

The influence of motivation and career opportunities on career choice: the mediating role of psychological capital

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Abstract

The rapid transformation brought by the industrial revolution 4.0 has created new challenges for the Indonesian workforce, particularly in aligning motivation, career opportunities, and psychological capital in career decision-making. This study aims to explain the causal relationship between motivation, career opportunities, psychological capital, and career choice among final-year students and recent graduates in Semarang City. Using a quantitative explanatory approach, data were collected from 142 respondents through purposive sampling and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that motivation and career opportunities significantly influence career choice both directly and indirectly through psychological capital as a mediating variable. Motivation and perceived opportunities positively affect psychological capital, which in turn strengthens individuals' confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience in making career decisions. The model explains 61.1% of the variance in career choice, confirming that psychological capital functions as a key mediating mechanism linking internal motivation and external opportunities. These findings contribute to human resource management and positive psychology by highlighting the importance of integrating psychological development into career planning strategies, suggesting that educational institutions and policymakers should foster motivation and psychological capital to enhance workforce readiness and career sustainability.

Keywords: motivation; career opportunities; psychological capital; career choice; workforce readiness.

Introduction

The social and economic transformations of the industrial revolution 4.0 have brought major changes to global employment dynamics, including in Indonesia. As one of the country's economic growth centers, Semarang faces complex challenges in human resource management, particularly in career decision-making among the productive-age population. Although developments in industry, trade, and services have expanded career opportunities, mismatches between career choices and job market needs remain

common. This indicates a gap between external factors, such as career opportunities, and individuals' psychological readiness to choose careers that align with their competencies and aspirations

Career choice is influenced not only by external environmental factors but also by internal factors, namely positive psychological strengths known as psychological capital (PsyCap). PsyCap consists of four dimensions self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience that serve as psychological resources in dealing with job market uncertainty. These elements help individuals become more adaptive, confident, and optimistic in exploring realistic career options. Most previous studies have focused on career choice factors in educational contexts, especially among students (Kholifah et al., 2025), while research on productive-age individuals already in the workforce remains limited. Moreover, earlier studies mostly examined the direct effects of motivation and career opportunities on career decisions, neglecting the internal psychological mechanisms that may mediate this relationship.

Recent studies (Jung, 2023; Karimi et al., 2023; Velasco & Wald, 2025) highlight psychological capital's crucial role as a mediating variable that strengthens the influence of external factors on career outcomes. This reveals a research gap concerning the integration of external factors (motivation and career opportunities) with internal variables (PsyCap) in explaining individual career decision-making. This gap serves as the empirical and theoretical foundation for exploring PsyCap's role as an intervening variable in the relationship between motivation, career opportunities, and career choice among the workforce in Semarang City.

This study contributes to strengthening both human resource management and positive psychology theories by offering an integrative approach combining external and internal factors in career decision-making. Theoretically, it expands understanding of PsyCap as a psychological mechanism that mediates the influence of motivation and career opportunities on career choice, providing a new empirical basis for developing a PsyCap-based career decision-making model. Practically, the findings have implications for educational institutions, HR practitioners, and policymakers. Educational institutions can design PsyCap-based career guidance programs, while organizations and employment agencies can use the results to create more adaptive HR development strategies. For individuals, this research emphasizes the importance of building

psychological resilience and internal motivation as key assets for achieving sustainable career paths.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on the productive-age urban workforce in Indonesia a group rarely examined in empirical studies of career decision-making. Furthermore, the integration of motivation, career opportunities, and psychological capital into one comprehensive model provides a deeper, contextually relevant perspective on workforce dynamics in an era of global competition. Therefore, this research makes a significant contribution to the development of career management theory and practice in Indonesia while addressing existing gaps concerning the role of psychological capital in the career decision-making process.

Literature review

Career choice

Career choice is one of the most strategic decisions in an individual's life because it influences personal growth, life satisfaction, and socio economic contribution. In today's dynamic workforce, career decisions are shaped not only by external factors such as job opportunities but also by internal psychological aspects. Understanding these determinants is essential, particularly for people of productive age who are moving from the education system to a competitive labor market.

According to Pham et al. (2024), career choice is a multidimensional process that involves exploration, evaluation, and decision making based on interests, values, and perceptions of job opportunities. Vilariño del Castillo and Lopez Zafra (2022) emphasize that career choice requires balancing personal aspirations with the realities of the labor market. Any mismatch between both sides may cause inefficiencies in the distribution of the workforce. Therefore, an effective career choice depends on motivational factors, available career opportunities, and psychological readiness to adapt to the dynamics of work.

From the perspective of positive psychology, psychological capital or PsyCap is a key determinant of an individual's readiness to face career uncertainty. Ephrem et al. (2021) define PsyCap as a positive psychological state consisting of four dimensions, namely self efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Individuals with a high level of PsyCap tend to be more adaptable, remain motivated in

difficult situations, and make career decisions with greater confidence (Kuroki and Shirinashihama, 2025).

Motivation also plays an important role in the process of career decision making. In a career context, motivation can be intrinsic, such as the desire for personal growth and meaningful work, or extrinsic, such as income, stability, and social status. Ephrem et al. (2021) found that opportunity driven motivation enhances PsyCap, particularly self efficacy, optimism, and resilience. This finding shows that motivation not only directs behavior but also strengthens the psychological capacity required for career readiness.

Considering the complexity of decision making that is influenced by both internal and external factors, individuals tend to choose careers that are in harmony with their interests, values, and available opportunities. Career choice affects life satisfaction, self development, and social contribution (Pham et al., 2024). It also determines the structure and availability of labor because mismatches between aspirations and market needs can create imbalances. Therefore, governments and educational institutions need career guidance systems that are based on data in order to align workforce potential with future employment prospects.

A chosen career refers to a sequence of jobs or positions pursued throughout one's professional life. It is shaped by exploration, self efficacy, and readiness to face the dynamics of the labor market (Kholifah et al., 2025). Career choices influence the direction and composition of a region's workforce and over time affect education, employment, and economic development policies (Vilariño del Castillo and Lopez Zafra, 2022).

In conclusion, career choice is a crucial life decision that affects personal, social, and professional aspects of human life. As Kholifah et al. (2025) state, career choice should be understood as a series of positions that a person occupies throughout their working life rather than a one time selection of a job.

Psychological capital

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is defined as “an individual's positive state of psychological development characterized by efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience” (Kuroki & Shirinashihama, 2025). It plays a crucial role in determining how individuals respond to available career opportunities. In the context of labor supply,

psychological capital functions as non-physical capital that enhances the quality of human resources in the labor market.

Research by Çavuş and Gökçen (2015), as cited in Ronauli and Rosari (n.d.), shows that PsyCap complements personal and organizational characteristics that support both individual and collective success. Workers with high psychological capital tend to be more adaptive to changes in the work environment, better at managing stress and pressure, and more motivated and confident in accomplishing tasks. They also tend to be more productive and contribute positively to organizational performance. Increasing psychological capital among prospective workers can reduce structural unemployment rates, as individuals become better prepared to learn and adapt to industry demands.

According to Velasco and Wald (2025), psychological capital represents a positive psychological state consisting of four core components:

1. Self-efficacy: confidence in one's abilities.
2. Optimism: a positive outlook on the future.
3. Hope: an expectation to achieve desired goals.
4. Resilience: the ability to recover from adversity.

In general, psychological capital is a concept within positive psychology that reflects an individual's positive psychological development and potential to perform effectively in various work contexts.

Motivation

Motivation is a psychological drive that directs individuals to act. Motivation refers to the internal and external forces that drive individuals to act or behave in particular ways. It encompasses the underlying causes of behavior that influence one's decision to engage in or refrain from certain actions. Motivation plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' attitudes, fostering enthusiasm, and enhancing their sense of responsibility toward organizational goals and tasks. Within the workplace context, motivation constitutes a critical determinant of employee effectiveness and career achievement. Broadly, it can be understood as an individual's aspiration to attain higher levels of status, power, or recognition. In this sense, motivation functions not only as a catalyst for behavior but also as a fundamental basis for achieving success across

various dimensions of life through increased competence and willingness.

In the workplace, motivation functions as an internal factor that encourages employees to deliver their best performance, even under challenging conditions. It may originate from within the individual, such as a sense of responsibility, or from external sources, including rewards, social support, and a conducive work environment. One significant external factor that influences motivation is the social environment, which includes the support provided by family, friends, and coworkers. Within project-based work, social support has been shown to enhance psychological capital and significantly reduce stress and burnout. This indicates that the quality of social relationships can strengthen an individual's psychological capacity to cope with work pressure (Velasco & Wald, 2025).

In relation to labor supply, motivation can be categorized into two main types: opportunity-driven and necessity-driven. Opportunity-driven individuals tend to achieve greater business success because they exhibit proactive orientations supported by strong psychological capital, including hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Ephrem et al., 2021).

Career opportunities

Career opportunity refers to the potential or possibility for individuals to access, pursue, and obtain job positions that match their skills and interests. Leonardi and Panggabean (2021) define career opportunity as an employee's positive perception of available career prospects, which enables them to evaluate the compatibility between their job and their interests, thereby reducing turnover intention. Such opportunities are influenced by active career exploration and the relevance of individual competencies to the dynamics of the labor market.

According to Falah et al. (2025), career opportunity represents an individual's ability to access and secure employment that aligns with their competencies and interests. This ability is shaped by continuous career exploration and preparedness to face changes in labor market conditions. Career opportunity can also be understood as a condition that allows individuals to develop their competencies, obtain promotions, and advance along their career paths through work experience, training, and exposure to challenging tasks. Moreover, career opportunity is closely related to an individual's

perception of prospects for advancement and professional growth within the labor market.

Operationally, career opportunities encompass the availability and accessibility of various professional development paths, including job promotions, increased compensation, skill enhancement, expanded responsibilities, and career mobility both within and across organizations. These opportunities enable individuals to pursue and achieve their career goals.

In the context of career opportunities, the social environment refers to the social setting in which individuals live and interact. It includes interpersonal relationships, social structures, societal norms, and institutions that influence personal development and behavior. Operationally, the social environment reflects the totality of social relationships, values, and socio-economic conditions that shape one's attitudes and actions. Its scope ranges from the immediate (family and friends) to the broader (society and culture), all of which directly or indirectly encourage individuals to pursue and achieve their professional aspirations.

The influence of motivation on psychological capital

Research by Ephrem et al. (2021) found that opportunity-driven motivation significantly increases the psychological capital of young entrepreneurs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The study explained that “evidence for the positive effect of opportunity-led motivation on psychological capital was found... psychological capital positively and significantly mediated the relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and business success.” This finding indicates that individuals who are strongly motivated by opportunities rather than by necessity are more likely to develop psychological capital in the form of hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, which in turn contribute to their success in careers or businesses.

Intrinsic motivation encourages individuals to engage in activities for the internal satisfaction they obtain, thereby strengthening psychological capital components such as self-efficacy and optimism. This result aligns with Vilariño del Castillo and Lopez-Zafra (2022), who concluded that one of the antecedents of psychological capital (PsyCap) development is motivation, including intrinsic motivation and proactive individual drives in the work context. These findings confirm that motivation plays a crucial

role in shaping and enhancing PsyCap, particularly through psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy and hope for the future.

From a theoretical perspective, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can reinforce PsyCap components, including hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Higher levels of motivation tend to increase self-confidence (self-efficacy), strengthen the belief in goal attainment (hope), enhance the ability to recover from adversity (resilience), and foster a positive outlook on the future (optimism). These elements represent the fundamental dimensions of psychological capital.

Based on the previous research, it can be concluded that motivation exerts a positive and significant influence on psychological capital.

H1: Motivation has a positive and significant influence on psychological capital.

The influence of career opportunities on psychological capital

Research by Ronauli and Rosari (n.d.) states that positively perceived career development can lead to productive employee performance that supports organizational success. Psychological capital, as a psychological aspect that helps individuals achieve subjective career success and organizational goals, refers to the individual's positive psychological state. The study demonstrates a positive relationship between psychological capital and subjective career success among millennial employees. The higher the psychological capital possessed by millennial employees, the higher their perceived career success. This finding aligns with Jodhy et al. (2022) and Baluku et al. (2021), who explain that high-performance work systems—including career opportunities, training, and development—have a positive and significant influence on psychological capital. It suggests that when organizations provide challenging work and clear career development opportunities, they foster hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience among employees.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap), as a multidimensional construct encompassing hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, has become a significant focus in career development research. Psychological capital is defined as “an individual's positive state of

psychological development characterized by efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience” (Kuroki & Shirinashihama, 2025), which plays a crucial role in determining how individuals respond to available career opportunities. Recent studies indicate that the absence or limitation of career opportunities can negatively affect employees’ psychological capital.

In contrast, research also shows that psychological capital serves as an essential source of career adaptability. Pham et al. (2024) identify several research hotspots related to PsyCap, including its benefits for the mental health of specific groups, its function in organizational management, its impact on the work attitudes of migrant workers, and its mechanisms among university students. Based on previous research, it can be concluded that when individuals have access to adequate career opportunities, their psychological capital tends to increase, which contributes to various positive outcomes in the workplace.

H2: Career opportunities have a positive and significant effect on psychological capital.

The influence of motivation on career choice

Ephrem et al. (2021) show that opportunity-driven motivation significantly correlates with career success through the mediating role of psychological capital. Individuals motivated by recognizing opportunities tend to develop psychological resources such as hope, optimism, and resilience, which enhance their confidence in choosing and pursuing suitable careers. Although the study focused on young entrepreneurs in Congo, its implications are widely relevant: motivation serves as a fundamental basis for career decision-making by strengthening psychological readiness and resilience in facing workplace challenges. When combined with self-efficacy and outcome expectations, motivation reinforces career exploration and decision-making processes.

The influence of motivation on career choice has been proven significant, particularly as an internal drive that guides individuals to make decisions based on personal values, interests, and aspirations. Intrinsic motivation –such as passion, curiosity, or life purpose– often leads individuals to pursue careers that provide both material benefits and psychological fulfillment. Ephrem et al. (2021) also found that personal interest is the dominant factor influencing the career decisions of new graduates, surpassing external influences

such as peers or family. Individuals driven by intrinsic interest tend to be more focused, confident, and prepared to pursue careers aligned with their values and aspirations. These findings indicate that strong internal motivation contributes to clearer and more structured career orientation.

Personal motivation functions as a compass that helps individuals navigate career possibilities and resist environmental pressures that contradict their personal goals. Thus, motivation is not only an initial trigger for career choice but also a central factor in decision-making, integrating rational, emotional, and psychological aspects. It enhances emotional engagement and psychological commitment to chosen careers, resulting in deliberate, focused, and meaningful career decisions. In conclusion, previous research consistently shows that motivation significantly influences career choice. Both intrinsic motivation (such as interest and passion) and extrinsic motivation (such as the pursuit of success or recognition of market opportunities) act as key drivers in the career decision-making process.

H3: Motivation has a positive and significant influence on career choice.

The influence of career opportunities on career choice

Career opportunities significantly influence career choice because individuals' perceptions of the availability, accessibility, and relevance of job options strongly affect their career decisions. Previous studies have shown that people tend to select careers perceived as realistic and promising based on factors such as industry demand, income potential, and job stability. Pham et al. (2024) found that external factors, including work environment exploration and social support, play vital roles in shaping students' career choices. This suggests that the clearer and more attainable the perceived career opportunities, the stronger individuals' motivation to pursue them, as positive expectations such as salary, stability, or social recognition become key considerations in decision-making.

The mismatch between labor supply and market demand further underscores the role of career opportunities in guiding individual choices. Many students choose majors such as business or management because these fields are perceived to offer abundant job prospects due to high market demand, as observed in

Vietnam. Thus, career opportunities act not only as external incentives but also as strategic determinants shaping career preferences and decisions.

Research by Kholifah et al. (2025) supports this view by emphasizing that the alignment between individual competencies and industry needs influences career decision-making, particularly in vocational education in Indonesia. The study found that many vocational graduates face difficulties determining their careers due to limited awareness of job opportunities relevant to their skills, indicating that perceptions of career opportunities are crucial in guiding decisions. When individuals possess sufficient information and access to suitable opportunities, they tend to be more prepared and confident in making career choices. Conversely, limited or unclear job information may lead to uncertainty and hesitation. The research also identifies career exploration as a key mediator between perceived opportunities and career decisions, as it helps individuals align their potential with labor market demands.

In summary, the greater and more relevant the perceived career opportunities, the more likely individuals are to make rational and realistic career choices aligned with market needs. Studies by Pham et al. (2024) and Kholifah et al. (2025) confirm that environmental exploration, social support, and career exploration collectively strengthen the relationship between perceived opportunities and career decisions. Therefore, career opportunities are not merely external factors but strategic elements that actively shape individuals' career preferences and directions.

H4: Career opportunities have a positive and significant influence on career choice.

The influence of psychological capital on career choice

Previous studies have shown that psychological capital (PsyCap) significantly affects career choice, as its main components –self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience– encourage individuals to be more confident, positive, and persistent in making career decisions. Karimi et al. (2023) found that PsyCap serves as a key mediator between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior, suggesting that individuals with high PsyCap can adapt better, pursue long-term goals, and stay productive under organizational pressure. This finding is relevant to career decision-making, which also requires adaptability and internal psychological

strength. Individuals with high PsyCap tend to see career challenges as opportunities and remain confident in pursuing careers aligned with their aspirations, even in uncertain conditions. Similarly, Kholifah et al. (2025) confirmed that self-efficacy, a component of PsyCap, indirectly influences career choice through career exploration, which contributes to decision-making. This implies that PsyCap affects career choice both directly and indirectly, helping individuals make career decisions that are focused, consistent, and aligned with their potential and values.

Velasco and Wald (2025) further emphasized the role of PsyCap in reducing stress, preventing burnout, and enhancing individual performance in high-pressure work environments. Individuals with strong PsyCap are able to maintain emotional and mental resilience, strengthening their capacity to make critical decisions, including those related to careers. In this context, self-efficacy fosters belief in one's abilities, hope motivates goal achievement, optimism promotes a positive career outlook, and resilience helps individuals recover from setbacks during the job search process. Overall, previous research concludes that psychological capital significantly influences career choice by providing individuals with the psychological strength needed to make confident, rational, and well-prepared career decisions aligned with their long-term aspirations.

H5: Psychological capital has a positive and significant influence on career choice.

The influence of motivation on career choice through psychological capital as a mediator

Research by Ingarianti et al. (2020) shows that subjective career success influences objective career success, mediated by self-confidence and increased motivation. Strong motivation enhances psychological capital (PsyCap), which includes self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, thereby strengthening an individual's career orientation. High internal motivation fosters the development of strong PsyCap, which in turn shapes career decisions aligned with personal values and life goals. The self-efficacy dimension of PsyCap is closely related to an individual's perceived influence on their environment and organization. Thus, individuals with strong motivation tend to develop high self-efficacy, increasing their confidence in choosing meaningful and impactful careers.

Further supported by Karimi et al. (2023), motivation, when combined with a transformational leadership context, helps shape employees' PsyCap, which plays a key role in encouraging innovative work behavior. In the context of career decision-making, this means motivation not only drives direct action but also builds psychological readiness to face career challenges. Motivated individuals who lack confidence, hope, or resilience may experience hesitation in making career decisions, whereas those with high PsyCap become more adaptive, confident, and optimistic in pursuing careers that align with their goals. Hence, PsyCap acts as an internal mechanism that transforms motivation into effective career decisions. This highlights the importance of developing PsyCap as a response to motivational drives, enabling individuals to make rational and sustainable career choices.

Based on previous studies, motivation indirectly influences career choice through the mediating role of PsyCap. Highly motivated individuals whether driven by internal factors (interest, passion) or external factors (job opportunities, financial needs) tend to develop psychological strengths. This motivation fosters the formation of PsyCap components such as self-efficacy (confidence in success), hope (goal expectancy), optimism (positive outlook), and resilience (persistence in adversity). Ephrem et al. (2021) found that opportunity-driven entrepreneurial motivation does not directly affect career success but does so through PsyCap as a mediator. This implies that motivation enhances PsyCap, which in turn strengthens an individual's confidence and readiness to pursue suitable career paths. In summary, motivation has a positive and significant effect on career choice, mediated by psychological capital. Individuals with high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation tend to develop PsyCap components more effectively, which then enhance their psychological readiness and confidence in making career decisions.

H6: Motivation has a positive and significant influence on career choice, mediated by psychological capital.

The Influence of career opportunities on career choice through psychological capital as a mediator

The influence of career opportunities on career choice through psychological capital (PsyCap) as a mediating variable is supported by previous studies. Kholifah et al. (2025) found that careers perceived as open and aligned with individual competencies encourage students to engage more actively in career exploration,

which in turn enhances their confidence and readiness to make career decisions. The study revealed that career self-efficacy, a key component of PsyCap, does not directly affect career choice but operates significantly through career exploration. This indicates that open and well-defined career opportunities foster internal psychological strengths such as hope and optimism for the future which ultimately lead to more focused and realistic career decisions.

López et al. (2023) further mapped the various factors influencing career choice, particularly in STEM fields, emphasizing career prospects as a crucial determinant. Their findings suggest that career prospects affect career choice through personal factors like motivation and psychological attributes. According to their review, frameworks such as Expectancy-Value Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory are often used to explain these relationships. When individuals recognize career opportunities that align with their interests and abilities, these opportunities act not only as motivational drivers but also as reinforcements of PsyCap components, including resilience and confidence. Thus, PsyCap serves as a bridge that transforms external perceptions of career opportunities into internal readiness for appropriate and sustainable career decisions. In line with previous studies, career opportunities influence career choice through the mediating role of psychological capital. Individuals who perceive promising job opportunities whether in terms of stability, income, or future prospects tend to develop stronger psychological resources such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Velasco and Wald (2025) also emphasized that environmental support, including family and coworkers, can enhance PsyCap, reducing stress and burnout while improving work performance.

Overall, the perception of good career opportunities functions as an external support that nurtures PsyCap, empowering individuals to explore and decide on their careers with greater confidence and persistence. Therefore, PsyCap acts as a psychological mechanism that bridges the positive relationship between career opportunities and career choice, making the decision-making process not only rational but also strengthened by confidence and mental resilience.

H7: Career opportunities have a positive and significant effect on career choice, mediated by psychological capital.

Research methods

This study employs a quantitative approach using an explanatory research method. The main objective is to explain the causal relationship between motivation (X_1), career opportunities (X_2), psychological capital (Z), and career choice (Y). This approach is appropriate because it aligns with the research objective, namely to test the direct and indirect influences among variables as formulated in the hypotheses. The research object is the productive-age workforce in Semarang City, consisting of final-year students and recent graduates from various universities in the region. Semarang City was selected because it represents a center of economic and employment growth in Central Java with complex labor market dynamics.

The population of this study includes all final-year students and recent graduates in Semarang City who are or have been at the stage of making career decisions. Because the exact population size is unknown, the sample size was determined using the Lameshow formula, resulting in a minimum of 100 respondents. The sampling technique applied was purposive sampling with the following criteria: final-year students or graduates within the last two years, individuals who have participated in training, seminars, or activities related to career development, and those willing to complete the questionnaire in full.

To obtain relevant, valid, and accountable data, both primary and secondary data were utilized. According to Sugiyono (2009), primary data refers to data provided directly by the source to the researcher without intermediaries. In this study, primary data were collected through questionnaires measuring the research variables. The responses were summarized and analyzed quantitatively. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from various literature sources such as journals, books, websites, and archives relevant to the research topic. Sugiyono (2009) defines secondary data as data acquired through other media that serve as supporting information for the study.

Data collection was conducted through two main techniques: administering a questionnaire and conducting a literature review. The questionnaire was closed-ended and used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure each indicator. The literature review was performed to

strengthen the theoretical foundation by collecting and analyzing relevant studies, journals, and scholarly works related to the research variables.

The main research instrument was the questionnaire designed to capture respondents' perceptions regarding motivation, career opportunities, psychological capital, and career choice. Data processing and analysis were conducted using SmartPLS software to test the structural model and hypotheses.

The operational definitions of the research variables are as follows. Motivation (X_1) is defined as the psychological drive that directs individuals in determining their career path, measured through indicators such as career goals, economic needs, and personal interests (Ephrem et al., 2021). Career Opportunities (X_2) refer to an individual's perception of available career development paths, including access to job information, career prospects, and training opportunities (Wan Sulaiman et al., 2023). Psychological Capital (Z) is a positive psychological state characterized by hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience (Jodhy et al., 2022). Career Choice (Y) represents the individual's decision-making process regarding a career consistent with their interests and potential, measured through indicators of career planning, field suitability, and career evaluation (Kholifah et al., 2025).

Data analysis was performed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The analytical procedures included validity and reliability testing to assess instrument quality, measurement model (outer model) testing to evaluate the relationships between indicators and constructs, and structural model (inner model) testing to determine the strength of the relationships among latent variables. Furthermore, partial hypothesis testing (t-test) was conducted to measure the significance of the effects among variables at a 5 percent significance level. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to determine the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables.

Results and discussion

This study involved 142 respondents consisting of final-year students and recent graduates in Semarang City. Based on the data collection results, female respondents predominated, totaling 92

(64.8%), while male respondents comprised 50 (35.2%). These results indicate that female participation in career exploration is higher than that of males, reflecting an increasing awareness of the importance of career planning among young women. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 20 and 25 years old (81%), followed by those aged 26 to 30 (14.8%), and those under 20 (4.2%). This shows that most respondents were in the early productive age group, typically in the transition from education to the workforce.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to describe respondents' perceptions of the variables of motivation, career opportunities, psychological capital, and career choice. Each indicator was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variable	Average	Category
Motivation	4.21	High
Career opportunities	4.16	High
Psychological capital	4.20	High
Career choice	4.18	High

Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

As shown in Table 1, all research variables fall into the high category. The highest mean value was found in the motivation variable (4.21), indicating that respondents have a strong internal drive in determining their career choices. Psychological capital also demonstrated a high mean value (4.20), suggesting that respondents possess strong self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience in facing career challenges.

The results of the structural model analysis using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach show that the R-square (R^2) value for the Career Choice variable is 0.611, and for the Psychological Capital variable is 0.567. These values indicate that 61.1% of the variance in Career Choice can be explained by Motivation, Career Opportunities, and Psychological Capital, while the remaining 38.9% is influenced by other factors outside the model.

Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Relationship between variables	Path coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Information
H1	Motivation → Psychological capital	0.482	7.213	0.000	Significant
H2	Career opportunity → Psychological capital	0.321	5.448	0.000	Significant
H3	Motivation → Career choice	0.275	4.621	0.000	Significant
H4	Career opportunity → Career choice	0.198	3.754	0.001	Significant
H5	Psychological capital → Career choice	0.327	5.682	0.000	Significant
H6	Motivation → Career choice (via PsyCap)	0.157	3.118	0.002	Significant
H7	Career opportunity → Career choice (via PsyCap)	0.112	2.871	0.004	Significant

Table 2. Total direct effect

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistic	P-value
Motivation → Psychological capital	0.339	0.342	0.080	4.259	0.000
Career opportunity → Psychological capital	0.630	0.628	0.077	8.175	0.000
Motivation → Career choice	0.323	0.333	0.083	3.887	0.000
Career opportunity → Career choice	0.651	0.642	0.083	7.856	0.000
Psychological capital → Career choice	0.431	0.427	0.095	4.535	0.000

Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Table 3. Indirect effect

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistic	P-value
Motivation → Psychological capital → Career choice	0.146	0.147	0.050	2.904	0.004
Career opportunity → Psychological capital → Career choice	0.272	0.267	0.065	4.172	0.000

Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

The results presented in Tables 2 and 3 show that all proposed hypotheses are supported. The first finding (H1) indicates a positive and significant relationship between motivation and psychological capital. This aligns with Ephrem et al. (2021), who found that opportunity-driven motivation strengthens individuals' self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, thereby enhancing PsyCap. Similarly, Vilariño del Castillo and López-Zafra (2022) emphasized that motivation functions as a key antecedent of PsyCap development. The current study confirms that students with higher motivation exhibit stronger psychological resources, reflecting their readiness to navigate career uncertainty. Motivation thus acts as a psychological energizer that shapes positive attitudes, hope, and self-confidence in pursuing career goals.

The second finding (H2) shows that career opportunities positively and significantly affect psychological capital. This supports the work of Jodhy et al. (2022), who argued that clear and attainable career development pathways foster self-efficacy and optimism. When individuals perceive that they have realistic opportunities in the labor market, they develop stronger psychological capital that enables them to face challenges confidently. This is consistent with Ronauli and Rosari (n.d.), who found that perceived career development contributes to productive employee behavior by enhancing PsyCap. Accordingly, the perception of career opportunity strengthens internal psychological readiness through optimism, hope, and resilience.

The third and fourth findings (H3 and H4) demonstrate that both motivation and career opportunities have direct, positive, and significant effects on career choice. These results are in line with Pham et al. (2024), who highlighted that motivation –whether intrinsic or extrinsic– serves as a central force directing individuals toward careers that align with their values and goals. Motivated individuals tend to make rational and future-oriented decisions. At the same time, perceived career opportunities play a strategic external role, as found by Kholifah et al. (2025), showing that accessible job information and market alignment encourage confident and realistic career choices. Thus, both internal drive (motivation) and external conditions (career opportunities) are crucial determinants in shaping career preferences.

The fifth finding (H5) reveals that psychological capital has a positive and significant influence on career choice. This supports

Karimi et al. (2023), who identified PsyCap as a vital resource that fosters adaptability, confidence, and perseverance in decision-making processes. Likewise, Velasco and Wald (2025) noted that individuals with strong PsyCap experience reduced stress and burnout, allowing them to make better and more resilient career decisions. In this study, the components of PsyCap –self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience– serve as psychological foundations that enable individuals to choose careers consistent with their long-term aspirations and personal development goals.

The sixth hypothesis (H6) confirms the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between motivation and career choice. This finding echoes Ephrem et al. (2021) and Ingarianti et al. (2020), who emphasized that motivation enhances PsyCap, which then transforms into confident and goal-oriented behavior. Individuals with strong motivation develop self-efficacy, hope, and resilience, enabling them to make mature and meaningful career choices. PsyCap thus acts as a cognitive-emotional mechanism that channels motivational energy into effective decision-making.

Similarly, the seventh hypothesis (H7) indicates that psychological capital mediates the relationship between career opportunities and career choice. This finding resonates with López et al. (2023), who, within the Social Cognitive Career Theory framework, observed that perceived opportunities increase hope and optimism, which then foster adaptive and confident career choices. Velasco and Wald (2025) also emphasized that supportive environments enhance PsyCap, helping individuals convert external opportunities into internal readiness for decisive career actions. The current study reinforces that PsyCap bridges external opportunity perceptions with internal confidence and persistence, allowing individuals to make career choices that are not only rational but also psychologically sustainable.

Overall, the findings confirm the theoretical models proposed in prior literature. Motivation and career opportunities both directly and indirectly influence career choice through psychological capital. This supports the multidimensional view of career decision-making, where psychological capital acts as a vital mediating mechanism linking internal drives and external conditions. The results align with Pham et al. (2024) and Kholifah et al. (2025), who emphasize that fostering PsyCap among students and young professionals can

strengthen employability, adaptability, and long-term career success in a competitive labor market.

In sum, motivation, career opportunities, and psychological capital collectively explain 61.1% of the variation in career choice. This underscores that the interplay between psychological and contextual factors significantly determines how individuals make career decisions. The study highlights the importance of educational institutions and policymakers promoting programs that enhance motivation and psychological capital –such as mentoring, career counseling, and experiential learning– to prepare young individuals for effective and sustainable career planning.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explain the causal relationship between motivation, career opportunities, psychological capital, and career choice among final-year students and recent graduates in Semarang City. The results demonstrate that motivation and career opportunities both have direct and indirect positive effects on career choice through the mediating role of psychological capital. The findings indicate that individuals with higher motivation and greater perceived access to career opportunities tend to possess stronger psychological resources such as self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. These psychological strengths in turn support more confident and rational career decisions. The study confirms that psychological capital functions as a key psychological mechanism that connects internal motivation and external opportunities with the actual process of career decision-making.

Despite its significant findings, this research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to capture long-term causal effects and dynamic changes in psychological capital and career behavior. Second, the sample was limited to respondents in Semarang City, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other demographic or cultural contexts. Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias or social desirability effects. These limitations suggest the need for caution when interpreting the findings beyond the current sample and setting.

Future research is encouraged to expand the scope by employing longitudinal designs to observe the development of motivation, psychological capital, and career decision-making over time. Comparative studies across regions or cultural backgrounds may also provide a broader understanding of how contextual factors shape career behavior. Moreover, future studies could integrate qualitative approaches to explore deeper insights into how individuals interpret and internalize career opportunities and motivational drives. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and environmental mechanisms that influence career choice and readiness among young adults entering the workforce.

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