

## **Choose Entrepreneurship Amidst Difficult Job Opportunities: Dilemmas for High School/Vocational High School Graduates in Sidenreng Rappang Regency in Determining the Type of Business**

**Amrizal Salida<sup>1</sup>, Haeril<sup>2</sup>✉, Idris Yunus<sup>3</sup>, Abdul Kadir<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> *Ichsan University of Sidenreng Rappang*

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the dilemmas faced by high school and vocational school graduates in Sidenreng Rappang Regency when deciding what type of business to start, given the limited availability of job opportunities. The study uses an exploratory and interactionist qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The data were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, supported by data triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings. To facilitate the data analysis process, NVivo software was also used. The results reveal a complex dilemma in determining the type of business to pursue. This issue is influenced not only by limited financial capital, but also by psychological factors, practical skills, market access, and the lack of external guidance. These barriers are multidimensional, involving both individual and structural aspects, where fear of debt, low self-confidence, and limited experience further intensify the challenges. Despite these constraints, there are potential business opportunities that can be accessed with minimal capital, such as online trading, service-based skills, culinary ventures, agribusiness, and non-formal education. Graduates tend to adopt adaptive strategies such as self-directed learning, starting small businesses, relying on family support, and using digital technology. However, these strategies alone are not sufficient to ensure business sustainability without external support. In conclusion, entrepreneurial readiness among graduates is shaped by a combination of financial capital, social capital, self-confidence, and structural support. Therefore, entrepreneurial success largely depends on the synergy between individual capacity and a sustainable supporting ecosystem.

**Keywords:** *Employment Opportunities; High School/Vocational School Graduates; Business Type Determination; Unemployment; Entrepreneurship*

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✉ Corresponding author: Haeril  
Email Address: [haerileril93@gmail.com](mailto:haerileril93@gmail.com)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Employment is a basic need for a well-being. However, reality shows that obtaining employment is not easy, especially for those with limited education and minimal work experience (Baptista et al., 2024). This includes high school (SMA) and vocational school (SMK) graduates. Data shows that the open unemployment rate in Indonesia for these graduates is the highest compared to other graduates (Central Statistics Agency, 2025; Central Statistics Agency, 2024).

**Table 1** Open unemployment rate

Highest level of education completed	2024			
	February (Person)	August (Person)	Improvement (Σ)	Improvement (%)
SENIOR SCHOOL	2,107,781	2,293,359	185,578	1.08%
Vocational School	1,621,672	1,840,162	218,490	1.13%

**Figure 1** Open Unemployment Rate

High school/vocational school graduates have difficulty finding employment because they do not meet the criteria set by job seekers, both in terms of skills, work experience, and education that are in line with industry needs (Magfur et al., 2024; Suhardi et al., 2023; Kwan et al., 2025). The solution most often chosen by people when facing difficulties in finding work is entrepreneurship, as evidenced by the high percentage of the Indonesian population who choose this path (Central Statistics Agency, 2024) .

**Table 2** Main Employment Status

Primary Employment Status	2024 (August) %
Workers/Employees/Staff	38.80
Try	38.85
Freelance Worker	9.01
Family Workers	13.34
Total	100.00

Entrepreneurship is the desire to start a business (Barrero et al., 2024), or the process of creating, starting, building, and developing a sustainable business by utilizing available resources. Entrepreneurs also play a vital role in the economic development of countries (Oyinlola et al., 2024). Many high school/vocational school graduates are interested in entrepreneurship but face several obstacles and challenges, such as limited capital (Graña-Alvarez et al., 2024), business innovation, low human resources, and slow adoption of technology and marketing (Bachmann et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2024; Raya et al., 2021).

The main problem lies not only in these obstacles and challenges, but also in the most crucial initial step, namely determining the type of business to run. Once the right type of business has been determined, various obstacles and challenges can essentially be overcome. This problem often presents a dilemma for high school/vocational school graduates who want

to become entrepreneurs because they have difficulty finding work, but are confused about choosing the right type of business. On the one hand, they have the desire to become entrepreneurs due to limited job opportunities, but on the other hand, they are unsure about choosing the right type of business. As a result, many of them tend to postpone or even abandon their entrepreneurial intentions, which ultimately contributes to rising unemployment rates.

Several previous studies have examined entrepreneurship such as job training and job search for micro jobs (Baptista et al., 2024), creative attitude in fostering entrepreneurial spirit and utilizing technology to create ideas in business (Suhardi et al., 2023), readiness of young people to face the transition from school to the world of work through internships (Kwan et al., 2025), entrepreneurship training by considering existing social and cultural norms (Barrero et al., 2024), increasing entrepreneurial spirit for graduates by implementing entrepreneurship curriculum (Oyinlola et al., 2024), financial management for start-up entrepreneurs (Graña-Alvarez et al., 2024), analysis of innovation in entrepreneurial business models (Bachmann et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2024); Raya et al., 2021). However, none of these studies have focused on examining the dilemma of choosing a business type for aspiring high school/vocational school graduate entrepreneurs. Therefore, our research aims to fill the gaps and gaps in these studies.

So based on this, we conducted research in Sidenreng Rappang Regency because it has a high commitment to supporting entrepreneurship, as reflected in one of its missions "REALIZE COMMUNITY WELFARE BY EXPANDING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES, CREATING JOBS AND ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION" (Sidenreng Rappang Regency Government, 2024) In addition, of the 155,860 residents classified as the workforce, 80,035 (51.35%) chose entrepreneurship as their main job (Central Statistics Agency, 2025).

This study aims to explore the dilemmas faced by high school/vocational school graduates in Sidenreng Rappang Regency when deciding on a business type to start due to limited job opportunities. The results are expected to serve as a reference for aspiring entrepreneurs in determining the right type of business for them.

Urgency This research is based on the importance of understanding this problem more deeply in order to help them determine the right type of business and prevent them from giving up on their entrepreneurial intentions, which if left unchecked will further worsen the unemployment rate, especially among high school/vocational school graduates who are recorded as having the highest unemployment rate.

## METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore the dilemma faced by high school/vocational school graduates who have difficulty finding work and want to become entrepreneurs but are confused about determining the type of business, so that the exploratory qualitative method is considered appropriate to use because it is able to explore and produce in-depth and illustrative information to understand various dimensions of the research problem and the focus of this method is on understanding and explaining social dynamics that cannot be quantified because they are related to very complex aspects of reality (Wilestari et al., 2023; Firman et al., 2024) and also allows participants to use their own words in responding to research problems (Shah et al., 2023). An interactionist approach is also used which allows us to engage in interactive and in-depth conversations with participants (Simba et al., 2023).

Participant selection using *purposive*, *snowball* and *quota sampling methods* (Ahmed, 2024). *Purposive sampling* or participant criteria:

1. High school/vocational school graduates from Sidenreng Rappang Regency in the last 2-3 years.
2. Don't have a job yet and want to be an entrepreneur but have a dilemma in determining the type of business.
3. They are alumni of schools from Maritengngae District which has the largest number of schools and students in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2025), so they are considered more representative.

*For Snowball Sampling*, we require participants who are high school/vocational school graduates who have experienced the dilemma of choosing a business but have ultimately started one within the last 1-2 years. This allows for in-depth research and a richer understanding of the data obtained. If access to such participants is difficult, we will ask other participants for recommendations.

*Quota Sampling*, ensures that the proportion of participants who are high school graduates, vocational school graduates, and those who have successfully started businesses is balanced, with a ratio of 1:1, 10 participants each.

The number of participants can change as needed. For the exact number, we refer to data saturation, which means stopping data collection when data begins to repeat itself (Rahimi, 2024). This indicates that the researcher has adequately explored the research problem.

Data collection through: Observation, by conducting direct observations to obtain data that cannot always be expressed through interviews or documentation. Conducting interviews with participants to explore and understand their responses to the research problem, before the interview we asked participants about how and where they wanted to be interviewed so they felt comfortable and free. The interview asked about the research problem in depth and was conducted semi-structured to be flexible in exploring the participants' answers, during the interview we would record it. Documentation strengthened the findings obtained from the interviews and observations.

The data obtained is evaluated, after which it is processed and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which is carried out continuously and thoroughly, so that the data is saturated and the activities consist of *reduction*, *display* and *conclusion drawing/verification*. (Safaruddin et al., 2023). *Reduction*, transcribing the interview recordings into text, rereading the transcripts, analyzing the results of observations and documentation, and *coding*. Display, the reduced data is presented using narratives, tables, and images to facilitate understanding and conduct the analysis. *Conclusion drawing/verification*, or drawing valid conclusions that can be scientifically justified. To facilitate data analysis, the Nvivo application was used. To ensure data validity, data triangulation is required, namely utilizing different perspectives, different methods, and different data (Köhler, 2024). We used triangulation techniques, samples, and time.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### General description of research informants.

This study used data obtained through interviews with all informants. The initial research plan specified 10 informants each from high school and vocational high school graduates who were unemployed but wanted to become entrepreneurs but were still confused about choosing a type of business, and 10 informants from high school/vocational high school graduates who had successfully determined and pioneered a business. However, this number was not fully met because during the interview process the data obtained had shown repetitive patterns or had reached a point of saturation (Rahimi, 2024). This was evidenced by the existence of uniform patterns and information when interviews were conducted with informants 14, 15, 16 and 17. To provide a general overview of the informants, the researcher presented the general identities of the informants while still disguising all their identities because the informants were unwilling to be identified in full.

**Table 3** Informants of high school/vocational school graduates who are in a dilemma in determining the type of business

No	Gender	Graduate of	Reasons for the dilemma of determining business
1	Man	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	Capital
2	Man	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	Fear of failure
3	Woman	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	No Experience
4	Woman	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	Confused where to start?
5	Woman	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	Equipment constraints
6	Man	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	There is no place to sell
7	Woman	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	Capital
8	Woman	Vocational School	No idea
9	Woman	Vocational School	Business land
10	Man	Vocational School	No ability
11	Woman	Vocational School	Don't want the capital to come from debt
12	Man	Vocational School	Capital

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

The table shows that there are seven informants who graduated from high school, while there are five informants who graduated from vocational high school. All of these informants had varying reasons for the dilemma they faced in deciding on a business type. The identities of informants from among alumni who experienced similar dilemmas but ultimately succeeded in starting a business are presented in the following table.

**Table 4** Informants who are high school/vocational school graduates who have started a business

No	Gender	Graduate of	Reasons for the dilemma of determining business
1	Man	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	Offline and Online Clothing Business
2	Woman	SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL	Scinkare business online
3	Man	Vocational School	Laptop and cellphone service business
4	Woman	Vocational School	Trift business (Selling used clothes)
5	Woman	Vocational School	Online culinary business

Source: Processed primary data, 2025



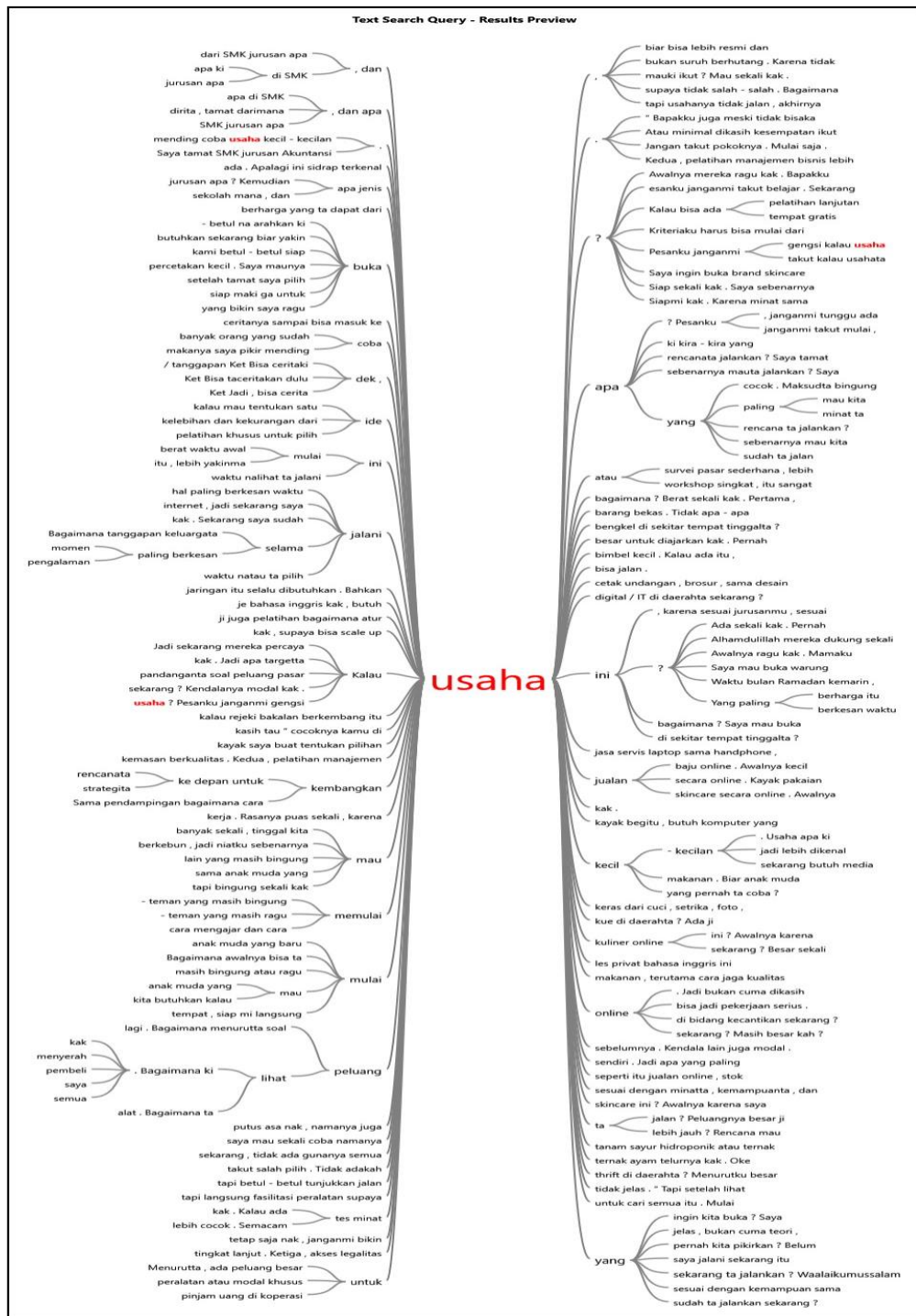
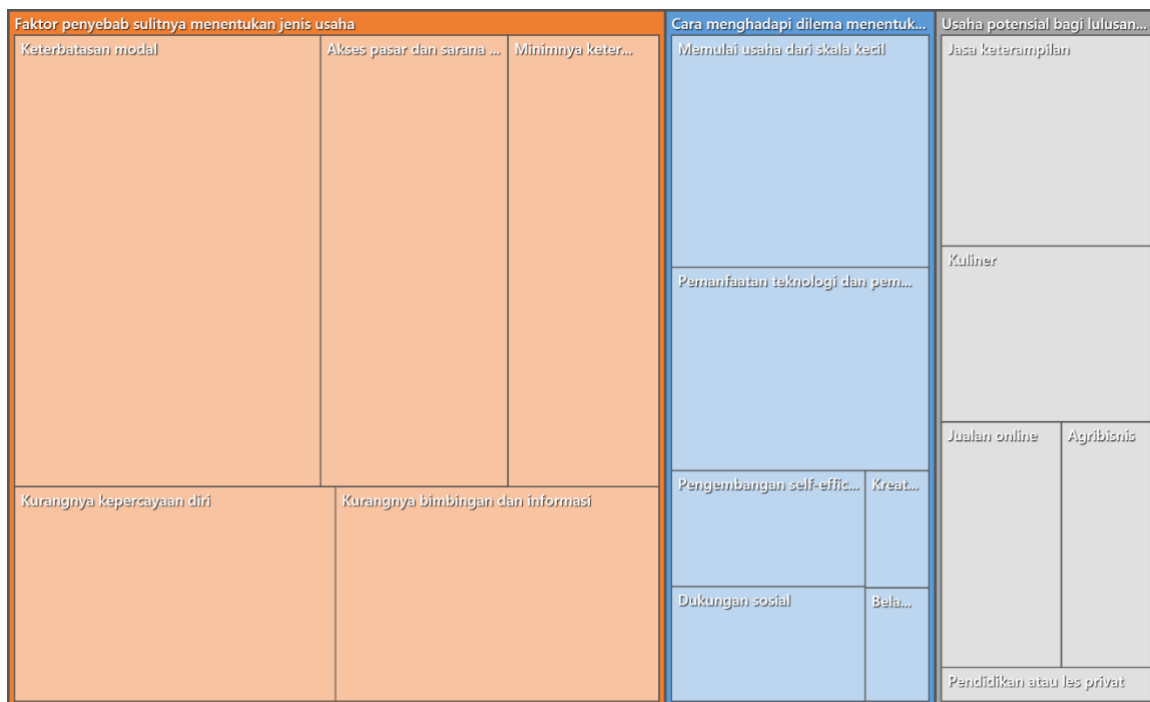


Figure 3 Word tree of the meaning of the word "Usaha"

The word tree image with the keyword "Business" illustrates the informants' word usage patterns in the interview transcripts, reflecting how they understand, plan, and face the dilemmas of entrepreneurship. Most informants associated business with their high school/vocational school education, such as accounting or acquired technical skills. The most frequently mentioned types of businesses were small-scale, such as food stalls, home-cooked meals, and online commerce (clothing, skincare, and thrift shops), followed by service businesses such as laptop repair and private tutoring, and agribusiness sectors such as hydroponics and chicken farming. This visualization also emphasizes the importance of social support, especially from family, in building confidence to start a business, as evident in the informants' statements that they felt more courageous because of their parents' support. On the other hand, the word branching reveals the main obstacles they face, including limited

capital, doubt, fear of making the wrong choice, and lack of self-confidence. However, optimism also emerged in the form of a desire to develop their business through marketing strategies, product innovation, and the use of digital technology. Thus, the results of this *word tree* strengthen the research findings that the business dilemma of high school/vocational school graduates is influenced by a combination of internal factors (capital, skills, self-confidence) and external factors (family support, market opportunities, and technological developments).

The next step is to *code* to determine the factors that cause high school/vocational school graduates to have difficulty in determining the type of business, as well as determining the potential types of businesses and strategies for dealing with dilemmas for high school/vocational school graduates.



**Figure 4** Hierarchical diagram of the dilemma of high school/vocational school graduates in determining the type of business

*hierarchical chart* systematically illustrates the three main aspects of the research problem: factors that make it difficult to choose a business, ways to address business dilemmas, and potential businesses for high school/vocational school graduates. On the first side, the dominant factors inhibiting business choice are limited capital, limited market access and facilities, minimal skills and experience, lack of self-confidence, and limited guidance and information. On the second side, we can see the adaptive strategies used by graduates to overcome these dilemmas, such as starting a small business, utilizing technology and digital marketing, developing *self-efficacy*, seeking social support, pursuing creative strategies, and self-study. Meanwhile, on the third side, businesses considered potential include skilled services (such as service and sewing), culinary arts, online sales, agribusiness, and non-formal education such as private tutoring. Thus, this chart confirms that business dilemmas arise from a combination of internal and external factors, but there are still opportunities that can be maximized through adaptive strategies and appropriate support.

**Factors causing high school/vocational school graduates to have difficulty determining the type of business**

Interviews with 17 informants revealed that high school/vocational school graduates in Sidenreng Rappang Regency face various dilemmas in determining the right type of business.

These dilemmas arise not only from limited capital but also from psychological factors, skills, experience, market access, and a lack of external guidance. This indicates that the difficulty in determining a business type is multidimensional and involves an interaction between internal and external factors.

**Table 5** Difficulty factors in determining business

Main Factors	Description
Capital Limitations	Difficulty purchasing equipment, renting space, or expanding the business. Fear of debt.
Lack of Self-Confidence	Fear of failure, embarrassment if the business doesn't sell, doubts about one's abilities.
Minimal skills and experience	Vocational school graduates feel that their skills are not enough to start a business.
Limited market access and facilities	Not having a business location, difficulty in obtaining production equipment, expensive rental costs for strategic locations.
Lack of guidance and information	There is no business mentoring, training, or clear direction.

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

The table shows that there are five main factors that cause high school/vocational school graduates to have difficulty in determining the type of business when they want to start a business.

1. Limited Capital and Financial Access

Nearly all informants emphasized capital as the primary obstacle. Capital is considered an absolute requirement for starting a business, whether for purchasing equipment, renting premises, or providing raw materials. Several informants stated that without financial support, they could only plan, unable to realize their business ideas. Others added that limited capital impacted the scale of their businesses, leading them to prefer small-scale operations, thus preventing them from competing with larger, more financially-backed businesses.

Interestingly, there's a psychological dimension to capital: the fear of debt. Several informants admitted to being reluctant to seek loans due to concerns about defaulting, which could potentially create a social burden on the community. This demonstrates that capital isn't just an economic issue, but also has social and psychological dimensions.

2. Lack of Self-Confidence and Entrepreneurial Mentality

Psychological factors are a significant factor in shaping the dilemma faced by high school/vocational school graduates in starting a business. Informants expressed fear of failure, self-doubt, and embarrassment if their business doesn't sell. These conditions indicate low *self-efficacy*, or confidence in one's abilities. *Self-efficacy* plays a crucial role in encouraging someone to take risks and consistently face challenges. This lack of confidence leads many graduates to delay starting a business even though they already have ideas and aspirations.

3. Lack of Practical Skills and Business Experience

Vocational high school graduates are expected to have a technical advantage over high school graduates. However, interview data indicates that their skills are not yet fully ready for application in the business world. For example, one informant stated that vocational high school graduates were hesitant to start a culinary business due to limited practical experience, while another informant, also a vocational high school graduate, reported

limited land for developing a hydroponic farming business. Informants who graduated from vocational high schools majoring in engineering also felt they lacked the expertise to start their own businesses. The lack of practical experience and managerial skills is a major obstacle in determining a realistic and sustainable business.

#### 4. Limited Market Access and Production Facilities

Several informants revealed external constraints such as limited access to markets, land, and production facilities. They also faced difficulties in obtaining affordable production equipment and strategic locations due to excessive rental costs. This situation suggests that the dilemma of choosing a business is also related to the local economic structure, where access to business facilities remains limited for young graduates with limited capital.

#### 5. Lack of Guidance, Mentoring, and Access to Information

Nearly all informants expressed the need for mentoring or training. They found it difficult to access information on prospective business types, business management methods, and marketing strategies. This confirms that the primary problem lies not solely with the individual, but also with a lack of external support in the form of policies and development programs. Without structural intervention, many graduates will remain stuck in the throes of choosing the right business.

The results of this study align with several previous research findings, which emphasized that barriers to entrepreneurship among young people are not only related to financial capital but also to social capital. Social capital has been shown to be a determining factor in entrepreneurial readiness. Previous research also shows that social capital plays a significant role in shaping students' entrepreneurial behavior, with entrepreneurial *passion* and risk perception as mediating factors (Liang et al., 2024). Social capital also plays a role in building *self-efficacy* and entrepreneurial motivation among students in Indonesia (Junaidi et al., 2023). Other research has also found that the ability of young Indonesians to utilize social capital contributes to their business development (Maming et al., 2023). In addition to the role of social capital, social network structure, trust, and institutional support also play a significant role in determining an individual's ability to build and run a business (Crowley et al., 2022).

Thus, the results of this study regarding the factors causing high school/vocational school graduates to have difficulty choosing a business align with previous literature, which emphasizes that barriers to entrepreneurship cannot be understood solely in terms of limited financial capital but also social capital. Psychological factors such as self-confidence, as well as external factors such as access to social capital, networks, and mentoring, are key aspects that determine success or failure in determining the right type of business.

### Potential business types for high school/vocational school graduates

Based on interviews, the types of businesses considered promising by high school/vocational school graduates in Sidenreng Rappang Regency are highly diverse. This business potential arises from a combination of personal interests, skills, local market conditions, and digital economic development trends. Interestingly, the emerging businesses can be categorized into five main sectors: online commerce, skills-based services, culinary arts, agribusiness, and non-formal education.

**Table 6** Potential Businesses for High School/Vocational School Graduates

Business Category	The type of business that emerged in the interview	Reasons why this type of business is considered potential
Online Trading	Selling clothes, skincare, thrift shop (selling used clothes)	Relatively small capital, wide reach through social media, increasing digital consumption trends

<b>Skills Services</b>	Laptop/cellphone service, network setup, sewing, graphic design.	The level of community needs is high, it can be started from home, based on special skills
<b>Culinary</b>	Fried chicken, drinks, homemade cakes.	High public consumption, flexible business, suitable for <i>entry-level entrepreneurs</i>
<b>Agribusiness</b>	Hydroponic farming, chicken farming	Stable food demand, high sustainability potential, supporting local food security
<b>Education/Private Tutoring</b>	English tutor	The increasing need for additional skills, opportunities for non-formal education services are wide

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

The five business categories considered potential by informants can be further categorized into several types. A more complete explanation is as follows:

1. Online Trading ( *E-Commerce* and Social Media)

Several informants stated that online trading is a potential option because it doesn't require large capital for space rental and can be managed from home. The growing trend of digital consumption, especially among young people, strengthens the prospects for this business. Products such as clothing, skincare, and thrift shop items are relatively easy to market through social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Online trading also allows them to reach a wider consumer base, even beyond the Sidenreng Rappang region. However, challenges include high competition and the need for digital marketing skills. This suggests that despite the potential, the success of online businesses depends heavily on promotional creativity and an understanding of the digital market.

2. Skill-Based Services

Opening laptop/cell phone repair and sewing services demonstrates that practical skills-based businesses have a relatively stable market. Furthermore, graphic design and printing are highly sought-after sectors, especially among small businesses. These types of businesses rely more on individual competency ( *human capital* ) than financial capital, thus presenting significant opportunities for vocational school graduates with vocational skills who have limited financial resources. Challenges include limited modern equipment, lack of promotion, and low confidence in competing with professional service providers. However, with the support of additional technical training, this sector has significant potential for development.

3. Culinary (Food and Beverage Business)

The culinary industry is a highly sought-after sector. It's relatively easy to run with limited capital, as it can utilize a home kitchen as a production center. Furthermore, the fast-food culture and online ordering are further expanding market opportunities. Challenges include intense competition, limited capital for product innovation, and the need to maintain quality and hygiene. Nevertheless, the culinary industry has proven to be highly attractive, as market demand for food is a primary need.

4. Agribusiness and Small-Scale Livestock

Hydroponic farming and chicken farming offer significant potential, particularly in meeting local demand. Furthermore, the agribusiness sector offers the advantage of sustainability, as food demand is always available. Furthermore, these businesses can support regional food security. However, the main constraints are limited land and capital. This demonstrates that the potential of the agribusiness sector can only be maximized with the support of adequate facilities, technical assistance, and financial capital.

5. Non-Formal Education (Private Tutoring and Courses)

Another informant proposed the idea of opening a private English tutoring service. This represents a significant opportunity in the non-formal education sector, given the growing need for additional skills. Demand for private tutoring tends to be stable, as many parents want their children to develop additional skills beyond formal education. The main challenges are limited teaching experience, access to promotional media, and the ability to build credibility with consumers. Nevertheless, this sector holds potential because it requires little capital other than teaching skills.

The results obtained indicate that entrepreneurial capital for young people (*entrepreneurship capital*), which in this study refers to high school/vocational school graduates, has a significant opportunity to start a business despite limited financial capital (Purusottama, 2019). Meanwhile, research in the field of agribusiness shows that training, education, and social support, especially from family, are key factors in fostering interest in agripreneurship (Shidiq, 2020; Pratiwi et al., 2025).

Other research also shows that awareness of information technology and the use of digital marketing have a positive impact on the performance of culinary SMEs by increasing innovation and the ability to adapt to modern business models (Halik et al., 2024).

The consistent support from several previous studies further strengthens the results obtained in this study that the types of potential businesses chosen by high school/vocational school graduates are not merely the result of personal preferences, but are also influenced by external factors in the form of digitalization trends, local market needs, and access to entrepreneurship education.

### How high school/vocational school graduates face the dilemma of determining the type of business

Interviews with 17 informants revealed that high school/vocational school graduates who have or have not started businesses use various strategies to overcome the dilemma of starting a business. These strategies arise from practical needs (capital, experience), psychological (self-confidence), social (family/environmental support), and adaptation to technological/digital opportunities. Some informants chose to start small-scale businesses first, learn independently, utilize social networks, and even imitate similar businesses as initial steps. Thus, even though conditions are less than ideal, they tend to be proactive in the face of uncertainty.

**Table 7** Strategies for dealing with business dilemmas

Strategy/how to deal with dilemmas	Type	Effects/benefits
<b>Learn to be independent / self-taught</b>	Learn online marketing and product research yourself	Improve technical & digital knowledge, reduce dependence on formal mentors
<b>Starting a business from a small scale</b>	Starting from home, as a small reseller	Low risk, flexible, can learn from small mistakes.
<b>Social/ family support</b>	Get small capital from family/friends	Providing moral encouragement and light financial support
<b>Creativity (imitation, adaptation, capital pooling)</b>	Emulating an existing business model, purchasing equipment jointly	Reduce trial costs, speed up implementation
<b>Utilization of technology and digital marketing</b>	Those who already have a business use social media & marketplaces to market their products	Expanding the market, more effective promotion and cost efficiency

<b>Development of self-efficacy and entrepreneurial mentality</b>	Informants mentioned the importance of self-confidence, and learning to deal with failure.	More prepared to face challenges
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Source: Processed primary data, 2025

The strategies chosen by these informants certainly have their respective benefits. A complete interpretation is as follows:

1. Self-study / autodidactic

Many informants who hadn't received formal training used alternative learning resources such as the internet, videos, or small-scale experiences. This suggests that when external support is inadequate, they seek out their own resources. Previous research has shown that *financial literacy* and *social capital* positively influence *emotional intelligence*, and this is related to an individual's ability to learn independently and take initiative (Worokinasih et al., 2023).

2. Starting a business from a small scale

Small businesses started from home or on a micro-scale are often used as a mitigation strategy when capital is limited. This strategy reduces the risk of financial failure. Previous research also shows that *self-efficacy* and *leadership skills* positively influence the *coping strategies* chosen by small business owners (Triyani et al., 2023).

3. Social / family support

Informants who have social support from family or friends report having an easier time navigating the initial stages of a business. This support can be moral support, small capital, or other practical assistance. Previous research has shown that informal sector workers utilize their social networks and community support as part of a *coping strategy* to meet economic needs amidst low incomes (Susanto et al., 2020).

4. Creativity (imitation, adaptation, capital pooling)

Some informants viewed existing businesses and successful models as "*prototypes*" for their own ventures; this imitation was seen as a safe way to minimize errors and accelerate the learning process. Previous research suggests that imitation strategies are part of early innovation, especially when resources are limited (Sulistiyani et al., 2012).

5. Utilization of technology and digital marketing

For informants who already have businesses, utilizing social media, *marketplaces*, and digital marketing is a highly efficient market penetration and promotion strategy. Previous research also noted that one strategy for developing a digital ecosystem is helping SMEs "*level up*" their technical capabilities and connecting with stakeholders to expand their digital market (Yudianti et al., 2022).

6. Development of *self-efficacy* and entrepreneurial mentality

Self-confidence, the ability to face failure, and perseverance emerged as strong themes in the interviews. This suggests that when interviewees are willing to try and face various challenges, mental strength becomes the driving force to get started. Previous empirical research has demonstrated that *entrepreneurial self-efficacy* and *entrepreneurial passion* significantly influence *the resilience* of aspiring entrepreneurs (Santoso et al., 2022).

It can be emphasized that the strategies employed by high school/vocational school graduates in facing business dilemmas demonstrate a commendable adaptive effort, despite the limitations. Through self-study, starting small businesses, leveraging social support, and

adopting digital technology, they strive to overcome barriers to capital, skills, and market access.

However, this strategy cannot stand alone without more systematic external support, such as incubation programs, technical training, and policies that favor budding entrepreneurs. Thus, this study demonstrates that successfully navigating business challenges is not solely an individual issue, but also the result of the interaction between personal capacity and available socio-economic support structures.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study conclude that high school (SMA/SMK) graduates in Sidenreng Rappang Regency face a complex dilemma in determining their type of business, stemming not only from limited financial capital but also from psychological factors, practical skills, market access, and a lack of external guidance. Capital is often considered the primary barrier, but fear of debt, low self-confidence, and limited experience and production facilities exacerbate these difficulties. These findings confirm that barriers to entrepreneurship are multidimensional, encompassing both individual and structural aspects.

Nevertheless, the results of this study also indicate various potential business opportunities suitable for high school/vocational school graduates, including online trading, skills-based services, culinary arts, agribusiness, and non-formal education. These types of businesses are relatively accessible with limited capital, aligning with digitalization trends, local market needs, and the skills of the informants. This demonstrates that entrepreneurial opportunities remain open, as long as there is adequate support to build individual capacity and overcome external barriers.

When faced with business dilemmas, high school (SMA/SMK) graduates tend to develop adaptive strategies, such as self-study, starting small, leveraging family and social network support, copying or adapting existing businesses, and maximizing the use of digital technology. These strategies reflect the resilience of young entrepreneurs under limited resources. However, these strategies are insufficient to ensure business sustainability without systematic external support, such as training programs, business incubation, and policies that favor budding entrepreneurs.

Therefore, the overall results of this study can be concluded that the entrepreneurial readiness of high school/vocational school graduates is influenced by a combination of financial capital, social capital, self-confidence, and external support. Their success in starting and growing a business is determined not only by individual factors but also by socioeconomic structures that provide access, facilities, and ongoing mentoring.

Based on the results of this study, local governments, educational institutions, and relevant stakeholders should strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem for high school (SMA/SMK) graduates by providing vocational training programs, business incubation programs, and beginner-friendly access to financing. This can enhance their practical skills, confidence, and competitiveness in determining and running businesses. Furthermore, family and local community support should be increased to strengthen social capital.

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