

Career optimism of Jakarta's University students

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Abstract: Career optimism is an important factor that influences university students' readiness to face the world of work. Given the significant challenges posed by career uncertainty today, understanding university students' levels of career optimism is an important area of investigation. This study aims to examine the level of career optimism among university students in Jakarta. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed involving 866 active students from several higher education institutions in Jakarta. The measurement instrument used was the Career Futures Inventory (CFI), particularly the Career Optimism sub-scale, which had been translated into Indonesian. Data analysis was carried out by using descriptive statistical techniques. The instrument achieved acceptable construct validity, evidenced by item-total correlations ($r \geq 0,30$), and demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0,85, making it appropriate for use in this research. The study revealed that the majority of university students were classified as having high (37,8%) and moderate (29,8%) levels of career optimism, indicating that they hold positive views about their prospective careers. These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive career support within higher education institutions to improve students' readiness for employment. Additionally, the study provides groundwork for implementing campus-level psychological interventions targeting improvements in students' confidence, career self-efficacy, and early comprehension of world of work conditions.

Keywords: career optimism; university students; Jakarta.

Abstrak: Optimisme karier merupakan faktor penting yang memengaruhi kesiapan mahasiswa dalam menghadapi dunia kerja. Mengingat besarnya tantangan ketidakpastian karier di era sekarang, pemahaman mengenai tingkat optimisme karier mahasiswa menjadi relevan untuk diteliti. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan tingkat optimisme karier mahasiswa di Jakarta. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif dengan partisipan sebanyak 866 mahasiswa aktif dari beberapa perguruan tinggi di Jakarta. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah Career Futures Inventory (CFI) subskala Career Optimism yang telah diterjemahkan ke dalam Bahasa Indonesia. Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif. Instrumen ini telah teruji validitas konstruk melalui analisis korelasi item-total ($r \geq 0,30$) serta memiliki reliabilitas yang tinggi dengan nilai Cronbach's Alpha sebesar 0,85, sehingga layak digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa berada pada kategori optimisme tinggi (37,8%) dan sedang (29,8%), yang mengindikasikan adanya pandangan positif mahasiswa terhadap masa depan karier mereka. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya dukungan karier di perguruan tinggi untuk meningkatkan kesiapan kerja mahasiswa. Selain itu, hasil penelitian memberikan dasar bagi pengembangan intervensi psikologis berbasis kampus yang berfokus pada peningkatan keyakinan diri, efikasi karier, serta pemahaman tentang dunia kerja sejak dini.

Kata kunci: optimisme karier; mahasiswa; Jakarta.

INTRODUCTION

Career occupies a central role in an individual's life, acting simultaneously as a means of economic fulfillment and as a pathway to self-actualization. As individuals navigating the transition from academic life to professional contexts, university students need to possess sufficient preparedness to confront the career-related challenges that lie ahead. A key factor that facilitates career readiness is career optimism, an individual's affirmative belief about their future career outcomes (Gofur, 2021). Within the lifespan framework, career development is conceptualized as a continuous, adaptive, and multidimensional process, profoundly shaped by the individual's social context. Hirschi et al. (2022) developed the notion of Whole-Life Career Self-Management, highlighting that career management encompasses not only employment-related choices but also the integration of broader social roles, including familial responsibilities, community roles, and the maintenance of work-life balance.

Career optimism represents a psychological construct that assists individuals in responding adaptively to the uncertainties and shifting demands of the work environment. High career optimism is commonly associated with increased persistence, resilience, and readiness to pursue career opportunities, notwithstanding the obstacles encountered. According to Rottinghaus et al., (2005), career optimism is an inclination to expect the best result regarding long term career, making it one of the key indicators in *Career Futures Inventory* (CFI). There are some factors affecting this kind of optimism, both internal factors, such as self-efficacy and self-concept, and external factors, such as social support and field experience opportunities (Gofur, 2021; Eva et al., 2020). Optimism is also considered an important psychological resource that helps individuals maintain hope in difficult situations (Carver et al., 2010).

Career optimism appears to facilitate the realization of individuals' professional aspirations. Recent studies suggest that higher levels of career optimism contribute positively to the career success of university students. Optimistic students generally have a clear understanding of their abilities and interests and stay committed to pursuing their career targets (Nakuloadi et al., 2024). Studies show that students with career optimism are likely to maintain positive outlooks regarding their professional future and demonstrate greater

commitment to achieving their career objectives (Nakuloadi et al., 2024). Additionally, Putri & Yuniasanti (2023) found a significant positive correlation between career optimism and career adaptability among final-year university students, indicating that optimistic students are better prepared to face challenges and changes in the workforce.

Initial studies on optimism highlighted that maintaining positive future expectations is associated with mental well-being and personal resilience (Scheier & Carver, 1992). Furthermore, Anggraini et al. (2022) demonstrated that students with high career optimism are generally more adaptable when facing career-related changes, especially in transitional contexts like the post-pandemic period. Recent researches emphasize that career optimism plays a significant role in determining university students' satisfaction with their choice of departments. Pazer (2024) reported that students exhibiting high levels of career optimism, marked by strong belief in career opportunities and preparedness for professional challenges, generally show higher satisfaction with their choice of departments and greater confidence in entering the workforce. In line with that finding, Oliveira & Marques (2024) noted that career adaptability and academic engagement are significantly positively correlated with students' life satisfaction, reflecting their approval of their chosen study programs. Overall, the combination of career optimism, adaptive capacities, and academic engagement serves as a significant determinant of university students' satisfaction with their choice of departments and their anticipated career trajectory.

Nevertheless, previous studies still have certain limitations. Most studies have concentrated on final-year students or other variables such as career adaptability and academic engagement, leaving a broader understanding of university students' career optimism still limited. In addition, the majority of previous research has focused on Indonesian students in general, overlooking the unique context of Jakarta, where economic and educational factors create a more competitive career environment. Therefore, a research gap regarding the need for a representative mapping of career optimism levels among university students in Special Region of Jakarta still remains.

On the other hand, today's workforce is facing intricate dynamics, including digital

transformation, globalization, and competition among university graduates. This contributes to heightened pressure and uncertainty during the transition from academic life to the labor market. Particularly in Jakarta, which had served as the nation's capital for a long time, while remains a hub for economic, social, and educational endeavors, career competition among students is intensified. According to the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2023), open unemployment in Special Region of Jakarta continues to exceed the national average, reflecting a mismatch between university graduates and labor market demands.

Observational data show a significant mismatch between graduates' study programs and their jobs, reinforced by Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim's claim that 80% of higher education graduates in Indonesia do not work in fields corresponding to their majors (Saputra & Heikal, 2024) coupled with students' limited psychological readiness to face career challenges. In this regard, examining career optimism is essential to gauge the level of students' preparedness for future professional challenges. The phenomena of "Indonesia Gelap" (Dark Indonesia) and "Kabur Aja Dulu" (Escape First) represent current trends in public discourse, highlighting the apprehension of young Indonesians toward policies shaping their future. Understanding the degree of career optimism allows higher education institutions to tailor interventions and policies to better facilitate students' professional development.

Therefore, this study aims to illustrate the level of career optimism among university students in Special Region of Jakarta due to the lack of researches that focused on examining this population. By employing a relatively large sample, 866 respondents, this study is able to produce findings that reliably reflect the general characteristics of the population. This study's results aim to inform the design of data-driven career guidance and counseling initiatives and serve as a basis for subsequent research in the fields of educational psychology and higher education career development.

METHOD

The present research utilized a descriptive quantitative methodology and a cross-sectional survey design to generate an overarching depiction of university students' career optimism (Pregoner, 2024). This methodological approach is intended to portray the examined phenomena in a systematic, factual, and accurate manner (Sugiyono, 2019). Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study, with inclusion criteria consisting of active students enrolled in various departments across several universities in Jakarta. Purposive sampling technique is categorized as non-probability method in which participants are chosen according to predefined characteristics that align with the aims of the research. In quantitative research settings, this technique is often employed in cross-sectional survey studies to maintain the adequacy and internal coherence of the data (Memon et al., 2025).

The study adopted the Career Futures Inventory (CFI), formulated by Rottinghaus et al. (2005), with emphasis on the Career Optimism subscale. This instrument was translated into Indonesian using a forward-backward translation technique by certified sworn translators and underwent readability assessment through expert judgment. Construct validity and reliability of the instrument were confirmed in this study, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.845 indicating very good internal consistency.

Data collection was conducted digitally by disseminating an online questionnaire containing the Career Optimism scale. The total score was classified into five categories very low, low, moderate, high, and very high with reference to the empirical score distribution. Techniques of data analysis used in this research involves descriptive statistics, frequencies count, percentages calculations, and distribution table presentations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistical procedures were employed to measure the frequency and percentage distributions within the five categories of career optimism: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. The table below presents the distribution of respondents across the five career optimism categories.

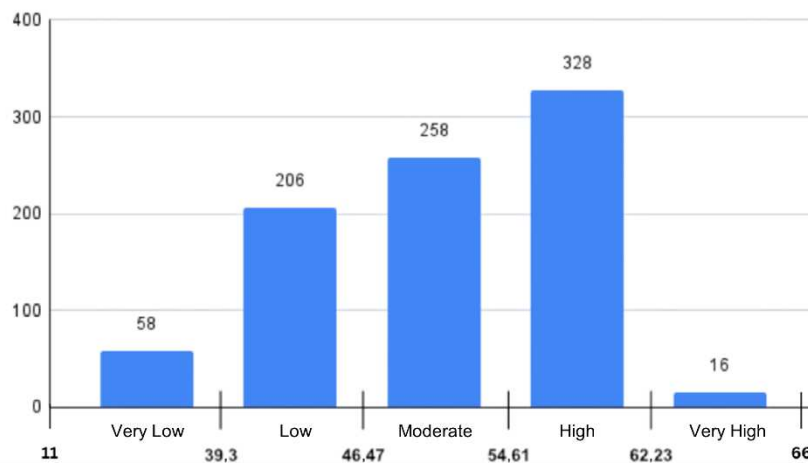
Table 1. Table of distribution of career optimism level

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very Low	58	6,7%
Low	206	23,8%
Moderate	258	29,8%
High	328	37,8%
Very High	16	1,9%

A total of 866 active university students from several universities in the DKI Jakarta region were included as respondents in this study. This study aims to investigate university students' career optimism level using the Career

Optimism subscale of the Career Futures Inventory (CFI), which had been translated into Indonesian and examined for both validity and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0,845).

Figure 1. Diagram of Career Optimism



The study revealed that the majority of university students were classified as having high (37,8%) and moderate (29,8%) levels of career optimism, indicating that generally they hold positive views about their prospective careers. This aligns with the perspective presented by Rottinghaus et al. (2005) stating that career optimism represents an individual's anticipation of optimal outcomes in the trajectory of long-term career development. Individuals with high career optimism generally display a positive perspective

in challenging circumstances, demonstrate problem-solving abilities, and believe in the success of their future careers.

Moreover, the total Career Optimism scores of the students revealed a mean of 78,45 and a standard deviation of 9,89. The observed scores ranged from 55 to 102, with a maximum possible score of 108. This shows that despite the generally positive career optimism among students, there exists a segment whose scores are below the mean.

Table 2. Table of distribution of career optimism level based on sex

Category	Sex		Total	Percentage
	Male	Female		
Very Low	28	30	58	6,7%
Low	86	120	206	23,8%
Moderate	106	152	258	29,8%
High	170	158	328	37,8%
Very High	7	9	16	1,9%

Further demographic analysis indicated that of the 866 participants, 68,1% were female and 31,9% were male. When linked to career optimism levels, the finding indicates an absence of significant distinctions between the two gender categories. The near-equivalent percentage of high career optimism suggests that gender does not serve as a primary determinant of students' positive perception on their future careers. Students of both genders showed equivalent adaptive functioning and parallel levels of

optimism regarding their career futures.

It implies that gender is not a determining factor in career optimism; instead, psychological attributes and social environments play a more substantial role. The result aligns with Alvaretta's (2023) study, which similarly identified relatively high career optimism in senior university students. Correspondingly, Utomo et al. (2022) reported that individuals with access to comprehensive career information and support tend to show enhanced career optimism

Table 3. Table of distribution of career optimism level based on university location

Category	University Location					Total	Percentage
	North Jakarta	West Jakarta	South Jakarta	East Jakarta	Central Jakarta		
Very Low	9	12	13	9	15	58	6,7%
Low	16	81	29	38	42	206	23,8%
Moderate	61	68	48	39	42	258	29,8%
High	64	58	61	80	65	328	37,8%
Very High	3	1	4	5	3	16	1,9%
Total	220	167	155	171	153	866	100%

Based on the location of the respondents' universities originated from institutions located in all five areas of Jakarta Special Region Central, East, West, North, and South Jakarta, the distribution of career optimism was found to be relatively consistent, with a predominance of high and moderate optimism categories. The highest proportions of high career optimism were observed in Central Jakarta and South Jakarta, possibly owing to students' better access to

established academic resources, including career services, industry collaborations, and internship opportunities. Meanwhile, higher proportions within the moderate and low categories were exhibited in the regions of East Jakarta and North Jakarta. This finding indicates that geographical factors or institutional facilities may play a role in shaping students' career perceptions and expectations.

Table 4. Table of distribution of career optimism level based on semester

Academic Progress (Semester)	Optimism Category					Total	Percentage
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High		
1	12	48	73	113	5	251	28,9%
2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0,1%
3	13	32	39	111	6	201	23,2%
4	0	4	0	0	0	4	0,4%
5	3	23	27	5	0	58	6,7%
6	4	8	4	0	0	16	1,8%

7	19	67	100	77	3	266	30,7%
8	0	5	3	1	0	9	1%
9	7	17	12	20	2	58	6,7%
10	0	0	0	1	0	1	0,1%
11	0	1	0	0	0	1	0,1%
Total	220	167	155	171	153	866	100%

Based on the academic progress, the respondents were distributed across semesters 1 through 8 and beyond. The analysis shows that higher career optimism tends to be found among respondents in semesters 1, 3, and 7, which generally correspond to students' academic transition phases. Respondents in semester 1 and 3 exhibit high optimism which is likely attributable to their ongoing exploration phase and motivational boost associated with early university experiences. Meanwhile, students in semester 7 also show high levels of optimism as they begin working on their undergraduate thesis and developing post-graduation plans. In contrast, semesters 5 and 6 demonstrate a modest rise in the proportion of respondents categorized as having moderate or low levels of career optimism. This may occur because students are experiencing a more complex period of academic adaptation, coupled with the early onset of career-focused stressors.

However, when compared with the results reported by Oktaviani and Dirga (2021), an intriguing distinction emerges. The study stated that during covid-19 pandemic, numerous university students experienced career optimism due to economic instability and restricted opportunities for field-based practice. The result strengthens the perspective that career optimism is markedly conditioned by the external factors and socioeconomic realities encountered by university students.

Furthermore, career optimism is closely related to self-efficacy. Individuals who possess strong self-efficacy tend to believe in their ability to manage obstacles and achieve their intended career outcomes. Gofur (2021) stated that university students with strong self-efficacy have more confidence in choosing their career path, despite all the uncertainties they face. Moreover, social support from family, lecturer, or peers also serves as an essential factor in fostering students' positive outlooks toward their future careers (Eva et al., 2020). This finding is in line with a recent investigation by Charokopaki and Douros (2025), which demonstrates that dispositional optimism contributes substantially to the development of general and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and that integrating optimism into self-efficacy and

outcome-expectation frameworks strengthens motivational processes and future career success.

From an institutional perspective, this finding underscore the critical role of higher education in supporting students' career readiness (Bemi et al., 2024). Career guidance service, soft skills training, internship program, and self-development workshop can serve as effective strategy to increase career optimism. Higher education institution must engage in preventive and promotive efforts to ensure that students, especially those with low career optimism, are supported through early and relevant intervention programs.

The result revealed that a substantial proportion of Jakarta-based university students exhibit high (37,8%) and moderate (29,8%) levels of career optimism, reflected in a mean score of 78,45. The results align with previous research conducted by Alvaretta (2023) and Utomo et al. (2022), which similarly revealed that final-year university students exhibit higher career optimism, especially when supported by adequate career counseling and comprehensive work-related information.

Nevertheless, the fact that nearly 30% of students fall within the low to very low optimism categories highlights challenges that align with the results consistent with Anggraini et al. (2022) which reported that economic uncertainty causing students' career optimism during post-pandemic transition period. These result parallels the study by Oktaviani and Dirga (2021), which documented decreasing optimism among internship students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the strong influence of external and socio-economic factors on career optimism.

In comparison with Pazer's (2024) research, highlighting that students with elevated career optimism exhibit greater satisfaction with their field of study and increased confidence in entering the workforce, the findings in present study show a similar pattern. University students in Special Region of Jakarta exhibiting high career optimism tend to show positive attitudes and preparedness for career challenges, while a portion continue to display hesitation.

Thus, this study reinforces previous literature emphasizing the importance of career optimism as a predictor of work readiness and academic satisfaction. However, unlike previous studies that mainly addressed national-level contexts or final-year students, this research provides a novel contribution by highlighting broader variables of university students in Jakarta, who face more competitive career challenges compared to other regions.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis on 866 students from various universities in Special Region of Jakarta, it can be concluded that generally students possess quite good career optimism level. The majority of respondents fall within the high (37,8%) and moderate (29,8%) career optimism categories. There is only a small portion of them showing career optimism levels in the very low (6,7%), low (23,8%), and very high (1,9%) categories. The average score of respondents' career optimism is 78,45 from maximum score 108, showing a positive tendency in their perception of future career.

This high degree of career optimism suggests that Jakarta Special Region-based university students maintain hope and confidence in pursuing their future career ambitions. The students typically exhibit an optimistic approach toward overcoming challenges and obstacles encountered along their career trajectories. This study highlights that career optimism constitutes a significant factor in facilitating effective career planning and the capacity to make wise and realistic decisions.

However, the finding that approximately 30% students have low and very low levels of career optimism reveals the need for specific and systematic intervention. University students with low levels of career optimism may experience uncertainty in choosing a career path, anxiety about the future, and decreased motivation, potentially affecting both academic performance and work readiness.

Accordingly, it is suggested that universities strengthen their provision of holistic career counseling and guidance programs. The programs need to cover training in career planning, reinforcement of self-efficacy, and the delivery of accurate and relevant workforce information. In addition, it is also crucial to involve academic advisors, campus career units, and educational psychologists in providing support to students, particularly those who exhibit

a pessimistic outlook toward their career future.

For theoretical development and future research, it is recommended for future studies to examine more the factors influencing career optimism, such as internship experiences, economic status, and the role of parents and social environment. Furthermore, it is also recommended to explore other variables related to students' optimism, such as Perceived Future Employability (PFE). PFE refers to individuals' perception on their future skills to obtain and maintain a job. (Gunawan et al., 2024). Incorporating both career optimism and PFE into a unified model can enable future investigations to better elucidate how students construct expectations about their future careers in a social-cognitive context.

Therefore, this research not only illustrates the general level of career optimism among university students in Special Region of Jakarta, but also encourages educators, counselors, and higher education policymakers to design strategies that sustainably support students' preparedness for their future careers.

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