



The Effect of Internal Locus of Control on Career Adaptability: The Mediating Role of Career Decision Self-Efficacy among Fresh Graduates

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ABSTRACT

The school-to-work transition requires fresh graduates to develop career adaptability in response to labor-market uncertainty and changing skill demands. This study examines the effect of internal locus of control on career adaptability and the mediating role of career decision self-efficacy among fresh graduates of the Bachelor of Management Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected through an online questionnaire from 110 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The instruments measured internal locus of control, career decision self-efficacy, and career adaptability using established scales. The data were analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4. The results show that internal locus of control has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability and career decision self-efficacy. Career decision self-efficacy also has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability. Furthermore, career decision self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between internal locus of control and career adaptability. These findings indicate that fresh graduates with stronger internal control beliefs are more adaptable, particularly when they are confident in making career decisions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid and unpredictable changes in the global economic environment have made sustainable careers increasingly important for individuals entering the labor market. For fresh graduates, the transition from higher education to work is not merely an administrative shift from student status to employee status; it is an early career stage that requires personal agency, career planning, and readiness to respond to uncertainty. This challenge is intensified by global youth employment conditions. The International Labour Organization reported that the global youth unemployment rate was approximately 13.0%, or 64.9 million people, in 2023, while also emphasizing the persistence of young people in the NEET category (International Labour Organization, 2024). In addition, the World Economic Forum projected that 44% of workers' core skills would change within five years in its 2023 report and later estimated that 39% of core skills would be disrupted by 2030 due to technological integration and economic transformation (World Economic Forum, 2023, 2025). These conditions suggest that fresh graduates require not only academic qualifications, but also psychosocial resources and career strategies that enable them to adapt.

Similar challenges are evident in Indonesia, particularly in the persistent gap between the national open unemployment rate and the unemployment rate in West Sumatra. The World Bank (2024) noted that Indonesia still faces challenges in aligning higher-education outcomes with the needs of modern industry. This problem is reflected in the comparison of national and regional unemployment rates presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Comparison of National and West Sumatra Open Unemployment Rates (TPT), 2021-2025

Year	Indonesia (%)	West Sumatra (%)	Gap (%)
2021	6.26	6.67	0.41
2022	5.83	6.17	0.34
2023	5.45	5.90	0.45
2024	4.82	5.71	0.89
2025	4.76	5.69	0.93

As shown in **Table 1**, the national unemployment rate declined from 6.26% in 2021 to 4.76% in February 2025. However, West Sumatra remained consistently above the national average, reaching 5.69% in February 2025. The widening gap between national and regional rates indicates that fresh graduates in West Sumatra may encounter a more competitive labor market than the national context suggests (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sumatera Barat, 2025). The unemployment rates by educational level at the national and West Sumatra levels are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. TPT by Educational Level: National and West Sumatra, February 2024-2025

Education Level	National 2024 (%)	National 2025 (%)	West Sumatra 2024 (%)	West Sumatra 2025 (%)
Primary School	2.38	2.32	3.01	2.90
University (D4-S3)	5.63	6.23	6.89	7.07

Table 2 shows a more specific issue among highly educated job seekers. While unemployment among those with primary education decreased, unemployment among university graduates increased at both the national and regional levels. In West Sumatra, the unemployment rate for university graduates (D4-S3) increased to 7.07% in 2025, higher than the national rate of 6.23% for the same category. This pattern indicates a form of educated unemployment, suggesting that academic credentials alone are insufficient to ensure a smooth transition into work without adequate career adaptability and decision-making confidence. The career transition status of Management alumni at Universitas Negeri Padang from 2020 to 2022 is summarized in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Career Transition Status of Management Alumni at Universitas Negeri Padang, 2020-2022

Career Status	2020 (%)	2021 (%)	2022 (%)
Working	43.0	57.1	31.0
Entrepreneurship	28.0	16.6	40.0
Seeking Employment	22.0	22.7	22.0
Further Study and Other	7.0	3.6	7.0

At the institutional level, tracer-study data from the Department of Management show that the proportion of alumni still seeking employment remained relatively stable at around 22% across the 2020, 2021, and 2022 reporting periods (Department of Management, 2020, 2021, 2022). This consistency indicates that some graduates require a longer period to enter the labor market. Therefore, it is important to examine internal psychosocial factors that may help fresh graduates navigate the transition from university to professional life. Drawing on Career Construction Theory (CCT), career adaptability is understood as a psychosocial resource that enables individuals to cope with developmental career tasks, occupational transitions, and unexpected work-related challenges (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In this study, internal locus of control is positioned as a dispositional readiness that encourages graduates to take responsibility for their career future. Through the lens of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), this internal control belief is expected to strengthen career decision self-efficacy, which then supports the development of career adaptability (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2013). Accordingly, this study aims to examine the mediating role of career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between internal locus of control and career adaptability among fresh graduates of the Bachelor of Management Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Background

This study integrates Career Construction Theory (CCT) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to explain the formation of career adaptability among fresh graduates. CCT views career development as a dynamic process in which individuals construct meaning and adjust to career-related tasks, transitions, and changes. Within this theory, career adaptability represents a key psychosocial resource for coping with current and anticipated career demands (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). SCCT complements this perspective by emphasizing the role of self-efficacy as a cognitive mechanism that shapes career interests, choices, persistence, and actions (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2013). The integration of both theories allows this study to explain how internal locus of control, as a personal disposition, may contribute to career adaptability through career decision self-efficacy.

2.2. Career Adaptability

Career adaptability refers to an individual's readiness and resources to cope with developmental career tasks, occupational transitions, and unexpected work-related challenges (Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas, 1997). It enables individuals to regulate themselves and respond constructively to changing career environments. Career adaptability is commonly represented by four dimensions: concern, which reflects future orientation; control, which reflects responsibility for career decisions; curiosity, which reflects exploration of possible career opportunities; and confidence, which reflects belief in one's ability to overcome obstacles (Maggiori et al., 2017; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

2.3. Internal Locus of Control

Locus of control refers to individuals' generalized beliefs about whether life outcomes are determined by their own behavior or by forces outside their control (Rotter, 1966). Internal locus of control specifically describes the belief that success and failure are mainly shaped by personal effort, ability, preparation, and decisions rather than by luck, fate, or powerful others. In the career domain, internal locus of control reflects the belief that career progress and success are influenced by one's own actions and competencies (Guan et al., 2013). Within the CCT framework, this belief can be understood as a form of adaptivity that motivates proactive career behavior.

2.4. Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE)

Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) is an individual's belief in his or her capability to successfully complete tasks required to make effective career decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983). The short form of the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale assesses five key competencies: self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem solving (Betz et al., 1996). In the school-to-work transition, CDSE is important because fresh graduates must evaluate their abilities, gather job-market information, set realistic goals, plan job-search strategies, and respond to obstacles.

2.5. Hypothesis Development

Fresh graduates with a strong internal locus of control tend to believe that their career future is shaped by their own preparation and effort. This belief can encourage planning, exploration, and persistence, thereby strengthening career adaptability (Kim & Lee, 2018; Rosita Ningsih & Musoli, 2023). Internal locus of control may also enhance career decision self-efficacy because individuals who attribute career outcomes to controllable personal factors are more likely to believe that they can complete career decision-making tasks

successfully (Duru & Soner, 2024; Ulas & Yildirim, 2019). In turn, individuals with higher CDSE are more capable of mobilizing adaptive behaviors, including exploring alternatives, setting goals, and solving career-related problems (Hou et al., 2014; Kim & Lee, 2018). Therefore, CDSE is expected to function as a cognitive mechanism that translates internal control beliefs into career adaptability. Based on this reasoning, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1: Internal locus of control has a positive effect on career adaptability.

H2: Internal locus of control has a positive effect on career decision self-efficacy.

H3: Career decision self-efficacy has a positive effect on career adaptability.

H4: Career decision self-efficacy mediates the effect of internal locus of control on career adaptability.

The conceptual framework developed from these hypotheses is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

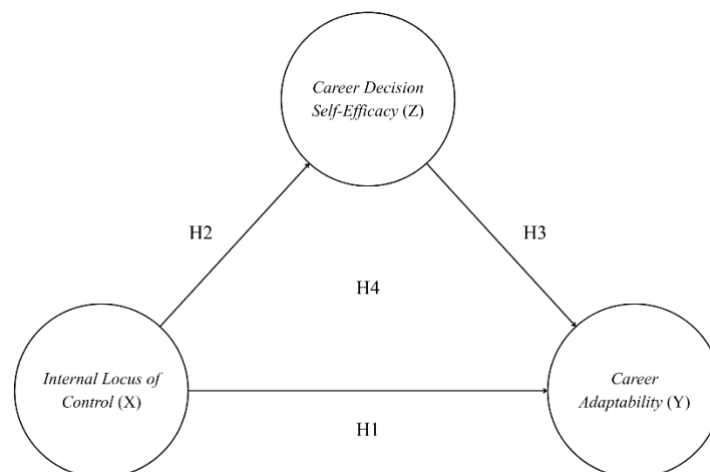


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design. The target population consisted of fresh graduates from the Bachelor of Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang. Purposive sampling was used because the respondents had to meet specific criteria: they had officially graduated within the last two years and were in the early stage of the school-to-work transition, including job seeking, full-time or part-time employment, internship, entrepreneurship, or further study. The final sample consisted of 110 eligible respondents.

Primary data were collected using an online questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Internal locus of control was measured using six items adapted from the internal factor subscale of the Career Locus of Control Scale developed by Guan et al. (2013). Career decision self-efficacy was measured using 25 items adapted from the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form by Betz et al. (1996). Career adaptability was measured using 12 items from the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-Short Form by Maggiori et al. (2017).

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The analysis consisted of two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess indicator validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test the proposed hypotheses through the bootstrapping procedure. The mediation effect was assessed using the indirect effect and the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value to determine the nature of the mediation (Hair et al., 2011).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Respondent Characteristics

The sample was dominated by women (60.0%) and graduates from the 2025 cohort (68.2%). In terms of current professional status, most respondents were either seeking employment (41.8%) or working full-time (40.9%). The largest study concentrations were Human Resource Management (40.9%) and Marketing Management (36.4%). These characteristics indicate that the respondents represent fresh graduates who are actively navigating the early stage of career transitions. The demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents are presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Respondent Characteristics (n = 110)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Women	66	60.0%
	Men	44	40.0%
Study Concentration	Human Resource Management	45	40.9%
	Marketing Management	40	36.4%
	Financial Management	15	13.6%
	Operations Management	10	9.1%
Employment Status	Unemployed/Job Seeking	46	41.8%
	Employed (Full-Time)	45	40.9%
	Entrepreneur/Freelancer	8	7.3%
	Internship	5	4.5%
	Employed (Part-Time)	4	3.6%
	Further Study (Master's)	2	1.8%
Graduation Year	2026	24	21.8%
	2025	75	68.2%
	2024	11	10.0%

4.2. Measurement Model (Outer Model) Evaluation

The first-order and second-order measurement models used to evaluate the constructs are presented in **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**.

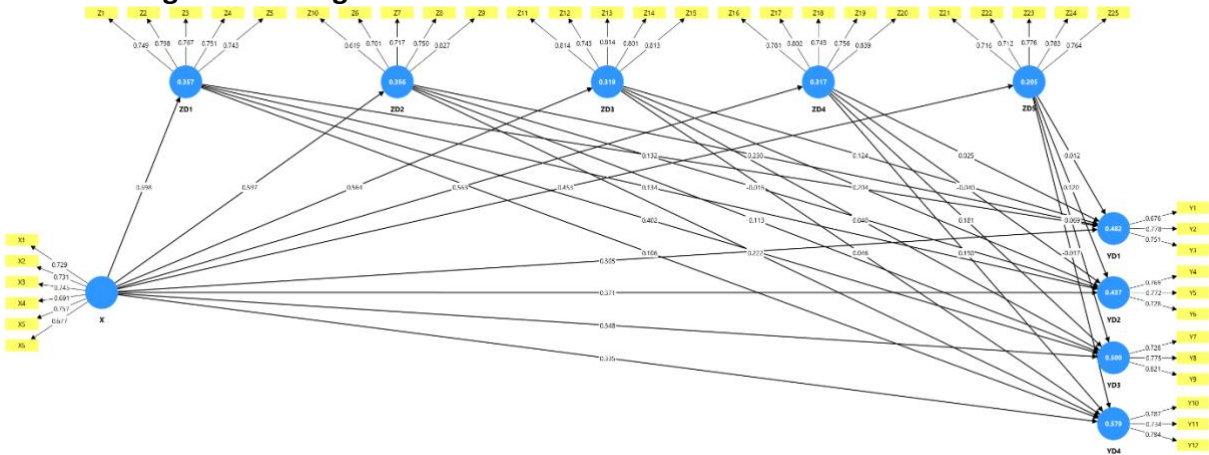


Figure 2. First-Order Outer Model

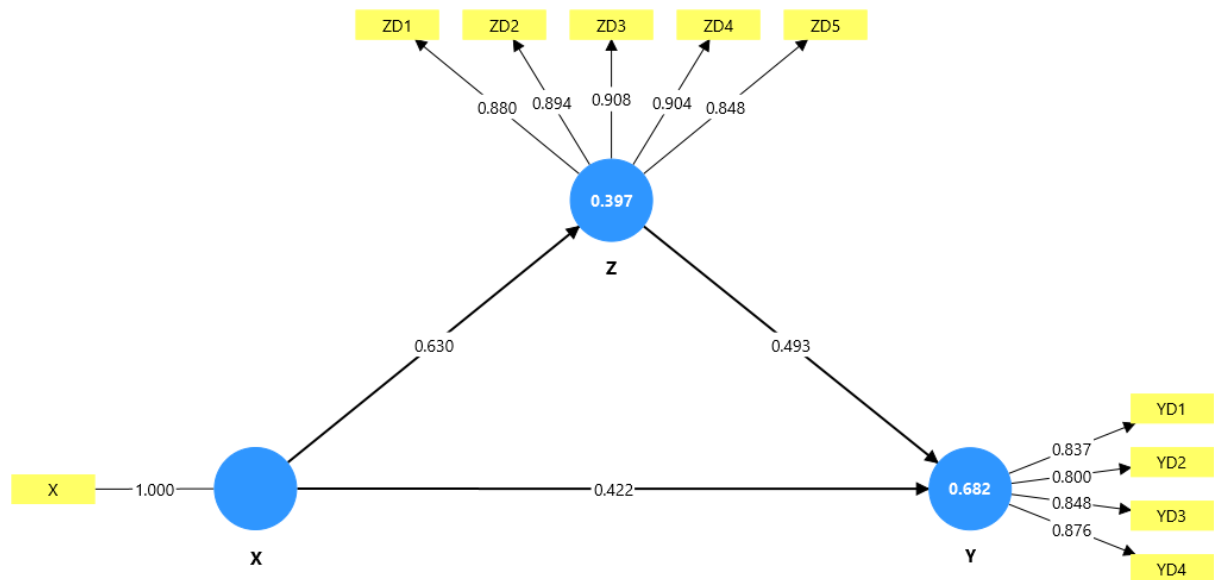


Figure 3. Second-Order Outer Model

The measurement model was evaluated using convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. The results showed that all retained indicators had outer loading values above 0.60, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50. These results indicate acceptable convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also established because the indicator loadings on their assigned constructs were higher than their cross-loadings on other constructs. In addition, the Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. These criteria are consistent with the recommended standards for assessing measurement models in PLS-SEM research (Hair et al., 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2014). The results of construct reliability and validity testing are presented in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Remarks
Internal Locus of Control (X)	0.522	0.867	Valid & Reliable
Career Decision Self-Efficacy (Z)	0.527 – 0.636	0.847 – 0.897	Valid & Reliable
Career Adaptability (Y)	0.542 – 0.602	0.780 – 0.819	Valid & Reliable

4.3. Structural Model (Inner Model) Evaluation

The bootstrapping results of the structural model are displayed in **Figure 4**.

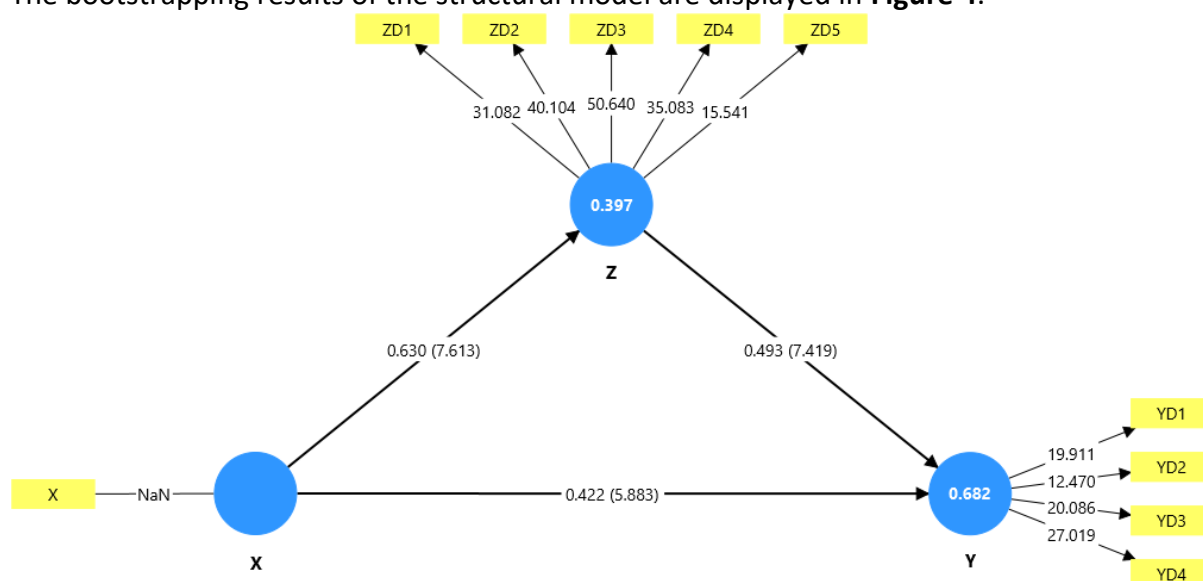


Figure 4. Bootstrapping Results

The structural model evaluation indicated no multicollinearity problem because the inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 3.00, with the highest value at 1.657. The R^2 value for career adaptability was 0.682, meaning that internal locus of control and career decision self-efficacy explained 68.2% of its variance. This value indicates a strong explanatory model. The R^2 value for career decision self-efficacy was 0.397, indicating a moderate level of explanatory power. Predictive relevance was also supported because the Q^2 predict values were above zero for both career adaptability (0.530) and career decision self-efficacy (0.392). These results indicate that the structural model has acceptable explanatory and predictive relevance in line with PLS-SEM evaluation criteria (Hair et al., 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2014).

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

The results of direct and indirect hypothesis testing are presented in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Original Sample (O)	T-Statistic	P-Values	Conclusion
H1	$X \rightarrow Y$	0.422	5.883	0.000	Supported
H2	$X \rightarrow Z$	0.630	7.613	0.000	Supported
H3	$Z \rightarrow Y$	0.493	7.419	0.000	Supported
H4 (Mediation)	$X \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	0.310	5.888	0.000	Supported; partial mediation (VAF=42.35%)

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure at a 5% significance level. A hypothesis was considered supported when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below 0.05. As shown in **Table 6**, all direct and indirect effects were positive and significant. Thus, H1, H2, H3, and H4 were supported. The use of bootstrapping is appropriate for testing the significance of direct and indirect effects in PLS-SEM models (Hair et al., 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2014).

4.5. Discussion

The first finding confirms that internal locus of control has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability. This result supports CCT by showing that internal control beliefs function as a personal readiness factor that encourages graduates to construct and mobilize adaptability resources. Fresh graduates who believe that their career outcomes depend on their own effort, preparation, and decisions are more likely to plan their future, explore career alternatives, take responsibility for choices, and remain confident when facing obstacles. This finding is consistent with prior studies showing that internal locus of control contributes to career adaptability (Kim & Lee, 2018; Kholqiyah & Tusyanah, 2025) and supports the view that adaptability resources help individuals manage career transitions and changing career demands (Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The second finding shows that internal locus of control positively and significantly affects career decision self-efficacy. This result is consistent with SCCT, which emphasizes the role of personal beliefs in shaping self-efficacy and career-related action. Graduates with stronger internal control beliefs tend to view career challenges as controllable through effort and strategy. As a result, they are more confident in evaluating themselves, gathering occupational information, selecting goals, planning career steps, and solving career problems. This finding supports previous evidence linking locus of control with career decision-making self-efficacy (Duru & Soner, 2024; Ulas & Yildirim, 2019) and is consistent with the SCCT perspective that personal beliefs influence self-efficacy and career-related behavior (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2013).

The third finding demonstrates that career decision self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability. This indicates that confidence in making career decisions helps fresh graduates transform career intentions into adaptive career behaviors. Graduates with high CDSE are more likely to explore opportunities, prepare career plans, and persist when facing uncertainty in the labor market. This result is in line with studies showing that decision-making self-efficacy strengthens career adaptability among young people and graduates (Hou et al., 2014; Kim & Lee, 2018), confirming that self-efficacy is an important cognitive resource in career development.

The fourth finding indicates that career decision self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between internal locus of control and career adaptability. The indirect effect was significant, and the VAF value of 42.35% indicates partial mediation. This means that internal locus of control can directly strengthen career adaptability, but its effect becomes more optimal when graduates also possess strong confidence in making career decisions. This mediation result is consistent with Kim and Lee (2018), who found that career decision-making self-efficacy plays an important mediating role in explaining how internal locus of control contributes to career adaptability. In theoretical terms, this finding links CCT and SCCT by demonstrating that a dispositional control belief can be translated into adaptability through a cognitive self-efficacy mechanism.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that internal locus of control has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability and career decision self-efficacy among fresh graduates of the Bachelor of Management Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang. Career decision self-efficacy also has a positive and significant effect on career adaptability. Furthermore, career decision self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between internal locus of control and career adaptability. These findings show that fresh graduates with stronger internal control beliefs tend to be more adaptable, particularly when they believe in their ability to make effective career decisions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the integration of Career Construction Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory by showing that career decision self-efficacy serves as a cognitive bridge between personal control beliefs and career adaptability. Practically, the findings suggest that higher-education institutions and career development centers should design career intervention programs that strengthen students' and graduates' decision-making confidence. Such programs may include career self-assessment, job-market information training, goal-setting workshops, career planning, interview simulations, mentoring, and problem-solving exercises related to job search and early career adjustment.

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causal changes over time. Second, purposive sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings beyond the study context. Third, the model focuses on internal psychological variables and does not include external contextual factors. Future studies should consider longitudinal designs, probability sampling, and additional variables such as social support, peer support, internship experience, family background, and institutional career services to provide a more comprehensive explanation of career adaptability.

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7. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors also confirm that the manuscript is free from plagiarism.

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