

CAREER DISCUSSION AS AN EFFORT TO BROADEN EDUCATIONAL HORIZONS AND SUPPORT FUTURE PLANNING AMONG MTS AND MA STUDENTS AT AT-TURMUDZI, CIBODAS VILLAGE

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Abstract

This career discussion program was conducted for students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) At-Turmudzi in Cibodas Village as part of the Community Service Program (KKN). The program was initiated based on field observations indicating that some students, particularly those approaching graduation from MTs, tended to prioritize working or getting married after completing lower secondary education. At the same time, opportunities for students to discuss further education, career choices, and future planning remained limited. This activity employed a descriptive qualitative approach consisting of observation, informal interactions, documentation, and activity reflection. Career discussion sessions were tailored to the students' educational levels. For MTs students, discussions focused on self-awareness, interest mapping, post-graduation educational alternatives, career options, and the correlation between educational attainment and the future workforce. For MA students, topics were expanded to post-graduation planning, higher education mapping, study program selection, career exploration, and preparation for higher education or entering the job market. During the MA session, the program also introduced Al-Ghifari University as one of the higher education alternatives for students to consider. The implementation demonstrated that interactive career discussions helped broaden students' perspectives regarding future choices. Furthermore, this program highlights the importance of sustainable career guidance involving schools, families, and the community to enable students to make informed educational and career decisions based on comprehensive information, interests, abilities, and clear future goals.

Keywords: Career Discussion; Career Guidance; Career Planning; MA Students; Mts Students.

A. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial phase in individual development dynamics because individuals at this stage begin to face strategic decisions related to education, employment, and their future. Career orientation during adolescence is not limited to choosing a desired occupation; it also encompasses identifying self-potential, understanding various educational options, searching for information, and formulating concrete steps to achieve these goals. Therefore, career awareness and planning must be integrated from the secondary education level so students gain a broad perspective on available options. Career planning becomes increasingly critical for Junior High/MTs students as they approach an educational crossroads upon completing lower secondary education. Research by Rosmana et al. (2019) indicates that junior high school students generally lack mature career planning and experience limited information regarding further schooling, fields of study, and the world of work. The study emphasizes that every student possesses varying potential and abilities, necessitating an influx of information to help them consider career options aligned with their capabilities and interests.

Similar empirical conditions were identified by Ghassani et al. (2020), who demonstrated that career planning training utilizing decision-making stages can enhance the career maturity of junior high school students. This indicates that the ability to plan for the future does not develop automatically; rather, it must be cultivated through self-awareness processes, information provision, and intensive guidance.

These challenges were highly relevant to the phenomena observed during the Student Community Service Program (*Kuliah Kerja Nyata / KKN*) at MTs and MA At-Turmudzi in Cibodas Village. Field observations and interactions revealed a tendency among some students to view post-MTs graduation options as relatively limited. For several students, entering the workforce immediately after graduation was considered the most realistic path, while discussions regarding marriage at a relatively young age also emerged. These findings are not intended to generalize all students or judge family and community decisions, but rather serve as an indicator that students require an educational space to explore a broader array of educational and career alternatives.

Discussions regarding post-school choices must be placed within a broader context. The phenomenon of child marriage in Indonesia is closely linked to various socio-economic factors, spanning education, health, social protection, and employment dimensions (UNICEF Indonesia et al., 2020). UNICEF emphasizes that the education sector serves as a main pillar in ensuring children can develop and achieve better life opportunities. Expanding perspectives on education and careers can thus serve as an educational, preventive approach.

At the Senior High/MA level, career planning extends beyond the decision to pursue further schooling. MA students are in a transition phase closer to higher education or the workforce. They require clear information regarding higher education options, study programs, required competencies, and post-education career pathways. Darwin et al. (2020) highlighted that high school students demonstrate a high need for career guidance and counseling services tailored to their specific conditions and needs.

Recent research on high school students indicates that their career planning remains in the moderate category, requiring intervention programs to assist them in structuring their

plans more purposefully. For instance, Sapitri and Syafiq (2025) found that the majority of students in their study fell into the moderate category regarding career planning.

These conditions reinforce the rationale for providing career discussions prior to graduation. Ideally, students should not wait until after completing school to seek information about universities or job markets.

Based on these objective conditions, KKN students designed and conducted a career discussion program for MTs and MA At-Turmudzi in Cibodas Village. The program was structured not as a one-way lecture, but as an interactive discussion space allowing students to share aspirations, ask questions about education and employment, and identify actionable steps to achieve their goals.

For MTs students, activities focused on introducing post-graduation possibilities, emphasizing the importance of continuing education, recognizing interests and abilities, and understanding the link between education and career choices. Meanwhile, for MA students, discussions addressed post-graduation options, higher education, study programs, and career mapping. During the MA session, student facilitators also introduced Al-Ghifari University as a higher education alternative for consideration.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Career Decision-Making Theory

Career Decision-Making Theory explains how individuals navigate choices regarding education, training, and occupational paths through structured processes of self-assessment and information gathering. Grounded in vocational psychology, this theory posits that effective career choices rely heavily on an individual's self-awareness, knowledge of available options, and the ability to process relevant information systematically. In secondary school environments, students often face critical junctures where limited awareness leads to premature or unguided decisions such as entering the workforce immediately or early marriage. Targeted interventions, such as interactive career discussions and counseling, serve as external mechanisms that enhance decision-making competence by expanding students' perspectives on further education and training pathways. Consequently, facilitating structured discussions enables students to make informed educational choices aligned with their personal interests and long-term career goals. Indicator:

Here is the English translation:

- Self-Awareness: A student's understanding of their interests, potential, and personal abilities relevant to the future.
- Occupational and Educational Exploration: Activities involved in searching for and gathering information regarding secondary schools, higher education institutions, study programs, and the job market.
- Option Evaluation: The ability to weigh the consequences, requirements, and benefits of each available pathway option (higher education, employment, or vocational training).
- Action Planning: Clarity in formulating concrete and realistic steps to achieve desired aspirations or career choices.

Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory

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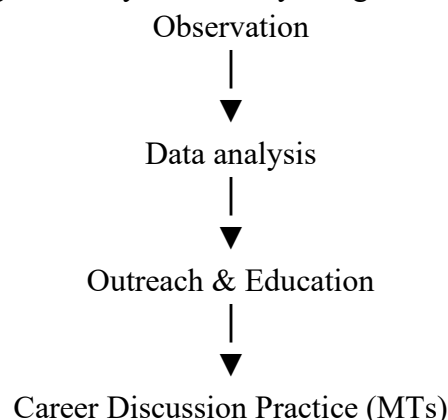
Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory conceptualizes career development as a lifelong, progressive process composed of distinct developmental stages and evolving social roles. According to this framework, adolescents in middle and upper secondary education are situated within the Exploration stage, where they attempt to understand themselves and map out potential roles in the adult workforce. During this developmental phase, students need structured space to transition from abstract aspirations toward concrete educational planning and career mapping. Providing comprehensive career guidance and institutional exposure helps students bridge the gap between their current educational status and future professional expectations. Ultimately, navigating this stage effectively fosters career maturity, empowering students to construct clear career trajectories and adapt smoothly to post-graduation choices. Indicator:

- Crystallization of Career Goals: A student's ability to formulate a clearer and more directed vision of their future aspirations or desired profession.
- Specification of Choice: The identification and selection of specific continuing education pathways, higher education institutions, or study programs that support career qualifications.
- Career Maturity: A student's mental readiness and cognitive clarity when navigating the transition toward higher education or the workforce.
- Environmental & Role Awareness: A student's understanding of the interconnections between educational attainment, personal readiness, and future job market demands.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The implementation of the community service program within this "Impactful Thematic KKN" (Student Community Service) initiative adopts a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach was selected because the activity aims to describe objective conditions in the field including the career discussion process, student responses, and activity reflections rather than to measure changes in career-related capabilities through quantitative statistical testing.

The activities were conducted at MTs and MA At-Turmudzi in Cibodas Village. The target participants were students at the MTs (Islamic Junior High School) and MA (Islamic Senior High School) levels. This target group was selected based on the students' need for information and a forum for discussion regarding further education and career choices. The program implementation stages were systematically designed, as illustrated in the chart. 1.



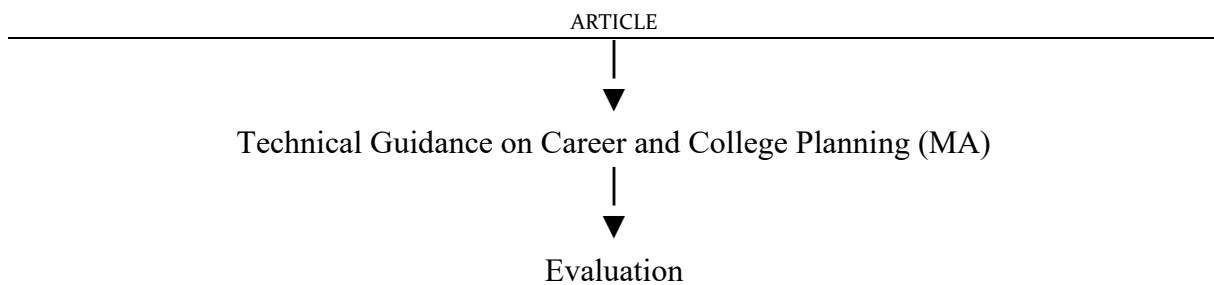


Diagram 1. Implementation Stages of Community Service in Impactful Thematic Student Community Service (*KKN Tematik Berdampak*).

Data collection was conducted through several interrelated stages:

- Observation: Observation is a method of collecting data to achieve expected objectives (Zanariyah, 2024). Observation was used to obtain an overview of students' conditions and responses prior to and during the activities.
- Data Analysis: Data analysis is the process of arranging the sequence of data, organizing it into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units (Ardhana, in Moleong, 2007).
- Socialization and Education: Socialization is the process of learning about all aspects of life, including values, norms, and knowledge (Ismail, 2019), whereas education is the process of modifying attitudes or conduct in an effort to mature human beings through teaching.
- Practice and Technical Guidance (*Bimtek*): Practice represents the actual implementation of theoretical concepts, while technical guidance (*Bimtek*) refers to training activities designed to impart specific technical knowledge and skills. In this program, practice was carried out as a goal-mapping simulation for MTs students, whereas technical guidance was conducted through career plan formulation and higher education mapping for MA students. Specifically for the MA session, the introduction of Al-Ghifari University was provided following the career planning discussion so that it became part of rational higher education options.
- Evaluation: Evaluation is the process of assessing something based on established criteria or objectives to provide input for decision-making regarding the executed program (Sianipar et al., 2023).

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Initial Condition of Students' Career Awareness

Based on field observations during the Student Community Service Program (*Kuliah Kerja Nyata / KKN*) at MTs and MA At-Turmudzi, students generally possessed an initial vision of their aspirations and future occupations; however, not all students clearly understood the concrete steps required to achieve those goals. Among MTs students, discussions regarding the future tended to remain at the level of raw aspirations, while the link between personal goals, educational attainment, and requisite skills was not always understood in a linear manner.

These findings align with research by Rosmana et al. (2019), which indicates that junior high school students often face information constraints regarding continuing education, fields of study, and the labor market. Their study emphasizes that career planning is essential for enabling students to weigh relevant information prior to making decisions.

In the context of MTs At-Turmudzi, this issue is crucial because a portion of students are at a decision-making stage regarding whether to pursue further education or opt for other paths after graduation. The tendency to immediately enter the workforce or consider early marriage suggests that future pathways require broader discussion. However, this situation should not be simplified as a mere lack of learning motivation. Family support, economic capacity, social environment, and information accessibility significantly shape what choices students view as realistic.

Therefore, the discussion sessions were not aimed at discrediting students' choices, but rather at demonstrating that various alternative pathways exist. Students were helped to understand that working and pursuing further education are not mutually exclusive. Continuing education can provide skills and capabilities that ultimately expand future employment opportunities.

Implementation of Career Discussions for MTs Students

Career discussions for MTs At-Turmudzi students began with simple ice-breaker questions about their aspirations and familiar occupations. These questions served as prompts allowing students to discuss their futures using language close to their daily experiences.

The conversation was then guided toward more specific inquiries, such as educational qualifications needed for particular roles, essential skills to master, and immediate steps to take. Through this approach, students moved beyond simply naming desired jobs to connecting aspirations with actionable pathways.

This interactive approach aligns with findings by Cahyaningsih et al. (2018), who showed that interactive methods enhance junior high school students' career planning abilities. Their study noted improvements in career planning capability after students engaged with interactive guidance media.

Additionally, Ghassani et al. (2020) demonstrated that career planning training enhances career maturity among junior high school students. Thus, activities providing opportunities for students to reflect, ask questions, and discuss future options hold high relevance for developing career planning early in lower secondary education.

An important emphasis during these sessions was that students were not expected to lock in a definitive lifelong career immediately. At the MTs level, the primary focus is recognizing self-potential, mapping interests, gathering information, and understanding that educational choices directly correlate with future opportunities.

Entering the Workforce and Marriage Post-MTs as Perspective Issues

A key finding motivating this intervention was the perception among some students that entering the workforce or getting married immediately after MTs graduation were their primary options. In this study, this perception is understood as a limitation of awareness and available options rather than an individual moral issue.

When students lack adequate information about continuing education and career pathways, the options closest to their immediate environment become the easiest to imagine.

Consequently, career discussions serve to introduce alternatives and assist students in evaluating the consequences and phases of each path.

Regarding marriage, discussions were approached thoughtfully given its personal and familial nature. The program did not aim to prohibit discussions on marriage, but rather to encourage students to recognize marriage as a major life decision requiring thorough readiness. Under Law No. 16 of 2019, the Indonesian government established 19 as the legal minimum marriage age for both men and women.

A joint report by UNICEF Indonesia, BPS, PUSKAPA UI, and the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas (2020) highlights that child marriage is deeply tied to socio-economic factors, including educational and employment dimensions. Thus, expanding access to information on education and careers serves as an educational preventive measure giving adolescents the opportunity to consider their futures more maturely.

Implementation of Career Discussions for MA Students

Unlike the MTs level, discussions for MA At-Turmudzi students focused on the post-graduation transition phase. Students engaged in comparative discussions weighing options such as continuing education, entering the job market, joining vocational training, pursuing entrepreneurship, or combining study with work experience.

The session centered on translating aspirations into actionable plans. For instance, if a student aspired to become a diplomat, teacher, entrepreneur, physician, designer, or other professional, they explored the educational background, competencies, and experience typically required to enter those fields.

This step is critical because career planning involves not only identifying desired occupations but also understanding strategic processes to reach them. Research by Darwin et al. (2020) highlights that senior high school students demonstrate a high need for career guidance services that clarify qualification requirements and future choices.

Recent literature on senior high school students further indicates that student career planning often remains at a moderate level, necessitating targeted interventions to help structure their plans. For example, Sapitri and Syafiq (2025) found that the majority of students in their study fell into the moderate category regarding career planning.

These empirical facts reinforce the necessity of providing career discussions prior to graduation. Ideally, students should not defer exploring higher education or job market options until after completing secondary school.

Introduction to Higher Education and Al-Ghifari University

During the MA sessions, discussions transitioned into exploring higher education. This segment was essential because several students expressed a preference to pursue higher education but lacked clear criteria for selecting suitable study programs or institutions.

The KKN facilitators introduced Al-Ghifari University as one higher education alternative. This overview covered institutional details, available degree programs, and the importance of choosing majors aligned with personal interests and career plans.

The introduction of Al-Ghifari University was not framed as the sole or mandatory choice. Instead, the information provided a concrete illustration of the higher education options available following MA graduation.

This approach proved effective as university outreach gains relevance when connected directly to student needs. Students first reflected on the rationale for pursuing higher education before receiving information about a specific institutional option.

Through this structure, the program fulfilled two primary functions:

1. Delivering foundational literacy regarding education and career pathways.
2. Introducing Al-Ghifari University to MA students as a viable higher education option post-secondary school.

Student Responses to Career Discussions

Throughout the activities, discussion dynamics demonstrated that students engaged more actively when materials were linked to daily life experiences. Questions regarding aspirations, target occupations, motivations, and post-graduation plans served as effective prompts for students to voice their perspectives.

For MTs students, discussing aspirations served as an entry point to introduce secondary education choices. Meanwhile, MA students engaged more deeply with questions on post-graduation pathways, university selection criteria, and professional fields.

These responses indicate that students possess genuine interest in discussing their futures when provided an open environment to ask questions and gather information. This finding aligns with research by Sari et al., showing that career information services effectively enhance career planning among secondary students.

Consequently, career discussions within the KKN framework functioned not merely as informational delivery, but as an interactive communication forum between university facilitators and students. The relatively small age gap between university students and participants rendered conversations about higher education and careers more relatable and tangible.

Career Discussion as an Educational Intervention in KKN

The career discussion program represents a problem-solving, educational intervention tailored to the target community's needs. The KKN initiative sought to address real field conditions observed during initial assessments rather than delivering purely theoretical lectures.

The primary challenge at MTs and MA At-Turmudzi was not a complete lack of learning motivation, but rather a shortage of spaces dedicated to discussing future possibilities. Creating interactive discussion forums enabled students to explore a wider range of life choices.

This framework directly reflects career planning concepts by encouraging students to assess self-potential, gather information, evaluate options, and formulate strategic steps. At the MTs level, this process focused on foundational exploration, whereas at the MA level, it targeted concrete planning.

Furthermore, the program illustrates how KKN initiatives serve as a bridge connecting higher education institutions with local communities. Facilitators gained insights into objective challenges faced by rural students, while participants benefited from student experiences and gained exposure to higher education opportunities.

The Role of Schools and Families in Program Sustainability

Incidental, single-session career discussions are insufficient on their own to fully build student career maturity. Future planning is a gradual process influenced by a student's broader ecosystem.

Schools play a central role in providing ongoing career guidance services. Educational institutions can systematically share information regarding continuing education, universities, vocational centers, the labor market, and various learning pathways, while guiding early interest exploration.

Alongside schools, families exert a strong influence over student decision-making. Family support assists students in evaluating educational and career options realistically. Therefore, conversations about the future should ideally engage teachers, parents, and community members alongside facilitators.

In Cibodas Village, long-term sustainability can be fostered through periodic career talks, alumni sharing sessions, guest lectures from local professionals, and dedicated informational channels for scholarships and university admissions.

Limitations of the Activity

This activity faced several methodological limitations. First, discussion sessions were constrained by time allocations inherent to the broader KKN schedule. Second, quantitative measurement tools (such as pre-tests and post-tests) were not utilized, meaning changes in career maturity levels were not recorded as numerical scores.

Third, observations regarding post-MTs tendencies toward immediate work or marriage were derived from qualitative interactions during KKN and cannot be generalized to all youth in Cibodas Village. Fourth, introducing Al-Ghifari University to MA students reflected the specific context of this KKN program and was not intended to rank or favor the institution over other higher education providers.

These limitations suggest that future interventions could be expanded through extended mentorship initiatives, standardized career planning assessment tools, and deeper structural involvement of school staff and parents.

E. CONCLUSION

The implementation of career discussions at MTs and MA At-Turmudzi, Cibodas Village, represents one of the initiatives under the Impactful Thematic Student Community Service Program (*KKN Tematik Berdampak*) by Al-Ghifari University, designed based on students' needs to acquire broader insights into education and future pathways. Observations during the program revealed that several MTs students tended to hold limited views regarding post-graduation choices, particularly leaning toward immediate employment or early marriage. This condition underscores the importance of delivering clear information and creating open discussion forums on diverse educational and career alternatives.

At the MTs level, career discussions focused on self-potential recognition, personal interests, skills, further education pathways, and the core relationship between educational attainment and the workforce. Meanwhile, at the MA level, sessions were directed toward post-graduation planning, higher education options, study program selection, skill development, and career trajectories. The introduction of Al-Ghifari University during the

MA session served as part of providing information on a viable higher education alternative for students to consider.

This program demonstrates that an interactive and communicative discussion approach can effectively initiate conversations about the future. Students gained opportunities to express aspirations, inquire about education and employment options, and recognize that multiple pathways exist to achieve their long-term goals.

However, single-session incidental activities are insufficient to fully build student career maturity on their own. Therefore, sustained efforts are required through integrated career guidance services in schools, active family engagement, regular distribution of educational information, and continuous exposure to diverse professions and educational tracks. For future activity development, evaluations should ideally utilize standardized career planning or career maturity assessment instruments to measure program impact more rigorously and systematically.

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