

SPECIALIZATION GUIDANCE SERVICES AND STUDENTS' CAREER PLANNING READINESS IN A PESANTREN BASED MADRASAH

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Abstract

Career indecision among Madrasah Aliyah graduates remains a persistent problem in Indonesian secondary education. This problem is further complicated in schools that combine a general curriculum with pesantren (Islamic boarding school) routines. This study examines the implementation of specialization guidance (layanan peminatan) within the guidance and counseling program at MA Matsaratul Huda, Pamekasan, and its impact on students' career planning readiness. A qualitative descriptive design was used, involving 12 informants: the school principal, five teachers (including the guidance and counseling teacher, subject teachers, and homeroom teachers), and six twelfth grade students who had participated in the specialization service. Data were collected from 2 to 29 July 2026 through observation, semi structured interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed inductively through data reduction, display, and conclusion verification, with credibility strengthened through prolonged engagement and triangulation across observation, interview, and documentation sources. Findings show that specialization services combined classical and individual strategies, integrating formal in class sessions with informal approaches, and drew on report card achievement, psychological observation, and students' self reported interests as assessment instruments. According to informants' accounts, the service was perceived to strengthen self understanding, reduce confusion in choosing further education, and build confidence through sustained teacher support, with success also reflected in several students' university admission outcomes. Supporting factors included institutional commitment, parental involvement, and dedicated facilities; inhibiting factors included pesantren schedule conflicts, distance related parental restrictions, and an unintegrated formal schedule. These findings extend trait and factor and career development perspectives to the pesantren based madrasah context, with implications for Islamic career guidance practice.

Keywords: specialization guidance service, career planning, career maturity, guidance and counseling, Madrasah Aliyah, Islamic education

Abstrak

Ketidakpastian karier pada lulusan Madrasah Aliyah masih menjadi persoalan berulang dalam pendidikan menengah di Indonesia. Persoalan ini semakin kompleks pada madrasah berbasis pesantren yang memadukan kurikulum umum dengan rutinitas keagamaan. Penelitian ini mengkaji pelaksanaan layanan peminatan dalam program bimbingan dan konseling di MA Matsaratul Huda, Pamekasan, serta dampaknya

terhadap kesiapan siswa dalam perencanaan karier. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan 12 informan, terdiri atas kepala sekolah, lima guru (termasuk guru bimbingan dan konseling, guru mata pelajaran, dan wali kelas), serta enam siswa kelas XII yang telah mengikuti layanan peminatan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi terstruktur, dan dokumentasi selama periode 2 sampai 29 Juli 2026. Data dianalisis secara induktif melalui reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan data, dengan keabsahan data diperkuat melalui ketekunan pengamatan dan triangulasi sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa layanan peminatan dilaksanakan melalui strategi klasikal dan individual. Strategi ini memadukan sesi formal di kelas dengan pendekatan informal, serta menggunakan nilai rapor, pengamatan psikologis, dan minat siswa sebagai instrumen asesmen. Berdasarkan pengalaman dan persepsi informan, layanan ini dipandang memperkuat pemahaman diri siswa, mengurangi kebingungan dalam menentukan pendidikan lanjutan, dan menumbuhkan kepercayaan diri melalui pendampingan guru yang berkelanjutan; keberhasilan ini turut tercermin dari penerimaan sejumlah siswa di perguruan tinggi. Faktor pendukung meliputi komitmen kelembagaan, keterlibatan orang tua, dan fasilitas khusus peminatan. Faktor penghambat meliputi benturan jadwal kegiatan pesantren, pembatasan orang tua terkait jarak perguruan tinggi, serta jadwal layanan yang belum terintegrasi secara formal. Temuan ini memperluas teori trait and factor serta perkembangan karier ke konteks madrasah berbasis pesantren, dengan implikasi bagi praktik bimbingan karier Islami.

Kata kunci: layanan peminatan, perencanaan karier, kematangan karier, bimbingan dan konseling, Madrasah Aliyah, pendidikan Islam

INTRODUCTION

Career planning is one of the key developmental tasks of adolescence, especially for high school students who are on the cusp of transitioning from secondary education to higher education or the workforce. Globally, career guidance is recognized as a school-based process that supports adolescents in developing a coherent understanding of their vocational identity and reducing uncertainty during this critical transition period (Ashari, Azman, & Rasul, 2019; Super, 1980). In the Indonesian context, this developmental task is often complicated by limited access to career information, a lack of understanding of personal aptitudes, and inadequate guidance infrastructure, resulting in many Madrasah Aliyah graduates who remain uncertain about whether to continue their studies or enter the workforce directly.

Interest-based guidance, or interest-based services, is a component of school guidance and counseling programs specifically designed to help students identify their interests, talents, and academic inclinations as a foundation for determining appropriate educational and career paths. This service is rooted in the “Trait and Factor” tradition first formulated by Frank Parsons, who stated that appropriate career choices are based on a clear understanding of an individual’s abilities and interests, accurate knowledge of job requirements, and rational reasoning that connects the two (Chartrand, 1991). This initial framework was later expanded by Holland’s (1997) person-environment fit theory, which links vocational personality types to the work environment, as well as by Super’s (1980) life-span and life-space model (life span, life space model) by Super (1980), which views career development as an ongoing process shaped by an individual’s various life roles, rather than merely a decision made at a single point in time. Self-efficacy theory further

explains why purposeful experiences are important: an individual's belief in their own ability to perform an action shaped by experiences of mastery and social persuasion is the primary determinant of whether career exploration will lead to confident decision-making (Bandura, 1977). A recent study published in the *Journal of Islamic Educational Counseling* extends the "Traits and Factors" framework specifically to the field of career guidance for students with special needs, demonstrating that this approach continues to offer a systematic method for matching students' strengths with appropriate career paths (Hidayati, Idhartono, & Mufidah, 2025)

Cross-national evidence on school-based career interventions also indicates that structured guidance activities are associated with higher career adaptability and career maturity among high school students (Chuang, Huang, Lin, & Chen, 2022; Bae, 2022; Wang, Lu, & Liu, 2025; Zewude et al., 2025), and a recent systematic review of career interventions for high school students found that counselor support, value clarification, and psychoeducational content were the most consistently effective components across studies (Wang, Li, & Wang, 2024). The Career Maturity Inventory (CMI), originally developed to operationalize this construct, remains a benchmark for understanding how attitudes and competencies in vocational decision-making develop over time (Crites & Savickas, 1996). Overall, this body of research indicates that the rationale behind career guidance services in Indonesia aligns with broader international career development studies, although this has rarely been explored from that perspective in the literature on Islamic education.

At MA Matsaratul Huda in Panempan, Pamekasan, career guidance presents an additional level of complexity because the school operates within a pesantren environment. Guidance activities must be scheduled around religious routines, and career decisions are influenced not only by students' own interests but also by family expectations, economic capabilities, and geographical considerations related to distance from home. This school was purposively selected not merely because it is pesantren-based, but because it constitutes what qualitative research refers to as an "information-rich case" (Yuliani, 2018): unlike many other pesantren-based madrasahs, this school has dedicated classrooms for academic counseling, an on-site college admissions support team, and an accredited status that officially supports its counseling infrastructure, while its students still face conflicts between pesantren schedules and family authority over higher education choices just as documented in institutions with more limited resources.

This combination makes the school a strategic location for observing both what a relatively well-supported academic counseling service can achieve and where its structural limitations persist. Preliminary observations indicate that, despite the existence of this guidance and counseling program, many students still struggle to articulate clear career goals, and the specialization track itself has not yet been formally integrated into the current curriculum structure, meaning its implementation relies heavily on the initiative of guidance counselors during unscheduled free periods. Previous research on career guidance in Indonesian schools has generally emphasized the effectiveness of single intervention techniques, such as group discussions (Fikriyani & Herdi, 2021), the RIASEC method (Pramitha & Fitriani, 2025), or group counseling models using

discussion techniques (Septayanti, Giri, & Mahaardhika, 2025), or the general impact of career guidance on career planning outcomes (Hasanah, Rahmawati, & Damayanti, 2019; Herman, Firman, & Netrawati, 2025; Damanik, 2024). A study specifically indexed in the *Journal of Islamic Educational Counseling* by Hasana, Rasmanah, and Putra (2025) also confirms that career guidance information services significantly improve students' career planning during their early semesters, thereby reinforcing the relevance of information-based guidance interventions in the field of Islamic guidance and counseling.

There are three recurring limitations in this body of research. First, most studies isolate only a single technique or a single outcome variable, providing little insight into how multi-component services—such as specialized counseling actually function as an integrated whole in daily practice. Second, almost none of these studies were conducted in pesantren settings, where formal school hours compete directly with pesantren obligations and family authority over final career decisions is particularly strong; the limited literature focused on pesantren tends to address religious or behavioral guidance rather than specialized career services. Third, the research designs used are largely evaluative or correlational, documenting whether a service is successful but failing to explain how it is implemented, adapted, or constrained within a specific institutional context. This study addresses these gaps, and its uniqueness lies specifically in presenting an in-depth, process-oriented qualitative description of how specialized career guidance is implemented at MA Matsaratul Huda, a pesantren-based madrasah, how this service influences students' readiness to plan their careers, and what contextual factors—particularly the interaction between pesantren routines and family authority—support and hinder its effectiveness.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design, chosen to provide an in-depth and contextual description of how departmental guidance is implemented and experienced at MA Matsaratul Huda, rather than to test pre-determined hypotheses (Yuliani, 2018; Gumilang, 2016). The researcher served as the primary instrument, conducting direct field research at the study site for four weeks, from July 2 to 29, 2026.

Research Site and Participants

The research site, MA Matsaratul Huda in Panempan, Pamekasan, was selected through purposive sampling because this institution actively provides specialized guidance services within a pesantren-based environment and has students who are actively engaged in planning their post-graduation paths. Primary data were obtained from 12 informants comprising three categories: the principal; five teachers, including the guidance and counseling teacher responsible for delivering the specialized services, along with subject teachers and homeroom teachers involved in its collaborative evaluation; and six 12th-grade students who had directly participated in the group and individual specialized sessions described in the Results and Discussion section. Student informants were selected purposefully based on their active involvement in these services, so that their accounts could directly illustrate the implementation and perceived impacts. Secondary

data consisted of relevant school documents, including guidance program records and documentation of specialized services.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: participatory observation of specialized activities as they occurred naturally; non-participant observation of the broader guidance environment, including counseling rooms, service schedules, and the school climate; and semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, guided by an open-ended interview protocol based on three focus areas: implementation, impact on career planning readiness, and supporting and hindering factors. This was supplemented by school records.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed inductively using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Operationally, interview transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly and open-coded to identify recurring categories relevant to the three focus areas; related codes were then grouped into broader themes—such as sources of assessment, mechanisms of impact on career readiness, and supporting and hindering factors—which formed the basis for the presentation in the Results and Discussion section. These themes were then refined, presented, and interpreted based on the study's theoretical framework, with findings triangulated through observational data, interviews, and documentation throughout the process.

Data Reliability

The credibility of the findings is strengthened through three techniques. First, long-term engagement and continuous observation at the research site allow the researcher to verify the consistency of information among informants and over time before drawing conclusions. Second, data triangulation through observational sources, interviews, and documentation was used to cross-verify emerging themes, such that a finding was retained in the analysis only if confirmed by at least two independent sources. Third, member checking is conducted by presenting preliminary interpretations to key informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of their accounts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that specialized guidance at Matsaratul Huda High School is delivered through two complementary strategies. The first is a traditional approach, in which guidance is provided to the entire class at once, typically during free periods resulting from subject teachers' absences; since the current curriculum structure does not officially schedule specialization sessions, guidance counselors rely on these unscheduled free periods, supplemented by specialized classes held concurrently with regular science track classes. The second is an individualized strategy, provided privately through formal face-to-face meetings in the counseling room and through informal, relationship-based approaches, such as casual conversations during break times—particularly with twelfth-grade students—intended to help students express their interests and plans without feeling pressured. Assessment in this service draws on three complementary sources of

information: the most recent report card grades as an indicator of academic strength, daily psychological observations of student behavior, and students' self-reported interests and aspirations. Guidance counselors note that these three sources are not always aligned, as a student's best academic performance does not always correspond to their preferred areas of interest; this requires counselors to align empirical performance data with the students' own voices, rather than relying solely on test scores. Table 1 summarizes the operational structure of the service as observed in the field.

Table 1. Implementation Structure of Specialization Guidance Service at MA Matsaratul Huda

Dimension	Strategy or Instrument	Description
Service format	Classical (in class) and Individual	Classical sessions use vacant class periods and a dedicated specialization class; individual sessions combine formal counseling room meetings with informal, relationship based approaches.
Assessment sources	Report card, observation, self report	Triangulates academic performance, daily behavioral observation, and students own stated interests to identify the best fit pathway.
Institutional facility	Dedicated specialization classroom	Provided to enable closer monitoring of student potential and reduce the risk of misdirected guidance.
Follow through	University registration support team	A school based team assists and registers students for tertiary admission online, according to each student's finalized choice.
Evaluation mechanism	Collaborative monthly review	Subject teachers and homeroom teachers contribute observations that are consolidated in monthly meetings, rather than evaluation resting on the BK teacher alone.

Institutional support for the implementation of this program is provided through specialized classrooms, which were established to monitor students' interests more closely and help guidance counselors ensure that they do not provide students with misguided advice regarding their future studies. This guidance continues through the college application process itself, via a dedicated school team that assists and registers students online for college admission based on each student's final choice. Evaluation of this service is conducted collaboratively, as subject teachers and homeroom teachers—who interact most closely with students in the specialized classrooms—provide feedback that is then consolidated and discussed during monthly meetings.

When compared to Parsons' original Trait and Factor Model (Chartrand, 1991), this evaluation structure effectively distributes the function of understanding the individual among several observers, rather than concentrating it on a single counselor; this can be

said to strengthen the reliability of the process of matching individuals with their environment, even in the absence of standard psychometric instruments such as the Career Maturity Inventory (Crites & Savickas, 1996). This specialized service has been proven to have a tangible positive impact on students' readiness to plan their careers, operating through three interrelated mechanisms as illustrated in Figure 1. First, this service enhances students' self-understanding: the school intentionally allocates specific time for students to complete interest and aptitude assessments, which, according to participants, allows them to express their aspirations more freely and satisfactorily than if this service were not available. Second, this service reduces students' confusion regarding further education by facilitating the expression of interests through various channels—namely, interest selection forms, class discussions, and individual counseling—triggered by reflective questions about preferred subjects, post-graduation plans, and anticipated obstacles. Observations confirm that approximately ninety percent of students actively participate in specialization discussions, with significantly higher participation rates among students who have decided to continue their studies—a pattern consistent with international findings that active engagement in career exploration activities is both a predictor and an outcome of greater career clarity (Zewude et al., 2025; Wang, Li, & Wang, 2024).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Relationship between Specialization Guidance Service and Students' Career Planning Readiness

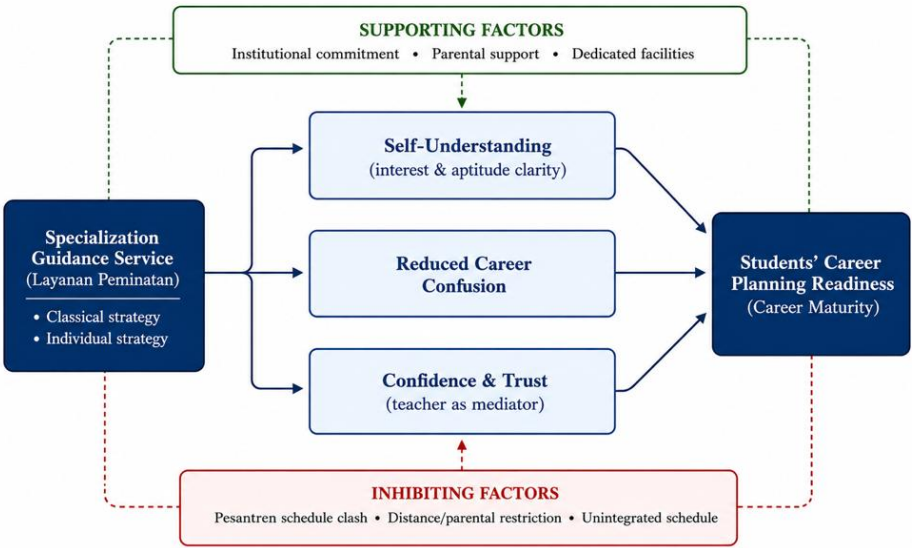


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationship between specialization guidance service and students' career-planning readiness at MA Matsaratul Huda

Figure 1 illustrates these relationships as a conceptual model, rather than merely a list of outcomes. This model positions two implementation strategies—classical guidance and individualized specialization guidance—as primary inputs, which operate through three interrelated mediating mechanisms: enhanced self-understanding, reduced confusion regarding further education, and increased self-confidence through ongoing teacher support. These three mechanisms are not parallel and independent effects; rather, self-understanding serves as the foundation upon which the reduction of confusion and the development of self-confidence are built, since a student who has not first developed a

clearer understanding of their personal interests and talents has little basis for narrowing down their options for further education or for engaging confidently with a counselor. The outcome of this model students' readiness for career planning—is therefore best understood as the cumulative result of this internal sequence rather than as a separate fourth mechanism, and this is empirically grounded in concrete indicators such as college acceptance rates. Institutional and parental support, along with structural constraints such as scheduling conflicts and distance-related limitations, are incorporated into the model as boundary conditions that determine the extent to which inputs can be translated into outcomes, in line with Parsons' original individual-environment fit logic (Chartrand, 1991) and Super's (1980) view of career development as a process embedded in surrounding life roles, rather than as an isolated event.

Third, this service appears to build students' self-confidence and sense of support. Students reported that having a teacher who serves as a trusted mediator described by counselors as a bridge or interpreter of students' voices between students and their parents made them more willing to express ambitions they might otherwise hesitate to share, especially when the direction the student desires differs from what their family expects. These findings are strongly aligned with international evidence that parental and social support significantly shape adolescents' career adaptability and confidence in decision-making, consistent with self-efficacy theory's emphasis on social persuasion as a source of self-confidence (Bandura, 1977; Chuang et al., 2022; Zewude et al., 2025), while also revealing a distinctive local, family-centered dimension of individual adaptation to the environment—one that is relatively underemphasized in secular career guidance literature. In pesantren-based madrasahs, the "environment" in Parsons' equation of characteristics and factors is not merely the labor market or the higher education system, but rather the family unit, whose economic capacity and cultural expectations also determine what is considered a viable career choice.

Ultimately, the school assesses the success of specialization guidance as concretely reflected in the outcomes: students are accepted into higher education institutions that align with the choices they have solidified through the guidance process. For students who ultimately do not pursue higher education—whether due to family circumstances, economic constraints, or persistent uncertainty despite having received guidance, career guidance counselors report intentionally steering them toward constructive alternative paths, such as employment or supporting the family's livelihood, ensuring that career guidance in this context functions as an inclusive process oriented toward student well-being, rather than merely a narrow admissions track.

Several factors were identified as either supporting or hindering this pathway, as summarized in Table 2. Institutional support was reported to be very high, encompassing the time, facilities, and policies allocated to these services. Parental support was also identified as a key factor: since a student's final career choice has tangible economic and social consequences for the family, guidance counselors consider it important to secure direct parental consent rather than simply following the student's preferences—specifically to avoid decisions made in haste that are later regretted. Conversely, the inhibiting factors center on structural and contextual constraints, rather than student

unwillingness. The most prominent is the recurring conflict between the schedules of the specialization program and pesantren activities; because of the institution’s dual identity as both a formal school and a pesantren, guidance time must compete with religious routines and dormitory life. A second constraining factor is the tension between students’ preferences and parental consent regarding the distance to their chosen higher education institution: some students admitted to universities located relatively far from home found that their parents refused to allow them to attend, forcing them to choose an alternative institution that was less desirable but closer to home. These results illustrate how, in this context, career planning readiness and actual career achievement can differ even when the guidance process itself has gone well.

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Specialization Guidance

No.	Supporting Factors (positive)	Inhibiting Factors (negative)
1	Strong institutional commitment: time, facilities, and policy allocated for the service	Recurring schedule clash between specialization sessions and pesantren (boarding school) routines
2	Active parental involvement and confirmation of the student’s chosen pathway	Parental restriction on tertiary institution choice due to distance from home
3	Dedicated specialization classroom enabling continuous monitoring	Economic constraints limiting some students continuation to higher education
4	School accreditation status supporting adequate guidance infrastructure	Specialization service not yet formally integrated into the curriculum schedule

When considered together, these findings support and expand upon the “Traits and Factors” logic underlying specialization guidance: guidance counselors at MA Matsaratul Huda systematically triangulate academic achievement, behavioral observations, and self-reported interests before guiding a student toward a particular track, reflecting Parsons’s early emphasis on the rational fit between individual characteristics and environmental demands (Chartrand, 1991; Hidayati, Idhartono, & Mufidah, 2025). These findings are also consistent with Holland’s (1997) proposition that satisfying and stable career choices arise from a fit between personal characteristics and environmental opportunities, as well as Super’s (1980) view of career development as an ongoing process shaped by successive life stages, rather than merely a single decision-making event. At the same time, these findings indicate that individual-environmental fit in this context cannot be reduced solely to the relationship between students and occupations; the family and institutional contexts function as a third determining variable, which can accelerate or hinder the transformation of career planning readiness into actual career achievement.

The positive relationship observed here between structured specialization activities and reduced student confusion is also consistent with broader findings that information-based career guidance services measurably improve students’ career planning outcomes

(Hasana, Rasmanah, & Putra, 2025; Kamalia, Damayanti, & Kuastino, 2025; Yuningsih & Herdi, 2021), providing convergent support across several studies published in Indonesia and JKPI studies conducted in various institutional settings. However, the persistence of scheduling conflicts as the dominant barrier at MA Matsaratul Huda differs from studies conducted in non-boarding schools, where facility and motivation barriers tend to dominate (Aini, Sari, & Nasution, 2023). This difference is not merely descriptive; it indicates that the constraining conditions hindering specialized guidance in pesantren settings are structural and temporal in nature, rather than resource-based—a factor not accounted for by resource-centered explanations in previous studies. This implies that pesantren-based madrasahs require a guidance model explicitly designed to adapt to pesantren routines, rather than a model directly transplanted from conventional day-school settings a theoretical refinement that this study contributes to the literature on Islamic career guidance and counseling.

DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of academic interest guidance services as a *person–environment fit* process

The research findings indicate that academic interest guidance services at MA Matsaratul Huda were developed through a combination of group-based and individual strategies. Group-based strategies were implemented by utilizing free class periods and special interest-based classes, while individual strategies were carried out through formal counseling in the guidance office and informal approaches via interpersonal conversations. These findings indicate that career interest guidance services are not positioned merely as an administrative activity to determine a major, but rather as an ongoing process to help students understand their own characteristics, explore educational alternatives, and build readiness to make career decisions. These findings align with the research by Gashi et al. (2023), which shows that career guidance interventions combining *self-awareness*, career exploration, information on educational pathways, real-world experiences, and decision-making can enhance students' *career self-efficacy* and career goals.

From the *Trait and Factor* perspective, this pattern suggests that the specialization selection process at MA Matsaratul Huda seeks to align individual characteristics with the demands of the educational and career environments. However, this study expands upon that classical understanding because the *matching* process is not based solely on a single psychometric instrument. Counselors utilize report card grades, observations of daily behavior, and reports regarding students' interests and aspirations. This triangulation is crucial because academic performance does not always align with career interests or aspirations. Thus, the decision regarding academic track selection is understood as the result of integrating objective data with students' subjective perspectives.

These findings are consistent with contemporary literature that frames career development as an adaptive process, rather than merely the result of matching individual characteristics to a job. Cristy and Kurniawati (2023), through a systematic review of

career adaptability among adolescents, demonstrated that career adaptability is influenced by a combination of personal and environmental factors. Similarly, Liang et al. (2023) found that a supportive yet non-intrusive parenting style is associated with higher levels of *career adaptability* among adolescents. Thus, the career exploration services at MA Matsaratul Huda can be understood as a form of *context-sensitive person–environment fit*. The environment considered includes not only higher education institutions or the workforce but also the family, madrasah, Islamic boarding school, economic capacity, and students' aspirations.

2. Assessment triangulation strengthens the quality of career decision-making

One of the key findings of this study is the use of three sources of information: report card grades, counselor observations, and student *self-reports*. This approach is strongly aligned with the contemporary career assessment paradigm, which emphasizes the integration of personal, social, and contextual information. The use of academic grades provides information about students' actual strengths, while observations provide information about behavior, consistency of interests, motivation, and everyday characteristics that may not be reflected in academic grades. Meanwhile, *self-reports* provide a space for students to express their preferences, aspirations, and future plans. The integration of these three sources reduces the risk of decisions based solely on academic performance. These findings are also relevant to the research by Söner and Gültekin, which shows that parental career support is associated with *career congruence* between adolescents and their parents through the mechanism of *self-efficacy*. Pratama and Muttaqin (2024) also found that parental career support contributes to *vocational identity* through *career decision-making self-efficacy*. Thus, students' voices should not be treated merely as supplementary information but as a crucial component in the construction of identity and career decisions. Research by Wang et al. also indicates that *career decision self-efficacy* serves as a key mechanism linking social support to *career adaptability*. This means that high-quality career decisions require not only accurate information but also students' confidence in their ability to use that information to make decisions.

3. Individual and relational approaches strengthen career self-efficacy

Findings regarding the use of informal conversations, particularly with 12th-grade students, are one of the notable characteristics of the services at MA Matsaratul Huda. Counselors do not always wait for students to formally visit the guidance office but build relationships through daily interactions. This approach provides a safer psychological space for students to express their aspirations, especially when their personal choices do not fully align with their families' expectations. This finding reinforces the view that interpersonal relationships are an integral part of career counseling mechanisms. Research by Parola et al. (2025) indicates that teachers' career-related support is associated with *career decision self-efficacy* through *career adaptability*. In other words, teachers or counselors are not merely providers of information but also sources of social support that help students build confidence in their ability to make decisions.

This is also consistent with the study by Xu et al. (2025), which found that parental career support is associated with *career adaptability*, with resilience serving as a mediating

mechanism and the quality of the parent–child relationship acting as a moderating factor. Research by Zhou et al. (2024) further indicates that the parent–child relationship is even more closely linked to *career adaptability* than parents’ career behaviors are directly. In the context of this study, counselors serve as relational mediators between students, families, and educational institutions. This role is particularly important in the context of Islamic boarding schools because educational decisions often have direct consequences for families.

4. Reducing Uncertainty Through Structured Career Exploration

Research findings indicate that approximately 90% of students actively participate in career interest discussions, and higher engagement was observed among students who already had plans to continue their education. These findings suggest that career exploration can serve as a mechanism to transform uncertainty into knowledge and more directed decisions. Haenggli et al. (2025), through a six-wave longitudinal study of 1,132 adolescents, found that increased exploration of the career environment predicted increased career knowledge and *career decidedness*. These findings provide strong support for the research results indicating that discussions, interest selection, form completion, and individual counseling are not merely informative activities but are processes that help students clarify their choices. Research on career exploration also indicates that *career exploration* plays a crucial role in linking *self-efficacy* to career choices, particularly when students receive adequate social support. Thus, the more opportunities students have to explore educational and occupational options, the greater the likelihood of developing career knowledge and making more realistic decisions.

5. Parental support serves as a contextual factor determining the realization of choices

One of the key contributions of this study is the discovery of a tension between students’ choices and parental approval. Some students were accepted into colleges aligned with their choices but were not granted permission to attend due to the distance of the institution from home. This situation highlights a discrepancy between career planning readiness and career achievement. This finding is highly relevant to the research by Liang et al. (2023), which shows that consistent and non-intrusive parental support is most beneficial for *career adaptability*. Conversely, overly controlling support can limit students’ exploration and decision-making processes. Research by Chen et al. (2025) also indicates that *adolescent–parent career congruence* is positively associated with *career adaptability* among high school students. Therefore, the success of career guidance services cannot be measured solely by whether students have made a choice, but also by whether that choice receives the necessary social support to be realized. In the context of MA Matsaratul Huda, the family is part of the *career environment*. Economic factors, distance, family norms, and parental expectations directly influence the likelihood that a career decision will be realized. This perspective broadens the application of the *person–environment fit* concept because students’ career environments consist not only of educational institutions and workplaces but also of family structures and the pesantren community.

6. Institutional support is strong, but curriculum integration remains an issue

The study found that the school has specialized classrooms, policy support, a college admissions support team, and monthly evaluations involving subject teachers and homeroom teachers. This support indicates relatively strong *institutional readiness*. However, the specialization program has not yet been fully integrated into the curriculum structure and still conflicts with boarding school activities. This finding is important because it indicates an implementation gap between institutional support and structural integration. These services can operate effectively through the creativity of counselors, but the sustainability of the program will be better ensured if these services are formally allocated time within the curriculum. Research by Parola et al. highlights the importance of teacher support in fostering *career adaptability* and *career decision self-efficacy*, while research by Gashi et al. shows that structured interventions can lead to improvements in *career self-efficacy* and career goals. Therefore, the findings of MA Matsaratul Huda indicate that the quality of services depends not only on the counselors' competencies but also on institutional design that provides time, facilities, and coordination mechanisms.

7. Schedule Conflicts as a Distinctive Feature of Career Services in a Pesantren Setting

The finding that conflicts between specialization services and pesantren activities constitute a major barrier provides an important contextual contribution. This barrier differs from issues commonly found in non-boarding schools, as students' time is divided among formal academic activities, religious activities, and dormitory life. Consequently, the career guidance service model developed at MA Matsaratul Huda cannot fully adopt the structure of a regular school. A flexible service design is required, such as *micro-counseling*, individual counseling based on an integrated schedule, digital assessments, and coordination among guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, pesantren advisors, and parents. A systems perspective is increasingly important in understanding this context. Recent literature on *career adaptability* emphasizes that career development is not merely an individual capacity but unfolds within a network of social, educational, economic, and institutional systems. Therefore, the findings of this study support the need to develop a boarding school-based career guidance model that is ecological and relational, rather than merely individualistic.

8. Theoretical Contributions and Implications of the Model

Overall, this study reveals that the interest-based guidance services at MA Matsaratul Huda operate through a chain of processes: service strategies → self-understanding → educational/career exploration → reduction of confusion → increased self-confidence → readiness for career planning → realization of choices. However, this chain does not proceed linearly because it is influenced by family support, economic conditions, curriculum structure, and pesantren living rules. This model expands the *Trait and Factor* perspective by incorporating mechanisms of *self-efficacy*, career exploration, social support, and family circumstances. These findings align with developments in the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which positions *self-efficacy*, *outcome expectations*, goals, and environmental support as key elements in career decision-making. Studies by Gashi et al. (2023), Wang et al., and Salim et al. (2023) highlight the importance of *career decision self-efficacy* in explaining the relationship between social support and career

development. Thus, the main contribution of this study is not merely to show that the academic tracking service “works,” but to demonstrate how this service functions within the pesantren educational ecosystem. Its uniqueness lies in the integration of academic and psychological assessments, the counselor’s relational approach, parental involvement, institutional support, and the negotiation between students’ aspirations and pesantren-family norms. In practical terms, these findings suggest that an effective career guidance model in pesantren-based madrasahs needs to be designed as a service that is structured yet flexible, individualized yet collaborative, and oriented toward students’ choices while remaining sensitive to family and institutional realities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that major selection guidance at Matsaratul Huda High School is implemented through a combination of conventional and individualized strategies, utilizing report card grades, psychological observations, and student self-reports as complementary sources of assessment, and is further supported by a dedicated major selection classroom and a school-based college admissions support team. Informants perceived these services as having a tangible positive impact on students’ career planning readiness by strengthening self-understanding, reducing confusion about higher education, and building self-confidence through continuous, trust-based teacher support—with tangible results reflected in students’ college acceptance rates. Its effectiveness is jointly influenced by strong institutional and parental support as well as by structural constraints, particularly the unresolved tension between the scheduling of specialization programs and pesantren routines, distance limitations imposed by parents on college choices, and the absence of a formally integrated schedule within the current curriculum.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the career development literature by demonstrating that, in pesantren-based madrasahs, the family unit functions as a third determining element in Parsons’ person-environment fit equation, alongside the individual and the occupation itself (Chartrand, 1991). This study also demonstrates that Trait- and Factor-based practices can be effectively implemented through distributed assessments drawn from various sources, by combining academic records, behavioral observations, and self-reported interests—even without standardized psychometric instruments such as the Career Maturity Inventory (Crites & Savickas, 1996). This expands—rather than merely applies—the theory to the context of faith-based boarding schools—a context that has been underrepresented in the international career guidance literature.

These findings suggest that Trait- and Factor-based specialized guidance, while conceptually robust, requires deliberate contextual adaptation to function effectively in pesantren-based madrasahs, where the family unit serves as a defining element in the equation of the personal environment, alongside the student and the work. In practical terms, a formally established specialization schedule, structured mechanisms for early and ongoing parental involvement, and sustained investment in specialized guidance facilities and follow-up support such as a university admissions team—are recommended as concrete steps for MA Matsaratul Huda and similar institutions.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study was conducted at a single pesantren-based madrasah, namely MA Matsaratul Huda; therefore, its findings represent an in-depth case study rather than a pattern that can be generalized to all pesantren-based madrasahs, particularly those with more limited institutional resources. Second, the descriptive qualitative design of this study prioritizes depth of understanding over measurable and comparable indicators of career readiness; consequently, claims regarding the positive impact of these services reflect the perceptions of informants and observed outcomes, such as acceptance into higher education institutions, rather than validated and measurable indicators of career maturity. Third, data collection was concentrated within a four-week period (July 2–29, 2026), which did not allow this study to track how students' career readiness developed or was maintained after graduation. Follow-up research using a mixed-methods or longitudinal design across various pesantren-based madrasahs will help establish the generalizability of these findings, combine validated measures of career maturity with qualitative reports, and clarify the long-term relationship between specialized guidance and students' career trajectories after graduation.

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