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Career Construction among Islamic Primary School Student: An Exploratory Study of Early Career Planning

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ABSTRACT

Research on career development has largely focused on adolescents and young adults, leaving early career construction in primary education relatively underexplored, particularly in religious-based schooling context. Drawing on Career Construction Theory (CCT), this study examines how teachers in Islamic elementary schools facilitate students' early career meaning making. A qualitative design was employed involving five Islamic elementary school teachers in Central and East Java, Indonesia, selected based on their teaching experience and involvement in student development programs. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document observations and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis framework. Credibility was ensured through data triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal that teachers act as key agents in fostering students' early career awareness by integrating Islamic values such as responsibility, discipline, honesty, and respect into learning actions and school programs. Experiential activities, including career visits, school orientation programs, and interest-based extracurricular activities, support students' early exploration and emerging career adaptability. This study contributes to the development of CCT by demonstrating how early career narratives can emerge within culturally and spiritually grounded educational environments. Pratically, the findings highlight the need for developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive career guidance frameworks in primary education. Future studies should incorporate students' and parents' perspectives to further capture the dynamics of early career constructions.

Keywords: Career Planning; Islamic Primary School; Career Construction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of modern education is to equip younger generations for a future marked by uncertainty. Rapid technological innovation, economic transformation, and shifting workforce demands have significantly altered how individuals envision and plan their careers (Minciu et al., 2025; Muslihati et al., 2023). Career development is no longer understood as a linear process beginning in adolescence; rather, it is increasingly viewed as a gradual developmental process shaped by social experiences, schooling, family influence, and early role models (Maree, 2019; Mcmahon & Watson, 2022). Early career awareness allows children to recognize their

preferences, imagine possible futures, and strengthen their self-efficacy in educational transitions (Arumsari et al., 2025). Therefore, career-related learning during the primary school years has become an important foundation for long-term career development.

Career Construction Theory offers a strong conceptual lens for understanding career development across the lifespan. This theory positions career as a process of meaning-making through which individuals construct their identities and future roles based on experiences, personal narratives, and social interaction (Savickas, 2002; Wang & Li, 2024; Wulandari et al., 2023). Three key elements shape this process, such as career adaptability, vocational personality, and life themes. Career adaptability refers to an individual's readiness to cope with transitions, challenges, and changing environments; vocational personality reflects interests, abilities, and preferences related to occupational fields; and life themes provide narrative meaning and direction to one's choices and aspirations (Savickas, 2005b, 2019). These dimensions suggest that career development is not limited to occupational preparation, but also involves identity formation, purpose development, and meaning-making across life contexts.

Recent studies indicate that elementary school is a critical period for cultivating early career awareness and future readiness. At this stage, children begin to form aspirations, construct self-images, and imagine future occupations through interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and school experiences (Endendijk & Portengen, 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2026). Educational settings therefore have a strategic role in supporting children's holistic growth, including the development of curiosity, confidence, adaptability, and responsibility (Ismail et al., 2024). However, in many educational systems, including Indonesia, career guidance at the primary school level remains underdeveloped, unstructured, and often secondary to academic priorities (Prada, 2025). As a result, children are often given limited opportunities to build early career narratives and connect their present learning experiences with future aspirations.

This issue becomes particularly meaningful in Islamic primary schools, where academic learning is closely integrated with moral and spiritual formation. Islamic education does not merely focus on knowledge transmission, but also emphasizes the development of character, discipline, responsibility, and purposeful living grounded in religious teachings (Andrianie et al., 2020, 2021). In such contexts, schools may serve as important spaces for nurturing students' potential through value-based educational experiences. The integration of Islamic values can enrich career construction by shaping children's life themes and linking personal aspirations with moral responsibility, social contribution, and spiritual purpose (Efendi & Distira, 2024; Jakandar et al., 2025; Sutisna et al., 2025). This suggests that Islamic primary schools offer a distinctive context for understanding how career development may be guided through culturally and spiritually grounded educational practices.

Despite this potential, only a limited number of studies have examined career development processes within Islamic primary school settings. Much of the existing literature on career development and Career Construction Theory has focused on adolescents, vocational students, or university populations (Merino-tejedor et al., 2025; Wang & Li, 2024). Consequently, the early phases of career narrative formation in childhood have received far less empirical attention. Likewise, little is known about how teachers in Islamic primary schools support children's career awareness or how spiritual values are incorporated into students' aspirations and life meanings. This absence represents an important gap in the literature on culturally and spiritually responsive career guidance. Addressing this gap is essential not only for extending Career Construction Theory to younger populations, but also for informing context-sensitive career guidance practices in faith-based educational settings.

Hence, this study aims to explore teachers' understanding of their roles in supporting students' early career planning in Islamic primary schools. It also investigates how career construction processes emerge informally in classroom practices through teachers' everyday interactions, guidance, and support for students' exploration of interests and aspirations. More specifically, this study examines how teachers facilitate the development of students' career interests, aspirations, and life meanings, as well as how they integrate Islamic values into early career learning experiences. Through the lens of teachers' perspectives, this research seeks to offer new insights into the development of contextual and values-based career guidance approaches in Islamic primary education.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative interpretivist paradigm to understand how teachers construct meaning from their experiences in supporting students' early career planning. Within this paradigm, reality is viewed as socially constructed through interactions, interpretations, and contextual experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Therefore, qualitative inquiry is appropriate for exploring how teachers interpret career construction processes in everyday classroom practices. Methodologically, this study combined a narrative approach with thematic analysis. The narrative approach was used to capture teachers' stories and experiences regarding how they guide students in developing aspirations and future orientations. Narratives allow participants to describe how meanings, values, and experiences unfold in their professional practice. Meanwhile, reflexive thematic analysis was employed as an analytical strategy to systematically identify patterns of meaning across these narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Through this integration, teachers' individual stories were first understood as narrative accounts and subsequently analyzed thematically to reveal broader patterns related to the construction of career awareness and the integration of Islamic values in career guidance practices at the elementary school level.

2.2 Research Location and Subject

This research was conducted in Islamic primary schools (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* and Islamic elementary schools) located in East Java and Central Java, Indonesia. These regions were selected because they represent areas where Islamic-based schools are widely established and vary in terms of institutional characteristics, educational programs, and school cultures. Such diversity provides a rich context for understanding how career related guidance practices are implemented within Islamic educational settings.

This participants in this study were five teachers who actively worked in Islamic primary schools in these provinces. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which aims to identify participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria for participants were: (1) having at least five years of teaching experience; (2) being actively involved in student self-development or character education activities; and (3) having experience in guiding students in developing aspirations, interests, or future plans within school activities.

The number of participants was considered adequate for exploratory qualitative research that focus on in-depth understanding rather than statistical generalization. Narrative-based qualitative studies typically involve a small number of informants to allow detailed exploration of participants' experiences and meanings (Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2024). Data collection

was conducted until the narratives provided rich and repetitive patterns of meaning, indicating that sufficient information had been obtained to address the research objectives.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews based on semi-structured guidelines so that informants had the space to reflect and speak openly according to their respective contexts (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted individually with each participant. The interview guideline was designed to explore several key areas related to early career construction in Islamic primary schools. Interviews were conducted in a conversational format to allow participants to share their experiences in depth. Within participants' consent, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

To enrich contextual understanding, supporting documents such as scholl self-development programs, character education activities, or career-related innitiatives were also reviewed when available. These documents helped provide additional contextual insights into how schools support students' self-development and future orientation. Prior to the data collection process, participants were informed about the research objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations, including voluntary participation, confidentiality of identity, and the right to with draw from the study at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure adherence to ethical research principles (Hosseini & Haukås, 2025).

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using the reflexive thematic narrative analysis, following the procedure proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach was selected because it allows researchers to systematically identity patterns of meaning across qualitative data while remaining sensitive to the narrative context of participants' experiences. The analysis was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher engaged in data familiarization by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding of participants' narratives. Second, initial coding was performed by identifying meaningful segments of the text related to teachers' experiences in supporting students' career awareness and aspirations. Third, the codes were organized the search for preliminary themes that reflected broader patterns within the narratives. Fourth, the emerging themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately represented the data and maintained coherence within each theme. Finally the themes were defined and named, followed by the interpretation of how these themes explained teachers' roles in facilitating early career construction and integrating Islamic values within classroom practices (Nowell et al., 2017). Throughout the analysis process, particular attention was given to how teachers' narratives reflected the elements of career adaptability, vocational interests, and life themes, as well as how Islamic values influenced the meaning-making process in students' early career development.

2.5 Strategies for Ensuring Data Credibility

Several strategies were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. First, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews with supporting school documents and relevant theoretical perspectives. Second, member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries or interpretations to participants to confirm that the findings accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives (Ahmed, 2024).

In addition, the researcher maintained reflexive notes during the research process to document analytical decisions and reflections while interpreting the data. This process helped ensure transparency in the analytical procedure and minimized potential bias in the interpretation of participants' narratives. Through these strategies the study aimed to produce findings that are credible, transparent, and academically accountable.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles for qualitative research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants, including the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews were conducted. To protect participants' privacy, all personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts and replaces with pseudonyms. The interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team. These procedures were implemented to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and responsible management of research data throughout the study process.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were derived from in-depth interviews with Islamic elementary school teachers regarding how schools support students' early career awareness and how teachers interpret their role in facilitating career development. Using thematic analysis, several key themes emerged that illustrate the dynamics of career construction among elementary school students in Islamic educational settings.

3.1 Implementation of Career Guidance and Counseling Programs in Elementary Schools

Based on interviews conducted with five Islamic elementary school teachers, it appears that most schools are aware of the importance of career guidance and counseling services as an essential part of education in Islamic elementary schools. However, in practice, the implementation of this program is not yet fully structured in a formal manner. A total of four of the five schools have guidance counselors or counselors who play a role in assisting student development, including in the aspect of career development. This shows that most Islamic elementary schools support the implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools. However, even so, the explicit involvement of teachers in the guidance and counseling program is still limited. A total of three of the five school teachers are involved in activities related to elementary school student career guidance and counseling programs. This indicates that although career development has been deemed important to implement from an early age, its implementation still depends on the initiative and capacity of each individual teacher, rather than being part of a systematic and structured program.

A total of four out of five schools have special programs for self-development, life skills, or career introduction. A total of three of the schools participate in training or workshops related to career planning or character development for students. These programs are implemented through various activities such as School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS); field trips and career visits to places such as hospitals, fire stations, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*), and businesses; interest-based extracurricular programs such as robotics, arts, sports, and tahfidz; as well as inviting guest speakers from various professions to participate in school activities. These activities are considered to enhance students' career

exploration by providing them with insights into various professions and the world of work, while emulating the prophets or Islamic figures as professionals in their respective fields, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Career visits to fire stations and Indonesian National Police

3.2 Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Early Career Introduction

Interviews with elementary school teachers consistently highlighted the importance of introducing career concepts from an early age. Teachers emphasized that early exposure allows students to develop future-oriented thinking, increases their motivation to learn, and maximizes their development potential. One teacher said, "*I think career introduction from elementary school age is very important. Because with career introduction, students will have an idea of what they want to be in the future...*" (2/I/K/7-7-25). Introducing careers as early as possible is considered important so that students can achieve each stage of their development as optimally as possible. This is in line with the opinion expressed by one of the teachers who said that "*Introducing careers to elementary school students is very important because it will broaden their horizons and help students plan their goals for the next stage...*" (5/I/A/8-7-25). This confirms that rather than viewing career services programs as something distant, teachers believe that career awareness in basic education serves as cognitive and psychological preparation for the next stage of development.

This analysis is in line with the Career Construction Theory (CCT) framework developed by Maree (2016); Obi (2015); Savickas (2013) which states that a career is not a fixed path, but rather a narrative that is actively constructed by individuals through interactions with their social and cultural environment. When viewed from the CCT perspective, early career awareness will facilitate the emergence of early career schemas, which can then develop into a life theme that provides the basis for the formation of career identity (Savickas, 2002, 2005b, 2013). In this context, teachers' emphasis on early career planning highlights the importance of integrating career service programs into daily school activities, thereby strengthening students' career adaptation skills, which encompass four main dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2005b).

3.3 Internalization of Islamic Values in Student Career Planning

Islamic values such as honesty, manners, faith, noble character, self-confidence, and responsibility are considered important foundations in helping students plan their careers. As stated by one of the teachers, "*The Islamic value that I think is most important to instill is honesty so that when they grow up, that value will remain ingrained in them*" (1/I/F/5-7-25). In addition, accustoming students to religious activities is considered to increase their discipline and responsibility towards their obligations. This is in line with what one of the teachers said, "*The*

habit of performing the dhuha prayer so that Allah will make it easy for them to obtain halal sustenance and achieve their dream future" (4/I/L/7-7-25). These habitual religious activities are considered to be able to shape the character of discipline and *tawakal*, which are very important in the process of achieving students' goals or dreams for the future.

According to CCT, these values play a role in shaping life themes in students. Life themes are seen as a personal narrative that gives meaning to every life and career choice made by an individual (Arastaman, 2018; Ruiters & Maree, 2022; Savickas, 2005b). CCT emphasizes that an individual's career orientation is shaped based on meaningful experiences which are then linked to the values and beliefs held by the individual (Kivunja, 2014; Maree, 2016). This life theme explains that every individual, even from an early age, begins to form a narrative of their life which then gives meaning to who they are and how they want to contribute to their surroundings (Savickas, 2005b).

This concept follows Donald Super's initial postulate, which states that job choices are not only based on rational decisions, but also as an individual's attempt to realize their self-concept in the real world (Savickas, 2002, 2005a). Therefore, job choices are not only based on high salaries or high positions, but also because the job represents who the individual is and what they consider important. In the context of Islamic schools, the process of forming a life theme can begin through the introduction of meaningful and contextual professions and careers accompanied by the instilling of Islamic values such as responsibility, manners, discipline, honesty, and other values. The integration of religious values is an important part of students' narrative construction of who they are and what their contribution is to the surrounding community.

3.4 The Role of Teachers and Schools in Organizing Career Guidance and Counseling Programs

Islamic elementary school teachers play an important role in students' career planning. Teachers can act as facilitators in guiding students to achieve their desired goals. Teachers stated that they routinely use stories of prophets, verses from the Qur'an, and hadith in their teaching to inspire students. As one teacher said, "*Yes, in our daily lessons we use the stories of the prophets as inspiration*" (1/I/F/5-7-25). The use of stories of the prophets and messengers, Islamic figures, verses from the Qur'an, and hadiths is used to motivate students and shape their spiritual awareness in achieving their goals. As one teacher stated, "*Students relate more to inspirational figures such as prophets or their favorite religious teachers*" (5/I/A/8-7-25). As the initial foundation in shaping students' character and life direction, elementary school teachers play an important role in planning students' careers.

In line with this, several schools also have programs such as MPLS, field trips, career visits, and interest-based extracurricular activities to help students explore various types of jobs and professions around them and optimize their talents and potential. In line with what was conveyed by one of the teachers, "*The role of elementary school teachers is to help students build their future plans, among others by introducing various professions and equipping students academically*" (1/I/F/5-7-25) and "*Our school has invited guest speakers such as dentists, and students have participated in activities with the fire department, the military, entrepreneurs...*" (5/I/A/8-7-25). This shows that the school has a career guidance and counseling program that supports the career planning of elementary school students, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Document of school curriculum that include career development program

The findings show that teachers play a key role as facilitators in shaping students' careers, helping them explore various career options and develop future-oriented goals. Through the integration of stories of the Prophets and Messengers, verses from the Qur'an, and Hadith, teachers help students construct narratives that connect personal values with the aspirations of exemplary figures. Based on the CCT perspective, this activity supports the development of life themes or personal narratives that give meaning to students' career choices (Savickas, 2002, 2005b, 2013). Individuals create their life narratives based on past memories, current experiences, and future aspirations, including their spiritual or cultural identities (Wang & Li, 2024). In addition, structured school programs such as field trips, guest lectures, and extracurricular activities based on interests can increase students' career adaptability by fostering curiosity, building self-confidence, expanding knowledge about the world of work, and increasing concern for their future (Stringer et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2019). These interventions illustrate how educators and schools actively shape students' career narratives.

3.5 The Influence of Family and Social Environment in Developing Student Career Planning

The family environment plays an important role in shaping students' self-image and dreams. Family support, especially from parents, greatly influences students' self-confidence and consistency in achieving their goals. As stated by one teacher, "*In my opinion, the family environment is the main factor that influences students' self-image and future dreams*" (4/I/L/7-7-25). The family environment is considered the main factor in shaping students' career choices. This is in line with what one teacher said: "*The family environment is very influential because elementary school-aged children still tend to imitate the people around them, especially their parents*" (5/I/A/8-7-25).

The family and social environment plays an important role in shaping students' career construction. Teachers emphasize that parental support, modeling behavior, and providing guidance can provide meaningful experiences in helping students develop career schemas and clarify their life themes. According to CCT, these early interactions contribute to the formation of a cohesive career narrative, connecting individual interests, values, and social expectations (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Savickas, 2005b). Students often model their aspirations on family members or role models, illustrating how the socio-cultural context influences the formation of their career identity narrative. Family support is the foundation for the formation of self-image

and students. Various studies show a positive correlation between parental support and career adaptability, especially in elementary and early secondary school students, where families are considered capable of providing emotional, moral, and professional information support that can strengthen the dimensions of confidence and control in students' career adaptability (Chen, Liang, & Liu, 2024; Feng & Shixiang, 2025; Wang & Dong, 2024).

3.6 Stages of Career Planning for Elementary School Students

Islamic elementary school students are still in the career exploration stage. Many students have shown interest in certain professions or jobs, often inspired by people close to them or other inspirational figures. As stated by one of the teachers, "*For example, one of my students is preparing himself to become an Air Force soldier like his father*" (1/I/F/5-7-25). Some students have also shown curiosity through questions, discussions, and active participation in various school activities. As stated by one of the teachers, "*Students are starting to ask questions about the duties of these professions, and some students are even starting to make these professions their dreams*" (5/I/A/8-7-25).

Islamic elementary school students are in the exploration stage of their career development. Their high curiosity, numerous questions, and active participation in career-related activities reflect the initial formation of a career schema that serves as a cognitive framework for understanding professions and their capabilities (Savickas, 2002, 2005b). Through various meaningful experiences and role models, students can begin to build their early life themes, and subsequently integrate moral, spiritual, and practical dimensions into their evolving career narratives (Palma & Reid, 2021; Stringer et al., 2011; Wang & Li, 2024). This stage strengthens the process of narrative construction and career identity and serves as a foundation for more complex career planning and identity formation in the future.

3.7 Challenges in Providing Career Guidance and Counseling Services to Students

The main challenges faced by teachers are limited time to provide the necessary career services, some students who need personal assistance, and a lack of training for elementary school teachers on the career guidance and counseling services needed by students. As stated by one teacher, "*The challenge is when we encounter students who are unaware of their potential and we don't have enough time to provide the services they need*" (3/I/B/7-7-25). The lack of formal career guidance and counseling programs in elementary schools, the absence of guidance and counseling teachers, and the large number of students per class are other challenges faced by elementary school teachers in providing the necessary career guidance and counseling services.

Various challenges that hinder students' career development were found in SDI, such as limited time for career service programs, inadequate teacher training, an unfavorable student-teacher ratio, and the absence of formal programs. From a CCT perspective, these obstacles limit students' opportunities to develop career adaptability and career scheme development through meaningful experiences (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Savickas, 2005a; Wang & Dong, 2024). Therefore, overcoming these challenges is crucial to ensure that students can actively build coherent and personal career narratives from an early age.

This study highlights how early career construction among elementary school students emerges through everyday educational experiences, social interactions, and exposure to role models within the school and family environment. Rather than representing a process of selecting specific occupations, career development at this stage reflects the early formation of future oriented thinking and identity exploration (Mcmahon & Watson, 2022; Savickas, 2019). This

suggests that individual career development does not emerge as a sudden decision formed immediately in adulthood, but instead develops gradually as a narrative process that begins in childhood. Within the CCT framework, this condition reflects the individual's process of building themselves and finding direction in their careers (Gregor et al., 2020). CCT positions career as a continuously evolving construct of life's meaning, thus understanding careers in elementary school age as a process of growing concern and curiosity about the future.

Based on research findings, elementary school teachers are aware of the importance of early career development. They believe that career development for elementary school students is not only aimed at determining final career choices but also at developing future orientation and motivating students to learn (Fadhilah et al., 2025; Krispaty et al., 2025). In the elementary school environment, Islamic values in the curriculum are an equally important element in students' career development. Islam teaches students to have a guiding principle in life and to remain motivated to develop themselves to achieve future goals (Andrianie et al., 2021; Muslihati et al., 2023). Through the integration of these Islamic values, students are facilitated to develop life themes or personal narratives that give meaning to their career choices. This forms the life themes in students' career development (Nor et al., 2024; Sampaio et al., 2021).

Career planning in the career construction of Islamic elementary school students positions teachers as facilitators who provide space for students through learning experiences and activities that foster awareness and support their future careers (Mccowan et al., 2025). The learning activities carried out by SDI teachers include the MPLS program, field trips and career visits to places such as hospitals and fire departments, interest-based extracurricular programs, and inviting guest speakers from various professions to participate in professional introductions at school. These activities can provide opportunities for students to build curiosity, expand knowledge about possible future professions, and begin to interpret their future desires (Leung, 2022; D. Wang & Li, 2024). From the perspective of CCT, these findings illustrate how children begin constructing their career narratives through interactions with meaningful social context. Teachers, parents, and cultural values provide narrative resources that help students interpret who they are and what they may become in the future. This shows that teachers at SDI have a crucial role in shaping students' career identities. Also, experiential exposure to professions such as field trips and guest lecturer can be interpreted as opportunities that stimulate career curiosity, one of the core dimensions of career adaptability (Merino-tejedor et al., 2025; Parmentier et al., 2022; Savickas, 2005b). Through observing real workplaces and interacting with professionals, students develop initial schemas about possible future roles.

In line with this, family and social environments also shape students' career aspirations and self-image. The influence of the family environment further reinforces the relational nature of career development. Students often model their aspirations after parents or individuals within their immeadiate social environment. For children, parents serve as role models who provide information about jobs, working hours, and required tasks, which in turn shape students' perspectives on future careers (Endendijk & Portengen, 2022). From a CCT perspective, this will internalize students' values, expectations, and relational experiences. These relational experiences also contribute to the development of self-concept and career identitiy through ongoing interactions with significant others. Family support for children, along with the values and expectations established by the family, will help students determine future career choices and mediate their career adaptability (Vautero et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

The research findings indicate that CCT is highly relevant for application in the context of religious-based primary education. The roles of teachers, families, the social environment, and the

religious values acquired at school will shape unique and context-specific career constructions for students (Andrianie et al., 2020; Qingfeng et al., 2024; Wang & Jiao, 2023). Teachers also emphasize moral qualities such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility as essential foundations for future professional life. From a CCT perspective, these values contribute to the formation of life themes, which represent the deeper meanings that individuals attach to their career aspirations (Savickas, 2005a). In this context, religious values function not merely as moral guidance but also as narrative anchors that shape how students imagine their future contributions to society. The role of teachers in this process also reflects the narrative nature of career construction. By using stories of prophets, historical figures, and inspirational role models, teachers provide symbolic narratives that students can internalize when imagining their future identities. Such narrative-based learning aligns closely with the CCT emphasis on storytelling as a way individuals construct meaning about their lives and careers. This broadens the application of CCT in developing early career guidance and counseling models that are culturally, spiritually, and developmentally appropriate. However, the implications of CCT in shaping students' career plans remain limited, so it cannot be implemented optimally.

The implementation of guidance and counseling services in elementary schools continues to face limitations. Lack of time for guidance and counseling services, limited time available, the absence of formal programs, and an inadequate student-to-teacher ratio are the reasons why career guidance and counseling services in elementary schools cannot be implemented optimally. Therefore, the design and implementation of formal and systematic career guidance and counseling programs in schools, the development of professional teacher competencies in the implementation of career guidance and counseling services, and optimal family involvement are necessary to overcome the challenges of implementing guidance and counseling at the elementary school level (Thasfa & Daulay, 2024; Wulandari et al., 2023).

The findings of this study highlight several important implications. First, the results emphasize the importance of supporting students' career development through structured school-based career guidance and counseling programs that are tailored to the cultural and religious context. The integration of Islamic values into career planning from an early age is not only important for promoting moral and spiritual growth, but also plays a key role in strengthening students' career adaptability and forming a cohesive career life theme that guides students' career narratives (Maree & Twigge, 2016; Savickas, 2013). This integration demonstrates that career interventions can be effectively adapted outside of Western traditions, thereby expanding the application of CCT in various educational and cultural environments (Ruiters & Maree, 2022).

Second, this study suggests that schools should be encouraged to design and implement formal career guidance and counseling programs that systematically integrate belief-based approaches. This is in line with previous studies that emphasize the importance of early intervention in raising students' awareness of career opportunities and preparing individuals for future developmental tasks (Hartung, 2013). Structured programs such as visits to places of worship, learning exemplary values from religious figures, and extracurricular activities can broaden students' career exploration and improve individuals' ability to connect personal career aspirations with broader cultural and spiritual values (Obi, 2015).

Third, professional development for teachers is essential to equip educators with the ideal practical and theoretical competencies needed to effectively implement career guidance and counseling programs. Various studies show that teachers who receive training in CCT can improve students' career adaptability, resilience, and self-concept through a narrative counseling

approach (Fabio, 2016; Maree et al., 2019). This study highlights the importance of professional training that integrates narrative-based career counseling with Islamic pedagogical values and ensures that the program is not only appropriate for student development but also contextually meaningful.

Finally, family involvement needs to be strengthened and optimized. This is based on the fact that parents and the environment influence students' career aspirations and identity (Whiston & Keller, 2004). A collaborative approach involving teachers, parents, and students can create an ecosystem that supports the development of career adaptability skills and a moral and spiritual foundation that can encourage sustainable career development. This emphasizes the importance of policies that encourage parental involvement in student career development and facilitate collaboration between religious and educational institutions. Overall, these findings indicate that CCT can be applied in religiously oriented educational settings to describe the dynamic interaction between individuals' personal selves, sociocultural influences, and value systems in students' early career development (Arastaman, 2018; Savickas, 2005a). This opens up new avenues for developing culturally responsive career guidance and counseling practices, especially in non-Western and religion-based contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study advances an understanding of early career development in Islamic elementary schools by interpretating teachers' perspectives through the lens of Career Construction Theory. The findings suggest that career development at the primary level can be conceptualized as an early process of career meaning-making in which students begin to form preliminary career narratives through exploration, social interaction, and the internalization of moral and religious values. Within this process, teachers emerge as key agents who facilitate the interpretation of career possibilities and guide students in linking aspirations with values, experiences, and future life roles.

The study contributes to the career development literature by extending the application of CCT to the context of Islamic primary education, a setting that has received limited scholarly attention. By demonstrating how career related learning is embedded withing character education, religious practice, and experiential school activities, this research highlight the role of culturally and spiritually grounded learning environments in shaping early career construction processes. The novelty of this study lies in positioning religiously informed educational practices as a meaningful context for the emergence of students' early career narratives and adaptive orientations toward future work.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The study relies primarily on teachers; perspectives within a limited institutional context, which may not fully capture the complexity of students' and families; roles in early career construction. Future research should incorporate multiple stakeholders and employ longitudinal or mixed method approaches to examine how early career narratives evolve over time. Further investigations are also needed to develop and evaluate structured career guidance models that are developmentally appropriate for primary education and responsive to diverse cultural and religious contexts.

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