

The Implementation of Career Guidance Services in Enhancing Students' Readiness for Admission to Public Universities

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Abstract. Students' readiness for admission to State Universities (PTN) requires systematic and sustained career guidance services. This study explores the implementation of career guidance services at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan in supporting students' readiness for higher education. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed involving the principal, vice principals, guidance and counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, and teachers responsible for university preparation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that career guidance is implemented continuously from Grade 10 through four integrated services: information and further study exploration, counseling and major selection assistance, academic readiness strengthening, and psychological and administrative support. These services are collaboratively delivered by school leaders, teachers, parents, alumni, and external partners. According to school staff, the integrated implementation of these services supports students in understanding higher education options, selecting appropriate study programs, strengthening academic preparation, and enhancing confidence for university admission. The findings highlight the importance of sustained, collaborative career guidance in facilitating students' readiness for higher education.

Keywords: career guidance, service implementation, readiness for further study

1 Introduction

Entering a State University (PTN) remains a major aspiration for many Indonesian senior high school students and their families. State universities are widely perceived as offering higher academic quality, broader study program options, better scholarship opportunities, and stronger academic networks. However, students' aspirations to pursue higher education are not always accompanied by adequate preparation [1]. In practice, many students only begin considering their study program options during their final year of high school, while others seek information only shortly before the university admission period. As a result, decisions regarding further education are often made hastily without sufficient planning or self-reflection [2].

Competition for admission to state universities has become increasingly intense in recent years. The number of applicants consistently exceeds the available admission capacity, making the selection process highly competitive. This situation requires students not only to demonstrate strong academic performance but also to prepare themselves strategically by understanding admission pathways, selecting appropriate study programs, recognizing their personal strengths, and planning their educational goals well in advance. Without adequate preparation, students may choose unsuitable majors, miss opportunities through available admission pathways, or experience uncertainty regarding their future educational direction [3], [4].

Readiness for further study is an essential aspect of career development during senior high school. At this stage, students are expected to explore their interests, talents, values, and future educational opportunities before making important career decisions. According to career development theory, adolescence represents the exploration stage, during which individuals gradually crystallize their career preferences and begin making educational decisions [5]. Consequently, the decision to pursue higher education should not be regarded merely as a university application process but as an integral part of long-term career development that requires systematic guidance and support.

Higher education institutions play a fundamental role in preparing qualified human resources through education, research, and community service. Therefore, successful transition to higher education requires students to understand their own capabilities, evaluate available study programs, recognize admission opportunities, and develop confidence in facing competitive selection processes [6], [7]. Such preparedness cannot be achieved through one-time information sessions conducted shortly before graduation. Instead, students require continuous career guidance services that begin earlier, address individual needs, and support informed educational decision-making throughout their high school years.

Previous studies have consistently reported that many senior high school students encounter difficulties when making decisions about further education. Students' decisions are influenced by a combination of internal factors, including interests, abilities, aspirations, motivation, and academic readiness, as well as external factors such as parental support, school environment, peer influence, and access to information about higher education [8], [9]. Because these factors interact simultaneously, students often require professional guidance to integrate various sources of information into realistic and well-informed educational decisions.

Career guidance therefore plays an important role in assisting students to understand themselves and to plan appropriate educational and career pathways. Beyond providing information about occupations or universities, career guidance helps students identify their interests and competencies, evaluate available educational alternatives, and make decisions that are consistent with their academic abilities and future career aspirations. Effective career guidance also supports students in developing decision-making skills, educational planning abilities, and confidence during the transition from secondary school to higher education [10].

In this context, career guidance services function not only as information delivery but also as a comprehensive developmental process. Through systematic guidance

activities, students are encouraged to explore university options, reflect on their personal potential, evaluate educational opportunities, and formulate realistic plans for higher education [11], [12]. These services contribute to improving students' readiness by integrating self-understanding with knowledge of educational pathways and admission requirements.

Despite their importance, career guidance services in many senior high schools remain largely informational rather than developmental. Activities frequently focus on distributing admission schedules or introducing universities without providing comprehensive assistance in selecting study programs, interpreting admission competitiveness, evaluating academic readiness, or developing admission strategies. Consequently, some students rely heavily on peer influence or make decisions based on limited information rather than careful consideration of their interests, abilities, and future goals.

Although numerous studies have examined the influence of career guidance on career planning, career maturity, and educational decision-making, relatively limited attention has been given to how career guidance services are implemented to improve students' readiness for admission to state universities. Existing studies also rarely examine the integration of various career guidance activities—such as university admission information, individual and group counseling, educational seminars, campus outreach programs, admission simulations, and registration assistance—as a comprehensive support system. Furthermore, evidence from integrated Islamic senior high schools remains limited despite their distinctive educational environment and student development approaches [13].

SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan provides an interesting context for investigating this issue because the school has developed structured career guidance programs aimed at supporting students' transition to higher education. These programs include interest and aptitude assessments, guidance in selecting university majors, dissemination of information regarding university admission pathways, educational seminars, and assistance throughout the university application process. The school also benefits from relatively strong educational resources and broad access to digital information, creating a supportive environment for implementing comprehensive career guidance services.

The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on the implementation of career guidance services as a strategic approach to improving students' readiness for admission to state universities. Rather than merely examining the existence or effectiveness of career guidance programs, this study explores how various career guidance services are implemented, how they complement one another, and how they contribute to students' preparedness for higher education. Particular attention is given to four major service components: information regarding state university admission pathways, individual and group counseling, educational seminars and campus outreach activities, and university entrance examination simulations accompanied by registration assistance.

Accordingly, this study aims to describe the implementation of career guidance services in improving students' readiness for further study at state universities at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan. By focusing on the implementation process, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how career guidance services

support students in preparing for one of the most critical educational transitions in their academic lives.

2 Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of career guidance services in improving students' readiness for further study at State Universities (PTN). A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on exploring the implementation process, participants' experiences, and the meanings they attached to career guidance activities within the natural school setting rather than examining causal relationships among variables. This approach enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena through the perspectives of those directly involved [14].

2.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The school was selected because it has implemented a structured career guidance program designed to prepare students for admission to higher education and has demonstrated consistent success in supporting graduates to continue their studies at various universities.

The research focused on the implementation of career guidance services related to students' preparation for entering state universities, including information services on university admission pathways, individual and group counseling, educational seminars and campus outreach, university entrance examination (UTBK) simulations, and registration assistance.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all informants possessed relevant knowledge and direct experience regarding the implementation of career guidance services. The participants consisted of the principal, vice principal for curriculum, vice principal for student affairs, guidance and counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, and teachers directly involved in mentoring students' higher education preparation. The participant group was considered adequate because it represented all key stakeholders directly involved in planning, coordinating, and implementing career guidance services at the school. Interviews were conducted until no substantially new information emerged regarding the implementation process across participant roles. The consistency of findings across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence indicated sufficient information power to address the objectives of this implementation-focused qualitative study.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to

explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies regarding the implementation of career guidance services, factors supporting program implementation, and challenges encountered during student mentoring. Observations were undertaken to obtain firsthand information regarding the implementation of career guidance activities within the school environment, allowing researchers to understand actual practices beyond participants' verbal explanations. Document analysis was conducted to complement and verify the findings obtained from interviews and observations by examining school documents, guidance program plans, activity reports, university admission materials, and other relevant records.

The use of multiple data collection methods enabled the researchers to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of career guidance services.

2.4 Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants representing various roles within the school. Methodological triangulation involved comparing evidence obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis to identify consistency across different sources of data.

In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming preliminary findings with several participants to ensure that the researchers' interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles for educational research. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving an explanation of the study's objectives, research procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all interview participants. To protect participants' identities, all interview data were anonymized using role-based codes (e.g., Principal, Vice Principal, Guidance Counselor, and Homeroom Teacher), and the findings are reported without revealing personally identifiable information.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The analysis consisted of three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

During the data reduction stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were organized, coded, and categorized according to the research objectives. The researchers focused on information related to the implementation of career guidance services, including university admission information services, individual and group counseling, educational seminars and campus outreach, UTBK simulations, and registration assistance.

The reduced data were subsequently presented in the form of descriptive narratives, thematic categories, and data matrices to facilitate pattern identification and interpretation. Finally, conclusions were continuously developed and verified throughout the research process by comparing emerging themes across different data sources. This iterative analytical process enabled the researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of how career guidance services contribute to improving students' readiness for further study at state universities.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of career guidance services at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan is carried out in stages and continuously from students in grades 10 to 12. The implementation of services does not only focus on providing information about higher education, but also includes assistance in selecting majors, strengthening academic readiness, and psychological and administrative assistance prior to the college entrance selection process. The research findings identify four main forms of services that are the core of the implementation of career guidance in schools, namely information services and exploration of further studies, counseling and assistance in selecting majors, strengthening academic readiness to enter state universities, and psychological and administrative assistance.

The service implementation flow can be read through the concept map in Figure 1. In this figure, service implementation is positioned as one of the important elements that connects career guidance service management with student readiness to enter PTN.



Fig 1. Concept Map of Career Guidance Service Results

Based on the focus of service implementation in the concept map, there are four most prominent forms of service, namely information services and exploration of further studies, counseling and assistance in selecting majors, strengthening academic readiness to enter PTN and psychological and administrative assistance.

Table 1. Focus of Career Guidance Service Implementation

Form of service	Implementation in schools	Staff-reported contributions to students' readiness for further study
Further study information and exploration services	The school carries out socialization of the SNBP, SNBT, and independent pathways, provides scholarship information, presents educational consultants, involves alumni, and organizes the Goes to Campus program starting from grade 10 to introduce the world of higher education and various study program options.	According to school staff, these services helped students develop a better understanding of PTN admission pathways, study program options, scholarship opportunities, and campus life..
Counseling and assistance in selecting a major	Guidance and counseling teachers map interests and talents through psychological tests, the RIASEC instrument, interviews, and observations. Assistance is provided through individual and group counseling, involving homeroom teachers and parents in the decision-making process for further study.	Students are better able to recognize their potential, understand the match between interests, academic abilities, and choice of major, and can determine a study program that is more realistic and in line with their career goals.
Strengthening academic readiness to enter PTN	The school develops the PTN Success Program through TPS learning, Indonesian language literacy, English language literacy, mathematical reasoning, periodic UTBK try outs, consultations with external consultants, and the use of academic data as a basis for further study assistance.	School staff reported that students appeared better prepared academically and were more strategic in selecting universities based on tryout results..
Psychological and administrative assistance	The school provides motivational classes, personal consultations, stress management assistance prior to selection, and technical assistance during the SNBP, SNBT, and independent pathway registration processes.	Staff perceived that students demonstrated greater confidence and psychological preparedness during the university admission process..

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, the implementation of career guidance services at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan is carried out through four main service types: information and exploration services for further study, counseling and assistance in selecting a major, strengthening academic readiness for entering state universities, and psychological and administrative assistance. These four services complement each other in helping students prepare for further study at university. A summary of the service implementation is presented in Table 1.

Information services and further study exploration

Information services are the initial stage of career guidance provided to students. The information provided not only relates to university entrance pathways such as SNBP, SNBT, and independent pathways, but also includes an introduction to the campus environment, study programs, scholarship opportunities, and career prospects relevant to students' interests.

Information services are provided through outreach activities, educational seminars, consultations with external parties, and the Goes to Campus program. This program begins in 10th grade and aims to introduce students to the university environment in a more realistic way. The Vice Principal for Student Affairs emphasized:

"We intentionally introduce students to universities from Grade 10 because many of them initially have only a limited understanding of higher education. Through the Goes to Campus program, students can directly observe the learning environment, interact with university students, and begin considering study programs that match their interests." (VP-SA).

During the Goes to Campus activity, the researcher observed that students actively asked questions regarding admission pathways, scholarship opportunities, and campus facilities. Many students recorded information provided by university representatives and discussed study program options with teachers during the visit. His observation was consistent with the school's annual career guidance program, which schedules campus visits and university exploration activities beginning in Grade 10.

In addition to campus visits, schools also bring in educational consultants and alumni to provide information on state university admission pathways and the university experience. Alumni involvement is considered to be significantly influential, as students feel more connected to the experiences shared by their seniors. These findings indicate that information services not only function as a means of delivering academic information, but also as a means of career exploration that helps students gain a more concrete picture of their educational options after graduating from high school.

Counseling and Assistance in Selecting a Major

The second dominant service is counseling and assistance in selecting a major. This assistance is based on the results of mapping students' interests, talents, academic abilities, and career goals, collected since grade 10. Guidance teachers conduct assessments using psychological tests, the RIASEC instrument, interviews, and observations involving homeroom teachers. The guidance counselor stated:

"We never recommend majors based only on students' preferences. We compare the RIASEC results, academic achievement, psychological assessments, and discussions with parents before providing recommendations." (GC1)

During an individual counseling session, the researcher observed that the counselor reviewed students' assessment reports while discussing alternative study programs and university admission opportunities. Students' career assessment reports also

documented the alignment between interests, aptitude profiles, and recommended study programs.

The assessment results are used as the basis for providing individual and group counseling services. At this stage, students are assisted in aligning their study program choices with their academic abilities and potential. The guidance counselor explained that the mentoring process often involves communication with parents, especially when there are differences between the student's desires and their parents' expectations regarding their chosen major. The role of the homeroom teacher is also evident in this mentoring process. The homeroom teacher serves as a liaison, conveying students' academic development, character, and interests to the guidance counselor as consideration in counseling services.

Research findings indicate that counseling services help students narrow down their previously general major choices to more specific and realistic ones. According to homeroom teachers, after participating in career guidance services, students become familiar with various study program alternatives they were previously unaware of.

Strengthening Academic Readiness for Entering State Universities

Career guidance at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan is also integrated with an academic readiness strengthening program. The school has developed a State University Success Program, designed to help students prepare for university entrance exams starting in 10th grade. The program is implemented through the gradual introduction of materials on the Scholastic Potential Test (TPS), Indonesian language literacy, English literacy, and mathematical reasoning into the school curriculum. The Deputy Head of Curriculum explained that

"UTBK preparation is not something we begin in Grade 12. Since Grade 10 students have gradually been introduced to TPS, literacy, and reasoning because readiness develops over time." (VP-C).

In addition, schools regularly conduct UTBK tryouts and use the results as a basis for mapping student abilities. Tryout data is used to help students make more realistic choices about study programs and universities that align with their academic abilities.

Other findings indicate that schools also involve external educational consultants in the process of selecting majors and advising on university entrance strategies. This assistance is provided by considering report card grades, tryout results, student achievement, and the chances of acceptance into the chosen study program.

Psychological and Administrative Assistance

In addition to academic aspects, the implementation of career guidance services also aims to strengthen students' mental readiness. Schools offer motivational classes, personal consultations, and psychological support to help students cope with the pressures of the college entrance selection process. The guidance counselor explained that:

"Students are often academically prepared but emotionally anxious. Therefore, motivational sessions and personal consultations are equally important before the admission process." (GC2).

The researcher observed that counseling sessions prior to SNBT focused not only on admission procedures but also on stress management and confidence building. Assistance is also provided during the administrative stages, particularly during the SNBP (National Student Admissions), SNBT (National Student Admissions), and independent registration processes. Guidance teachers, homeroom teachers, and the school team assist students in determining their program selection order, completing documentation, and ensuring all registration steps are completed correctly.

Overall, the research results indicate that the implementation of career guidance services at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan is not carried out as an incidental activity prior to graduation, but rather as a continuous mentoring process from grade 10 to grade 12. The service implementation is carried out through an integration of information services, counseling, academic reinforcement, as well as psychological and administrative support to form a more comprehensive readiness for further study for students.

3.2 Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation of career guidance services at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan has been carried out comprehensively through four interrelated service components: information services and further study exploration, counseling and assistance in selecting majors, strengthening academic readiness, and psychological and administrative support. These components collectively contribute to improving students' readiness for further study at State Universities (PTN).

Implementation of Information Services and Further Study Exploration

The first finding shows that information services are implemented systematically beginning in Grade X. Students are gradually introduced to self-awareness, educational opportunities, university admission pathways, scholarship information, and campus life through activities such as Goes to Campus programs, educational seminars, and alumni sharing sessions. This staged implementation allows students to develop educational plans over a longer period rather than making decisions only during the final year of high school [14], [15].

These findings support career development theory, which positions high school students in the exploration stage where individuals actively gather information, evaluate alternatives, and begin forming educational and career preferences. The study also demonstrates that information services become more effective when formal information is combined with experiential activities that expose students directly to higher education environments. Collaboration among guidance counselors, school leaders, alumni, and external partners strengthens the continuity and relevance of the information provided [16], [17].

Counseling and Assistance in Selecting Majors

The second finding highlights the importance of counseling and mentoring in helping students choose appropriate study programs. Counseling services are based on interest and talent assessments, academic performance, and consultations involving students, parents, homeroom teachers, and guidance counselors. This process helps students align their study choices with their abilities and future aspirations [18].

The findings indicate that career decision-making is treated as a collaborative process rather than an individual decision. Guidance counselors act not only as information providers but also as facilitators who help students and parents reach realistic educational decisions. This supports previous research emphasizing that career counseling contributes to students' self-understanding and improves the quality of educational decision-making [19].

Strengthening Academic Readiness for PTN

The third finding reveals that career guidance services are integrated with academic preparation programs. The school has developed a PTN Success Program that includes Scholastic Potential Test preparation, literacy development, mathematical reasoning, UTBK tryouts, and consultations with educational consultants. Preparation begins in Grade X and becomes increasingly intensive in Grades XI and XII [20], [21].

This integration demonstrates that academic readiness and career guidance are implemented simultaneously. Tryout results are used not only to evaluate learning outcomes but also to provide recommendations regarding suitable universities and study programs. The findings support the view that effective career guidance programs should be integrated with academic programs to optimize students' educational and career development [22], [23].

Psychological and Administrative Support

The fourth finding emphasizes the role of psychological and administrative assistance during the university admission process. Students receive support through motivational classes, individual consultations, communication with parents, and assistance with registration procedures for SNBP, SNBT, and independent selection pathways.

The involvement of guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and parents demonstrates that students' readiness for further study is influenced not only by academic ability but also by motivation, emotional readiness, family support, and confidence in facing competitive selection processes. This finding reinforces previous studies indicating that psychological and social support are important factors in students' educational planning and transition to higher education [24], [25].

Overall Interpretation

Overall, the findings show that the implementation of career guidance services at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan functions as an integrated support system that combines informational, counseling, academic, psychological, and administrative dimensions. Rather than operating as isolated activities, these services are interconnected and implemented continuously from Grade X to Grade XII. This comprehensive approach

enables students to recognize their potential, explore educational alternatives, strengthen academic preparedness, and develop confidence in making informed decisions regarding further study at state universities.

The study therefore contributes to the literature by demonstrating that students' readiness for admission to PTN is built through a sustained and collaborative guidance process involving multiple stakeholders within the school environment. The findings suggest that career guidance services become more effective when they are implemented systematically, integrated with academic preparation, and supported by strong collaboration among school leaders, guidance counselors, teachers, parents, alumni, and external educational partners.

4 Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of career guidance services at SMAIT Istiqamah Balikpapan is carried out systematically and continuously from the time students are in grade 10 to grade 12. The implementation of services not only focuses on providing information regarding college entrance pathways, but also includes counseling and assistance in selecting majors, strengthening academic readiness through the PTN Success Program, and psychological and administrative assistance during the college entrance selection process. All of these services are implemented collaboratively by involving guidance and counseling teachers, the principal, vice principals, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, parents, alumni, and external partners.

The research findings indicate that the gradual implementation of services contributes to students' increased readiness for further study, as evidenced by clearer study program choices, improved understanding of college entrance pathways, improved academic preparedness, and increased student confidence in the selection process. These findings demonstrate that the success of career guidance services is determined not only by the quality of counseling services but also by the program's integration with school academic activities and the collaboration of all stakeholders in supporting students.

This research's contribution lies in its finding that the implementation of continuous career guidance services starting in grade 10 can build students' readiness for further study more comprehensively than services that only focus on mentoring before graduation. Therefore, schools need to develop career guidance services as part of an educational strategy integrated with the curriculum and student development to support more mature and focused decision-making about further study..

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