

## **Enhancing Employability: The Role of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy in Management Programs**

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Career readiness has become a critical outcome in management education as employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate competencies such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving. Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE), defined as individuals' confidence in performing tasks related to career planning, is recognised as a key predictor of effective career development. However, limited empirical research has examined how CDMSE influences career readiness among management students in emerging economies such as India, where the skill gap between academic training and industry expectations remains a major concern. This study investigates the relationship between CDMSE and career readiness among BBA and MBA students and examines the predictive influence of CDMSE dimensions—self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving—on career readiness. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted using validated scales (Taylor & Betz, 1983; NACE, 2021), and data were collected from management students through convenience sampling. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression techniques were performed using Jamovi software. Results indicate a positive and significant relationship between CDMSE and career readiness. Further, all five dimensions of CDMSE were found to be significant predictors of career readiness, with planning and self-appraisal emerging as the strongest contributors. The study highlights the need for universities to strengthen career guidance, employability skill training, and experiential learning to enhance students' confidence in career decision-making. Findings contribute to theory by extending self-efficacy applications in career readiness research and offer practical insights for educators, policymakers, and career counsellors aiming to improve employability outcomes for management graduates.

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### Introduction

In recent years, employability and career readiness have emerged as central outcomes of management education, driven by rapid changes in labour markets and increasing employer expectations. Management graduates are no longer evaluated solely on academic performance but are expected to demonstrate a range of transferable competencies, including communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving abilities. Despite possessing formal qualifications, many graduates continue to face challenges in transitioning from academia to the workforce, highlighting a persistent gap between educational outcomes and industry requirements.

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks related to career exploration, planning, and decision-making. Rooted in Bandura's self-efficacy theory, CDMSE has been recognised as a critical psychological resource influencing career-related behaviours and outcomes. Individuals with high CDMSE are more likely to engage in proactive career planning, seek relevant occupational information, and make confident career choices.

In the Indian context, this issue is particularly significant due to the expanding higher education sector and concerns regarding graduate employability. Management programs such as BBA and MBA are designed to prepare students for professional roles; however, questions remain regarding their effectiveness in fostering career readiness. While prior studies have examined CDMSE in relation to career choice and career adaptability, limited empirical research has explored its role in predicting career readiness among management students in emerging economies.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines the relationship between CDMSE and career readiness among BBA and MBA students. Further, it investigates the predictive influence of specific CDMSE dimensions—self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving—on career readiness. By doing so, the study contributes to both theory and practice by extending self-efficacy research into the domain of employability and offering insights for strengthening career development initiatives within management education.

The concept of career readiness has gained prominence as higher education institutions are increasingly held accountable for graduates' employability outcomes. Career readiness encompasses not only technical knowledge but also the preparedness of students to navigate career transitions, adapt to workplace demands, and demonstrate professional behaviours valued by employers. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2021), career readiness is reflected through competencies such as critical thinking, ISBN code 978-93-83302-80-2

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communication, teamwork, leadership, professionalism, and career management skills. For management students, these competencies are particularly vital, as they are expected to assume decision-making and leadership roles early in their careers.

However, evidence suggests that many management graduates lack adequate confidence in making informed career decisions, despite possessing academic qualifications. This lack of confidence often results in indecisiveness, poor career planning, and difficulty aligning personal strengths with occupational opportunities. Such challenges underscore the importance of psychological factors that influence career behaviour, particularly self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' motivation, persistence, and performance in complex tasks, including career-related decision-making (Bandura, 1997).

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) provides a useful framework for understanding how students' confidence in career-related competencies translates into career readiness. CDMSE reflects individuals' perceived ability to assess their strengths, gather occupational information, set realistic career goals, plan career paths, and solve career-related problems (Taylor & Betz, 1983). Students with higher CDMSE are more likely to engage proactively in career exploration activities, utilise career services effectively, and develop employability skills. Despite its relevance, empirical research examining CDMSE as a predictor of career readiness—particularly among management students in emerging economies like India—remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between CDMSE and career readiness and to identify the specific dimensions of CDMSE that significantly influence career readiness among BBA and MBA students.

### Review of Literature

#### Career Readiness and Employability

Career readiness is widely regarded as a multidimensional construct that reflects an individual's preparedness to enter and succeed in the workforce. It involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours necessary for effective career performance and adaptability in dynamic work environments (NACE, 2021). In management education, career readiness is closely linked to employability, as employers expect graduates to demonstrate both technical competence and transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving (Yorke, 2006).

Several studies have highlighted a persistent employability gap among management graduates, particularly in developing economies. While academic curricula provide theoretical foundations, they often fall short in fostering practical skills and career management competencies required by industry (Bridgstock, 2009). In the Indian context, rapid expansion of higher education and increased competition in the job market have intensified concerns regarding graduate readiness for employment (Blom & Saeki, 2011). As

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a result, there is growing emphasis on identifying psychological and behavioural factors that contribute to career readiness beyond academic achievement.

### **Self-Efficacy Theory and Career Development**

Self-efficacy, as conceptualised by Bandura (1997), refers to individuals' beliefs in their capability to organise and execute actions required to manage prospective situations. Self-efficacy influences goal setting, effort, persistence, and resilience when faced with challenges. In career development literature, self-efficacy has been consistently associated with career exploration, decision-making, and career success outcomes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) posits that self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals interact to shape career interests and choices. Individuals with strong self-efficacy are more likely to explore career options, seek information, and commit to career goals. Conversely, low self-efficacy may lead to avoidance behaviours, indecision, and reduced career engagement. This theoretical framework provides a strong basis for examining career decision-making self-efficacy as a determinant of career readiness among students.

### **Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE)**

Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) was introduced by Taylor and Betz (1983) to assess individuals' confidence in performing tasks essential to effective career decision-making. CDMSE comprises five key dimensions: self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving. Together, these dimensions reflect an individual's perceived ability to understand personal strengths, explore career options, set career goals, develop plans, and overcome career-related obstacles.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that CDMSE is positively associated with career exploration behaviour, career commitment, and career adaptability (Betz & Luzzo, 1996; Creed, Patton, & Bartrum, 2002). Students with higher CDMSE are more proactive in seeking career guidance and exhibit greater confidence in navigating career transitions. In management education, where career paths are diverse and competitive, CDMSE is particularly relevant in shaping students' readiness to enter the workforce.

### **Dimensions of CDMSE and Career Outcomes**

Each dimension of CDMSE plays a distinct role in career development. Self-appraisal enables individuals to recognise their interests, values, and competencies, which is essential for making informed career choices. Occupational information refers to the ability to gather and utilise information about careers, industries, and job requirements. Studies suggest that access to occupational information enhances career clarity and awareness of employability (Zikic & Saks, 2009).

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Goal selection and planning are critical for translating career aspirations into actionable steps. Individuals who are confident in setting career goals and planning their career paths are more likely to engage in skill development and experiential learning opportunities (Lent et al., 2016). Problem-solving, the final dimension, reflects individuals' confidence in handling career-related challenges and uncertainties. Effective problem-solving has been linked to career resilience and adaptability, which are key components of career readiness in uncertain labour markets.

### **CDMSE and Career Readiness**

While previous research has extensively examined CDMSE in relation to career choice, career maturity, and career adaptability, limited studies have directly linked CDMSE to career readiness. Career readiness requires not only skills but also confidence in managing one's career, making CDMSE a theoretically relevant predictor. Some studies indicate that students with higher self-efficacy demonstrate stronger employability skills and greater engagement in career preparation activities (Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

However, empirical evidence on the role of CDMSE in enhancing career readiness among management students, particularly in the Indian context, remains scarce. Most existing studies have been conducted in Western contexts and have focused on undergraduate populations broadly rather than management-specific programs. This gap highlights the need for focused research examining how CDMSE and its dimensions influence career readiness among BBA and MBA students. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to contribute to career development and management education literature by empirically investigating the relationship between CDMSE and career readiness and identifying the most influential dimensions of CDMSE.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The present study employed a quantitative research approach, utilising a cross-sectional survey design, to investigate the relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and career readiness among management students. This design was considered appropriate as it enables the objective measurement of variables and statistical examination of relationships among constructs at a single point in time.

#### **Sample and Data Collection**

The sample for the study consisted of **278 management students**, including both **undergraduate (BBA) and postgraduate (MBA) students**, enrolled in higher education institutions. Data were collected using the **convenience sampling technique**, which facilitated access to respondents who were readily available and willing to participate. This sampling

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method is commonly employed in educational and behavioural research when probability sampling is not feasible.

A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents, and participation was voluntary. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be used solely for academic research. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the final analysis to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data.

### Variables and Measurement

The present study examines the influence of **career decision-making self-efficacy** on **career readiness** among management students. The variables included in the study were identified based on established theoretical frameworks and validated measurement scales.

#### Independent Variable: Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE)

Career decision-making self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to perform tasks necessary for making effective career decisions (Taylor & Betz, 1983). In this study, CDMSE is treated as a **multidimensional construct** and is measured across five dimensions:

- **Self-Appraisal:** Confidence in assessing one's interests, values, strengths, and weaknesses relevant to career decisions.
- **Occupational Information:** Confidence in seeking and using information about career options, industries, and job roles.
- **Goal Selection:** Confidence in selecting suitable and realistic career goals.
- **Career Planning:** Confidence in formulating plans and strategies to achieve career objectives.
- **Problem-Solving:** Confidence in handling obstacles and challenges encountered in career decision-making.

CDMSE was measured using the **Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale** developed by Taylor and Betz (1983). Responses were recorded on a Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of self-efficacy.

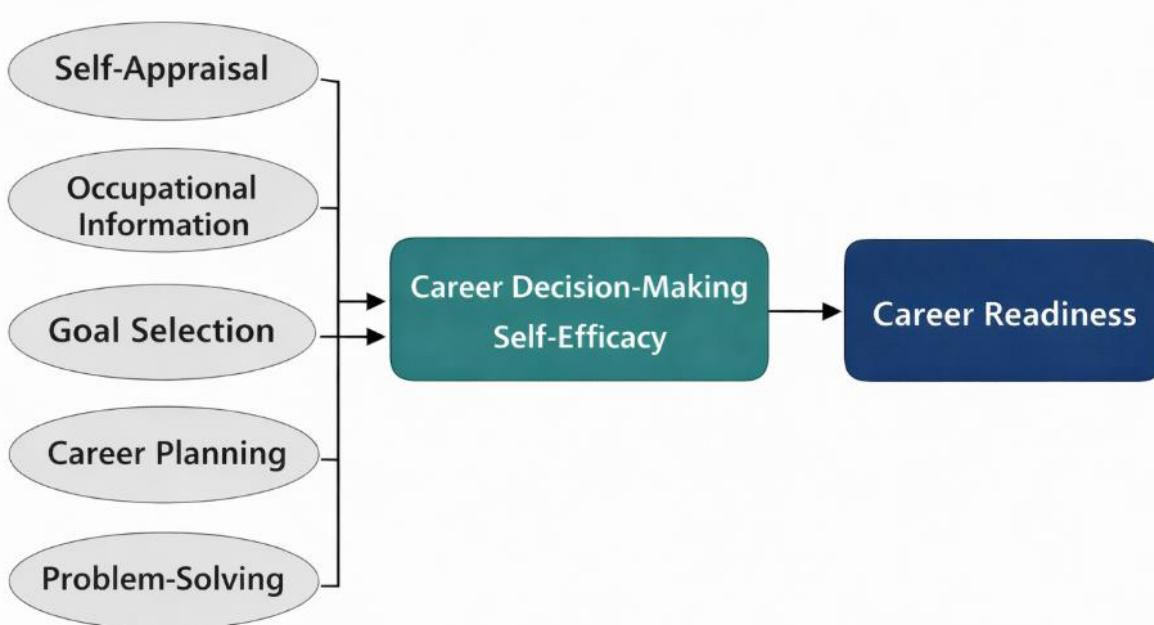
#### Dependent Variable: Career Readiness

Career readiness refers to the extent to which individuals are prepared to successfully enter and function effectively in the workforce. It encompasses a range of competencies, including communication skills, teamwork, leadership, professionalism, critical thinking, and career management abilities (NACE, 2021).

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In this study, career readiness was measured as a **single composite construct** using the **Career Readiness Competencies Considered Essential for Career Success** framework developed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2021). Higher scores indicate higher perceived levels of career readiness.

### Conceptual Framework of the Study



The conceptual framework of the study is grounded in **Self-Efficacy Theory** (Bandura, 1997) and **Social Cognitive Career Theory** (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). These theories propose that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities significantly influence their behaviour, motivation, and performance outcomes.

In the present study, **career decision-making self-efficacy** is conceptualised as the key **independent variable** influencing **career readiness**, the **dependent variable**. The framework posits that management students who possess higher confidence in evaluating themselves, gathering occupational information, selecting goals, planning career paths, and solving career-related problems are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of career readiness.

Each dimension of CDMSE—self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, career planning, and problem-solving—is assumed to have a **direct and positive influence** on career readiness. Strong self-efficacy beliefs enable students to engage more actively in career preparation behaviours, thereby enhancing their employability and workforce preparedness.

## Instruments

### Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale

Career decision-making self-efficacy was measured using the **Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE)** developed by Taylor and Betz (1983). The scale assesses individuals' confidence in performing career-related tasks across five dimensions: **self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving**. Responses were recorded on a Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of self-efficacy. The CDMSE scale has been widely validated and has demonstrated strong reliability across diverse student populations.

### Career Readiness Scale

Career readiness was measured using the **Career Readiness Competencies** framework developed by the **National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2021)**. The scale evaluates students' perceived preparedness across key employability competencies, including communication, teamwork, professionalism, leadership, critical thinking, and career management skills. Responses were obtained using a Likert-type scale, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of career readiness.

## Data Analysis

Data were analysed using **Jamovi statistical software**. **Descriptive statistics** were computed to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to examine the distribution of study variables. **Reliability analysis** was conducted using **Cronbach's alpha** to assess the internal consistency of the measurement instruments.

To examine the relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and career readiness, **Pearson's correlation analysis** was employed. Further, **multiple regression analysis** was conducted to assess the predictive influence of the five dimensions of career decision-making self-efficacy on career readiness. Statistical significance was assessed at conventional levels.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the study. Participation was **voluntary**, and respondents were assured of the **confidentiality and anonymity** of their responses. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. All data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

## Data Analysis and Results

Data collected from **278 management students** were analysed using **Jamovi statistical software**. The analysis comprised demographic profiling, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of career decision-making self-efficacy on career readiness.

### 6.1 Demographic Details of the Respondents

Demographic analysis was conducted to understand the background characteristics of the respondents, including gender, level of study, and age group.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 278)\*\*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	128	46.0
	Female	150	54.0
Level of Study	BBA	162	58.3
	MBA	116	41.7
Age Group	Below 20 years	68	24.5
	20–22 years	134	48.2
	Above 22 years	76	27.3

### Interpretation

The demographic profile indicates that the sample consisted of a slightly higher proportion of female respondents (54%) compared to male respondents (46%). Undergraduate students (BBA) formed the majority of the sample, accounting for 58.3%, while MBA students constituted 41.7%. Most respondents were in the **20–22 years age group**, which is typical for management students preparing for career entry.

### 6.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the mean scores and variability of career decision-making self-efficacy and career readiness.

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Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 278)\*\*

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Self-Appraisal	3.78	0.56
Occupational Information	3.62	0.61
Goal Selection	3.70	0.58
Planning	3.85	0.54
Problem-Solving	3.60	0.63
CDMSE (Overall)	3.71	0.49
Career Readiness	3.74	0.52

*(Measured on a 5-point Likert scale)*

### Interpretation

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents demonstrated **moderate to high levels** of career decision-making self-efficacy and career readiness. Among the CDMSE dimensions, **planning** recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.85), suggesting that students felt most confident in organising and planning their career paths. Career readiness also showed a relatively high mean score (M = 3.74), reflecting a positive perception of workforce preparedness among management students.

### 6.3 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using **Cronbach's alpha** to assess the internal consistency of the study instruments.

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Table 3 :Reliability Statistics\*\*

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Self-Appraisal	5	0.84
Occupational Information	5	0.81
Goal Selection	5	0.83
Planning	5	0.86
Problem-Solving	5	0.80
CDMSE (Overall)	25	0.92
Career Readiness	20	0.90

**Interpretation**

All scales demonstrated **good to excellent internal consistency**, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.80 to 0.92. These results exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming the reliability of the measurement instruments.

**Correlation Analysis**

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and career readiness.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix\*\*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-Appraisal	1					
2. Occupational Information	.52**	1				
3. Goal Selection	.58**	.55**	1			
4. Planning	.61**	.54**	.59**	1		
5. Problem-Solving	.49**	.50**	.53**	.56**	1	
6. Career Readiness	.62**	.55**	.58**	.65**	.54**	1

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### **Interpretation**

The correlation results reveal **positive and statistically significant relationships** between all dimensions of career decision-making self-efficacy and career readiness. **Planning** ( $r = .65$ ) and **self-appraisal** ( $r = .62$ ) exhibited the strongest correlations, indicating their critical role in enhancing students' career readiness.

### **Regression Analysis**

Multiple regression analysis was performed with **career readiness as the dependent variable** and the five CDMSE dimensions as independent variables.

Table 5

#### Multiple Regression Results\*\*

Predictor	$\beta$	t	p
Self-Appraisal	0.28	4.86	< .001
Occupational Information	0.14	2.41	.017
Goal Selection	0.19	3.28	.001
Planning	0.32	5.72	< .001
Problem-Solving	0.11	2.02	.044

#### **Model**

$R^2$  =

$F(5, 272) = 69.21, p < .001$

#### **Summary:**

0.56

### **Interpretation**

The regression model was statistically significant and explained **56% of the variance** in career readiness. **Planning** and **self-appraisal** emerged as the strongest predictors, while all five dimensions of CDMSE significantly contributed to career readiness. This supports the study's hypotheses and confirms the predictive role of career decision-making self-efficacy.

### **Summary of Results**

The analysis demonstrates that career decision-making self-efficacy has a significant and positive influence on career readiness among management students. Strong confidence in planning, self-appraisal, and goal selection enhances students' preparedness for the workforce.

## Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between **career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE)** and **career readiness** among management students, with specific emphasis on the predictive role of CDMSE dimensions. The findings revealed a **positive and significant relationship** between CDMSE and career readiness, suggesting that students who possess higher confidence in making career-related decisions are better prepared to transition into the workforce.

Among the dimensions of CDMSE, **career planning** and **self-appraisal** emerged as the strongest predictors of career readiness. This indicates that students who are confident in evaluating their strengths and weaknesses and in systematically planning their career paths are more likely to exhibit higher levels of employability preparedness. These findings align with **Self-Efficacy Theory** (Bandura, 1997), which posits that individuals with strong efficacy beliefs demonstrate greater motivation, persistence, and goal-directed behaviour. They are also consistent with **Social Cognitive Career Theory** (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), which highlights the role of self-efficacy in shaping career behaviours and outcomes.

The positive influence of **goal selection**, **occupational information**, and **problem-solving** further underscores the multidimensional nature of career decision-making self-efficacy. Students who are confident in accessing career information, selecting appropriate goals, and managing career-related challenges are more likely to engage in proactive career preparation activities. These results support earlier studies that have linked CDMSE to career adaptability, career maturity, and employability outcomes (Betz & Luzzo, 1996; Jackson & Wilton, 2017).

In the context of management education in India, the findings are particularly relevant. Despite academic exposure, many management students experience uncertainty regarding career choices and workforce expectations. The present study demonstrates that enhancing students' confidence in career decision-making competencies can significantly improve their career readiness. Thus, CDMSE serves as a critical psychological mechanism bridging academic learning and employability outcomes.

## Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the influence of **career decision-making self-efficacy** on **career readiness** among management students. The findings provide empirical evidence that CDMSE is a significant predictor of career readiness awareness and preparedness. All five dimensions of CDMSE—self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, career planning, and problem-solving—were found to contribute positively to career readiness, with career planning and self-appraisal playing the most influential roles.

The results highlight the importance of integrating career development interventions within management education curricula. Beyond imparting technical and theoretical knowledge,

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institutions must focus on strengthening students' confidence in career decision-making processes. By doing so, higher education institutions can enhance students' ability to navigate career transitions and meet evolving labour market demands.

Overall, the study contributes to the existing literature by extending the application of self-efficacy theory to the domain of career readiness and employability. It provides valuable insights for educators, career counsellors, and policymakers seeking to improve workforce preparedness among management graduates.

### Future Scope and Directions for Further Research

While the study offers meaningful insights, several avenues for future research emerge. First, the use of a **cross-sectional design** limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Future studies may adopt **longitudinal research designs** to examine how career decision-making self-efficacy and career readiness evolve over time.

Second, the study employed **convenience sampling** and focused on management students, which may consider expanding the sample to include students from other academic disciplines to enhance generalisability. Comparative studies across disciplines, institutions, or regions could provide deeper insights into contextual variations in career readiness.

Third, future research may explore **mediating or moderating variables**, such as career guidance support, internships, mentoring, employability skills training, or personality traits, to better understand the mechanisms linking CDMSE and career readiness. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, may also provide richer insights into students' career decision-making experiences.

Finally, future studies could examine the effectiveness of **career development interventions** designed to enhance CDMSE and assess their impact on career readiness and actual employment outcomes. Such research would further strengthen the practical relevance of career development initiatives in higher education.

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