



Exploring The Psychological State Of Career Well-Being In Vocational Students' Choice Of Major Interest

Muhammad Rafli

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

m.rafli04042001@gmail.com

Muzayyinah Al Usrah

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

muzayyinalusrah966@gmail.com

Abstract

Exploring the psychological state of career well-being in vocational students' choice of major interest. This research aims to explore the level of career satisfaction through interest in the scientific fields of majors taken by Vocational High School students in South Sulawesi, especially at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng. This research uses a descriptive quantitative approach. This research uses the Career Well-being Scale (CWS) instrument consisting of 14 items which have been tested for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The sample for this research was 200 students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng. Descriptive data analysis techniques using the JASP statistical test application. The research findings through aspects of positive affective career planning conditions, career meaningfulness conditions, career network conditions/social support as a whole are categorized as high. Recommendations for further research are needed to look at factors and further interventions related to career development in schools.

Keywords: Career Psychological Wellbeing; Interest; Vocational school students.

A. Introduction

The career problem of vocational/vocational education graduates in Indonesia is still an issue considering that the unemployment rate tends to be high. Data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency shows that in August 2021, February 2021 and August 2020, the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) for students graduating from vocational high schools is quite high compared to others. Other

data on (Sandra Desi Caesaria, 2022) shows that 80% of graduates do not even work according to their major/field of science. This gives an indication that vocational/vocational school graduates view the world of work in terms of skills in addition to the scientific field studied (Nuryanto & Eryandi, 2020). Apart from that, career guidance efforts are needed which can be interpreted as assistance from counselors to counselees to get an overview of their potential, determine job positions, develop work performance and solve problems experienced by counselees (Rahmawati, 2022).

Vocational high school students currently belong to generation Z who are in their teens and have also entered the quarter life crisis period which of course has prospects for future career preparation such as the decision to continue their education, work or other necessary choices (Nugraha et al., 2023; Suyono et al., 2021). This triggers many problems related to incompatible interests and majors/career prospects. Every year, many vocational school students are faced with the problem of choosing a major for further studies or employment options (Wahyuningsih & Alhusin, 2019). Various expert responses regarding this phenomenon are based on the fact that when choosing a major, students are not equipped with the basis of their abilities and interests systematically and methodologically (Mohammed et al., 2021).

Rambe et al. (2023) stated that vocational school students need to be equipped with skills that are in line with the field of study/major they are pursuing. Tomy & Pardede (2019) stated that students will be able to better determine their careers based on their potential, interests and talents (Holland, 1959). One of the supporting aspects is soft skills, including communication skills, problem solving, leadership, adaptation, ethics, time management, creativity and teamwork. However, in fact, students do not yet recognize their potential and even the major they will choose during school, which triggers psychological disorders in students such as stress, feeling left behind, overthinking, and even the desire to drop out of school (Anggreni & Immanuel, 2020; Urbanaviciute et al., 2019). This indicates that students' major interests also have a psychological impact on them.

Previous study findings suggest that the impact of low soft skills on career decisions has been studied in depth in various studies. In the world of vocational students, the development of soft skills at school through facilities, learning curriculum, stakeholders and peers influences students' career preparation.(Xu et al., 2023). If these aspects are not fulfilled in a vocational school unit, it will have an impact on career competency imbalances, conflicts of interest, academic burnout, and emotional exhaustion which will affect work performance and achievement after vocational school students enter the professional world (Saripah et al., 2023).

Hard skills and soft skills, social support, and mature career confidence (Career-Efficacy) will provide optimal well-being, self-confidence, and the ability to excel at school and in the world of work (Alissa & Akmal, 2019). Of course, students need soft skills and also social support so that students' well-being will be more optimal. Motivation to learn will certainly influence the career well-being of graduates after working to overcome challenges, emotional stress, unfavorable working conditions which endanger career well-being(Anggreni & Immanuel, 2020).

The psychological state of vocational school students' career well-being is greatly influenced by the extent to which their choice of main interest is in line with their aspirations and career hopes in the future. Research by Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) shows that students who feel that their choice of interests reflects their desired career goals tend to have higher levels of well-being. They found that students' active involvement in the career decision-making process increased their sense of autonomy and self-control, which are key factors in psychological well-being. This supports the claim that the connection between personal interests and career choices can make a positive contribution to overall well-being, especially in the context of vocational school students who are preparing for their future in the world of work.

Furthermore, Gati et al. (2001) emphasize the importance of effective career counseling to help vocational students explore their interests and understand how

these interests can be translated into realistic and satisfying career choices. They argue that the support provided through career guidance not only helps students in choosing a career path that suits their interests but also improves their emotional well-being by reducing confusion and anxiety regarding the future. This underlines the claim that appropriate intervention in the process of selecting major interests in school can play a significant role in improving students' psychological well-being.

Research on career psychological well-being in vocational school students has shown that students' choice of main interests can be influenced by various factors, including family support, educational environment, and individual perceptions of future career prospects. For example, Nurmi and Salmela-Aro (2002) found that students who felt supported by their families and schools in choosing a major that suited their interests tended to have higher levels of career well-being. This relates to the concept of self-determination, where students who have control over their career choices feel more satisfied and motivated, which ultimately has a positive impact on their psychological well-being.

In addition, research also shows that the match between a student's main interests and their desired future job plays an important role in career well-being. Hirschi & Koen (2021) emphasize that vocational school students who have clear career interests that are in line with their skills and personal aspirations tend to be more confident in pursuing their careers. This study highlights the importance of effective career guidance in schools, which can assist students in exploring their interests and understanding how those interests can be applied in real career contexts, thereby improving their psychological well-being in the long term.

This research makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by identifying specific relationships between vocational school students' choice of major interests and their psychological well-being, an area that remains underexplored in the context of vocational education. Through a deeper analysis of factors such as social support, self-efficacy, and the role of career guidance, this research expands understanding of how early career decisions can influence

students' long-term well-being. Wilkins et al. (2018) stated that research examining career well-being in specific contexts, such as vocational education, can provide valuable insights for developing more effective and contextual interventions. Thus, this research not only adds a new dimension to the study of career well-being, but also provides a basis for practical efforts to support the well-being of vocational school students in choosing an appropriate career path.

Although the factors determining students' major interests are relative through interest tests, several external factors need to be explored more deeply through the choice of parents, peers, or other encouragement so that this research aims to explore the level of career satisfaction through interest in the scientific field of majors taken by students. Vocational High Schools in South Sulawesi, especially at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng.

B. Method

This research uses a descriptive quantitative approach. Quantitative research is research that presents data in the form of numbers as the results of the research. Quantitative descriptive research is research that describes variables as they are, supported by data in the form of numbers produced from actual conditions.

This research uses data collection techniques through questionnaires on Google Form. The questionnaire used is an adaptation of the Career Well-being Scale (CWS) by (Coetzee et al., 2021). The construct validity and reliability of the scale have been analyzed using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) test. The type of sampling used is random sampling (simple random sampling). The sample used was 200 respondents taken from vocational school students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng. The Likert measurement scale and data analysis techniques used in this research include descriptive data analysis techniques through the JASP statistical test application.

This research uses instruments including adapting the Career Well-being Scale (CWS) questionnaire which is divided into three (3) aspects: positive affective career planning conditions, career meaningfulness conditions, career network

conditions/social support which consists of 14 statement items related to positive career preparation, the positive affective career planning condition indicator consists of 6 statement items, the career meaningful condition indicator has a total of 4 statement items, and the career network condition/social support indicator consists of 4 statement items. The results of the questionnaire validity test are presented in table 1 below.

Instruments	N	Reliability Test			Validity Test			
		Cronbach's	McDonald's	RMSEA	GFI	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI
CWB Scale		0.896	0.897	0.071	0.99 2	1,988 /44*	0.99 5	0.99 4
Positive affective career planning conditions		0.834	0.834					
Conditions for career meaningfulness	201	0.787	0.788					
Career network conditions/social support		0.760	0.767					

McDonald's > 0.60 (Reliable). Cronbach alpha > 0.60 (Reliable). RMSEA ≤ 0.08 (Accepted Model). GFI (Goodness of Fit) = 0 (poor fit) - 1.0 (perfect fit). CMIN/DF ≤ 2.0 (Accepted Model). CFI ≥ 0.95 (Accepted Model). TLI ≥ 0.95 (Very Good Fit). *p < 0.001

Table 1. Confirmatory Test Results for Factor Analysis of CWB Measuring Instruments

Based on the results of the CFA analysis, it is stated that the Career Well Being (CWB) instrument has 14 statement items related to the conditions of students' career planning. This scale uses a Likert model with a scale of 1-5. The instrument shows a validity value in Cronbach alpha of 0.896, greater than 0.60, then a McDonald's value of 0.897 or greater than 0.60 and (CMIN/DF = 1.988/44) < 2.0. Being categorized as acceptable and valid states that the instrument is suitable for use in this research.

Quantitative descriptive research that explores the psychological state of career well-being in vocational school students' main interest choices generally

begins with the research planning stage, which includes problem identification, goal determination, and hypothesis development. In this stage, researchers need to develop data collection instruments, such as structured questionnaires to measure student career well-being and interests. Creswell (2017) explained that the validity and reliability of the instrument must be tested first to ensure that the data obtained can be trusted. Once the instrument is ready, the researcher then determines the research sample randomly or uses certain representative sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling, to ensure the generalization of the results.

The next stage involves data collection, where the researcher distributes questionnaires to vocational school students who are respondents. The data obtained was then analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, such as mean, median, and frequency distribution, to describe the overall psychological well-being of students' careers. Wallen & Fraenkel (2013), emphasize the importance of proper data analysis in order to provide an accurate picture of the phenomenon being studied. The results of the analysis are then presented in the form of tables, graphs and narratives to facilitate interpretation. The final stage of the research is interpretation and drawing conclusions based on existing findings, where the researcher formulates practical implications of the research results for the development of more effective career guidance policies or programs in vocational schools.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Descriptive Statistics

The average standard deviation of (9.076) for the research measuring instrument variables is presented in table 2. In addition, the percentage of participants in each variable was calculated. Regarding the mature career preparation of Generation Z at SMK 1 Negeri 1 Bantaeng (n=200), the sample provided responses in the following table.

	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Positive affective career planning conditions				
1	I feel supported in achieving my career goals through the major I have currently chosen	3,909	0.978	Tall
2	I have the resources necessary to achieve my future career goals	3,525	1,026	Tall
3	I feel satisfied with the progress and growth of the career I have chosen	3,874	0.950	Tall
4	I feel positive about my chosen interest/major	3,843	1,052	Tall
5	I always feel that I am making progress in achieving my chosen career goals	3,707	0.921	Tall
	Total	18,858	4,927	Tall

Table 2. Descriptive Test of Positive Affective Career Planning Condition Aspects

Based on the results of data analysis in table 2, it shows that positive affective career planning conditions for students tend to be high with a mean of 18,858 and standard deviation (SD) = 4,927. Therefore, it can be concluded that in general the level of positive career planning for generation Z is optimal, while a high SD indicates that generation Z has a good level of consistency in career planning. Next, the specific results of the aspects in the table It was explained that generation Z, namely students, have career support in their currently chosen major which is in the high category (mean= 3.909), have the resources needed to achieve their future career goals in the high category (mean= 3.525), feel satisfied with academic progress and growth. those who have taken it are in the high category (mean= 3,874), have a positive view in determining their future career in the high category (mean= 3,843), and always feel they have progress to achieve their chosen career goals (mean: 3,707). Overall, these results indicate that generation Z's affective career planning at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng is in the high category.

	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Conditions for career meaningfulness				
1	The major I chose is interesting and makes me excited	4,162	0.898	Tall
2	I feel that what I do in my chosen major is very valuable and useful	4,005	0.985	Tall
3	The major I choose will contribute to a larger life goal	3,909	0.913	Tall
4	The interest/major I chose is the result of my personal choice	3,919	1,244	Very high
	Total	15,995	4,040	Tall

Table 3. Aspects of Career Meaningfulness Conditions

Based on the results of data analysis in table 3, it shows that the condition of career meaningfulness for students tends to be high with a mean of 15,995 and standard deviation (SD) = 4,040. Therefore, it can be concluded that in general the level of meaningfulness of Generation Z's career is optimal, while a high SD indicates that Generation Z has a high level of confidence in their chosen career. Furthermore, the specific results of each aspect in the table are explained that generation Z, namely the major chosen by students, has a positive relationship with their learning motivation in the high category (mean= 4.162), the major chosen is valuable and attractive for future careers in the high category (mean= 4.005). , the chosen major has a big influence on the future in the high category (mean= 3.909), the chosen major is the result of the individual's personal choice in the very high category (mean= 3.919). So overall, these results indicate that the career significance of generation Z at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng is in the high category.

	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Career network conditions/social support				
1	I get support from others when I need support	3,571	1,058	Tall
2	I find it easy to contact other people to help and support me in achieving my chosen career goals in the future	3,354	1,065	Tall
3	I have relationships/relationships with supportive people in the major I choose	3,672	0.955	Tall
4	I have a community/feedback network that helps me stay connected to my personal abilities and areas where I can improve.	3,667	0.873	Tall
	Total	14,264	3,951	Tall

Table 4. Career Network Conditions/Social Support

Based on the results of data analysis in table 4, it shows that the condition of students' career networks/social support tends to be high with a mean of 14,264 and standard deviation (SD) = 3,951. Therefore, it can be concluded that in general the level of career network/social support for generation Z is optimal, meanwhile a high SD indicates that generation Z has good external social support which is in the high category. Furthermore, the specific results of each aspect in the table are explained that generation Z, namely getting support from other people when they need support, is in the high category (mean= 3.571), I find it easy to contact other people to help and support me in achieving my chosen career goals in the future categorized as high (mean=3,354), have relationships/relationships with supportive people in the major I choose (mean=3,672), has a community/feedback network that helps me stay connected to my abilities and areas where I can develop categorized as high (mean= 3.667). So overall, these results indicate that the

condition of the social network/support of generation Z at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng is in the high category.

2. Discussion

The education system in vocational schools, especially vocational schools, provides various views on the certainty, interest and career confidence of each student. This research has been able to identify a picture of the psychological well-being of Generation Z's career in Vocational High Schools while still at school. The findings support the statement that optimal positive affective career planning conditions in generation Z are supported by various factors including control and optimism (self-efficacy) which are related to well-being both psychologically and physically (Alwi & Arifin, 2017; Mahoney et al., 2005). This is supported by the results of research by Anggraini & Iswari (2022), which suggests that someone who is optimistic about how to think about the future will provide good results in career well-being.

The second finding in the aspect of career meaningfulness conditions shows that individuals who choose a major at school through a test of interest, talent, personal self-confidence, without coercion or a concrete basis will be more enthusiastic, happy and prosperous in pursuing the education pursued in the major at that school. This is in accordance with the findings that the factors that influence career well-being at school are students' goals and aspirations in setting their goals to find meaning in life that will help them overcome future obstacles (Anggreni & Immanuel, 2020). Individuals who find their career meaningful will find it easier to achieve and excel in the school they attend so that these aspects can improve their career goals in the future (Hurlock, 1980).

The third finding in this research is the aspect of career network conditions/social support, this aspect includes friends, social relationships, social roles, and personality characteristics. The research results show that individuals

who have close relationships with family, friends or significant others will influence life happiness (Hardjo & Novita, 2015). As for (Keyes & Waterman, 2003) explains that individuals who receive support from peers (peer groups) will experience more happiness. One of the functions of peer groups is as a source of information and comparison about the academic world and future careers. The school environment is also a place for students to carry out social roles, one of which is through activities that increase the maturity of students' skills at school (Anggreni & Immanuel, 2020).

School is a very important educational space for generation Z who will now enter the world of work. Students' well-being positively influences their learning process and learning outcomes. Students who have planning, social support and career confidence will more easily develop a positive attitude towards their learning process. Apart from that, in terms of management, schools that have good curriculum patterns, rules and teaching staff certainly influence the welfare of students at school both career-wise and psychologically. So that schools can maintain balanced conditions to achieve the specified goals.

The findings of this research show that the psychological well-being of vocational school students is greatly influenced by the suitability between the choice of main interests and career aspirations, in line with the results of previous research. Hirschi & Koen (2021) found that students who have career interests that align with their choice of major in vocational school tend to experience higher career satisfaction and lower stress levels. These two studies show that choosing an educational path that suits personal interests not only influences career readiness, but also students' emotional and psychological well-being.

However, this research also found that social support factors from family and school had a more significant influence compared to previous research. Skorikov and Vondracek (2007), for example, emphasize the importance of self-efficacy in determining career well-being, but place less emphasis on the role of external support. This research strengthens the argument that support from the immediate environment, such as parents and teachers, plays an important role in shaping the

psychological well-being of vocational school students, especially in facing challenges in the world of vocational education.

The findings of this research are closely related to the Self-Determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in supporting individual psychological well-being. This research found that vocational school students who chose their main interests according to their aspirations and abilities showed a higher level of career well-being, which is in line with the principle of autonomy in Self-Determination theory. Deci and Ryan (2008) stated that when individuals feel they have control over the choices they make, especially in a career context, they tend to feel more motivated and satisfied, which ultimately improves their psychological well-being. Thus, this research supports and strengthens the concept that autonomy in career decision making is a key factor in students' career well-being.

Apart from that, this research is also related to the concept of Person-Environment Fit (PE Fit), which refers to the suitability between individual characteristics and the work or educational environment they choose. This research shows that vocational school students' career well-being increases when their main interests match their field of study and future career prospects. Kristof-Brown et al. (2000) in their study regarding PE Fit emphasized that the match between individuals and the educational or work environment can increase satisfaction and well-being, because individuals feel more suited and able to contribute effectively. Thus, the findings of this study strengthen the concept of PE Fit, especially in the context of vocational education, and show that this fit is important not only for career success, but also for students' psychological well-being.

In addition, these findings also provide a new perspective on the role of career guidance in schools in improving students' career well-being, an aspect that was not really highlighted in previous research. Gati & Saka (2001), focus on the importance of career counseling in helping students make the right career decisions, but this research adds that more structured and ongoing counseling can

significantly reduce students' anxiety regarding their future careers. Thus, this research not only confirms previous findings but also expands understanding of how school interventions can holistically support the career well-being of vocational school students.

D. Conclusion

This research explains the Career Well-Being picture of students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng using the CWS instrument. The research findings from the aspects tested include positive affective career planning conditions, career meaningfulness conditions, career network conditions/social support as a whole which are categorized as high by 200 respondents who are students of SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng. Although further research is needed to look at further factors and interventions related to career development in schools. Future research will also allow researchers to contribute to looking at Career Well-Being variables for future generations.

The practical implication of this research is that schools need to strengthen career guidance programs by providing assessment tools that help students identify their interests and provide ongoing counseling. Apart from that, parental involvement in supporting children's career choices must also be increased through workshops or information sessions that help them understand the important role of social support in improving students' career well-being. This will ensure that students feel more confident and supported in their career journey, which can improve their overall psychological wellbeing.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered in interpreting the findings. One major limitation is the use of a quantitative descriptive research design, which, although providing a general picture of the relationship between interest choices and psychological well-being, does not allow researchers to identify direct cause-and-effect. In addition, the sample used may not fully represent the entire population of vocational school students, so the results may not be widely generalized. These limitations imply that interpretation of the findings should be

done with caution, and further research is needed, such as longitudinal or qualitative studies, to explore more complex dynamics in the relationship between career interests and students' psychological well-being.

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