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The influence of self-efficacy on career maturity through positive affect

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Self-efficacy, positive affect, career maturity, mediation, high school students.	Students' readiness to make career decisions is influenced by internal factors such as self-efficacy and positive emotional states. This study aims to examine the effect of self-efficacy on career maturity through positive affect among senior high school students. A quantitative approach with a regression design was employed, involving 275 eleventh-grade students from public senior high schools in Semarang City selected through cluster random sampling. Instruments included the General Self-Efficacy Scale, Positive Affect Scale, and Career Maturity Scale based on Savickas' theory. Data were analyzed using Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 4. Results indicate that self-efficacy significantly affects positive affect ($\beta = 8.232, p < 0.05, R^2 = 0.220$) and career maturity ($\beta = 6.362, p < 0.001$). Positive affect also significantly influences career maturity ($\beta = 6.276, p < 0.05, R^2 = 0.502$). The mediation effect of positive affect, amounting to 3.925, was significant as the 95% confidence interval did not include zero. These findings highlight the importance of educational interventions that enhance self-efficacy while fostering positive emotions to better prepare students to face career challenges with maturity and confidence.

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Introduction

Career maturity is a crucial aspect of individual development, particularly during adolescence, when senior high school students begin to encounter challenges in determining the direction of their future professional paths. Career maturity reflects an individual's readiness to make realistic, responsible, and future-oriented career decisions. Super (as cited in Hakim, 2022) explains that adolescent career maturity encompasses the awareness and preparedness to plan a career, explore various occupational information, make career decisions, understand the world of work, identify preferred occupational groups, and effectively realize career choices. In other words, career maturity not only demands an understanding of the world of work but also the ability to set career goals, realistically recognize oneself, and act consistently with the chosen career direction.

However, the attainment of career maturity among students is often hindered by uncertainty, low self-confidence, and insufficient affective readiness in navigating complex career choices. One important internal factor is self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their capability to accomplish tasks and achieve goals. Self-efficacy encourages students to be more confident in exploring career options, developing well-structured plans, and making appropriate decisions. Students with high self-efficacy tend to be more proactive in exploring the world of work, understanding occupational information, and demonstrating readiness to actualize their career choices.

Several prior studies support the significant role of self-efficacy in career development. Pham, Lam, and Bui (2024) emphasize that self-efficacy is a subjective aspect that strongly influences students' career selection. Fitriyana, Kurjono, and Santoso (2021) found that the majority of students with moderate self-efficacy also demonstrated less-than-optimal career maturity levels. Similarly, Ran et al (2022) reported that low self-efficacy negatively impacts students' ability to make career decisions, even when they are aware of the type of job they desire.

Nonetheless, previous studies have shown inconsistent findings regarding the extent to which self-efficacy contributes to career maturity. This inconsistency suggests that the relationship between the two may be influenced by other psychological factors that have received little attention in earlier models. One relevant factor to consider is positive affect, which refers to emotional states reflecting feelings such as happiness, optimism, satisfaction, and enthusiasm in facing challenges. Positive affect is believed to strengthen individuals' confidence in the career decision-making process and enhance emotional resilience in dealing with future uncertainties. Individuals with high levels of positive affect tend to be more motivated, capable of managing stress adaptively, and have a constructive outlook toward the future. Therefore, positive affect has the potential to serve as an important psychological variable in clarifying the relationship between self-efficacy and career maturity.

Positive feelings can reinforce students' self-confidence, make them more open to opportunities, and enhance their persistence in formulating and pursuing career plans. Fredrickson (2001) explains that positive affect broadens individuals' thought-action repertoires, enabling them to make wiser and more strategic decisions. Nevertheless, there remains a limited body of empirical research examining the mediating role of positive affect in the relationship between self-efficacy and career maturity, particularly among adolescents in the Indonesian educational context. Most prior studies have focused on the direct influence of self-efficacy, without further exploring affective aspects that may shape students' readiness to make career decisions.

Preliminary findings from a study conducted among 11th-grade students in three public senior high schools in Semarang City revealed that most students still displayed relatively low levels of career planning and understanding of preferred occupational groups. This condition indicates that many students lack adequate readiness to design their career paths, either due to limited information or weak belief in their own abilities. At the adolescent stage of career development, the ability to plan, explore, and decide is a key indicator of career maturity. This situation reflects a broader challenge in fostering career readiness among Indonesian adolescents, especially amid the dynamic labor market, which demands flexibility and psychological resilience. Therefore, efforts to develop career readiness through psychological approaches—particularly those aimed at strengthening self-efficacy and fostering positive affect—are increasingly relevant and urgent for scholarly investigation.

This study aims to examine the influence of self-efficacy on career maturity, taking into account the mediating role of positive affect. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of career guidance services in schools, particularly by emphasizing the importance of enhancing self-efficacy and positive affect as factors that can promote students' career maturity. Such an approach is expected to help students become more confident, maintain an optimistic outlook, and make career decisions independently and purposefully.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the effect of self-efficacy on career maturity, with positive affect serving as a mediating variable. The aim was to determine the extent to which self-efficacy contributes to shaping students' career maturity through positive affect as an intermediary mechanism.

The population consisted of public senior high school students in Semarang City, totaling 1,259 students across 16 schools. The sampling technique used was cluster random sampling, in which groups (clusters) were categorized based on three geographical areas—central, peripheral, and intermediate districts. One school from each cluster was then randomly selected, rather than selecting individuals directly. This process resulted in three schools being chosen from the total of 16 public senior high schools. This method was deemed efficient in terms of time and resources, as the population was widely distributed across locations. All 11th-grade students from the selected schools were included in the sample. The sample size was determined using the Isaac and Michael table at a 5% margin of error, yielding a total of 275 11th-grade students as research respondents.

Career maturity was measured using the Career Maturity Scale based on Savickas' (2002) theory, which assesses an individual's ability to plan, manage, and make career decisions flexibly and adaptively. The instrument consisted of 15 statement items. Construct validity testing indicated that all items met validity assumptions with *r*-values greater than 0.254, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.857, categorized as excellent. Self-efficacy was assessed using the General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1999), comprising 10 items adapted into Indonesian. Construct validity testing showed all items met validity assumptions with *r*-values greater than 0.254, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.822, categorized as excellent.

Positive affect was measured using the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson et al. (1988). The scale consisted of 20 statement items. Construct validity testing indicated that all items met validity assumptions with r -values greater than 0.254, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.958, categorized as excellent. Data analysis was conducted using a parametric statistical approach with the aid of SPSS version 26 integrated with PROCESS Macro version 5.0. Hayes' Model 4 was applied to test the effect of self-efficacy on career maturity with positive affect as a mediating variable. This analytical technique enabled the identification of both direct and indirect (mediated) effects among the variables under investigation in a comprehensive manner.

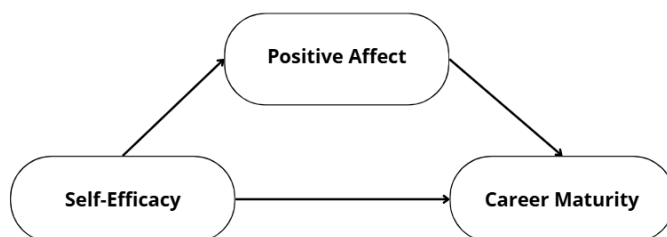


Figure 1. Model Hayes 4

Result and Discussion

The research instruments were administered to 275 11th-grade students from three public senior high schools in Semarang City, selected through the cluster random sampling technique. Each student was asked to complete a questionnaire measuring self-efficacy, positive affect, and career maturity.

Descriptive analysis results indicated that the average self-efficacy score was in the high category ($M = 29.44$, $SD = 4.81$), suggesting that, in general, students possessed a positive belief in their ability to face both academic and non-academic challenges. Career maturity was also categorized as high ($M = 43.95$, $SD = 7.03$), indicating that students had a good understanding of career planning, exploration, and decision-making. Similarly, positive affect was found to be in the high category ($M = 60.21$, $SD = 13.14$), reflecting that most students maintained stable positive emotional states. These results, presented in Table 1, served as the initial basis for conducting inferential analyses on the relationships among the study variables.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and category of variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Category
Self-efficacy	29,44	4,81	High
Career maturity	43,95	7,03	High
Positive affect	60,21	13,14	High

Further analysis was conducted to examine the effect of self-efficacy on career maturity, as well as to test the role of positive affect as a mediating variable in this relationship. The analysis was performed using Hayes' Model 4 with the aid of PROCESS Macro version 5.0. The detailed results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Hypothesis testing results

Predictors	β	t	p	SE	R	R^2	F
Positive affect:					0.451	0.220	556.33
Self-efficacy	8.232	11.746	0.035	0.653			
Career maturity:					0.708	0.502	136.95
Self-efficacy	6.362	16.544	0.000	1.626			
Positive affect	6.276	11.203	0.023	1.229			
Indirect effect	Estimate	SE	95%CI				
			LL	UL			
M*X-Y	3.925	1.277	0.913	1.159			

Based on the results of hypothesis testing presented in Table 2, it was found that self-efficacy had a causal-statistical effect on positive affect ($\beta = 8.232$, $SE = 0.653$, $p < 0.05$), with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.220. This indicates that 22% of the variance in positive affect can be explained by self-efficacy, and the F value of 556.33 suggests that the regression model is significant overall. Furthermore, self-efficacy also exerted a significant causal effect on career maturity ($\beta = 6.362$, $SE = 1.626$, $p < 0.001$), and positive affect acted as an additional causal factor significantly influencing career maturity ($\beta = 6.276$, $SE = 1.229$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 value

of 0.502 shows that the model was able to explain 50.2% of the variance in career maturity, with an F value of 136.95, which was statistically significant. The analysis of the indirect effect revealed that self-efficacy influenced career maturity through positive affect with a value of 3.925, with a 95% confidence interval ($LL = 0.913$; $UL = 1.159$) that did not include zero, indicating that the mediation effect was significant.

The findings indicate a significant correlational relationship between self-efficacy, positive affect, and students' career maturity. Self-efficacy was positively correlated with positive affect, as reflected in the emergence of emotions such as confidence, enthusiasm, and optimism toward the future. Positive affect, in turn, was positively correlated with career maturity, particularly in students' readiness to make decisions, plan, and explore career options. This correlation clarifies that self-efficacy functions not only as a belief in one's own capabilities but also as a factor that fosters positive emotional states, which in turn support students' active engagement in career development processes. The higher the students' self-efficacy, the greater the likelihood that they will experience positive affect, which subsequently strengthens their direction and determination in strategically preparing their career future.

Bassi, Steca, and Caprara (2007) found that self-efficacy has a significant relationship with positive affect, particularly in the context of academic achievement. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to display positive emotions because they believe that their efforts will yield the expected results. Furthermore, Tuncer, Demir, and Koç (2021) demonstrated that academic self-efficacy not only increases positive affect, such as feelings of pride and enthusiasm for learning, but also reduces negative affect. Han, Kim, and Lee (2023) also emphasized that physical education students' self-efficacy plays a key role in enhancing positive emotions and reducing negative emotions. High self-efficacy gives students a sense of control over their learning situations, thereby reinforcing pleasant emotional experiences. This aligns with Pekrun et al.'s (2007) Control-Value Theory, which explains that an individual's belief in their competence to achieve success significantly influences the quality of emotions experienced during the learning process.

Conceptually, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1997). In the career context, self-efficacy affects not only students' ability to make decisions and plan for the future but also relates closely to the emotional responses that arise during the process. Strong self-belief fosters feelings of optimism and hope, which in turn promote positive affect such as enthusiasm, motivation, and confidence in academic and career success.

Research conducted by Han, Kim, and Lee (2023) showed that self-efficacy significantly enhances students' positive affect while reducing negative affect. This finding is supported by Tuncer, Demir, and Koç (2021), who reported that students with high academic self-efficacy tend to display greater positive emotions, such as pride and satisfaction in learning. Positive affect is then associated with higher career maturity, as students are better able to interpret their learning experiences constructively and exhibit greater motivation in designing their career future.

The significance of the relationship between self-efficacy and positive affect on career maturity is also supported by the mediation test results, which revealed that positive affect significantly mediates the influence of self-efficacy on career maturity. This means that although self-efficacy has a direct impact on career maturity, its contribution is optimized when individuals also possess high positive affect. In this regard, career maturity is determined not only by the cognitive aspect of belief in one's abilities but also by the emotional readiness to face the future adaptively.

The influence of positive affect on career maturity is further reinforced by the study of Hirschi and Freund (2014), which showed that students with high levels of positive affect tend to have greater clarity of career goals, more confidence in decision-making, and greater perseverance in exploring various career options. Positive affect plays an important role in facilitating self-reflection and the interpretation of career experiences, enabling students to formulate their career goals in a more structured and realistic manner.

Furthermore, Park, Young, and Cho (2021) found that positive emotions play an important role in fostering career resilience and career efficacy in adolescents. When students maintain healthy and positive emotions, they become more open to uncertainties and challenges in the world of work, as well as better able to envision themselves optimistically and adaptively across different work contexts. Therefore, positive affect not only acts as a consequence of high self-efficacy but also functions as an important internal factor in shaping comprehensive career readiness. This explains why students with higher levels of positive affect tend to be more mature in making career decisions and better prepared to face the dynamics of the future.

The implications of these findings provide important insights for educational interventions that aim not only to develop students' self-efficacy through learning and career counseling but also to cultivate a positive emotional climate within the school environment. Teachers and counselors have a strategic responsibility to create a supportive atmosphere in which students are encouraged to believe in their potential and feel

comfortable expressing their aspirations and future plans. Programs such as soft skills training, project-based learning, and guidance services oriented toward strengthening positive emotions can serve as effective means of enhancing students' overall career maturity. Additionally, collaboration among schools, parents, and educational practitioners is crucial to continuously supporting the development of self-efficacy and positive affect in adolescent education.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, this study affirms that self-efficacy has a significant influence on students' career maturity, both directly and through positive affect as a mediating variable. Students who possess confidence in their abilities tend to exhibit positive affect such as enthusiasm, optimism, and self-confidence, which in turn supports their readiness to plan, explore, and make well-considered career decisions. These findings highlight the crucial role of positive affect in bridging cognitive and emotional aspects in career development. The practical implications suggest that educational processes and guidance services should actively strengthen students' self-efficacy and foster a learning climate that supports the growth of positive affect, enabling students to be more emotionally and psychologically prepared to face future career challenges.

Author Contributions Statement

Putri Hartati: Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **Sugiyono:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Kurotul Aeni:** Project administration, Resources, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript for publication.

Declaration of Generative AI

AI was used during the preparation of this manuscript to improve linguistic expression and enhance the clarity and readability of the text. The authors carefully assessed and revised the AI-assisted content where necessary and remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and final version of the published manuscript.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial interests or personal relationships known to them that could have improperly influenced the research or the interpretation of its findings.

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