



## Career Exploration Predicts Career Decision-Making among Final-Year Students in Islamic Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

Final-year students in Islamic higher education often face difficulties in making career decisions during the transition from university to employment. Although career exploration is widely recognized as an important component of career development, empirical evidence on its predictive contribution to career decision-making in Islamic higher education remains limited. This study examined whether career exploration predicts career decision-making and identified the level of career exploration among final-year students. A quantitative correlational survey design was used with 113 final-year students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using career exploration and career decision-making scales and analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. Reliability analysis showed Cronbach's alpha values of .837 for the career exploration scale and .926 for the career decision-making scale. The results indicated that career exploration was a positive and significant predictor of career decision-making ( $B = 1.076$ ,  $\beta = .729$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The regression model explained 53.2% of the variance in career decision-making ( $R^2 = .532$ ), suggesting that students with higher career exploration tended to report stronger career decision-making ability. Descriptive analysis showed that most respondents had a moderate level of career exploration (64.6%), followed by high (28.3%) and low (7.1%) levels. These findings may inform Islamic value-based career counseling services that help students explore career options and make more reflective decisions. This study is limited by its correlational

design, self-report data, and single-institution sample. Future research should examine additional variables, use longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and involve broader Islamic higher education contexts.

**Keywords:** Career Exploration; Career Decision-Making; Islamic Educational Counseling; Final-Year Students; Islamic Higher Education

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**ABSTRAK**

Mahasiswa tingkat akhir pada perguruan tinggi Islam sering menghadapi kesulitan dalam mengambil keputusan karier selama masa transisi dari perguruan tinggi menuju dunia kerja. Meskipun eksplorasi karier diakui sebagai komponen penting dalam pengembangan karier, bukti empiris mengenai kontribusi prediktifnya terhadap pengambilan keputusan karier dalam konteks perguruan tinggi Islam masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji apakah eksplorasi karier memprediksi pengambilan keputusan karier serta mengidentifikasi tingkat eksplorasi karier mahasiswa tingkat akhir. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain survei korelasional kuantitatif dengan melibatkan 113 mahasiswa tingkat akhir yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan skala eksplorasi karier dan skala pengambilan keputusan karier, kemudian dianalisis dengan statistik deskriptif dan regresi linear sederhana. Uji reliabilitas menunjukkan nilai alpha Cronbach sebesar 0,837 untuk skala eksplorasi karier dan 0,926 untuk skala pengambilan keputusan karier. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa eksplorasi karier merupakan prediktor positif dan signifikan terhadap pengambilan keputusan karier ( $B = 1,076$ ;  $\beta = 0,729$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ). Model regresi menjelaskan 53,2% varians pengambilan keputusan karier ( $R^2 = 0,532$ ), yang menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa dengan eksplorasi karier lebih tinggi cenderung memiliki kemampuan pengambilan keputusan karier yang lebih kuat. Analisis deskriptif menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar responden berada pada tingkat eksplorasi karier sedang (64,6%), diikuti tingkat tinggi (28,3%) dan rendah (7,1%). Temuan ini dapat menjadi dasar pengembangan layanan konseling karier berbasis nilai Islam. Penelitian ini terbatas pada desain korelasional, data laporan diri, dan sampel dari satu institusi. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk menguji variabel tambahan, menggunakan desain longitudinal atau metode campuran, serta melibatkan konteks perguruan tinggi Islam yang lebih luas.

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**Kata kunci:** Eksplorasi Karier; Pengambilan Keputusan Karier; Konseling Pendidikan Islam; Mahasiswa Tingkat Akhir; Perguruan Tinggi Islam

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## INTRODUCTION

The transition from higher education to employment is a critical developmental period in which students are required to make career decisions that may shape their future professional lives. Final-year students are expected not only to complete academic requirements, but also to develop independence, personal responsibility, and readiness to enter increasingly complex career environments (Hansen et al., 2024; Ramos et al., 2026; Shortlidge et al., 2024). This transition is often accompanied by uncertainty because students must connect academic experiences with future occupational choices, develop a clearer sense of identity, and respond to changing employability demands (Branje et al., 2021; Van Hooft et al., 2021). Their concerns are therefore not limited to graduation, but also include the question of what career path they should pursue after completing their studies (Maghfiroh & Dewi, 2023; Menge & Gerick, 2026; Ong & Fong, 2025).

Career decision-making has become an important issue among university students because many students experience difficulty in determining career options that are consistent with their interests, abilities, values, and personal goals. Career choices become more complex when students have limited self-understanding, unequal access to career information, weak professional networks, or insufficient readiness to meet labor market expectations (Bauer et al., 2023; Grimme et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, the mismatch between students' fields of study and career interests indicates that some students may enter higher education without adequate career planning or sufficient understanding of their own potential (Setiawan & Nusantoro, 2020). Initial observations and interviews with several students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu also indicated that some final-year students still experienced difficulty in determining their future career paths. Several students reported limited information about desired careers, limited professional networks, low curiosity about occupational opportunities, and insufficient awareness of their interests, talents, and abilities. These conditions suggest that career uncertainty among final-year students may be associated with insufficient career exploration.

Career exploration is one of the central processes in preparing students for career decision-making. It enables individuals to understand themselves, identify possible career paths, examine occupational demands, and evaluate the fit between personal characteristics and career options (Jiang et al., 2019; Kleine et al., 2021). For final-year students, career exploration may serve as a foundation for reducing uncertainty and strengthening readiness to enter the labor market. Students who actively explore career information are more likely to examine possible alternatives, understand the consequences of career choices, and make more informed decisions (Le et al., 2024; Paixão & Gamboa, 2022; Pham et al., 2024). Career exploration is not only an information-seeking activity, but also a reflective process that connects self-understanding, career opportunities, decision confidence, and future planning.

In Islamic higher education, career decision-making is not only related to employability and economic achievement, but also to ethical responsibility, meaningful work, social benefit, and religious values. Islamic education positions career as part of worship, self-development, and service to society, so students are expected to consider trustworthiness, justice, excellence, and public welfare when determining career choices (Suhartiwi et al., 2024). Career development in Islamic educational contexts may also be connected with values such as *istiqāmah* and *murāqabah*, which contribute to professional commitment and responsibility (Bashori et al., 2026). Religious and cultural values can also become important content in career guidance because they help students interpret career choice as a personally meaningful and socially responsible process (Cahyadi et al., 2023). This perspective shows that career exploration in Islamic higher education should help students align personal potential, occupational possibilities, lawful livelihood, and social contribution.

Previous studies have discussed career exploration in relation to employability, career readiness, intervention programs, and career development across educational contexts (Jiang et al., 2019; Kleine et al., 2021; Pham et al., 2024). Other studies have also emphasized the role of career exposure, professional transition, and developmental support in helping students understand occupational possibilities and prepare for future work (Borromeo et al., 2026; Melkman et al., 2026; Taylor et al., 2026). Nevertheless, fewer studies have directly examined the predictive contribution of career exploration to career

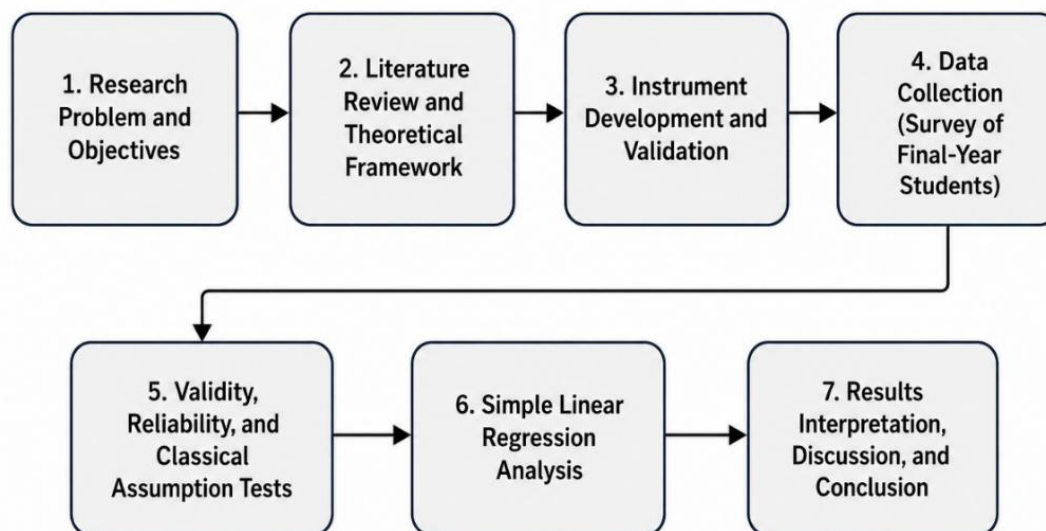
decision-making among final-year students in Islamic higher education. This gap is important because final-year students are at a critical transition stage and require evidence-based career counseling support. Recent work in Islamic educational counseling also emphasizes the need to strengthen career guidance and career readiness among Muslim students through structured and context-sensitive services (Rodliyatur et al., 2022; Wulandari et al., 2026). Career exploration in this context should be understood not only as a process of collecting occupational information, but also as a value-based process through which students integrate self-understanding, moral responsibility, and future career orientation.

This study aims to examine the effect of career exploration on career decision-making among final-year students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu. Specifically, this study investigates students' level of career exploration and analyzes the extent to which career exploration predicts career decision-making. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to situate career exploration within the framework of Islamic educational counseling by linking career decision-making with religious values, ethical responsibility, meaningful work, and social benefit. This study contributes to career development literature by showing how career exploration may inform value-based career decision-making among students in Islamic higher education. The findings are expected to provide a basis for developing structured career counseling programs that help students explore career options, understand themselves, and make career decisions that are realistic, informed, ethical, and socially meaningful.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a quantitative correlational survey design to examine the predictive association between career exploration and career decision-making among final-year students in Islamic higher education. This design was appropriate because the study did not manipulate variables, but examined the extent to which career exploration was statistically associated with students' career decision-making. Career exploration was positioned as the independent variable, while career decision-making was positioned as the dependent variable. The research procedure consisted of six stages: identifying the research problem, reviewing relevant literature, developing and adapting the instruments, conducting

expert review and instrument testing, collecting data from eligible respondents, and analyzing the data using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These stages were arranged to ensure that the research process was systematic, measurable, and consistent with the purpose of the correlational survey design. The complete flow of the research procedure is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Flow of the Research Procedure

**Table 1.**

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<b>Study Program</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Islamic Guidance and Counseling	40	35.4
Islamic Communication and Broadcasting	38	33.6
Da'wah Management	35	31.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The participants were 113 final-year students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Indonesia. They were selected using purposive sampling because the study required respondents who had specific characteristics relevant to the research focus. The inclusion criteria were students who were in their final year of study, working on their final academic project, or preparing for graduation. These criteria were used because final-year students are generally in a transition period from higher education to employment and are expected to engage more actively in career exploration and career decision-making.

The sample size was considered adequate for simple linear regression with one predictor variable. Based on the guideline proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the

minimum sample size for regression can be estimated using the formula  $N \geq 50 + 8m$ , where  $m$  refers to the number of predictors. Since this study used one predictor, the minimum required sample was 58 respondents. Therefore, the sample of 113 students exceeded the minimum requirement and was considered sufficient for the planned regression analysis. The respondents came from three study programs: Islamic Guidance and Counseling, Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, and Da'wah Management. The demographic distribution of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Data were collected using two self-report scales: the Career Exploration Scale and the Career Decision-Making Scale. The instruments were developed and adapted based on established theoretical indicators and previous studies on career exploration and career decision-making. Career exploration was conceptualized as students' active efforts to understand themselves, seek occupational information, and explore career-related opportunities. This conceptualization is consistent with career exploration literature, which defines exploration as a process of collecting and evaluating information about the self and the world of work to clarify career direction (Stumpf et al., 1983; Jiang et al., 2019; Kleine et al., 2021). The indicators of career exploration included self-exploration, occupational information seeking, and environmental exploration.

Career decision-making was conceptualized as students' ability to clarify career goals, evaluate alternatives, make career choices confidently, and prepare future career plans. The indicators included clarity of career choice, consideration of career alternatives, confidence in career decisions, and readiness to determine future career plans. These indicators were used because career decision-making involves not only selecting an occupation, but also evaluating the fit between personal interests, abilities, goals, and available career opportunities.

The initial items were reviewed by experts in guidance and counseling before empirical testing. The expert review focused on item clarity, construct relevance, language suitability, and contextual appropriateness for final-year students in Islamic higher education. Items considered unclear, overlapping, or insufficiently aligned with the intended construct were revised before the try-out stage. This process was conducted to reduce construct ambiguity and ensure that the instruments reflected the theoretical dimensions of career exploration and career decision-making.

Before the main data analysis, item validity was examined using corrected item-total correlation. This procedure was used to determine whether each item contributed adequately to the total score of its respective scale. Items that did not meet the minimum validity criterion were excluded from the final analysis because they showed weak associations with the construct being measured. The exclusion of these items was intended to refine the instruments and retain only items that were empirically consistent with the measured dimensions.

For the Career Exploration Scale, 7 of the initial 15 items met the validity criterion and were retained. These retained items represented the core dimensions of career exploration, namely self-exploration, occupational information seeking, and environmental exploration. For the Career Decision-Making Scale, 16 of the initial 36 items met the validity criterion and were retained. These items represented the main dimensions of career decision-making, including clarity of choice, consideration of alternatives, decision confidence, and readiness for future career planning. Several items were removed because they showed weak item-total correlations, overlapped semantically with other items, or were less suitable for the final-year student context after empirical testing. Therefore, the final scales were considered more focused, internally coherent, and aligned with the theoretical constructs.

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha to examine the internal consistency of the retained items. A Cronbach's alpha value of .70 or higher is generally considered acceptable for social science research instruments (DeVellis, 2017; Field, 2018). The reliability analysis showed that the Career Exploration Scale had good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .837. The Career Decision-Making Scale also showed excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .926. These results indicate that both scales were reliable for measuring the constructs examined in this study.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to respondents who met the inclusion criteria. Before completing the questionnaire, participants received information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw from the study. Informed consent was obtained before respondents proceeded to the questionnaire. The online format was used to reach final-year students efficiently and to facilitate standardized data collection.

All responses were screened before analysis to ensure that the data were complete and suitable for statistical testing.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and to classify the level of career exploration. Career exploration scores were categorized into low, moderate, and high levels using the hypothetical score interval based on the number of valid items and response options. Since the final Career Exploration Scale consisted of seven valid items with a five-point Likert response format, the minimum possible score was 7 and the maximum possible score was 35. The score range was divided into three categories: low (7–16), moderate (17–26), and high (27–35). The score intervals used for each category are presented in Table 4.

Simple linear regression was used to examine whether career exploration predicted career decision-making. Before conducting the regression analysis, preliminary assumption tests were performed to examine normality and linearity. Normality was assessed through visual inspection of the histogram and normal probability plot of standardized residuals. The residuals were considered approximately normally distributed when the histogram followed a normal curve and the points in the normal probability plot were distributed close to the diagonal line. Linearity was examined using the deviation from linearity value. The relationship between career exploration and career decision-making was considered linear when the significance value of deviation from linearity was greater than .05. The linearity test showed that the assumption of linearity was met, as indicated by the non-significant deviation from linearity value,  $p = .262$ .

The regression analysis was interpreted using the unstandardized coefficient, standardized coefficient, t-value, significance level, coefficient of determination, and 95% confidence interval. A significance value below .05 indicated that career exploration was significantly associated with career decision-making. The coefficient of determination, or  $R^2$ , was used to determine the proportion of variance in career decision-making explained by career exploration (Field, 2018; Ghazali, 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before conducting the regression analysis, preliminary assumption tests were performed to examine whether the data met the requirements for simple linear regression. Visual inspection of the histogram and normal probability plot of standardized residuals indicated that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. The linearity test showed that the relationship between career exploration and career decision-making was linear, as indicated by the non-significant deviation from linearity value,  $p = .262$ . These results suggest that the assumptions of normality and linearity were adequately met.

The results of the simple linear regression analysis are presented in Table 2. This analysis was conducted to examine whether career exploration predicted career decision-making among final-year students. As shown in Table 2, career exploration positively and significantly predicted career decision-making. The unstandardized coefficient was positive ( $B = 1.076$ , 95% CI [.886, 1.266]), indicating that each one-unit increase in career exploration was associated with a 1.076-unit increase in career decision-making. The standardized coefficient also indicated a strong positive association ( $\beta = .729$ ), and the t-test confirmed that the regression coefficient was statistically significant,  $t = 11.214$ ,  $p < .001$ . These findings indicate that students with higher career exploration scores tended to report stronger career decision-making ability.

The regression equation obtained from the analysis was:

$$Y = -4.301 + 1.076X$$

**Table 2.**

Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Career Exploration and Career Decision-Making

Model	B	Std. Error	95% CI for B	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	-4.301	4.081	[-12.39, 3.79]	—	-1.054	.294
Career Exploration	1.076	.096	[.886, 1.266]	.729	11.214	< .001

**Note.** Dependent variable: career decision-making. CI = confidence interval.

**Table 3.**

Model Summary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.729	.532	.528	6.886

**Table 4.**

Level of Career Exploration among Respondents (N = 113)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Score Interval</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
High	27–35	32	28.3
Moderate	17–26	73	64.6
Low	7–16	8	7.1
<b>Total</b>	—	<b>113</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In this equation, Y represents career decision-making, while X represents career exploration. The positive coefficient indicates that higher career exploration was associated with higher career decision-making scores. The strength of the regression model is presented in Table 3. As presented in Table 3, the correlation coefficient was  $R = .729$ , indicating a strong positive association between career exploration and career decision-making. The coefficient of determination was  $R^2 = .532$ , meaning that career exploration accounted for 53.2% of the variance in career decision-making among final-year students. The remaining 46.8% of the variance was associated with other factors not examined in this study.

Descriptive analysis was also conducted to identify the level of students' career exploration. The distribution of respondents based on career exploration level is presented in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, most respondents were in the moderate category of career exploration ( $n = 73, 64.6\%$ ). Meanwhile, 32 students (28.3%) were in the high category, and 8 students (7.1%) were in the low category.

This finding indicates that most final-year students had engaged in career exploration at a moderate level, suggesting that their exploration of self-understanding, occupational information, and career opportunities had begun to develop but was not yet optimal. Overall, the results indicate that career exploration was a significant positive predictor of career decision-making among final-year students. Students who reported higher engagement in career-related information seeking, self-exploration, and exploration of occupational opportunities tended to show clearer and more confident career decision-making.

The findings of this study indicate that career exploration is positively and significantly associated with career decision-making among final-year students in Islamic higher education. Students with higher career exploration scores tended to report stronger career decision-making ability. This result suggests that career exploration is not merely an activity of collecting occupational information, but a developmental process that helps

students clarify their interests, abilities, values, and future career possibilities. For final-year students who are approaching the transition from university to employment, this process becomes important because they need to connect academic experiences with realistic occupational choices. Previous studies similarly show that students who engage more actively in career exploration tend to be better prepared to examine career alternatives, strengthen decision confidence, and make more informed career choices (Feng et al., 2025; Nurrohim et al., 2023; Pham et al., 2024; Pribadi et al., 2021).

The descriptive results showed that most respondents were in the moderate category of career exploration. This finding indicates that many final-year students had begun to explore career-related information, although their exploration may not yet be fully systematic, reflective, or supported by structured guidance. Moderate exploration suggests that students may already have some awareness of their interests and career options, but still need stronger support to connect self-understanding with occupational information. Career exploration becomes meaningful when students are able to assess the fit between personal characteristics and occupational demands, develop realistic career perceptions, and evaluate possible consequences of their choices (Kleine et al., 2021; Kwon & Lee, 2025; McCartney & Lee, 2026; Putri & Taufiqurrahman, 2024). In this sense, career exploration functions as a bridge between students' initial aspirations and the career decisions they eventually make.

These findings are consistent with career development literature, which positions exploration as a key process in strengthening career clarity and decision-making readiness. Career exploration may include internships, workplace exposure, career information seeking, professional networking, and reflection on the relevance of academic background to future employment. Such activities help students identify career fields that are relevant to their competencies and formulate more appropriate career goals. This is also in line with career guidance practices in Islamic educational counseling, where counselors are expected to provide career information, support students' career planning, and help them prepare for future work (Rodliyaton et al., 2022). The findings also support recent evidence that employability skills and career readiness among Muslim students are closely related to career decision-making self-efficacy, indicating the need to integrate career exploration with confidence-building interventions (Le et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2026; Wulandari et al., 2026).

The relationship between career exploration and career decision-making can be explained through Social Cognitive Career Theory and the Career Self-Management model. In these perspectives, career exploration is not only an information-seeking behavior, but also a mechanism that links self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career decision outcomes. Students with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to explore career options, while meaningful exploration may strengthen their confidence in making career decisions (Wang et al., 2023). The Career Self-Management model also explains that exploration allows individuals to collect and interpret information about themselves and the world of work in order to clarify career choices (Coun et al., 2026). Career empowerment and longitudinal evidence further indicate that exploratory actions, perceived career control, and career decision-making self-efficacy may mutually reinforce each other in reducing career indecision and strengthening adaptive career behavior (Fort et al., 2026; Grabarski et al., 2025; Paixão & Gamboa, 2022).

Career decision-making among students may also be influenced by psychosocial and contextual factors beyond individual exploration. Social support, self-advocacy, academic accommodation, career anxiety, and perceived barriers may shape how students interpret opportunities and make career choices (Amjad & Irshad, 2026; Chen et al., 2026; Duan et al., 2026). Career exploration may help students manage uncertainty by encouraging them to search for information, compare alternatives, and evaluate the fit between personal goals and occupational possibilities. Students may still experience indecision or regret when they lack confidence, face external pressure, or fail to translate exploration into concrete action (Akkermans & Donald, 2026; Schulze Schleithoff et al., 2025; Schulze Schleithoff et al., 2026). This finding suggests that career exploration should be accompanied by counseling support that strengthens emotional regulation, career resilience, and decision-making confidence.

In the context of Islamic higher education, career decision-making should not be understood only as a process of choosing employment. It also involves ethical responsibility, meaningful work, lawful livelihood, and social contribution. Career exploration can help students examine whether their career choices are aligned not only with their competencies and interests, but also with Islamic values and social benefit. This perspective is relevant because Islamic educational contexts emphasize values such as

*istiqāmah*, *murāqabah*, responsibility, and commitment in professional life (Bashori et al., 2026; Suhartiwi et al., 2024). Family and cultural expectations may also influence students' career decisions, particularly in collectivist contexts where personal aspirations are often negotiated with family values and communal considerations (Işık & Yılmaz Alici, 2026; Wang et al., 2025). The value of active effort is also reflected in QS. Ar-Ra'd [13]: 11, which emphasizes that change begins with human effort and self-transformation (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Career exploration in Islamic higher education can be viewed as both a psychological and ethical process that supports students in making realistic, responsible, and meaningful career decisions.

This study contributes to career development literature by extending the discussion of career exploration into the context of Islamic higher education. Previous studies have generally examined career exploration as a psychological and developmental process related to employability, self-efficacy, identity formation, and career readiness (Koropogui et al., 2026; Le et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023). The present study adds a value-based perspective by showing that career exploration in Islamic higher education can also be understood as a process through which students connect self-understanding, occupational possibilities, ethical responsibility, lawful livelihood, meaningful work, and social contribution. This contribution is relevant to Islamic educational counseling because career decision-making is not only directed toward obtaining employment, but also toward helping students make career choices that are consistent with their competencies, personal values, and religious commitments. This study strengthens the conceptual link between career exploration, career decision-making, and Islamic value-based counseling.

The practical implication of this study is that Islamic higher education institutions need to develop structured career exploration programs for final-year students. These programs can be implemented by university career centers, guidance and counseling lecturers, academic advisors, and faculty-based student affairs units. The program may include self-assessment, interest and aptitude mapping, career information services, workplace exposure, alumni mentoring, internship preparation, and career decision-making workshops. Career programs and developmental support in different educational contexts have shown that structured exposure, mentoring, and guided reflection can help students understand career pathways and prepare for professional transitions (McCartney & Lee,

2026; Melkman et al., 2026; Taylor et al., 2026). In Islamic higher education, these activities can be strengthened through reflective exercises that help students recognize talents and competencies as *amanah*, evaluate career choices based on lawful work and social benefit, practice active effort in seeking career information, and develop *tawakkul* after careful decision-making.

Career counselors should also identify students with low and moderate levels of career exploration and provide targeted support to strengthen self-understanding, occupational awareness, self-efficacy, and decision-making confidence. Preventive services can provide early career literacy and labor market information, developmental services can facilitate workplace exploration and career identity formation, while responsive services can assist students who experience career anxiety, family pressure, or uncertainty in making career choices. Digital resources may also support career exploration when used critically, although students still need counseling guidance to interpret information accurately and avoid overreliance on fragmented or biased sources (Duan et al., 2026; Pribadi et al., 2026). These efforts may help students make career decisions that are realistic, ethical, personally meaningful, and socially beneficial.

This study has several limitations. First, the correlational quantitative design does not allow causal conclusions about the relationship between career exploration and career decision-making. The findings should be interpreted as predictive associations rather than causal effects. Second, the sample was limited to final-year students from one Islamic higher education institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Third, this study examined only career exploration as the predictor variable, while other relevant factors, such as career decision-making self-efficacy, social support, family expectations, career maturity, career adaptability, religiosity, and employability skills, were not included. Fourth, the use of self-report questionnaires may involve response bias and may not fully capture students' actual career exploration behaviors. Future studies should employ longitudinal, qualitative, or mixed-methods designs, involve broader institutional contexts, and examine additional variables to produce a more comprehensive model of career decision-making among students in Islamic higher education.

Future research may also evaluate the effectiveness of structured career counseling interventions, including Islamic value-based career counseling, workplace exploration

programs, alumni mentoring, and digital career guidance. Comparative studies across Islamic and non-Islamic higher education institutions may provide a clearer understanding of how religious values, institutional support, cultural expectations, and labor market readiness interact in shaping students' career decisions. Studies involving students from different disciplines, regions, and socioeconomic backgrounds may also strengthen the generalizability of findings. In addition, future research should examine whether career exploration mediates or moderates the relationships among self-efficacy, social support, career adaptability, anxiety, employability skills, and career decision-making readiness.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study found that career exploration was a significant positive predictor of career decision-making among final-year students in Islamic higher education. Most respondents demonstrated a moderate level of career exploration, indicating that students had begun to engage in self-exploration, occupational information seeking, and exploration of career opportunities, although this process still requires more structured support. The regression results showed that higher career exploration was associated with stronger career decision-making ability, suggesting that students who actively explore career information and reflect on their interests, abilities, values, and occupational possibilities tend to make clearer and more confident career decisions. Theoretically, this study extends career exploration research by situating career decision-making within Islamic higher education, where career choice is not only related to employability but also to ethical responsibility, meaningful work, lawful livelihood, and social contribution. Practically, the findings can inform the development of Islamic value-based career guidance and counseling services that integrate self-assessment, career information, workplace exposure, decision-making support, and reflection on Islamic values. However, this study is limited by its correlational design, self-report data, and sample from a single institution, which restrict causal interpretation and broader generalization. Future studies should include additional variables, such as career decision-making self-efficacy, social support, career maturity, career adaptability, religiosity, and employability skills, and employ longitudinal, qualitative, or mixed-methods designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' career decision-making processes.

### Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was not required for this study because the research involved minimal risk to participants and did not include clinical intervention or collection of sensitive personal data. This research was conducted in accordance with institutional procedures and permissions. The author(s) confirm that the study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality protection.

### Declaration of Generative AI Use

The author(s) used DeepL Translator to assist with language editing and readability improvement. The author(s) have reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted content and accept full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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