

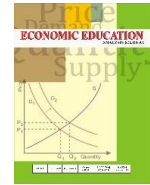


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The Effect of Career Adaptability on Career Anxiety with the Mediation of Self-Efficacy in Decision-Making in UNESA Business Education Students

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between career adaptability and career anxiety through the mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate business education students. Drawing on Career Construction Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory, the study addresses the limited understanding of how adaptive career resources are translated into reduced career anxiety through confidence in career decision-making. A quantitative explanatory design was employed, and all members of the target population were included to ensure comprehensive representation of the study context. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through path analysis. The findings demonstrate that career adaptability reduces career anxiety both directly and indirectly through career decision-making self-efficacy. Students with stronger adaptive capacities tend to develop greater confidence in making career decisions, which subsequently alleviates career-related anxiety. This study extends career development literature by clarifying the psychological mechanism linking adaptability and anxiety, while offering practical implications for higher education institutions in designing interventions that strengthen students' career readiness, decision-making confidence, and resilience in navigating an increasingly uncertain labor market.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from higher education to the labor market has become increasingly complex due to rapid economic, technological, and occupational changes (Maree, 2017; Carter, 2019; Chen et al., 2020). Within this context, Career Construction Theory (CCT) posits that individuals actively construct their careers by mobilizing psychological resources that enable them to adapt to changing vocational environments (Savickas, 2005). Complementing this perspective, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in shaping career-related behaviors, choices, and emotional outcomes (Lent et al., 1994). Together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that successful career development depends not only on individual competencies but also on the psychological resources that help individuals navigate uncertainty and career transitions (Rudolph et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2020; Paul & Michael, 2017).

In higher education, career preparation represents a fundamental objective of the learning process. Universities are expected to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to enter professional environments and respond effectively to labor market demands. This expectation is also reflected in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3/2020 concerning National Standards for Higher Education, which emphasizes graduate competencies that support both personal and professional development. However, despite these institutional efforts, many students continue to experience uncertainty regarding their future careers, particularly during the transition from university to employment (Zulfahmi & Andriany, 2021). Career anxiety emerges when individuals experience concerns about career choices, personal capabilities,

or future employment opportunities (Elfina & Andriany, 2023). Such concerns have become increasingly relevant in labor markets characterized by intense competition and uncertainty, where graduates are expected to demonstrate adaptability and readiness to respond to changing occupational demands (Stead et al., 2022; Aun, 2020; Carter, 2019; Kapitsa & Apanovich, 2023).

Educational institutions therefore play an important role in facilitating students' career readiness through internships, training programs, and career guidance initiatives that strengthen adaptability and support successful school-to-work transitions (Li et al., 2022). Nevertheless, institutional support alone may not be sufficient. Previous studies suggest that career-related outcomes are also influenced by individual psychological factors, including perceptions of work environments, economic pressures, interpersonal competencies, family expectations, and perceived employment opportunities (Haricharan, 2025). These factors shape how students evaluate their future careers and respond to career-related uncertainty (Ghosh & Fouad, 2017; Hui et al., 2018; Hendayani & Abdullah, 2018).

Among the psychological resources associated with career development, self-efficacy has received substantial scholarly attention. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs regarding their capability to perform specific tasks and achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1971). In career contexts, stronger self-efficacy is associated with greater confidence in making career decisions, higher persistence in overcoming career challenges, and more adaptive responses to uncertainty (Lent & Brown, 2019; Zhang et al., 2025; Kim & Lee, 2018; Hou et al., 2019). Conversely, lower self-efficacy may intensify perceptions of vulnerability and increase susceptibility to

career anxiety (Zhou et al., 2024; Schönfeld et al., 2017; Sarteshneizy et al., 2020). SCCT further proposes that self-efficacy influences career-related emotions by shaping how individuals interpret opportunities, barriers, and their own capabilities in pursuing career goals (Lent et al., 1994; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021).

Career adaptability represents another critical psychological resource within Career Construction Theory. Savickas and Porfeli (2012) conceptualize career adaptability as a multidimensional construct comprising concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These dimensions function as adaptive resources that enable individuals to prepare for vocational transitions, manage career-related challenges, and respond effectively to changing work environments. Individuals with stronger adaptability are generally better equipped to cope with uncertainty and maintain positive career-related expectations (Akkermans et al., 2018; Rudolph et al., 2017; Bocciardi et al., 2017; Udayar et al., 2018). From this perspective, career adaptability may serve as an important mechanism for reducing career anxiety by enhancing individuals' capacity to manage future career demands (Autin et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019; Atac et al., 2018).

The relationship between adaptability and anxiety can also be understood through Cognitive Theory of Anxiety, which argues that anxiety arises when individuals interpret situations as threatening or beyond their control (Freeman & Ditomasso, 2015). In career contexts, students who underestimate their abilities or exaggerate potential career risks may experience heightened anxiety regarding future employment (Mahmud et al., 2021). Accordingly, adaptive psychological resources and positive efficacy beliefs may help students reinterpret uncertainty more constructively, thereby reducing career-

related anxiety (Richardson, 2023; Hallford et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2021).



Figure 1. Summary of Career Anxiety Levels for UNESA Business Education Students, Class of 2022

Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

Empirical studies have demonstrated significant associations among career adaptability, self-efficacy, and career-related outcomes. Lent and Brown (2019) reported that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in career decision-making processes and emotional adjustment. However, Haricharan (2025) argued that self-efficacy may not independently explain career anxiety because broader contextual and socio-economic factors can influence students' career perceptions. Although previous studies have examined the direct relationships among career adaptability, self-efficacy, and career anxiety, the literature remains fragmented. Most studies have investigated these constructs separately or focused primarily on direct effects, providing limited understanding of the psychological mechanisms through which career adaptability influences career anxiety (Kim & Lee, 2018; Hou et al., 2019; Akkermans et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2018).

This limitation is particularly relevant in educational settings where students are increasingly exposed to experiential learning activities such as

internships and teaching practice. While such experiences are expected to strengthen adaptability and career confidence, students may still experience uncertainty regarding their future career trajectories. In the context of Business Education students at Surabaya State University (UNESA), this issue is especially important because students are expected to transition into diverse professional pathways that require both adaptive capabilities and effective career decision-making (Ismail, 2017; Kwon, 2019).

Accordingly, this study addresses an important gap in the literature by examining career decision-making self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism linking career adaptability and career anxiety within a single integrated model. By integrating Career Construction Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory, the study advances understanding of how adaptive career resources are translated into lower levels of career anxiety through enhanced confidence in career decision-making (Kim & Lee, 2018; Hou et al., 2019; Zhang & Huang, 2018). The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by clarifying the psychological processes underlying career adaptation and anxiety, while also providing practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen students' career readiness and psychological resilience during the transition to employment (Rudolph et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2020; Akkermans et al., 2018).

Drawing upon the theoretical insights and empirical evidence previously outlined, the present study identifies a research gap in the insufficient exploration of self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism in career-related contexts decision-making in the relationship between career adaptability and career anxiety among university students. Understanding this psychological mechanism is important to

explain how students' adaptive capabilities influence their emotional responses toward career uncertainty. In light of this, the study intends to explore the impact of career adaptability on students' career-related anxiety and evaluate the intervening role of self-efficacy in their career decision processes of the Business Education Undergraduate Program at Surabaya State University.

METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the causal relationships among career adaptability, career decision-making self-efficacy, and career anxiety among undergraduate students. A quantitative design was considered appropriate because the study seeks to empirically test theoretically derived hypotheses and quantify the magnitude of relationships among variables through statistical procedures (Sugiyono, 2020). Specifically, an explanatory research design was employed because the primary objective of the study was not merely to describe observed phenomena but to explain the causal mechanisms underlying the relationship between career adaptability and career anxiety, as well as to examine the mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy within this relationship. This design is particularly suitable when research aims to verify theoretical propositions and identify direct and indirect effects among constructs within a specified conceptual framework.

The conceptual model consists of three principal constructs. Career adaptability was positioned as the independent variable, career anxiety as the dependent variable, and career decision-making self-efficacy as the mediating variable. Career adaptability refers to the psychosocial resources that enable

individuals to cope effectively with vocational developmental tasks, occupational transitions, and career-related challenges. The construct was measured using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) developed by Savickas and Porfeli (2012), which comprises four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. The instrument consists of twenty-four items measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties of the CAAS across diverse cultural contexts, supporting its reliability and construct validity in career development research.

Career decision-making self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs regarding their capability to successfully perform tasks associated with making career-related decisions. This construct was measured using the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE) developed by Betz and Taylor (1996). The instrument encompasses five dimensions, namely self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem solving, represented by twenty-five items evaluated through a five-point Likert scale. The CDMSE has been widely employed in career development studies and has demonstrated strong reliability and validity in assessing confidence related to career decision-making processes.

Career anxiety represents a negative emotional condition characterized by uncertainty, worry, and apprehension regarding future career prospects and employment opportunities. The construct was measured using the Career Anxiety Scale developed by Tsai et al. (2017), which consists of twenty items representing four dimensions: perceived personal competence, irrational employment-related beliefs, labor market conditions, and professional education

and training. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of career anxiety. Prior research has reported satisfactory psychometric performance of this instrument in measuring anxiety associated with career-related concerns.

To ensure measurement quality, all instruments underwent validity and reliability assessments before hypothesis testing. Construct validity was evaluated through factor loading analysis and average variance extracted (AVE), while internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients. The accepted thresholds followed established recommendations in the methodological literature, indicating that factor loadings should exceed 0.70, AVE values should be greater than 0.50, and reliability coefficients should surpass 0.70 to demonstrate adequate convergent validity and internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2019).

The population of this study consisted of all students from the 2022 cohort of the Undergraduate Business Education Program at Surabaya State University (UNESA), comprising 99 students distributed across Classes A, B, C, and I. Given the relatively small population size, a saturated sampling technique was employed, whereby all members of the population were included as research participants. This approach was selected to maximize population representation and minimize sampling error. Nevertheless, although saturated sampling enhances internal representativeness within the investigated population, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings beyond the specific institutional context because the sample was drawn from a single study program and university.

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire

administered to participants during the academic semester. Prior to data collection, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protection, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before questionnaire completion. The collected data were anonymized and used exclusively for academic research purposes to ensure compliance with ethical research standards.

The data were analyzed using path analysis because this technique enables simultaneous examination of direct and indirect relationships among variables and is particularly suitable for testing mediation models. Path analysis allows researchers to assess the extent to which career adaptability influences career anxiety directly and indirectly through career decision-making self-efficacy. Before hypothesis testing, the data were examined to ensure compliance with relevant statistical assumptions.

The mediating effect of career decision-making self-efficacy was evaluated using a bootstrapping procedure with bias-corrected confidence intervals. Compared with the traditional Sobel test, bootstrapping is considered a more robust approach because it does not rely on the assumption of normal distribution for indirect effects and provides more accurate estimates of mediation effects, particularly in relatively small samples. Mediation was considered significant when the confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero. This procedure enabled a more rigorous assessment of the indirect pathway linking career adaptability and career anxiety through career decision-making self-efficacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, several diagnostic procedures were conducted to verify that the regression framework satisfied essential statistical prerequisites, including assessments of distribution normality, linear association, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. The evaluation of normality through the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov procedure produced a significance level of 0.200, exceeding the threshold of 0.05, thereby indicating that the dataset followed a normal distribution pattern. In addition, the linearity assessment revealed that the associations among the examined variables adhered to a linear form, as evidenced by the significance value reported in the Deviation from Linearity statistic which exceeded the 0.05 threshold.

Furthermore, the multicollinearity test results showed tolerance values above 0.10 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values below 10 for all variables, indicating that no multicollinearity problem occurred in the regression model. The heteroscedasticity assessment further revealed that every predictor variable produced significance levels exceeding 0.05, indicating the absence of heteroscedasticity within the regression model. which means that the regression model did not experience heteroscedasticity. Based on these results, it can be concluded that all classical assumptions were met, and the regression analysis could be conducted.

The outcomes of the multiple linear regression procedure are summarized in Table 1. The analysis reveals that both career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy exhibit a statistically meaningful influence on career anxiety among students. Career adaptability shows a positive regression coefficient and a significant statistical value, indicating that it contributes

significantly to predicting career anxiety within the model. Meanwhile, self-efficacy in career decision-making shows a negative regression coefficient, indicating that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with lower levels of career anxiety among students. These findings suggest that psychological readiness and confidence in making career decisions play an important role in shaping students' emotional responses toward career uncertainty.

The coefficient of determination results presented in Table 2 show that career adaptability and self-efficacy in career decision-making jointly contribute to explaining the variation in career anxiety among students. The R Square value indicates that the model is able to explain a considerable proportion of the variance in career anxiety. This finding implies that both variables have a meaningful contribution in predicting students' career anxiety, although other factors outside the research model may also influence the condition. Therefore, the regression model used in this study can be considered adequate for explaining the relationship between career adaptability, self-efficacy in career decision-making, and career anxiety among students.

Table 1. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	26,042	3,664		7,108	,001
	Adaptabilitas	2,019	,064	,701	31,468	,001
	Efikasi Diri	-1,854	,038	-1,077	-48,296	,001

Table 2. Adjusted R2 Values

Model	R	RSquare	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of the estimate
1	,680 ^a	,462	,451	4,877

As displayed in Table 2, the obtained

correlation coefficient (R) of 0.680 signifies a substantial degree of association linking career adaptability and self-efficacy in career decision formulation with career-related anxiety. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) reaching 0.462 implies that a notable share of the variance observed in career anxiety can be statistically attributed to the combined explanatory influence of Career adaptability and decision-making self-efficacy together explain 46.2% of the variation in students' career anxiety. Meanwhile, the Adjusted R Square value of 0.451 indicates that after adjusting for the number of samples and the number of variables in the model, the model's explanatory power is 45.1%.

This means that 45.1% of the variation in career anxiety is explained by the variables in this model, while the remaining 54.9% is influenced by other factors outside the research model. Hence, the regression specification applied in this investigation indicates that influences outside the examined constructs also contributed to the outcome can be categorized as adequate in explaining the relationships between the variables studied.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the proposition that psychological resources play a crucial role in shaping students' emotional responses toward career uncertainty. The results indicate that career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy jointly contribute to explaining variations in career anxiety among undergraduate students. Although the explanatory power of the model can be categorized as moderate, the findings suggest that students' ability to adapt to career-related challenges and their confidence in making career decisions constitute important psychological mechanisms for managing

uncertainty associated with future employment.

From the perspective of Career Construction Theory, the findings reinforce the argument that career adaptability functions as a key psychosocial resource that enables individuals to navigate vocational transitions and cope with developmental career tasks (Savickas, 2013). Career adaptability encompasses concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, which collectively help individuals anticipate future career demands, regulate their career behavior, explore available opportunities, and maintain confidence in dealing with occupational challenges (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Students who possess stronger adaptive resources are generally better prepared to respond to labor market uncertainty because they are more capable of interpreting career-related challenges as manageable rather than threatening situations. This interpretation is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that career adaptability contributes positively to career development outcomes, employability, well-being, and successful school-to-work transitions (Rudolph et al., 2017; Akkermans et al., 2018; Maree, 2017).

The present findings also align with empirical evidence suggesting that career adaptability serves as a protective factor against psychological distress during career transitions. Previous studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of adaptability tend to report lower levels of career-related stress, greater career optimism, and stronger perceptions of employability (Autin et al., 2017; Kwon, 2019; Udayar et al., 2018). This pattern can be explained by the adaptive readiness mechanism proposed within the career adaptation model, whereby adaptable individuals are better able to mobilize personal resources when confronted with

uncertainty and change (Savickas, 2013; Zhou et al., 2016). Consequently, career adaptability not only facilitates career planning and exploration but also functions as an important psychological buffer that reduces the likelihood of experiencing excessive career anxiety.

The findings further highlight the importance of career decision-making self-efficacy as a psychological resource that influences students' emotional adjustment. Consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory, self-efficacy beliefs shape how individuals evaluate their abilities, interpret environmental challenges, and regulate their behavioral responses (Bandura, 1997; Lent & Brown, 2013). Students who believe they possess the capability to make effective career decisions are more likely to perceive career-related tasks as achievable and manageable. As a result, they experience lower levels of uncertainty and emotional distress when confronted with important career decisions. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that career decision-making self-efficacy is positively associated with career exploration, career optimism, employability perceptions, and adaptive career behaviors (Kim & Lee, 2018; Xin et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2019).

The negative relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and career anxiety can also be explained through Bandura's social cognitive framework. Self-efficacy influences emotional functioning by affecting how individuals appraise potentially stressful situations (Bandura, 1997). Individuals with strong efficacy beliefs tend to focus on opportunities for action and problem solving, whereas those with weaker efficacy beliefs often focus on potential threats and negative outcomes. Consequently, lower levels of self-efficacy increase susceptibility to anxiety because individuals perceive themselves as less

capable of coping with future challenges (Schönfeld et al., 2017; Sarteshneizy et al., 2020; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). In the context of career development, confidence in career decision-making enables students to approach career uncertainty with greater psychological resilience and a stronger sense of personal control.

A particularly important contribution of this study concerns the mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy. The findings suggest that career adaptability does not merely influence career anxiety directly but also operates indirectly through students' confidence in making career-related decisions. This result supports the proposition that adaptive career resources are translated into favorable emotional outcomes through cognitive self-regulatory mechanisms. Students who possess greater adaptability tend to develop stronger confidence in evaluating career alternatives, gathering occupational information, setting career goals, and solving career-related problems. These efficacy beliefs subsequently reduce uncertainty and anxiety regarding future employment.

This finding extends previous studies that have emphasized the close relationship between career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy. Kim and Lee (2018) found that career decision-making self-efficacy serves as an important mechanism linking internal psychological resources with adaptive career outcomes. Similarly, Hou et al. (2019) demonstrated that self-efficacy mediates the influence of contextual resources on career adaptability. The current study advances this literature by demonstrating that career decision-making self-efficacy also functions as an explanatory mechanism through which career adaptability contributes to lower levels of career anxiety. In doing so, the

study provides empirical evidence supporting the integration of Career Construction Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory within a single explanatory framework.

The findings also contribute to a broader understanding of anxiety from a cognitive perspective. Cognitive theories of anxiety suggest that anxiety emerges when individuals perceive future situations as uncertain, uncontrollable, or threatening (Eysenck et al., 2007; Hallford et al., 2024). Students who lack adaptive resources and confidence in career decision-making may be more likely to engage in catastrophic thinking regarding employment opportunities, career success, or future occupational stability. Conversely, students with stronger adaptive capacities and efficacy beliefs are more likely to interpret uncertainty as a challenge that can be managed through planning, exploration, and proactive action. This interpretation reduces perceived threat and ultimately lowers anxiety levels.

The moderate explanatory power of the model indicates that career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy represent important but not exhaustive determinants of career anxiety. More than half of the variance in career anxiety remains unexplained by the current model, suggesting the potential influence of additional factors such as social support, labor market perceptions, socioeconomic background, personality characteristics, emotional intelligence, career optimism, and employability perceptions. Previous studies have demonstrated that social support from peers, family members, and educational institutions can significantly influence career-related confidence and emotional well-being (Ghosh & Fouad, 2017; Hui et al., 2018; Atac et al., 2018). Similarly, perceived employability and career optimism have been identified as

important predictors of adaptive career outcomes and psychological adjustment during career transitions (Kwon, 2019; Ismail, 2017).

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of developing both adaptive capacities and efficacy beliefs among university students. In an increasingly uncertain labor market, students require not only technical knowledge and professional skills but also psychological resources that enable them to cope effectively with ambiguity, complexity, and change. By strengthening career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy, higher education institutions can play a significant role in preparing students for successful and psychologically healthy career transitions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that career adaptability plays a significant role in reducing career anxiety among Business Education students at Surabaya State University. The findings reveal that the influence of career adaptability operates through both direct and indirect pathways, with career decision-making self-efficacy serving as an important psychological mechanism that translates adaptive career resources into lower levels of career anxiety. Students who possess stronger adaptability tend to develop greater confidence in making career-related decisions, which subsequently helps them manage uncertainty and emotional distress associated with future career transitions.

The findings extend Career Construction Theory by providing evidence that career adaptability not only functions as an adaptive resource for managing vocational challenges but also contributes to emotional adjustment through cognitive self-regulatory

processes. Furthermore, the study enriches Social Cognitive Career Theory by demonstrating that career decision-making self-efficacy serves as a key mechanism linking adaptive career resources to career-related emotional outcomes. The integration of these theoretical perspectives offers a more comprehensive understanding of how students navigate career uncertainty during the transition from higher education to employment.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening students' career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy through career counseling, mentoring, experiential learning, and career development programs. Such initiatives may help students become more prepared, confident, and resilient in facing an increasingly dynamic labor market.

This study is limited by its focus on students from a single study program and institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research is encouraged to examine additional contextual and psychological factors that may influence career anxiety across more diverse educational and occupational settings. Overall, this study contributes to the career development literature by clarifying the psychological processes through which career adaptability promotes more positive emotional outcomes during career transitions.

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