

ENHANCING CAREER READINESS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF PSYCHOMETRIC TEST TRAINING FOR INDONESIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The persistent challenge of high unemployment rates among Indonesian vocational high school (SMK) graduates highlights the need for holistic approaches to career readiness, extending beyond technical instruction to include psychological preparation for recruitment and selection processes. This study aims to explore the perceptions of grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara regarding psychological test training (specifically the TIU 5 General Intelligence Test) and its impact on their career readiness. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through purposive sampling of students who participated in open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations, and analyzed thematically using NVivo 12. The findings reveal that the majority of students perceive themselves as ready to transition to the workforce or higher education, with both internal factors (motivation, self-confidence) and external factors (internships, parental and teacher support, and structured psychometric practice) playing significant roles. Psychometric test training was found to enhance students' self-awareness, self-efficacy, and confidence, while reducing anxiety toward recruitment assessments. Students regarded these exercises as directly relevant to their future career and educational pathways. The study concludes that integrating systematic psychological test practice within vocational guidance programs not only addresses a critical gap in the Indonesian context but also fosters greater adaptability and success in school-to-work transitions. This research underscores the importance of reflective, experiential, and motivational interventions in vocational education and recommends expanding psychometric test training to improve employability outcomes for SMK graduates.

Keywords: Adaptability, Career Guidance, Employability, Psychometric Test, Vocational Education.

INTRODUCTION

Preparing students to enter the world of work or continue their education is one of the primary objectives of vocational education. Vocational high schools, or Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK), are designed to equip students with technical competence, practical experience, work discipline, and career readiness. In this context, career preparation is not only a technical or academic matter, but also a moral and spiritual responsibility. From an Islamic perspective, work is regarded as part of human responsibility and worship. Allah SWT commands human beings to strive, work, and demonstrate accountability for their actions. This principle is reflected in Q.S. At-Tawbah [9]:105: "And say, 'Work, for Allah will see your work, and so will His Messenger and the believers. And you will be returned to the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed, and He will inform you of what you used to do'" (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). This verse emphasizes that human effort, including work and self-development, has spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions. Letsoin (2023) explains that Q.S. At-Tawbah [9]:105 contains a command to work and perform good deeds because every human action will be witnessed, evaluated, and ultimately accounted for before Allah SWT. Therefore, preparing students to become productive, responsible, and competent individuals is consistent with both educational goals and Islamic values. In practical terms, vocational students who have completed their education are expected to be able to plan

their careers, obtain employment, adjust to workplace demands, or continue to higher education. However, the reality shows that many SMK graduates still face difficulties in entering the labor market or pursuing further studies. Data from Statistics Indonesia indicate that the Open Unemployment Rate among vocational high school graduates reached 9.01%, the highest percentage compared with other education levels (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2025). This situation suggests that vocational education alone does not automatically guarantee students' readiness to enter the world of work. Career readiness may also be influenced by other factors, including students' understanding of recruitment procedures, self-confidence, psychological preparedness, and their ability to complete psychological tests used in job or educational selection processes. Psychological tests are commonly used by companies, institutions, and educational organizations as part of selection mechanisms to assess whether candidates are suitable for certain positions, programs, or career pathways. Nevertheless, many vocational students experience anxiety and lack confidence when facing psychological tests because they are unfamiliar with the structure, format, and strategies required to complete them. One of the main causes is the lack of systematic training and limited exposure to psychological test practice. Although several schools have conducted career preparation programs, including psychological test training, such programs have not been implemented evenly across vocational schools. The absence of structured preparation may cause students to feel anxious, uncertain, and less confident when participating in recruitment or admission selection. Previous studies have shown that work readiness training, including curriculum vitae writing, psychological test preparation, and interview practice, can improve students' professional integration. Rahmatika et al. (2021) found that career preparation programs help students acquire the necessary skills to obtain employment, adapt to the workplace, and build healthy professional relationships. This indicates that psychological test preparation may play an important role in strengthening students' career readiness, particularly for vocational students who are preparing to enter employment or continue to higher education.

Students are individuals who are engaged in a formal learning process and are expected to develop their personal, intellectual, moral, and social potential. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, a student is a learner or pupil, especially one who studies at the primary or secondary education level (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, 2016). Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System defines students as members of society who seek to develop their potential through educational processes at certain pathways, levels, and types of education (Republic of Indonesia, 2003). This definition implies that students are not passive recipients of knowledge, but active individuals who are in the process of self-development. Students also require continuous guidance and supervision because they experience physical, psychological, social, and spiritual growth. Yolanda et al. (2023) explain that students are children or adolescents who learn, seek knowledge, and participate in educational institutions to obtain certain forms of education. Similarly, Khan (2005) describes students as individuals who learn in order to develop intelligence and morality. In the school context, students must be guided so that their potential can develop optimally. Hujaemah (2020) emphasizes that students need ongoing assistance to achieve their maximum potential, while Faizah (2023) highlights that students are individuals who grow physically, psychologically, socially, and religiously as they prepare to face life in the world and the hereafter. This developmental perspective is particularly relevant for vocational students. Students at the SMK level are generally in adolescence, a period in which they begin to explore interests, talents, identity, and future career options. Therefore, career preparation programs should not only focus on technical competencies, but also on psychological readiness, career maturity, self-understanding, and confidence in facing selection processes.

Career planning is an important aspect of personal development because it reflects an individual's ability to make informed decisions about future education and employment. Lent, Brown, and Hackett's Social

Cognitive Career Theory explains that career readiness is influenced by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal goals, and contextual supports or barriers (Lent et al., 2000). In this perspective, students' career readiness is shaped not only by external factors such as education, family, and school environment, but also by internal factors such as interests, abilities, motivation, and confidence. Savickas (2013) argues that career readiness is closely related to an individual's capacity to adapt to changes in the workplace. This readiness is reflected in mental preparedness, adaptability, and the ability to construct meaningful career plans. For vocational students, career readiness is highly important because they are expected either to work immediately after graduation or to continue to higher education. Therefore, SMK students need systematic preparation so that they can understand their personal potential, identify career opportunities, and adjust to the demands of the labor market. Career readiness is also part of 21st-century skills. Jackson and Tomlinson (2020) emphasize that career planning, proactive behavior, and employability perceptions are essential for students facing uncertain labor market conditions. In addition to technical knowledge obtained at school, students must develop soft skills, including interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, adaptability, communication, and problem-solving abilities (Ekhsan et al., 2022). Early psychological support can help students identify their potential, choose suitable study programs or occupations, and make more directed career decisions (Nugroho et al., 2023). Thus, psychological test preparation can be understood as one form of psychological and career intervention that supports students' readiness to enter the labor market or higher education.

Psychological tests are standardized and objective instruments used to measure aspects of human behavior, cognition, personality, interest, aptitude, emotion, and intellectual capacity. Anastasi and Urbina (1997) define psychological testing as a standardized and objective measurement of behavior. In practice, psychological assessment uses specific instruments developed by professionals in psychology to evaluate individual characteristics relevant to education, employment, and personal development. Psychological tests may include intelligence tests, personality tests, aptitude and interest tests, and achievement tests. Intelligence tests are used to assess analytical and logical thinking abilities, while personality tests help evaluate candidates' compatibility with organizational culture. Aptitude and interest tests are used to identify individual strengths and preferences in certain fields, while achievement tests measure specific competencies or learning outcomes (Hilmi et al., 2018). In employment contexts, psychological tests are often used to assess whether prospective employees have the mental, emotional, cognitive, and personality characteristics needed for a particular role. For SMK students, psychological test practice can help them understand the structure, types, and logic of questions commonly used in recruitment processes. In the context of SMK Garuda Nusantara, psychological test practice, particularly the General Intelligence Test or Tes Intelegensi Umum (TIU 5), is intended to help students develop strategies for answering psychological test items, strengthen their confidence, and improve their readiness to face future selection processes. Such practice also supports students in identifying their analytical abilities, problem-solving capacity, and potential suitability with certain work cultures or career pathways.

Career guidance plays an important role in helping students prepare for employment and further education. Career guidance is a counseling service that assists students in understanding themselves, exploring occupational information, making career decisions, and developing future plans. Syamal et al. (2021) explain that career guidance helps students solve problems related to occupational choice and career development by analyzing student data so that they can better understand themselves and their environment. Nur Ihsan (2018) also emphasizes that career guidance supports individuals in recognizing themselves, understanding the world of work, and developing future plans that correspond to their expected life goals. Career guidance is part of developmental guidance. Amalianita and Putri (2019) explain that career guidance should be provided throughout an individual's growth, beginning from early education and

continuing through secondary school, higher education, and even the workplace. This continuity is important because individuals face different career-related tasks at different developmental stages. For vocational students, career guidance must help them understand their interests, motivation, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and the expectations of the workplace. Nuraini (2022) states that career guidance aims to help students understand not only themselves, but also their environment, including peers, family, society, and the world of work. In relation to psychological test preparation, career guidance can provide students with structured opportunities to explore their potential, recognize possible career pathways, and build confidence in facing recruitment procedures. Therefore, psychological test practice should be integrated into school career guidance services so that students can prepare themselves more systematically and realistically.

Several career development theories provide a strong foundation for understanding the role of psychological test preparation in vocational students' career readiness. First, Crites' theory of career maturity explains that the ability to make realistic and responsible career decisions requires career maturity. The content dimension of Crites' model includes the realism of career choice, namely the extent to which an individual's skills, interests, and personality correspond to the requirements of a chosen occupation (Busacca & Taber, 2002). Psychological test practice can help vocational students increase awareness of their interests, talents, and abilities, thereby supporting more mature and realistic career decisions. Second, Super's life-span, life-space theory views career development as a lifelong process involving personal growth, self-concept, and adaptation. Super (1980) explains that career development occurs through several stages, including growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Students in Grade XI of vocational high school are generally in the exploration stage, during which they begin to consider career alternatives, training opportunities, work experiences, and selection requirements. Psychological test preparation is relevant at this stage because it gives students early exposure to recruitment demands and strengthens their confidence in preparing for future employment or higher education. Third, Holland's theory of vocational personalities and work environments is also relevant in explaining the function of psychological tests in career readiness. Holland classifies personality and career interests into six types known as RIASEC: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (Spokane et al., 2002). Through psychological tests, students can better understand their interests, talents, and personality tendencies. This understanding can assist them in choosing career pathways that are more compatible with their personal characteristics and occupational environments. Fourth, Savickas' Career Construction Theory emphasizes career adaptability as a key indicator of readiness to enter the world of work. Career adaptability consists of four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2013). Psychological test preparation can support these dimensions by helping students become more aware of their future, take responsibility for career decisions, explore available career options, and build confidence in facing career challenges. In this sense, psychological test practice is not merely a technical exercise, but also a developmental process that strengthens students' career adaptability. Fifth, Bandura's concept of self-efficacy is important in understanding students' confidence when facing psychological tests and recruitment processes. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions required to achieve certain goals (Bandura, 1978). Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to feel confident in completing psychological tests, participating in interviews, and facing selection procedures. Psychological test practice can increase students' familiarity with test formats and reduce anxiety, thereby strengthening their self-efficacy and positive perception of career readiness.

Several previous studies have examined career readiness among vocational students. Sintia Dewi et al. (2024) found that teaching factory learning and soft skill mastery influence vocational students' work

readiness. Susanti (2023) analyzed work readiness among students at SMKN 1 Pati and highlighted the importance of school-based preparation for employment. Widadi (2016) investigated students' perceptions of readiness in implementing industrial work practice based on the 2013 curriculum and its relevance to career choice. The study showed that students' readiness for industrial practice was related to their career preferences, although no significant differences were found across different periods of industrial practice. Other studies have focused on work readiness training and psychological test preparation. Lasut et al. (2024) found that work readiness training can improve career adaptability among vocational students in Temanggung Regency. Widharma et al. (2021) examined psychological test item discussion training for students of SMK Darussalam Puri Pamulang and found that students became more familiar with strategies for completing psychological test questions, which helped them feel more prepared to enter the world of work. In addition, Rahmatika et al. (2021) showed that career preparation activities, including CV writing, psychological test education, and interview training, can support vocational students' readiness for professional integration. Although these studies provide valuable insights, most previous research has focused on internships, industrial work practice, teaching factory programs, soft skills, or general work readiness training. Limited attention has been given to students' perceptions of psychological test preparation as a specific component of career readiness. Therefore, this study offers novelty by focusing on the role of psychological test practice, particularly TIU 5, in shaping the career readiness perceptions of Grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara in the 2024/2025 academic year. This focus is important because students' perceptions can reveal how they understand, experience, and evaluate psychological test preparation as part of their transition toward employment or higher education.

Based on the background above, the research problem of this study is formulated as follows: How do Grade XI students of SMK Garuda Nusantara perceive psychological test preparation in relation to their readiness to enter the world of work? This study aims to investigate and describe Grade XI students' perceptions of psychological test preparation as a means of improving career readiness, both for entering the labor market and continuing to higher education. Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of career counseling services in vocational schools, particularly in relation to psychological test preparation. Practically, the findings may provide useful recommendations for guidance and counseling teachers in designing more effective, systematic, and student-centered training programs that respond to students' needs as they prepare for future careers.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study seeks to understand students' perspectives, experiences, and meanings related to career readiness after participating in TIU-5 psychotest practice. Qualitative research allows the researcher to collect data mainly in the form of words, describe participants' views, analyze textual information into themes, and interpret educational phenomena within their natural context (Sobry & Hadisaputra, 2020). Through this approach, the researcher can explore how students understand their own career preparation, how they reflect on psychotest practice, and how they perceive their readiness to enter the workforce or continue to higher education. The case study design was selected because it enables an in-depth investigation of students' subjective experiences within a specific school context. A case study focuses on a bounded case, event, program, activity, or phenomenon and examines it comprehensively through various sources of evidence. In this research, the case refers to the experiences of Grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara who have participated in TIU-5 psychotest practice. The term "case" itself refers to an event, situation, or object of investigation that can be studied in detail (Hornby, 2005). Therefore, the

case study design is suitable for examining students' perceptions of career readiness, the relevance of psychotest practice, and the factors that influence their preparation for future employment or further education.

Research Subjects and Setting

The subjects of this study are Grade XI students of SMK Garuda Nusantara in the 2024/2025 academic year who have participated in TIU-5 psychotest practice. The participants are selected using purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to choose participants based on specific criteria that are relevant to the objectives of the study. In this research, the participants are not selected randomly but are intentionally chosen because they are expected to provide rich and meaningful information about students' perceptions of career readiness through psychotest practice. The criteria for selecting participants include students who are officially registered as Grade XI students of SMK Garuda Nusantara in the 2024/2025 academic year, have participated in the TIU-5 psychotest practice organized by the school, have completed the online questionnaire through Google Forms, are willing to participate in interviews, and are present and actively involved in the research process. These criteria are used to ensure that the selected participants have direct experience with the psychotest practice and are able to provide relevant information for the study. The research is conducted at SMK Garuda Nusantara. The fieldwork is planned to be carried out over three months. During this period, data collection is organized into three main activities: distributing open-ended questionnaires, conducting interviews with selected participants, and carrying out observations in the school setting. This setting is considered appropriate because it provides a direct context for understanding students' experiences, responses, and perceptions regarding career readiness after participating in TIU-5 psychotest practice.

Research Instruments and Data-Collection Techniques

This study uses several instruments and data-collection techniques to obtain comprehensive qualitative data. In addition to the TIU-5 psychotest practice, which functions as a stimulus for exploring students' perceptions of career readiness, the study also employs open-ended questionnaires, unstructured interviews, and observation. Psychological testing can provide structured information about individuals' abilities, readiness, and psychological characteristics when interpreted carefully within an educational context (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). However, in this study, TIU-5 is not used as the only measurement of students' career readiness. Instead, it serves as a contextual activity that helps students reflect on their preparation for employment or further education.

Research Procedures

The research procedures are designed to ensure that the study is conducted systematically and consistently with the research objectives. The procedures consist of four main stages: the preparation stage, the data-collection stage, the data-analysis stage, and the report-writing stage. The preparation stage begins with the identification of the research problem. The researcher observes the phenomenon of students' career readiness after participating in psychotest practice and reviews relevant literature related to career readiness, vocational students, psychotest practice, and career guidance. This stage is important because it helps the researcher formulate the research focus, objectives, and expected benefits of the study. After identifying the research problem, the researcher develops the research instruments. The open-ended questionnaire is prepared using Google Forms so that it can be distributed easily to students. The researcher also prepares an interview guide to explore students' experiences in greater depth and develops observation indicators to guide the observation process during TIU-5 psychotest practice. In addition, the researcher submits a formal

research permit to the school through an official letter or direct communication with the student-affairs office, guidance and counseling teacher, or homeroom teacher. The researcher also explains the purpose, procedures, and expected benefits of the study to school stakeholders so that the research can be conducted ethically and cooperatively. After obtaining permission from the school, the researcher proceeds to the data-collection stage. Data are collected using three complementary techniques: questionnaire, interview, and observation. First, the open-ended questionnaire is distributed through Google Forms to Grade XI students who have participated in TIU-5 psychotest practice. The questionnaire provides initial information about students' perceptions and reflections on career readiness. Second, the researcher conducts unstructured interviews with selected students who meet the participant criteria. These interviews allow the researcher to obtain deeper and more detailed information about students' experiences, interpretations, and expectations related to psychotest practice and career preparation. Third, the researcher conducts observations during TIU-5 psychotest practice and other relevant school activities. The observation provides contextual data about students' participation, behavior, and responses in the natural school environment. The data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and observations are analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The first step is data reduction, in which the researcher selects, simplifies, and organizes relevant data from questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, and observation notes. This step helps the researcher focus on data that are directly related to students' perceptions of career readiness and the role of TIU-5 psychotest practice. The next step is coding and categorization. In this stage, the researcher assigns codes to meaningful units of data and groups them into categories based on similarities, patterns, and recurring ideas. After that, thematic analysis is conducted by identifying, reviewing, and interpreting themes that emerge from the data. These themes may include students' understanding of career readiness, perceived benefits of psychotest practice, factors influencing readiness, and students' expectations for future employment or further education. The final step is data presentation, in which the findings are presented in narrative form and supported by relevant quotations, tables, and interpretive explanations. After the data analysis is completed, the researcher prepares the final research report in the form of a scientific article. The report is written based on the results of qualitative analysis and organized according to academic writing standards. In this stage, the researcher presents the findings, discusses them in relation to relevant theories and previous studies, draws conclusions, and formulates recommendations for the school. The researcher also compiles the reference list using APA style to ensure academic consistency and credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Vocational Education, Work Readiness, and the Ethical Meaning of Work

Preparing students to enter the labour market or continue to higher education is one of the central purposes of vocational education. Vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) are expected to develop students who are not only technically competent but also psychologically ready, ethically grounded, and adaptive to changing employment demands. In the Indonesian context, this mandate is consistent with the national education system, which defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create learning conditions that enable learners to actively develop their potential, including spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Republic of Indonesia, 2003). Thus, career preparation in vocational schools should be understood as a holistic process that integrates technical mastery, character formation, self-understanding, and future-oriented decision-making.

From an Islamic educational perspective, work is not merely an economic activity but also a moral and spiritual responsibility. Q.S. At-Tawbah [9]:105 emphasizes that human beings are commanded to work,

and that their deeds are subject to divine, prophetic, and social accountability (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Letsoin (2023) interprets this verse as an instruction that Muslims should engage in productive effort, develop their abilities, and treat work as part of worship and social contribution. This religious foundation is important for vocational education because students are not only prepared to obtain employment but also to view work as a form of responsibility, self-development, and service. In this sense, career readiness is inseparable from the cultivation of values, discipline, perseverance, and awareness that professional competence should contribute to individual welfare and social benefit.

The urgency of career readiness becomes more evident when linked to employment challenges faced by graduates. National employment statistics show that open unemployment remains a significant issue across educational levels, including among vocational-school graduates (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). This condition indicates that the existence of vocational education alone does not automatically guarantee successful school-to-work transition. Students need systematic preparation that helps them understand labor-market expectations, recruitment procedures, personal strengths, career interests, and the psychological demands of work. Previous community engagement and training programs have shown that students benefit from practical preparation such as curriculum vitae writing, interview simulation, psychological-test familiarization, career-adaptability training, and job-selection guidance (Lasut et al., 2024; Rahmatika et al., 2021). Therefore, vocational schools should design career-preparation programs that move beyond technical instruction and include structured psychological and career-guidance components.

Students as Developing Career Subjects

The term student refers to a learner who participates in an educational process and is positioned as a developing subject rather than a passive recipient of instruction. The Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia defines *siswa* as a learner or school pupil (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, 2016), while the Indonesian national education law emphasizes that learners are members of society who attempt to develop their potential through educational pathways (Republic of Indonesia, 2003). This definition implies that students need guidance that supports their intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and vocational development. In the context of vocational schools, students are in a developmental period in which they must begin to connect learning experiences with occupational aspirations, further study opportunities, and personal identity.

Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, self-evaluation, and future planning. Developmental studies emphasize that learners undergo continuous physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that influence how they make decisions and understand themselves (Yolanda et al., 2023). Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy also views education as a process of developing human potential and moral awareness so that individuals can live meaningfully and responsibly (Khan, 2005). Within this developmental framework, vocational students require support from teachers, homeroom teachers, parents, school counselors, and the school environment. Hujaemah (2020) highlights the importance of empowering homeroom teachers to increase student participation, while Faizah (2023) argues that student management in Islamic-based schools should include systematic guidance, monitoring, and character development. These perspectives suggest that students' readiness for work or further study is shaped by a combination of personal motivation, school support, family encouragement, and meaningful learning experiences.

Career Readiness in Vocational-School Contexts

Career readiness refers to the degree to which students possess the knowledge, attitudes, skills, self-confidence, and planning capacity needed to make informed career decisions and engage successfully in work or further education. In vocational schools, career readiness should include technical competence, soft

skills, understanding of recruitment procedures, ability to adapt to workplace culture, and awareness of personal strengths and limitations. Studies on vocational students show that work readiness is influenced by practical learning experiences, industrial work practice, teaching factory implementation, soft-skill mastery, and students' perceptions of career pathways (Sinta et al., 2024; Susanti, 2023; Widadi, 2016). These findings confirm that career readiness is multidimensional: it is not only produced by classroom learning but also by authentic work exposure and reflective career guidance.

Industrial internship or practical field experience is particularly important because it allows students to encounter workplace expectations directly. Through internships, students learn discipline, communication, task completion, teamwork, and professional responsibility. However, practical experience alone may not be sufficient when students lack self-understanding or remain uncertain about their occupational direction. Career planning and proactive behaviour are strongly associated with employability perceptions, especially in uncertain labour-market conditions (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). For this reason, vocational schools need to help students transform practical experience into career insight. Guidance activities, psychological support, and career counseling can help students interpret their experiences, identify competencies that need strengthening, and select appropriate pathways after graduation.

Several Indonesian studies and community-service programs have addressed the need to prepare students for work through CV-writing workshops, interview simulations, job-search education, career-adaptability training, and psychological support in choosing majors or occupations (Lasut et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2023; Rahmatika et al., 2021). These initiatives are valuable because they provide concrete and immediately applicable skills. Nevertheless, there remains a need to examine students' own perceptions of career readiness and the extent to which specific preparation activities, especially psychometric-test practice, help them understand their abilities and readiness. Without students' subjective perspectives, career-preparation programs may become procedural rather than developmental. Therefore, students' voices should be treated as an important source of evidence in evaluating the relevance of school-based career guidance.

Psychometric Test Practice as Career Preparation

In Indonesia, psychological tests or psychometric tests (commonly known as psikotes) are widely used in recruitment, educational selection, and career decision-making contexts. Psychological testing refers to systematic procedures for measuring samples of behaviour, abilities, interests, personality tendencies, and other psychological attributes (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). For vocational students, psychometric-test practice can serve at least two functions. First, it familiarizes students with the format, time pressure, and reasoning demands of selection tests. Second, it provides an opportunity for self-reflection because students can identify areas of strength and weakness, such as numerical reasoning, logical thinking, concentration, accuracy, and problem-solving speed.

The use of psychometric-test practice in career preparation should not be reduced to test-taking drills. When implemented pedagogically, it can become part of a broader career-guidance strategy that helps students understand themselves and make more realistic career choices. Gani and Krisnawati (2011) show that psychometric-test learning can be supported through digital applications, while Rahmatika et al. (2021) report the relevance of CV-writing, psychometric-test familiarization, and interview education for students preparing to face the world of work. In addition, career-guidance services are designed to strengthen students' career planning, career maturity, and decision-making readiness (Nuraini, 2022; Nurihsan, 2018). Thus, psychometric-test practice can complement counseling services by offering concrete experiences that connect self-assessment with occupational preparation.

The relevance of psychometric testing is also related to the fact that career choice is influenced by personality, interests, abilities, motivation, and environmental conditions (Sassine & Hajj, 2022). Students who understand their personal profile are more likely to choose pathways that correspond to their potential and aspirations. However, ethical and educational caution is necessary. Psychometric-test results should not be used to label students rigidly or limit their aspirations. Instead, they should be interpreted as developmental feedback that encourages students to improve competencies, seek support, and build confidence. This approach is consistent with the view that career readiness involves not only matching students with occupations but also helping them develop adaptability, self-efficacy, and proactive agency.

Theoretical Foundation of Career Readiness

This study is grounded in several complementary theories of career development. Super's life-span, life-space theory explains career development as a lifelong process in which individuals form and implement self-concepts through roles, experiences, and developmental stages (Super, 1980). For adolescents and young adults, the exploration stage is especially relevant because individuals begin to crystallize, specify, and implement occupational preferences. Career maturity, as reflected in readiness to make career decisions, is therefore influenced by self-concept, information, planning, and experience (Busacca & Taber, 2002). In the vocational-school context, Grade XI students are situated within an important exploratory period: they have begun to experience vocational learning and internship preparation, yet many still need guidance to clarify their career direction.

Holland's theory of vocational personalities and work environments further explains that career satisfaction and stability are influenced by the congruence between individual characteristics and occupational environments (Spokane et al., 2002). Career counseling based on trait-and-factor and Hollandian perspectives emphasizes the importance of identifying interests, abilities, and personality patterns so that students can make more suitable career choices (Amalianita & Putri, 2019; Syamal et al., 2021). In this regard, psychometric-test practice can help students recognize their capabilities and begin to connect personal characteristics with possible educational or occupational pathways. Nevertheless, career choice should not be understood as a one-time matching process; it also requires adaptability, narrative meaning, and ongoing construction of identity.

Career Construction Theory strengthens this developmental view by emphasizing that individuals build career paths through life stories, personal meanings, adaptability, and responses to changing social contexts (Savickas, 2013). For vocational students, career readiness includes the ability to narrate who they are, what they value, what kind of work they want to pursue, and how they can adapt to opportunities and constraints. This perspective is particularly relevant in an era marked by labour-market uncertainty and rapid technological change. Students should not only be prepared for existing jobs but also trained to adapt, learn continuously, and make reflective decisions.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides another important foundation by explaining how self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, goals, contextual supports, and barriers shape career interests and choices (Lent et al., 2000). Bandura's concept of self-efficacy emphasizes that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence motivation, behaviour, and persistence (Bandura, 1978). In career preparation, students who believe they can complete selection procedures, solve test items, communicate in interviews, and adapt to workplace demands are more likely to engage in proactive planning. Conversely, students with low self-efficacy may avoid opportunities or feel uncertain even when they possess adequate technical skills. Psychometric-test practice may contribute to self-efficacy when it is accompanied by explanation, feedback, and opportunities for improvement.

Research Gap and Study Focus

Although various programs have been implemented to prepare students for work, much of the existing discussion focuses on training outputs rather than students' perceptions of readiness. Previous studies and community engagement activities have demonstrated the usefulness of work-preparation education, psychological support, and career-adaptability training (Lasut et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2023; Rahmatika et al., 2021). However, limited attention has been given to how vocational students interpret psychometric-test practice as part of their career-readiness process. This issue is important because the success of a career-guidance activity depends not only on the activity itself but also on whether students perceive it as meaningful, relevant, and helpful for their future.

Furthermore, there is a need to integrate vocational education, Islamic work ethics, career-development theory, and psychometric-test practice into one coherent framework. Work readiness should not be measured only by students' technical competence or willingness to work. It should also include moral responsibility, self-awareness, motivation, career adaptability, and confidence in facing selection processes. By examining students' perceptions, schools can understand the internal and external factors that influence readiness, such as personal motivation, internship experience, parental support, teacher guidance, school programs, and psychometric-test exposure. Such understanding can help counselors and school leaders design more responsive career-guidance services.

Based on this background, this study focuses on Grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara in the 2024/2025 academic year. The study seeks to analyze students' perceptions of their career readiness, identify factors that influence those perceptions, examine the role of psychometric-test practice in helping students understand their strengths and weaknesses, and evaluate the relevance of psychometric tests to students' readiness to enter the labour market or continue to higher education. The study is expected to contribute to vocational-school career guidance by providing empirical insight into how students experience career-preparation activities and how psychometric-test practice can be positioned as an educational, reflective, and developmental tool rather than merely a recruitment simulation.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions of grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara regarding psychological test preparation and its relationship to career readiness, specifically after their participation in TIU 5 (General Intelligence Test) training. The key findings highlight that most students perceive themselves as career-ready, a perspective shaped by both internal factors (such as motivation and self-confidence) and external factors (including internships, support from parents and teachers, and structured psychological test practice). The study reveals that psychometric test exercises not only enhance students' self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses but also foster self-efficacy, reduce anxiety about recruitment processes, and are regarded by students as directly relevant to their future career and educational pathways. These insights fill a critical research gap in the Indonesian vocational education context by demonstrating the reflective and developmental value of systematic psychological test training. The research contributes by offering empirical evidence and practical recommendations for integrating structured psychometric exercises into vocational guidance curricula, supporting both theory and global best practice, and advocating for their adoption as a means to promote greater career adaptability, student confidence, and successful school-to-work transitions.

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