

School Counselors' Social Support and Career Adaptability: The Mediating Role of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Gender among High School Students

Dwi Jayanti Ariani¹, Binti Isrofin²

^{1,2}Department of Guidance and Counseling,
Faculty of Education and Psychology,
Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

email: ¹hanyadwi21@gmail.com, ²bintiisrofin@mail.unnes.ac.id

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Abstract. Career adaptability is a key psychosocial resource for students navigating educational and occupational transitions. This research explores how school counselors' support is associated with students' career adaptability by considering career decision-making self-efficacy and gender. A quantitative correlational design involved 330 Grade XII students from public senior high schools in Semarang, Indonesia. Data were collected using validated Likert-type scales measuring school counselors' social support, CDMSE, and career adaptability. Analysis used PROCESS Macro Model 5 with bootstrapping. Result showed that school counselors' social support significantly predicted both CDMSE and career adaptability. CDMSE was positively associated with career adaptability and significantly mediated the relationship between social support and career adaptability. The relationship between social support and career adaptability appeared similar for both male and female students. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening students' confidence in career decision-making through sustained counselor support to promote long-term career adaptability.

Keywords: career adaptability, career decision-making self-efficacy, school counselors' social support

A. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an important period when students begin to formulate plans for their educational and occupational future. At the senior high school level, students are expected to make important decisions while simultaneously coping with academic demands and social expectations. These combined pressures often create uncertainty, especially for students who have limited experience in career planning. As a result, the ability to adjust, regulate emotions,

and make thoughtful decisions becomes increasingly important during this period.

Typically ranging from 15 and 18 years old, senior high school students are in a developmental phase marked by the gradual movement toward adulthood. During this period, adolescent begin to recognize their ability to make choice concerning their life direction and future career paths (Santrock, 2011). Upon completing high school, they must consider multiple alternatives, including selecting academics majors or entering particular occupational fields. However, many students find it difficult to identify options that correspond with their interest and personal strength. This difficult often results in hesitation and uncertainty facing career-related choices.

Observations in school indicate that confusion regarding future careers remains common among students. Many adolescents report limited understanding of available career paths and lack strategies for exploring them effectively. This situation was also reflected in informal discussions with guidance and counseling teachers during the Musyawarah Guru Bimbingan dan Konseling (MGBK) of senior high schools in Semarang in April 2025. Teachers noted that a considerable number of Grade XII students had not yet formed clear plans after graduation and felt overwhelmed by career-related demands. These observations indicate that that students differ in how prepared they feel when facing life after high school.

Career adaptability can be viewed as an individual's capacity to respond constructively to career-related demands that arise over time (Savickas, 1997). Rather than focusing only on preparation for a specific occupation, this concept emphasizes how students manage uncertainty, make plans, and adjust to changing situations during their career development. For Grade XII students, this capacity becomes especially relevant because they are required to determine future educational or occupational directions despite having limited prior experience.

Previous studies indicate that students with stronger adaptability tend to be more future-oriented, actively explore career information, and take responsibility for their choices (Sisca & Gunawan, 2015). Evidence from Indonesia schools also shows that many senior high school students demonstrate measurable levels of adaptability (Intani & Sawitri, 2023). However, observations from guidance and counseling teachers in Semarang reveal that not all students possess this readiness equally, as some still experience hesitation and pressure when facing career-related expectations.

Nevertheless, adaptability is not equally developed in all students. Reports from guidance and counseling teachers in Semarang revealed that some students continue to feel doubtful, pressured by their surroundings, and challenged by rapid changes in their environment. These findings underline the importance of identifying factors that may strengthen students' adaptability, particularly during the final year of high school when career decisions become more pressing.

Both personal and environmental aspects are known to influence career adaptability (Savickas, 1997). One important internal factor is career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), defined as students' belief in their ability to perform activities involved in choosing a career (Taylor & Betz, 1983). This includes seeking information, evaluating options, and establishing realistic plans. When students feel confident about making decisions, they tend to engage more actively in exploring career option and show greater readiness to handle vocational challenges (Betz & Luzzo, 1996; Creed et al., 2006).

Evidence from Indonesian studies also supports the role of self-efficacy in shaping career development. Students with higher levels of confidence in their abilities tend to formulate clearer career goals and make decisions with greater assurance (Pango & Wibowo, 2020; Nugraha et al., 2021). Such findings indicate that CDMSE contributes significantly to how students respond adaptively to career-related demands.

In addition to internal beliefs, external encouragement from the surrounding environment is equally important. Social support can be understood as the assistance, reassurance, and care individuals receive from others (Sarafino & Smith, 2011). Within schools, guidance and counseling teachers are central figures who provide support related to students' career development. Their role in offering information, motivation, and emotional encouragement can reduce students' anxiety and enhance their readiness for future transitions (Intani & Sawitri, 2023).

Social Cognitive Career Theory explains that environmental support influences career outcomes by strengthening individuals' beliefs about their own capabilities and shaping their career goals (Lent et al., 2017). When students feel supported by counselors, they are more likely to develop stronger confidence in making decisions and to engage in behaviors that promote career adaptability. In this way, CDMSE may act as a pathway through which social support affects adaptability.

The influence of gender on career adaptability has produced mixed results. Some studies report no meaningful differences between male and female students (Hirschi, 2009), while others suggest variation in adaptability levels (Han & Rojewski, 2015). In Indonesia, Zulfiani & Masri Khaerani (2020) reported significant gender differences. However, recent large-scale evidence indicates that the relationship between perceived social support and career adaptability remains stable across gender groups (Stead et al., 2025). These differing findings suggest that the role of gender should be re-examined within specific educational and cultural settings.

Considering the importance of career adaptability for students preparing for life after high school, this study explores how support provided by school counselors is linked to adaptability among Grade XII learners in Semarang. The research further examines how decisional confidence acts as an intermediary factor and whether differences appear between male and female students. By

bringing together cognitive factors and social support within a single model, this research aims to offer a broader understanding of how students develop adaptability in senior high schools.

B. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Career adaptability describes students' readiness to respond to career-related demands, transitions, and uncertainties that arise during their development (Savickas, 1997). In Career Construction Theory, this readiness is reflected through concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, which indicate how individuals plan ahead, take responsibility, explore possibilities, and trust their ability to manage challenges (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). For Grade XII students, these adaptive resources are particularly important as they are required to determine future educational or occupational directions with limited prior experience.

One important internal factor related to career adaptability is career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), defined as students' beliefs in their ability to carry out tasks involved in making career decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983). Students who feel confident in gathering information, setting goals, planning, and solving problems usually engage more actively when exploring career options and show greater readiness to decide (Betz & Luzzo, 1996; Creed et al., 2009). Thus, CDMSE functions as a key psychological resource supporting adaptive career behavior.

In addition to internal beliefs, external support from the school environment contributes to the development of adaptability. Social support, which includes emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal assistance (Sarafino & Smith (2011), is often provided by guidance and counseling teachers. Through encouragement and career-related guidance, counselors help students feel more confident and prepared when facing future transitions.

Social Cognitive Career Theory explains that such environmental support strengthens individuals' self-efficacy, which subsequently influences their career-related (Lent et al., 2022). In this framework, CDMSE may act as a mechanism through which social support contributes to career adaptability.

Research findings on gender differences in career adaptability remain mixed. While some studies report no differences (Hirschi, 2009), others indicate variations (Han & Rojewski, 2015; Zulfiani & Khaerani, 2021). However, meta-analytic evidence suggests that the relationship social support and career adaptability tends to be consistent across genders (Stead et al., 2025). For this reason, this research also consider whether differences appear between male and female students.

C. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A quantitative correlational approach was used to explore the relationship among school counselors' social support, career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), and career adaptability. In addition, this study tested the mediating role of CDMSE and the moderating role of gender within the proposed model. A cross-sectional survey was conducted to obtain data within a single period. This approach allowed the study to capture students' perceptions and psychological conditioning during their final year of senior high school, when career decisions become more demanding.

Research Participants

Participants in this study were Grade XII students enrolled in public senior high schools in Semarang City. A total of 330 students participated in the study, consisting of 137 male students and 193 female students. Participants were selected using a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, five school were randomly selected to represent different geographical areas of Semarang City. In the second stage, classes were randomly selected within each selected school. The

number of participants from each school was determined using proportional allocation based on the number of Grade XII students in each school. The total population of Grade XII students across the five selected school was 1.889 students, from which 330 students (approximately 17.5% of the population) were included as research participants. This procedure ensured proportional representation of students from school with different population sizes. The inclusion criteria were students who were actively enrolled in Grade XII and who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study. This sample size was considered adequate for mediation and moderation analyses using regression-based procedures.

Measurement Tools

The population of this study consisted of 6.151 Grade XII students enrolled in 16 public senior high schools in Semarang City. Data were collected using three self-report instruments developed and adapted based on established theoretical frameworks. Career adaptability was measured using the Indonesian adaptation of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) based on the work of Savickas & Porfeli (2012) and validated by Nurfitriana et al. (2021) through rigorous cross-cultural procedures. The instrument consisted of 24 items assessing four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, and demonstrated excellent reliability in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.972$). Career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) was measured using a 25-item Indonesian-adapted scale developed by Purnama & Ernawati (2021) based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2017), which assesses students' confidence in evaluating personal strengths, accessing career-related information, making decisions, planning, and solving career-related problems (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.952$). Perceived social support from school counselors was measured using a 35 items scale developed from Sarafino and Smith's social support framework, capturing emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support in the context of career guidance (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.959$). All instruments used a five-point Likert

scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Prior review ensured clarity and contextual relevance, and reliability testing indicated satisfactory internal consistency across all measures.

Research Procedures

Data collection was conducted during the academic year after obtaining permission from the relevant schools. The questionnaires were administered to students in classroom settings under the supervision of the researcher and school personnel. An explanation of the research was provided to participants, and they were assured that their answers would remain confidential and used only for this study. Participation was voluntary, and students were allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty. Completed questionnaires were checked to ensure completeness before being included in the analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using SPSS. After descriptive statistics, assumption tests for normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity showed that the data met regression requirements. Mediation and moderation were tested using Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 5 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Gender was included to examine whether the relationship between counselors' support and career adaptability differed between male and female students. Statistical significance was determined using confidence intervals that excluded zero.

D. RESEARCH RESULTS

This section reports the descriptive statistic and the result of hypothesis testing examining the relationship among school counselors' social support, career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), and career adaptability among Grade XII senior high school students.

Descriptive Results

The descriptive analysis provides an overview of students' perceptions of school counselors' social support, CDMSE, and career adaptability. As presented

in Table 1, students reported moderate to high levels of perceived social support from school counselors, along with relatively high levels of career adaptability and career decision-making self-efficacy.

The average career adaptability score was 92.13 (SD = 3.79), showing differences in how students handle career demands and changes. The mean score of CDMSE was 94.84 (SD = 4.88), while the mean score of school counselors' social support was 160.03 (SD = 3.46). The standard deviation values across variables indicate individual differences in students' perceptions of social support, self-efficacy, and career adaptability. Descriptive statistics of the main variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables

Variable	N	M	SD
Career adaptability	330	92.13	3.790
CDMSE	330	94.84	4.881
School counselors' social support	330	160.03	3.464

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing employed PROCESS Macro Model 5. The regression analyses indicated that school counselors' social support significantly predicted CDMSE ($\beta = 0.86, p < 0.001$) and career adaptability ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$). CDMSE also significantly predicted career adaptability ($\beta = 0.51, p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of school counselors' social support on career adaptability through CDMSE was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.44, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.35, 0.53]$), indicating a mediation effect. The interaction between school counselors' social support and gender on career adaptability was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.05, p = 0.523$). In addition, gender did not have a significant direct effect on career adaptability ($\beta = -0.38, p = 0.068$). The full results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of hypothesis testing results (Model 5 Hayes)

Path	β	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
DS→CDMSE	.86	.05	17.17	<.001	.76	.96
DS→CA	.33	.06	5.20	<.001	.21	.46
CDMSE→CA	.51	.04	12.88	<.001	.43	.59
G→CA	-.38	.21	-1.83	.068	-.79	.029

DS→G	.05	.07	.64	.523	-.10	.19
Indirect Effect						
DS→CDMSE→CA	.44	.05	-	-	.35	.53

E. DISCUSSION

School Counselors' Social Support and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

The findings show that students who perceive stronger support from school counselors tend to report higher confidence in making career-related decisions. Students who feel guided, heard, and encouraged by counselors appear more capable of gathering information, considering alternatives, and deciding on future plans. This pattern indicates that supportive counseling interactions contribute to students' sense of competence during the decision-making process.

In the Indonesian context, previous studies also report that support from guidance and counseling teachers is associated with stronger confidence in career planning among students (Pango & Wibowo, 2020; Nugraha et al., 2021). Counseling support therefore functions not only as a source of information but also as a means of reinforcing students' belief in their own abilities.

From the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory, supportive environments help individuals develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs through encouragement and positive feedback (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 2022). During the final year of senior high school, when students face increasing pressure to determine their future pathways, consistent reassurance and guidance from counselors may help students interpret career decision tasks as manageable rather than overwhelming. This process explains how social support can be translated into stronger career decision-making self-efficacy among Grade XII students.

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Career Adaptability

The results indicate that students with stronger confidence in making career decisions tend to show higher levels of career adaptability. Students who

feel capable of evaluating options, seeking information, and planning future steps appear more prepared to deal with career-related demands and transitions. The finding aligns with the view that self-efficacy influences how individuals approach challenges and regulate their behavior in career development (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 2017). When students believe they can make appropriate decisions, they are more willing to explore alternatives, adjust to new information, and plan their future more carefully.

Similar patterns have been reported in Indonesian studies showing that higher self-efficacy is associated with greater readiness for post-school transitions and stronger adaptability among senior high school students (Sisca & Gunawan, 2015; Pango & Wibowo, 2020; Nugraha et al., 2021). These behaviors reflect key aspects of career adaptability, particularly responsibility, exploration, and confidence in facing uncertainty (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). This relationship becomes especially relevant during the final year of senior high school, when students are required to make important decisions regarding further educational or employment. In this context, career decision-making self-efficacy serves as an important internal resource that supports adaptive career behavior.

School Counselors' Social Support and Career Adaptability

The results show that students who perceive stronger support from school counselors tend to demonstrate higher career adaptability. Emotional encouragement, relevant information, and practical guidance from counselors appear to help students feel more prepared when facing career-related tasks and transitions. Supporting counseling interactions may reduce students' uncertainty by helping them view career demands as manageable. Through consistent guidance and reassurance, counselors provide a sense of direction that enables students to plan ahead and take responsibility for their future choices. This pattern reflects the idea that adaptability develops through interaction between individuals and their social environment (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Findings from Indonesian studies similarly report that students who perceive

stronger support from teachers and counselors tend to show greater readiness in facing post-school transitions (Sisca & Gunawan, 2015; Intani & Sawitri, 2023). These results indicate that school counselors' social support functions as an important external resource in strengthening students' career adaptability.

The Mediating Role of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

The analysis shows that career decision-making self-efficacy mediates the relationship between school counselors' social support and career adaptability. This means that the positive effect of counselors' support on adaptability becomes stronger when students develop greater confidence in their ability to make career decisions. This pattern can be understood through Social Cognitive Career Theory, which explains that environmental support influences career behavior by strengthening individual' self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 2017). When students internalize the guidance and encouragement provided by counselors as confidence in their own abilities, they become more prepared to respond adaptively to career-related demands.

From the perspective of Career Construction Theory, adaptive career behavior requires not only external support but also internal readiness to anticipate and manage career challenges (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). By reinforcing students' decisional confidence, school counselors' helps develop essential adaptive capacities during the transition from school to further education or work. These findings suggest that counseling support is most effective when it strengthens students' sense of competence in making career decisions, which in turn promotes stronger career adaptability.

The Moderating Role of Gender

The moderating analysis shows that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between school counselors' social support and career adaptability. This finding suggests that both male and female students benefit in relatively similar ways from the support provided by school counselors within the

school context examined. In other words, counselors' social support appears to function as a general resource that promotes career adaptability regardless of students' gender.

The absence of a moderating effect may be understood in relation to the relatively equal access to guidance and counseling services within public senior high schools. School-based counseling programs are typically designed to provide standardized services for all students, which may reduce gender-based differences in how support is received and utilized. This explanation is consistent with previous findings reporting no significant gender differences in career adaptability among adolescents, particularly when students are exposed to similar educational environments and counseling resources (Hirschi, 2009).

Although previous studies have reported mixed findings regarding gender differences in career adaptability, with some suggesting higher adaptability among male students (Han & Rojewski, 2015), the present findings align with studies indicating that contextual support plays a more influential role than gender in shaping students' adaptive career resources. In the Indonesian context, this result supports the view that school counselors' social support serves as an inclusive developmental resource that benefits students across gender groups (Zulfiani & Masri Khaerani, 2020).

Importantly, this pattern is also reinforced by recent large-scale evidence. A comprehensive meta-analysis by Stead et al. (2025) demonstrated that social support shows a robust positive association with career adaptability across diverse populations, while demographic variables, including gender, did not consistently moderate this relationship. These findings suggest that social support operates as a broadly applicable psychosocial resource that enhances career adaptability irrespective of gender differences

Accordingly, the present findings suggest that school-based counseling interventions aimed at enhancing career adaptability can be implemented in an inclusive manner without the need for gender-specific differentiation, particularly

when the focus is on strengthening universal resources such as support, guidance, and students' confidence in managing career-related transitions.

Integration of Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that career adaptability among senior high school students is shaped by an interaction between environmental support and internal cognitive processes. School counselors' social support plays a central and consistently positive role in fostering adaptability. Career decision-making self-efficacy, which is strengthened by social support, functions as a key internal resource that enhances students' career adaptability.

These findings emphasize that effective career counseling should focus not only on increasing students' confidence in making career decisions but also on supporting the development of reflective thinking, flexibility, and continuous career exploration. Counselors are encouraged to promote adaptive decision-making processes that integrate confidence with openness to learning and change, particularly during critical transition periods. By doing so, counseling services can better support students in developing career adaptability that remains relevant in a dynamic educational and occupational landscape.

F. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between school counselors' social support, career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), and career adaptability among Grade XII senior high school students. The findings indicate that school counselors' social support plays an important role in enhancing students' career adaptability. Students who perceive emotional, informational, and instrumental support from school counselors tend to demonstrate stronger readiness to manage career-related tasks and transitions following the completion of secondary education. The results also show that school counselors' social support has a positive effect on career decision-making self-efficacy. Furthermore, career decision-making self-efficacy is positively associated with career adaptability and

functions as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between school counselors' social support and career adaptability. This finding suggests that confidence in career decision-making serves as an important internal resource that supports students' adaptive readiness during critical educational transitions. In addition, gender does not moderate the relationship between school counselors' social support and career adaptability, indicating that supportive counseling practices benefit male and female students in a relatively similar manner. Overall, this study contributes to the career development literature by integrating environmental support and internal cognitive factors within a single model of career adaptability. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening students' confidence while simultaneously encouraging reflective thinking, flexibility, and continuous career exploration in school-based career guidance, while future research may further examine these relationships across different educational levels and cultural contexts. By adopting this integrative approach, school counselors can more effectively support students in navigating complex and evolving educational and employment pathways.

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