



PROFILING STUDENTS' NEEDS FOR GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the guidance and counseling needs of vocational high school students as a basis for developing a comprehensive and student-centered program. Using a descriptive quantitative survey design, data were collected from 117 tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Batu through the Angket Kebutuhan Peserta Didik (AKPD), which covers four service domains: personal, career, academic, and social. The results revealed that the personal domain had the highest level of need (22.99%), followed by career (23.79%), academic (26.08%), and social (27.14%). These findings indicate that students require the most support in developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and career readiness. Although academic and social needs were rated lower, they remain important for supporting students' overall development. The study emphasizes the value of structured needs assessment in guiding the design of relevant, data-driven counseling services in vocational settings. It also highlights the importance of integrating preventive, developmental, and responsive functions within a holistic guidance framework. The results serve as a foundation for counselors, educators, and policymakers to create more targeted and impactful support programs for vocational school students.

Keywords: guidance and counseling; vocational education; needs assessment

1. Introduction

Guidance and counseling services are essential components of the educational process, designed not only to help students overcome personal, social, academic, and career-related challenges, but also to promote their holistic development. These services function beyond mere problem-solving; they serve preventive, developmental, and responsive purposes that align with the evolving needs of students in a complex and dynamic world. According to Ulfah and Arifudin (2019), school-based counseling assists individuals and groups in understanding themselves and their environment, while Kamaluddin (2011) identifies its functions as including understanding, prevention, alleviation, development, and advocacy. As students experience rapid developmental changes and face pressures related to identity formation, academic demands, and future planning, comprehensive counseling services play a pivotal role in fostering resilience, self-direction, and adaptive functioning. In line with global frameworks such as the ASCA National Model, guidance and counseling programs should be data-driven, student-centered, and integrated into the school's educational mission. Therefore, the presence of a well-structured guidance and counseling program is not only a support system, but a strategic necessity for nurturing students' overall success and well-being.

In delivering effective guidance and counseling services, it is essential to adopt a multidimensional framework that addresses students' needs from preventive, developmental, and responsive perspectives. Each of these dimensions plays a distinct role in shaping students'

personal and educational trajectories. The preventive function aims to equip students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to avoid potential problems before they arise. The developmental function focuses on fostering students' strengths, helping them realize their potential, and supporting their growth in line with their developmental stage. Meanwhile, the responsive function addresses immediate or ongoing issues that may hinder students' well-being or academic performance. Kamaluddin (2011) articulates these roles through five key functions: understanding, prevention, alleviation, development, and advocacy—each contributing to a comprehensive approach in school counseling. This integrated model is especially relevant in today's educational landscape, where students are confronted with increasingly diverse and complex challenges. A guidance program that combines these three dimensions not only mitigates risk but also enhances students' readiness for life's demands, both inside and beyond the school setting.

Vocational high school students, in particular, face unique developmental tasks and contextual challenges that distinguish them from their peers in general education tracks. Unlike students in academic-oriented schools who are often prepared for higher education, students in vocational schools are expected to acquire practical skills and job readiness within a relatively short timeframe. This expectation brings additional psychological and developmental pressures, especially during adolescence—a period marked by identity exploration, emotional fluctuation, and the desire for autonomy (Santrock, 2012). In the Indonesian context, students in vocational schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan or SMK) are introduced early to industry-based learning, which demands not only technical competence but also maturity, self-regulation, and decision-making skills. These characteristics underline the importance of tailored guidance and counseling services that address both their vocational orientation and their socio-emotional development. Without such support, students may struggle with career indecision, low self-confidence, or a lack of personal direction, all of which can hinder their ability to thrive in school and transition smoothly into the workforce.

Given these unique developmental demands, a holistic approach to guidance and counseling in vocational education is essential. This approach is best operationalized through a comprehensive guidance and counseling program that integrates four interrelated components: basic services, individual planning, responsive services, and system support (Habsy, 2017; Safitri & Putranti, 2019). Basic services focus on structured developmental activities delivered to all students to enhance personal, social, academic, and career competencies. Individual planning helps students set and manage their personal goals, educational choices, and career pathways. Responsive services provide immediate assistance to students facing specific difficulties, including personal crises, peer conflicts, or academic distress. Lastly, system support ensures collaboration among school staff, parents, and the wider community to maintain the effectiveness and sustainability of the program. When these components are aligned with students' developmental stages and contextual needs, they can create a cohesive support system that not only addresses problems as they arise, but also proactively nurtures students' growth and future readiness.

A critical starting point for designing such a holistic program is the identification of students' actual needs through systematic assessment. Needs assessment serves as a diagnostic process that enables school counselors to understand the areas in which students require the most support—whether in personal development, academic skills, career planning, or social adjustment. In Indonesia, one widely used instrument for this purpose is the Angket

Kebutuhan Peserta Didik (AKPD), which categorizes student needs into four service domains: personal, social, academic, and career (Zamdi et al., 2024). The results of this assessment not only inform the prioritization of counseling services but also guide the selection of relevant topics for classroom guidance and individual interventions. Moreover, research has shown that students' interests and potentials are more likely to develop when supported by targeted, need-based interventions (Charli et al., 2019; Yumnah, 2016). Thus, integrating needs assessment into the planning cycle is essential for ensuring that the guidance and counseling program remains relevant, responsive, and impactful.

Despite the recognized importance of needs-based program planning, many schools—particularly vocational high schools—continue to implement guidance and counseling services without systematically assessing students' specific developmental and contextual needs. As a result, the services provided are often generic, misaligned, or overly focused on academic or disciplinary issues, overlooking critical areas such as personal identity, emotional regulation, and career decision-making. This gap is particularly concerning in vocational settings, where students must navigate both adolescence and early preparation for the labor market. Without clear data on what students actually need, counselors may fail to address the domains that require the most attention, leading to fragmented interventions and missed opportunities for meaningful support. Therefore, empirical studies that explore and map the real needs of vocational students are urgently needed to support the design of targeted and evidence-informed guidance and counseling programs.

This study aims to fill that gap by profiling the guidance and counseling needs of vocational high school students through a systematic needs assessment conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Batu, Indonesia. By analyzing students' perceived needs across personal, social, academic, and career domains, this research provides empirical evidence to inform the development of a comprehensive, student-centered guidance and counseling program. The findings are expected to support counselors and school administrators in designing services that are not only relevant and timely, but also aligned with the preventive, developmental, and responsive functions of school counseling. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for data-driven and contextually grounded guidance programs in vocational education, where students' readiness for life, work, and personal fulfillment must be cultivated in a deliberate and structured manner.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design to explore the guidance and counseling needs of vocational high school students in a structured and objective manner. The survey approach was chosen to systematically collect data from a representative group of students, allowing the researchers to quantify the extent of students' needs across four key domains: personal, social, academic, and career. As emphasized by Islamy (2019), the descriptive survey method is particularly suitable for educational settings where the goal is to map existing conditions, behaviors, or perceptions within a specific population. In the context of this study, the design enabled the identification of priority areas in guidance and counseling services, serving as a foundational step for developing a holistic and responsive school-based program.

The participants in this study were tenth-grade students from SMK Negeri 1 Batu, East Java, Indonesia, specifically from the Fashion Design and Culinary Arts programs. A total of 117

students were selected as respondents. The sample was drawn using a simple random sampling technique to ensure that each student in the population had an equal chance of being selected. This approach minimizes selection bias and increases the generalizability of the findings to the broader student population. Simple random sampling was deemed appropriate given the relatively homogenous characteristics of the student population in terms of age group, educational level, and institutional context. By using this technique, the study aimed to capture an accurate representation of students' perceived needs across the four service domains of guidance and counseling.

The primary instrument used for data collection was the Angket Kebutuhan Peserta Didik (AKPD), a needs assessment questionnaire designed to identify students' perceived needs across four domains of guidance and counseling services: personal, social, academic, and career. The questionnaire consisted of items formatted using a four-point Likert scale with response options ranging from "Strongly Appropriate" to "Strongly Inappropriate." This format enabled the researchers to measure the degree of relevance students assigned to various counseling topics. The AKPD was adapted from previously validated instruments and underwent expert review by professionals in the field of guidance and counseling to ensure content validity. Each domain contained a set of items that reflected common developmental challenges and concerns typically experienced by vocational high school students, providing a comprehensive view of their support needs.

The data collection procedure began with coordination between the research team and school counselors at SMK Negeri 1 Batu to schedule the administration of the questionnaire. Prior to distribution, the researchers provided a brief explanation to the students regarding the purpose of the study, the structure of the questionnaire, and instructions for completing it. The AKPD was administered offline (paper-based) in a classroom setting under the supervision of the counselor and one of the researchers to ensure clarity and consistency. Students were encouraged to respond honestly and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. After the questionnaires were completed, the responses were collected, sorted, and entered into a data matrix for further analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify the levels of students' needs across the four domains of guidance and counseling services. Specifically, the analysis focused on calculating mean scores and percentage distributions for each domain—personal, social, academic, and career. These descriptive statistics were used to determine which areas exhibited the highest and lowest levels of perceived need, thereby informing the prioritization of counseling topics in program development. All data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, which provided accurate computations and clear tabulations for interpretation. The results of this analysis served as the empirical foundation for designing a more focused and student-responsive guidance and counseling program at the school.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

The results of the needs assessment revealed varying levels of demand across the four domains of guidance and counseling services: personal, career, academic, and social. Data

obtained from 117 tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Batu showed that each domain exhibited a distinct pattern of perceived need, as reflected in the average scores and percentage distributions. Among the four domains, the personal domain emerged as the area with the lowest average score (315), corresponding to 22.99%, indicating it as the domain with the highest level of student need. This was followed by the career domain with a score of 326 (23.79%), the academic domain at 357.4 (26.08%), and finally, the social domain with the highest average score of 372.2 (27.14%), suggesting it was the domain with the lowest perceived need. These findings provide a foundational understanding of the priority areas that require targeted intervention through guidance and counseling services in the vocational school context.

The personal domain, with the lowest average score of 315 (22.99%), represents the most critical area of need among the students surveyed. This domain encompasses aspects related to self-awareness, emotional regulation, confidence, responsibility, and time management—elements that are particularly important during adolescence. The data showed that several topics received notably high attention from students, including “Responsibility Starts with Me” (5.94%), “Discover Your Interests, Shape Your Future” (5.49%), and “Time is Opportunity” (5.36%). Additionally, topics such as “Dare to Shine, Dare to Excel” (4.57%) and “Face Your Fears, Build Your Confidence” (3.99%) reflected significant concerns with self-confidence and personal agency. These findings suggest that students are struggling with issues related to self-concept and emotional maturity—factors that, if unaddressed, could impact their motivation, interpersonal functioning, and readiness for post-school life. As such, the personal domain should be prioritized in the design of school-based guidance programs, particularly through developmental classroom guidance and individual counseling interventions.

The career domain ranked second in terms of priority, with an average score of 326 (23.79%). This finding reflects the pressing need among vocational students for guidance related to future planning and career decision-making—needs that are especially relevant given the practical, work-oriented nature of vocational education. Several counseling topics in this domain were identified as high priorities, including “Find Out Who You Are!” (5.70%), “Let’s Plan the Future” (5.39%), “The First Step Toward Your Dreams” (5.18%), “Recognize Your Direction” (5.07%), and “Explore the World of Work” (4.89%). These topics suggest that students are eager to gain a clearer understanding of their interests, strengths, and the pathways available to them after graduation. Without structured support in this area, students may feel uncertain or unprepared for life beyond school. Therefore, career guidance should be a central element of counseling services in vocational schools, emphasizing both self-exploration and exposure to real-world career opportunities.

The academic domain ranked third in the level of student need, with an average score of 357.4 (26.08%). Although not the highest priority, the data indicate that a considerable number of students still experience difficulties related to learning strategies, time management, and academic motivation. The most frequently selected topics in this domain included “Knowledge for Life” (6.02%), “Defeat Laziness, Achieve Excellence” (5.91%), “Never Give Up on Learning” (5.76%), “Together We Can!” (5.62%), and “Start Early, Succeed Later” (5.46%). These responses suggest that while students are aware of the importance of academic success, many may lack the tools or discipline to maintain consistent learning habits. Addressing these issues through counseling services can help students develop more effective

study skills, improve their academic performance, and build confidence in their learning capacities. Consequently, while the academic domain is not as urgent as the personal or career domains, it remains an essential area of intervention to support students' overall development and school engagement.

The social domain recorded the highest average score of 372.2 (27.14%), indicating it as the area with the lowest perceived need among students. This suggests that, relative to the other domains, students at SMK Negeri 1 Batu feel more confident in their social interactions and peer relationships. Nonetheless, several topics within this domain still received notable responses, reflecting the importance of continued support. These include themes such as developing empathy, managing interpersonal conflicts, and maintaining healthy friendships—elements crucial for adolescent social adjustment. Although the social domain is not a top priority, it should not be overlooked. Adolescents are still in the process of learning how to navigate complex social dynamics, and neglecting this area may lead to unresolved relational issues or unhealthy behavioral patterns. Therefore, while interventions in this domain may be less intensive, structured opportunities for social-emotional learning should remain a component of the school's guidance and counseling framework.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study provide a clear profile of vocational high school students' guidance and counseling needs, with the personal and career domains emerging as the most pressing areas for intervention. This distribution of needs aligns with the developmental characteristics of adolescents in vocational settings, who simultaneously face internal psychological transitions and external demands related to career preparation. The relatively lower scores in the personal and career domains suggest that students are experiencing challenges in understanding themselves, managing emotions, building self-confidence, and planning for their future. These findings reinforce the importance of structured, student-centered guidance and counseling programs that prioritize both intrapersonal development and career readiness. In this context, vocational schools must ensure that their counseling services are not generalized or reactive, but instead are responsive to the specific and measurable needs of their student populations.

The prominence of the personal domain as the highest area of need reflects the complex psychological and emotional transitions that students undergo during adolescence. This stage is marked by identity exploration, heightened emotional sensitivity, and a growing desire for autonomy, all of which can lead to internal struggles when not supported by appropriate guidance (Santrock, 2012). In vocational school settings, these challenges may be intensified by the added pressure to make career-related decisions early on. The low scores in this domain point to students' difficulties with self-understanding, emotional regulation, and confidence—core components of personal competence. As noted by Maharani (2023), adolescents require consistent support in forming a stable self-concept and managing the psychological demands of growing up. Without effective intervention, these unresolved personal issues may hinder academic performance, peer relationships, and overall well-being. Thus, personal guidance should be positioned as a foundational element in school counseling, ensuring that students are emotionally equipped to handle both current and future life challenges.

To address the high level of need in the personal domain, schools must implement developmentally appropriate interventions that strengthen students' intrapersonal skills and emotional resilience. One effective strategy is the integration of structured classroom guidance sessions focused on themes such as self-confidence, emotional regulation, time management, and self-responsibility. In addition, individual counseling should be made accessible for students who require deeper support in processing personal concerns. Research by Charli et al. (2019) and Yumnah (2016) highlights that personal growth and motivation are closely linked to self-awareness and a sense of agency, both of which can be nurtured through intentional guidance activities. These interventions not only help students understand themselves better, but also foster proactive behaviors and a positive self-concept—critical traits for navigating both academic demands and life beyond school. Therefore, counselors must prioritize personal development as a core element of the guidance program, using both preventive and responsive approaches tailored to students' real-life challenges.

The strong need identified in the career domain underscores the urgency of implementing structured career guidance in vocational school settings. Unlike students in general academic tracks, vocational high school students are expected to prepare for direct entry into the workforce shortly after graduation, often without the option or intention of pursuing higher education. This reality places additional pressure on them to make informed, realistic, and timely career decisions. However, many students lack the necessary information, self-knowledge, and decision-making skills to navigate these choices effectively. As noted by Juwitaningrum (2013), career guidance in SMK must go beyond job placement support—it must empower students to recognize their strengths, explore career alternatives, and plan their future pathways with confidence. Suwanto (2016) also emphasizes that without adequate career maturity, students may experience confusion, anxiety, or disengagement. Therefore, developing students' career readiness should be a core priority in vocational guidance programs, grounded in continuous exploration and supported by relevant, real-world exposure.

To effectively support students' career development, vocational schools must implement practical, student-centered strategies that translate career guidance into actionable experiences. This includes offering individual planning sessions where students can explore their interests, set vocational goals, and map realistic steps toward achieving them. Furthermore, career exploration activities such as industry visits, job shadowing, guest lectures from professionals, and internship programs can provide students with meaningful exposure to real-world work environments. Equipping students with practical skills such as CV writing, interview techniques, and workplace communication is also essential to increase their employability and self-efficacy. These activities should be embedded within a structured guidance curriculum and aligned with the students' field of study. By integrating developmental career guidance into the broader counseling framework, schools can foster not only career readiness but also long-term adaptability—qualities that are indispensable in a rapidly evolving labor market.

Although the academic and social domains ranked lower in terms of perceived need, they remain crucial components of a well-rounded guidance and counseling program. In the academic domain, students expressed difficulties related to learning motivation, time management, and perseverance—issues that, if neglected, may hinder not only school performance but also long-term achievement. Rozak et al. (2018) highlight the importance of

study skills interventions and academic counseling in helping students develop productive learning habits. Similarly, the social domain—while showing the lowest level of need—still warrants attention, as adolescents continue to navigate complex peer relationships and emotional dynamics. Topics such as empathy, conflict resolution, and healthy communication are essential for creating a supportive school climate. Khalilah (2017) emphasizes that social guidance plays a key role in building relational competence and reducing interpersonal tensions. According to Kamaluddin (2011), both academic and social services fulfill the preventive and maintenance functions of counseling, ensuring that students are not only problem-free but also growth-oriented and socially integrated.

The findings of this study further emphasize the critical role of needs assessment in the development of effective and relevant school counseling programs. By systematically identifying students' concerns and priorities, counselors can shift from delivering generalized services to implementing targeted, data-informed interventions. The use of instruments like the *Angket Kebutuhan Peserta Didik (AKPD)* allows schools to capture nuanced variations in student needs across different developmental domains, providing a reliable basis for planning both preventive and responsive services. Zamdi et al. (2024) underscore the value of such instruments in aligning counseling topics with students' lived experiences. Likewise, Eka Safitri and Putranti (2019) argue that structured needs assessments are foundational for comprehensive guidance programming in schools, especially in vocational contexts where the stakes of misalignment are high. Without a clear understanding of students' actual conditions, counseling services risk becoming reactive, fragmented, or disconnected from students' realities. Therefore, ongoing and context-sensitive assessments should be institutionalized as part of a data-driven guidance planning cycle.

The implications of this study call for strategic action from school counselors, administrators, and policymakers in vocational education. First, guidance and counseling programs should prioritize the personal and career domains, as these areas reflect the most urgent needs among students preparing for adult life and employment. School counselors must be equipped not only with relevant skills but also with institutional support to design programs that are contextually appropriate, developmental, and evidence-based (Finishia, Hidayah, & Rahman, 2020). Professional development opportunities should focus on enhancing counselors' capacity for need-based service planning, data interpretation, and collaborative programming. Furthermore, schools should strengthen partnerships with industry and higher education institutions to enrich career-related interventions. Policymakers are encouraged to allocate resources and policies that support routine needs assessments and differentiated service delivery in vocational settings. Finally, future research should extend this study by exploring needs patterns across different types of vocational schools, regions, or student demographics, and by evaluating the impact of tailored guidance interventions on student outcomes. Such efforts will contribute to building a more responsive, inclusive, and empowering guidance and counseling ecosystem for Indonesian vocational students.

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that vocational high school students exhibit varying levels of need across the four domains of guidance and counseling services, with the personal and career domains emerging as the most critical areas for intervention. These findings highlight the importance of implementing a comprehensive, data-driven guidance program that addresses students' developmental, preventive, and responsive needs. Personal guidance is essential for

helping students navigate identity formation and emotional challenges during adolescence, while career guidance is vital for preparing them to make informed and realistic decisions about their futures. Although academic and social needs were perceived as less urgent, they remain integral to fostering balanced growth and school success. The use of structured needs assessments such as the AKPD provides valuable insight for designing targeted interventions that reflect the real conditions and aspirations of students. Overall, this study underscores the necessity for vocational schools to adopt a holistic and evidence-based approach to guidance and counseling in order to support students' readiness for both life and work.

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