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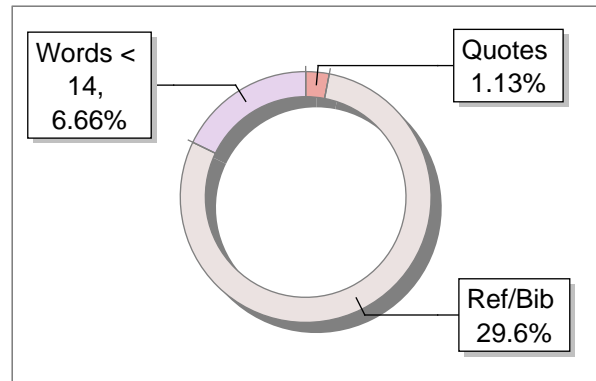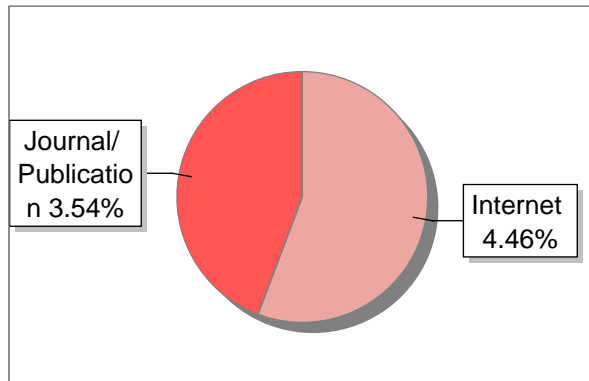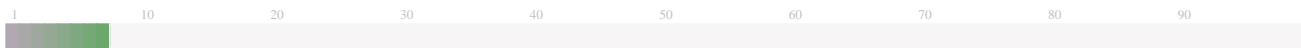
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Weighing the role of self-regulation and self-concept on job search anxiety among Higher Education Graduates

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ABSTRACT

Job search anxiety in Indonesia has increased during and after the pandemic due to the ongoing economic and business situation. Internal factors are considered to be key influencers affecting this anxiety, including self-regulation and self-concept. This research aims to explore the relationship between self-regulation, self-concept, and job search anxiety among higher education graduates. The study involved 200 participants characterized by a minimum of a D3 education level, graduated between 2021-2022, and currently in the process of their first job search. Employing a quantitative approach, the research utilized three scales: self-regulation scale, self-concept scale, and job search anxiety scale, analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis. The results indicate that self-regulation and self-concept simultaneously contribute to job search anxiety. This study suggests the importance of simultaneously strengthening self-concept and self-regulation in preparing graduating students to minimize arising levels of anxiety, ultimately aiding them in achieving their desired career and job objectives.

Keywords: Higher Education Graduates, Job search anxiety, Self-concept, Self-regulation

ABSTRAK

Menakar peran regulasi diri dan konsep diri terhadap kecemasan pencarian kerja lulusan Pendidikan Tinggi

Kecemasan pencarian kerja di Indonesia meningkat selama masa pandemi dan setelahnya karena situasi ekonomi dan bisnis yang belum pulih. Faktor internal ditengarai menjadi salah satu kunci yang mempengaruhi tingkat kecemasan ini, diantaranya regulasi diri dan konsep diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelisik hubungan regulasi diri dan konsep diri pada kecemasan pencarian kerja diantara lulusan pendidikan tinggi. Penelitian melibatkan 200 partisipan dengan karakteristik khusus minimal pendidikan D3, lulus di kurun waktu 2021-2022 dan sedang dalam proses pencarian kerja pertama. Dengan menerapkan pendekatan kuantitatif, penelitian ini menggunakan tiga skala yaitu skala regulasi diri, skala konsep diri dan skala kecemasan pencarian kerja dan dianalisa dengan menggunakan teknik analisis regresi linear berganda. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa regulasi diri dan konsep diri secara simultan berkontribusi terhadap kecemasan pencarian kerja . Penelitian ini mengisyaratkan pentingnya penguatan konsep diri dan regulasi diri secara simultan dalam persiapan kelulusan mahasiswa agar mereka dapat meminimalisir tingkat kecemasan yang timbul dan pada akhirnya mencapai tujuan pekerjaan dan karir yang diharapkan.

Kata kunci: Kecemasan pencarian kerja, Konsep diri, Lulusan Pendidikan Tinggi, Regulasi diri

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic has brought significant changes to the economy in Indonesia, particularly in economic opportunities and employment. Throughout 2020, the unemployment rate increased by 5.2% in the Asia Pacific region [1], with Indonesia specifically experiencing an open unemployment rate of 7.07% [2]. Post-pandemic, there has been an improvement with the creation of job opportunities for 4.25 million people [3]. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate remains higher than pre-pandemic levels [4]. This condition has triggered anxiety among job seekers, especially recent graduates, resulting in nearly half of the pandemic-era graduates experiencing high levels of anxiety [5] and confusion [6].

From an emotional experience perspective, the job-seeking process is closely associated with stress, anxiety, frustration, and depression [7]. These responses vary due to influencing factors such as uncertainty, feelings of rejection, financial difficulties, and loss of social status [7]. Perceptions of post-graduation developmental tasks and the natural situation of scholarship also trigger varied responses [6], [7]. On the other hand, companies are reluctant to recruit new graduates because they are considered to lack experience [8], knowledge, and skills [9]. These realities, combined with the prevailing economic uncertainty and job market conditions, evoke anxiety among job seekers, particularly recent college graduates.

Job seeker anxiety is a specific form of anxiety related to how individuals feel about the job-seeking process as a whole [10]. Furthermore, researchers describe three aspects of job seeker anxiety: nervousness involving bodily responses, worry involving feelings of apprehension and fear while job hunting, and tension involving emotional pressure due to feeling endangered and unhappy [10]. The onset of this anxiety can even manifest physically as rapid heartbeat, trembling, cold sweats, nausea, and vomiting [11]. If this condition persists with unemployment, potential anxiety can become a serious mental health issue [7].

Researchers and academics suggest appropriate interventions to mitigate and address the issue of job seeker anxiety. Thus, investigating the mechanisms behind this condition is urgently needed [12]. This study seeks to provide insight into the mechanisms of job seeker

anxiety from the internal perspectives of graduates. This effort stems from the understanding that the job-seeking process involves three specific dimensions: effort-intensity, activity-direction, and temporal-persistence [7].

Referring to the fundamental definition of job-seeking as a self-regulation process that begins with identification and commitment to achieving work-related goals [7], we initiate this investigation from the perspective of self-regulation's role in job-seeking anxiety. Self-regulation refers to one's ability to modify responses, such as controlling behavioral impulses, restraining desires, managing thoughts, and altering emotions [13]. It plays a crucial role in shaping the job search experience and an individual's success in obtaining employment [14], [15], [16]. Self-regulation in job-seeking consists of three main activities: self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and personal reactions [17]. The third activity is closely linked to an individual's feelings and responses in job-seeking. Personal reactions serve an informational as well as motivational role in the self-regulation cycle [17].

In job hunting, individuals face uncertainty as it is challenging to predict the success of their job search [8]. Each person responds differently and needs to devise internal strategies to cope with various future possibilities [18]. This situation demands managing thoughts and behaviors while discerning which abilities or skills to employ [19], [8]. In psychology, these skills are often identified as self-regulation. Self-regulation helps individuals manage reactions, control impulses, restrain desires, and alter emotions, making the exhibited responses and behaviors more effective in achieving goals during the job-seeking process [20]. In fact, effective emotional management through self-regulation is believed to transform job-seeking anxiety into an enthusiastic state [19].

Apart from self-regulation, another internal factor influencing job-seeking anxiety is self-concept, as anxiety is influenced by cognitive factors, one of which is self-concept [21]. Self-concept can be understood as self-identity, consisting of organized sets of beliefs and feelings about oneself [22]. Self-concept is a crucial factor for every individual as it is believed to alter behavior, enhance individual value, and facilitate progress in engaging with the external world [23].

In the context of job seeking, particularly post-pandemic, filled with uncertainty, individuals tend to feel confused, lack self-assurance, and doubt their capabilities, thus increasing the risk of anxiety [24]. An individual's ability to perceive and evaluate oneself becomes a key determinant of anxiety levels faced in their work and career [25]. Individuals

with a mature self-concept have a lower risk of experiencing anxiety as they are adept at assessing themselves well [26]. Self-concept is not an objective evaluation but more about what one thinks and, as a consequence, what one does [27]. Therefore, if an individual has a positive self-concept, they will feel more competent, thus being more motivated and energetic in pursuing their goals [27]. This condition subsequently helps alleviate anxiety arising from job-seeking uncertainty.

  Several previous studies on job-seeking anxiety have shown that this theme has been extensively studied in relation to various constructs, including social support [28], psychological capital [12], [28], career hope [28], job preparation behavior [6], coping styles [12], and self-efficacy [29]. We observe that fundamental internal capacities such as self-regulation and self-concept have not been simultaneously investigated for their roles in job-seeking anxiety, although these two internal capacities are interconnected and serve as the foundation for individuals in facing various situations in their lives. Previous research explains that uncertainty about self-concept can disrupt regulatory abilities because individuals cannot perceive the gap between their current point and their future goals [30]. Some previous studies have examined the relationship between job-seeking anxiety and self-regulation and self-concept independently [31], [32]. Therefore, based on these various studies, this research presents a primary hypothesis that self-regulation and self-concept contribute simultaneously to job-seeking anxiety among college graduates.

  Furthermore, the development and changes in external situations such as pandemics, economic crises, and technological advancements are significant factors influencing job-seeking anxiety. Therefore, investigating post-pandemic job-seeking anxiety becomes urgent to understand anxiety conditions specific to this changing situation. This study will also endeavor to investigate the level of job-seeking anxiety in this current situation compared to the previous one [33], [34].

METHOD

  This research was conducted using a quantitative method involving 200 graduates from diploma (D3) and bachelor's (S1) degrees from various fields of study. Participant recruitment was open to individuals who met the following criteria: had graduated from D3 and S1 education between 2021-2022 and were currently in the process of seeking their first job after graduation. Recruitment was conducted through various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and kudata.id, with an included link to an e-form that could

be independently filled out. Participants involved ranged in age from 21-25 years, with a dominance of females (102 individuals) and S1 graduates (164 individuals).

This study employed three main scales: the job-seeking anxiety scale, the self-regulation scale, and the self-concept scale (sample items detailed in Table 1). First, the job-seeking anxiety scale comprised 13 items with three aspects: nervousness, worry, and tension [8]. This scale had a reliability coefficient of 0.868, with item-total correlation indices ranging from 0.304 to 0.776. Sample items from this scale include: "I worry that I won't meet the company's criteria" and "I feel calm because with my abilities, I can get a job." Second, the self-regulation scale consisted of 21 items covering five aspects: goal attainment, mindfulness, adjustment, proactiveness, and goal setting [35]. This scale had a reliability coefficient of 0.884, with item-total correlation indices ranging from 0.335 to 0.726. Sample items from this scale include: "I never monitor the progress of my goals" and "I feel confused when planning for my future." Third, the self-concept scale comprised 30 items covering four aspects: physiological, psychological, psychosocial, and psychospiritual [36]. This scale had a reliability coefficient of 0.918, with item-total correlation indices ranging from 0.309 to 0.785. Sample items from this scale include: "My talents make me feel valuable" and "I lack interests that I can develop."

The analysis technique employed in this study was multiple linear regression analysis. Before hypothesis testing, the researcher conducted assumption tests. The results of the assumption tests indicated that the data were normal, linear, ideal, and exhibited no multicollinearity. All data obtained were analyzed using SPSS 19 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multiple regression analysis in Table 1 indicates that self-concept and self-regulation jointly impact job search anxiety. The regression coefficient value of the self-regulation variable (-0.132) signifies a negative influence on job search anxiety. This implies that a 1% increase in self-regulation leads to a decrease of approximately 0.132 in job search anxiety, assuming other variables remain constant. Similarly, the regression coefficient value of the self-concept variable (-0.139) indicates a negative impact on job search anxiety. A 1% increase in self-concept results in an approximate 0.139 decrease in job search anxiety, assuming other variables remain constant.

Table 1 also illustrates that the combination of self-regulation and self-concept variables explains around 11.94% of the variation in job search anxiety (R^2= 0.119 ; $p<0.01$). This suggests that approximately 88.06% of the remaining variation in job search anxiety is explained by other factors not examined in this research. Please refer to Table 1 for further details.

Table 1 Hypothesis Testing Results.

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient		*Standardized Coefficient Beta*	F	t
	B	Standard Error			
Constant	60.846	4.580		13.356	13.286
Self-Regulation	-0.132	0.087	-0.140		-1.511
Self-Concept	-0.139	0.055	-0.234		-2.522

Note: The values $p<0.01$. with R= -0.346 and R^2=0.119.

These findings align with research conducted by two different researchers stating that self-regulation and self-concept play significant roles in determining the level of job search anxiety, both before and during the pandemic [31], [11], [32]. In prior studies, researchers found that a major factor causing individual anxiety in job searches occurs when one cannot accurately assess oneself and manage thoughts and actions effectively [31]. This can be minimized in individuals with good self-regulation and self-concept. With effective self-regulation, individuals can set the direction they aim to achieve by self-evaluation and behavioral modification to anticipate potential future occurrences [37]. Strong self-regulation enhances an individual's flexibility in facing changes, thereby enabling the management of internal issues by goal setting, planning, implementation, and monitoring personal progress [38], [39]. Meanwhile, individuals with a strong self-concept can more accurately assess themselves, influencing behavior and life expectations [40].

The job search process inherently generates anxiety as it represents an uncertain condition that can threaten an individual's future [41]. Furthermore, during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods, various changes exacerbate anxiety when seeking career opportunities [42]. Worries become a distinctive symptom experienced by individuals facing job search anxiety [10]. Interestingly, individuals with good self-regulation tend to minimize worries by seeking knowledge, information, and preparation, thereby reducing their anxiety [6]. Additionally, self-regulation assists individuals in controlling thoughts and actions, overcoming obstacles, and preparing themselves to achieve their goals [43].

Apart from self-regulation, some researchers argue that in uncertainty, anxiety can be transformed into self-confidence if individuals possess a strong self-concept [21]. Self-concept is an individual's identity, a fundamental schema consisting of organized sets of beliefs and attitudes toward oneself, comprising both negative and positive aspects [44]. As an implication, individuals can understand themselves well, have stability, accept facts about themselves both positive and negative accept others, design suitable and realistic goals, act courageously, and treat others warmly and respectfully [45]. The ability to design realistic goals becomes crucial in minimizing job search anxiety, especially during a pandemic, as individuals are better equipped to accept uncertain conditions by considering consequences and planning for them.

Self-regulation and self-concept, when viewed concurrently in their roles in job search anxiety, are not entirely separate constructs. As internal capacities, self-concept is not the only psychological structure guiding behavior, but it holds a primary role [46]. Furthermore, self-concept mediates and regulates stimuli individuals receive from the environment [27]. Individuals with a strong self-concept tend to emphasize problem-solving approaches, creativity, spontaneity, originality, and possess high self-esteem [47]. It can be concluded that self-concept serves as a foundation for the growth of various intra and interpersonal skills, including self-regulation.

The concept of self is often linked to self-regulation as it represents a fundamental concept and structure in human thoughts, feelings, and particularly behavioral change. Both concepts are often studied for their mechanisms, causality, and correlation with many other psychological variables [30]. A study shows that self-concept is an essential prerequisite for individuals to regulate themselves because uncertainty regarding self-concept can disrupt an individual's assessment of their current position compared to their future goals [30]. Consequently, individuals may not exert maximal effort to achieve their goals [30]. Psychologists believe that anxiety occurs more due to beliefs or convictions about a situation rather than the situation itself [48]. This helps explain the central role of self-concept in building such beliefs along with self-regulation.

Additional analysis of the descriptive research data shows that the anxiety levels of job seekers mostly fall within the moderate level at 42% and high level at 51%. What's even more surprising is that more than half of the respondents actually feel extremely anxious during this job search process. The descriptive data on anxiety findings from this research

can be observed in the following Table 2.

Table 2 Anxiety Levels of Participant Job Seekers

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
High	$39 \leq X$	102	51%
Moderate	$26 \leq X < 39$	84	42%
Low	$X < 26$	14	7%

These findings significantly differ from previous research that stated the subjects' average experienced anxiety at a low level [49]. The pandemic situation has indeed led to a significant increase in mental health issues, including anxiety [50]. Restrictions on activities during the pandemic have resulted in many businesses collapsing, as indicated by the survey results from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reporting an 82.85% decrease in company revenues [51]. This, of course, has led companies to reconsider their recruitment strategies, with many opting for layoffs [52]. This situation has heightened job seekers' concerns about their future, thus triggering anxiety issues in job hunting [42]. Addressing this issue is crucial, especially for higher education graduates, as securing employment is a primary concern linked to their economic independence, which, in turn, can impact their mental health status in the future.

CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that self-regulation and self-concept have a significant relationship with job search anxiety during the pandemic. Both variables contribute to more than 11% of job search anxiety, leaving 89% of its role attributed to other psychological aspects and variables. This opens opportunities for other researchers to explore additional aspects that play a role in determining job search anxiety. The importance of self-regulation and self-concept in job search anxiety also implies that programs strengthening these aspects are crucial to be prepared both individually and organizationally by higher education institutions. The results imply that strengthening should begin with building a clear and positive self-concept to provide individuals with an objective view of themselves. It's also intriguing to study how the mechanisms of these two variables, self-concept and self-regulation, influence job search anxiety. Testing with moderation or mediation models can be experimented with to observe their causality and correlations more distinctly. Moreover, testing through longitudinal studies or experiments presents an interesting opportunity for

future researchers. Data collection took place during and shortly after the pandemic, a period marked by high economic and business uncertainty. This makes individuals more susceptible to psychological issues such as anxiety. Therefore, it's also suggested to conduct research on job search anxiety after the pandemic ends and the economic situation stabilizes. Monitoring and resolving this issue are essential as prolonged anxiety can disrupt an individual's functioning in life.

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