The Role of Career Exploration Behavior as A Mediator in The Relationship Between Social Support and Career Decision Self-Efficacy Among High School Students

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of career exploration behavior as a mediator of the relationship between social support and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) among high school students. This study used a cross-sectional study design with a quantitative approach. The participants were in 10th and 11th grade in Jabodetabek High Schools (N = 130). Data were collected using convenience sampling. The instruments used in this research comprised the Career Decision Self-Efficacy-Short Form (CDSE-SF), Adolescent Social Support Scales (ASSS), and Career Exploration Survey (CES). All data were analyzed statistically by descriptive, correlation, and mediation analysis. The results show that career exploration behavior fully mediates the relationship between social support and CDMSE (c = 0.208; p < 0.001). While external support from parents, teachers, and friends is crucial, internal factors are equally essential to help high school students plan their careers effectively. High school students need access to various useful information from their surroundings to actively engage in career exploration and gain the confidence needed to make informed career decisions. In this study, it was found that for students to have career decision self-efficacy, social support and career exploration behavior are needed in high school students.

Introduction

The Merdeka Curriculum is one of the national education policies that aims to present a more flexible and contextual approach to learning (Purnawanto, 2022). This approach prioritizes the development of competencies and thinking skills, which are considered important for students to be able to compete and adapt in the era of globalization and technological development. For this reason, in February 2022, the Minister of Research, Technology and Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim announced and inaugurated the Merdeka Curriculum which emphasizes student freedom and independence in the learning process (Vhalery et al., 2022). In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the high school level, there is a striking change in the form of the elimination of major choices such as science, social studies, and language that were previously available.

The implementation of the elimination of this major specialization gives students more freedom in choosing a learning path that suits their interests and talents so that students can more freely navigate the fields they are interested in (Sari et al., 2023). However, this change can potentially lead to a lack of understanding of various college majors and careers among students. Therefore, it is important to provide guidance by counseling teachers so that students can better understand their interests and talents related to understanding future careers (Nurmalasari & Erdiantoro, 2020). This is certainly a challenge for students in making career decisions.

Based on the results of the elicitation conducted by the researcher on 12 students, it shows that 10th and 11th grade students in Jabodetabek high schools various schools face challenges in dealing with career decision-making. The choice of Jabodetabek as the research location is based on the widespread implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in numerous schools in the area. They are given a lot of direction by teachers and parents to think carefully about their future, while also getting support from counseling guidance teachers and peers. However, their experience with the Merdeka Curriculum sometimes leaves them feeling exhausted, especially with the long duration of lessons and project assignments. In addition, there are significant changes to the curriculum when they reach 11th grade, with an emphasis on choosing subjects according to their interests and desired college majors. Although aptitude tests and report cards still play a role in decision-making, many students feel confused, some have two majors to choose from, others still have no clear idea, and some feel pressured by parental expectations. This explanation illustrates that students' unpreparedness and confusion have a significant impact on their career decision-making, where this condition makes them lack confidence (self-efficacy) in their career decision-making.

Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) is an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks related to career decision-making (Taylor & Betz, 1983). A person who has career decision self-efficacy will feel confident in the work related to himself, can predict his career future with good working conditions, and adjust the work by having a strong resistance to an obstacle (Bubic, 2017; Miraglia et al., 2015). When people are confident in their career decision-making, it can have a positive impact on various aspects of their lives. First, confidence in career choice increases one's motivation to achieve goals and overcome obstacles that may arise (London, 2014). In addition, people who are confident in their career choices tend to be more assertive in making decisions regarding education, work, and personal development. As a result, a strong belief in one's career choice can help one achieve success in their chosen field. On the other hand, if one is not confident in their career decision-making, there are negative consequences that may occur (London, 1983).

Stacy (2003) explained that two main factors influence career decision self-efficacy (CDMSE), namely external factors and individual factors. External factors that play a role in predicting CDMSE include family, school, and community environments such as specialization at school, career planning courses, and support from parents. Findings conducted by Jemini-Gashi et al. (2021) explain that support from teachers and parents affects self-efficacy in making career decisions. Support provided by parents, teachers, and peers has a role in supporting student involvement in school. The results of this study were in line with when researchers conducted interviews with high school students which showed that most said that the support of parents, teachers, and peers played a role in the career world.

Social support itself is defined as a place of physical and psychological comfort obtained from family members and friends (Byrne & Baron, 2003). Furthermore, Hurlock (2010) states that when a person gets support from family, including attention, acceptance, and trust, this has the potential to increase happiness and well-being in their lives. Therefore, adolescents who have self-confidence can make more informed decisions when they also receive social support from their surrounding environment (Hou, 2019). To achieve the best results in making career decisions, an individual needs support in the form of encouragement, affection, information, access to facilities, and guidance from their environment. Conversely, if individuals lack social support, this can be an obstacle for individuals in determining their career choices (Fadhillah & Yudiana, 2020).

Some researchers have proven that individuals who get social support from the environment can help increase the self-efficacy experienced by someone in the career

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decision-making process (Febriana & Masykur, 2022; Hou et al., 2019; Gilstrap, 2016). However, new research shows that social support has no relationship with self-efficacy in career decision-making (Suciati, 2013). Such findings highlight the importance of considering the diversity of these factors in analyzing the relationship.

Research conducted by Choi et al. (2012) on high school adolescents shows inconsistent results in the relationship between social support and career decision self-efficacy. This indicates the possibility of other factors influencing this relationship. The alleged existence of these additional variables can be explained by internal factors that support students to be more confident in making career decisions after graduating from high school. In adolescence, when career decision becomes challenging and complex, individuals rely not only on social support but also engage in an exploration of various career options available (Vertsberger and Gati, 2015).

Researchers have discovered that higher levels of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) are correlated with a clearer career identity, increased self-esteem, greater expectations for career outcomes, enhanced persistence in pursuing career goals, and heightened engagement in career exploration activities (To et al., 2022). Out of these factors, career exploration is particularly crucial for examination during the high school stage, as adolescents are actively involved in this process. Career exploration behavior, defined by Stumpf et al. (1983), is the ability of individuals to gather relevant information, evaluate their interests and abilities, and identify career paths that align with their needs and preferences. This process involves learning about oneself and the career environment, where individuals seek a better understanding of their interests, values, and goals. They also strive to gather information about various career options, understand the characteristics and requirements of different jobs, and assess the compatibility between their interests and skills with the world of work (Vignoli, 2005).

In adolescence, social support plays a crucial role in career development. Social support serves as contextual antecedents that can trigger or motivate individuals to engage in a career exploration process, which includes seeking information, trying new experiences, and developing skills relevant to their career goals (Papalia & Feldman, 2012). Through this career exploration behavior, individuals can access a variety of useful information about careers that can help them in making career decisions. Thus, it can help students build confidence in themselves to make career decisions that match their interests, talents, and goals.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the role of career exploration behavior as a mediator of the relationship between social support and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) among high school students. Based on previous studies, career exploration behavior has also been examined along with CDMSE, and a positive correlation was obtained from research (Rossallina dan Salim, 2019; Chan, 2018; Gushue et al., 2006). This study stands out due to its exclusive focus on high school students who have experienced notable changes in their curriculum. The research specifically delves into the impact of these changes, which involve the elimination of specialization majors such as Science, Social Studies, and Language. Emphasizing this aspect underscores the novelty of our research.

Research Method

This study used a cross-sectional study design with a quantitative approach. To recruit potential respondents, we used a convenience sampling method. The preparation stage involved obtaining permission to use the measurement tools, the adaptation process, ethical studies, and data collection. This study obtained permission from the original owners to use

all measurement tools and adapt them to the Indonesian context via email. This study was reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia, and found to be in accordance with the ethical standards of the discipline of Psychology and the Code of Research Ethics.

A total of 130 respondents were 10th and 11th-grade students in Jabodetabek high schools who had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The questionnaire in the form of a Google form was distributed through various social media accounts (Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Line). This research uses informed consent from parents and children. The questionnaire will be processed further if the participant agrees to sign the informed consent provided. On the other hand, if participants are unwilling or choose not to agree, they are free not to fill out the research questionnaire.

The instruments used in this study include the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Short Form (CDSE-SF) was modified by Sawitri (2009), the Adolescent Social Support Scales (ASSS), and the Career Exploration Survey (CES) has been adopted by Rossalina & Salim (2019). The CDSE-SF is used to measure one's level of confidence in making career decisions. The ASSS is used to measure social support from parents, teachers, and peers. The CES is used to measure students' career exploration behavior. After data collection, descriptive statistical tests contained mean, SD, frequency, and percentage of respondents' demographic data. Then, we conducted correlations between variables and mediation analysis. The statistical analysis techniques used included descriptive, correlational, and mediation tests using Macro PROCESS v3.4 in IBM SPSS Statistic 26.

Results and Discussion

Based on the demographic data of the respondents, the majority of respondents in this study were female, as many as 69 (53.1%). Furthermore, the age of respondents was in the range of 15-17 years old, with the majority being 16 years old (57.6%), and the sample population was dominated by students who were in grade XI (62.3%). This study was dominated by students from high schools in Bogor and Jakarta, with 34 (26.2%) and 32 (24.6%) respectively, followed by Bekasi, Depok, and Tangerang.

It is known that there is a positive and significant relationship between social support and career exploration behavior ($r = 0.245$, $p<0.01$), meaning that the higher the level of social support students receive, the more encouraged they are to explore various aspects of careers. A positive and significant relationship between career exploration behavior and career decision self-efficacy ($r = 0.633$, $p<0.01$), meaning that the more active students are in exploring career options, the higher their level of confidence in making career-related decisions. Career exploration activities can help students understand their strengths and interests, which in turn increases their confidence in making career decisions. A positive and significant relationship between social support and career decision self-efficacy ($r = 0.208$, $p<0.01$), indicates that students who perceive high social support tend to have greater levels of self-efficacy in making career decisions. All variables have a positive and significant correlation. The details of the correlation for each variable are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of respondents

Descriptive data		N	%
Gender	Female	69	53,1%
	Male	61	46,9%
Ages	15 years old	48	36,9%
	16 years old	75	57,6%
	17 years old	7	5,5%

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Grade	10th	49	37,7%
	11th	81	62,3%
School	Jakarta	32	24,6%
	Bogor	34	26,2%
	Depok	22	16,9%
	Tangerang	19	14,6%
	Bekasi	23	17,7%

Table 2. Correlation matrix among research variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Crobanch	1	2	3
1. CDMSE	96.70	6.87	.823	1	–	–
2. SS	80.98	8.21	.959	0.208**	1	–
3. CEB	56.58	6.73	.831	0.633**	0.245**	1

Note. CDMSE=career decision making self-efficacy, SS=social support, CEB=career exploration behavior

Table 3 and Figure 1 show that social support has no direct effect on CDSE. Meanwhile, the indirect effect shows that there is an indirect effect of social support to CDSE through career exploration behavior or career exploration behavior acts as a mediator, at .469. This suggests that individuals who receive social support are more likely to engage in career exploration behaviors, and these behaviors then contribute to an increase in their CDSE. Since path a and path b are significant, it can be concluded from Baron & Kenny's (1986) guidelines that there is a mediating role. Thus, these results support the proposed hypothesis that career exploration behavior mediates the effect of social support on career decision self-efficacy.

Table 3. Mediation results

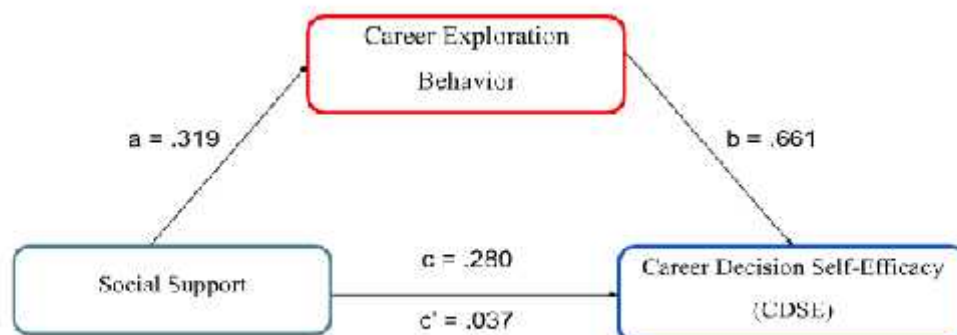| Antecedent		Outcomes						
		M (Career Exploration Behavior)				Y (CDSE)		
Variable		**Coeff**	**SE**	***p***		**Coeff**	**SE**	***p***
X (Social Support)	a	.319	.072	.000*	c'	.037	.075	.112
					c	.280	.078	.000*
M (Career Exploration Behavior)		–	–	–	b	.661	.091	.000*
		Effect	**LLCI**	**ULCI**				
Direct effect		.037	-.8810	.4361				
Indirect effect		.469	.1911	.7286				

*p <.001.

Figure 1. The mediation analysis result.

From this study, it can be discussed that career exploration behavior acts as a mediator between social support and career decision self-efficacy. Porfeli and Lee (2012) explained

that internal encouragement has a major impact on individual behavior, which can be an asset to developing self-competence, managing, and planning careers better. Career exploration behavior can be developed through information obtained so that it can conduct research, consider personal goals, and self-reflection to make better and more mature choices (Freedman, 2013).

Super (1980) conceptualized career exploration as one of the stages of career development that individuals will go through. A good career exploration activity needs to include both self-exploration and environmental exploration and be a place where individuals have the space to get to know themselves more deeply, such as their career skills, interests, needs, and values. In addition, individuals should also have the opportunity to gather career information about the surrounding environment, such as the prospects of a particular career field, the opportunities available, and the compatibility between themselves and the career (Chen & Vinitwatanakhun, 2020; Esters & McCulloh, 2008; Stumpf et al., 1983).

Career exploration is related to the process of mapping future careers, recognizing personal and environmental characteristics, and making career decisions. This relationship is inseparable from the components of career exploration, namely self-exploration and environmental exploration. Exploration is also influenced by the social environment. Support in the form of knowledge exchange about career plans from peers can increase individual confidence in making career decisions (Salim et al., 2023).

The results of this study support the findings of Taveira and Moreno (2012), who state that social support can facilitate high school students in increasing exploratory activities. They emphasized that having a safe and comfortable relationship is a key factor in stimulating exploratory activities. The support and sense of security obtained in friendship relationships can be an important motivation for high school students to engage in career exploration behavior. This is especially relevant for high school students who are collectively going through a career search period (Tadele & Terefe, 2016). Therefore, students' interactions with their surrounding environment, whether from teachers, family, or peers, have a significant role in shaping their career exploration behavior. Social support is obtained in the form of recognition, encouragement, and relevant information related to careers, then the confidence to take steps can increase and provide encouragement for high school students to be active in various career exploration activities (Alaei & Hosseinnezhad, 2020).

Focused career exploration is often associated with effective career decision-making (Guan et al., 2018; Ketterson & Blustein, 1997; Stumpf et al., 1983). Individuals' engagement in career exploration is positively correlated with their increased confidence in their career decisions. The collection of information obtained becomes the basis for consideration when individuals make career decisions, and decisions supported by adequate career information can increase individuals' confidence in these decisions (Hirschi et al., 2011).

Social support not only has a direct influence on students' confidence in career decision, but also influences through the mediation of career exploration behavior. The findings results of this study are in line with those (Chasanah & Salim, 2019; Rossallina & Salim, 2019; Park, et al, 2017; Downing & Nauta 2010) that suggest that career exploration behaviors mediate the relationship between certain factors, which ultimately contribute to an individual's ability to make career decisions. Career exploration activities provide students with the opportunity to better understand themselves and build confidence in dealing with career choices. Students need to be made aware of the importance of career exploration and how social support can be a key factor in developing self-efficacy (Guay et al., 2006).

At school, students need assistance not only for learning but also to support them in career exploration. Support provided by parents, teachers, and friends can be a trigger for

students to actively explore career options (Chan, 2018). Career education programs should not only focus on increasing knowledge but should also motivate students to be active in exploring their interests and abilities (Super & Hall, 1978). As the world of work continues to evolve, these findings provide additional insights into how social factors can shape students' level of preparedness for future educational and career challenges.

Social support plays an important role because, through this support, students can be encouraged to increase their exploration. If students lack support from parents, it seems that peers and teachers at school can be an impetus for students to explore more information that supports their career choices. Thus, support from various parties can help strengthen their confidence in their future career decisions. Research by Jiang et al. (2019) found a close relationship between career exploration behavior and students' level of knowledge and perceptions of various types of work.

Conceptually, our findings highlight the pivotal role of collaboration among teachers, parents, and peers in addressing challenges in career decision under the Merdeka Curriculum. Practically, our research underscores the need for targeted interventions, such as workshops and counseling, to provide students with the support and information required for informed career choices. Implementing comprehensive career guidance programs at the high school level is crucial to align with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Conclusion

The results show that career exploration behavior fully mediates the relationship between social support and CDSE (c = 0.208; p < 0.001). This means that to develop career decision self-efficacy, students need support from teachers, family, and friends, which will trigger the emergence of students' career exploration behavior. The more actively students engage in exploring various career options, the easier it is for them to make the right career decisions. By obtaining comprehensive information and having clear career aspirations, students' confidence in making career decisions can increase.

Recommendation

Based on the result of this study, the following recommendations are suggested: (a) Future research should further investigate by incorporating a more extensive and geographically diverse sample, encompassing a broader range of educational levels. (b) Students should build their careers by socializing, exploring personal interests, and gathering information from various fields of career interest. (c) Teachers, counselors, and school authorities should assist in preparing students to be more confident in their career decisions.

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