



Strengthening Career Literacy for 12th Grade Students through Career Training and Information Services at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir

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Abstract

The Career Literacy Strengthening Activities for 12th Grade Students through Training and Career Information Services at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir were conducted as a form of community service aimed at increasing students' awareness, understanding, and career readiness ahead of graduation. The background of this activity stems from students' low understanding of their potential, further educational pathways, and job prospects that match their interests and abilities. The activities were carried out through a participatory approach using interactive training methods and career information services, presented in the form of discussions, simulations, and self-reflection. The implementation of this activity involved Guidance and Counseling teachers, lecturers, university students, and 12th-grade students as the main participants. The results of the activity indicate that students experienced improvements in career awareness, decision-making abilities, and self-confidence in determining their future direction. In addition, this activity also contributed positively to enhancing the quality of career guidance services at school. Nevertheless, the activity still has limitations in terms of implementation time and participant coverage. Therefore, it is recommended that similar programs be conducted continuously with adequate facility support and collaboration with external parties such as universities and the workforce. Overall, this activity successfully strengthened students' career literacy and serves as a strategic step in preparing a young generation that is independent, visionary, and ready to face future workforce challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the world of education today requires students not only to excel academically but also to have a well-prepared career readiness to face future challenges (Sitorus et al., 2025). In the midst of globalization and the highly dynamic transformation of the world of work, the ability to plan a career has become an essential life skill for the younger generation (Garcia, McWhirter, & Cendejas, 2020).

However, the reality on the ground shows that many high school students, especially in grade XII, still experience confusion in determining their career direction after graduation.

This phenomenon is also evident at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir, where most students do not have adequate understanding of career choices, further education paths, or the alignment between interests, talents, and job opportunities. The lack of exposure to accurate and guided career information leads students to make decisions based on environmental influences or trends alone, rather than through mature self-reflection. This condition highlights the importance of systematic efforts to improve students' career literacy.

Career literacy is not merely knowledge about various types of jobs, but also involves the ability to understand one's potential, assess opportunities, and design strategic steps to achieve career goals (Gee et al., 2021). Therefore, schools as formal educational institutions have a significant responsibility in facilitating the growth of career awareness and skills among students. One approach that can be implemented is through planned, directed, and relevant career training and information services that meet the needs of learners (Fletcher & Dumford, 2021).

In recent years, various studies on student career planning have been conducted, whether through career guidance services, individual counseling, or the provision of career information in a conventional manner. Most of these studies highlight the importance of career guidance in helping students recognize their interests and talents, such as the research by (Childs, et al., 2022) which indicates that career information services are capable of enhancing readiness in choosing a college major. Similarly, a study by (Ng, Su, & Chu, 2024) emphasizes that career guidance influences the career decision-making abilities of high school students.

Nevertheless, most of the existing research still focuses on theoretical aspects and short-term outcomes, such as merely increasing career knowledge, without integrating interactive training approaches and career services based on students' contextual needs. Moreover, many studies are conducted in urban schools with relatively comprehensive counseling facilities, while the context of schools in semi-peripheral or peripheral areas, such as SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir, has not been explored in depth. This indicates the existence of empirical and contextual gaps in efforts to understand the effectiveness of career literacy programs in various school settings.

Moreover, some previous community service and research activities tended to separate the aspects of training and career information services. In fact, in holistic guidance practice, these two aspects complement each other. Career literacy training can develop reflective thinking skills, while career information services provide concrete data and insights about the world of work and further education. Integrating both becomes a more comprehensive approach to shaping students' career readiness. The novelty of this community service program lies in strengthening career literacy through an integrative model that combines reflective training, student needs-based career information services, and direct mentoring by guidance counselors and academic teams. This approach is designed not only to enhance career knowledge but also to foster self-awareness, career decision-making abilities, and proactive attitudes in facing the transition to higher education levels or the workforce.

Moreover, this activity has a novelty value in terms of implementation, as it adapts the training methods to the characteristics of students in regional schools, who generally have limited access to information and a narrow view of careers. By combining participatory approaches, career simulations, and self-potential mapping, this program aims to create a more meaningful and practical career learning

experience for the students. Thus, the Career Literacy Enhancement activities for Grade XII students through Training and Career Information Services at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir are expected to bridge the gap of previous research and provide a tangible contribution to the development of a student-empowerment-based career guidance model in the context of secondary schools in Indonesia.

METHODS

The Career Literacy Strengthening Activities for 12th Grade Students through Career Information Training and Services at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir were carried out using a descriptive qualitative approach based on the Participatory Action Research (PAR) model. This approach was chosen because it allows for active participation between the implementation team, teachers, and students throughout the entire activity process, from problem identification, program design, implementation, to result evaluation. According to (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), Participatory Action Research is a form of action research oriented towards social change and the empowerment of participants through direct involvement in reflective and collaborative activities.

The initial stage of the activity began with a needs assessment conducted through interviews and observations with Guidance and Counseling teachers and 12th-grade students. The purpose of this stage is to gain an understanding of the extent to which students comprehend the concept of career literacy, their ability to plan for the future, and the challenges they face in the career decision-making process. Observations indicated that most students still have limited understanding of the working world and further education opportunities. This condition highlights the need for interventions through directed and continuous training activities.

Based on the results of the assessment, the community service team then designed a training and career information service program tailored to the needs of students. The design of this program is based on the Life-Span, Life-Space career development theory from (Savickas, 2005), which emphasizes the importance of self-understanding, career exploration, and the ability to adapt to changes in the workplace. The training program includes five main components: (1) self-introduction and potential assessment, (2) exploration of the world of education and work, (3) career decision-making strategies, (4) preparation of a personal career plan, and (5) career consultation and information services based on students' needs.

The implementation of the activities is carried out through interactive training methods and participatory career information services over several sessions. Each session is designed with an experiential learning approach as proposed by (Iskandar, 2022), where participants are encouraged to learn through hands-on experience, reflection, and application in real-world contexts. Training activities are carried out using various methods such as interactive lectures to provide conceptual insights, group discussions and case studies to develop critical thinking skills, as well as career planning simulations so that students can create concrete future plans. In addition, simple interest and aptitude tests are provided, along with a career information corner containing guidance on college, professions, and job opportunities relevant to local needs.

The implementation of this activity involves collaboration between lecturers, students, guidance counselors, and the school. This collaboration aligns with the perspective (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996) that service learning or community service activities in the field of education must be reciprocal, where educational institutions and the community learn from each other and contribute to the development of shared capacity.

The final stage of the activity is evaluation and follow-up. Evaluation is conducted to assess the success of the program in terms of both process and outcomes. Process

evaluation includes assessing student involvement, the effectiveness of the methods used, and the relevance of the training materials to the participants' needs. Meanwhile, outcome evaluation is carried out by comparing students' career literacy understanding before and after the training using reflective questionnaires and brief interviews. According to (Winkel & Hastuti, 2018), The success of career guidance services can be seen from the increased self-awareness, understanding of career alternatives, as well as students' ability to make more rational and directed career decisions.

Through this participatory approach, community service activities are expected not only to provide conceptual knowledge about the career world but also to shape a reflective and independent mindset in students. With the strengthening of career literacy through structured training and information services, students of SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir are expected to be able to recognize their potential, determine their future direction, and become individuals ready to compete in the dynamic and competitive global era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Program Implementation and Student Participation

The program was implemented over two consecutive days in the main hall of SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir and involved 60 twelfth-grade students as the primary participants. The activity was supported by guidance and counseling teachers, lecturers, and university students who served as facilitators and mentors throughout the process. Observational data collected during the program indicated that logistical readiness, coordination with school stakeholders, and the availability of learning facilities contributed positively to the smooth implementation of the program. Students demonstrated punctual attendance and consistent engagement throughout all sessions, reflecting a high level of readiness and interest in career-related activities.

Student participation during the training sessions was characterized by active involvement in discussions, reflective exercises, and simulation-based learning activities. Students actively responded to facilitators' questions, shared personal aspirations, and engaged in peer discussions regarding future educational and career choices. This level of engagement indicates that the training topics were closely aligned with students' developmental needs and concerns as they approached graduation.

In addition, observational notes revealed that collaborative learning dynamics emerged naturally during group activities. Students supported one another in clarifying career interests and exploring various alternatives, thereby creating a learning environment that encouraged openness and mutual support. Such interactions are consistent with participatory learning principles, which emphasize shared meaning-making and collective reflection as essential elements of effective educational interventions.

The participatory atmosphere also contributed to students' willingness to engage in reflective thinking. Rather than passively receiving information, students were encouraged to question assumptions about career success and to reconsider previously held views influenced by peers or family expectations. This reflective engagement suggests that the program functioned not only as a medium for information delivery but also as a space for cognitive and attitudinal change. The observational findings are also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

Guidance and Counseling Teacher

The guidance and counseling teacher stated that the implementation of the Career Literacy Strengthening program had a positive impact on students' engagement and career readiness. This was reflected in noticeable changes in students' attitudes during the activities. The informant remarked:

"During the program, I observed that students were more enthusiastic compared to the career guidance services we usually conduct at school. They were more confident in asking questions and expressing their future plans. The methods used helped students recognize their interests and potential, so they no longer merely followed others' expectations but began to think independently about their careers."

This statement reinforces the observational findings regarding high levels of student participation and the emergence of more reflective career awareness.

Twelfth-Grade Student Participant

One twelfth-grade student expressed that the program provided a new experience in understanding career options after graduation. The informant stated:

"Previously, I was still confused about what to do after graduating. I usually just followed my friends' or parents' suggestions. However, after participating in this program, I became more aware of my own interests and realized that there are many options that can be considered according to my abilities."

This quotation indicates a process of self-reflection and a shift in students' perspectives on career planning, as observed during discussion and simulation sessions.

Program Facilitator

The facilitator assessed that the participatory approach implemented in the program successfully created a conducive learning atmosphere and encouraged active student engagement. The informant stated:

"The students' responses were very positive. They actively participated in discussions, asked questions, and supported one another during group activities. The classroom atmosphere was lively because students were not merely listening to the material but were genuinely involved in the process of understanding and planning their careers."

This statement further supports the observational findings regarding the emergence of collaborative dynamics and active student involvement throughout the program.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the Career Literacy Strengthening program at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir was implemented effectively. The program succeeded in creating a participatory learning environment, increasing students' active engagement, and fostering the development of self-understanding and career readiness among twelfth-grade students. Logistical support, collaboration among stakeholders, and interactive training approaches contributed significantly to the emergence of reflective attitudes, independence in career planning, and shifts in students' mindsets when determining educational and career choices after graduation.

Development of Self-Understanding and Potential Awareness

During the introductory sessions on career literacy concepts, students were responsive to facilitator prompts and frequently related the material to their personal experiences and concerns about post-graduation pathways. This finding aligns with Garcia, McWhirter, and Cendejas (2020), who emphasize that student-centered and contextually relevant career interventions are more effective in fostering engagement

and meaningful learning. The interactive delivery approach enabled students to articulate their initial career perceptions, many of which reflected uncertainty and limited exposure to diverse career options.

A central result of the program was the improvement in students' self-understanding, particularly in recognizing personal interests, talents, and values relevant to career development. Through reflective exercises and simple interest and aptitude assessments, students were encouraged to evaluate their strengths and preferences systematically. Post-activity reflections revealed that many students gained new insights into their personal potential, which they had previously overlooked or underestimated. This outcome supports the theoretical perspective of Savickas (2005), who argues that self-concept clarity is a foundational element in the process of career construction. Students' written reflections indicated increased awareness of the relationship between personal characteristics and potential career paths, suggesting a meaningful internalization of self-assessment outcomes.

Furthermore, students began to demonstrate greater clarity in articulating their strengths and limitations in relation to future goals. Several reflections revealed a shift from externally driven aspirations toward more personally grounded career considerations. This shift indicates that self-understanding activities encouraged students to take ownership of their career development process.

The reflective exercises also enabled students to identify gaps between their current competencies and desired career outcomes. By recognizing these gaps, students became more aware of the skills and learning experiences required to achieve their aspirations. This awareness is an important precursor to adaptive career behavior, as it motivates individuals to engage in purposeful preparation and self-improvement.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the self-understanding component of the program played a critical role in strengthening students' career foundations. Enhanced self-awareness not only informed subsequent exploration and planning activities but also contributed to students' confidence in navigating future career-related decisions.

Enhancement of Career Exploration Competencies

The results further demonstrate significant enhancement in students' career exploration competencies. Career exploration activities introduced students to a wide range of educational pathways and occupational fields through visual media, guided discussions, and access to a career information corner. Observational data show that students actively sought information related to higher education institutions, study programs, and emerging job sectors. This exposure broadened students' perspectives on career possibilities beyond their immediate social and geographical environments. Consistent with Gee et al. (2021), the provision of structured and accessible career information played a critical role in improving students' readiness to engage with future educational and occupational decisions.

The integration of career information services within the training framework proved particularly effective in addressing students' informational gaps. Students reported that the availability of concrete materials, such as university brochures, professional profiles, and facilitator explanations, helped them clarify misconceptions about admission requirements, career prospects, and skill demands in the labor market. This finding resonates with Pratiwi et al. (2023), who highlight that visually supported and interactive career information services enhance students' comprehension and retention of career-related knowledge. As a result, students were better able to compare alternatives and align their aspirations with realistic opportunities.

In addition to broadening knowledge, career exploration activities encouraged students to critically evaluate the relevance of different career paths to their personal interests and abilities. Students were observed discussing the advantages and challenges associated with various educational and occupational options, indicating a more analytical approach to career exploration.

Exposure to diverse career information also helped reduce uncertainty and anxiety related to post-graduation transitions. Many students expressed relief after gaining clearer information about entry requirements and potential career trajectories, suggesting that access to reliable career information can alleviate decision-making stress. The enhancement of career exploration competencies enabled students to move beyond limited or stereotypical views of work. By engaging with a wider range of possibilities, students developed a more informed and realistic understanding of their future options, which is essential for effective career planning.

Improvement in Career Decision-Making and Personal Career Planning

Another important result of the program concerns the development of students' career decision-making and personal career planning abilities. During structured career planning simulations, students were guided to integrate insights gained from self-assessment activities and career exploration sessions into coherent career considerations. Observational data indicate that students became more deliberate in discussing their future options, demonstrating an emerging ability to connect personal characteristics with realistic educational and occupational pathways.

The analysis of students' written career plans reveals a clear shift from vague and generalized aspirations toward more specific and structured goals. Many students were able to identify preferred fields of study, potential career sectors, and concrete preparatory actions such as selecting relevant academic tracks or seeking additional information about admission requirements. This progression suggests that students were increasingly capable of translating abstract career ideas into actionable plans, reflecting a growing level of career maturity.

Career planning activities also contributed to the development of more rational and reflective decision-making processes. Through guided discussions and simulation exercises, students compared alternative career options by considering factors such as personal interests, perceived abilities, and future opportunities. This analytical engagement indicates an improvement in students' capacity to evaluate choices systematically rather than relying solely on external influences or peer trends. Such findings are consistent with Ng, Su, and Chu (2024), who argue that guided career planning interventions enhance students' ability to make informed and reasoned career decisions.

From a psychological perspective, the program further contributed to an increase in students' career self-efficacy. Facilitators observed growing confidence among participants when articulating their career intentions, both in small-group interactions and plenary reflection sessions. Students who initially appeared hesitant or uncertain gradually became more willing to express their goals, justify their choices, and seek constructive feedback from peers and facilitators.

This increased confidence suggests that students not only gained cognitive clarity regarding career options but also developed a stronger belief in their ability to plan and pursue future goals. As emphasized by Mardiah, Firman, and Netrawati (2025), career self-efficacy plays a critical role in sustaining students' commitment to career planning and long-term goal attainment. Overall, these findings indicate that the program effectively strengthened both the cognitive and motivational dimensions of students' career decision-making and personal career planning.

Implications for School-Based Career Guidance Services

The results additionally indicate positive implications for the development of the school's career guidance ecosystem at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir. Guidance and counseling teachers reported that the program enriched existing career services by introducing participatory learning methods and updated career information resources. These approaches were perceived as more engaging than conventional guidance practices and were effective in encouraging active student involvement during career-related activities.

The collaborative implementation model also provided valuable professional learning opportunities for school counselors. Through direct involvement in training sessions and joint facilitation with university lecturers and students, counselors were able to observe alternative approaches to career guidance delivery that emphasize interaction, reflection, and student-centered learning. This reciprocal collaboration aligns with the perspective of Bringle and Hatcher (1996), which highlights that partnerships between higher education institutions and schools can contribute to mutual capacity building and the sustainability of educational interventions.

At the institutional level, the program contributed to the strengthening of career guidance practices by providing materials and strategies that could be adapted for continued use within the school. Counselors indicated that reflective worksheets, career planning frameworks, and information resources introduced during the program were applicable for integration into regular guidance sessions. This suggests that the outcomes of the program extended beyond short-term student engagement and supported the enhancement of the school's career guidance infrastructure.

Despite these positive implications, the results also reveal limitations that warrant consideration. Some students continued to experience difficulty in envisioning long-term career trajectories, particularly in relation to non-academic or vocational pathways. This challenge reflects persistent gaps in students' exposure to labor market dynamics and alternative career routes, a finding that is consistent with Sumartias et al. (2024). In addition, the relatively short duration of the program constrained the depth of individual counseling and follow-up support that could be provided to students with more complex or uncertain career concerns.

The findings demonstrate that the integrated career training and information services implemented at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir enhanced students' career literacy while simultaneously strengthening the school's career guidance ecosystem. The sequential contribution of each program component from self-awareness and exploration to decision-making, planning, and consultation resulted in observable improvements in students' confidence, clarity, and preparedness for future transitions. These results underscore the potential of comprehensive and participatory career literacy programs to support both individual student development and institutional capacity building, particularly in secondary schools with limited access to career guidance resources.

CONCLUSION

The Career Literacy Strengthening Activities for 12th-grade students through Training and Career Information Services at SMA Negeri 1 Paya Pasir have shown positive results in improving students' understanding and readiness in planning their future careers. Through interactive training and career information services, students have become more capable of recognizing their own potential, understanding their interests and available opportunities, and formulating concrete steps to achieve their career goals. The implementation of these activities also encourages active student participation in discussions and simulations, making them more confident in making choices after graduation. The implications of this

activity highlight the importance of the role of guidance and counseling teachers in providing directed and sustainable career services. However, this activity still has limitations, particularly regarding the short duration of implementation and the limited scope of participants. Therefore, it is recommended that similar activities be conducted periodically with more comprehensive facilities and involve external parties such as universities or the workforce, so that students' career literacy can develop more broadly and be applicable according to the needs of the times.

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