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A Study of Career Problems Among High School Students and Their Implications for Career Guidance Programs

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to determine: (1) the profile of career problems among Grade XI A students at SMA Negeri 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year, and (2) the implications of these career problems for the career guidance program. This study employed a quantitative descriptive research method, using a career problems questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The population consisted of 286 students, while the sample comprised 72 students selected through a random sampling technique. The data were analyzed using central tendency analysis. The results showed that the career problems of Grade XI A students at SMA Negeri 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year had a mean score of 115, which fell within the score range of 102–132 and was therefore classified as high. This indicates that the students had limited understanding of various career-related issues, including knowledge of the world of work, career planning and the selection of specific careers or occupations, as well as future aspirations. However, the students had already developed an understanding of their interests in particular careers.*

Keywords: *Career problems; students; implications; career guidance*

Abstrak: *Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui 1) profil masalah karir siswa kelas XI A SMA Negeri 3 Kupang Tahun Pelajaran 2025/2026 dan 2) Implikasi masalah karir siswa kelas XI A SMA Negeri 3 Kupang Tahun Pelajaran 2025/2026 bagi program bimbingan karir. Peneliti menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif kuantitatif dengan alat pengumpul data berupa angket masalah Karir. Populasi dalam penelitian ini berjumlah 286 siswa dan sampel penelitian berjumlah 72 siswa dengan teknik pengambilan sampel random sampling. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan adalah analisis kecenderungan pusat. Hasil analisis penelitian menunjukan bahwa masalah karir siswa kelas XIA SMAN 3 Kupang tahun pelajaran 2025/2026 menunjukkan skor rata-rata sebesar 115 yang berada di antara rentangan skor 102–132, sehingga tergolong dalam kategori tinggi. Artinya siswa kelas XIA SMAN 3 Kupang kurang memahami berbagai masalah karir seperti pemahaman tentang dunia kerja, rencana dan pemilihan karir atau jabatan tertentu serta cita-cita masa depan. Sementara minat terhadap karir tertentu sudah dipahami oleh siswa.*

Kata kunci: *Masalah karir; siswa; Implikasi; bimbingan karir*

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Introduction

Career development is a process through which individuals identify their potential and develop an understanding of the world of work by acquiring relevant knowledge, skills, and experience. Career development is influenced by various factors, including interests, self-efficacy, personal values, and environmental support, which contribute to shaping individuals' career choices and directions (Lent et al., 2020:146) .In the educational context, understanding career development is particularly important for senior high school students because they must make decisions regarding further education, occupational fields, and future planning.

During this developmental process, students may experience various career problems, including limited knowledge of the world of work, difficulties in developing career plans and selecting specific careers or occupations, uncertainty about their career interests, and unclear future aspirations. These problems may hinder students from determining educational and occupational pathways that align with their potential, interests, and abilities. Therefore, identifying students' career problems is necessary as a basis for designing guidance services that address their developmental needs.

One form of service that supports students' career development is career guidance. This service helps students identify their potential, interests, talents, and skills while providing information about various educational and occupational alternatives. Gysbers & Henderson (2006:225) emphasized the importance of structured guidance programs in supporting student development, including helping students understand available options and make appropriate decisions. Through career guidance, students are expected to reduce uncertainty in determining their career directions, strengthen their self-confidence, and develop future plans that align with their individual characteristics.

The importance of career guidance is also associated with the needs of senior high school students who are preparing to pursue higher education or enter the workforce. The study by Husen, (2018), as cited in this study, indicates the need for more structured career guidance services, particularly in the areas of self-awareness, career exploration, information about further education, and career decision-making. Accordingly, the development of school career guidance programs should consider students' needs so that the services provided can support self-awareness, career exploration, and educational and occupational planning. Hasanah *et al.* (2018). also highlighted the importance of developing guidance services that consider service quality and students' needs.

Effective career guidance programs require support and collaboration among schools, guidance and counseling teachers, students, and parents. Such collaboration can help students obtain adequate information about educational and occupational options while providing support throughout the decision-making process. In this regard, guidance and counseling teachers play an important role in identifying students' career needs, providing relevant information, and facilitating career planning according to each student's potential and circumstances.

SMA Negeri 3 Kupang, as a secondary educational institution, has a responsibility to support students' career development by providing services that address their needs. Career guidance at this school is expected to help Grade XI students identify their interests and talents, understand various options for further education and employment, and develop more focused plans for their future. This support is particularly important because Grade XI students are beginning to face the need to consider educational and occupational pathways after completing secondary education.

Based on preliminary observations of Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Kupang during the 2025/2026 academic year, several indications of career problems were identified, including limited understanding of the world of work, the absence of clear career plans and occupational choices, insufficient understanding of career interests, and unclear future aspirations. Information obtained through interviews with the school's guidance and counseling teacher also indicated that students needed career guidance services to address these problems. The teacher explained that the services had been implemented systematically through classroom sessions and individual consultations. The topics covered included self-understanding, information about the world of work, and further educational opportunities. These services aimed to help students identify their interests, talents, and personal potential so that they could determine appropriate career directions and develop a clearer understanding of their prospective educational and occupational pathways.

These preliminary findings indicate the need for a systematic examination of students' career problems as a basis for determining their implications for the development of school career guidance programs. This study focuses not only on identifying the problems experienced by students but also on using the findings as a consideration for designing guidance programs that address their needs.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to: (1) determine the profile of career problems among Grade XI A students at SMA Negeri 3 Kupang during the 2025/2026 academic year; and (2)

identify the implications of these career problems for the career guidance program.

Method

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to examine career problems among Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Kupang and their implications for the school's career guidance program. The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Kupang, located on Jalan W.J. Lalamentik, Oebufu, Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The research was scheduled from May to December 2025.

Participants, Sample, or Data Sources

The study population consisted of 286 Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year. A sample of 72 students was selected using a random sampling technique, representing approximately 25% of the population. This sample was used to obtain information about students' career problems across four aspects: understanding the world of work, career planning and selection, interest in a particular career, and future aspirations.

Instruments and Measures

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire on career problems consisting of 40 statements. The questionnaire covered four aspects of career problems, with 10 items for each aspect. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Appropriate (SS), Appropriate (S), Inappropriate (TS), and Strongly Inappropriate (STS). Each response was assigned a score based on the scoring guidelines established for the questionnaire.

Before being used in the main study, the questionnaire was tested on 72 students who were not included as research respondents. The trial was conducted on January 12, 2026, to assess the instrument's validity and reliability. Item validity was examined using SPSS for Windows version 26 by comparing the calculated correlation coefficient (r-value) with the critical value from the Product Moment correlation table at a 5% significance level. All 40 items were declared valid. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced a coefficient of 0.902, indicating that the questionnaire had good internal consistency.

Procedure and Research Ethics

The research procedure involved preparing the career problems questionnaire, conducting an instrument trial, evaluating the validity and reliability of the items, and administering the questionnaire to the selected research sample. The responses were subsequently collected, scored, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis. The available research documentation does not provide specific information regarding ethical approval, informed consent, or confidentiality procedures.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the career problems experienced by Grade XI students. The analysis involved frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation, and standard error calculations. A 5% significance level was applied, and the calculated results were consulted against the standard normal distribution table (z-table) to determine the relevant intervals. The findings were then interpreted using predetermined score categories.

The overall career problems questionnaire consisted of 40 items, with a minimum possible score of 40 and a maximum possible score of 160. The scores were classified into four categories: very high (133–163), high (102–132), low (71–101), and very low (40–70). Each of the four aspects was also assessed separately using its own score classification, ranging from very low to very high. The descriptive results were used to identify the aspects of career problems requiring attention and to formulate recommendations for the school's career guidance program.

Results and Discussion

Research Data Analysis

Overall Data Analysis of the Career Problems Questionnaire

Based on the scores obtained from the 72 research respondents, the researcher subsequently analyzed the data using measures of central tendency through the following procedures:

1) Constructing a Frequency Distribution Table

The procedures for constructing the frequency distribution table are as follows:

79 79 89 90 91 96 97 98 99 99 100 100 101 101 105 105 105 107 107 107 107 108 108 108 108 111 111 111 111 113 114 114 114 115 115 116 117 117 117 118 118 118 119 119 119 119 120 120 121 121 122 122 122 122 123 124 124 125 125 126 126 128 129 129 133 133 136 137 138 140 142

a) Calculating the Data Range (R)
R = 142-79= 63
R = 63

b) Determining the Number of Class Intervals (K) Using Sturges' Formula

K = 1 + 3,3 log_n
K = 1 + 3,3 log $_{72}$
K = 1 + 3,3 (1,857)
K = 1 + 6,128
K = 7,128
K = 7

c) Calculating the Class Width (I)
I = $\frac{R}{K} = \frac{63}{7} = 9$

I = 9

d) Constructing the Frequency Distribution Table

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Career Problems Questionnaire Scores

No	Interval Class	f_i	x_i	$f_i\,x_i$	$x_{i-\bar{x}}$	$(xi-\bar{x})$	$f_i\,(xi-\bar{x}$
1	133-141	8	137,5	1.100	22,5	18.906	151.906
2	124-132	9	128	1.152	13	16.384	147.456
3	115-123	22	119	2.618	4	14.161	311.542
4	106-114	16	110	1.760	-5	12.100	193.600
5	97-105	11	101	1.101	-14	10.201	112.211
6	88-96	4	92	368	-23	8.464	33.856
7	79-87	2	83	166	-32	6.889	13.778
	Total	72	770,5	8.256	-34,5	87.105	964.349

Source: Processed Data

2) Calculating the Mean ($\bar{x}$) Using the Following Formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum f_i\,x_i}{\sum f_i} = \frac{8.256}{72} = 114{,}666$$
$$\bar{x} = 115$$

3) Calculating the Standard Deviation Using the Following Formula:

$$SB = \sqrt{\frac{\sum f_i(xi-\bar{x})^2}{n-1}} = \sqrt{\frac{87.105}{71}} = 1.226$$

4) Calculating the Standard Error Using the Following Formula:

$$GB_{\bar{x}} = \frac{SB}{\sqrt{n}} = \frac{1.226}{\sqrt{72}} = \frac{1.226}{8{,}485} = 0{,}144$$

The calculation results indicate that the standard $GB_{\bar{x}}$ is 0.144. This value was subsequently referred to the standard normal distribution table (z-table) at a significance level of 5%. Based on the reference value, the population mean (μ=mu) lies within the interval of $\bar{x}$- (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$) = $\bar{x}$ + (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$), and Thus, the minimum estimated value of μ at the 5% significance level is: 115 – (1,96 x 0,144) = 115-0,282= 114,718 Meanwhile, the maximum estimated value of μ is: 115 + (1,96 x 0,144) = 115 + 0,282 = 115,282 Based on these calculations, the average score of career problems is: $\frac{114{,}718+115{,}282}{2} = \frac{230}{2} = 115$

Based on the predetermined assessment criteria, the mean score of the career problems questionnaire among Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year was 115. This score falls within the range of 102–132, which is classified as high.

Data Analysis of Each Aspect of Career Problems

After conducting an overall analysis of the career problems questionnaire completed by Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year, the researcher proceeded to analyze each individual aspect of the questionnaire. The results of the analysis for each aspect are presented below.

Understanding the World of Work Aspect

The calculation results indicate that the standard $GB_{\bar{x}}$ =0,556. This value was subsequently referred to the standard normal distribution table (z-table) at a significance level of 5%. Based on the reference value, the population mean (μ=mu) lies within $\bar{x}$- (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$) = $\bar{x}$ + (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$). Thus, the minimum estimated value of (μ=mu) at the 5% significance level is: 27 − (1.96 × 0.556) = 27 − 1.089 = 25.911 Meanwhile, the maximum estimated value of (μ=mu) is: 27 + (1.96 × 0.556) = 27 + 1.089 = 28.089 Based on the above calculations, the average career problems score is $\frac{25{,}911+28{,}089}{2} = \frac{54}{2} = 27$.

Based on the predetermined assessment criteria, the mean score of the career problems questionnaire for Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically for the indicator of understanding the world of work, was 27. This score falls within the range of 26–33, which is classified as high.

Career Planning and Selection of a Particular Career or Occupation

The calculation results indicate a value of 2.381. This value was subsequently referred to the standard normal distribution table (z-table) at a significance level of 5%. Based on the reference value, the population mean (μ=mu) lies between the lower limit, calculated as the mean minus $\bar{x}$- (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$) = $\bar{x}$ + (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$). Thus, the minimum estimated value of μ at the 5% significance level is: 28 − (1.96 × 2.381) = 28 − 4.666 = 23.334 Meanwhile, the maximum estimated value of μ is: 28 + (1.96 × 2.381) = 28 + 4.666 = 32.666 Based on the above calculations, the average score for the aspect of career planning and selection of a particular career or occupation is: $\frac{23{,}334+32{,}666}{2} = \frac{56}{2} = 28$.

Based on the predetermined assessment criteria, the mean score of the career problems questionnaire for Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically for the indicator of career planning and selection of a particular career or occupation, was 28. This score falls within the range of 26–33, which is classified as high.

Career Interests Aspect

The calculation results indicate a value of 1.444. This value was subsequently referred to the standard normal distribution table (z-table) at a significance level of 5%. Based on the reference value, the population mean (μ=mu) lies between the lower limit, calculated as the mean minus $\bar{x}$- (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$) = $\bar{x}$ + (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$). Thus, the minimum estimated value of μ at the 5% significance level is:19 − (1.96 × 1.444) = 19 − 2.830 = 16.17 Meanwhile, the maximum estimated value of μ is: 19 + (1.96 × 1.444) = 19 + 2.830 = 21.83 Based on the above calculations, the average score for the career interest aspect is: $\frac{16,17+21,83}{2} = \frac{38}{2} = 19$. Therefore, the mean score of career problems among Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically for the career interest indicator, was 19. This score falls within the range of 18–25, which is classified as low.

Future Aspirations Aspect

This value was subsequently referred to the standard normal distribution table (z-table) at a significance level of 5%. Based on the reference value, the population mean (μ=mu) lies between the lower limit, $\bar{x}$- (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$) = $\bar{x}$ + (1,96 x $GB_{\bar{x}}$). Thus, the minimum estimated value of μ at the 5% significance level is: 29 − (1.96 × 0.529) = 29 − 1.036 = 27.964. Meanwhile, the maximum estimated value of μ is: 29 + (1.96 × 0.529) = 29 + 1.036 = 30.036. Based on the above calculations, the average score for the future aspirations aspect is: $\frac{27,964+30,036}{2} = \frac{58}{2} = 29$.

Based on the predetermined assessment criteria, the mean score of the career problems questionnaire among Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang, specifically for the future aspirations indicator, was 29. This score falls within the range of 26–33, which is classified as high.

Discussion

Implications for the Career Guidance Program

The research findings indicate that career problems among Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang fall within the high category, particularly in the aspects of understanding the world of work, career planning and selecting a particular career or occupation, and future aspirations. Guidance and counseling teachers are expected to assist students in developing their understanding of the world of work, planning and selecting particular careers or occupations (professions), and establishing future aspirations. Such assistance can be provided through various guidance services, including group guidance, content mastery services, and individual counseling. Accordingly, the school's career guidance program is expected to address students' career-related problems, enhance clarity regarding their career interests, and prepare them to make appropriate and responsible career decisions in the future.

On the other hand, the low level of problems in the aspect of interest in a particular career indicates the need for a career guidance program that helps students select occupations aligned with their interests. This condition suggests that career guidance programs in schools should focus on students' individual interests rather than merely providing basic career information. Career guidance programs need to be developed continuously and adapted to students' developmental stages so that their existing understanding can be transformed into well-informed and realistic career plans. Accordingly, the recommendation takes the form of a proposed school career guidance program that can serve as a reference for guidance and counseling teachers in implementing career guidance services for Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year.

The recommended materials for the career guidance program implementation plan comprise four aspects. The first is Understanding the World of Work, which covers an overview of the working world, including various types of occupations, organizational structures, workplace culture, professional ethics, and competency requirements in the modern era. The objective is to deepen students' understanding of the working world so that they can adapt to workplace environments and develop realistic career perspectives. This material falls under the career guidance field and is delivered through content mastery services in a classroom format.

The second aspect is Career Planning and Selection, which focuses on career planning, exploring educational and occupational pathways, and applying strategies for choosing careers in accordance with personal goals and values. Its

objective is to help students establish well-directed and responsible career plans and choices. This material is included in the career guidance field and is delivered through content mastery services in a group format.

The third aspect is Interest in a Particular Career, which emphasizes exploring students' interests, talents, and personal potential through exposure to various career fields and self-reflection activities. The objective is to help students identify their interests so that they can determine career choices that align with their potential. This material falls under the career guidance field and is delivered through group guidance services in a group format.

The fourth aspect is Future Aspirations, which discusses the importance of having aspirations and life goals, as well as the relationship between these aspirations and future education and career pathways. The objective is to encourage students to establish clear future goals as motivation for self-development and career planning. This material is included in the career guidance field and is delivered through content mastery services in a classroom format.

Based on the results of the central tendency analysis, career problems among Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year obtained a mean score of 115, which falls within the score range of 102–132 and is therefore classified as high. This indicates that Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang have not yet adequately understood various career-related issues, including understanding the world of work, career planning and selecting a particular career or occupation, and future aspirations. Meanwhile, the aspect of career problems classified as low is interest in a particular career. The low score in this aspect indicates that students have developed an understanding of their personal interests, enabling them to identify suitable career paths without experiencing significant difficulties.

The findings of this study are consistent with Husen (2018) research, which emphasizes that students encounter several career-related problems requiring career guidance, namely understanding the world of work, career planning and selecting a particular career or occupation, interest in a particular career, and future aspirations.

Understanding the World of Work Aspect. This aspect indicates that students still lack adequate knowledge of organizational structures, workplace culture, professional ethics, and developments in labor market dynamics. This condition suggests that students' understanding of the world of work has not yet developed comprehensively. Adequate career knowledge is essential for students to recognize various educational and occupational alternatives and establish realistic career directions in accordance with their personal development. Pratiwi *et al.* (2024*)* emphasize that the ability to adapt to developments and changes in the world of work is an essential component of students' career readiness. Therefore, students' limited understanding of the world of work indicates the need for more contextualized career information, particularly regarding job characteristics, competency requirements, work ethics, and changing labor market demands.

Career Planning and Selection of a Particular Career or Occupation Aspect. This aspect indicates that students still experience limitations in determining their intended career paths based on their personal values, abilities, interests, and goals. Career planning essentially involves more than identifying a desired occupation; it also encompasses recognizing available alternatives, considering their compatibility with individual characteristics, and formulating the steps necessary to achieve career objectives. Hariyanto et al. (2024) demonstrate that students' career choices are influenced by various factors associated with individual readiness to make career decisions. Accordingly, this condition indicates that students require guidance in connecting their personal potential with available educational and occupational alternatives so that career decisions are not made spontaneously but through careful consideration.

Future Aspirations Aspect. The high score in this aspect indicates that students have relatively developed an understanding of the goals they wish to achieve in the future, whether in the form of aspirations to obtain particular positions or occupations or to contribute to their social environment. These aspirations can serve as an initial foundation for students' personal development and for determining their educational and career directions. However, such aspirations need to be accompanied by the ability to translate them into more concrete plans so that they do not remain merely wishes. Pratiwi *et al.* (2024*)* explain that readiness to face career development is associated with an individual's ability to address current and future vocational developmental tasks. Thus, the high score in the future aspirations aspect can be regarded as a positive potential that needs to be strengthened through career guidance services, enabling students to transform their future-oriented aspirations into more specific and realistic goals supported by clear action plans.

Interest in a Particular Career Aspect. This aspect represents the career problem dimension classified in the low category. This condition indicates that students have relatively developed an interest in particular career fields or occupations, allowing them to identify jobs that correspond to their personal interests without experiencing substantial difficulties. This finding can serve as an

initial asset in the career decision-making process because interest is one of the essential elements to consider when individuals select an occupation. From Holland's perspective, the compatibility between individual characteristics and the work environment is an important consideration in career selection. Farhan & Biran (2022) explain that personality characteristics and compatibility with career environments can help students determine their career choices, while Sembiring et al. (2024) demonstrate that students' career interests can be mapped through six RIASEC types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Therefore, the low level of problems in this aspect indicates that students have relatively established career interests. Nevertheless, these interests still need to be guided through the exploration of occupational characteristics and competency requirements so that their career choices become increasingly aligned with their personal potential.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Susilaningsih & Mudjijanti (2024), which states that Grade X senior high school students have demonstrated a good understanding of careers. This consistency is reflected in the high scores obtained in several aspects of career problems, indicating that students have developed adequate awareness and understanding of various career dimensions. However, a good understanding of careers does not necessarily correspond to clarity regarding career interests. Therefore, more focused career guidance is needed to facilitate the exploration of students' interests and talents.

Conclusion

The results of data collection and analysis indicate that the career problems of Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang in the 2025/2026 academic year obtained a mean score of 115, which falls within the score range of 102–132 and is classified as high. This indicates that Grade XI-A students at SMAN 3 Kupang continue to experience career-related problems, particularly in understanding the world of work, planning and selecting a particular career or occupation, and establishing future aspirations. Meanwhile, the low level of problems in the aspect of interest in a particular career indicates that students have relatively developed an interest in career fields that align with their personal preferences.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions (Optional)

The author was responsible for conceptualization, research design, methodology, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript preparation, including writing the original draft and reviewing and editing the final manuscript.

Generative AI Disclosure

The author used ChatGPT, a generative AI tool, to assist with language translation, academic writing, and manuscript editing. The author takes full responsibility for verifying the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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