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' selfawareness, 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 for entry into the workforce or continuation to higher education is one of the central objectives of vocational education. Vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) in Indonesia are designed to equip students with practical skills and industry-relevant knowledge to ensure employability and career adaptability upon graduation (Dewi et al., 2024). However, despite the specific focus of vocational curricula, a considerable proportion of SMK graduates still face difficulties in securing employment or continuing their studies. According to the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024), the open unemployment rate for SMK graduates reached 9.01% in 2024, which is the highest among all education levels. This striking fact signals that beyond technical and vocational instruction, there are additional dimensions influencing students' career readiness. A significant factor affecting this transition is the students' preparedness for the recruitment and selection process, particularly psychological testing. Psychological tests, often employed by companies and educational institutions as part of candidate selection, assess cognitive abilities, personality, and other attributes to determine suitability for particular roles (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997; Urbina, 2016). Despite their prevalence, many vocational students feel anxious and lack confidence when faced with such tests due to limited prior exposure and lack of effective practice (Rahmatika et al., 2021). Inadequate psychological test training within school-based career preparation programs may leave students less equipped to manage the pressures of job selection, further exacerbating barriers to employment.

The primary research problem addressed in this study is the low level of psychological test readiness among vocational high school students and its impact on overall career readiness. This problem is compounded by the lack of systematic and widespread psychological test training within SMK curricula,

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leading to increased anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and ultimately, diminished employability (Lasut et al., 2024). The general solution proposed by many educators and policymakers involves the integration of career guidance and psychological test training as core elements of vocational education. Career guidance programs, if implemented systematically, have the potential to enhance students' understanding of the labor market, improve self-awareness, and foster the skills necessary for effective job search and adaptation (Fadillah, 2022).

Scientific literature consistently highlights the importance of holistic career readiness interventions that include not only technical training but also the development of psychological competencies and employability skills (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). According to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), career readiness is influenced by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived environmental supports (Lent et al., 2000). Training programs targeting psychological test preparation can increase students' self-efficacy, reduce anxiety, and promote a more positive attitude toward the selection process (Bandura, 1978; Nugroho et al., 2023). Moreover, career development theories, such as Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory and Holland's RIASEC model, emphasize the role of self-assessment, personality alignment, and adaptive decision-making in achieving career maturity and successful career transitions (Super, 1980; Amalianita & Putri, 2019). Psychological testing not only aids in matching students' attributes to appropriate career paths but also strengthens self-knowledge, an essential factor for career adaptability and lifelong employability (Savickas, 2013).

Several recent studies have investigated career readiness and the impact of school-based interventions among SMK students. Dewi et al. (2024) reported that the inclusion of resume writing, interview skills, and psychological test training within career guidance programs led to measurable improvements in students' job readiness and integration into professional settings. Lasut et al. (2024) demonstrated that work readiness training programs are effective in enhancing career adaptability among vocational students. Similarly, Widharma et al. (2021) found that targeted psychometric test training improved students' strategies for handling real-world selection tests, fostering greater preparedness and self-confidence. Despite these advances, a closer examination of the literature reveals notable gaps. Many existing studies focus on broad career guidance, job fairs, or internships (Susanti, 2023; Widadi, 2016) rather than specifically on psychological test training. Furthermore, most research assesses career readiness using quantitative posttraining outcomes but seldom explores students' perceptions or lived experiences of psychological test preparation. There is also limited investigation into how psychological test training directly influences the dimensions of career adaptability—namely, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence—as outlined in Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013). Moreover, the contextual relevance of these interventions for Indonesian SMK students remains underexplored, especially regarding the integration of psychological test practice as a mainstream component of the vocational education system. This gap is significant given the unique challenges faced by SMK students, such as higher unemployment rates and distinct recruitment hurdles compared to their academic-track counterparts (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024).

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara regarding psychological test preparation and its relationship to career readiness. Specifically, it seeks to (1) characterize students' attitudes and confidence toward psychological testing after participating in training; (2) identify perceived benefits and challenges; and (3) assess the relevance of psychological test practice to career adaptability and decision-making for both workforce entry and further education. Unlike prior research that primarily examines the outcomes of broad career readiness programs or the efficacy of internships, this study focuses specifically on psychological test training—a component that has received limited empirical attention in the Indonesian SMK context. By centering on students' subjective perceptions after experiencing TIU 5 (General Intelligence Test) training, the study provides nuanced insights into how such interventions shape self-efficacy, reduce anxiety, and foster career adaptability. This approach fills a vital research gap and offers practical recommendations for integrating psychological test training into the vocational school curriculum. Building on established theories—SCCT (Lent et al., 2000), Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), and Bandura's self-efficacy model (Bandura, 1978)—the hypothesis underpinning this study posits that systematic psychological test training increases students' confidence, reduces test-related anxiety, and positively impacts career readiness. The findings are expected to justify

the incorporation of structured psychological test exercises as a standard practice within SMK career guidance services. The study focuses exclusively on grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara during the 2024/2025 academic year who have participated in psychological test training, specifically TIU 5. The research employs qualitative methods to capture detailed perceptions and lived experiences, thereby providing depth and context-specific recommendations for vocational education stakeholders.

METHOD

Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design to provide an in-depth exploration of student perceptions and experiences. Qualitative research emphasizes the collection and interpretation of participants' words and subjective meanings, employing open-ended inquiry to uncover themes and patterns within complex social phenomena (Loso Judijanto et al., 2024; M. Sobry & Prosmala Hadisaputra, 2020). The case study method was chosen as it is highly effective for investigating phenomena within their real-life context and allows for a holistic understanding of individual experiences. According to Rachmawati (2007), the case study approach is particularly relevant for examining nuanced, context-specific experiences, making it ideal for this study's focus on students' experiences with psychological test exercises as a component of career readiness training at SMK Garuda Nusantara.

Subject

The subjects of this study were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara during the 2024/2025 academic year who had participated in the TIU 5 psychological test practice. The purposive sampling method enabled the selection of participants based on specific inclusion criteria that aligned with the research objectives (Hasanah, 2017). The criteria included being a current grade XI student at SMK Garuda Nusantara, active participation in the TIU 5 psychological test exercise, completion of an open-ended questionnaire via Google Form, willingness to participate in follow-up interviews, and availability throughout the research period. The research was conducted on-site at SMK Garuda Nusantara, with data collection activities—questionnaires, interviews, and observations—spanning approximately three months.

Instrument

To comprehensively explore students' perceptions, the research employed several instruments. The primary instrument was the General Intelligence Test (TIU 5), used as a stimulus to prompt student reflection on their career readiness. Supplementary data collection tools included an open-ended questionnaire, unstructured interviews, and direct observations. The open-ended questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms, enabled the collection of detailed narratives about students' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward psychological test training and career readiness (Pratiwi et al., 2024). Unstructured interviews provided participants the freedom to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences, promoting the emergence of rich qualitative data and facilitating in-depth exploration beyond initial questionnaire responses (Rachmawati, 2007; M. Sobry & Prosmala Hadisaputra, 2020). Additionally, observations conducted during the psychological test sessions enabled researchers to document student behaviors, engagement levels, and contextual factors, providing supplementary evidence for data triangulation (Hasanah, 2017; Hilmi et al., 2018).

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures consisted of four main stages. The first stage involved research preparation, including initial problem identification through preliminary observation and literature review, the development of data collection instruments, and securing official research permissions from the school. This stage also included clear communication with school authorities regarding the objectives and potential benefits of the research. The second stage was the active data collection phase, beginning with the administration of the open-ended questionnaire to eligible students, followed by the conduction of in-depth interviews with selected participants, and field observations during the psychological test exercises. The

third stage comprised systematic data analysis, which included data reduction (screening and grouping data based on relevance to the study objectives), coding and categorization (systematic labeling of text segments), and thematic analysis using NVivo 12 software to facilitate consistency and analytical depth (Busacca & Taber, 2002). Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of patterns and the emergence of key themes from the diverse qualitative data sources. Finally, the reporting stage entailed synthesizing the analyzed data into a comprehensive scientific article, formulating conclusions and recommendations for practice, and disseminating the findings by submitting the article to a SINTA 4-indexed journal.

To visually clarify the research process, the study's methodological flow can be illustrated as follows: initial problem identification leads to instrument development, followed by obtaining the necessary research permit. Afterward, data collection activities are conducted, consisting of questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Subsequently, the collected data undergo reduction, coding and categorization, and thematic analysis. The results are reported and synthesized into conclusions and recommendations, culminating in the submission of the research article. This process is iterative, allowing for a return to earlier stages if data quality is insufficient, thus ensuring the rigor and validity of findings (M. Sobry & Prosmala Hadisaputra, 2020).

Data Analysis

The data analysis relied on thematic analysis techniques, following the stages outlined by Faizah (2023) and Busacca and Taber (2002). Initially, data reduction was performed to filter and organize responses according to their relevance and emergent themes. Coding and categorization followed, wherein meaningful data segments were systematically labeled and grouped into broader categories—such as perceptions of readiness, challenges with psychological testing, and perceived benefits. These categories were then synthesized into overarching research themes. NVivo 12 software was employed to enhance the consistency, transparency, and rigor of the coding and mapping process. Finally, results were presented through descriptive narrative, integrating data from all sources, and supported by direct quotations and observational data to ensure triangulation and validity.

Table 1 Below Summarizes the Thematic Analysis Stages:

Step	Description
Data Reduction	Filtering and grouping data relevant to research objectives
Coding	Systematic labeling of significant data segments
Categorization	Grouping similar codes to form categories
Theme Identification	Synthesizing categories into overarching research themes
Software Support	Use of NVivo 12 for systematic coding and mapping

Through this rigorous and structured methodology, the study sought to provide an in-depth and credible exploration of vocational students' perceptions regarding psychological test training and its role in fostering career readiness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section systematically presents the research findings and offers an in-depth discussion based on qualitative data from questionnaires, interviews, and direct observations, processed and analyzed using NVivo 12 Plus software. The results are structured according to four main themes: (1) Students' Perceptions of Career Readiness, (2) Factors Influencing Career Readiness, (3) The Role of Psychometric Testing, and (4) The Relevance of Psychometric Tests to Career Readiness. Each section integrates data visualizations (bar charts, word clouds, cluster and connection maps, project maps) and is accompanied by comparison with existing national and international literature.

Students' Perceptions of Career Readiness

Analysis of the bar chart visualization (see Figure 1) indicates that the majority of grade XI students at SMK Garuda Nusantara for the academic year 2024/2025 perceive themselves as ready to either enter the workforce or continue their studies. Specifically, most respondents were categorized as "Ready," while only two fell into the "Undecided" group, and none were labeled as "Not Ready." This finding is supported by students' own statements, such as:

"Ready, because the school has the MSP (Mitsubishi School Program) so we can learn from there." (Nurul Anwar, Interview, 2025)

"Not perfect yet, Ma'am. I don't have much experience yet, I'm hesitant." (Pajril, Interview, 2025)

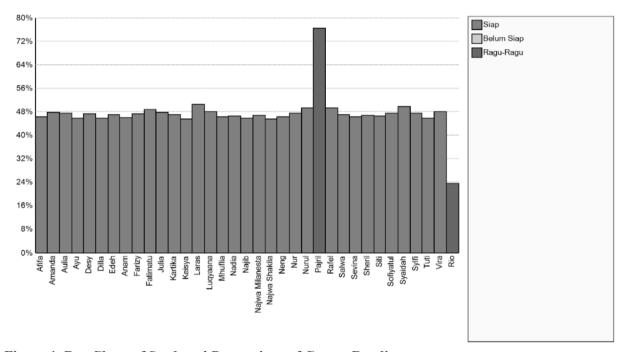


Figure 1. Bar Chart of Students' Perceptions of Career Readiness

These self-assessments reveal a generally positive outlook among students regarding their ability to manage post-school transitions. Students express confidence, which is a crucial indicator of career adaptability and resilience.

The positive perceptions found in this study align with the Career Construction Theory (CCT) by Savickas (2013), which emphasizes the role of self-narrative in constructing a career identity and adapting to changing environments. Career readiness is not merely about technical skill acquisition but also involves psychological preparedness, as highlighted in recent studies (Koen et al., 2012; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Lent et al., 2000). International literature corroborates that students' self-perceptions of readiness are highly predictive of actual transition success (Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Nota et al., 2013). Furthermore, career education programs that integrate both cognitive and affective domains have been shown to improve self-efficacy and readiness among vocational students (Bimrose & Barnes, 2010; Gore et al., 2015).

These findings underscore the effectiveness of school-based career readiness programs and industry partnerships, such as the Mitsubishi School Program, in enhancing student self-confidence. Self-perceived readiness is a strong predictor of positive school-to-work transitions and can mediate anxiety related to career uncertainty (Koen et al., 2012; Fugate et al., 2004). The implication is that vocational schools should continue to integrate experiential and reflective components into career guidance, as these shape both attitudes and practical outcomes.

Factors Influencing Students' Career Readiness

The analysis using NVivo Word Cloud and Cluster Analysis (see Figures 2 and 3) reveals the most dominant factors influencing students' perceptions of career readiness. Key terms include "motivation," "experience," "PKL/internship," "support," "psychological tests," and "guidance and counseling teacher." These themes reflect both internal and external contributors to students' sense of preparedness.



Figure 2. Word Cloud of Factors Influencing Career Readiness

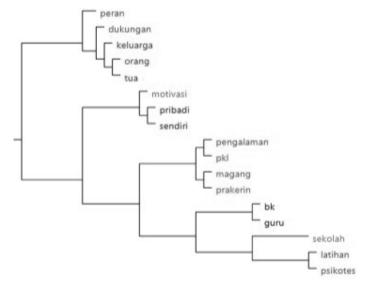


Figure 3. Cluster Analysis of Interrelated Factors

Students attribute their readiness to:

- Personal motivation and self-confidence
- Support from parents, teachers, and the school
- Practical experience through internships (PKL)
- Guidance and counseling services
- Exposure to psychological test exercises

This is further illustrated by student statements:

"Personal motivation, support from parents, and experience during internship." (Tuti, Questionnaire, 2025)

"Internship experience, psychological test practice, the role of guidance and counseling teachers, and personal motivation." (Zahra, Questionnaire, 2025)

These findings are consistent with Donald Super's Career Development Theory, which asserts that career readiness is shaped by self-perception, learning experiences, and the environment (Super, 1980; Savickas, 2013). Internal factors such as motivation are widely recognized as primary drivers of adaptive career behavior (Lent et al., 2000; Bandura, 1978; Koen et al., 2012). Internationally, studies confirm the importance of both intrinsic (motivation, self-efficacy) and extrinsic (social support, internship experience) influences (Hirschi, 2011; Nota et al., 2013; Creed et al., 2020). The role of guidance and counseling is highlighted in multiple studies as being central to career decision-making and transitions (Bimrose & Barnes, 2010; Gore et al., 2015). Internships are particularly impactful, providing students with direct exposure to the realities of work and opportunities to develop practical skills (Smith et al., 2009; Jackson & Wilton, 2016).

Understanding the dynamic interplay between internal and external factors is essential for designing comprehensive career guidance interventions. These findings reinforce the value of integrated support systems involving families, schools, and industry partners. Schools must recognize the critical role of psychological support (including test training) in fostering student resilience and adaptability—a conclusion echoed in global best practices for vocational education (Lent et al., 2000; Koen et al., 2012; Creed et al., 2020).

The Role of Psychometric Testing in Career Readiness

NVivo Project Map visualization (see Figure 4) demonstrates that a substantial majority of students (33 out of 36) believe that psychological test exercises help them better understand their strengths and weaknesses. Only a small minority (3 students) indicated that these exercises did not significantly affect their self-perception or preparedness.

Observational data support these findings. During the TIU 5 psychological test practice, students generally arrived on time, prepared necessary materials, and engaged actively. However, being their first experience, several required additional explanations, and some showed confusion or time management difficulties. Notably, most students expressed interest in repeating the experience and provided constructive feedback—such as requests for clearer visuals and longer test duration. Selected student comments include:

"Yes, psychological test practice can help you understand your own strengths and weaknesses." (Ayu, Questionnaire, 2025)

"I don't think so because I don't fully understand the psychological test exercises." (Sofiyatul, Questionnaire, 2025)

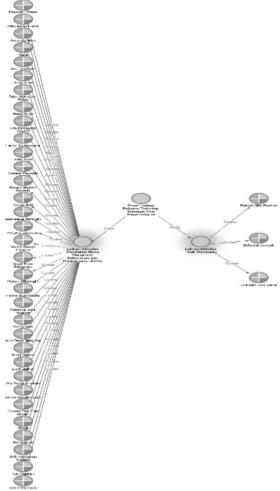


Figure 4. Project Map: Impact of Psychometric Testing on Student Self-Awareness

Comparison with Literature

These findings are in strong agreement with research on the formative and reflective functions of psychological assessment in career development (Savickas, 2013; Bandura, 1978; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Psychological tests are widely recognized as effective tools for promoting self-exploration and self-efficacy, both of which are central to successful career planning (Spokane et al., 2002; Hirschi, 2011; Datu, 2014). International literature points to the value of standardized assessments in supporting career guidance—helping students clarify personal strengths, interests, and fit with various career paths (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Akkermans et al., 2018). Meta-analyses further reveal that career interventions incorporating psychological test feedback are associated with increased confidence, self-knowledge, and adaptive job-seeking behaviors (Whiston et al., 2017; Koen et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020).

The strong positive response to psychological test exercises highlights the need to make such practices a regular feature of vocational education. These exercises function not just as selection tools, but as mechanisms for self-assessment and skill development, especially for students with limited prior exposure (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Given the global trend toward competency-based and student-centered vocational training, the integration of reflective assessments aligns with best practice and maximizes student agency and employability (Jackson & Wilton, 2016; Akkermans et al., 2018).

The Relevance of Psychometric Testing to Career Readiness

Connection Map visualization using NVivo (see Figure 5) shows that most grade XI students consider psychological tests to be highly relevant or very relevant to their future job search or continued studies. Only one student expressed uncertainty. Word Cloud analysis further highlights "important" and "very helpful" as dominant terms, signifying widespread recognition of the value of such training.

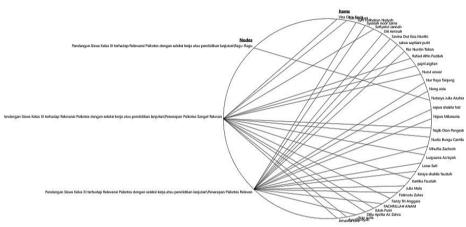


Figure 5. Connection Map: Perceived Relevance of Psychometric Testing to Career Readiness



Figure 6. Word Cloud: Keywords for Psychometric Testing Relevance

Students' qualitative responses support this conclusion:

"It is important to know one's strengths and weaknesses." (Fatimatu, Questionnaire, 2025) "Maybe yes." (Natasya, Questionnaire, 2025)

This finding directly supports the assertions of Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2000) and is reflected in recent empirical work showing that students who view assessment as relevant are more motivated, perform better, and are more likely to engage in adaptive career behaviors (Savickas, 2013; Datu, 2014; Wang et al., 2020). International research underscores that career assessment activities, when perceived as meaningful and aligned with students' interests, drive engagement and readiness (Nota et al., 2013; Akkermans et al., 2018; Hirschi, 2011). Furthermore, at the age range of 15-24 (the "exploration stage" in Super's Life-Span Theory), structured assessments are especially valuable for helping students make informed decisions (Super, 1980; Patton & McMahon, 2014).

These results confirm the strategic value of embedding psychometric test exercises in vocational guidance. When students perceive these activities as relevant, they not only gain technical competence but also build psychological readiness—both of which are essential in a rapidly changing labor market (Koen et al., 2012; Creed et al., 2020). The evidence suggests that early and repeated exposure to such assessments can help mitigate the shock of transition from school to work or higher education, reducing anxiety and increasing self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2020; Whiston et al., 2017).

Synthesis, Implications, and Recommendations

The combined results indicate that grade XI students of SMK Garuda Nusantara generally perceive themselves as career-ready, a perception shaped by both internal factors (motivation, self-confidence, personal experience) and external factors (internship, parental/teacher support, psychological test training). Psychological test exercises, especially the TIU 5, play a critical reflective and formative role, helping students assess their own strengths, weaknesses, and potential for growth. Most students view these exercises as directly relevant to their impending career and educational pathways.

The patterns found in this study are reinforced by a broad international literature, which recognizes that holistic career guidance—including psychometric testing, motivational enhancement, experiential learning, and supportive relationships—yields the strongest outcomes in terms of student confidence, adaptability, and successful transitions (Bimrose & Barnes, 2010; Whiston et al., 2017; Gore et al., 2015; Creed et al., 2020; Akkermans et al., 2018). Recent studies by Akkermans et al. (2018) and Creed et al. (2020) confirm that self-awareness and practical assessment feedback are critical for youth entering volatile job markets, and that such interventions are especially beneficial for students from less privileged backgrounds or those with limited social capital.

From a theoretical perspective, the study affirms the continuing relevance of Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2000), Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), and Super's Life-Span Theory in contemporary vocational education settings. These frameworks explain how self-efficacy, reflective practices, and exploration processes underpin career adaptability—a finding now well-evidenced in both Western and Asian contexts (Nota et al., 2013; Koen et al., 2012). Practically, the research demonstrates the necessity of integrating psychometric test exercises not merely as assessment tools but as developmental experiences that foster student engagement, reflection, and agency. It recommends that schools formalize such exercises within their career guidance programs and provide sustained support to ensure equitable access and positive psychological outcomes.

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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