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The relationship between personality, self-esteem, and career decision making among university students in Malaysia

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Abstract
This research aims to explore the predictors of career decision-making among students in a private university in Malaysia, focusing on personality and self-esteem. Personality refers to the unique characteristics of an individual that influence their conduct and social interactions. It has long been recognized as a major factor in determining job decisions. And strong self-worth and confidence, or self-esteem, are necessary for making decisions. Prior studies have highlighted the impact of personality on decision-making, this research delves into the less-explored realm of self-esteem's influence on career decision making. Employing a quantitative research design, data from 150 respondents was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study utilized three research instruments: Holland's Code Test (1970s), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965), and Career Decision Scale (third revision: 1976). The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between personality traits and career decision-making ($r = .22$, $p = .007$), whereas no significant correlation was found between self-esteem and career decision-making ($r = .08$, $p = .326$). Additionally, gender did not significantly influence career decision-making among the students ($p>.05$). These findings suggest that while personality traits are influential in shaping career decisions, self-esteem may not play a significant role. Furthermore, gender differences do not appear to impact career decision-making within this cohort.

Keywords: Personality, self-esteem, career decision making

1. Introduction
Career development is a very dynamic process in which individuals connect personal characteristics with chosen career routes while pursuing numerous professional opportunities (Srikanth & Israel, 2012) [50]. For students, choosing a career is very important since it affects their entire sense of contentment and wellbeing in addition to influencing their future goals (Chinyere, 2017) [51]. The shift from education to the workforce is a momentous occasion in their lives that is frequently met with a mixture of excitement and anxiety (Wirkus *et al*., 2021) [46]. For undergraduate students, choosing a career amid a plethora of options and considerations can be extremely difficult. To help individuals make fulfilling and sustainable career paths, it is necessary to have a very good understanding of the factors that influence these decisions (Chong & Rusell, 2019; Rami, Zaini, & Aziz, 2021) [7, 34].
Amidst the multitude of factors influencing professional choices, personality characteristics and self-worth stand out as significant markers. A person's unique thought, feeling, and behavior patterns make up their personality, which has a big impact on their motivations, preferences, and ability to adjust to different circumstances (APA, n.d.; Ashton, 2018; Ringwald *et al*., 2021) [52]. According to Preston and Salim (2020) [53], proactive students generally exhibit higher levels of confidence and assurance while making career decisions, highlighting the critical impact that personality qualities play in determining career trajectories.
On the other hand, self-esteem, which includes confidence and sentiments of self-worth, is very crucial for making wise decisions (Cherry, 2022) [6]. William James emphasized the critical role that self-esteem plays in supporting proactive engagement in career exploration and decision-making highlighting the significant influence that self-perceptions have on employment choices (Rosenberg, 1979, Moulton, 2022) [54, 24]. The development of positive self-perceptions is very important for career development, as evidenced by the correlations between high and low self-esteem and increased indecision in professional choices, psychological well-being and job satisfaction (Choi *et al*., 2022; Lent & Fouad, 2021; Betz *et al*., 2022) [55, 56, 57].

Although the impact of personality and self-esteem on decision-making has been recognized, there is still much to learn about the complex relationships between them, especially in the Malaysian context. Undergraduate students in Malaysia face problems due to the country's cultural and socioeconomic context, which calls for a greater understanding of the underlying causes (Yusof *et al*., 2020) [48]. Thus, the purpose of this study is to look at how personality traits, self-esteem, and professional decision-making relate to one another among undergraduate Malaysian university students. This research aims to improve understanding of career decision-making dynamics and provide targeted insights to support Malaysian undergraduate students in making informed career choices by examining gender disparities in career decision-making processes and clarifying the relationship between personality traits and self-esteem.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Personality

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), personality is a very distinctive set of characteristics and actions that sets people apart (APA, n.d.). Decision-making is greatly influenced by these individual attributes, especially in job contexts, as they lead to varying responses to similar situations (Sharma & Suri, 2019) [41]. Although having the right skills and cognitive abilities is essential for success in the workplace, personality characteristics can help or hinder job advancement (Sharma & Suri, 2019) [41]. An individual's opinion of his/her job prospects is significantly shaped by internal characteristics, such as motivational levels and personality attributes (Duru *et al*., 2021) [8]. Notably, personality traits including emotional stability, aggression, extroversion, and introversion play a critical role in influencing one's propensity for making decisions (Nuckcheddy, 2018) [26].

Besides, Holland's theory contends that people tend to follow occupations that fit their personality archetypes, which improves performance and job satisfaction (Nauta, 2010) [25]. Research demonstrates a positive association between academic achievement and environmental fit clearly indicating the interaction between personality and environmental congruence. (Ding *et al*., 2015) [58] On the other hand, adverse character attributes have been connected to career uncertainty, emphasizing the necessity for customized career counseling programs (Duru *et al*., 2021) [8]. It is especially clear that in order to address the complex needs of brilliant and talented people, tailored career counseling is required in order to maximize career trajectories (Yusof *et al*., 2020) [48].

2.2 Self-Esteem

One of the most important variables in the decision-making process while choosing a career is self-esteem, which is defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of their own value and confidence (Cherry, 2022) [6]. A proactive approach to goal pursuit and resilience in the face of professional adversities are fostered by high self-esteem (Levy & Baumgardner, 1991) [59]. Research demonstrates that there is a strong relationship between career decisions and self-esteem, highlighting the importance of self-esteem in helping people get ready for the challenges in the workplace (Ram, 2018) [33]. High self-esteem makes people more receptive to new things and makes career exploration easier, which helps people make well-informed decisions (Bojanic *et al*., 2019) [4]. On the other hand, low self-esteem might hinder career progression prospects and cause anxiety while making decisions (Wray & Stone, 2005) [47].

Additionally, self-esteem plays a crucial part in determining how satisfied people feel about their careers, emphasizing how important it is in determining career paths (Riley, 2021) [36]. A person's capacity to manage changing work situations with confidence and adaptation depends heavily on their career adaptability, which is rooted in their self-esteem (Atac, Dirik, & Tetik, 2018) [3]. Consequently, a key factor in directing people toward rewarding career pathways and raising general professional efficacy is their sense of self-worth.

2.3 Career Decisions

Informed career decision-making hinges upon a multifaceted interplay of internal and external factors, including knowledge acquisition, intrinsic motivations, and exposure to diverse career options (Krannich *et al*., 2019) [17]. Individuals' proclivity towards particular vocations is often predicated on their personal interests and intrinsic motivations, thereby necessitating a comprehensive exploration of potential career pathways (Legault, 2017) [19]. Career maturity, attained through systematic inquiry and exposure to varied professional environments, empowers individuals to make judicious career choices aligned with their aptitudes and aspirations (McCartney & Robinson, 2015) [23]. Furthermore, exposure to diverse career options and job scopes augments individuals' comprehension of different professional avenues, facilitating informed decision-making processes (Rosantono *et al*., 2021) [37].

The literature review highlighted the significant influence of personality traits, self-esteem, and career decisions, particularly in shaping individuals' vocational paths and decision-making processes. However, existing research, primarily focusing on the relationship between self-efficacy and career decisions, had overlooked the nuanced role of self-esteem, particularly within the Malaysian context. Given this gap, this study aimed to investigate the correlation between personality traits, self-esteem, and career decisions among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia. By delving into these factors within the Malaysian context, this research endeavored to provide localized insights into career decision-making processes, enriching the existing literature and informing targeted interventions and career counseling practices.

Hence, based on the identified gaps and the need for localized research, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H_{o1}: There was no significant relationship between personality and career decisions among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia.

H_{a1}: There was a significant relationship between personality and career decisions among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia.

H_{o2}: There was no significant relationship between self-esteem and the level of certainty in career decisions among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia.

H_{a2}: There was a significant relationship between self-esteem and career decision certainty among undergraduate

students at a private university in Malaysia.

Ho_3: There was no significant difference in terms of career decisions based on gender among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia.

Ha_3: There was a significant difference in terms of career decisions based on gender among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia.

Through the exploration of these hypotheses, this study aimed to provide nuanced insights into the factors influencing career decisions among Malaysian undergraduate students, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this important area of study.

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative research design was employed to investigate the relationship between personality traits, self-esteem, and career decision-making among undergraduate students at a private university in Malaysia.

Three research instruments were utilized in this study. Firstly, the Holland's Code Test, developed by John Holland in the 1970s, was employed to assess the relationship between personality traits and career decisions. This instrument, originally comprising 48 items scored on a dichotomous scale, was modified for this study to include only 24 items, scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly dislike) to 5 (strongly like). Secondly, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965 [38], was utilized to measure levels of self-esteem among participants. This scale consists of 10 items presented in a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). Lastly, the Career Decision Scale third revision, developed by Osipow, S. & Winer, J. (1976) [60], was employed to assess participants' level of career indecision. This scale, comprising 19 items presented in a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 4 (exactly like me), was used to measure career indecision. However, for the purposes of this study, only 18 questions from the scale were utilized. The data collected was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The demographic profile of the study participants included gender and age. Out of the total 150 respondents, 38 (25.3%) were male and 112 (74.7%) were female. In terms of age distribution, 104 respondents (69.3%) were aged between 18 and 22, 45 (30%) were in the 23-27 age bracket, and only one respondent (0.7%) was aged 28-32.

4.2 Reliability Statistics

In this study, the reliability of the research instruments was assessed through Cronbach's alpha values. The total number of items utilized in the study was 52, resulting in an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. Specifically, the Holland's Code Test, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Career Decision Scale exhibited Cronbach's alpha values of 0.83, 0.76, and 0.87, respectively. These values indicate good to excellent reliability, ensuring the consistency of results obtained from the instruments throughout the study.

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha for all 52 items

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.826	.815	51

4.3 Validity

The validity of the questionnaires utilized in this study has been well-established. Tasrif's (2022) [44] confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the validity of the Holland's Code Test. Similarly, Schmitt & Allik (2005) [40] demonstrated the reliability and validity of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Additionally, Osipow & Winer's (1996) [28] research provided evidence for the validity of the Career Decision Scale. These validations support the credibility and accuracy of the research findings.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis presented in Table 2 reveals a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.22 ($p = 0.007$) between personality traits, assessed by the Holland's Code Test, and career decision making. This indicates a noteworthy association between an individual's personality characteristics and their process of making career decisions. Higher scores on the Holland's Code Test, reflecting specific personality traits, align with more decisive career choices among the participants. This finding substantiates the hypothesis asserting the significant influence of personality traits on career decision-making processes among undergraduate students.

Table 2: Correlations analysis of Personality and Career Decision Making

		Holland's Code Test	Career Decision Scale
Holland's Code Test	Pearson Correlation	1	.220**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	150	150
Career Decision Scale	Pearson Correlation	.220**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 displays the correlation analysis between scores obtained from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Career Decision Scale. The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates a negligible positive correlation of 0.081 ($p = 0.326$) between self-esteem and career decision making. This suggests that there is no statistically significant relationship between self-esteem levels and the ability to make career decisions among undergraduate students. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which posits no significant relationship between self-esteem and career decision making, is upheld based on these findings.

Table 3: Correlation analysis of Self-Esteem and Career Decision Making

		Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	Career Decision Scale
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	Pearson Correlation	1	.081
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.326
	N	150	150
Career Decision Scale	Pearson Correlation	.081	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.326	
	N	150	150

Table 4 presents statistics on gender differences in career decision-making among undergraduate students. The mean score for males was 45.92 (SD = 8.40), while for females it was 46.97 (SD = 8.64). This indicates a slightly lower mean score and standard deviation for males compared to females.

Table 4: Group Statistics of Differences between Genders on Career Decision Making

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Career Decision Scale	Male	38	45.92	8.403	1.363
	Female	112	46.97	8.635	.816

4.5 Independent t-test between gender and career decision making

Table 4 presents the results of the independent samples t-test examining gender differences in career decision-making. The Levene's test for equality of variances indicates homogeneity across groups, allowing for analysis using the first row. The findings reveal no significant mean difference between gender and career decision-making, t(148) = 0.653, p = 0.515. Therefore, the null hypothesis, suggesting no gender-based disparity in career decision-making among undergraduate students, is upheld.

Table 4: Independent Samples Test of the Differences between Gender on Career Decision Making

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 -tailed)	Mean Difference
Career Decision Scale	Equal variances assumed	.031	.860	-.653	148	.515	-1.052
	Equal variances not assumed			-.662	65.461	.510	-1.052

5. Discussion

The initial hypothesis indicated a considerable relationship between personality factors and profession choices. This hypothesis was confirmed by correlation analysis between the Holland's Code Test (HCT) and professional Decision Scale (CDS) scores, which showed a significant relationship between the students' personality traits and professional decision-making. This result is in line with earlier studies showing that people frequently match their personalities with their career choices (Jemini-Gashi & Berxulli, 2017) [14]. Sharma & Suri (2019) [41], who emphasize that people may miss opportunities outside of their comfort zones, thereby limiting their career choices, highlight the potential limitations of people limiting themselves to career options within their comfort zones.

Contrary to predictions, the study found no significant relationship between self-esteem and career decisions. This finding runs counter to previous studies by Abdullah (2020) [1] and Javed & Tariq (2019) [13], which demonstrated the important role that self-esteem plays in influencing profession choices. Although earlier research (Javed & Tariq, 2019) [13] suggested that poorer self-esteem might influence job decision-making, the results of this study show no such relationship. This gap, as highlighted by Javed & Tariq (2019) [13], calls for more research into the complex nature of self-esteem and its variable influence on job decisions across diverse contexts, socioeconomic backgrounds, and support systems.

Analyzing gender disparities in professional decision-making was the third goal. Surprisingly, the study found no evidence of a major gender difference in job decision-making. This result runs counter to earlier studies by Javed & Tariq (2019) [13] and Siti Fatimah (2020) [42], which hypothesized gender-based variations in the decision-making processes related to careers. The results of the current study did not support the conclusions of earlier research (Siti Fatimah, 2020; Javed & Tariq, 2019) [42, 13], which indicated that gender differences existed in the degree of difficulty in making career decisions. This disparity highlights the intricate interactions between personal goals, support networks, and society norms that influence how both genders make job decisions. An additional analysis showed that even after deciding on a major, many respondents struggled to select from a number of appealing career options in their field of study, suggesting persistent doubt or ambivalence about particular career pathways. This emphasizes how crucial it is to explore employment options and seek advice from family, educators, and the community. Maftei *et al*. (2023) [21] found a relationship between career exploration and parental support perception, highlighting the critical role that advice and support networks play in helping teenagers make well-informed professional selections. Therefore, having access to strong career counseling and support systems is crucial to enabling people to consider a variety of career options and make well-informed selections that are in line with their skills and objectives.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this study has shed light on the influence of personality and self-esteem on career decision-making among undergraduate students at a private University in Malaysia. While the findings indicated a positive correlation between personality and career choices, contrary to expectations, no significant correlation was observed between self-esteem and career decision-making. Additionally, the study revealed no discernible gender-based differences in career decision-making difficulties. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, suggesting the need for further comprehensive investigations to enhance our understanding of these relationships. Subsequent studies could delve deeper into these variables to uncover nuanced insights into their interplay.

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