

## Optimizing Career Counseling to Support Elective Subject Selection in the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) at SMAN 1 Petir

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### ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum marks a progressive step towards education that is more personalized and relevant to the needs of students. One of the most important aspects of this curriculum is the opportunity for students to choose elective subjects based on their interests, talents, and future career plans. However, this process is not easy, especially at the high school level. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data was collected through interviews with three students of class X and one Guidance and Counseling teacher at SMAN 1 Petir. The results showed that students experienced confusion in choosing subjects due to lack of information, lack of communication with parents, and low motivation to learn. To address this, BK teachers provide structured career guidance services, including classical tutoring, individual and group counseling, as well as the use of instruments such as RIASEC interest questionnaires. This service helps students understand themselves and their career plans. Collaboration between BK teachers, homeroom teachers, and subject teachers supports the implementation of the program. Despite facing challenges such as limited BK staff and curriculum dynamics, the program helps students become more reflective of their potential and career goals. The career counseling development program at SMAN 1 Petir has shown continuous efforts in helping students choose achievement subjects according to the Independent Curriculum.

**Keywords:** *Career counseling; Kurikulum Merdeka; Subject selection.*

### INTRODUCTION

The reform of the education system in Indonesia through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum marks a progressive step towards an education that is more personalized and relevant to the needs of students. One of the most important aspects of the curriculum is the opportunity for students to choose a "elective subject" or an "achievement map" based on their interests, talents, and future career plans. However, this court process is not easy for all students, especially at the secondary school level. Many of them do not yet have a complete understanding of their potential, career prospects, and the academic implications of their choices. Therefore, the need for structured and relevant career counseling services has become very urgent to assist students in making informed and informed decisions. Iskandar et al. (2024)

A number of studies have underscored the importance of career counseling in

helping students plan for their futures. One of the classic studies by Super (1990) emphasizes that career development is a lifelong process, which has implications for the importance of ongoing mentorship at different stages of an individual's life (Savickas, 2015). Ginzberg's approach suggests that career choice is closely related to the stages of adolescent psychological development, emphasizing the importance of support at critical times such as high school, although there are no specific references to support this statement in the context listed (Hidayat et al., 2022).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field brings a number of significant challenges, especially in the selection of elective subjects for students. In many schools, especially in areas with limited access to information, students tend to choose subjects based on peer influence or parental demands, rather than a deep understanding of the relevance of those subjects to their desired careers (Wibowo et al., 2021). Research by Wibowo et al. shows that students experience an increased understanding of career planning after receiving systematic guidance, underscoring the importance of structured career guidance programs to help students in this transition period (Wibowo et al., 2021). In this condition, the existence of a career counseling development program in accordance with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum is very important. This kind of program is expected to not only provide information, but also build students' reflective awareness of their career potential and preferences.

Given the complexity of the challenges faced by students and educators, an adaptive, systematic, and contextual needs-based career counseling program is needed. This program should be able to synergize a humanistic counseling approach and self-development with an understanding of the curriculum structure and trends in the needs of the world of work. Several recent studies have begun to develop a digital or strength-based counseling model, but not many have explicitly linked it to the process of selecting achievement maps. (Tunggali, 2021). However, the implementation of these models in the context of selecting subjects to achieve educational goals still needs further research. Therefore, the preparation of a career counseling development program that directly supports students in choosing their preferred map is very relevant to answer the challenges of the Independent Curriculum.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Subject**

The subjects in this study consisted of 3 students of class X at SMAN 1 Petir and 1 Counseling Guidance (BK) teacher. The selection of these subjects is carried out by considering their role and involvement in the process of coaching and developing students' character. Final students are chosen to get a direct picture of their

experiences and views, while BK teachers and homeroom teachers are chosen to provide perspectives from educators regarding behavior, development, and problems faced by students.

### Instruments and Interview Questions

This study uses a qualitative research method with a case study research method. A case study is a series of intense, detailed and in-depth scientific activities about a program, event, and activity, either at the level of an individual, a group of people, an institution, or an organization to gain in-depth knowledge about the event. which aims to understand the individual in depth and detail, because the qualitative method directly meets and conducts deeper interviews, therefore the research conducted by the author regarding "Career Counseling Development Program to Support the Selection of Elective Subjects (Achievement Subjects) in the Independent Curriculum at SMAN 1 Petir" is very suitable for using a qualitative approach. Therefore, the researcher asked questions related to this study. Namely: Interview Questions for BK Teachers (12 Questions) and for Grade X Students.

**Table 1.** Interview Questions

No	Teachers	Students
1	How would you explain the <b>role of BK counselors</b> in helping students choose elective subjects within the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> (Independent Curriculum)?	Were you aware that the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> requires you to <b>choose specific subjects</b> (Achievement Subjects/Elective Maps)?
2	What are the primary <b>challenges</b> you face in assisting students during the selection process for the Achievement Map (Elective Subjects)?	How do you <b>feel</b> about being asked to choose the subjects you will take in the future?
3	Does your school currently have a <b>structured career counseling program</b> ? If so, what is the form of its implementation?	Do you already have an <b>idea about the major or career path</b> you want to pursue after high school?
4	To what extent do Grade X students understand the <b>importance of choosing subjects</b> that align with their interests and talents?	What are the key <b>factors you consider</b> when choosing your elective subjects?
5	What <b>approach or method</b> do you predominantly use in career counseling for Grade X students?	Do you feel <b>guided or accompanied</b> by the BK teacher in this selection process? Please describe your experience.
6	Do you utilize any <b>interest or aptitude assessment tools</b> in the counseling process? If so, how are the results integrated and used?	Have you ever taken a <b>career counseling or talent/interest test</b> at school? What was your experience like?
7	How significant is the <b>involvement of parents</b> in the subject selection process carried out by students?	How important do you think it is to <b>choose a subject that truly suits your interests and ambitions</b> ?
8	Do you believe the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>	Did you <b>discuss</b> the selection of the

	provides <b>sufficient scope/space</b> for effective career counseling? Please elaborate on your reasoning.	Achievement Map with your parents or guardians?
9	What are your <b>inputs for the development</b> of career counseling programs to make them more effective in supporting the selection of Achievement Maps?	What <b>obstacles or difficulties</b> have you encountered in determining your choice of subjects?
10	Have you participated in any <b>special training</b> to support the implementation of career counseling within the context of the Independent Curriculum?	Do you feel that the <b>information provided about the elective subjects</b> is clear enough at school?
11	How significant is the <b>role of subject teachers or homeroom teachers</b> in the counseling process for subject selection?	What are your <b>expectations</b> for the guidance that the BK teachers can provide in this selection process?
12	How do you <b>evaluate the success</b> of the ongoing career counseling program?	If you were given the opportunity to <b>improve the subject selection guidance program</b> , what would you like to change or add?

### Data Collection

The data collection technique used by primary data is data obtained directly from the research subject by using a measurement tool or a data collection tool directly on the subject as the source of information sought. The data collection methods used by researchers to obtain primary data include interviews, observations, and documentation.

Interviews between researchers and respondents were conducted in the BK room. The entire interview process was recorded so that the information obtained could be optimally utilized in identifying factors related to the career counseling development program to support the selection of elective subjects (achievement subjects) in the Independent Curriculum at SMAN 1 Petir, which then became part of the findings of this study.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Merdeka Curriculum provides students with the freedom to choose achievement subjects according to their interests, talents, and future career plans. However, in its implementation, the selection of this map is not easy because most students, especially at the high school level in class X, are still in the stage of finding their identity and do not have a clear picture of their future. Based on observations and interviews at SMAN 1 Petir, it was found that many students experienced confusion in determining the choice of subjects due to lack of information, lack of communication with parents, and low motivation to learn. This is as conveyed by Mrs. Tita Khoirunisa, BK Teacher of SMAN 1 Petir, that "adolescent children have unstable thoughts, and have not thought about what their future career will be." The

students themselves also admitted that when choosing a lesson "there was confusion because they didn't know what to take," but also felt happy because "they could decide for themselves." This is in line with the explanation that BK teachers carry out career guidance and counseling services to identify and develop students' interests, talents, and abilities through basic and responsive services (Shobrina, 2024). In the adolescent stage, students' confusion in making choices is a sign that the role of BK teachers is needed to provide direction and career support according to their developmental needs.

In an effort to overcome this difficulty, BK teachers provide structured career guidance services. This program includes classical guidance to grade X students containing information related to the Independent Curriculum, explanations of elective subjects, and the dissemination of various assessment instruments such as talent interest questionnaires (RIASEC), student needs questionnaires, and study plans. The questionnaire includes academic grades, academic and non-academic achievements, choice of subject or vocational, study program choice plan, interest in further study, work interest, health examination results, parental attention, learning facilities, and means of transportation. In the implementation of this service, students admitted that they felt quite helped because "the BK teacher invited them to talk one by one and explain each lesson choice, so I understood better." These findings are in line with basic service theory that emphasizes the importance of helping students understand themselves, develop career plans, and choose subjects that support their careers (Aryanto, 2022). In the theory, it is explained that BK teachers have an important role in providing classical, group, and cross-class guidance so that students can explore their interests, talents, and abilities.

In addition, individual and group counseling is also provided as part of responsive services. The purpose of this service is to help students who are experiencing further confusion or have conflicts with parents regarding their choices. The results of the interviews showed that "most of the obstacles faced in the selection of elective subjects are the lack of good communication with parents," especially for students who "have parents who work out of town," so communication can only be done "via telephone." Therefore, the subject selection questionnaire also functions as a communication medium between students and parents so that they can discuss decisions together. This is in line with the theory that responsive services are provided to students who have difficulty in planning their careers and need immediate help, either on their own initiative or based on the referral of BK teachers. In theory, it is explained that this service is intended for students who have not been able to determine a choice of subjects or post-high school career plans. The theory also emphasizes that individual counseling plays a role in encouraging behavior change, self-development, and problem-solving and

decision-making skills, while group counseling utilizes group dynamics to learn from each other so that students can overcome the challenges they face (Sari, 2021).

The implementation of this program also involves direct interviews with each student, carried out from semester 1 until it ends in May. In the process, BK teachers collaborate with homeroom teachers and subject teachers. This collaboration is very important considering that there are only 4 BK teachers at SMAN 1 Petir and have to handle around 1,000 students. Mrs. Tita stated, "we ask for help from homeroom teachers to communicate again regarding the development of students' subjects, because homeroom teachers only focus on one class, while BK teachers handle many classes." On the other hand, students admitted that although the information was quite clear, "sometimes they were still confused," but they felt that "the BK teacher is the best, the subject is humble." The findings are in line with the theory that supporting information plays an important role in helping students recognize their interests, talents, and aspirations, as stated that "supporting information... is very important in helping students recognize themselves" (Hadi, 2023). The theory also emphasizes that data collection should be done holistically through various forms of non-test assessments, including "observations, interviews, questionnaires, inventory, documentation, and student briefs," which can then be used for individual or group counseling services. Furthermore, the theory asserts that non-test assessments are "effective in unearthing information about students' interests and talents," so that BK teachers can provide more appropriate direction (Hawari et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in the face of the dynamics of the Independent Curriculum which is not yet fixed and is still undergoing changes, BK teachers and other teachers routinely take part in special training through IHT (In House Training) activities every semester, by presenting certified speakers. This is done to dig deeper information and adjust the counseling approach to the development of education policies. With this humanistic and collaborative approach, students begin to have an awareness of their career choices and educational direction. One of the students said that he already had a vision of what the major for further studies would be like in the future, the student revealed "majors that have to do with health, accounting, management and there are also those who want to be able to study while working." These findings are directly related to the understanding cited from Ananta and Sumintono, who explain that the Independent Curriculum "focuses on active, project-based, and student-oriented learning" (2020). The explanation shows that curriculum changes encourage the role of teachers as facilitators and direct students to become active learners in building knowledge and planning their future careers. Furthermore, the view quoted from Yulianti et al. affirms that "curriculum infusion and group activities can help prepare students for future career challenges" (2024).

This is in line with the practice of BK teachers who consistently improve their competence through continuous training.

Thus, the career counseling development program implemented at SMAN 1 Petir has shown serious and continuous efforts in helping students choose achievement subjects. The program not only provides information, but also builds students' reflective awareness of their potential and career goals. Although they still face various challenges such as low learning motivation and limited communication with parents, collaboration between BK teachers, students, homeroom teachers, and subject teachers is an important key in the effective and relevant implementation of the Independent Curriculum .

## **CONCLUSION**

The career counseling development program at SMAN 1 Petir has proven to play an important role in supporting students to choose achievement subjects according to the Independent Curriculum. Through classical tutoring, individual and group counseling, and the use of interest questionnaires and other assessments, BK teachers help students understand their interests, talents, and career plans. This effort is a solution to the confusion experienced by many students due to low motivation to learn and lack of communication with parents. Although there are still obstacles such as the limited number of BK teachers and the dynamics of students' understanding of the Independent Curriculum, this program has had a positive impact. Cooperation between BK teachers, homeroom teachers, and subject teachers is the main key to the success of career counseling services at this school. With a structured and humanistic approach, students are better helped in making the right decisions and are responsible for their future.

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