

From campus to career: Job search behavior of generation z graduates from Nusa Cendana University, Indonesia

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Abstract. This study explores the job search behavior of Generation Z graduates from Nusa Cendana University, addressing the gap between limited work experience during university and the need to enter the labor market promptly. The lack of structured internship opportunities has resulted in unsystematic job search behaviors, raising concerns among employers regarding the preparedness and skills of Generation Z in professional settings. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight alumni, selected via purposive sampling, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study identified six themes, namely career development, self-efficacy, proactive and systematic approaches, coping strategies, and resilience. Career development is the primary motivational factor, followed by the need for flexibility and the desire for independent income, reflecting intrinsic and altruistic work values. Cognitively, participants exhibited high self efficacy, realistic attitudes toward selection stages, and full awareness of responsibilities, serving as psychological resources for achieving career goals. Behaviorally, job search intensity varied among individuals but was managed through effective self-regulation and proactive strategies. Affectively, participants demonstrated adaptive coping mechanisms and resilience, maintaining focus and optimism throughout challenging and unpredictable job search processes. The study provides insights for curriculum development at Nusa Cendana University to enhance real work experience and better prepare graduates for labor market demands.

1 Introduction

Generation Z, or more commonly known as Gen Z, is the generation born between 1997 and 2012. Gen Z is one of the dominant generations in Indonesia, accounting for approximately 71.28 million people, or 26.4% of the total population, and entering their productive age [1]. As a generation that grew up in an era of rapid digital technology development, Gen Z exhibits slightly different preferences and profiles when it comes to finding and performing their jobs. One of Gen Z's orientations

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when searching for work is the amount of monthly salary received. Research by Fikri et al. added flexibility, career development, work location, and work-life balance as other preferences. These preferences then influence Gen Z's job search behavior [2].

Job search behavior is a series of actions connecting job seekers with the types of jobs they need, involving the integration of motivational perspectives and self-regulation within the job seeker. Data from various job search platforms indicates that 65% of job seekers are Generation Z (currently aged 15-30) [3]. The official website of the Ministry of Manpower (satudata.kemnaker.co.id) in 2024 shows an increase in the workforce to 7.56 million people between 2021 and 2023. This means the number of job seekers has increased over the past three years [4].

As the generation that dominates job search sites, the behavior of Gen Z is significantly different from previous generations. A 2020 study by Hanifah & Wardono found at least five factors influencing Gen Z in Jakarta and Bandung in their job search: intrinsic, extrinsic, altruistic, status, and social relationships. "Career," as part of the extrinsic value factor, ranks first among job seeker behavior indicators. Gen Z considers how their career path will be if they apply to a particular company. Another study in Riau province showed that the work environment and flexible working hours dominate Gen Z's intentions to apply for jobs [5].

Several stages must be undertaken in the process of securing employment, one of which is the job interview. Findings from interviews with Human Resources (HR) personnel, responsible for conducting recruitment and selection processes reveal varied perspectives regarding Generation Z's workplace behavior. Generation Z is often perceived as inconsistent and slow to adapt to organizational culture; possessing unrealistic salary expectations despite having little or no work experience; and being the most challenging generation to retain and motivate. Additional concerns include their high dependency on internet based technologies and their preference for flexibility in working anytime and anywhere [6].

Job search behavior will determine how people behave in the workplace. Therefore, recruitment processes often use the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) method when interviewing prospective employees. The goal is to evaluate candidates by assessing their past behavior and identifying future behavioral tendencies. The workplace performance of Generation Z has increasingly drawn attention. Consequently, companies and organizations often attempt to adapt to the needs and preferences of this generation. However, empirical data indicate that Gen Z's work performance is frequently rated poorly, sometimes leading to employment termination. A 2024 survey by Intelligent.com reported that 60% of companies had dismissed Generation Z employees, with the top three reasons being lack of motivation/initiative (50%), lack of professionalism (46%), and poor organizational skills (42%). Other reasons included inadequate communication skills, insufficient relevant experience, inadequate technical skills, and misalignment with organizational culture [7].

Research on job search behaviour has not yet been specifically conducted among graduates in East Nusa Tenggara. Meanwhile, existing studies have predominantly focused on the variable of work performance, in which individual performance is regarded as a reflection of workplace behavior. The work performance variable itself is generally examined alongside other factors such as resilience and job burnout, commitment and work motivation, job satisfaction, work attitudes and values, as well as transformational leadership and work motivation [8]. Thus, it can be concluded that most studies have placed greater emphasis on individual performance rather than on job search behavior.

As a university that consistently produces graduates each year, the University of Nusa Cendana aims to prepare its students to participate sustainably in the workforce. However, preliminary interviews with alumni revealed that internship programs have not been integrated across all study programs, resulting in unequal access and limited exposure to professional environments. The only field-based program available, the Community Service Program (Kuliah Kerja Nyata), differs significantly from the actual workplace setting. Under these circumstances, employers tend to prioritize candidates with prior work experience. Therefore, this study aims to explore the strategies employed by graduates, particularly those from Generation Z, in the process of job searching.

Both theoretical models of job search and empirical research findings suggest that job search behavior is not a unidimensional construct. This study adopts Van Hooft's Job Search Behavior theory because it is more comprehensive and multidimensional. This theory views job search as an active and structured process influenced by goal clarity, motivation, and emotional states, making it particularly relevant to Generation Z, who seek meaningful work and are susceptible to workplace stress. Moreover, Van Hooft's theory is the most recent framework compared to the other job search theories. This study examines the job search behavior of Generation Z graduates from the University of Nusa Cendana using Van Hooft's theoretical framework, which addresses motivational, cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions [9]. The findings aim to provide an overview of these graduates' job search behavior and inform psychological intervention strategies to enhance their labor market readiness, adaptability, and resilience

2 Methods

This study used a qualitative approach. Data collection was conducted through interviews with eight alumni of Nusa Cendana University. The interview guide was developed using the Job Search Behavior theory developed by Van Hooft, Van Hooft, & Van den Hee [10]. This theory examines motivational, cognitive, behavioral, and affective.

2.1 Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- 1) Graduates of Nusa Cendana University;
- 2) Maximum age 28 years (Gen Z); and
- 3) Already working in the East Nusa Tenggara region.

2.2 Research Instrument

The research instrument used was an interview guide developed by Van Hooft et al. [10]. This theory examines motivational, cognitive, behavioral, affective. The interview instrument underwent a validity test using peer debriefing techniques with fellow researchers in the Psychology Study Program, Nusa Cendana. University Instrument reliability was tested using pilot interviews, interviewing three Gen Z individuals to ensure the interview guide was easily understood and effective in gathering data. All data collection processes were well documented.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were read and thoroughly understood. The researcher highlighted important sections and grouped them into subthemes. The grouped subthemes were then analyzed and reviewed to ensure they represented the data. Subthemes were grouped into themes and described along with supporting data quotations.

3 Results

The research analysis successfully identified six themes that describe the job search behavior of Universitas Nusa Cendana graduates. The six themes are outlined as follows:

Theme 1: Set the goal: Career development. Career development as a product of goal setting emerged as the primary theme in the job search behavior of graduates from Nusa Cendana University. The findings indicate that all participants agreed that their main objective in seeking employment is career advancement. Participants emphasized the importance of identifying a truly desired job as the primary goal to ensure a more directed and purposeful job search process. However, companies and institutions where participants submitted their applications tend to prioritize work experience, posing a particular challenge for recent graduates with limited experience.

Through interviews, all participants expressed a desire to secure employment that aligns with their educational background and allows them to work professionally with consistent income. Acknowledging the gap between the need for work experience and their limited experience, participants demonstrated flexibility by applying for contract, project-based, shift, or fieldwork positions, as well as engaging in organizational or community activities to accumulate as much work experience as possible. Participants recognized that even when performing jobs not fully aligned with their field of study, such experiences are considered an investment in their future career development.

Moreover, the skills acquired through current employment were perceived as highly valuable for advancing their careers in positions that truly match their educational background. Several participants also exhibited high levels of self confidence, particularly in their ability to adapt, collaborate, and continuously develop themselves on a daily basis.

“Our campus does not provide an internship program, so I have very limited experience. I am now focusing on finding a job related to psychology, since my current work in electronics services and restaurants is not aligned with my field. I realize that experience is essential, so I plan to gain some first and then seek an internship in psychology institutions. I really want to earn my own income and work professionally” (P1, CRN)

“I hope the experience I already have can lead me to a better career, especially as a professional supervisor, because it’s more flexible. I believe there are job opportunities as long as we’re willing to learn from experience. If we’re too strict about salary, position, or even dress code, it can limit our chances. From my experience, adaptability and professionalism are the keys to getting better jobs.” (P2, BSL)

“I want to focus on a career as a civil servant, but I also have a special passion for being a barista as a form of self expression. I hope to find a professional job that aligns with my personal passion. I believe opportunities mostly depend on the effort we put in—they’re something we create ourselves, not something given by others.” (P3, SKL)

“I still take full responsibility for my current job as a counselor at PPA, in order to gain more experience in the field of psychology. Right now, my goal is to become a Police officer in the HR/Psychology field, and I’m working on it.” (P4, FR)

“My main motivation is to establish an NGO in the field of education and social affairs. I feel highly confident in my abilities because I am very social and organizationally inclined, which makes it easier to find employment. I hope this job will provide valuable knowledge and experience to help me realize that dream. I also believe that networking and building connections will expand job opportunities, so these skills need to be developed.” (P5, SNN)

“I want to work professionally, preferably in a position that offers relative stability in working hours, job description, location, and salary. I focus on professional and systematic work that aligns with my education and aspirations, prioritizing career growth while believing that salary will follow. I feel confident in my abilities, can adapt well to the work environment, and am open to learning every day.” (P6, YYDD)

“My needs include earning income, gaining experience, and building new professional relationships. I feel highly confident in my abilities because the job I’m targeting matches my educational background in Communication Science. I aspire to work in a more professional environment where I can both apply and develop my communication skills, with the expectation of a more stable salary” (P7, MSX)

“I want to earn income independently. I have felt insecure because I’m applying to companies focused on industrial organizational psychology, but I have limited experience since I didn’t do any internships during college. I hope to develop professional competencies relevant to the job I apply for.” (P8, JL)

Based on the interview excerpts, two key aspects can be highlighted in participants’ career development: flexibility and the desire to earn income independently. After establishing their primary job goals, participants remain open to more flexible employment, as long as it provides opportunities to contribute and demonstrate their competencies as higher education graduates. Whether in field or office positions, aligned or not with their field of study, with high or low salaries, and with fixed or variable working hours, these factors do not pose a significant concern for Generation Z graduates of Universitas Nusa Cendana, as long as they are able to generate their own income and prepare for future career advancement.

Theme 2: Self-efficacy. The participants in this study demonstrated a high level of self-confidence in their abilities. They recognized that the demands of today’s labor market are increasingly complex, emphasizing not only technical knowledge but also soft skills and personal character as critical factors in recruitment and selection processes. Moreover, there is a significant gap between the number of available positions and the number of graduates applying, making rejection or failure during selection a

common experience for participants.

In response, participants consistently submitted multiple applications while simultaneously enhancing their competencies to meet the qualifications required by prospective employers. This awareness fostered a flexible mindset, including a willingness not to set high expectations for salary or job position. Consequently, participants engaged in every employment opportunity they secured to demonstrate that they are a generation capable of learning and adapting to the work environment, open to acquiring new skills, able to work in teams, perform under pressure, communicate effectively, build relationships, respond to technological developments, and be reliable in every task entrusted to them. This self-confidence aligns with the concept of self-efficacy, which serves as a key factor in participants' optimism in obtaining the jobs that match their aspirations.

“I try to determine a career path that truly matches my educational background. I search for job vacancies through various online and offline media and submit applications that meet the requirements to gain work experience. I prepare myself to meet the required skills, prioritize options that are more flexible and better fit my personal criteria, and focus on every stage of the selection process while staying optimistic” (P1, CRN)

“I believe success comes from experience, which starts with confidence in my knowledge and abilities. I don't have any hindering thoughts because my self-confidence drives me to take active steps every day to search for jobs and perform my current tasks. There's no time to dwell on potential failure. Maintaining optimism, being honest about my abilities, and being able to work in a team are essential.” (P2, BSL)

“Although I've been rejected in some cases, I try to maintain a realistic view given the intense competition and large number of applicants. My driving mindset is optimism, because I have experience, I constantly update my skills, and I tend to prepare thoroughly for all tasks.” (P3, SKL)

“I don't have any hindering thoughts—my Master's degree background gives me unique confidence.” (P4, FR)

“The connections and networks I gain come from my personal strengths in organizing, socializing, collaborating effectively in every opportunity, and demonstrating my skills.” (P5, SNN)

“I confidently presented my personal skills, and my organizational experience during college greatly helped in teamwork training. I don't have any inhibiting thoughts; despite some insecurity, I maintained self-confidence and continued to move forward.” (P8, JL)

Theme 3: Proactivity and Systematic Approach. The findings indicate that the participants demonstrated proactive and systematic behavior in their job search process. They systematically sought recruitment information through various media, both online and offline, as well as through information obtained verbally

from family or acquaintances. Moreover, participants focused on job vacancies that aligned with their personal characteristics and capabilities, thereby avoiding time spent on positions with qualifications that were irrelevant or unattainable. This process was reinforced by an active approach to self-development, including enhancing skills through online courses and participating in organizational activities. Consequently, throughout the job search process, participants consistently balanced their application efforts with beneficial self-development activities.

“I regularly update job vacancy information on Jobly, social media, and websites, and I apply for positions that match my experience. I avoid applying for jobs where I lack the basic skills to ensure I can perform optimally. I am quite systematic and detailed. No applications are submitted just as a trial.” (P3, SKL)

“I approach everything systematically and in a structured way, and I prefer contract work with a duration of around one year.” (P4, FR)

“I began by creating a CV and portfolio, attending online trainings, and continuously improving my foreign language and public speaking skills. I use social media to develop my skills, practice storytelling, and participate in major projects with seriousness and discipline. I regularly update my CV, build new professional connections, and see involvement in large-scale projects as a key avenue for recruitment opportunities.” (P7, MSX)

“I established my primary career goal of becoming a police officer. I applied for an HRD position and was accepted for a one-year contract. I studied fundamental materials on Industrial-Organizational Psychology, attended preparatory courses, and learned about tests like the MBTI to better engage with interviewers and successfully pass assessments.” (P8, JL)

Theme 4: Self-regulation. Self-regulation emerged as the fourth theme identified to describe the job search behavior of Generation Z graduates from Universitas Nusa Cendana. This theme was derived from interview findings in which participants explained how they consciously and independently managed themselves throughout each stage of the job search process. Self-regulation was reflected in their ability to determine the frequency of job searches each week, select appropriate methods, analyze and decide on suitable positions to apply for, prepare to meet the required qualifications, and allocate time to get ready for both written and oral selection processes. All of these procedures were carried out without external intervention. Participants also demonstrated a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and were able to formulate the most effective strategies to succeed in job selection processes.

“I apply to 4-5 job openings online each week. I dedicate much of my time to job searching and self-improvement activities, like practicing for interviews. My primary goal is to find a job that aligns with my educational background, namely becoming an HRD professional or working in the field of Psychology.” (P1, CRN)

“I apply for jobs at least twice a week, both online and offline. Every time I

submit an application, I make sure to learn about the company, its industry, and the basic knowledge and skills required. I actively work on learning and improving my skills.” (P2, BSL)

“All are carefully selected to match my capabilities and meet the job requirements.” (P3, SKL)

“I can apply to up to 10 job vacancies in one day, both online and offline. I do this to fill my time and save money for continuing professional studies. I put forth great effort, because besides my current job, I’m also working on other projects and preparing microteaching materials for the PPA program.” (P4, FR)

“I obtain jobs through networking rather than by submitting applications. My effort is focused on improving my networking skills, collaborating within large organizations, and continuously learning the skills I need to develop. I prepare myself to participate honestly in all stages of the selection process. Experience and relationships form the main framework of my job searching.” (P5, SNN)

“I applied for jobs almost daily, both online and offline. When the civil servant recruitment opened, I applied and passed the administrative stage, proceeded to the next tests, and continued to succeed until I secured my current position as a civil servant at the Land Office. I intensified my effort during preparation for the civil servant exam. My goal in every job search is to be accepted, but if I’m not, it’s acceptable as long as I’ve fully applied my effort and personal abilities without compromise.” (P6, YYDD)

“I learn from rejections due to university accreditation—an unchangeable factor—and my solution is to work harder through self-development to ensure my personal capabilities are beyond doubt. I monitor every job application I submit. Since job searching can be time-consuming, staying actively involved in social activities helps maintain my well-being, and I occasionally enroll in online courses.” (P7, MSX)

“I focused on personal branding through LinkedIn, which led to receiving a notification to participate in an HRD selection process. I managed my emotions by realizing that focusing on others’ strengths causes insecurity, so I redirected my focus toward my own potential.” (P8, JL)

Theme 5: Coping Strategies. The findings identified coping strategies as an important theme in describing the job search behavior of Generation Z graduates from Universitas Nusa Cendana. This theme emerged from participants’ experiences in managing psychological challenges during the job search process, such as anxiety, uncertainty, rejection, and extended periods of unemployment. Participants employed a variety of coping strategies to maintain motivation and psychological well-being. These included emotion regulation through the application of positive thinking, mindfulness, and self-reflection; engagement in productive activities such as online courses, skill development, and organizational involvement; as well as maintaining balance through social interactions, exercise, and religious practices. This approach demonstrates that participants were not solely focused on the end

result of securing employment, but also on sustaining a healthy psychological state throughout the process. Consequently, coping strategies play a critical role in supporting participants' resilience in navigating the dynamics of job searching.

"I occasionally feel fatigued or worried about not receiving interview calls or job offers, but I'm mostly driven to keep pushing myself until I achieve my ultimate goal. It doesn't reach the point of anxiety, stress, or frustration. I also focus on improving my personal skills while still making time to socialize and meet with friends." (P1, CRN)

"I experienced a four-month period of unemployment, which caused some stress, but it didn't last long. I believe stress during active job searching is unnecessary; the real problem arises when one is inactive in applying and has many demands, then stress is understandable. I have a mindset that if I don't get a certain job, it means it's not meant to be. Therefore, I keep trying and don't dwell too long on something that is truly not meant for me." (P2, BSL)

"Sometimes I felt 'left hanging' because they said I would be contacted but never were. There was some worry due to the prolonged process, but it never led to frustration. I cope by staying motivated and recognizing that options are limited. Since working as a barista is my passion, while applying for available job openings, I continue to improve my barista skills." (P3, SKL)

"At times, stress arose from overthinking about the future. I responded positively, without excessive anxiety or frustration. My mindset is: let it go." (P6, YYDD)

"I experienced worry and anxiety after 3–5 months without securing a job, yet my motivation to continue searching remained strong, without reaching the point of despair. I cope by engaging in community activities and learning new skills." (P7, MSX)

"I felt insecure, afraid of failure, and certain of deep disappointment if I was not accepted. I practiced mindfulness and self-reflection, understanding that not passing does not mean failure but a postponed success, giving me an opportunity to improve my skills for future acceptance." (P8, JL)

Theme 6: Resilience. Resilience emerged as the sixth theme identified in describing the job search behavior of Generation Z graduates from Nusa Cendana University. This theme reflects participants' capacity to recover from setbacks, persist in the face of challenges, and maintain motivation throughout the demanding process of seeking employment. Participants reported that experiences of rejection, prolonged waiting periods, and unmet expectations did not lead to despair or disengagement. Instead, these obstacles were interpreted as opportunities for self-improvement and as part of the learning process in building their future careers.

Participants FR and SNN demonstrated considerable resilience in their job search processes. FR, as a Psychology graduate, emphasized that she had developed adaptive habits to cope with stress and endure high-pressure situations. Her academic experience at the Master's level significantly contributed to strengthening her mental fortitude, while her professional role as a counsellor further reinforced her capacity to

manage challenges effectively.

In contrast, SNN cultivated resilience primarily through the utilization of social relationships and professional networking. His ability to build high-quality connections facilitated access to employment opportunities, thereby fostering a sense of optimism and positivity throughout the recruitment process. Although SNN acknowledged that establishing networks is not an easy task, he recognized it as one of the most effective strategies for securing employment in the contemporary labor market. Consequently, communication, organizational, and collaborative skills were considered essential, not only to enhance employability but also to sustain long-term career development within an increasingly dynamic work environment.

“I feel very enthusiastic and positive because working as a counselor/consultant at PPA is my desired role. There is a personal sense of satisfaction. In the job search process, I haven’t encountered anything that causes significant frustration; everything is manageable thanks to established habits such as journaling, exercising, and meditation.” (P4, FR)

“I feel very positive, enthusiastic, and confident. There is no pessimism at all. I know my skills must continuously be developed, and I must constantly build my networks.” (P5, SNN)

The graduates demonstrated adaptive responses by reframing failures as temporary and by strengthening their commitment to continuous development, whether through skill enhancement, networking, or engaging in diverse forms of employment. Such resilience not only enabled them to sustain optimism and perseverance during uncertain job search trajectories but also positioned them as adaptable individuals capable of navigating the complexities of the contemporary labor market.

4 Discussion

Based on the research findings, the participants demonstrated a tendency to prioritize career development, which was identified as the first theme of job search behavior among Nusa Cendana University graduates. All participants had determined a specific type of professional occupation aligned with their respective educational backgrounds. Participants prioritized career development as their primary goal in the job search, aligning with the concept of goal-directed behavior in Job Search Behavior. They identified positions matching their educational background and skills as their main targets while remaining flexible in pursuing contract, project-based, or temporary work to gain experience. This demonstrates that job search is not merely a routine activity but a strategically planned process, consistent with Van Hooft’s notion on the motivational aspect that clear goal-setting enhances search intensity and adaptive decision making [9]. These findings are consistent with the study by Anjum [11], which demonstrated that Generation Z places significant emphasis on the importance of having a structured career path. They seek companies that offer transparent frameworks, mentorship programs, and advancement opportunities that allow them to navigate their professional journey with clarity and purpose. In line with this, the study by Waruwu and Lestari [12] affirms that career, personal growth, and life achievements occupy the most important positions as core values in the job search process.

Career development represents an intrinsic work value, namely the satisfaction an individual derives from the work itself rather than from external rewards or outcomes. This value is reflected in participants' firm determination to identify the type of work they truly desire and subsequently design strategies to achieve it. In addition to intrinsic values, Generation Z graduates from Nusa Cendana University also demonstrated a strong drive to work for the purpose of helping, serving, or providing benefits to others and to society at large. This was evident among participants who aspired to create development programs for PPA children, establish non-governmental organizations to create job opportunities for the community, and undertake other similar initiatives. This phenomenon reflects altruistic work values, which view meaningful work as that which provides satisfaction through the benefits experienced by others because of one's work. The findings of this study indicate that intrinsic and altruistic work values constitute motivational factors that can be used to explain latent variables related to the behavior of Generation Z in the workplace [5].

In addition to career development, flexibility constitutes another motivation in job searching among Generation Z. Although oriented toward a primary occupation as their goal, participants tend to prefer jobs that offer flexibility. Generation Z demonstrates specific preferences regarding work arrangements, particularly in terms of spatial and temporal flexibility as well as work-life balance. These preferences align with their comfort level with technology and digital lifestyles. Flexibility encompasses options such as remote work, adjusted working hours, redesign of task execution methods, and career pathways that support continuous skill development. Furthermore, Generation Z prioritizes work-life balance, aiming to preserve time for personal activities, recreation, hobbies, and social interactions with family and friends. Flexibility has now become a new standard in the workplace, shaped by shifts in work culture during the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital access rapidly expanded and Generation Z emerged as the most adaptive group in utilizing it. Adaptability is regarded as a critical competence for performing work effectively, as engaging in flexible work requires a high level of adaptive capacity [5].

Another motivation identified is the desire to earn income independently. From a developmental perspective, the age of Generation Z, which spans late adolescence to early adulthood, represents a period in which decision-making regarding the future becomes a personal responsibility. At this stage, participants demonstrate a tendency to avoid reliance on others and position themselves as problem solvers for the challenges they encounter. This finding differs slightly from research on Generation Z in Java, which shows a strong emphasis on setting salary standards for desired positions. Septiawan and Suprianto [13] reported that 44.9% of Generation Z set a salary expectation above 5 million rupiahs, with 39.6% preferring entrepreneurial work. The remainder chose to become employees in state-owned enterprises (BUMN), civil servants (ASN), or other positions. In contrast, Generation Z in East Nusa Tenggara did not explicitly state specific salary expectations. This phenomenon is influenced by several factors, including the limited industrial sectors providing employment opportunities for prospective workers, restricted access to and development of digital technology, which limits opportunities to earn income through digital skills, and the low interest, awareness, and capacity within the community to enhance creativity for entrepreneurship.

The second theme identified in this study is self-efficacy. After establishing their primary job search goal, the participants demonstrated a high level of confidence throughout each stage of the process, including developing job search strategies, par-

ticipating in selection processes, networking, and facing challenges or rejections. In Van Hooft's theory, self efficacy serves as a key motivational and cognitive factor that bridges the gap between an individual's career goals and their actual job search behavior. Each stage of the selection process was approached with a high level of attention, accompanied by the preparation of various alternative strategies to ensure that career objectives could be achieved [10]. These findings reflect a high level of self-efficacy, as described in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, where self-efficacy influences cognitive processes, including goal setting, planning, strategy formulation, expectation management, attention allocation, and problem solving. High self-efficacy in job seekers leads to quality and systematic job search behavior and increases the likelihood of successful outcomes. Basid and Nisya, in their study on career decision-making, found that high self-efficacy enables individuals to believe they can face greater challenges. Self-efficacy can modify the way individual approach and overcome challenges in pursuing their careers. Without confidence in one's own abilities, job search behavior tends to be less structured, less intensive, and less effective [14].

Proactive and systematic approach are the third theme found in this study. Generation Z graduates from Nusa Cendana University actively sought job vacancies through online and offline media, leveraged social networks, and selected positions aligned with their capabilities. Their systematic approach, including careful vacancy selection and skill enhancement through courses or organizational involvement reflects planned and deliberate behavior, which Van Hooft associates with higher success rates in obtaining employment. In this context, participants actively built relationships by engaging in institutional or community projects and by participating in self-directed training programs, both online and offline. A positive mindset and strong self-efficacy serve as primary drivers influencing the cognitive performance of Generation Z in effectively managing and executing job search strategies. Participant also demonstrated a realistic perspective regarding the possibility of rejection during the job selection process. Identified contributing factors included the imbalance between the number of job vacancies and applicants, limited work experience, less competitive curriculum vitae, and the mismatch between educational background or university accreditation and the specified job requirements. This attribution pattern aligns with the Attributional Style dimension within Van Hooft's Job Search Behavior framework, which emphasizes the importance of how individuals interpret success and failure, whether through internal attributions (effort, skills) or external factors (labor market conditions). An adaptive attribution perspective encourages proactive behavior in continuously seeking job opportunities, even in the face of rejection [9].

The fourth theme, self-regulation can be categorized as a behavioral aspect in Van Hooft's job search theory. Self regulation is a central aspect of job search behavior, as effective job search requires planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation. Participants managed the frequency of job applications, methods used, and preparation strategies for selection processes, taking into account their strengths and weaknesses. This aligns with Van Hooft's framework, where self-regulation affects the effectiveness of job search and the individual's ability to adapt to labor market demands [9]. The study results indicated variation in job search intensity among participants, ranging from submitting 2–4 applications, 7 applications per day, to more than 10 applications per day, reflecting a high level of commitment to securing employment immediately after graduation. Job search methods involved both online and offline channels. Online, information was obtained through job search websites (e.g., jobly.com, karir.com, Jobstreet, loker.id), social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook), and

official websites of employment agencies. Offline, information was gathered through family, relatives, friends, and other personal networks. To enhance job search effectiveness, participants prepared themselves by improving skills, studying company profiles, and understanding the characteristics of the desired positions. Upon passing initial selection stages, preparations were intensified to maximize performance in subsequent stages. Various strategies were employed, including utilizing digital technology to create appealing CVs, promoting themselves through social media, and enhancing the soft skills required in the workplace.

Participants focused their attention and efforts on jobs that matched their competencies or skills that could still be developed, allowing the job search process to be conducted optimally. Building professional networks and relationships was also regarded as an important strategy for securing employment opportunities. All these behaviors reflect strong self-regulation abilities, consistent with Van Hooft's Job Search Behavior framework, which emphasizes that the effectiveness of job searching is determined by a combination of action intensity, the use of search strategies, and an individual's capacity to independently manage motivation, time, and resources. Participants showed an awareness that job searching is a personal responsibility reflects the proactivity dimension in Van Hooft's model, in which individuals actively initiate the actions necessary to achieve career goals, overcome obstacles, and ensure the continuity of job search efforts even in the face of negative consequences. Thus, the job search behavior of Generation Z graduates from Nusa Cendana University demonstrates an integration of behavioral strategies and adaptive self-regulation, which serves as a key factor in successfully entering the labor market [9].

The last two themes in this study, namely coping strategies and resilience, are concrete behaviors that explain the affective aspects in the theory of job search behavior. Analysis revealed that the affective aspect results from the integration of motivation, cognition, and behavior, and is related to the potential emergence of both positive and negative emotions during the job search process. Interestingly, negative emotions were not significantly observed among participants. Feelings of anxiety, stress, or frustration whether arising from rejections or delays in selection results—did not lead to discouragement in pursuing employment. On the contrary, participants demonstrated self-acceptance, optimism, and positive responses to every outcome of the selection process. The ability to accept realities that may not align with expectations can be categorized as resilience, which serves as an important asset in facing the challenges of today's labor market.

Moreover, the study found that each participant had developed individual coping strategies to manage concerns and stress during the job search process. These coping strategies played a crucial role in maintaining focus on the primary goal, namely securing employment and optimizing career development. This aligns with the study by Johnson & Sivaraman, which indicates that Generation Z tends to prepare thoroughly through various job search processes, approaching them with full awareness to achieve pre-established goals. Therefore, the present study supports previous findings that indicate a significant relationship between conscientiousness and resilience among Generation Z in the context of job searching. Resilience reinforces individuals' capacity to recover from setbacks, rejection, and uncertainty. This corresponds to sustained effort the ability to persist in job searching despite obstacles. Participants such as FR and SNN demonstrated that resilience can be cultivated through academic experience, professional roles, and social networking, all of which enhance overall job search effectiveness [15].

5 Conclusion

This study aims to identify and describe the job search behavior of Generation Z graduates from Nusa Cendana University. The study identified six themes: career development, self-efficacy, proactive and systematic approaches, self regulation, coping strategies, and resilience. These six themes were then analyzed using Van Hooft's job search behavior theoretical framework, finding that career development occupies a dominant position as a motivational factor, followed by the need for flexibility and the desire to earn income independently. These findings reflect the manifestation of intrinsic and altruistic work values, whereby Generation Z graduates seek both personal satisfaction and positive contributions to others through work aligned with their interests and preferences. From a cognitive perspective, Generation Z demonstrates a high level of self-efficacy, serving as a psychological resource for achieving career goals. A realistic attitude toward each stage of the selection process, combined with full awareness of responsibilities at every stage, further strengthens this cognitive dimension. In terms of behavior, job search intensity varies among individuals, influenced by personal characteristics, skills, and prior experiences. Nevertheless, participants can exercise effective self-regulation, ensuring that the job search process remains structured and systematic. Finally, the affective dimension emerges because of the harmonious integration of motivational, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. This is reflected in Generation Z graduates' ability to persevere through

complex, challenging, and sometimes unpredictable job search processes. Participants can develop adaptive coping strategies to manage negative emotions while maintaining focus on achieving their ultimate career goals.

6 Implication

Based on the findings of this study, a practical recommendation is for Universitas Nusa Cendana to develop a career guidance service for students, particularly during the semester in which they undertake their final project. This career guidance program could be offered optionally and delivered online to facilitate accessibility. The university may collaborate with professional partners, such as Human Resources departments (HRD) or industry practitioners, who can serve as facilitators in the program. The purpose of this program is to provide students with knowledge and insights regarding labor market requirements, preparation for entering the workforce, strategies to successfully navigate the job selection process, and opportunities to build professional networks that connect students with partners for internships or job-related information. Furthermore, the program also focused on job search behavior approached from various perspectives, including psychology, that are most relevant in the current context, enabling students to secure employment aligned with their field of expertise while also equipping them to address challenges arising from globalization.

Future studies are recommended to integrate additional psychological variables, such as career adaptability, optimism, and emotional intelligence, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. As a continuation of job search research, subsequent studies could also measure the resilience levels of Generation Z in the labor market, particularly in East Nusa Tenggara, using quantitative approaches to achieve more representative results.

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Data Availability Statement: This study was conducted in full compliance with the applicable procedures. The data are fully available, including research instruments (interview guidelines), interview transcripts, data analysis documents, and research documentation.

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