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Analysis of the Implementation of Life Skills as an Effort to Enhance Students' Career Exploration Readiness

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the phenomenon of low career exploration maturity among santri (Islamic boarding school students), which tends to be limited to traditional religious roles. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of life skill implementation in increasing the career exploration readiness of santri. The method used is a quantitative quasi-experimental approach with a non-equivalent control group design. The research subjects consisted of 60 santri divided into an experimental group and a control group. The data collection instrument utilized the Career Exploration Readiness Scale, which has been tested for validity and reliability. Data analysis was performed using the independent sample t-test. The results showed a significant increase in the average career exploration readiness score in the experimental group after the life skill intervention. The hypothesis test yielded a significance value (2-tailed) of 0.000 < 0.05, indicating that the life skill program effectively improves the students' ability to seek career information, recognize self-potential, and plan for the future. The implications of this study suggest the importance of integrating a life skills curriculum in pesantren to produce graduates who are adaptive to the dynamics of the modern world of work.

Keywords: career guidance; life skills; career exploration; santri; pesantren

Introduction

Entering the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0, the dynamics of the world of work have undergone a radical transformation that requires individuals to be prepared from an early stage. These changes demand that individuals develop adaptive career readiness early in life, not only in the form of technical skills but also in the ability to understand their personal potential and the opportunities available

in their environment. Career exploration is no longer merely about choosing a job; rather, it is a complex process of recognizing personal potential and environmental opportunities. According to Savickas (2012), in the career construction theory, individuals need to possess high adaptability to respond to the uncertainty of the ever-changing global labor market.

In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) represent one of the oldest educational institutions that have made significant contributions to character formation and human resource development. Pesantren function not only as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also as spaces for shaping values, morality, and the independence of students (santri). However, a major challenge that often emerges is the dichotomy between religious knowledge and the professional demands of the external world. Santri frequently encounter obstacles in exploring broader career options beyond traditional religious roles (Hidayat, 2021).

In modern career development studies, career exploration is viewed as an important process that enables individuals to understand their potential, interests, and opportunities available within the work environment. Research indicates that career exploration involves two main dimensions, namely self-exploration and environmental exploration, which together help individuals develop clearer career directions (Jiang et al., 2019). During adolescence and early adulthood, career exploration activities play a crucial role in shaping future educational and occupational aspirations and influence individuals' educational attainment in later stages of life (Beal & Crockett, 2010). Furthermore, individuals' involvement in career exploration activities is closely related to the formation of a more mature career identity and the ability to make more realistic career decisions (Sturges et al., 2019; Porfeli & Lee, 2012).

Career exploration represents an important stage in individual career development. During adolescence, individuals begin to develop awareness of their interests, values, and abilities through various exploratory activities. Super states that career maturity in adolescence is characterized by the individual's ability to engage in purposeful career exploration through information seeking, role experimentation, and continuous self-evaluation (Super, 1990). Without adequate exploration, santri are at risk of experiencing career stagnation or mismatched interests after graduating from pesantren.

Various studies also emphasize that the success of the career exploration process is influenced by psychological factors and the social environment. Self-efficacy, social support, and individuals' engagement in the learning process are

important factors that encourage individuals to actively seek information about available career opportunities (Fan et al., 2012; Lent et al., 2016). In the educational context, structured career education programs have been proven to improve career development competencies, confidence in decision-making, and students' readiness to face the transition to the world of work (Reese & Miller, 2006; Kim & Lee, 2023). Moreover, recent research shows that participation in career education programs can strengthen career adaptability and students' learning engagement, which ultimately contributes to improved academic self-efficacy and readiness to face future challenges (Chen & Zhang, 2023).

Within pesantren environments, the process of career exploration often faces structural limitations. The pesantren curriculum, which focuses on the study of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) and intensive religious activities, limits students' interaction with the realities of the modern labor market. Research by Arifin (2023) indicates that some pesantren graduates experience anxiety when entering the workforce due to limited access to career information and the lack of guidance services relevant to contemporary professional demands.

One approach that can be used to bridge the gap between pesantren education and labor market demands is the strengthening of life skills. Life skills serve as a solution to bridge the gap between the pesantren curriculum and the needs of the job market. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defines life skills as adaptive abilities and positive behaviors that enable individuals to effectively deal with the demands of everyday life. In the context of career development, life skills include critical thinking, decision-making, and effective communication.

The development of life skills plays an important role in preparing individuals for the future. Life skills education helps learners understand the relationship between the educational process they undergo and the career opportunities they may face in the future (Brolin, 2005). For santri, strengthening life skills can serve as an important asset to enhance independence, self-confidence, and the ability to adapt to various available career options.

Life skills provide a foundation for individuals to develop critical thinking abilities, decision-making skills, and interpersonal competencies necessary for planning their future careers. Research shows that students who possess adaptive competencies and strong social skills tend to demonstrate higher levels of career exploration and greater readiness to face the dynamic changes of the labor market (Chen et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating life skills development into career

guidance programs represents a strategic approach to help students build more comprehensive career readiness.

Santri who possess strong life skills tend to be more proactive in seeking opportunities. Individuals' ability to manage themselves and interact with their social environment increases their confidence in exploring various career fields. As emphasized by Goleman (2015), emotional and social competencies constitute a fundamental foundation for successful career navigation.

Despite the widely recognized importance of life skills development in educational and counseling literature, the implementation of career guidance programs in pesantren environments remains relatively limited to the provision of general career information. Existing programs are often ceremonial in nature and are not yet integrated with systematic life skills training that encourages active student involvement in the career exploration process. This condition indicates the need to develop more contextual and practical career guidance models that align with the characteristics of the pesantren environment.

Based on these conditions, this study seeks to examine how the implementation of life-skills-based career guidance programs can enhance the career exploration readiness of santri. The study focuses on the process of internalizing values of independence, decision-making ability, and perseverance as psychological capital for planning their future careers. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of a more relevant career guidance model for pesantren environments.

Specifically, this study aims to analyze the extent to which the implementation of life skills influences the career exploration readiness of santri. The results of this research are expected to serve as a basis for developing career guidance programs in pesantren that not only strengthen students' Islamic identity but also enhance their competitiveness in facing the dynamics of the global labor market.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental method with a non-equivalent control group design. This design was chosen to examine the effectiveness of life-skills-based guidance implementation in improving santri's career exploration readiness by comparing a group receiving the treatment with a group that did not receive the treatment. The quantitative approach was used

to examine relationships among variables objectively through statistical analysis, allowing the researcher to test hypotheses empirically (Creswell, 2014).

The population of this study consisted of all santri at Annasuchiyah Islamic Boarding School in Kudus. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling, namely students who were at the secondary education level and in the stage of planning their future careers. The sample was then divided into two groups: an experimental group that received life-skills-based career guidance intervention and a control group that received conventional career guidance services. This design enabled the researcher to compare changes in career exploration readiness before and after the treatment was administered.

Data were collected using the Career Exploration Readiness Scale developed based on indicators from the Career Maturity Inventory (CMI) developed by Savickas and Porfeli (2012). The scale employed a Likert model with several response alternatives that reflected respondents' level of agreement with the statements provided. This instrument measured several main dimensions of career exploration, including self-knowledge, career information seeking, and career goal setting.

Prior to its use in the study, the instrument was tested to determine its validity and reliability. The validity test was conducted to ensure that each item was capable of measuring the intended construct, while the reliability test was performed to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability of the scale was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, in which the instrument was considered reliable if the coefficient value met the established statistical criteria.

The collected data were analyzed using the independent sample t-test statistical technique with the assistance of SPSS software. This analysis aimed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment was administered. Before conducting hypothesis testing, prerequisite analyses including normality and homogeneity tests were carried out to ensure that the data met the assumptions of normal distribution and homogeneous variance. The t-test was used to compare the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether the differences observed were caused by the treatment provided (Pallant, 2020). The results of this analysis indicate the extent to which life-skills-based guidance is effective in improving the career exploration readiness of santri compared to conventional career guidance services.

Results

This study involved 60 santri as respondents who were divided into two groups: 30 santri in the experimental group and 30 santri in the control group. The research participants were predominantly final-year students (Grade XII) aged between 17 and 19 years. The selection of these participants was based on the consideration that this phase represents an important transition period from secondary education to higher education or the workforce, making career exploration readiness a highly relevant issue to examine.

Prior to the intervention in the form of the life skills program, both groups participated in a pre-test to measure the initial level of career exploration readiness. The results of the pre-test indicated that the average score of students' career exploration readiness fell within the low to moderate category. This finding suggests that most santri did not yet possess a clear understanding of systematic steps in exploring career options.

The experimental group was subsequently provided with a life-skills-based career guidance program consisting of eight sessions. The materials included self-awareness development, decision-making skills, interpersonal communication, and digital-based career information searching techniques. The activities were conducted using group discussions, simulations, and career information exploration assignments.

After the intervention was completed, a post-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups. The comparison of the average scores of career exploration readiness between the experimental and control groups before and after the intervention is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Career Exploration Readiness

Group	Stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Eksperimen	Pre-test	30	62.45	5.12	Low
	Post-test	30	88.90	4.35	High
Kontrol	Pre-test	30	61.80	5.30	Low
	Post-test	30	63.17	4.80	Low

The data indicate a significant increase in scores in the experimental group, where the average score shifted from the "Low" category to the "High" category. Respondents demonstrated notable improvement particularly in the indicators of career information seeking and independence in determining professional choices.

Meanwhile, in the control group, which only received conventional guidance (one-way lecture), the post-test results did not show any meaningful change. The average score in this group remained within the "Low" category, indicating that without an active and life-skills-based approach, students' career readiness tends to remain stagnant.

Before conducting hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests were performed. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test showed a p-value greater than 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed. Similarly, the Levene test showed that the data were homogeneous, allowing parametric statistical analysis using the t-test to be conducted. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Paired Sample t-test Results for the Experimental Group

Variabel	Tahap	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Career Exploration Readiness	Pre-test	62.45	-15.432	29	**0.000**
	Post-test	88.90			

The paired sample t-test results for the experimental group showed a significance value (2-tailed) of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This result indicates a highly significant difference in the level of career exploration readiness of santri before and after receiving the life-skills-based guidance program.

Furthermore, the difference test between the experimental and control groups produced a calculated t-value greater than the t-table value. This finding confirms that the improvement observed in the experimental group did not occur by chance but was a direct result of the implementation of the life skills program. A more detailed description of the improvement in each indicator of career exploration readiness is presented in Table 3 to identify which aspects experienced the greatest development.

Table 3. Indicator Score Achievement in the Experimental Group

No	Readiness Indicator	Pre-test Score (%)	Post-test Score (%)	Improvement (%)
1	Self-Awareness	58%	84%	26%
2	Career Information Seeking	42%	87%	45%
3	Future Career Planning	55%	82%	27%
4	Decision-Making Independence	60%	85%	25%

In detail, the indicator career information seeking showed the highest increase, reaching 45%. Santri became more proficient in using digital career platforms and conducting informational interviews with alumni. The self-awareness indicator also showed improvement, reflected in students' ability to objectively identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of students' career exploration readiness. The group that received the life-skills-based career guidance intervention showed a higher increase in scores compared to the group that only received conventional guidance. This finding suggests that the development of life skills can make a meaningful contribution to individuals' readiness to understand their personal potential, explore career information, and determine future directions more systematically. Theoretically, career exploration readiness is part of career development associated with an individual's ability to recognize personal potential, understand labor market information, and plan for the future realistically.

These findings are consistent with the concept of career development proposed by Mark L. Savickas and Erik J. Porfeli (2012), which explains that career readiness is influenced by an individual's ability to integrate self-knowledge with available career information. Individuals with higher career readiness tend to be more active in exploring various professional possibilities and more confident in making career decisions. The life skills guidance program implemented in this study provided students with opportunities to develop self-reflection skills, problem-solving abilities, and decision-making competencies, all of which play an important role in the career exploration process.

Furthermore, the findings of this study support the research of Annamaria Di Fabio (2016), which states that the development of life skills and career adaptability has a significant relationship with individuals' readiness to face the dynamic nature of the labor market. Individuals who possess strong life skills are generally better able to manage career uncertainty and are more open to exploring available opportunities. In the context of Islamic boarding school education, the integration of life skills development with spiritual values can serve as an effective approach in preparing students to face social and professional challenges in the future.

The improvement in students' career exploration readiness demonstrated in this study confirms that life skills constitute an essential component of modern

career guidance. Life skills provide students with tools to process raw information into well-considered decisions. In line with the view of Brolin (2005), life skills education helps individuals connect what they learn in educational institutions with the realities of the labor market.

Traditionally, many santri have felt inferior when facing the broader job market. The life skills program, particularly through self-awareness sessions, successfully increased their self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), high self-confidence encourages individuals to undertake challenging tasks, including exploring diverse and demanding career options. One of the key points highlighted in this discussion is the behavioral shift observed among the santri. Previously, students tended to rely solely on directions from religious teachers (kiai or ustadz), but through decision-making training, they began to take greater responsibility for their own life choices. This represents a concrete form of career independence, which is a primary goal of guidance and counseling. Khafidhoh (2022) notes that santri often encounter difficulties in making career decisions, which can be minimized when they possess adequate information related to career opportunities.

This study also reinforces the findings of Fred W. Vondracek (2001), who emphasized that educational environments play an important role in facilitating adolescent career development through structured guidance programs. Educational institutions that provide systematic career guidance services can help students develop a broader understanding of the world of work and improve their readiness to plan for the future. In this study, the life skills guidance program functioned as an experiential learning platform that enabled students to develop self-awareness, social skills, and a clearer future orientation.

Nevertheless, the results of this study should be interpreted critically. One aspect that needs to be considered is that the improvement in students' career exploration readiness may not be solely influenced by the life skills intervention. Other factors, such as the support of the pesantren environment, the role of teachers or religious mentors, and students' family backgrounds, may also contribute to the development of career readiness. These factors may have influenced the results of the intervention; therefore, the findings of this study should be understood within the broader educational dynamics of the pesantren context.

These findings also strengthen the Career Construction Theory proposed by Savickas (2012), which emphasizes the importance of career adaptability. Students who were equipped with life skills demonstrated better adaptability when confronted with diverse career information. They were no longer confused by the wide range of available options but were able to filter choices that aligned with their

values as santri. The substantial increase in the information-seeking indicator indicates that students' career literacy has improved. In the digital era, the ability to distinguish between valid information and misinformation regarding job vacancies or scholarship opportunities is an essential life skill, particularly critical thinking. This competence is crucial for santri to avoid unrealistic career choices.

The discussion also highlights that the disciplined environment of the pesantren served as a foundational factor contributing to the success of the program. The strong discipline among santri facilitated the internalization of life skills more rapidly compared to the general adolescent population. Values such as *barakah* (blessing) and *ikhlas* (sincerity) in work became unique intrinsic motivations in their career exploration process. The maturity of career exploration is closely related to the quality of decision-making. Students who participated in this program tended to demonstrate more thoughtful consideration rather than simply following trends or peer influence. They began to consider long-term prospects and the social contributions of the professions they intended to pursue.

The results observed in the control group demonstrate that lecture-based methods alone are insufficient. Career guidance in pesantren must move beyond merely providing information toward developing competencies. Without practical skill training, santri may continue to feel unfamiliar with the mechanisms of a competitive labor market. Theoretically, this study provides new evidence regarding the application of career guidance in religious educational environments. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for pesantren administrators to integrate life skills curricula into annual programs for final-year students as part of their preparation for graduation.

Despite its positive results, this study has several limitations, including the relatively short duration of the intervention. Future research is therefore recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to determine whether the improvement in career exploration readiness continues as students transition into employment or higher education.

In addition, the use of a quasi-experimental design also presents limitations in controlling all external variables that may influence the research outcomes. Within this design, the researcher cannot fully ensure that both groups possess completely equivalent initial characteristics. Although experimental and control groups were established, differences in individual characteristics may still have affected the results. Therefore, the interpretation of the findings should be conducted cautiously while considering the possibility of external influencing factors.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide important implications for the development of Islamic counseling services within pesantren environments. Guidance programs that integrate life skills approaches can serve as a strategic method to enhance students' career readiness. Counselors or guidance teachers in pesantren can develop services that not only focus on spiritual development but also emphasize life skills such as communication skills, decision-making abilities, self-management, and future planning. The integration of Islamic values with life skills development is expected to produce santri who possess both strong spiritual depth and readiness to face social challenges and the modern labor market.

Furthermore, Islamic counseling services in pesantren can develop career guidance approaches that incorporate religious values such as *ikhtiar* (effort), *tawakkal* (trust in God), and responsibility as integral parts of the career decision-making process. This approach can help students understand that career planning is not merely about choosing a profession but also about fulfilling life responsibilities in a meaningful and accountable way. Thus, Islamic counseling within pesantren has significant potential to develop a career guidance model that integrates psychological, spiritual, and moral dimensions.

The limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size and the fact that the research was conducted in only one pesantren. These conditions limit the generalizability of the findings to similar educational contexts. Additionally, this study focused only on measuring career exploration readiness within a specific period after the intervention, and therefore it cannot yet fully describe the long-term impact of the life skills guidance program on students' career development.

Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve a larger number of participants and include several pesantren with different characteristics to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Future research may also employ stronger experimental designs, such as true experimental designs, and develop longitudinal studies to examine students' career readiness development over a longer period. Further studies may also explore the integration of Islamic counseling approaches with modern career development theories to produce a more comprehensive and contextually relevant career guidance model for pesantren environments.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of life-skills-based career guidance significantly improves the career exploration readiness of santri (Islamic boarding school students). There

is a notable difference in the level of students' career maturity before and after the intervention was implemented. This finding demonstrates that an approach focused on the development of life skills is more effective than conventional guidance methods that rely primarily on one-way information delivery.

Life skill components such as self-awareness, decision-making ability, and information literacy have proven to be key factors that encourage students to move beyond their comfort zones. Santri no longer feel isolated from the world of work; instead, they possess both the mental and technical capacities to search for, process, and evaluate available career opportunities. The program successfully bridges the traditional values of pesantren education with the demands of modern professional life.

The most significant improvement was observed in the dimensions of information seeking and career planning. Students demonstrated greater proactiveness in utilizing digital technology for career research and showed increased confidence in mapping their future career paths. Overall, this guidance model provides a positive contribution to fostering students' independence in determining their life direction after graduating from the pesantren.

Pesantren institutions are therefore encouraged to integrate life skills materials into supplementary curricula or structured counseling programs. Considering the increasingly complex challenges of the modern labor market, the provision of soft skills for final-year students should not be conducted only incidentally but should become a regular program as part of alumni preparation to enhance their competitiveness.

Counselors and mentors in pesantren are also expected to develop more interactive and practical guidance media. The use of methods such as role-playing, job interview simulations, and industry visits can enrich students' career exploration experiences. In addition, counselors should continuously update their knowledge regarding labor market trends so that the guidance provided remains relevant to current societal needs.

This study is limited to measuring career exploration readiness at a single point in time (cross-sectional). Future researchers are therefore encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies to examine whether the improvement in exploration readiness is consistently associated with the long-term career success of santri. Furthermore, the development of more specific life skills modules tailored to different educational backgrounds within pesantren such as modules designed

specifically for tahfidz students or vocational-track students would also be an interesting area for further research.

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