

Building the Future: The Impact of Life Meaning and Career Planning on Students' Quarter-Life Crisis

Membangun Masa Depan: Dampak Kebermaknaan Hidup dan Perencanaan Karir pada Quarter-Life Crisis Mahasiswa

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Abstract :

College students are a transition phase from late adolescence to early adulthood like physical, emotional, and social changes. For they have difficulty dealing with its will being quarter-life crisis. The meaning of life and career planning are good predictors for overcoming the difficulties experienced by college students when confront it. This study used a quantitative method with a correlational design which to empirically prove the influence of the meaning of life and career planning on the quarter-life crisis in college students. The research sample was 497 active college students in East Kalimantan aged 18-29 years who from any programs like science and humanities. The measurement instrument used are The Development of Career Planning Scale from Wang et al. (2023) with reliabitly score 0.880, The Meaning in Life Questionnaire-Short Scale from Steger and Samman (2012), and Development Crisis Questionnaire from Pertov et al. (2021). All of these instruments were adapted by the researcher. The data analysis technique in this study used multiple linear regression analysis with JASP 0.17 version. The results of the study showed that the meaning of life and career planning had 46.3% influence on quarter-life crisis with a significance level of $p < 0.05$ ($p = .000$). So the students need to find the meaning of life and plan their careers as early as possible in order to quickly resolve the difficulties experienced during the quarter-life crisis. They can be done through anything such as finding career experience with internships or part-time and supportive relationship.

Keywords: Career planning, meaning in life, quarter-life crisis

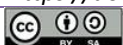
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1. Introduction

Students are in a transitional phase from late adolescence to early adulthood, characterized by numerous physical, emotional, and social changes. During this phase, individuals begin to search for their identity and face challenges in determining their life goals. Some students commonly experience confusion and anxiety about the future, while others may feel enthusiastic and ready to face new challenges. This uncertainty is related to careers, relationships, and life goals. This phenomenon can be referred to as a quarter-life crisis (QLC).

Quarter-life crisis is a psychological phenomenon often experienced by young adults, particularly students who are transitioning from the academic world to the professional realm. This phase is marked by confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty regarding identity, life goals, and career direction

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(Robinson, 2018). QLC often arises due to social pressures, high expectations, and uncertainty about the future (Afnan et al., 2020; Rosyiddin & Afandi, 2023).

In Indonesia, social and economic pressures can exacerbate the symptoms of QLC, such as stress, depression, and life dissatisfaction, potentially leading to suicidal actions. According to a report by Kompas, every hour, 83 people commit suicide, with a significant portion being young individuals (Wahyudi, 2024). Therefore, it is crucial for individuals to be open to change and seek help if needed. Balancing family responsibilities, career, and personal life is also key to overcoming the quarter-life crisis (Lestari et al., 2022).

Students, as a group in the process of identity exploration and career decision-making, are vulnerable to experiencing QLC. Symptoms include feelings of stagnation, self-doubt, and fear of failure. QLC can negatively impact mental health, productivity, and psychological well-being (Setiani et al., 2024). Research indicates that the meaning of life plays a protective role that can reduce the intensity of the crisis. Students with a high sense of life meaning tend to be better equipped to face challenges and stress, including QLC (Habibie et al., 2023).

Meaning in life refers to an individual's perception that their life has purpose, value, and significance. Students with a high level of life meaning are generally better able to cope with challenges and pressures in life, including QLC. A sense of meaning in life provides a positive framework for thinking, helping individuals view challenges as part of the growth process and reducing feelings of helplessness (Mahmud, 2024). In the context of QLC, meaning in life can serve as a protective factor that mitigates the intensity of the crisis.

Additionally, clear career planning can reduce uncertainty and anxiety about the future, as well as enhance self-control and self-confidence. Irnanda et al. (2023) highlight that in one university in Indonesia, 61.1% of its graduates experience feelings of anxiety and worry due to not receiving job offers and the mismatch between their workplace and their abilities. This contrasts with students who receive job offers immediately after graduation, partly due to a lack of career planning (Noviyanti, 2021; Nurjanah, 2018).

Career planning involves the process of setting career goals, identifying steps to achieve them, and preparing to face challenges in the workforce. Students with clear career planning tend to be more prepared for the transition from the academic world to the professional world (Jalal, 2024). Well-thought-out career planning can reduce uncertainty and anxiety related to the future, thereby decreasing the risk of experiencing QLC. Furthermore, career planning can also enhance self-control and self-confidence, which are crucial factors in facing QLC. Given the rapid changes in the job market and technological advancements, students may feel pressured by uncertainty about their futures, particularly regarding their careers (Adnan & Bhakti, 2025).

A survey by LinkedIn (2017) found that 75% of LinkedIn users aged 25 to 30 experience QLC issues, with the main factors being difficulty finding jobs that match their interests (61%) and life goals (33%). Research by Irnanda et al. (2023) indicates that 61.1% of graduates from a university in Indonesia experience anxiety and worry due to not receiving job offers. This underscores the importance of career planning before graduation.

Although there is research showing the influence of life meaning on QLC, there are still shortcomings in the measurement instruments used. Previous research by Habibie et al. (2023) indicated that life meaning has a significant impact on QLC, but the instruments used were far

from current standards. Therefore, it is necessary to update the measurement instruments to obtain more accurate and relevant results.

Additionally, research discussing career and quarter-life crisis has not been extensively covered. Research by Astanu et al. (2022) linked quarter-life crisis to career maturity, where an individual's career maturity needs to go through career planning such as career exploration, information wealth, and decision-making regarding the chosen career. It would be more effective if career planning were discussed first as an early detection of the level of quarter-life crisis among students. Additionally, the limited number of respondents should also be considered regarding the representativeness of the research sample.

Based on the description above, the aim of this study is to explore the influence of meaning in life and career planning on the quarter-life crisis among students. The proposed hypotheses are: H1: There is an influence of meaning in life and career planning on the quarter-life crisis among students.

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H2: There is an influence of meaning in life on the quarter-life crisis among students. H3: There is an influence of career planning on the quarter-life crisis among students. This research is expected to provide deeper insights into the factors influencing QLC and assist students in facing challenges during this transitional phase.

2. Methods

This study employs a quantitative method with a correlational approach, aiming to determine the influence of independent variables on dependent variables. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling. The respondents in this study are active college students attending college in East Borneo, aged between 18 and 29 years old. A total of 479 students participated in this research. The independent variable in this study is the meaning in life, measured using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire-Short Scale by Steger and Samman (2012), focusing on the aspects of search and presence. Career planning is measured through an adaptation of the Development of Career Planning Scale by Wang et al. (2023) which includes the aspects of interests, abilities, values, and personality. The dependent variable in this study is measured using an adaptation of the Development Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12) by Petrov et al. (2022), focusing on the aspects of disconnection and distress, lack of clarity and control, and transition and turning points.

The data collection instruments used are credible measurement tools that meet the requirements for validity and reliability. The normality of these variables was assessed using boxplot norms. Field (2005) states that both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests are very sensitive to sample size. When the sample size is large, specifically above 150, there is a tendency for both statistical results to always be significant, which can indicate non-normal data. Therefore, assessing data normality using significance can introduce bias when applied to large datasets. Thus, histogram norms can be utilized. Subsequently, hypothesis data analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression to predict the values of the dependent variable based on one or more independent variables. The entire data analysis process was carried out with the assistance of JASP version 0.17.

3. Results

The content validity test is measured through testing the feasibility of the test content by expert judgment, namely a review by professionals of each statement item and testing the readability of each scale by providing improvements to the right words and sentences based on the aspect indicators used. All scales were declared to have passed the content validity test.

Based on the results of questionnaire calculations from respondents using JASP 0.17 version, the results of the reliability test of the meaning in life scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.880 ($\alpha \geq .700$) with a total of 6 items and for the differentiating power test the items moved from 0.534-0.700. The reliability test results of the career planning scale obtained an alpha value of 0.884 ($\alpha \geq .700$) with a total of 20 items and the results of the item discrimination test ranged from 0.440-0.662. The results of the quarter-life crisis scale reliability test obtained an alpha value of 0.773 ($\alpha \geq .700$) for a total of 9 items and the results of the item discrimination power test increased from 0.316-0.614. These results show that the three measuring tools are valid and reliable for measuring each attribute.

Table 1. Hypothesis Test Results

Variabel	Validity	Note	Reliability	Note
Meaning in Life	0.534-0.700	Valid	0.880	High
Career Planning	0.440-0.662	Valid	0.884	High
Quarter-life Crisis	0.316-0.614	Valid	0.773	High

The normality test for the variables of meaning in life, career planning, and quarter-life crisis was conducted using histograms due to the large sample size of over 150 respondents. Based on the results of the normality test, all of variables are within the range of normal data. This is indicated by the histogram graph resembling an inverted bell shape. This means that the more data points are concentrated around the mean, the more normal the data becomes. The majority of the data is

positioned at the mean skor. The results of the normality testing can be seen in the figures and tables below.

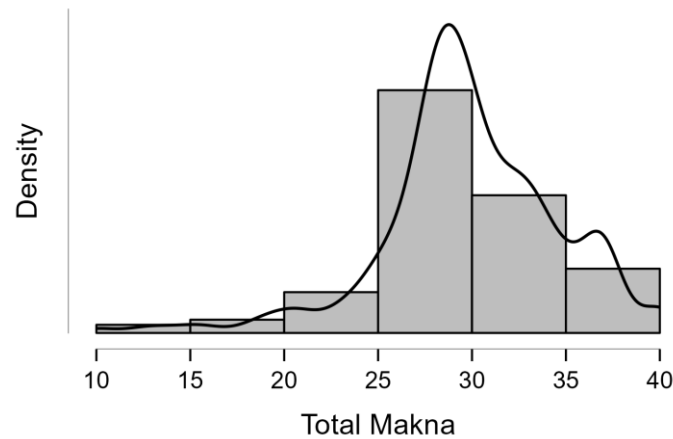


Figure 1. The Result of Meaning in Life Histogram

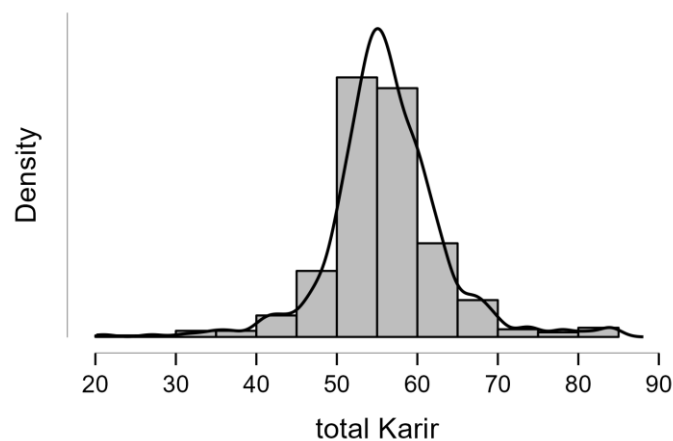


Figure 2. The Result of Career Planning Histogram

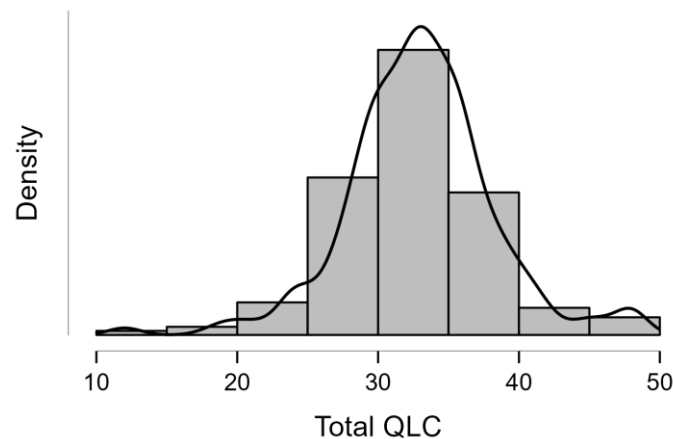


Figure 3. The Result of Quarter-life Crisis Histogram

Table 2. The Mean Test Result

	Meaning in Life	Career Planning	Quarter-life Crisis
Mean	29.839	56.193	32.972

Based on the results of data analysis conducted using multiple regression tests, it is known that the influence of meaningfulness of life and career planning simultaneously on quarter-life crisis with a

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significance value of $p < .001$, so it can be concluded that meaning in life and career planning have a significant effect on quarter-life crisis. The main hypothesis is accepted. The results of the contribution analysis show a value of $R^2 = 0.463$, which means that the meaning of life and career planning contribute 46.3% to the quarter-life crisis.

On the influence of the meaning in life on quarter-life crisis, a significance value of $p < .001$ was obtained, so it can be concluded that the meaning in life has a significant effect on quarter-life crisis. The second hypothesis is accepted. The results of the influence analysis show a value of $R^2 = 0.570$, which means that the meaning in life contributes 57% to quarter-life crisis.

Career planning regarding the quarter-life crisis results a significance value of $p < .001$. This shows that career planning towards quarter-life crisis has a very significant influence so that the third hypothesis is accepted. The results of the contribution analysis show a value of $R^2 = 0.652$, which means that career planning contributes 65.2% to quarter-life crisis.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results

Variabel	Sig	Note	R ²
Career Planning and Meaning in Life on Quarter-life Crisis	.000	Significant	.463
Meaning in life on Quarter-life Crisis	.000	Significant	.570
Career Planning on Quarter-life Crisis	.000	Significant	.652

4. Discussion

In The results of the study showed that both the meaning of life and career planning have a significant influence on the quarter-life crisis in students. This means that increasing both of these things has an impact on resolving the psychological symptoms of the quarter-life crisis. This is in line with studies from Sallata and Huwae which state that individuals who feel their lives are meaningful tend to be more resilient in facing pressure and uncertainty towards adulthood (Sallata & Huwae, 2023).

Quarter-life Crisis in Pertov et al. (2022) study emphasizes the importance of identity exploration during this stage of life. This exploration of identity can be achieved by increasing the meaningfulness of an individual's life. This supports the study of Habibie et al. which states that the meaningfulness of life has a significant effect on quarter-life crisis. If this is not found immediately, it can slow down individuals from getting out of this zone (Habibie et al., 2023). In line with the study of Walshe (2018) found that individuals who feel unsure about their personal values and goals are more likely to find it difficult to overcome the symptoms of quarter-life crisis. Students can find personal goals and values through finding meaning in their lives (Aisah et al., 2023). Finding meaning in life made crisis process improves the quality of life and reduces the negative impact of a quarter-life crisis (Nabila, 2020; Sinta et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, career planning also has a significant influence to help students who experience lower QLC. This finding indicates that career planning can function as an effective coping strategy in facing the challenges of transition to adulthood. The third hypothesis, the results obtained are in line with research conducted by Ljungkvist and Moore who reported that difficulty aligning career choices with personal values is a significant source of stress for young adults (Ljungkvist & Moore, 2023). Therefore, it is a special concern for students to establish career choices as early as possible through the maturation of their career planning.

Increasing the meaning of life can be done through involvement in supportive things. Activities to help others and make positive contributions to society can provide a deep sense of meaning and satisfaction (Cahyaningtyas et al., 2020). The sense of gratitude that needs to be developed through appreciating the good things in life can help students feel happier and more satisfied in living their lives (Prabowo & Laksmiwati, 2020). One way to improve career planning is through exploring career options. Students need to have a better understanding of themselves, explore various career options that suit their interests, talents, values, and personality (Husniah et al., 2023). In addition, it is important to do a little research to find out about the institution and career prospects in the institution.

Internships and part-time can gain direct experience in the career field of interest. So that it can mature student career planning.

This study illustrated the importance of meaning in life and career planning, which can significantly influence the quarter-life crisis among students. To ensure that the research findings can be effectively applied, it is necessary to formulate interventions aimed at discovering and enhancing meaning in life. One approach is through cultural engagement, specifically by interpreting the macapat songs. Macapat can reveal the meaning of life and serve as a personal guide in navigating life (Prabawa & Mukti, 2022). This helps individuals behave more purposefully within society.

Although students' career planning may be categorized as good, this does not necessarily lead to an increase in gratitude for their achievements. Dissatisfaction with accomplishments or a lack of gratitude can diminish optimism about the future, prolonging the duration of the quarter-life crisis and potentially leading to other psychological problems (Mursid et al., 2024). Therefore, it is also essential to enhance gratitude through training or other interventions to support this research.

Additionally, psychological well-being also impacts the increase in meaning in life and career planning. This study indicates that students who are satisfied with their lives and have clear career plans tend to have better psychological well-being, which can reduce the risk of experiencing a quarter-life crisis (Kurniasari et al., 2019; Maghfiro & Dewi, 2023). Thus, it is important for higher education institutions in East Kalimantan to develop programs that support students' mental well-being.

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the conducted research, it can be concluded that this study reveals that meaning in life and career planning are important factors that can influence the stability of the quarter-life crisis among students, with a contribution of 46.3% ($p > 0.01$). Enhancing meaning in life and providing guidance for students in career planning, along with support from educational institutions and counseling services, can contribute to reducing the negative impacts of QLC. This study emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach in supporting students' psychological well-being, especially when facing the challenges of transitioning into adulthood. The researchers suggest a longitudinal approach to explore what kind of meaning in life needs to be sought, the dynamics of the quarter-life crisis for individuals living in remote rural areas, as the respondents primarily came from urban settings, or the exploration of mediating factors from other variables.

6. CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Rico Septian, Annisya Mutmainnah, & Irma Alfina: Conceptualization, Review, Discussion, Data Analysis & Editing. **Erdin Jhaya & Maulana Ishaq:** Data Collector Data, Review, & Discussion.

7. Declaration of Competing Interest

This study has no known competing financial, conflict financial, interests, or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this research.

8. Declaration of Generative AI and Assistive Technologies in the Writing Process

The supporting technologies used in the writing process of this journal include tools like Grammarly for correcting the language of the manuscript post-translation and JASP for data analysis.

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10. Ethical Approval

The authors declare that the research involving human participants complies with the ethical principles of the Code of Ethics of the Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSI), and Law No. 23 of 2022 concerning Psychology Education and Services and has obtained approval from each of the universities mentioned.

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