



Finding the Career Path: Career Well-being of Vocational High School Students in Major Selection

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze how students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng explore their major or career choices and how these choices relate to their future career well-being. The research employs a descriptive quantitative design. The sample consists of 198 active students from vocational high schools (SMK) in Bantaeng District, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The scale used to assess career well-being is based on the development of Coetzee's (2021) Career Well-Being Inventory. The Career Well-Being Scale uses a Likert-type scale with response criteria ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Based on the research findings, students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng demonstrate high overall career well-being, with aspects of affective career planning, career meaningfulness, and social support all falling within the high category. This reflects that students feel comfortable and supported in selecting their majors and planning their careers. The recommendations of this study include enhancing career planning support through strengthened guidance and counseling programs, as well as fostering partnerships with the industry to expand students' career networks.

Keywords: career well-being, students; career path, vocational high school.

▪ INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the number of graduates from Vocational High Schools (SMK) has been steadily increasing. However, a significant portion of these graduates chooses to enter the workforce or pursue higher education. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture reveals that most SMK students opt for employment after graduation, as they feel they have acquired sufficient skills from the vocational education they received (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2024). In practice, however, many SMK students face difficulties in selecting a career path that aligns with their interests and skills, which in turn can affect their career well-being (Cahyaningrum, Hazwani, Ho, & Ichsan, 2024). Some students even find themselves in jobs that do not match their interests or abilities, leading to job dissatisfaction and potential risks to their psychological and financial well-being in the future (Soleha, Mahmuda, & Jannah, 2024).

Several factors contribute to the challenges in career exploration among SMK students, one of which is the lack of self-awareness regarding potential career interests that align with their skills and aspirations (Faruq, Aziz, Sukmakarti, Rahmawati, & Purwandari, 2022; Novianti, Septian, & Yuliani, 2024). Many SMK students are more influenced by external factors such as family pressure, peer influence, or their family's economic situation, which affect their decisions in choosing a major or career after graduation (Fittari, Aprison, & Yusri, 2020; Suwanto, Istirahayu, & Qonitha, 2022). The limited availability of counseling services focused on career exploration and mapping students' interests and talents further exacerbates this situation (Karamoy, Afif, & Mutakin, 2023). As a result, many students lack a clear career plan and tend to choose

paths that are not aligned with their abilities, potentially hindering their long-term career well-being.

One of the efforts that can be made to help students explore their careers is through more intensive counseling services, which can assist students in recognizing their potential and identifying career paths that are suitable for them (Karamoy et al., 2023). Career orientation programs that involve various psychological and career counseling approaches can help students gain a deeper understanding of their career choices, including preparing the necessary skills for those careers. Additionally, the development of internship or work placement programs directly related to their vocational fields in the industry can serve as a solution to enhance students' readiness to enter the workforce and provide a clearer understanding of the real demands of the job market (Dinita, Setyaningsih, & Kanada, 2024). These efforts are expected to improve students' career well-being in terms of job satisfaction, economic stability, and personal development.

Previous studies have shown that well-developed career planning and confidence in one's ability to achieve career goals, or career efficacy, significantly influence an individual's career well-being (Lent & Hackett, 1987; Monteiro, Monteiro, Torregrossa, & Travassos, 2021). Earlier research also highlights the importance of career interest in determining a suitable career path, which ultimately contributes to increased job satisfaction and personal happiness (Potgieter, Coetzee, & Ferreira, 2021). In the context of SMK, several studies indicate that students who have a clearer understanding of their career options and are supported by effective counseling programs tend to be better prepared to face challenges in the workforce. Career interests that align with one's skills and passions motivate students to be more confident and enthusiastic about their careers, which directly correlates with their career well-being (Ahmet et al., 2020; Duarte et al., 2019).

However, despite numerous studies addressing factors influencing career well-being, there remains a gap in understanding the career exploration process among SMK students, particularly regarding their major preferences and how these choices impact their future career well-being. This study aims to analyze how students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng explore their major or career choices and how these choices relate to their future career well-being. This research is expected to provide new insights for developing more effective and relevant counseling programs that meet the needs of SMK students in planning their careers.

▪ **METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design. The research sample consists of 198 active students from Vocational High Schools (SMK) in Bantaeng District, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, who were recruited voluntarily through a career assessment administered by school counselors. The assessment was conducted using an online form distributed to the students. The majority of the participants were female ($n = 148$), while the remaining were male ($n = 50$). These participants were enrolled in different grade levels: 10th grade ($n = 144$), 11th grade ($n = 19$), and 12th grade ($n = 35$), representing an average distribution of the school's population.

Table 1. Description of research samples

Partisipant	n	198
Gender	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Male	50	25.3

Female	148	74.7
Grade Classification		
A. Grade 10	144	72.7
B. Grade 11	19	9.6
C. Grade 12	35	17.7

Data Collection Technique

From November to December 2023, all students at a school in Bantaeng District, South Sulawesi, received a classical career counseling service provided by the school counselor. Before the counseling session, the counselor distributed a voluntary online questionnaire to the students. The questionnaire focused on career well-being. Each questionnaire gathered demographic data, including name/initials, gender, age, grade level, major, and current school, and also included a statement of willingness to participate as a respondent. The scale used in the questionnaire assessed the students' career well-being in relation to their perceptions of their chosen major and their job prospects after graduation. This scale was adapted from the development of an inventory by Coetzee, Ferreira, & Potgieter (2021). The Career Well-Being Scale employed a Likert-type scale with answer choices ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), indicating the range of career well-being experienced by the students.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using quantitative analysis methods. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the validity of the entire set of respondent variables used in the study. The analysis employed maximum likelihood estimation with fit indices such as chi-square, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root-mean-square error approximation (RMSEA).

Subsequent statistical analysis involved descriptive tests such as frequencies, means, and percentage distributions. For categorical variables such as gender, grade level, major, and career well-being categories, chi-square independence tests were conducted using JASP statistical software. The validity and reliability of the Career Well-Being Inventory (CWB) are presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2. Confirmatory factor analysis career well-being scale (CWB-S)

Instrument	N	Reliability Test			Validity Test			
		Cronbach's	McDonald's	RMSEA	GFI	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI
CWB Scale	198	0.896	0.897	0.071	0.992	1.988 /44*	0.995	0.994

McDonald > 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

Based on the CFA, the Career Well-Being instrument, which contains 14 items related to students' career well-being, was validated. The scale employed a Likert-type model with a range of 1 to 5. The Cronbach's alpha value for the instrument was 0.896, which is considered reliable since it is greater than the threshold of 0.60. The Goodness of Fit (GFI) was 0.992, and the chi-square ratio (CMIN/DF) was 1.988/44, which is categorized as acceptable and valid. These results indicate that the instrument is suitable for use in this study.

▪ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following presents an overview of sexual violence experienced by 198 student respondents through three aspects of positive career conditions: affective career conditions, career meaningfulness, and career networks/social support.

Table 3. Overview career well-being

Aspek CWB	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Median	P-value of Shapiro-Wilk
positive career conditions: affective career conditions	198	18.858	4.927	6.000	30.000	
career meaningfulness	198	15.995	3.185	4.000	20.000	
career networks/social support	198	14.263	3.021	4.000	20.000	
Total		53.202	10.522	14.000	70.000	<.001

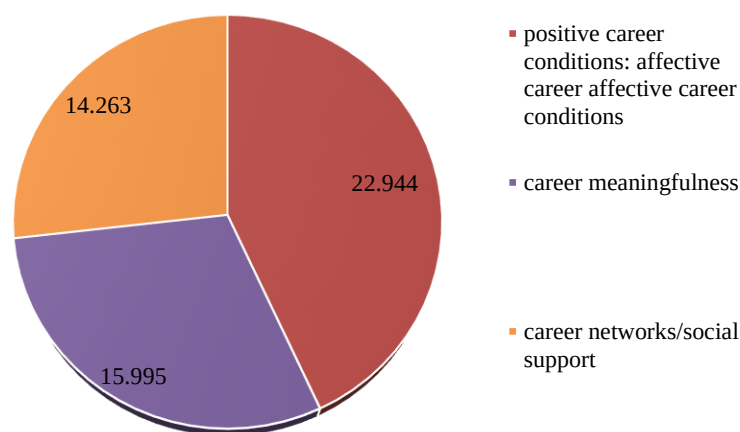


Figure 1. Career Well-Being (CWB) percentage diagram

Based on Table 2, the results from the Career Well-Being Scale (CWS) for vocational students indicate that, overall, the career well-being condition falls into the high category, with a mean value of 53.202, standard deviation (SD) of 10.522, and a p-value of (<0.001). Regarding the affective career planning condition, the results show that students' career well-being falls into the high category, with a mean value of ($M = 18.858$ and $SD = 4.927$). In the career meaningfulness condition, the score falls into the high category with an average of ($M = 15.995$ and $SD = 3.185$). For the career network/social support condition, the score also falls into the high category, with a mean of ($M = 14.263$ and $SD = 3.021$). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng generally experience a well-developed and positive career well-being, demonstrating maturity in choosing their academic tracks, which will support their future career development.

This study aimed to examine the career well-being levels of vocational high school (SMK) students, as assessed by the Career Well-Being Inventory (CWB-S), prior to their entry into the workforce. The study explored the extent to which students are aware of,

comfortable in, and feel capable of developing their interests and potentials while pursuing their education at school. The highest category found in this study was the positive affective career planning condition. This indicates that individuals who feel supported in achieving their career goals tend to enjoy their chosen academic track. This includes efforts to provide supporting resources for career development. This finding is supported by Alwi & Arifin (2017), who argue that when both factors support and career goal achievement are positively fulfilled, individuals experience satisfaction, feel they are progressing, and are able to make advancements in reaching their career goals (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005).

Further findings from this study relate to students' sense of career meaningfulness in their chosen academic tracks. The condition of career meaningfulness is assessed based on the students' perceptions of their selected program as interesting and motivating, which enhances the significance of the decisions they made to pursue education aligned with their interests. Anggreni & Immanuel (2020) assert that when individuals are enthusiastic about developing their interests and are excited about their developmental processes, it contributes to achieving broader life goals. Hurlock (1990) also emphasized that one of the key factors in career success is the alignment between career choices and an individual's interests, talents, or potentials.

The condition of career networks/social support plays a crucial role in supporting individual career development. The study found that this aspect was rated highly, indicating that students feel supported by others in their decisions, and that they receive assistance in achieving their career goals. Additionally, they are part of communities that can support their career preparation (Anggreni & Immanuel, 2020; Keyes & Waterman, 2003). Hardjo & Novita (2015) argue that external factors influencing career decisions often involve individuals who provide guidance, support, and share their experiences. The role of others is also beneficial, as it fosters relationships that can build collaborative networks, which significantly contribute to career development and well-being in the future.

▪ CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, students at SMK Negeri 1 Bantaeng demonstrated high overall career well-being, with the aspects of affective career planning, career meaningfulness, and social support falling within the high category. This reflects that students feel comfortable and supported in choosing their academic tracks and planning their careers. Students also showed high enthusiasm for the majors they chose, believing that these tracks align with their interests and potentials, and provide meaning in their learning process. Good social support, from family, friends, and the community, also plays a significant role in preparing students to enter the workforce.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the school continues to enhance career planning support by strengthening guidance and counseling programs, as well as fostering partnerships with the industry to expand students' career networks. Students are encouraged to further develop interests and skills relevant to their chosen fields, broaden their social networks, and seek mentors who can provide guidance in career development. Future research could explore qualitative aspects or include other external factors to gain a deeper understanding of students' career well-being within a broader context.

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