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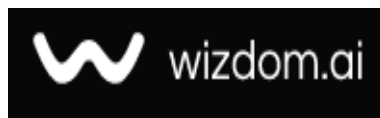
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Optimization of Career Guidance through Orientation Services to Enhance Career Understanding of 11th Grade Students

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Abstract

General Background: Education plays a vital role in developing human resources, and high school is a crucial stage where students must prepare for higher education or future careers. However, many students in Indonesia still struggle with unclear career goals and a lack of self-awareness. **Specific Background:** Existing career guidance programs in schools often remain underdeveloped due to limited resources and monotonous implementation. **Knowledge Gap:** Previous studies have highlighted the importance of career guidance but have rarely focused on optimizing *orientation services* as a specific strategy to improve students' career understanding.

Aim: This study aims to optimize career guidance through orientation services based on Holland's RIASEC theory to enhance the career understanding of 11th-grade students. **Results:** Using a descriptive qualitative approach, findings revealed that orientation services improved students' self-awareness, confidence, and career decision-making ability. **Novelty:** The study uniquely integrates the RIASEC model within school-based orientation services, offering a structured and reflective career development framework.

Implications: The findings suggest that continuous orientation services starting from Grade X can effectively strengthen students' career planning and provide practical insights for counselors in designing more targeted and sustainable career programs.

Highlights:

- Enhances students' self-awareness and confidence in career decision-making.
- Integrates Holland's RIASEC model into structured school orientation programs.
- Recommends continuous career guidance starting from Grade X for sustainability.

Keywords: Orientation Services, Career Understanding, Riasec Theory, Career Guidance, High School Students

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Introduction

Education is a key factor in shaping high-quality human resources. One of the strategic levels of formal education in Indonesia is Senior High School (SMA). SMA is a formal educational institution aimed at preparing students to continue their education to a higher level and to enter the workforce, through the provision of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.[1] High schools play a role in equipping students with the academic competencies and character needed for community life.[2] In the context of education in Indonesia, Senior High School (SMA) students have an equal status with Vocational High School (SMK) students and Madrasah Aliyah (MAN) students. These three types of educational institutions are at the secondary education level, as regulated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System Article 18 paragraph (3), which states that secondary education takes the form of senior high schools (SMA), Madrasah Aliyah (MA), vocational high schools (SMK), and vocational Madrasah Aliyah (MAK), or other equivalent forms.[3]

According to Konopka in *Early Childhood Development Psychology*, first edition, middle adolescents are individuals who are in the age range of 15 to 18 years.[4] At this stage, students experience significant development in physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. During this period, students face not only academic demands to complete their studies and take national exams but also the demands of future planning, including choosing a path for further education or a career. However, in practice, high school students in Indonesia face a variety of complex challenges. Various studies indicate that students often experience high academic pressure, negative influences from social media, as well as mental health issues such as stress and anxiety.[5] One of the increasingly prominent challenges is students' confusion in planning their future careers. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that many high school students do not yet have a well-developed career plan, have little information about the world of work, and are still influenced by environmental and family pressures that do not always align with their personal potential.[6]

Career, as defined by Greenhaus and Callanan, is 'the sequence of work experiences and roles adopted by a person throughout their life.'[7] Super strengthens this definition by stating that a career is the implementation of a person's self-concept in work activities throughout the lifespan. [8] Therefore, a career does not only mean a job, but it is a reflection of an individual's personal development throughout their life. In relation to career choice, Holland proposed that effective career selection occurs when there is a match between an individual's personality type and the work environment, through the RIASEC model (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional).[9] This emphasizes the importance of career guidance that can help students understand their interests, talents, and personal values from an early age.

Based on field observations, at the high school where this research was conducted, it was found that many eleventh-grade students experienced confusion in choosing a major or career after graduation. They showed a lack of understanding of their own potential, limited information about higher education programs, and insufficient familiarity with various career prospects. In fact, some students seemed indifferent to future planning and merely followed the choices of peers or decisions of their parents without careful personal consideration. This condition aligns with the findings of Husniah, Edison, and Elu, who revealed that many students have not yet understood their study or career interests that match their personalities.[10] This is exacerbated by the less than optimal implementation of career guidance, as revealed by Yasmin et al., who indicated that career guidance services in many schools are still constrained by limited resources, lack of coordination, monotonous service methods, and minimal access to labor market information.[11]

The impact of weak career orientation services is very serious. Students who lack a good understanding of careers are at risk of choosing the wrong majors, experiencing mismatches in the workforce, or even becoming part of the educated unemployment phenomenon. Intan and colleagues in their research indicate that the misalignment between the education system and industry needs is the main cause of the high unemployment rate among high school and vocational school graduates.[12] As a systematic effort to address this issue, the government has issued the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 111 of 2014 on Guidance and Counseling in Primary and Secondary Education. One of its focuses is career guidance services, which aim to help students understand their potential, explore career options, plan for the future, and make appropriate career decisions.[13]

Although various studies have examined the importance of career guidance, there is still limited research that specifically explores the optimization of orientation services as a strategy to enhance high school students' career understanding, particularly for 11th-grade students. This study aims to fill this gap, focusing on how orientation services can function effectively in helping students understand their potential, explore relevant career information, and make better career decisions. In this context, orientation services become one of the effective strategies for optimizing career guidance. According to Prayitno, orientation services aim to help individuals recognize their own potential and the environment related to future planning.[14] With structured orientation services, students can obtain information about the working world, educational pathways, and develop awareness of the importance of early career planning. Setiyowati's research in Abdullah and Rohman shows that orientation services implemented systematically can enhance students' career understanding and motivation in planning their future.[15] [16]

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. Through qualitative research, the researcher is able to identify subjects and experience the experiences that subjects undergo in daily life. In this study, the researcher will understand the background, atmosphere, and natural events related to the topic being studied.[17]. This research was conducted at SMA N 1 Kualuh Hulu, located in Aek Kanopan City, during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic

year. The research period is planned to last approximately 3 months, with scheduling adjusted according to the conditions of the school and the research subjects. According to Sugiyono, research subjects are parties who provide data in a study, whether individuals, groups, or institutions.[18]The subjects in this study were students of class XI-C who participated in career orientation activities, as well as the school counselors at the school where the research took place. The selection of subjects was carried out using Snowball Sampling, which is a chain-based technique of selecting informants, where the initial informants recommend other informants who are considered relevant and possess the information needed by the researcher.

The data collection techniques in this study used three main methods: (1) In-depth interviews: used to explore students' understanding and subjective experiences before and after the service. (2) Participatory observation: conducted during the service to directly observe students' behavior, engagement, and responses. (3) Documentation and reflection: used as support to identify changes in students' understanding in written form. Data analysis techniques in qualitative research are carried out continuously from the beginning to the end of the study. The process includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification.[18] Data analysis was conducted qualitatively, involving three main stages: (1) Data Reduction: Filtering, summarizing, and selecting important data from the results of observations and interviews. (2) Data Presentation: Organizing data in the form of narratives or thematic matrices to make patterns and relationships between categories more visible. (3) Drawing Conclusions and Verification: Concluding the meaning of the data and reviewing the findings to ensure their validity. The researcher also acted as the implementer of the orientation services. Therefore, to maintain the objectivity of the data, perspectives from other informants, namely the guidance counselors, were needed, as they also observed the implementation and outcomes of the services.

Results and Discussion

A. Description of the Initial Condition of Students' Career Understanding (Pre - Service)

Before the service was provided, students showed a low level of career understanding. They were not yet able to formulate their desired college major or career, did not fully recognize their own potential, and tended to follow the decisions of parents or peers. The guidance counselor emphasized, "Most students are still confused about making choices, especially regarding college majors." In line with this, a student stated, "I am still confused because I am not sure which direction to take" (Student 1, Pre-Service). The confusion was also influenced by the lack of school guidance and the students' low self-confidence.

B. Student Response During Service

The implementation of career orientation services is conducted through the delivery of materials, RIASEC tests, group discussions, and self-reflection. Observations show that students attend enthusiastically, focus on listening to the material, and actively ask questions about the results of the personality test. During the discussion session, they begin to relate their interests to majors and occupations, such as teacher, nutritionist, or midwife. Reflection sheets show that most students are able to write down their career direction and concrete actions, such as seeking information about courses or improving report card grades.

C. Description of Condition After Service (Post-Service)

After the orientation service, there was a significant increase in students' career understanding. They began to understand career concepts more comprehensively, recognize their personality and interests, and became more confident in planning their future. The guidance counselor mentioned, *'There has been a change from before; students now have a better understanding of their career choices. Some even started to mention specific majors and jobs.'*

Interviews with students also showed positive changes. Student 1 said, *"I feel more confident choosing to become a teacher after seeing the results of my personality test."* Student 2 added, *"I need to start highlighting the subjects that align with the profession I want and improve my report card grades."* Meanwhile, Student 3 emphasized, *"I am determined to become a midwife and have started looking for information about universities."*

In general, career orientation services help students move from a state of confusion and doubt to being more confident and focused. Before the service, their understanding of careers is vague, self-knowledge is limited, and their attitude toward the future tends to be passive. After the service, students understand career concepts, recognize their potential, and begin to develop concrete steps. Thus, career orientation services have been proven effective in enhancing students' career understanding, fostering motivation, and providing clear guidance in career decision-making. In addition, students stated that career orientation services should be held more frequently and should ideally start from the 10th grade so that they can plan their future earlier.

D. Comparison of Pre- Service and Post-Service

[Table 1. About Here]

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and student reflections obtained during and after the implementation of

career orientation services, it can be discussed that these services have a positive impact on increasing the career understanding of 11th-grade students in class XI-C. The services provided help students understand the meaning of a career, recognize their own potential, and connect their interests and personalities with suitable types of jobs. Before the services were implemented, the majority of students showed a high level of confusion in choosing a major or job to pursue after graduation. They did not have a clear concept of a career and often based their decisions on the opinions of others, social trends, or limited information. This is reinforced by the results of interviews with the guidance counselor, who stated that most students do not yet have a career picture and lack awareness of their own potential.

However, after being provided with career orientation services based on Holland's Personality Typology Theory (RIASEC), there was a significant change in students' understanding of their career direction. The RIASEC test used in the services helped students recognize their dominant personality types and match them with relevant work environments. Job satisfaction and career effectiveness can be achieved when a person is in a work environment that aligns with their personality type. This change indicates that students not only understand careers theoretically but also begin to internalize the concept and relate it to their real-life situations. In fact, some students have started taking concrete steps such as seeking information about campuses, majors, and setting target scores to enter their desired universities.

From a process perspective, this service also successfully creates a reflective and participatory learning environment. Observational results indicate that students actively participate in the entire series of activities, from listening to the material, taking tests, engaging in discussions, to writing personal reflections. This demonstrates that the approach used in the service (interactive lectures, RIASEC tests, discussions, and reflections) is effective in raising students' self-awareness. Syarqawi emphasizes the importance of students' self-understanding in the career selection process.[19] He stated that strengthening self-understanding regarding the career tendencies one intends to choose and develop is a crucial initial step in career guidance. In addition, orientation and information about the world of work, as well as an introduction to various job fields accessible to high school graduates, also become a primary focus in the career orientation process.

This discussion also indicates that career orientation services play a role as a bridge between students' potential and the working world, as well as helping students develop independent career decision-making skills. Based on student reflections and observation results, the strategy for optimizing career orientation services in the future can be implemented through: 1. Conducting services regularly starting from grade X. 2. Strengthening interest- and personality-based materials. 3. Using testing and self-reflection approaches. 4. Collaboration between guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, alumni, and parents in supporting students' career planning.

Conclusion

Career orientation services optimized with Holland's theory (RIASEC) approach are effective in enhancing the career understanding of 11th-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Kualuh Hulu. Before the service, students experienced confusion and a lack of understanding about careers, as well as limited information about their potential and future options. After receiving services that included the RIASEC Test, discussions, and self-reflection, students became more aware of their personalities and interests, and more confident and directed in planning their careers and further education. This service also encourages students to formulate concrete steps in making their career decisions. This understanding is important to be applied continuously from 10th grade in collaboration with guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, alumni, and parents to support a more structured and effective career planning for students. Thus, career orientation services make a significant contribution in helping students recognize their potential and prepare for the future in a realistic and targeted manner.

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