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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER SELF-EFFICACY AND CAREER EXPLORATION IN GRADE IX STUDENTS OF SMP NEGERI 22 MEDAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between career self-efficacy and career exploration in Grade IX students of SMP Negeri 22 Medan. The study employs a quantitative correlational design with 118 students selected through simple random sampling from a population of 281 students. Data were collected using a career self-efficacy scale (30 items; α = 0.899) based on Taylor and Betz's (1983) Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE), and a career exploration scale (31 items; α = 0.895) based on Stumpf et al.'s (1983) framework. Due to non-normal distribution in one variable, Spearman's Rho correlation was applied. Results revealed a positive and significant relationship between career self-efficacy and career exploration (r = 0.618, p < 0.001), categorized as a strong correlation. Career self-efficacy contributed 38.2% to career exploration variance. Both variables were predominantly at a moderate level. These findings support Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and underscore the importance of developing students' career self-efficacy through targeted school guidance and counseling programs to promote more active career exploration.

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Introduction

Career readiness is an important aspect that needs to be developed early, particularly among junior high school students. According to the World Economic Forum (2023) report, nearly half of the core workforce competencies will shift within the next five years. This condition requires individuals to begin career planning from the primary and secondary education levels. From the perspective of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), career development is an active process of building identity and future direction through the interaction between personal characteristics and the environment.

Career exploration is a purposeful process of gathering information about oneself and the environment to support career decision-making (Gati & Levin, 2014). For Grade IX students who are on the verge of transitioning to senior high school (SMA/SMK), career exploration becomes crucial. Low exploratory engagement may result in decisions that are inconsistent with individual interests and abilities (Hirschi, 2013). Within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), career self-efficacy is the primary determinant influencing career-related interests, choices, and developmental behaviors (Lent & Brown, 2019). Career self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own capacity to complete career-related tasks, including self-assessment, gathering occupational information, goal-setting, and coping with obstacles (Betz, 2013).

A phenomenon of low career exploration was identified among Grade IX students at SMP Negeri 22 Medan. Based on preliminary observations and interviews with the school counselor, most students had not independently sought information about the differences between SMA and SMK pathways, program prospects, or admission requirements of target schools. Students tended to wait for guidance from parents and teachers, or even follow their peers' choices without evaluating personal fit. This condition indicates low psychological engagement, which is thought to be related to low career self-efficacy among students.

Previous studies by Pham et al. (2024), Gerçek and Özveren (2026), and Falah and Sarianti (2025) have consistently demonstrated a significant positive relationship between career self-efficacy and career exploration. However, research at the junior high school level, particularly in Indonesia, remains very limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine whether there is a significant relationship between career self-efficacy and career exploration in Grade IX students of SMP Negeri 22 Medan.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational design. The study population consisted of all 281 Grade IX students at SMP Negeri 22 Medan. The sample was determined using the Slovin formula with a 7% margin of error, yielding 118 students selected through simple random sampling.

Data were collected using two Likert-scale instruments with four response options. First, the Career Self-Efficacy Scale was developed based on Taylor and Betz's (1983) Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSE), encompassing five dimensions: self-assessment, occupational information, decision making, planning, and problem solving. From an initial 40 items, 30 items were declared valid ($r_h > 0.349$) with a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of 0.899. Second, the Career Exploration Scale was developed based on Stumpf et al.'s (1983) framework, covering two dimensions: self-exploration and environmental exploration. From an initial 40 items, 31 items were declared valid with a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of 0.895.

Normality testing using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed that the career self-efficacy variable was normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk, $p = 0.071 > 0.05$), while the career exploration variable was not normally distributed ($p = 0.029 < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis testing was conducted using Spearman's Rho nonparametric correlation. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was used to calculate the contribution of career self-efficacy to career exploration.

Result and Discussion

Research Data Description

Descriptive analysis showed that students' career self-efficacy had a mean of 93.55 (SD = 9.685) and career exploration had a mean of 97.99 (SD = 10.610). Based on normative categorization using Mean ± 1SD, the majority of students were in the moderate category for both variables.

Table 1. Categorization of Career Self-Efficacy and Career Exploration Levels (N = 118)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Career Self-Efficacy	High (X > 103.24)	18	15.3%
	Moderate (83.87 – 103.24)	85	72.0%
	Low (X < 83.87)	15	12.7%
Career Exploration	High (X > 108.60)	24	20.3%
	Moderate (87.38 – 108.60)	77	65.3%
	Low (X < 87.38)	17	14.4%

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Hypothesis Testing Results

Based on the Spearman's Rho correlation test, a correlation coefficient of r = 0.618 was obtained with a significance value of $p < 0.001$ (2-tailed). This result indicates a positive and significant relationship between career self-efficacy and career exploration, classified as a strong correlation (Sugiyono, 2019). The coefficient of determination $KD = (0.618)^2 \times 100\% = 38.2\%$, meaning that career self-efficacy effectively contributed 38.2% to student career exploration.

Table 2. Spearman's Rho Correlation Test Results

Variable X	Variable Y	r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Career Self-Efficacy	*Career Exploration*	0.618	< 0.001

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Career Self-Efficacy Profile by Dimension

Based on the per-dimension analysis, the Self-Assessment dimension obtained the highest grand mean (3.12), followed by Occupational Information (3.11), Problem Solving (2.71), Decision Making (2.66), and Planning (2.64) as the lowest dimension. All dimensions were in the moderate category. This pattern indicates that students are relatively more confident in internal exploration and information-seeking, but are not yet sufficiently confident to take concrete actions in the form of career planning and decision-making.

Table 3. Grand Mean per Dimension of Career Self-Efficacy

No.	Dimension	Total Score	Grand Mean	Category
1	*Self-Assessment*	1,839	3.12	Moderate
2	*Occupational Information*	1,467	3.11	Moderate
3	*Decision Making*	1,570	2.66	Moderate
4	*Planning*	1,558	2.64	Moderate
5	*Problem Solving*	1,280	2.71	Moderate

Source: Primary Data (2026)

As for the career exploration variable, the Self-Exploration dimension obtained a grand mean of 3.08 and Environmental Exploration 3.02, both in the moderate category. This difference indicates that students find it easier to engage in internal self-exploration compared to actively seeking information from external sources.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between career self-efficacy and career exploration ($r = 0.618$, $p < 0.001$). This is consistent with the SCCT theoretical framework, which positions self-efficacy as the primary mechanism bridging learning experiences with career behaviors (Lent et al., 1994). Individuals with high levels of confidence in their abilities tend to be more active in seeking information, exploring various options, and taking concrete steps in career planning (Bandura, 1997).

These findings are consistent with the research of Gerçek and Özveren (2026), who found that career self-efficacy is a significant driver of career exploration. Similarly, Pham et al. (2024) demonstrated that high career self-efficacy promotes deeper exploration, which contributes to better career decisions. Falah and Sarianti (2025) further confirmed that career exploration acts as a mediator between career self-efficacy and career choice.

The contribution of career self-efficacy at 38.2% to career exploration indicates a substantial role, while also suggesting the presence of other contributing factors (61.8%), such as social support from parents and peers, access to career information, and career maturity (Kenny et al., 2003; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009).

The moderate category results for both variables can be understood contextually. Grade IX students are still in the tentative stage of career identity formation (Ginzberg in Crites, 1978), where self-confidence has not yet developed optimally due to limited experience and knowledge of the world of work. Practically, these findings imply the need for counseling services focused on strengthening the Planning and Decision Making dimensions, which were the weakest aspects of career self-efficacy, through individual career mapping activities and career decision-making simulations.

Conlusion

This study found a positive and significant relationship between career self-efficacy and career exploration in Grade IX students of SMP Negeri 22 Medan ($r = 0.618$, $p < 0.001$), classified as a strong relationship. Career self-efficacy contributed 38.2% to career exploration. The majority of students were in the moderate category for both variables. The Planning and Decision Making dimensions of career self-efficacy, and Environmental Exploration of career exploration, are the dimensions requiring the greatest attention in counseling intervention programs. Future research is recommended to use a longitudinal design with more diverse samples, and to explore mediating or moderating variables such as social support and the quality of counseling services.

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