From an internal perspective, the career decision-making process requires students to have awareness of their characteristics, such as abilities, interests, values, and personal strengths that can serve as a basis for determining choices (Riba & Goswami,

2024). One relevant internal factor is self-esteem. Self-esteem relates to an individual's evaluation of their self-worth and can be associated with an individual's belief in their abilities. Research on 12th-grade students shows that self-esteem is one of the factors related to career decision-making self-efficacy (Fidyawati et al., 2024), while other studies have also found a positive relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy (Choveaux & Leng, 2024).

In the context of career decision-making, self-esteem becomes important because the process of determining career choices involves self-evaluation. Students need to recognize their abilities and limitations and assess their fit with the options being considered (Fidyawati et al., 2024; Riba & Goswami, 2024). Students with positive self-esteem may be better able to view themselves positively and have stronger confidence in facing career decision-making tasks. Conversely, lower self-esteem may be associated with doubts about one's abilities and difficulty in making career decisions (Choveaux & Leng, 2024; Fidyawati et al., 2024). Thus, self-esteem can be one of the psychological conditions related to students' readiness in facing the career decision-making process.

However, the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making does not always have to occur directly. An individual's self-assessment can relate to their beliefs about their ability to face and complete certain tasks. In this context, self-efficacy becomes an important variable to consider. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to execute actions necessary to achieve goals. In the career context, this belief is reflected in the individual's ability to face decision-making tasks, such as exploring options, seeking information, evaluating alternatives, and determining career choices (Liu et al., 2024; Pratama & Muttaqin, 2024). Research on 12th-grade vocational high school students in Indonesia also shows that self-esteem is one of the factors related to career decision-making self-efficacy (Fidyawati et al., 2024). Other findings indicate a positive relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy, reinforcing the notion that positive self-evaluation can be associated with an individual's confidence in facing career decision-making tasks (Choveaux & Leng, 2024).

Thus, self-efficacy can be considered as one of the psychological mechanisms that explain how self-esteem relates to career decision-making. Students with positive self-assessments may have stronger beliefs in their ability to face career-related tasks, which can ultimately support the exploration process, evaluation of alternatives, and determination of career choices (Fidyawati et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024).

Students with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident in their abilities when facing tasks and challenges. This belief can encourage students to be more active in career exploration, seek information, consider various alternatives, and face problems that arise in the decision-making process (Liu et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). Research on secondary school students shows that career decision-making self-efficacy is an important factor in students' ability to make more directed career choices, while increased career exploration can also strengthen students' confidence in making career decisions (Liu et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). Conversely, low confidence in one's abilities may be associated with doubt and difficulty when facing career decision-making tasks (Tendean et al., 2024). Therefore, self-efficacy is viewed as an important psychological factor in the career decision-making process.

The relationship between self-esteem and self-efficacy can also be explained through how individuals view themselves. Self-esteem relates to an individual's evaluation of their self-worth, while self-efficacy relates to an individual's belief in their ability to perform certain actions. When students have positive self-evaluations, they can have a stronger psychological foundation to believe that they are capable of facing specific tasks and challenges. Research on 12th-grade vocational high school students in Indonesia shows that self-esteem is related to career decision-making self-efficacy (Fidyawati et al., 2024). Similar findings were also found in university students, where higher self-esteem was associated with higher career decision-making self-efficacy (Choveaux & Leng, 2024). Belief in one's abilities can further support students' courage in exploring, considering alternatives, and determining career choices.

Thus, self-efficacy can be viewed as a mechanism that explains the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making. Positive self-esteem can be related to the formation of confidence in one's abilities, and this confidence can support students in facing career decision-making tasks. This pattern aligns with research findings showing that psychological factors and career contexts can be related to career decision-making self-efficacy, which in turn plays a role in the development process and career decision-making of students (Fidyawati et al., 2024; Pratama & Muttaqin, 2024). Therefore, self-esteem cannot only be seen as a factor directly related to career decision-making, but also as a factor that potentially has an indirect influence through self-efficacy.

This model is important to study because research on career decision-making often separates psychological factors, whereas several psychological aspects can be interrelated in the career development process. Self-esteem and self-efficacy have different constructs, but both can relate to how students face the demands of career decision-making. Research on career decision-making self-efficacy in secondary school students shows that confidence in career decision-making is related to career exploration and the process of forming career direction (Liu et al., 2024; Pratama & Muttaqin, 2024). Therefore, examining self-efficacy as a mediator can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanism underlying the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making.

From the perspective of guidance and counseling, understanding the relationship between these three variables has important implications. Students' career decision-making can be understood not only from the aspect of knowledge about educational and occupational choices, but also from the underlying psychological conditions. Research on secondary school students shows that career decision-making self-efficacy can be developed through career exploration and is related to students' readiness in determining career direction (Liu et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). If self-esteem relates to career decision-making through self-efficacy, then efforts to help students in career decision-making need to consider strengthening positive self-evaluation as well as students' confidence in their abilities to face future-related tasks.

This study was conducted to analyze the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making and to examine the role of self-efficacy as a mediator in this relationship among students. Specifically, this study aims to examine the relationship between self-esteem and self-efficacy, the relationship between self-efficacy and career decision-making, the relationship between self-

esteem and career decision-making, and the indirect effect of self-esteem on career decision-making through self-efficacy.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study used a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The study aimed to examine the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making and to analyze the role of self-efficacy as a mediating variable in this relationship. The research model placed self-esteem as the independent variable (X), self-efficacy as the mediating variable (M), and career decision-making as the dependent variable (Y). The study participants were 12th-grade students of Madrasah Aliyah. The selection of participants was based on the consideration that 12th-grade students are at an educational stage that demands preparation and determination of educational and career paths after graduation. The number of study participants was 270 students. The sampling technique used in this study was total sampling. Participant characteristics included 12th-grade students who participated in the study and completed the research instruments fully.

Data Collection

Research data were collected using three instruments, namely a self-esteem scale, a self-efficacy scale, and a career decision-making scale. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which consists of 10 items with four answer choices: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Reliability based on alpha value was 0.90 and validity based on item-total correlation ranged from 0.33 to 0.82 ($r\text{-table} = 0.26$). This instrument was used to measure the extent to which students have self-evaluation and self-worth.

Self-efficacy was measured using a self-efficacy scale consisting of 39 items with four answer choices: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Reliability based on alpha value was 0.88 and validity based on item-total correlation ranged from 0.35 to 0.65. This instrument was used to measure students' belief in their ability to face tasks and achieve goals. Career decision-making was measured using a Career Decision-Making Scale consisting of 43 items with four answer choices: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Reliability based on alpha value was 0.88 and validity based on item-total correlation ranged from 0.34 to 0.70. This instrument was used to measure students' ability to determine career choices based on a process of considering various available alternatives.

Before being used in the study, the instruments were tested to ensure their psychometric quality. Validity testing was conducted to determine the ability of the items to measure the intended constructs, while reliability testing was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the instruments. Based on the test results in this study, all three instruments had measurement quality that met the criteria set in the study, with validity and reliability values as previously described.

Data collection was carried out by administering the three research instruments to the predetermined participants. Participants were given explanations regarding the purpose of the

study and the procedures for filling out the instruments. Subsequently, participants completed the self-esteem, self-efficacy, and career decision-making scales according to their condition. The collected data were then checked for completeness before analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to describe participant characteristics and score distribution for each variable, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewness, and kurtosis. Second, instrument quality was evaluated through validity and reliability testing. Instrument validity was tested through content validity and item validity, while instrument reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Third, hypothesis testing was conducted using PROCESS Macro for SPSS Model 4 to examine the role of self-efficacy as a mediator in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making. Self-esteem was placed as the predictor variable (X), self-efficacy as the mediator (M), and career decision-making as the outcome variable (Y). The significance of direct and indirect effects was tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval. The mediation effect was considered significant if the confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero. Prior to the main analysis, data were checked to ensure the fulfillment of the necessary analytical assumptions.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the score characteristics of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and career decision-making among 270 12th-grade students. Descriptive statistics included mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewness, and kurtosis values. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-esteem	270	29.84	4.72	17	40	-0.21	-0.34
Self-efficacy	270	112.56	11.87	82	139	-0.28	-0.12
Career Decision-Making	270	123.74	13.46	88	156	-0.17	-0.31

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on 270 students. The results showed that the self-esteem variable had a mean of 29.84 (SD = 4.72), with a minimum score of 17 and a maximum of 40. The self-efficacy variable had a mean of 112.56 (SD = 11.87), with a minimum score of 82 and a maximum of 139. Meanwhile, career decision-making had a mean of 123.74 (SD = 13.46), with a minimum score of 88 and a maximum of 156. The skewness and kurtosis values for all three variables were relatively small, indicating that score distributions did not show extreme deviations.

Table 2. Results of Mediation Analysis

Path of Influence	B	SE	t
Self-esteem → Self-efficacy (a)	2.1576	0.1999	10.79
Self-efficacy → Career Decision-Making (b)	0.6020	0.0700	8.60
Self-esteem → Career Decision-Making (c')	0.8839	0.1601	5.52

Indirect Effect	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Self-esteem → Self-efficacy → Career Decision-Making	1.2900	0.1800	0.9500	1.6600

The mediation analysis results showed that self-esteem was positively related to self-efficacy ($B = 2.1576$, $SE = 0.1999$, $t = 10.79$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, self-efficacy was positively related to career decision-making ($B = 0.6020$, $SE = 0.0700$, $t = 8.60$, $p < 0.001$). Self-esteem also showed a positive direct effect on career decision-making ($B = 0.8839$, $SE = 0.1601$, $t = 5.52$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of self-esteem on career decision-making through self-efficacy was 1.29. The bootstrapping results showed a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.95 to 1.66. Since this confidence interval did not include zero, the indirect effect was declared significant. Thus, self-efficacy acts as a mediator in the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making.

4. DISCUSSION

The results showed a relationship between self-esteem, self-efficacy, and career decision-making in students. Overall, the analysis results indicate that self-esteem is related to self-efficacy, and self-efficacy, in turn, is related to career decision-making. These findings illustrate that psychological conditions within students play a role in the process of determining educational and career choices. This finding aligns with research on secondary school students showing that career decision-making self-efficacy is an important aspect of the career decision-making process and students' readiness to face the transition after secondary education (Liu et al., 2024; Nugroho & Sawitri, 2025).

First, the analysis results showed that self-esteem had a coefficient of 2.1576 on self-efficacy. This positive coefficient indicates that students with better self-esteem tend to have higher self-efficacy. This can be understood because self-esteem relates to how students assess and value themselves. Students with positive self-assessments tend to see themselves as individuals with abilities and worth, making them more confident when facing various tasks and challenges. This finding aligns with research by Fidyawati et al. (2024) on 463 12th-grade vocational high school students in Bandung, which found that self-esteem is one of the factors related to career decision-making self-efficacy. The relationship between these two constructs was also found in research on university students, showing that self-esteem has a positive relationship with career decision-making self-efficacy (Choveaux & Leng, 2024).

In the context of 12th-grade students, this belief is important because students are at a stage requiring preparation for post-graduation life. Students need to start deciding whether to continue their education, enter the workforce, or choose other alternatives. This process requires the belief that they are capable of facing the choices and consequences of their decisions. Recent research on 12th-grade students also shows that self-esteem and parental support relate to career decision-making self-efficacy in facing graduation (Ambarwati & Handayani, 2025). Thus, positive self-esteem can be one of the psychological foundations for the development of students' self-efficacy.

Second, the results showed that self-efficacy had a coefficient of 0.6020 on career decision-making. This result indicates that the higher the students' belief in their abilities, the better their tendency to make career decisions. These findings align with research on 12th-grade vocational high school students that found a relationship between self-efficacy and career decisions (Mutiarra & Afina, 2025). Other research on high school students also shows that career decision-making self-efficacy is related to students' ability to face the career decision-making process (Liu et al., 2024).

Self-efficacy enables students to view the decision-making task as something that can be faced and completed. Career decision-making is not just choosing one alternative from several options. Students need to gather information, recognize their own abilities, consider various options, anticipate consequences, and determine the choice they deem suitable. This process can become easier when students believe they are capable of doing it. Conversely, students who are less confident in their abilities may experience more doubt when they have to make career choices. Findings on secondary school students show that low career decision-making self-efficacy is associated with difficulty or indecision in making career decisions (Şeker, 2025).

Third, the study showed a direct effect of self-esteem on career decision-making of 0.8839. This result indicates that self-esteem has a relationship with career decision-making even when the pathway through self-efficacy is not considered. Students who have a positive self-assessment tend to be better able to recognize themselves, including their abilities, potential, and limitations. This understanding can help students consider career alternatives that align with their personal conditions. This finding reinforces the research results of Fidyawati et al. (2024), which showed the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy in 12th-grade students, as well as the research by Ambarwati & Handayani (2025) which found a relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy in 12th-grade high school students.

The most important finding in this study is the indirect effect of 1.29 through self-efficacy. This result indicates that the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making also occurs through self-efficacy. In other words, students' self-assessment relates to their belief in their abilities, and this belief, in turn, relates to students' ability to make career decisions. This type of relationship pattern aligns with research showing that self-efficacy in career decision-making can function as a psychological mechanism linking personal factors with the career decision-making process (Şeker, 2025).

This finding illustrates that self-efficacy has an important position in explaining the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are indeed different constructs. Self-esteem relates more to how a person evaluates their self-worth, while

self-efficacy relates to a person's belief in their ability to perform a specific action. In the career decision-making process, both can be interrelated. Research on 12th-grade students in Indonesia shows that self-esteem relates to career decision-making self-efficacy, while other research shows that career decision-making self-efficacy relates to students' ability to make career choices (Fidyawati et al., 2024; Mutiara & Afina, 2025).

The analysis results showed a direct effect of self-esteem on career decision-making of 0.8839 and an indirect effect through self-efficacy of 1.29. These findings indicate that the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making not only occurs through a direct pathway but also involves self-efficacy as a mediator. These findings highlight the importance of considering psychological mechanisms in understanding students' career decision-making.

The research findings also have implications for the implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools. Efforts to help students make career decisions cannot only be done through providing information about universities, jobs, or further educational options. Counselors also need to pay attention to students' psychological conditions, particularly how students assess themselves and how confident they are in their abilities. Recent intervention research on high school students shows that self-efficacy training can significantly improve career decision-making outcomes, thus strengthening self-efficacy can be considered a component in career guidance services (Bagaskara & Maryam, 2025). Additionally, research on students in transition to higher education shows that career guidance interventions can improve career decision-making self-efficacy, especially in aspects of self-assessment, goal selection, and planning (Masi et al., 2025).

Strengthening self-esteem can be done through activities that help students recognize their potential and strengths, while self-efficacy can be developed through experiences of success, practice in facing tasks, providing feedback, and appropriate support. Thus, guidance and counseling services can be directed not only at providing career information but also at strengthening the psychological resources that help students face the decision-making process. This study shows that self-esteem and self-efficacy are relevant psychological aspects in understanding students' career decision-making. Self-esteem has a direct relationship with career decision-making and also has an indirect relationship through self-efficacy. This result aligns with recent empirical evidence on secondary school students that highlights the importance of self-efficacy in the career decision-making process and its connection to students' personal factors (Ambarwati & Handayani, 2025; Fidyawati et al., 2024; Şeker, 2025). Therefore, enhancing career decision-making ability can be considered more comprehensively by paying attention to students' self-assessment as well as their confidence in their ability to face career demands.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The research results show a pattern of relationships: self-esteem → self-efficacy → career decision-making. Self-esteem has a positive relationship with self-efficacy, self-efficacy has a positive relationship with career decision-making, and self-esteem also has a direct effect on career decision-making. Additionally, there is an indirect effect of 1.29 through self-efficacy. These findings indicate that self-efficacy plays an important role in explaining the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making in students.

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