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The Effect of Digital Competence and Psychological Well-Being on Career Choices through Self-Efficacy among MPLB Students

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A B S T R A C T

This study analyzes the influence of digital competence and psychological well-being on career choices through self-efficacy among students in the Office Management and Business Services (MPLB) program. A quantitative explanatory approach forms the basis of this research. From a population of 148 students, the Slovin formula and proportional stratified random sampling determined a sample of 108 respondents. Data collection utilized a Likert-scale questionnaire, and analysis employed the PLS-SEM method with SmartPLS. The results indicate that digital competence and psychological well-being positively and significantly affect self-efficacy and career choice. Self-efficacy also plays a significant mediating role in these relationships, with psychological well-being emerging as the most dominant factor.

INTRODUCTION

Various sectors, from education to the job market, have experienced profound changes driven by the rapid growth of digital technology (Purnama et al., 2024). These transformations require individuals to possess adequate digital competencies to adapt to the demands of an increasingly technology-oriented industry (Redecker & Punie, 2020). World Economic Forum (2023) has even identified digital literacy as one of the key skills needed to navigate the future of work. In the context of vocational education, this requirement becomes increasingly critical as students are prepared to directly enter a dynamic and competitive job market (Bi et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2021).

The increasing need for digital skills in Indonesia mirrors progress in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development index. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the index rose from 5.07 in 2018 to 5.90 by 2023(BPS, 2024).

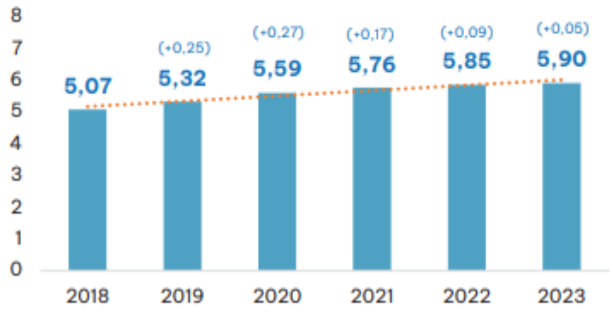

Figure 1. Development of Indonesia's ICT Development Index

This increase indicates that the demand for workers with digital skills is growing, meaning that vocational education graduates are not only required to master technical skills but also to adapt to technological advancements and shifts in industry dynamics (Zahra & Fitri, 2025). Digital competencies—including literacy, communication, and the use of technology in decision-making—are key factors in determining students' readiness and career choices (Al-fraihat et al., 2020).

On the ground, a mismatch persists between these growing requirements and the actual state of students. The situation at SMK Negeri 2 Buduran, particularly within the MPLB vocational program, reveals that certain students have not fully acquired basic technological competencies, such as using Microsoft Word and Excel effectively. Career uncertainty after graduation also plagues them. Adding to the problem, psychological well-being demands serious attention. Academic pressure and anxiety about what comes next typically reduce student motivation and career readiness, thereby compromising how well they make career decisions.

Theoretically, career determination does not depend solely on ability but is also influenced by psychological factors within the individual. Within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), self-efficacy is considered a primary factor in shaping interests, the exploration process, and career decision-making (Brown & Lent, 2019). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's

belief in their ability to complete tasks and face various challenges (Bandura, 1977). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident, possess strong motivation, and are capable of making more well-considered career decisions (Çam et al., 2020; Hamzah et al., 2021).

A number of previous studies have shown that digital competence has a positive effect on students' self-efficacy and career readiness siswa (Sutiman et al., 2022; Zhu, Y., Pan, Y., & Li, 2025). On the other hand, psychological well-being has also been shown to contribute to increased motivation, emotional stability, and an individual's future orientation (Buckingham et al., 2023; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Other studies indicate that self-efficacy functions as a mediating variable in the relationship between individual factors and career decision-making (Liu et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2024). However, the majority of studies still examine these variables separately and are more frequently conducted among university students or students in general education, so research on vocational high school students—particularly in the context of integrating digital competencies and psychological well-being through self-efficacy—remains limited.

Although several studies have examined various factors influencing career choice, there are still limitations in the existing literature. Most studies tend to examine digital competencies and psychological well-being separately and have not yet integrated them simultaneously to explain the role of self-efficacy in career choices (Pham et al., 2024; Sutiman et al., 2022; Zhu, Y., Pan, Y., & Li, 2025). Furthermore, research focusing on vocational high school students, particularly those in the Office Management and Business Services (MPLB) program, remains limited, even though the vocational education context has distinct characteristics in preparing students for the workforce.

This study thus advances a new approach rooted in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Within this model, digital competence and psychological well-being function as predictors, self-efficacy as a mediator, and career choice as the outcome. By focusing specifically on MPLB Vocational High School students, the research provides a more nuanced contextual contribution to career development studies in the realm of vocational education.

Accordingly, the research seeks to assess two pathways through which digital competencies and psychological well-being influence career choices: a direct pathway and an indirect pathway with self-efficacy as the mediating variable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Albert Bandura's reciprocal causality theory provides the foundation for Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). According to (Bandura, 1988), behavior results from the interplay of three components: personal factors, environmental conditions, and the behavior itself. When applied to career development, factors like self-efficacy, social support, opportunities, and external obstacles play significant roles in determining how well someone makes career decisions. Self-efficacy stands at the core of this theory. Defined as a person's confidence in their

ability to execute tasks and surmount challenges, self-efficacy subsequently affects thinking patterns, emotional states, motivational levels, and behavioral choices (Bandura, 1977).

Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett further specified SCCT for career development by emphasizing three central components: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals personal (Lent et al., 1994). Environmental factors work together with these three components to guide an individual's career interests and choices. Within this study's framework, digital competence and psychological well-being act as influencing factors on self-efficacy. Self-efficacy then serves as a mediating mechanism in determining students' career choices, especially important in vocational education contexts that demand both competency readiness and mental preparedness for the workforce.

Digital Competence

Digital competence covers a person's capacity to use digital technology in effective and efficient ways. This includes the knowledge, practical skills, and attitudes needed to access, assess, manage, and produce information using technology (Falma & Putra, 2025; Salsabila et al., 2025). Operating hardware and software requires technical skill, and a basic understanding of information technology also belongs to these competencies (Rahman, 2021). Digital competencies in education help increase how actively students involve themselves in learning. At the same time, these competencies prepare students to enter a job market increasingly dependent on digital tools (Anggraeni et al., 2023).

Beyond technical aspects, digital competence also encompasses technology security and ethics, such as safeguarding privacy and avoiding the dissemination of invalid information (Krumsvik, 2021). Developing these competencies from an early age, particularly among MPLB students, is crucial so they can optimally utilize technology for learning and personal development (Fakhri, 2023). Strong digital competencies can also enhance students' self-efficacy in facing the challenges of the digital age and help them make more appropriate career choices aligned with their abilities and available opportunities.

Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being is the result of an individual's evaluation of themselves and their life experiences, reflecting how a person assesses their overall quality of life (Issn et al., 2023). This concept relates to levels of satisfaction, happiness, and an individual's ability to function optimally in daily life. According to Ryff, psychological well-being is a state in which a person holds a positive view of both themselves and others, is capable of making independent decisions, and can control their own behavior (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Psychological well-being consists of six main aspects: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, life purpose, personal growth, environmental mastery, and autonomy, which collectively reflect an individual's ability to manage themselves and build a meaningful life (Izzati et al., 2021). Furthermore,

psychological well-being also encompasses the ability to manage stress, maintain emotional balance, and have clear goals, thereby contributing to students' mental readiness to face challenges, including in determining and planning their future careers (Wan et al., 2025).

Career Choice

Career choice is an individual decision-making process regarding the job or professional path one wishes to pursue in the future, involving considerations of interests, abilities, personal values, and expectations for the future (Yang & Nie, 2025). This process is a crucial aspect of individual development, particularly during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as it relates to life direction and the achievement of long-term goals.

Career choice is also a complex cognitive and emotional process, in which individuals often face conflicts between personal desires, social pressures, and information limitations, which can lead to uncertainty in determining a career path (Yang & Nie, 2025). Furthermore, career decisions are dynamic and evolve over time, influenced by psychological changes, experiences, and the individual's understanding of themselves and the ever-changing world of work.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to manage their actions, complete tasks, and effectively handle various situations, thereby reflecting the extent to which a person feels capable of controlling their life (Izzati et al., 2021). According to Bandura, self-efficacy consists of three main dimensions: magnitude (the level of difficulty of tasks one can handle), strength (the intensity of belief in one's abilities), and generality (the scope of belief across various situations). These three dimensions indicate that self-efficacy is not only related to ability but also to beliefs that influence motivation, decision-making, and an individual's response to challenges (Izzati et al., 2021).

In the context of adolescent development, self-efficacy is a crucial factor influencing how students assess their ability to cope with academic and life demands. A high level of self-efficacy can help students become more confident, adaptable, and better able to fulfill developmental tasks optimally (Izzati et al., 2021). Thus, enhancing self-efficacy contributes to an individual's readiness to make decisions, including in determining their future career path.

Hypotheses

Based on theory and empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Digital competence influences career choice
H2. Psychological well-being influences career choice
H3. Digital competence influences self-efficacy
H4. Psychological well-being influences self-efficacy
H5. Self-efficacy influences career choice
H6. Digital competence influences career choice through self-efficacy
H7. Psychological well-being influences career choice through self-efficacy

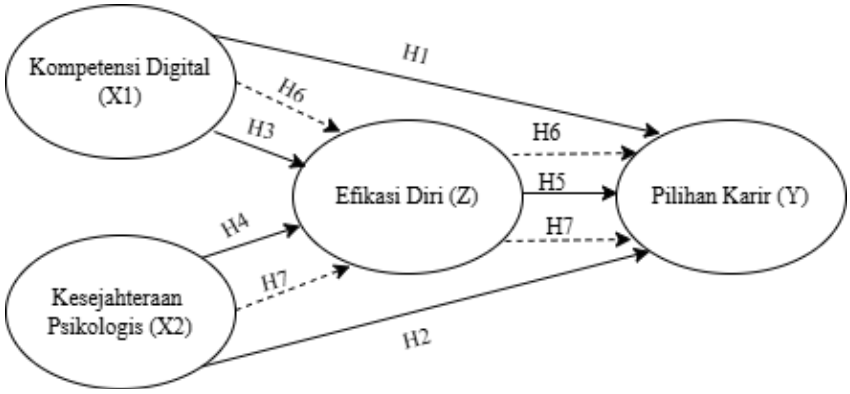

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative explanatory method guides this study. The goal: examining causal relationships between digital competence and psychological well-being (exogenous variables), career choice (endogenous variable), and self-efficacy (mediating variable). SMK Negeri 2 Buduran Sidoarjo hosted the research, with a population comprising all 148 students in the 11th and 12th grades of the Office Management and Business Services (MPLB) program. Determining the sample size required the Slovin formula (Sugiyono, 2023) at a 5% margin of error, calculated as follows:

$$\boldsymbol{n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}}$$

$$\boldsymbol{n = \frac{148}{1 + 148\,(0,05)^2}}$$

$$\boldsymbol{n = \frac{148}{1,37}}$$

$$\boldsymbol{n = 108}$$

Based on the calculation results, a sample size of 108 students was determined, which was then distributed using proportional stratified random sampling to ensure that each class was proportionally represented (Sugiyono, 2023). The details of the sample calculation are as follows:

Table 1. Sample Calculation

No	Class	Calculation	Total	Rounding
1	11th Grade MP 1	37/148X108	27	27
2	11th Grade MP 2	38/148X108	27,7	28
3	12th Grade MP 1	37/148X108	27	27
4	12th Grade MP 2	36/148X108	26,2	26
Total			**107,9**	**108**

Data sources in this study include primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires to respondents using a five-point Likert scale to measure the variables of digital competence, psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and career choices. Meanwhile, secondary

data were obtained from literature reviews, such as journals, books, and other supporting documents. The data collection process was conducted through observation and questionnaires developed based on a comprehensive literature review and expert input to ensure the validity of the variables and measurement parameters.

Data analysis was performed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, assisted by SmartPLS software, to test the relationships among latent variables simultaneously (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The analysis stages included testing the outer model to assess construct validity and reliability, as well as the inner model to test the structural relationships among variables. Additionally, a Goodness of Fit (GOF) analysis was conducted to evaluate the fit of the structural model with the empirical data obtained (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCCUSION

The research objectives guide this study. Specifically, the study aims to examine the direct effects of digital competence and psychological well-being on career choices, plus their indirect effects channeled through self-efficacy as a mediator.

Goodness of Fit (GOF)

SRMR

Assessing model fit against empirical data requires the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) test. In PLS-SEM analysis, the SRMR value serves as the primary benchmark for judging whether a structural model properly describes variable relationships. Researchers typically consider a model well-fitted when the SRMR value remains less than 0.08.

Table 2. SRMR Test Results

	Original sample (O)	**Sample mean (M)**	**95%**	**99%**
Saturated model	0.065	0.051	0.064	0.073
Estimated model	0.065	0.051	0.064	0.073

The SRMR score reached 0.065, a figure below the 0.08 cutoff. Consequently, the model achieves good fit and sufficiently represents how the variables relate to one another (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity testing in this study determined the extent to which indicators properly reflect their latent constructs. The PLS-SEM approach employs Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability for this purpose. A construct demonstrates strong convergent validity when AVE stays above 0.5 and composite reliability remains higher than 0.7.

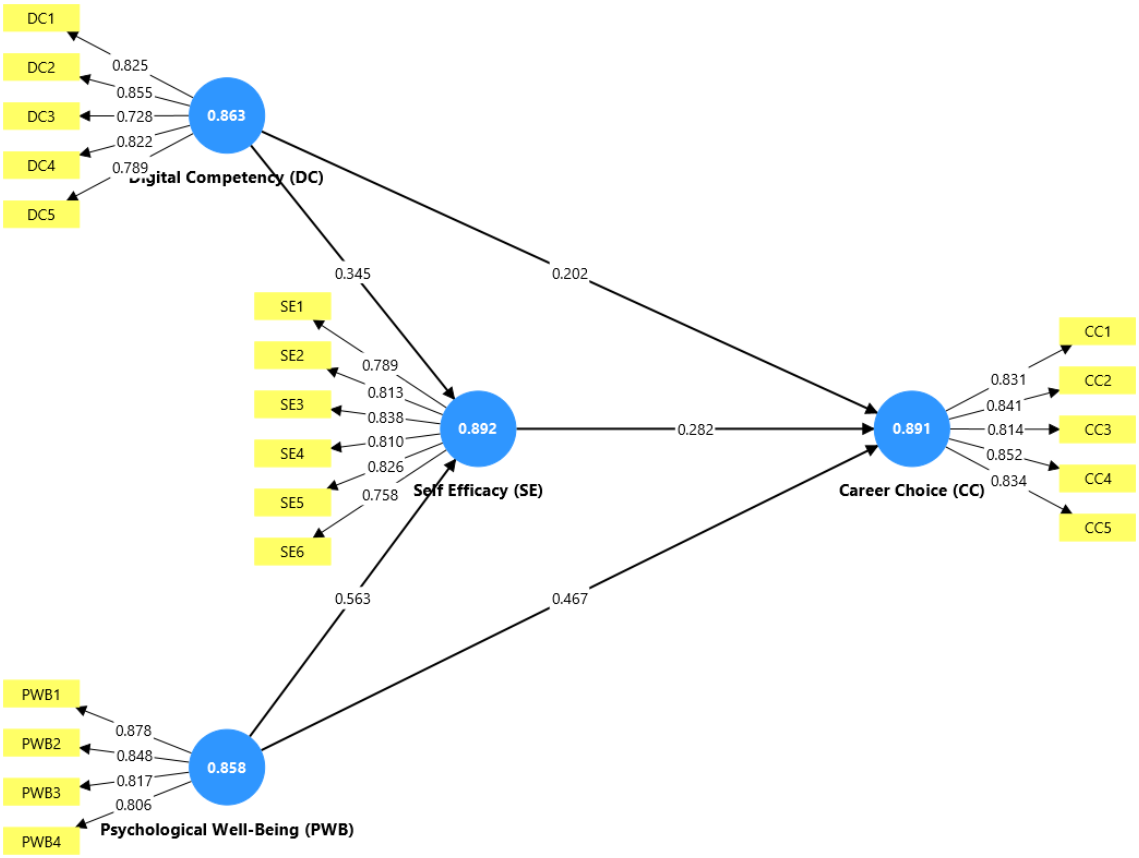

Figure 3. Outer Model Test Results

The Digital Competency (DC) variable yielded factor loadings from 0.728 to 0.855 across its five indicators (DC1–DC5). All remained valid. The Self-Efficacy (SE) variable produced indicator loadings (SE1–SE6) ranging from 0.758 to 0.838, likewise meeting convergent validity standards. The Psychological Well-Being (PWB) variable followed with loadings between 0.806 and 0.878, and the Career Choice (CC) variable with loadings from 0.814 to 0.852. Every indicator from all four variables stayed above the 0.70 cutoff. Since all outer loadings exceeded 0.70, the AVE values generally satisfied the > 0.5 criterion.

Discriminant Validity

To confirm that each construct in the research model differs distinctly from the rest, discriminant validity tests come into play. Such tests ensure each variable genuinely captures a unique concept. The Fornell-Larcker criterion guided this study's assessment of discriminant validity by matching the square root of each construct's AVE with its correlations to other constructs.

Table 3. Results of the Discriminant Validity Test

	CC	DC	PWB	SE
CC	0.882			
DC	0.835	0.855		
PWB	0.834	0.805	0.858	
SE	0.850	0.827	0.838	0.806

Discriminant validity matrix diagonal values (square roots of AVE) consistently show higher figures than the correlation coefficients between different constructs. Take the career choice construct with 0.882, digital competency at 0.855, psychological well-being at 0.858, and self-efficacy at 0.806. Each diagonal entry surpasses its corresponding inter-variable correlations, confirming that the Fornell-Larcker criteria have been met.

Construct Reliability

The construct reliability test measures how consistently indicators assess a single latent construct. PLS-SEM generally relies on Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) for this purpose. A construct passes the reliability threshold when Cronbach's Alpha exceeds 0.6 and Composite Reliability surpasses 0.7.

Table 4. Results of the Construct Reliability Test

	Cronbach's alpha	**Composite reliability (rho_a)**	**Composite reliability (rho_c)**	**Average variance extracted (AVE)**
	0.891	0.892	0.920	0.696
DC	0.863	0.865	0.902	0.648
PWB	0.858	0.863	0.904	0.702
SE	0.892	0.893	0.917	0.650

The analysis results confirm that each variable in the study meets construct reliability standards. Digital competency scored 0.863 on Cronbach's Alpha, psychological well-being 0.858, career choice 0.891, and self-efficacy 0.892. Meanwhile, Composite Reliability (rho_c) values for all constructs climbed above 0.9, pointing to highly robust internal consistency.

Structural Model (Inner Model)

R-Square

Assessing how effectively independent variables account for the dependent variable requires the R-Square (R^2) test in the structural model (inner model). The R^2 value tells what percentage of the endogenous construct's variation the exogenous constructs collectively explain. PLS-SEM standards classify 0.75 as strong, 0.50 as moderate, and 0.25 as weak.

Table 5. Hasil Uji *R-Square*

	R-square	R-squareadjusted
CC	0.820	0.815

According to the R-squared (R^2) test results from PLS-SEM, the Career Choice (CC) variable achieved an R^2 of 0.820 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.815. Around 82% of career choice variability the model's variables explain. Both figures land in the "strong" classification, indicating that the model possesses good predictive power.

Direct Effect

Understanding the direct influence between variables requires a direct effect analysis. PLS-SEM tests this through two criteria: a T-statistic exceeding 1.96 and a p-value below 0.05, both serving as indicators of significant relationships among constructs.

Table 6. Direct Effect Test Results

	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statictics	P values	Hipotesis
DC -> CC	0.084	2.404	0.016	H1
PWB -> CC	0.094	4.981	0.000	H2
DC -> SE	0.075	4.575	0.000	H3
PWB -> SE	0.070	8.014	0.000	H4
SE -> CC	0.080	3.543	0.000	H5

All variable relationships prove significant according to the direct effect test results. T-statistic values remain above 1.96 while p-values stay under 0.05. DC significantly affects CC (t = 2.404; p = 0.016) and SE (t = 4.575; p = 0.000). PWB significantly influences CC (t = 4.981; p = 0.000) and produces the strongest effect on SE (t = 8.014; p = 0.000). In addition, SE significantly impacts CC (t = 3.543; p = 0.000). Thus, hypotheses H1 through H5 all gain acceptance. Psychological well-being stands out as the most dominant factor.

Indirect Effect

An indirect effect analysis examined the role of self-efficacy as a mediator. The test evaluated T-statistic alongside p-value measurements on the mediation pathways to establish whether indirect effects exist between variables.

Table 7. Results of the Indirect Effect Test

	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values	Hipotesis
DC -> SE -> CC	0.035	2.809	0.005	H6
PWB -> SE -> CC	0.050	3.194	0.001	H7

Self-efficacy demonstrates significant mediation according to the indirect effect test outcomes. DC's influence on CC passing through SE yields a t-statistic of 2.809 (p = 0.005), confirming Hypothesis H6. Similarly, PWB's effect on CC mediated by SE records a t-statistic of 3.194 (p = 0.001), supporting Hypothesis H7. Overall, the evidence indicates that SE acts as a mediator linking DC and PWB to CC.

H1: The effect of digital competence on career choices

Digital competence significantly influences career choices according to the study results (t = 2.404; p = 0.016). Even though other variables exhibit stronger effects, digital competence remains a meaningful factor in determining student career trajectories. For vocational education specifically, digital competence helps students comprehend industry requirements and opens up wider access to career information. This aligns with Redecker & Punie (2020), who state that digital literacy is a key competency in navigating the modern workplace, and is supported by Zhu et al. (2025), who found that digital competence contributes to career readiness and decision-making.

H2: The Influence of Psychological Well-being on Career Choices

With a t-statistic of 4.981 and a p-value of 0.000, psychological well-being demonstrates a more powerful effect on career choices than digital competencies. Psychological factors, therefore, stand as the main drivers in how students make career decisions. Students enjoying sound psychological well-being usually possess emotional steadiness, well-defined life goals, and the capacity to handle stress. These qualities allow them to arrive at more mature career selections. These findings align with the concept proposed by Ryff & Keyes (1995) and are supported by Buckingham et al. (2023), who state that psychological well-being plays a crucial role in an individual's readiness to face life's challenges, including career planning.

H3: The Effect of Digital Competence on Self-Efficacy

The research reveals a significant effect of digital competence on self-efficacy, supported by a t-statistic of 4.575 and a p-value of 0.000. Technological mastery, therefore, helps enhance student self-confidence. From the perspective of Bandura's theory (1977), successful experiences in using technology can serve as a primary source for the development of self-efficacy. Students who are able to complete digital-based tasks will feel more confident in facing academic challenges as well as those in the workplace.

H4: The Influence of Psychological Well-being on Self-Efficacy

With a t-statistic of 8.014 and a p-value of 0.000, psychological well-being shows the most powerful effect on self-efficacy. Psychological condition, therefore, emerges as the dominant factor in forming students' self-confidence. High psychological well-being students generally possess good emotional regulation, positive mindsets, and adaptive coping skills. These qualities reinforce self-efficacy because individuals perceive themselves as more capable of managing the situations before them.

H5: The Effect of Self-Efficacy on Career Choice

A significant effect of self-efficacy on career choice emerged from the analysis ($t = 3.543$; $p = 0.000$). An individual's belief in their own capabilities, therefore, constitutes a critical factor in steering career direction. High self-efficacy students tend to show more confidence when making decisions, maintain robust motivation, and cope effectively with diverse challenges in career planning. These findings support Social Cognitive Career Theory, where self-efficacy occupies the position of primary determinant in career choice formation (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent et al., 1994).

H6: The effect of digital competence on career choices through self-efficacy

Self-efficacy significantly mediates the relationship between digital competence and career choices, according to the analysis ($t = 2.809$; $p = 0.005$). Digital competence, therefore, affects career choices not only directly but also indirectly by boosting student self-efficacy. High digital competence students gain greater confidence in confronting workplace requirements, leading to increased certainty in their career decisions. This finding supports the research by Pham et al. (2024), which states that self-efficacy acts as a mediator in the relationship between individual abilities and career decisions.

H7: The influence of psychological well-being on career choices through self-efficacy

The mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between psychological well-being and career choices received confirmation ($t = 3.194$; $p = 0.001$). Psychological well-being, therefore, exerts a more effective influence on career choices when mediated by self-efficacy, as this pathway boosts student self-confidence. Good psychological well-being in students tends to produce high self-efficacy, leading to greater confidence in career direction decisions. This finding aligns with Liu et al. (2024), who emphasize the role of self-efficacy as a mediator in career decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Digital competence and psychological well-being exert positive and significant effects on vocational high school students' self-efficacy and career choices, according to the research findings. Self-efficacy serves as a mediator in this relationship. Psychological well-being stands out as the more dominant factor shaping both self-efficacy and career decisions. These outcomes further support SCCT's framework, which stresses how cognitive and affective factors

interact during career decision-making. Therefore, schools need career development programs that go beyond enhancing digital skills to include psychological well-being and self-efficacy reinforcement via counseling services and self-development activities.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research is recommended to expand the sample size and employ a more diverse range of approaches to obtain more comprehensive results.

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