

CAREER READINESS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the differences in career readiness between male and female students at the high school level, with a focus on cognitive strategies, knowledge of career content, and contextual skills and awareness. This study uses a quantitative method with a survey design and involves 300 high school students in D.I. Yogyakarta who are selected through convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected using the Conley theory-based Career Readiness Scale, which has been tested with the RASCH model, and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of the analysis show that female students have higher career readiness than male students. Significant differences were found in cognitive strategy, knowledge of career content, and contextual skills and awareness, while there were no meaningful differences in academic behavior. These findings underscore the importance of a gender-tailored approach to career guidance and counseling services in schools.

Keywords: career readiness, gender, high school, guidance and counseling

INTRODUCTION

The opportunity to advance through the demographic bonus can be owned by Indonesia, which is characterized by a larger number of productive age population compared to the non-productive age population in the 2025-2035 period. Therefore, superior, competitive, innovative, and adaptive human resources are needed by Indonesia to face the era of globalization, digitalization, and industrial revolution 4.0. In reality, although in 2024 Indonesia's Open Unemployment Rate will decrease, the half-unemployment rate will increase, and full-time

workers will decrease (BPS, 2024). During January-May 2024, there have been 27.22 thousand victims of layoffs in Indonesia (Kemnaker, 2024), people's purchasing power has decreased (BPS, 2024). One way to prepare quality human resources is through higher education, which is considered to have an important and strategic role in realizing a Golden Indonesia by 2045.

Adolescence is a crucial period for vocational preparation for future career development. This stage has important implications for well-being and self-adjustment (Skorikov, 2007; Barrera, 2019; Al

Hendawi, 2022), and has a significant influence on career development and achievement throughout life (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006; Negru-Subtirica, 2016; Sugiyarlin, 2020). One of the core components of adolescent career preparation is the achievement of readiness for mature career choices, which can be defined as a person's readiness and ability to achieve mature career decisions (Phillips & Blustein, 1994; Borges, et al, 2007; Rasyidi, 2021). Career readiness encompasses multiple dimensions, including self-awareness (Özek, 2018; Lau, 2020), goal setting (Strauser, 2018; Kenny, 2024), decision-making (Kulcsár, 2020; Azhenov, 2023), as well as the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge (Moore, 2017; Falco, 2018). Ideally, schools should provide a comprehensive and inclusive career guidance program, as well as a learning environment that supports the development of all students' career potential regardless of gender (Kelly, 1990; Qian, 2018). However, the reality in Indonesia, Guidance and Counseling services are not included in the curriculum, so there is no good system support for BK teachers to enter classes to provide services, this has an impact on the emergence of a significant gap in career readiness between male and female high school students (Tzu-Ling, 2019; Card, 2021).

Brown and Lent (2016) state that "Educational and career resources are often given differently to children and adolescents, depending on the response of key social agents to their gender." Research by several figures shows that female students often face greater barriers to accessing career information and self-development opportunities compared to male students (Vokic, 2019). Factors such as social norms (Jayachandran, 2020), gender stereotypes (Heilman, 2012), and family expectations (Fan, 2014) often affect the way students view and prepare for their careers. Female students may feel less confident in making career decisions (Betz, 1981; Carlin, 2018) or lack of support to explore career fields (Francis, 2020; Mozahem, 2019) which is considered more suitable for men. This

difference creates a gap that affects the overall career readiness of students.

Some researchers concluded that men showed better performance in aspects of career readiness, such as self-efficacy in career decision-making and confidence in abilities (Jiang, 2014; Makki, 2015). However, researchers found that women outperformed men in terms of career readiness when they were at the same level of education (Connerley, 2008; Wright, 2016; Freeman, 2023; Reyes, 2023). Stringer and Kerpelman (2010) found that women scored higher on "identification with career identity commitment", meaning women were more likely to commit to their chosen career and begin to identify with it. Other researchers found that women have a higher chance of succeeding academically (Vellen, 2022). Creed (2003) and Rong (2018) observed that female students rate themselves higher on measures of career maturity. However, other experts conclude otherwise, Some researchers have found no gender differences (Choi et al., 2012). Luzzo & McWhirter (2001), and Rajakumar (2023) state that male and female students in their studies have the same confidence that they can overcome obstacles in their chosen careers.

Career readiness refers to an individual's readiness to be involved in the career decision-making process and make career decisions maturely (Hirschi and Läge, 2007). Career readiness helps the younger generation set career goals, plan career paths, improve professional skills and knowledge and follow the prescribed path (Gates et al., 2018). For high school students in Indonesia, career readiness is an important step in the transition from high school to university (Astuti, 2019; Miskatuzzahra, 2023). Conley (2010) states that success refers to the completion of all levels of education with a level of understanding and proficiency that allows students to be able to consider it in taking further education or the level of further education that is appropriate to their field. There are four dimensions that affect an individual's career readiness, the four basic dimensions are cognitive strategies (*key cognitive strategies*), content knowledge

(*key content knowledge*), academic behavior (*academic behavior*), and *contextual skills and awareness* (Conley, 2014).

This study aims to explore and compare the career readiness of male and female high school students in Yogyakarta, as well as identify the factors that contribute to this gap. By investigating various aspects of career readiness, including self-efficacy in career decision-making, career exploration behavior, and the influence of external factors, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of this disparity and offer practical recommendations for overcoming it.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses quantitative research with a survey design. The subject of the study was 300 high school students in D.I. Yogyakarta with details of 150 male students and 150 female students, with the sampling technique used, namely the convenience sampling technique. The instrument used is the Career Readiness Scale for High School Students which was developed based on Conley's career readiness theory and has been tested for validity and reliability with the RASCH model. The data analysis technique in this quantitative research uses descriptive statistics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the research respondents, Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of differences in career readiness of high school students in D.I. Yogyakarta.

Table 1
Characteristics of Research Respondents.

	Sum	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Man	150	50%
Woman	150	50%
Age		
14	5	2%
15	151	50%
16	144	48%
Parents' Work		
ASN	38	13%
Teachers and Lecturers	18	6%

TNI-Polri	18	6%
Medical Personnel	2	1%
Professional	7	2%
Employee	68	23%
Self employed	113	38%
Pension	4	1%
Farmers, Workers	32	11%
Regional Origin		
Yogyakarta City	62	21%
Gunungkidul	82	27%
Sleman	65	22%
Bantul	67	22%
Kulonprogo	24	8%

The demographic characteristics of the study participants provide important insights into their career readiness. With a balanced gender distribution (50% male and 50% female), this study can representatively explore differences and similarities in career readiness from a gender perspective. The age of the majority of participants (98% aged 15 and 16) indicated that they were at a critical period in career development. According to Flouri (2002) and Hirschi (2011), adolescence is an important time to explore interests, talents, and values that will influence future career choices. Career readiness development programs should be focused on developing career exploration and decision-making skills based on deep self-understanding.

The work background of the parents also plays an important role in the career readiness of the participants. Most parents work as self-employed (38%) and employees (23%), which can provide participants with a variety of perspectives and work experience. Parents who work as self-employed may encourage an entrepreneurial attitude and independence, while parents who work as employees may emphasize the importance of stability and career advancement in a more structured work environment (Brown & Lent, 2019). In addition, the distribution of participants' regional origins showed significant variations, with participants coming from various regions in Yogyakarta. This variation suggests that career readiness development programs should take into account the contextual and cultural

differences of each region (Patton & McMahon, 2021). Overall, a comprehensive and inclusive approach is needed in developing career readiness programs for adolescents, taking into account the backgrounds and needs of participants, and leveraging family and community support in the career decision-making process.

Table 2
Results of Career Readiness Analysis of High School Students.

	Group	N	Average	Mr	Description
Gender	Man	150	142,89	0.001	There is a significant difference
	Woman	150	171,51		
Aspects					
Cognitive Strategy	Man	150	62,69	0.001	There is a significant difference
	Woman	150	67,56		
Content Knowledge	Man	150	45,32	0.001	There is a significant difference
	Woman	150	48,73		
Academic Behavior	Man	150	26,56	0.179	No Difference
	Woman	150	27,60		
Contextual skills and awareness	Man	150	21,19	0.000	There is a significant difference
	Woman	150	23,44		

The results of this study revealed significant differences in various aspects of career readiness between male and female students at the high school level, with the average score of female students' career readiness higher compared to male students. Based on the data, male students (N=150) have a mean value of 142.89, while female students (N=150) have a mean value of 171.51, with a significance value (p) of 0.001. This difference can be explained through several theoretical approaches. According to the cognitive social theory of career development put forward by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994; 2016), an individual's perception of self-efficacy and expectation of results plays an important role in career development. This study may reflect that female students have a higher perception of self-efficacy and more positive expectations of outcomes in the context of career readiness than male students (Saunders, 2004; Adams, 2019; Mulhem, 2023). Factors such as social support and learning experiences can

influence self-confidence and career decision-making. Social support from family and environment may be greater in female students, giving them more confidence in planning future careers (Garcia, 2012; Wasif, 2020; Angeline, 2021).

The breakdown of differences in each aspect of career readiness further showed that cognitive strategies, which included ways of approaching and problem-solving, had an average score of 62.69 for males and 67.56 for females (p = 0.001). This difference indicates that women tend to be more structured and meticulous in their approach to problem-solving (Stoet, 2013, Hyde, 2014) and use elaborative strategies more often than men who are more likely to use repetitive strategies (Waters, 1991; Mayers & Massa, 2003). In terms of knowledge content including information on various career paths, educational requirements, and job prospects relevant to the career, the average score was 45.32 for males and 48.73 for females (p = 0.001), reflecting that women were more active in seeking career-related information and more involved in career exploration activities (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Olsen & LaGree, 2023). Contextual skills and awareness, including the ability to understand and navigate dynamic and complex work environments, also showed significant differences, with average scores of 21.19 for males and 23.44 for females (p = 0.000), which could be linked to greater hands-on experience and social support in female students (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Wasif, 2020; Angeline, 2021). However, there was no significant difference in academic behavior between the two gender groups (p = 0.179), suggesting that academic behaviors such as perseverance and engagement in learning tended to be similar between male and female students (Kamphorst et al, 2015; Duckworth & Seligman, 2006).

The practical implications of the results of this study in guidance and counseling services are very important, especially in designing programs that are responsive to gender differences in students' career readiness. Given that female students demonstrate higher career readiness in

cognitive strategies, career content knowledge, and contextual skills and awareness, school counselors need to develop interventions that can help male students improve in those areas. Career guidance programs should include activities that can strengthen male students' cognitive strategies and problem-solving, such as workshops and simulations that emphasize the development of analytical and critical skills. In addition, it is important to provide male students with greater access to career information resources and career exploration opportunities, for example through more intensive mentoring and mentoring sessions. Stronger social support needs to be facilitated for male students so that they feel more supported in the career development process. In particular, male students tend to need more explicit social support from their parents, given the various factors that influence their perception of such support. Factors such as differences in gender socialization, cultural expectations, and the way men internalize social support can contribute to this need. Therefore, parents need to provide more concrete encouragement, for example through more open career discussions, increased exposure to various career choices, and active involvement in boys' career decision-making. Meanwhile, for female students, career support programs can be focused on further strengthening the skills they have developed and helping them plan for a more confident transition to the workforce. In this case, parental support plays a role in validating girls' competencies, providing access to early work experience, and providing guidance in facing challenges in the world of work. Thus, the social support provided by parents can be an important factor in building students' career readiness, both male and female, according to their specific needs.

Thus, guidance and counseling services tailored to the specific needs of each gender will be more effective in preparing all students to face future career challenges.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study revealed significant differences in career readiness between male and female students at the high school level, with female students showing higher readiness in cognitive strategies, knowledge of career content, and contextual skills and awareness. Although there was no significant difference in academic behavior between the two gender groups, these findings emphasized the importance of a gender-tailored approach in career development programs in schools. Interventions focused on improving cognitive strategies and social support for male students, as well as strengthening already good skills in female students, would be particularly beneficial. As such, guidance and counseling services that are responsive to gender differences can help prepare all students to face future career challenges more effectively.

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