

Self-Determination as a Predictor of Career Decision-Making among Senior High School Students

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<p>Submitted: 2026-01-09</p> <p>Revised: 2026-01-27</p> <p>Published: 2026-02-15</p> <p>Keywords: Career Decision-Making, Senior High School Students, Self-Determination</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Author/s (2026)</p> <p>This article is under:</p>  <p>How to cite: Ismiati, I., Andriyani, J., Duri, R., & Muttaqin, R. (2026). Self-Determination as a Predictor of Career Decision-Making among Senior High School Students. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 8(1). https://doi.org/10.51214/002026081774000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: This study examines the relationship between self-determination and career decision-making ability among senior high school students. Globally and nationally, many adolescents including Indonesian high school graduates continue to experience uncertainty in selecting career paths. Using a quantitative correlational design, the study was conducted with Grade XII students of Senior High Schools (SMA) Negeri 3 Banda Aceh, Indonesia. From a population of 346 students, 177 participants were selected through simple random sampling based on the Isaac and Michael table with a 5% margin of error. Data were collected using the Self-Determination Scale, measuring autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and the Career Decision-Making Scale, which assesses exploration, crystallization, choice, and clarification stages. Content validity was evaluated using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR), while reliability analysis showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.871$ for self-determination; $\alpha = 0.867$ for career decision-making). The results indicated that most students demonstrated moderate levels of both self-determination and career decision-making ability. Pearson's product-moment correlation revealed a significant positive relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.533$, $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that higher levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are associated with more mature career decision-making. The study highlights the importance of fulfilling students' basic psychological needs to support their readiness for higher education or employment and recommends strengthening school-based career guidance, encouraging parental support, and expanding access to career information.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical transitional period from childhood to adulthood. At this stage, individuals experience rapid biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes (Santrock et al., 2014). Adolescents aged 15–18 years, including senior high school (SMA) students, are faced with various developmental tasks that demand independence, self-identity understanding, and the ability to plan for the future. One of the most important developmental tasks is making career decisions, whether to pursue higher education, vocational training, or enter the workforce directly.

Career confusion among adolescents is a global issue. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) notes that approximately 35% of adolescents across countries still do not have clear career plans upon graduating from secondary education. In Indonesia, the National Labor

Force Survey (BPS, 2024) shows that more than 40% of SMA/SMK graduates postpone higher education or employment due to confusion in determining their career direction. These findings indicate the need for specific support to help adolescents identify their interests, values, and opportunities that align with their potential.

Local-level studies also demonstrate similar patterns. For example, Pratama and Primanita (2023) found that more than half of senior high school students in Sawahlunto City experienced difficulties in determining further study choices due to a lack of information and self-confidence. Research by Hijri and Akmal (2017) in Padang also revealed relatively low levels of career maturity among senior high school students. These data underscore the urgency of research that highlights psychological factors influencing adolescents' career decision-making.

One theoretical framework relevant to explaining the dynamics of career decision-making is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2008) and further elaborated by Ryan and Deci (2017). SDT emphasizes that human behavior, including important decision-making, functions optimally when driven by intrinsic motivation, internal drives aligned with personal interests and values. Intrinsic motivation develops when three basic psychological needs are fulfilled: autonomy (a sense of control over one's own choices), competence (confidence in one's ability to achieve goals), and relatedness (supportive social relationships).

These three needs are highly relevant to the career choice process. Adolescents who experience autonomy are more willing to explore various career options without excessive external pressure. A sense of competence fosters confidence in meeting academic or professional demands in the chosen field. Meanwhile, relatedness with parents, teachers, and peers provides emotional support and essential information for decision-making.

International research supports the central role of self-determination in the career context. Lee and Lee (2022) found that career decision-making self-efficacy increased significantly when autonomy and competence needs were fulfilled. A meta-analysis by Wang and Ma (2023) also confirmed that fulfillment of basic psychological needs contributes to self-efficacy in career decision-making across countries.

Although the relationship between self-determination and career decision-making has been widely studied in other countries (Lee et al., 2022b; Wang et al., 2023), research in the Indonesian context remains relatively limited. Several local studies have found positive correlations between self-determination and career maturity (Mamahit, 2014; Pratama & Primanita, 2023; Utari, 2019), but most focus on Java or major urban areas. Cultural, economic, and educational access variations across regions in Indonesia may influence outcomes, making it important to extend research to other areas.

Banda Aceh City, for instance, has unique socio-cultural characteristics. The region is characterized by a significant religious influence, yet it simultaneously faces constraints regarding the breadth of professional and academic opportunities compared to major metropolitan centers. These conditions may shape how students perceive their future and make career decisions. To date, studies specifically examining self-determination as a predictor of career decision-making in Banda Aceh remain scarce.

Based on the above discussion, this study is guided by the main question: "To what extent does self-determination predict career decision-making ability among senior high school students?" This question is important because mature career decision-making not only affects further educational choices but also influences successful transitions into the workforce and long-term life satisfaction (Santrock, 2024).

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to describe the levels of self-determination and career decision-making ability among senior high school students in Banda Aceh and to analyze the

relationship between self-determination and career decision-making. This study also aims to examine the extent to which self-determination serves as a predictor of career decision-making ability. The proposed hypothesis is that there is a relationship between self-determination and career decision-making among senior high school students. The higher the level of students' self-determination, the better their ability to make career decisions. Conversely, lower self-determination is associated with lower career decision-making ability.

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the findings can enrich the literature on Self-Determination Theory within the Indonesian cultural context, particularly in Aceh. Practically, the results can serve as a basis for schools in designing career guidance programs based on intrinsic motivation. Such programs can help students develop autonomy, enhance competence, and strengthen relatedness with supportive environments, thereby better preparing them to determine their future direction.

METHODS

Design

This study employs a quantitative, correlational research design. The quantitative approach is intended to examine the degree to which variations in one or more variables are associated with variations in other variables. According to Azwar (2012), correlational research aims to identify and measure the strength and direction of relationships between variables without manipulating them. In this study, the correlational method is used to analyze the relationship between self-determination (independent variable, X) and career decision-making (dependent variable, Y). The study assumes that students' levels of self-determination are related to and may influence their ability to make effective career decisions.

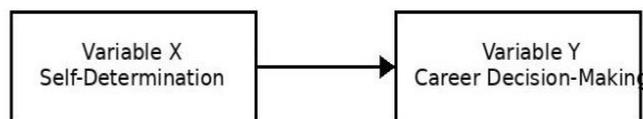


Figure 1. Correlational Research Design

Participants and Procedure

The study population consisted of all twelfth-grade students at SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh, totaling 346 students. The sampling technique used was simple random sampling. Based on the Isaac and Michael table with a 5% margin of error, the sample size determined for respondents was 177 students. Of these, 60 students (33.9%) were male, and 117 students (66.1%) were female. The age distribution of respondents was as follows: 32 students (18%) were 16 years old, 123 students (69.5%) were 17 years old, and 22 students (12.5%) were 18 years old. The majority of respondents were 17 years old. More detailed demographic information of the respondents is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Data

No.	Category	Sub-category	Number (n)	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	60	33,9
		Female	117	66,1
2.	Age	16 years	32	18
		17 years	123	69,5
		18 years	22	12,5
Total			177	100

Measure and Data Collection

Data collection techniques constitute an essential strategic step in research. In this study, the data collection technique applied was the Likert scale. The Likert scale, as proposed by Sugiyono (2021), is an instrument used to quantitatively measure opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals or groups toward a social phenomenon. The Likert-scale research instruments were used to measure two variables, namely self-determination and career decision-making.

The Self-Determination Scale was developed based on the aspects proposed by Ryan and Deci (2017), namely competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Competence refers to an individual's ability to interact effectively with the environment. Relatedness is the feeling of being connected and having positive social relationships. Autonomy refers to an individual's ability to regulate oneself and one's environment.

The career decision-making scale was measured using a scale developed by the researcher based on four aspects proposed by Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963), namely exploration, crystallization, choice, and clarification. Exploration refers to an in-depth search for alternative choices to be made, through which individuals understand the consequences of each option. Crystallization is the process of strengthening and consolidating confidence in a career choice. Choice is the process of making career decisions based on relevant goals. Clarification is the process of reviewing and clarifying career decisions that have been made.

The validity computation used in this study was the Content Validity Ratio (CVR). CVR is one of the methods used to assess content validity and was developed by Lawshe (in Puger, 2021). Subject Matter Specialists (SMEs) are a group of specialists whose evaluation results provide data used to calculate the CVR. The SMEs were asked to indicate whether the content of an item was necessary to meet the objectives of the test measurement.

If an item accurately represents the measurement objective, it is considered essential. There are three categories of essentiality for each assessment item: essential, useful but not essential, and not necessary (Puger, 2021). Azwar (2016) states that CVR statistics range from -1.00 to 1.00 , with $CVR > 0.00$ indicating that 50% of the SMEs consider the item essential and valid. In this study, the researcher used evaluations from three expert reviewers. The Content Validity Ratio (CVR) is a statistical measure used to quantify the degree of agreement among subject matter experts (SMEs) regarding the essentiality of an item in an instrument. The CVR is calculated using the formula $CVR = (2ne / n) - 1$, where ne represents the number of SMEs who judge a particular item as essential, and n represents the total number of SMEs involved in the evaluation. This formula produces a value ranging from -1 to $+1$. A higher positive CVR value indicates stronger agreement among experts that the item is essential and should be retained in the instrument, while lower or negative values suggest weaker agreement and may indicate that the item requires revision or removal. Thus, CVR serves as an important indicator in establishing the content validity of measurement instruments by ensuring that each item is relevant and necessary according to expert judgment.

The self-determination scale consisted of 28 items, while the career decision-making scale consisted of 26 items. Instrument validity was tested using content validity through expert judgment. Instrument reliability was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha formula. The collected data were then analyzed using SPSS statistical software version 25.0. The results of the reliability test for the Self-Determination Scale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of $\alpha = 0.871$, indicating that the scale is reliable with a high coefficient. Meanwhile, the reliability test for the Career Decision-Making Scale produced $\alpha = 0.867$, indicating that this scale is also reliable with a high coefficient.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis testing in this study employed the product-moment correlation analysis technique using SPSS version 25.0 for Windows. The correlation coefficient was considered statistically significant if the p-value was less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of students' responses to the self-determination scale, the frequency distribution of self-determination levels among twelfth-grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Levels of Respondents' Self-Determination

Category	Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage
Low	$X < 70,43$	29	16,4%
Moderate	$70,43 \leq X < 84,17$	120	67,8%
High	$84,17 \leq X$	28	15,8%

Table 2 shows that the majority of twelfth-grade students at SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh fall into the moderate self-determination category, with 120 students (67.8%). Based on the results of students' responses to the career decision-making scale, the frequency distribution of career decision-making levels among twelfth-grade students of SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Levels of Respondents' Career Decision-Making

Category	Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage
Low	$X < 69,43$	29	16,4%
Moderate	$69,43 \leq X < 83,41$	121	68,4%
High	$83,41 \leq X$	27	15,3%

Table 3 indicates that the majority of twelfth-grade students at SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh are also in the moderate category of career decision-making, with 121 students (68.4%). Before conducting hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests for correlation analysis were performed, namely the normality test, using skewness and kurtosis ratios with the assistance of SPSS 25.0 for Windows. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the Normality Test

Variable	Skewness	Std. Error (Skewness)	Kurtosis	Std. Error (Kurtosis)
Self-Determination	0,020	0,183	-0,662	0,363
Career Decision-Making	0,082	0,183	-0,063	0,363

According to Field (2013), the acceptable range for skewness and kurtosis values indicating normal distribution is between -1.96 and 1.96 (often rounded to -2 to 2). Field (2009) states that for small samples (<200), normality testing is conducted by dividing the skewness and kurtosis values by their standard errors.

In this study, with a sample size of 177 students (<200), the skewness value for self-determination was $0.020/0.183 = 0.109$, and the kurtosis value was $-0.662/0.363 = -1.823$. Meanwhile, the skewness value for career decision-making was $0.082/0.183 = 0.448$, and the kurtosis value was $-0.063/0.363 = -0.173$. These results indicate that all values fall within the acceptable range of -1.96 to 1.96, confirming that the variables are normally distributed. The results of the linearity test between the two research variables are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of the Linearity Test

Research Variables	Deviation from Linearity	p-value
Self-Determination Career Decision-Making	0,705	0,864

Based on Table 5, the deviation from linearity value is 0.705 with a significance value of 0.864 ($p > 0.05$). This indicates that the relationship between the two variables is linear and does not deviate from a straight line. Hypothesis testing was conducted using Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis. The results are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Research Variables	R	p-value
Self-Determination Career Decision-Making	0,533	0,000

The results of hypothesis testing show a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.533, indicating a positive relationship between self-determination and career decision-making. The significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that the relationship between self-determination and career decision-making among the respondents is positive and highly significant.

Discussion

Self-Determination as a Predictor of Career Decision-Making

The findings of this study indicate that self-determination has a positive and significant relationship with career decision-making ability among senior high school students ($r = 0.533$; $p < 0.05$). This result supports the proposed hypothesis and is consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Adolescents with strong intrinsic motivation are better able to evaluate career options, consider potential risks, and make decisions that are aligned with their personal values (Lee et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023).

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017), behaviors driven by intrinsic motivation tend to be more enduring and result in decisions that are congruent with personal values. In the context of senior high school students in Banda Aceh, the fulfillment of autonomy enables students to feel a sense of control over their educational and career choices. Competence helps them assess their academic abilities and relevant skills, while relatedness provides emotional support from peers, teachers, and family members. Together, these three psychological needs create conditions that facilitate more mature and well-considered career decisions.

The obtained correlation coefficient ($r = 0.533$; $R^2 \approx 0.28$) is comparable to the findings of Munfarida (2017) who reported $R^2 = 0.26$, and slightly higher than those of Pratama and Primanita (2023), who found $R^2 = 0.22$. These differences may be influenced by the cultural characteristics of Aceh, which emphasize strong religious values and collectivistic orientations (Insights, 2022). Global studies also support the role of self-determination in career decision-making across cultures (Chirkov et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2023), indicating that the need for autonomy is relevant in both individualistic and collectivistic cultural contexts.

Contextual Factors

Although self-determination contributes significantly to career decision-making, approximately 72% of the variance is explained by other factors. Several potential variables include: Parental support. Research by Saputro (2022) highlights the importance of autonomy-supportive parenting and open family communication. Career self-efficacy. Studies by Gati et al. (1996) and Wang et al. (2023) show that confidence in one's ability to achieve career goals mediates the

relationship between motivation and decision-making. Access to information and economic conditions. Lee et al. (2022) found that labor market information and socioeconomic status moderate readiness for career decision-making. In Aceh, limited access to career guidance resources in some schools may influence students' career efficacy. This condition underscores the need for SDT-based guidance programs that emphasize student autonomy.

Implications

Theoretically, these findings extend the application of SDT within the Southeast Asian context, particularly in Indonesia. The combination of autonomy, competence, and relatedness appears to remain relevant even in collectivistic cultures, challenging the assumption that autonomy is primarily salient in individualistic societies. Practically, the results suggest several recommendations. Schools are encouraged to develop career guidance programs grounded in intrinsic motivation, in which counselors facilitate value reflection, interest exploration, and personal goal setting to foster student independence. Parents are expected to provide opportunities for open dialogue, support their children's choices, and avoid controlling pressures, in line with the principles of autonomy support. In addition, collaboration among schools, universities, and the world of work is needed to provide information on educational pathways, internship opportunities, and career fairs that can strengthen students' competence in exploring and selecting career options.

For schools and guidance counselors: Schools are encouraged to integrate career guidance programs based on intrinsic motivation, such as workshops on personal value reflection, interest exploration, and goal-setting exercises. Learning experiences that foster competence (e.g., collaborative projects) and support autonomy (e.g., offering choices in topics or learning pathways) should also be emphasized. For parents and families: Parents are expected to promote open communication about their children's interests and career goals, provide autonomy support, and avoid controlling or coercive pressures. In addition, parents can serve as sources of information and networks that help students understand educational and employment opportunities.

For education Policymakers should provide training for school counselors to implement autonomy-supportive counseling approaches. Expanding access to career information such as university fairs, internship programs, and partnerships with businesses and industries is also essential. Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal conclusions; longitudinal studies are needed to examine changes in self-determination and career maturity over time. Second, self-report instruments are susceptible to social desirability bias; future research should incorporate qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or observations to validate the findings. Third, the sample was limited to students from SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh. Therefore, generalization to other regions in Indonesia should be undertaken with caution.

Limitation

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationship between self-determination and career decision-making; therefore, future longitudinal studies are recommended to examine developmental changes over time. Second, the reliance on self-report instruments may introduce social desirability bias and subjective interpretation; subsequent research should consider employing mixed-method approaches, including qualitative interviews or observational techniques, to enhance the validity of the findings. Third, the sample was limited to students from SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Future studies should involve more diverse samples across different regions and educational contexts in Indonesia. Additionally, other potentially influential variables such as socioeconomic background, cultural values, academic achievement, and parental involvement were

not examined in this study and should be incorporated in future research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing career decision-making.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that self-determination is a significant predictor of senior high school students' career decision-making ability, with regression analysis indicating that self-determination accounts for approximately 28% of the variance in career decision-making. Students who demonstrate higher levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness tend to show greater confidence in exploring their interests, evaluating opportunities, and selecting appropriate educational or occupational pathways. These findings are consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and align with prior national and international research. Theoretically, this study broadens the application of SDT within a collectivistic cultural setting such as Aceh, where relatedness is particularly salient, while autonomy remains an essential psychological need. However, since about 72% of the variance in career decision-making is influenced by other factors including parental support, career self-efficacy, socio-economic conditions, and access to career information future intervention programs should incorporate these elements to more effectively promote students' overall career maturity.

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