

Career exploration among early adults: the influence of perceived future employability and career optimism

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ABSTRACT

Career exploration is an important career development task to support individual success in achieving career goals. This study aims to determine the relationship between perceived future employability and career optimism with career exploration in early adulthood. This study involved 205 university students, 66.3% female and 33.7% male. This study used a quantitative approach with three measurement instruments, namely: career exploration survey scale, perceived future employability scale, and career optimism scale to collect the data. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis techniques. The results showed that perceived future employability and career optimism were related to career exploration. Separately, perceived future employability was positively related to career exploration, but there was no relationship between career optimism and career exploration. The study has implications for how universities and career counselors may assist students in enhancing their career exploration by increasing their positive perception of future employability.

Keywords: *career exploration; career optimism; perceived future employability*

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INTRODUCTION

According to Gunawan et al. (2019) perceived future employability includes six dimensions, namely perceptions of future skills, expected experience, personal characteristics, future networks, future labor market knowledge, and anticipated reputation of educational institutions. Perceived future employability was associated with an individual's view of how employable they will be after completing their formal education. When individuals perceive a discrepancy between their perceived future employability status and their current progress toward that imagined goal (e.g., appraisal that the goal might not be met), they are likely to reduce the discrepancy by engaging less with their career, or lowering their career expectation (Lord et al., 2010). Previous research conducted by Humairah & Herlena (2024) found that perceptions of future employability affect the level of individual commitment to their careers. The results of previous research also found that high perceived future employability is associated with low career distress, high career self-efficacy, career effort and career aspiration (Gunawan et al., 2024).

Another factor that influences career exploration is optimism. Optimism is a person's hope that things will go in a good direction. People with high levels of optimism expect things to go their way and generally believe that positive things will happen in their lives (Scheier & Carver, 1985). According to Seligman (2006) an optimistic person believes that all good events that occur are permanent, believes that positive things will happen to everyone, considers the beneficial things that occur as a result of internal reasons and anticipates that negative events will be associated with external. Previous research found the results of high optimism can improve future orientation in final year students at Malikussaleh University (Nasution & Anastasya, 2022). Optimism affects

academic stress in students who are working on a thesis (Kencana & Muzzamil, 2022). The higher the optimism that students have, the higher the problem focused coping (Valentsia & Wijono, 2020).

In the career context, optimism is an important internal factor in achieving career goals. According to Rottinghaus et al. (2012) individuals who have high career optimism can have positive thoughts about careers and the future, understand work-related abilities and interests, have career planning, are positive in pursuing career goals, and make the right career decisions. Research on career optimism conducted by Asfy & Primanita (2024) shows that career optimism plays a role in increasing work engagement in honorary teachers. Another study also found that career optimism is related to career adaptability in college students (Ramadhanti & Priyatama, 2023).

One approach that addresses the complex relationship between perceptions of future employability and positive expectations about future careers and career-related behaviors is Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent & Brown, 2013). According to SCCT, the efforts made by individuals in achieving career goals are influenced by self-beliefs and career expectations formed from interests, goals that are influenced by individual and contextual factors. Individual factors (personality, intelligence) and background contextual factors (socioeconomic status, discrimination) shape the experience or learning process in a person. In turn, an individual's interpretation or perception of themselves and their experiences will develop self-efficacy and expectations of the results of their efforts. Furthermore, self-efficacy fosters positive attitudes and outcome expectations, and self-efficacy and outcome expectations, individually or together, will shape career interest. Furthermore, interest will be translated into career goals and objectives, which in turn will motivate individuals to engage in various career activities that are appropriate to achieve the ultimate career goal.

In line with SCCT, perceived future employability describes individuals' perceptions of their future career viability. They believe that their knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences, networks and reputation of their educational institutions provide future career opportunities and will be motivated to be active in activities oriented towards achieving their career goals, including career exploration. They will be more active in observing and exploring information related to their interests, goals, values and information related to job opportunities, networking and self-development in their environment. Individuals who have positive thinking and believe that they are able to get a decent job in the future will make efforts to recognize themselves and develop their skills and will explore their careers. Individual perceptions of high employment opportunities will strengthen self-efficacy which encourages individuals to pursue their career goals Yousaf & Sanders (2012). Research conducted by Pratama et al. (2024) found that individuals who have a positive perception of the future in their work are more active in exploring potential career opportunities.

In line with SCCT, beliefs about career expectations and individual expectations of the results of their efforts in career achievement will motivate individuals to realize their career goals in career behavior. Career optimism is related to individuals' positive thoughts about their career achievements. Individuals with high career optimism will have positive thoughts about careers and the future, understand their abilities and have career planning and have a positive attitude in pursuing their career choices (Rottinghaus et al., 2012). Someone who has positive expectations about their career tends to explore optimally because they feel that they are confident in their future career choices (Lent et al., 2017). Research conducted by Creed et al. (2002) found that individuals who have a high level of optimism will be able to carry out good career planning and exploration, be confident in making career decisions and have career goals. When someone has career optimism, the individual can increase the chances of achieving their career goals, living a happy and satisfying work life.

This study aims to develop existing knowledge, by examining the relationship between internal factors (perceived future employability and career optimism) with career exploration in college students. This research will be useful for parents, educational institutions and career counselors to help students improve their career exploration. Based on the explanation above, the hypotheses proposed in this study are 1) major hypothesis: there is a relationship between perceived future employability and career optimism with career exploration; 2) minor hypothesis 1: perceived future employability is positively related to career exploration; 3) minor hypothesis 2: career optimism is positively related to career exploration.

METHOD

This study uses a survey approach, using a career exploration scale, perceived future employability scale, and career future inventory as data collection tool. This study used cluster random sampling to select the participants. This study involved 205 university students, 66.3% female and 33.7% male. The data in this study were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before conducting hypothesis testing, assumption tests such as the normality test, linearity test and the multicollinearity test are carried out first. Based on the assumption test analysis, the results show that the data is normally distributed.

Table 1
Normality Test

Understandardized Residual	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
	.057	205	.200

Results showed the (KS-Z) value of 0.661; $p > 0.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the investigated variables are normally distributed so that there is no difference in data distribution between the sample and the population. See Table 1

The linearity test shows that the career exploration variable with perceived future employability can be connected with a straight line (*deviation from linearity* .050 ($p > .05$), although the data is less than ideal. See Table 2

Table 2
Linearity Test Perceived Future Employability

Career	Sig.	
Exploration	Linearity	.000
Perceived Future Employability	Deviation From Linearity	.050

The same thing with career exploration with career optimism which can be connected with a straight line *deviation from linearity* .093 ($p > .05$), although the data is less than ideal. See Table 3

Table 3
Linearity Test Career Optimism

Career	Sig.	
Exploration	Linearity	.535
Career Optimism	Deviation From Linearity	.939

The multicollinearity test it showed that the two independent variables do not occur multicollinearity or which means that the variables of perceived future employability and career optimism are not interconnected. Based multicollinearity test, it is found that the both pperceived future employability and career optimism have a tolerance value of .98 ($> .10$) and a VIF value of 1.10 ($< .10$). see Table 4

Table 4
Multicolinerity Test

	Tolarance	VIF
Perceived Future Employability	.987	1.014
Career Optimism	.987	1.014

The results of multiple linear regression analysis that have been carried out show that the coefficient value of $F = 35.67$, $R = 0.51$, $R^2 = 0.26$, $p < .001$. Based on the results of this analysis, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between perceived future employability and career optimism with career exploration. The hypothesis can be declared accepted or significant with an effective contribution (Rsquare) of perceived future employability and career optimism $.261 \times 100\% = 26.1\%$ to career exploration. See Table 5

Table 5
Major Hypothesis

Variable	R	R ²	F	Sig. F Change	Description
PFE and CO of CE	.51	.26	35.67	.00	Sig

Perceived future employability and career optimism together provide an effective contribution of 26.1% to career exploration.

Table 6
Minor Hypothesis

Variable	Beta	Partial	Sig	Description
PFE and CO of CE	.51	.51	.00	Significant
CO of CE	.01	.01	.81	Insignificat

Based on the results of the partial correlation test on the perceived future employability variable with career exploration, the partial correlation coefficient is $r = .51$, $p < .001$. It can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between perceived future employability and career exploration.

While the results of the partial correlation test between career optimism and career exploration obtained a partial correlation coefficient of $r = .01$ $p = 0.813$, $p > 0.05$. That is, there is no relationship between career optimism and career exploration

This study aims to examine the relationship between perceived future employability and career optimism with career exploration. Based on the results of data analysis that has been done, there is a relationship between perceived future employability and career optimism with career exploration in college students. Thus, the major hypothesis in this study is accepted. Together, perceived future employability and career optimism provide an effective contribution of 26.1% to career exploration, which means there is still 73.9% effective contribution from other variables. The results of the study confirm Lent & Brown (2013) SCCT that an individual's positive perception of self-ability and future career expectations will influence goals and motivate individuals in an effort to achieve goals. Individuals who have a perception of self-worthiness of their future career and have positive thoughts about their career, will encourage individuals to engage in career exploration.

The results of this study also confirm minor hypothesis one in this study. Data analysis shows a positive relationship between perceived future employability and career exploration in college students. The perceived future employability variable provides an effective contribution of 26.1% to the career exploration variable. This indicates that individuals who have a positive assessment of their future career skills or abilities will be encouraged to explore themselves and their career opportunities and self-development. The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Melfi & Aulia (2024) which states that students who already have career beliefs in the future will be motivated and more confident in achieving future career goals and active in the career search process. Students with a more positive and planned view of the future tend to be better able to plan and explore their career choices well so that they can make effective career decisions (Juniarti & Adrian, 2022)

In contrast to the results of minor analysis 1, the results found that there is no relationship between career optimism and career exploration in college students. Therefore, minor hypothesis 2 in this study is rejected. The results of this study differ from the research findings of Agustine & Riasnugrahani (2023) who found a positive and significant relationship between career optimism and individual willingness in career exploration. Students who have positive beliefs about their careers tend to be more ready to explore and face career challenges. This difference in results may be due to differences in samples. In Agustine & Riasnugrahani (2023) research the sample used was final semester students. This is likely to affect the difference in research results, because final semester students tend to have a clearer view of their careers. Meanwhile, this study involves 3rd semester students who have not explored much in depth about their careers. They tend to still focus on undergoing the lectures that are being undertaken.

The results showed that perceived future employability is related to high career exploration in college students. This has implications for parents, universities and career counselors to help students improve their career exploration abilities and activities in supporting the achievement of their career goals through increasing perceived future employability. Parents can support their children by giving positive appreciation for their children's achievements, abilities and skills. Parents also need to support children's positive perceptions of their future career feasibility by facilitating networking, providing information about labor market trends, inviting children to discuss career choices and directing based on experience, and helping children develop skills such as attending training or events related to their career choices. Universities need to improve their reputation, provide comprehensive career guidance programs, and develop students' skills according to the needs of the job market, and help students build relationships through events by inviting professionals who are experts in their fields. For career counselors to help increase positive perceptions of career viability through positive affirmation of strengths, successes and accepting limitations, providing constructive evaluation of progress in career exploration and skill development. Career counselors can also assist individuals in understanding their interests and values that may influence career choices, and can provide information on labor market trends to support career exploration.

This study has several limitations, among others, first, the research sample is relatively homogeneous because it is only taken from one department from one college, limiting the generalization of the research results. Future research can test with a wider sample from various majors or colleges or expand the sample with different characteristics such as individuals in early adulthood who do not continue to college or who are already working in order to expand the generalization of the research results. Second, the unequal sample composition between men and women, where the female sample is more than men, which may affect the research results. Future research needs to test with the same sample composition. In addition, other studies also need to examine the role of other variables that might explain the indirect relationship (mediate) or moderate the relationship between perceived future employability and career optimism with career exploration. Finally, this study is a cross-sectional study, where only one data collection is done so that the causal relationship between variables cannot be confirmed.

CONCLUSION

The results enrich the existing knowledge by confirming the relationship between perceived future employability and career optimism together with career exploration. Separately, only perceived future

employability is positively related to career exploration. A high positive perception of future career opportunities will support active engagement in collecting and evaluating self and career opportunities. The results of this study can assist parents, college and career counselors in helping individuals to increase their career exploration through increasing perceived future employability by encouraging positive affirmation of one's strength and understanding their interests and values that help them making right career decision

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

RIS and AW conceptualized and designed the study, acquired data, and performed data analysis and interpretation. The manuscript was drafted by RIS and AW. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version for submission.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that this publication is free from any conflicts of interest.

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