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Academic Fit, Adolescent-Parent Career Congruence, and Career Exploration in University Students

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Abstract

Based on the person-environment congruence theory which argues that better fit with individual's environment will lead to more positive outcomes, we examined the relationships between the fit between individuals and organization (i.e., academic fit), the fit between individuals and their parents (i.e., adolescent-parent career congruence), and career exploration in Indonesian university students. We surveyed 125 students (53.6% girls, mean age = 18.96 years) majoring in Fisheries and Marine Science from a state university in Semarang, Central Java, using measures of academic fit, adolescent-parent career congruence, and career exploration. We examined whether adolescent-parent career congruence mediated the relationship between academic fit and career exploration. Structural equation modelling demonstrated that adolescent-parent career congruence partially mediated the relationship between academic fit and career exploration, suggesting that fitting with academic situation affects career exploration behavior by directly motivating students to engage in career exploration activities, and also by facilitating congruence with parents regarding career matter, that in turn, influences involvement in career exploration behavior. Findings of this study showed the vital roles for academic fit and adolescent-parent career congruence in students' career exploration behavior.

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1. Introduction

The concept of person-environment congruence is based on the interactionist theory of behavior, which underlines that any variation in behavioral and attitudinal variables is the result of the interaction between the individual and the environment [1]. The contemporary theories of person-environment fit consist of three assumptions. First, individuals are more likely to find environments that match with their characteristics. Second,

the level of fit between individuals and their environment is related to vital outcomes for both the individual and the environment. Greater fit leads to positive outcomes, such as satisfaction, improved performance, and more persistence, whereas poorer fit leads to negative outcomes, such as dissatisfaction and lower achievement. Third, the process of fit is bi-directional. The individual influences the environment, and the environment influences the individual, and this bi-directional relation is a system, where change in one component affects the other component in the system [2]. No studies to date have involved two kinds of perceived fits and the outcome variable. In this study, we examined whether the fit between individuals and their parents (i.e., adolescent-parent career congruence) mediated the relationship between individuals and organization (i.e., academic fit) and university students' career exploration behavior.

We operationalize academic fit as the degree to which students feel that their sense of what is academically important to them is consistent with their perception of what their university and faculties value. Certain aspects of fit are likely to vary across institutions that differ in the nature of their missions, faculty and staff, and student bodies. However, the aspects of fit that are of interest in the current research deal with things that are likely to be shared across students at different universities/institutions such as the perceived need for competent faculties, course availability, and having classmates with similar academic interests [3].

Further, we operationalize adolescent-parent career congruence as the perceived compatibility, that is, the degree to which the adolescents perceive parents as fulfilling career exploration, planning, and goal-setting needs, and the degree to which they perceive parents to be happy, proud, contented, or agreeable with their career progress, and the perceived similarity between adolescents and their parents, that is, the level to which the adolescents perceive that their parents possess similar or corresponding ideas regarding career interests, values, plans, and goals [4].

In this study we involved career exploration as an outcome variable. Career exploration includes activities of gathering information relevant to the career progress of the individual [5, 6], and contains self- and environmental explorations [7]. Self-exploration refers to the exploration of individuals' own interests, values, and experiences in order to reflect on their career choice and to obtain a deeper understanding of themselves, whereas environmental exploration involves individuals' investigation of various career choices and involves collecting information on jobs, organizations, occupations or industries that correlates with more well-informed career decisions (Zikic&Klehe)[7]. During career exploration process, an increased self-understanding and knowledge about the working world allows individuals to crystallise their career goals and preferences, which can lead to a focus on a specific area for exploration [8]. Moreover, individuals who thoughtfully search for, analyse, and investigate career information relevant to themselves are likely to show better adaptation within rapidly changing modern work settings [9].

We tested the hypothesis using a sample of Indonesian students from a state university in Semarang, for whom adolescent-parent career congruence is especially salient. Indonesia is ranked high on aspects of collectivism, and Indonesian adolescents rely heavily on parents and respect obedience [10]. We targeted students majoring in Fisheries and Marine Science, as interest in this faculty was relevant with the location of Semarang as one of the coastal regions in Java. We hypothesized that adolescent-parent career congruence would mediate the relationship between academic fit and career exploration.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 125 Indonesian students (53.6% girls, mean age = 18.96 years) majoring in Fisheries and Marine Science from a state university in Semarang, Central Java, consisting of 53 students from Marine Science and 72 from Fisheries.

2.2. Survey Materials

All responses were made using a 6-point Likert-like scale (1= strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of each construct.

The 12-item Adolescent-Parent Career Congruence Scale [4] measures adolescent perceptions that parents are helpful and are satisfied with their career progress (complementary) and that parents have parallel career preferences and goals (supplementary congruence). A sample item, "My parents want the same career for me as I

want for myself". Alpha has been reported as .87, and validity demonstrated by positive associations with parental support, living-up-to parental expectations, and life satisfaction [4].

Academic fit was measured with a six item scale developed by Schmitt et al. [3]. The Alpha coefficient of this measure has been reported as .75. Validity demonstrated by positive correlations with academic satisfaction and GPA [3]. A sample item, "The courses available at this school match my interests."

Career exploration was measured using two subscales from Stumpf et al.'s [6] Career Exploration Survey. These subscales measure an individual's degree of self and career exploration behavior over the previous three month period. A sample item from the 5-item self-exploration subscale: "In the last three months, I have been focusing my thoughts on myself as a person in relation to my career". A sample item from the 6-item career-exploration subscale: "I have been investigating career possibilities". Reliability coefficients for the self-exploration subscale and career exploration subscale have been reported as .81 to .85 and .86 to .91 [11, 12, 6, 13,7]. A theoretically reliable factor structure supports the construct validity of the full Career Exploration Scale [13], and support for validity of the self and career exploration subscales have been shown by positive relationships with career-related behaviors such as job interview behavior[6] and career planning [12], and also negative relationships with career concerns [12].

2. 3. Translation of Measures

We used Brislin's [14]forward and backward translation technique to translate the measures into the Indonesian language: (a) two bilingual native speakers converted the items into Bahasa; (b) two monolingual speakers examined the readability of the translated version; (c) two bilingual speakers blindly back-translated the items into English; (d) the back-translated versions were contrasted with the original English versions, and any errors were adjusted; and (e) three Indonesian university students checked the readability of the final Indonesian version.

2. 3. Data Collection Procedure

Research assistants administered the questionnaires to students in the classroom. Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Ethics approval was obtained. There were direct individual benefits (i.e., a work book and a pen) from participating in this study.

2. 3. Statistical Analyses

In testing mediation, all models were analysed using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS. Model fit was examined using χ^2 , normed χ^2 (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). A significant or a non-significant χ^2 , $\chi^2/df < 3.0$, CFI values $> .95$, and RMSEA $< .08$ show a satisfactory fit for a model with 125 participants and 14 observed variables [15].

We examined mediation by testing two models: (a) with direct effects only, and (b) with both direct and indirect effects [16]. We calculated standard errors (SEs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for all direct and indirect estimates using AMOS bootstrapping. Mediation occurs when the predictor is correlated with the mediator and outcome, the mediator is correlated with the outcome, and the 95% CIs of the indirect effects via the mediator do not contain zero. Full mediation occurs if the direct effect is decreased to zero when the mediator is included, and partial mediation holds if the direct effect is decreased significantly when the mediator is included.

3.Results and Discussion

3. 1. Measurement Model

The measurement model which consists of academic fit, congruence, and career exploration showed good fit statistics, $\chi^2(70, N = 125) = 93.80, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 1.34, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05$, with factor loadings ranging from .41 to .91.

Table 1. Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach Alphas; *N* = 125

Variables	1	2	3	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
1. Academic fit	-	.24**	.44**	24.24	4.22	.72
2. Congruence	.33***	-	.32**	55.41	8.39	.88
3. Career exploration	.53***	.39***	-	48.62	8.91	.87

Note. Correlations among scales reported above diagonal; correlations among latent variables reported below. ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001

3.2. Adolescent-Parent Career Congruence as Mediator

First, we assessed a model in which academic fit predicted congruence, and congruence, in turn, predicted career exploration. This model showed a good fit, $\chi^2(70, N = 125) = 95.81, p < .01, \chi^2/df = 1.37, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .06$. Academic fit was correlated with congruence, and congruence was correlated with career exploration. Second, we tested the direct paths only between academic fit and career exploration, and tested the direct and indirect paths from academic, via congruence, to career exploration. The direct-effect model had a satisfactory fit, $\chi^2(71, N = 125) = 99.26, p < .05, \chi^2/df = 1.40, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06$. There were direct effects for academic fit ($\beta = .53, p < .001$) to career exploration, confirming the requirement of mediation that academic fit was correlated with career exploration [16]. The model that included the direct effects and congruence as the mediator (using 1,000 bootstrapped samples) had a satisfactory fit to the data, $\chi^2(69, N = 125) = 79.04, p = .19, \chi^2/df = 1.15, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .03$. In this model, academic fit predicted congruence ($\beta = .36, p < .01$), and congruence predicted career exploration ($\beta = .25, p < .05$), showing all requirements for mediation were met. Academic fit remained associated with career exploration ($\beta = .44, p < .01$), and the indirect CI did not contain zero (CIs = .02 to .23), demonstrating partial mediation. The model accounted for 13% of the variance in congruence and 33% in aspirations. See Fig. 1.

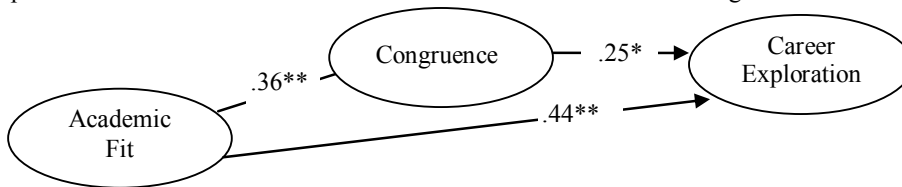


Fig 1. Final model with standardised regression weights reported

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01

The mediation model tested whether congruence mediated the relationship between academic fit and career exploration. We found partial support for our hypothesis, that congruence partially mediated the association between academic fit and career exploration. We found a positive correlation between academic fit and adolescent-parent career congruence. This suggests that students who feel convenient with their academic environment are more likely to be congruent with their parents regarding career matters. This finding extends previous research which found a positive relationship between academic fit and academic satisfaction[3]. We also found a positive relationship between adolescent-parent career congruence and career exploration, suggesting that students who are congruent with parents regarding career matters are more likely to engage in career exploration, which is consistent with previous findings [17, 18]. Academic fit was correlated positively with career exploration, directly, and indirectly via congruence. This indicates that congruence serves as a partial mediator between academic fit and career exploration, suggesting that academic fit affects career exploration by directly motivating individuals to involve in career exploration activities, and also by facilitating congruence. Findings of this study are in line with the person-environment fit theories [1, 2]and also expand previous studies regarding the correlates of adolescent career exploration in collectivist contexts [17, 18].

Our findings have an implication to career intervention program. Career-related education programs aimed at assisting students to explore career alternatives might include a focus on strengthening academic fit and perception of congruence with parents regarding career matters,as this combination is most likely to result in more engagement in career exploration behavior.Fostering academic fit is also likely to foster congruence, which in turn, should contribute to more involvement in career exploration, and possibly more success, as these students are likely to receive more support from their parents.

5. Conclusion

The current study demonstrated that congruence with parents regarding career matters serves as a partial mediator between academic fit and career exploration. This finding suggests that academic fit influences career exploration behavior by directly motivating students to involve in career exploration activities, and also by facilitating congruence with parents regarding career matters, which in turn, leads to more engagement in career exploration behavior. To facilitate students exploring career alternatives, counselor and those who work with these students might encourage them to examine whether they have an academic fit and perception of congruence with parents regarding career matters and to motivate them achieving better academic fit and congruence.

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