



The Dynamics of High School Students' Career Choice Problems and Guidance and Counseling Teachers' Efforts to Address Them

Husni Aini

Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of career choice problems among high school students, including internal and external factors, and to examine the efforts of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers in addressing these issues at SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru. The research employs a qualitative, descriptive approach. Data sources consist of 12th-grade students from the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 academic years. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data validity was ensured through triangulation, and data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model. The findings indicate that students experience internal problems, such as a lack of self-understanding, indecision in career choice, low self-confidence due to bullying experiences, limited independence, and minimal career knowledge. External problems include parental dominance, school policies, family economic conditions, parental trust levels, and single-parent status. The study has implications for strengthening BK teachers' strategic role in developing comprehensive, sustainable career planning for students.

KATA KUNCI

Pilihan Karir;
Siswa SMA;
Guru BK

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika problematika arah pilihan karir siswa SMA yang meliputi faktor internal dan eksternal, serta mengkaji upaya guru Bimbingan dan Konseling (BK) dalam menanggulangnya di SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Sumber data berasal dari siswa kelas XII tahun ajaran 2024–2025 dan 2025–2026. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Keabsahan data dijamin melalui triangulasi, analisis data mengikuti model Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami problematika internal berupa kurangnya pemahaman potensi diri, keraguan dalam pengambilan keputusan karir, rendahnya kepercayaan diri akibat pengalaman bullying, keterbatasan kemandirian, serta minimnya wawasan karir. Problematika eksternal meliputi dominasi orang tua, kebijakan sekolah, kondisi ekonomi keluarga, tingkat kepercayaan orang tua, dan status orang tua tunggal. Penelitian ini berimplikasi pada penguatan peran strategis guru BK dalam pengembangan perencanaan karir siswa secara komprehensif dan berkelanjutan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical phase in an individual's life journey before entering adulthood. During this period, individuals face several important developmental tasks, one of which is determining a career path and planning for the future in accordance with their interests, talents, and potential (Rosyidah, 2024). For high school students, career decisions are highly consequential, as the right choice not only affects academic and professional success but also psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and the ability to adapt in adulthood (Santrock, 2011).

In reality, many students at SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru face complex challenges in making career decisions, with 12th-grade students often experiencing confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty in selecting study programs or target

* **Corresponding Author:** Husni Aini; [✉ husniaini10@gmail.com](mailto:husniaini10@gmail.com)

Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia

Address: Jl. Jenderal Sudirman No.137, Limo Kaum, Kec. Lima Kaum, Kab. Tanah Datar, Sumatera Barat 27217, Indonesia

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universities. This issue affects even high-achieving students, indicating that career difficulties extend beyond academic ability to include broader psychological and social factors. Internally, students struggle with limited self-understanding, low self-confidence, indecisiveness, and past trauma such as bullying, which hinder their readiness to make independent career choices. Externally, parental pressure, family economic conditions, and school policies regarding elective courses frequently constrain students' options and may misalign with their personal interests. Although school counselors serve as facilitators, mediators, and guides, current interventions do not always fully address the complex interaction between internal and external factors, leaving students insufficiently supported in developing self-awareness, autonomy, and career readiness. This situation underscores the need for a comprehensive study of both the underlying causes of career indecision and the systematic strategies counselors use to help students make informed, independent career choices.

Previous research has categorized factors influencing career decision-making into two main dimensions: internal and external (Zulhakim et al., 2025; Herlovina, 2023; Hariyanto et al., 2024). Internal factors include a lack of understanding of self-potential, indecisiveness, low self-confidence, and psychological trauma from experiences such as bullying, which reduce students' courage to express opinions or make career choices (Pertwi et al., 2025; Febrianti et al., 2024). External factors include parental dominance in career decisions, family economic conditions, and school policies regarding the distribution of elective courses, which sometimes do not align with students' initial preferences due to teacher availability (Mardhiah, 2024).

The role of school counselors is vital in this context. They act as facilitators, mediators, and guides, helping students recognize their potential, overcome psychological barriers, and align their career choices with family circumstances and school policies (Yunita & Uda, 2025). Various intervention strategies, such as individual and group counseling, the use of career planning instruments, and parenting activities to build agreement between parents and students, have proven effective in helping students make more accurate and independent career decisions (Iloakasia, 2024).

Although previous studies have highlighted internal and external factors influencing students' career decisions, most are general in nature and do not sufficiently emphasize how these two factors interact in practice, nor how concrete school counselors systematically implement guidance strategies. This creates a research gap that needs to be addressed: an in-depth analysis of students' internal and external career challenges and school counselors' efforts in a real-world context at SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of student conditions while offering an applicable intervention model.

Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation and future planning, with career choice representing a pivotal developmental task that influences academic success, personal well-being, and long-term life satisfaction. At SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru, many 12th-grade students continue to experience confusion, anxiety, and indecision in selecting study programs or universities, even among high-achieving individuals. This highlights that career challenges are not solely tied to academic performance but are deeply intertwined with psychological, social, and familial factors, including limited self-understanding, past traumas, parental pressure, and school policies. The complexity of these internal and external influences underscores the urgent need for school counselors to implement systematic, evidence-based guidance interventions that help students make informed, autonomous, and realistic career decisions. Understanding this dynamic is essential to designing targeted strategies that help adolescents navigate career uncertainties while promoting self-confidence and long-term personal and academic development.

Based on this background, this study focuses on a deep understanding of the dynamics of students' career-choice problems and the strategies school counselors employ to address them. The research focuses on identifying students' internal constraints, such as limited self-understanding, past trauma, and low independence and self-confidence, as well as external constraints, including parental pressure, economic conditions, and school policies. Additionally, the study explores various counselor interventions, including the use of career planning instruments, individual or group counseling, mediation with parents, and coordination with the school administration.

The purpose of this study is to examine how students' internal and external problems shape their career paths and to reveal school counselors' efforts to overcome these challenges. Through this approach, the study is expected not only to contribute academically to understanding adolescent career development but also to provide practical recommendations for counselors and schools to support students in making appropriate, independent career decisions aligned with their potential. The study also serves as a foundation for more structured and sustainable intervention strategies within the context of secondary education.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis method. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth, contextual, and comprehensive understanding of the complex realities surrounding high school students' career choice problems and the efforts of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers in addressing them within the school environment. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics that cannot be measured quantitatively (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2018).

2.2 Subject

The research subjects consist of two main groups. The first group includes five twelfth-grade students at SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru in the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 academic years who experience specific challenges in determining their career direction. The second group comprises two senior BK teachers and the Vice Principal for Curriculum, who serve as policymakers responsible for decisions related to student career services and policies.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Observations were conducted systematically to monitor students' behaviors and activities during career consultation sessions. In-depth interviews employed unstructured techniques to explore informants' experiences, perspectives, motivations, and emotions regarding career choices. Documentation included written and visual data, such as student academic results, psychological test outcomes, BK activity agendas, and photographs taken during the research process.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and summarizing information relevant to the research focus. Data display was organized into systematic descriptive narratives for easier comprehension. The final stage involved verification or conclusion drawing to extract meaning and answer the research questions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The study shows that the internal dynamics of high school students at SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru in determining career choices are complex and multidimensional. Internally, many students lack a comprehensive understanding of their own potential, including interests, talents, and academic abilities. This leads to indecision and ambivalence in choosing a career path, even though students have participated in psychometric tests since grade 10. Low self-confidence is a significant barrier, especially when students compare themselves with the standards of their preferred universities, which reduces their courage in making career decisions. Another key finding is the lingering psychological trauma caused by previous experiences of bullying. Such trauma persists into grade 12, affecting social withdrawal, anxiety, and the inability to make independent career decisions. Additionally, anxiety about family circumstances, particularly among students from single-parent households, further intensifies internal barriers due to concerns about adding psychological or financial burdens on their parents.

Externally, the study finds that the environment exerts a strong influence, often conflicting with students' personal aspirations. Parental intervention dominates career decision-making, usually driven by concerns over university location, safety, and doubts about the child's independence. This situation can limit students' freedom of expression and the development of their interests. Family economic conditions also play a significant role, particularly in families with limited financial resources and multiple dependents, restricting university and program choices even when scholarship options are available. Additionally, school policies aimed at balancing subject offerings with available teaching staff can cause misalignment between the courses taken in grade 11 and students' long-term career plans.

To address these challenges, guidance and counseling teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru implement strategic and ongoing interventions. Counselors have developed innovative instruments such as the "Self-Oriented Smart Table" and the "College Choice Planning Table", which, combined with report card data and psychometric test re-

sults, help students map their potential more objectively and directionally. Intensive individual counseling is provided for students who have experienced bullying-related trauma, while group counseling expands career awareness and information. Additional interventions include parenting sessions and parent mediation to build mutual understanding and develop solutions that align parental expectations with students' potential. Counselors also actively collaborate with the Vice Principal for Curriculum and the school development team to ensure educational policies support optimal student career development and psychological well-being.

Table 1. Dynamics of Career Choice Problems and Strategic Interventions

Aspect	Findings / Problems	Impact on Students	Guidance Counselor Interventions
Internal	Lack of self-understanding	Students are indecisive and inconsistent in career choice	Use <i>Self-Orientation Smart Table</i> and psychometric data to map student potential
	Low self-confidence	Students fear competing in preferred universities and delay career decisions	Individual counseling to build confidence and self-efficacy
	Trauma from bullying	Students withdraw socially, fear interactions, struggle to make independent career decisions	Individual and group counseling for trauma recovery
	Anxiety about family conditions (especially single-parent families)	Students fear adding psychological or financial burden on parents	Mediation with parents and fostering student independence
External	Parental dominance in career choice	Students lose freedom of expression and limit pursuit of personal interests	Parenting sessions to create mutually beneficial solutions
	Family economic conditions	Limits university choices despite scholarships	Career counseling considering financial capacity and scholarship options
	School policies on subject selection	Selected subjects may not align with students' long-term career plans	Coordination with Vice Principal and school development team to align policies with student career development
Strategic Interventions by GC	Career planning instruments	Help students concretely map their potential	<i>Self-Orientation Smart Table</i> and <i>College Choice Planning Table</i>
	Individual and group counseling	Address trauma, enhance career understanding	Intensive counseling and career information provision
	Parenting and mediation	Align parental expectations with student potential	Discussions and agreements with parents
	Strategic school collaboration	Ensure school policies support optimal student development	Coordination with Vice Principal and school development team

The table demonstrates that students at SMA Negeri 3 Pekanbaru face both internal and external challenges in making career choices. Internally, students struggle with limited self-understanding, low self-confidence, lingering trauma from bullying, and family-related anxieties, particularly in single-parent households, which collectively hinder independent and confident career decision-making. Externally, parental dominance, family economic constraints, and school policies on subject selection further limit autonomy and alignment with students' personal interests.

To address these challenges, guidance counselors implement a comprehensive set of interventions: career planning instruments like the *Self-Orientation Smart Table* and *College Choice Planning Table*, intensive individual and group counseling to process trauma and build confidence, mediation with parents to create mutually agreeable solutions, and collaboration with school leadership to ensure policies support optimal student development. This

integrated approach highlights the critical role of guidance counselors in bridging internal and external barriers, fostering student self-efficacy, informed decision-making, and long-term career planning.

3.2. Discussion

Findings from research at SMAN 3 Pekanbaru indicate that career-related issues among 12th-grade students are not merely technical problems of selecting a major, but rather a psychological dynamic involving identity exploration (Super, 1990). According to Donald Super's career development theory, high school students are in the exploration stage, during which they should begin crystallizing their interests. However, field observations reveal significant obstacles in this crystallization process. Students' uncertainty about their own potential often stems from insufficient early exposure to in-depth self-information. The phenomenon of indecisiveness, or "pl-in-plan," observed by the researchers reflects career indecision, which, if left unaddressed, can lead to choosing the wrong major in higher education.

One finding highlights the impact of past bullying on career choices (Nurhayati, 2025). Theoretically, this relates to Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (Roe & Lunneborg, 1990). Students who have experienced bullying tend to have low self-efficacy, feel incompetent, and are hesitant to take risks (Thalia & Djuwita, 2024). This is reflected in their reluctance to choose competitive majors or those beyond their parents' protective reach. Guidance counselors at SMAN 3 Pekanbaru found that addressing past psychological wounds is a prerequisite for guiding students toward rational career decisions.

In Indonesia's cultural and social context, children's career choices are often viewed as a "family project." Findings regarding parental dominance, such as pressuring students toward Medicine or Civil Service, confirm the presence of enmeshment, in which the boundary between children's desires and parental ambitions blurs (Bandura, 1997). Parents often act out of economic fears or concern for social status. In this context, guidance counselors play a critical role as mediators. The win-win approach they apply does not aim to oppose parents but rather to "re-educate" them that children's career success is more likely when choices are based on passion and actual ability.

The challenges of career direction among high school students cannot be separated from adolescent developmental characteristics, particularly identity exploration, including career identity (Putri et al., 2022). At this stage, students often experience career confusion influenced by factors such as limited self-understanding (interests, talents, and abilities), parental pressure, peer influence, and insufficient knowledge about higher education and the labor market (Putri & Shofiah, 2025). Theoretically, this aligns with Super's career development theory, which places adolescents in the exploration stage, where they try out various options before making relatively stable choices. Unpreparedness during this exploration stage often leads students to make unrealistic, hesitant, or externally influenced career decisions.

Guidance and counseling teachers play a strategic role in helping students overcome career choice challenges through preventive, curative, and developmental services (Handayani et al., 2025). Guidance and counseling interventions rely on career guidance approaches that emphasize self-understanding, career information provision, and skill enhancement in decision-making. Through services such as classroom guidance, group guidance, and individual counseling, guidance counselors help students integrate personal potential with available educational and career opportunities (Kumara, 2019). Therefore, BK interventions not only reduce career confusion but also equip students with the career maturity required to make independent, rational, and responsible decisions.

Addressing these issues also incorporates a spiritual dimension. Guidance counselors guide students to understand that each individual is created with unique potential (fitrah). Awareness of divine values provides inner calm amid future uncertainties, enabling students to pursue not only worldly success but also blessings in their chosen careers. The use of a "Smart Table" combined with spiritual reinforcement creates a holistic career guidance model that aligns with the characteristics of students at SMAN 3 Pekanbaru.

The study revealed that high school students face both internal and external career-related problems. Internally, they experience limited understanding of personal potential, indecision in career choices, low self-confidence due to past bullying, limited autonomy, and minimal awareness of career pathways. Externally, barriers include parental dominance in decision-making, restrictive school policies, family economic conditions, parental trust in the child's abilities, and single-parent status. These findings underscore the strategic role of guidance counselors in guiding students through comprehensive, personalized, and sustainable career planning, enabling them to make more informed decisions aligned with their potential and interests.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have several important implications, both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research enriches the body of knowledge in education and counseling, particularly regarding the dynamics of high school students' career choice challenges. Findings concerning the interaction between internal factors such as limited self-understanding, low self-confidence, past trauma, and family-related anxiety and external factors such as parental dominance, economic conditions, and school policies highlight that adolescents' career decisions are complex and multidimensional. This study also underscores the role of guidance counselors (BK teachers) as change agents who can effectively facilitate, guide, and mediate students' career decision-making.

Practically, the study provides guidance for BK teachers in designing more targeted and systematic interventions. The use of career planning instruments, individual and group counseling, mediation with parents, and coordination with the school administration are key strategies that can enhance students' independence and self-confidence in making career decisions. In addition, schools can use these findings to develop policies that are more responsive to students' needs, including adjustments to elective courses and the provision of adequate career information.

Another implication concerns students themselves, encouraging them to understand their potential better, recognize suitable career options, and make independent decisions. For parents, the study emphasizes the importance of providing balanced support that aligns academic expectations with the development of their child's interests and abilities. Overall, this research contributes to the creation of an educational ecosystem that supports optimal, sustainable, and individualized career decision-making for students.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The internal career-related challenges faced by students at SMAN 3 Pekanbaru reveal that the main obstacles stem from an inability to recognize personal potential, low self-efficacy, and psychological barriers such as past trauma, including experiences of bullying, which hinder autonomy in career decision-making. These challenges are exacerbated by family-related anxiety, particularly among students from single-parent households, resulting in mental burdens and difficulties making independent decisions. Internal factors form a critical foundation that must be addressed in career guidance, as they directly influence students' confidence and motivation in planning their futures.

Externally, the most significant barriers come from the surrounding environment, particularly parental dominance in determining majors or college choices, which often conflict with students' aspirations. In addition, family economic constraints and school policies regarding elective course mapping further limit students' flexibility in career planning. These conditions create additional challenges, as students must balance parental expectations, school policies, and personal desires, making career decisions increasingly complex and requiring professional support.

Guidance and Counseling teachers have proven effective in addressing these issues by integrating professional and strategic approaches. The use of innovative instruments, such as the "Smart Table," enables objective mapping of students' potential based on report card data and psychological tests, helping them make more informed career decisions. Individual counseling, parental mediation, and collaboration with the curriculum team are also key strategies for aligning student aspirations, parental expectations, and school policies. Based on these findings, several recommendations are offered. BK teachers should continue to develop career guidance instruments and proactively detect psychological barriers early. Parents are encouraged to provide more open dialogue to support children's career choices. Schools should consider the diversity of students' career plans in elective course policies and support career guidance programs. Future researchers may develop quantitative studies to test the effectiveness of the "Smart Table" in promoting students' independence in career selection.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The authors contributed to the preparation and publication of this article from drafting to final submission.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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