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Integrating Career Orientation into High School Education: Preparing Students for Lifelong Success

Hangivola Emyblonde Ratna ^{1,*}, Muhammad Akbar ¹, Muliadi Mau ¹, and Ralaivao Hanginiaina Emynorane ²

¹Department of Communication Science, Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia

²Department of Management, University of Toliara, Toliara, Madagascar

* Email: ratnahe24e@ms.unhas.ac.id

Abstract

Integrating career orientation into high school education is a critical step in equipping students to make informed and purposeful decisions about their future. Considering the growing diversity of career opportunities and the increasing competitiveness of the global labor market, such programs play a key role in helping students understand professional pathways and the competencies required for success. This study investigates the benefits and impact of structured career orientation initiatives on students' decision-making processes at the high school level. Using documentation analysis, the study examined 32 documents consisting of research reports, educational policy documents, journal articles, school activity records, and relevant theoretical sources that met specific criteria of relevance, recency, and completeness. The analysis followed three stages, namely data reduction, categorization, and conclusion verification, allowing for a systematic interpretation of how career orientation programs function in various educational settings. The findings indicate that career orientation not only introduces students to diverse fields of work but also enables them to recognize their individual interests, talents, and necessary skills to achieve long-term goals. Additionally, the program strengthens students' confidence in selecting appropriate career paths and emphasizes the collaborative role of parents and teachers in offering consistent guidance and support. These findings also contribute to the achievement of SDG 4 through inclusive quality education, SDG 8 by supporting students' readiness for decent work, SDG 10 by reducing disparities in educational and career access, and SDG 17 through strengthened collaboration among schools, families, and stakeholders.

Keywords: Career Orientation; Students; Career Education

SDGs: Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

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INTRODUCTION

High school education plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic development and preparing them for life beyond the classroom (Emynorane, 2019). One critical component of this preparation is career orientation, which helps students explore their personal strengths, interests, and aspirations while understanding diverse opportunities in an evolving labor market. As Pan et al. (2022) explains that adolescents require structured support as they transition toward adulthood, highlighting the need for systematic career guidance during secondary education. The rapid expansion of career fields today, influenced by technological advancement and shifting global demands, makes it essential for schools to not only introduce students to various professions but also to help them develop the competencies needed to navigate these choices. Penn &

Lent (2019) emphasize that career decision-making must be grounded in students' developing sense of self-efficacy, while Stewart & Zediker (2000) state that students thrive when education allows them to interpret their experiences meaningfully. These perspectives underscore the importance of career orientation as more than a set of informational activities; it is a developmental process that equips students with the tools needed to plan their futures deliberately and confidently.

Many schools still struggle to implement career orientation in a coherent and sustained manner. Activities such as workshops, motivational talks, or career days are often conducted sporadically, with little connection to the broader curriculum. Rizana & Kristanti (2021) remark that short-term guidance activities rarely produce lasting effects on students' readiness, while Suryatni (2020) explains that fragmented exposure limits students' ability to form meaningful direction. Wang & Jiao (2023) also highlight that career readiness develops through repeated learning experiences rather than isolated events. These insights show that although students may receive some exposure to career-related information, they often lack the continuous support required to reflect on, evaluate, and align this information with their personal goals. As a result, many students form only preliminary and sometimes inaccurate understandings of the career pathways available to them.

In many school systems, particularly in developing contexts, academic achievement continues to dominate educational priorities, while long-term career development is treated as an optional or secondary concern. Although schools may recognize the importance of guiding students toward their future aspirations, they often lack structured frameworks to support this aim. As a result, students may receive information about careers but have limited opportunities for self-assessment or for connecting this information to their personal characteristics. Sugiyarto (2019) explains that career modules developed for systematic use can significantly increase clarity in students' planning, while Yanti (2021) highlights that effective preparation for future choices requires the involvement of teachers, families, and school counselors. Wang & Jiao (2023) also note that career development grows cumulatively and requires consistent support throughout adolescence. These insights indicate that career orientation should be introduced progressively across grade levels, with active participation from multiple stakeholders, and embedded within the broader educational experience.

Internationally, there is increasing emphasis on embedding career development into school systems as a continuous, long-term process rather than a one-off intervention. Countries with advanced guidance frameworks have shown that early exposure to diverse professions contributes to improved student motivation, better academic decisions, and smoother transitions into higher education or the workforce. Hidayat et al. (2022) found that early and consistent career exposure helps students recognize their strengths more effectively, and Barna & Mircea (2015) note that career counseling forms an important stage in shaping students' developing professional identities. Lent & Brown (2020) also highlight that career interventions are more effective when grounded in strong psychological principles that support long-term development. Local studies on career orientation are gradually increasing; however, many still focus on isolated activities or tools, which limit understanding of how different forms of guidance work together to influence students' readiness for future careers.

The challenges and opportunities of today's dynamic labor environment have led educational theorists to emphasize the importance of early and continuous career exploration. Super (1980) proposes that career development progresses through lifelong stages influenced by the individual's evolving self-concept, suggesting that adolescents require structured opportunities to explore and refine their emerging identities. Holland (1948) argues that students benefit when their personal tendencies align with appropriate work environments, indicating the value of helping students understand both their interests and potential career settings. Wilkinson (2011) adds that career preparedness develops through sustained learning experiences that gradually build confidence and competence. These theoretical insights highlight the importance of achieving career orientation as a deliberate and well-supported component of school education.

The influence of families and educators significantly shapes students' decisions during adolescence. Parents often play a central role in shaping students' perceptions of what career paths are possible or appropriate. Mattanah et al. (2011) demonstrates that parental relationships positively affect students' development and adjustment, and Pinquart (2023) reinforces that encouraging supportive home environments contributes to students' confidence in preparing for the future. Teachers also hold an important role because of their daily interactions with students. Sherlyanita & Rakhmawati (2016) explain that teachers' understanding of student strengths is critical for guiding educational and career choices, while Nice & Joseph (2023) note that adolescents benefit from supportive adults who can help them navigate transitions toward adulthood. These perspectives reaffirm the need for career orientation programs that involve not only students but also parents and teachers as essential partners in career guidance.

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The rapid changes occurring in the labor market create additional pressure on students as they choose educational pathways that align with emerging job demands. Without proper guidance, many young people make decisions based on limited knowledge, external expectations, or inaccurate assumptions about various professions. Sodiq & Herdi (2021) highlight that technology-based guidance tools can enhance career maturity by providing more accessible information and resources, and Emynorane et al. (2024) emphasize that collaboration among schools, families, and communities strengthens students' long-term developmental outcomes. Schaeffle (2018) also points out that early involvement in readiness programs builds confidence and reduces anxiety related to future decisions. The continually changing world of work requires students not only to understand available career options but also to develop adaptability, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and digital literacy, all of which can be supported through well-planned career orientation initiatives.

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Despite the growing body of literature on career orientation, there remains a limited understanding of how career orientation programs are implemented holistically within high school settings and how the combined roles of students, parents, teachers, and institutions interact to influence students' career decision-making readiness. A clear need emerges to examine how high schools implement career orientation and how these programs influence students' decision-making abilities. Many existing studies concentrate on specific methods or interventions, leaving limited evaluation of how guiding various efforts function collectively within school settings. Limited attention has also been given to the long-term structure of programs, the roles of stakeholders, and how these efforts align with students' developmental needs. Xie et al. (2025) point out that students' career self-efficacy grows through consistent reinforcement across multiple contexts, which indicates that schools need comprehensive and holistic approaches that support student growth continuously throughout adolescence.

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In response to this gap, this study aims to examine the role of career orientation in high school education and to analyze how structured career orientation programs contribute to students' academic and professional decision-making, while also considering the involvement of key stakeholders in supporting students' career development.

METHOD

This study uses documentation analysis, an approach that relies on the collection and examination of written documents or archives relevant to the research focus. The documents analyzed in this study include research reports on career orientation programs in schools, educational journal articles discussing career theory, activity reports from schools, and policy documents related to the implementation of career guidance. A total of 32 documents were used as data sources, selected based on the following criteria: (1) relevance to career orientation at the high school level, (2) publication between 2010 and 2024 to ensure contemporary relevance, (3) inclusion of empirical findings, policy perspectives, or program evaluations, and (4) accessibility in full-text format to allow comprehensive analysis. Documents that lacked methodological clarity, were incomplete, or addressed unrelated guidance topics were excluded.

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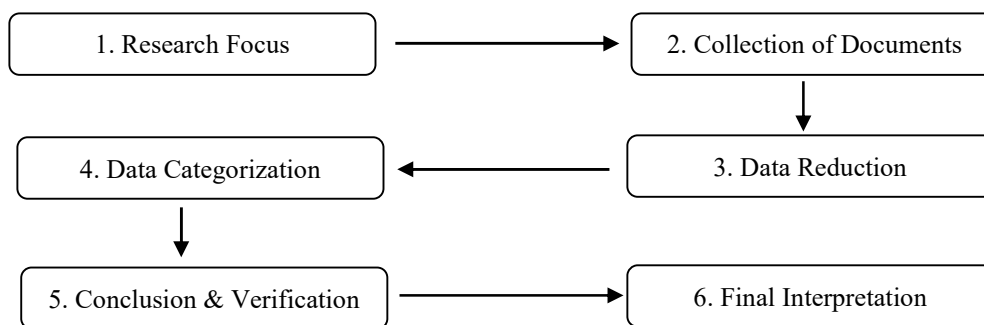


Figure 1. Research Procedure

After collecting all relevant documents, the next step was data analysis. The analysis followed three structured stages, namely data reduction, categorization, and conclusion verification. In the data reduction stage, all documents were reviewed to identify essential information related to career orientation implementation, program benefits, and challenges. Unrelated content was removed to ensure focus and clarity. The categorization stage involved organizing the reduced data into thematic groups, such as implementation strategies, stakeholder roles, student outcomes, and program limitations. This step ensured the identification of patterns and recurring issues within the collected documents. The final stage, conclusion verification,

consisted of cross-checking the categories findings across multiple sources to confirm the consistency, accuracy, and validity of the interpretations. This verification process aims to strengthen the reliability of the conclusions drawn from the data. To further clarify the procedures used in this study, Figure 1 outlines the stages of the document analysis process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal several interrelated dimensions of how career orientation contributes to students' academic and professional readiness. To present these findings clearly, the outcomes are organized in a thematic table (see Table 1) that highlights the main areas of impact, including interest and talent identification, skills development, educational pathway planning, self-confidence building, and the involvement of parents and teachers. In addition, the table outlines the broader contributions of career orientation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each thematic area is paired with specific recommendations directed at students, parents, teachers, and policymakers, ensuring that the findings are not only descriptive but also actionable in guiding future practice and policy.

Table 1. Integrating Career Orientation into High School Education

Focus Area	Findings	Implications/Recommendations
Identification of Interests & Talents	Career orientation helps students explore diverse professions and align personal interests with potential career paths (Hidayat et al., 2022).	Encourage schools to provide aptitude tests, mentoring, and exposure programs for self-discovery.
Skills & Competencies Development	Students gain awareness that career success requires both academic knowledge and soft skills such as leadership, problem-solving, and communication (Barna & Mircea, 2015; Iswatiningsih et al., 2021).	Schools should integrate skills-based workshops; policymakers should partner with industry for practical exposure.
Educational Pathway Planning	Programs guide students in aligning further education (university, vocational training, skill courses) with career goals (Pinquart, 2023; Pan et al., 2022).	Teachers should act as mentors linking academic subjects with real-world professions.
Increased Self-Confidence	Career orientation builds confidence by providing reliable information and professional interaction, reducing fear and anxiety in career decision-making (O'Brien et al., 2000; Yanti, 2021).	Schools should expand opportunities for students to meet professionals and conduct career field visits.
Parental Involvement	Support from parents enhances students' motivation and commitment to career goals (Emynorane et al., 2024).	Parents should actively participate in career discussions and collaborate with schools.
Teacher Involvement	Teachers serve as facilitators and mentors, linking classroom learning to workplace demands (Sherlyanita & Rakhmawati, 2016; Nice & Joseph, 2023).	Teacher training in career guidance should be institutionalized by policymakers.
Contribution to SDGs	Career orientation aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).	Policymakers should institutionalize career orientation in national curricula with industry partnerships.

Based on Table 1, career orientation in high school education shapes multiple dimensions of student development and preparedness for the future. Findings show that such programs enable students to identify their personal interests and talents while being introduced to a variety of career possibilities. Beyond self-awareness, students also gain a clearer understanding of the competencies demanded in the labor market, including both academic knowledge and soft skills such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving.

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This pattern in Table 1 indicates that exposure to career-related information equips students with a more comprehensive view of what is required to achieve long-term career success.

Table 1 further illustrates that career orientation supports students in mapping out appropriate educational pathways by linking future aspirations with study choices at university, vocational, or training levels. Another important outcome is the growth of self-confidence, which reduces anxiety and uncertainty in decision-making about careers and higher education. The role of parents and teachers is equally significant, as their involvement provides stronger guidance and encouragement. As reflected in Table 1, the broader societal dimension of career orientation also becomes evident through its alignment with Sustainable Development Goals focused on quality education, decent work, reduced inequalities, and strengthened partnerships.

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Benefits of Career Orientation Program

Career orientation programs at the high school level provide a number of significant benefits for students' personal and professional growth. One of the main benefits of these programs is guiding students in identifying their interests and talents (Hidayat et al., 2022). As teenagers, many students may be unsure about the specific field they want to pursue in the future. Career orientation programs provide participants with the opportunity to explore various professions and industry sectors, while also understanding how their personal interests align with available jobs (Sodiq & Herdi, 2021; Latifah et al., 2022). These programs enable students to make more informed career decisions aligned with their potential, thereby increasing their satisfaction and success in their future careers.

Furthermore, career orientation programs also assist students in understanding the skills and competencies needed in the workplace (Barna & Mircea, 2015; Lee & Hung, 2024). Many students fail to realize that the path to career success doesn't depend solely on formal education but also requires additional skills such as communication, leadership, problem-solving, and technical skills (Iswatiningsih et al., 2021). By participating in activities such as seminars and workshops, and interacting with professionals from various fields, students can gain a deeper understanding of the skills they need to be ready to enter the workforce (Permendikbud, 2014). This will enhance their preparation for entering the workforce or continuing their studies to the next level.

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Another advantage is that career orientation programs can guide students in developing appropriate educational steps to achieve their career dreams. High school students often feel confused about choosing the right college major or further education path to align with their career goals (Pinquart, 2023). Career orientation programs guide them in understanding the various educational options that align with their desired career path, including vocational education, university education, and specific skills training (Pan et al., 2022). By better understanding the connection between education and the world of work, students can plan their next steps with greater clarity and direction. This can help reduce the risk of confusion or uncertainty when choosing an educational path that aligns with their career goals.

Increased Self-Confidence

One of the valuable benefits for students from participating in a career orientation program is increased confidence in facing the future. The career orientation process helps students gain more detailed and objective information about the various career options available, along with the steps they need to take to achieve their career dreams (Sulistiawan & Kamaruzzaman, 2020; Xie et al., 2025). With a deeper understanding of their potential and prospects in the world of work, students feel more confident and confident in choosing a career path that aligns with their interests and talents (Yanti, 2021). Increased self-confidence is crucial, as it can inspire students to act more confidently and decisively in making decisions regarding their choice of college major and future career planning.

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Career orientation also provides students with opportunities to interact directly with professionals from various fields. Activities such as seminars, interviews with industry practitioners, or field trips provide students with a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face in various careers (Watie, 2016; Wang & Jiao, 2023). These interactions not only broaden their horizons but also help them feel more connected to the professional world. Seeing how successful professionals navigate their career paths and hearing their stories can inspire and reassure students about their potential (Schaeffle, 2018). They will realize that the world of work is not something scary or unattainable, but rather a place they can enter with thorough preparation.

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Increased self-confidence also helps reduce the fear and anxiety that teenagers often experience when facing important decisions about their future (Rottinghaus et al., 2009). Many students feel uncertain or anxious about choosing a career, especially when they lack sufficient information (Rizana & Kristanti, 2021).

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Career orientation programs provide them with a clearer and more concrete understanding of the process and provide support through counseling and guidance from teachers or school counsellors (Emynorane, 2019). Through these programs, students realize that navigating the process of choosing a suitable career is a skill that can be honed and learned, not a problem to be overly concerned about (Pinquart, 2023). This growing self-confidence allows students to be more proactive in taking the necessary actions to achieve their goals.

Increasing Parent and Teacher Involvement

Increasing parent and teacher participation in high school career orientation programs will help improve their effectiveness. Parents and teachers play a crucial role in providing guidance and support for students' career decisions (Johnson et al., 2023). By participating, students gain insights not only from formal education but also from their and teachers' experiences in various professional fields (Hidayat et al., 2022). In a quality career orientation program, parents and teachers are invited to share their knowledge, experiences, and provide valuable moral support to students. This way, students can explore a wider range of career options while understanding the challenges and opportunities inherent in the world of work (Sodiq & Herdi, 2021).

Parental participation positively impacts students' self-confidence and enthusiasm for pursuing their career goals. When parents support career orientation programs, they can provide a more intimate view of their children's abilities and interests, as well as provide positive and nurturing advice (Emynorane et al., 2024). With parental support, students feel encouraged and supported not only by the school but also by their families. This can strengthen students' commitment and decisions (Penn & Lent, 2019). For example, parents can provide guidance to students on the skills necessary to achieve success in a particular career. They can also share information about job opportunities that align with their children's interests.

Teachers also play a crucial role in increasing student engagement in career orientation programs. As teachers who are closely connected to their students, they possess a broad understanding of their talents, characteristics, and strengths in all areas, both academic and non-academic (Sherlyanita & Rakhmawati, 2016). In career orientation programs, teachers serve not only as facilitators providing information about various professions, but also as mentors helping students identify their interests and providing guidance on further education options (Sugiyarto, 2019). Teachers are able to connect school subject matter with the skills needed in the workplace, giving students the confidence and motivation to pursue careers that align with their interests and talents (Nice & Joseph, 2023). Active teacher participation in these programs can create a more positive environment for students to make more informed career decisions.

Research Limitations and Implications for SDGs

This study offers valuable insights but also has several limitations that should be considered. The use of documentation analysis means that it does not fully reflect the lived experiences of students, parents, and teachers across varied school environments. Differences related to rural and urban contexts, socioeconomic backgrounds, and institutional resources are not comprehensively represented. The absence of longitudinal data also limits the ability to evaluate the long-term impact of career orientation programs on students' career development. Future research may benefit from mixed-method approaches, including interviews, surveys, and case studies, to provide a more detailed picture of how these programs function in practice and adapt to ongoing changes in the labor market.

The integration of career orientation into high school education also carries important implications for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 (Quality Education) is supported through efforts to expand inclusive and equitable learning opportunities, while SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) is strengthened by students preparing for smoother transitions into employment. Developing students' decision-making abilities, enhancing essential skills, and reinforcing the involvement of parents and teachers contributes to reduced disparities in educational and employment opportunities, which aligns with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Collaboration among schools, families, and industry partners reflects the principles of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), demonstrating how education can promote sustainable social and economic advancement.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that career orientation in high schools plays a crucial role in helping students make academic and professional decisions with greater clarity and confidence. Such programs broaden students' understanding of career pathways, strengthen decision-making skills, and encourage productive collaboration among students, parents, and educators. To optimize these benefits, several

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recommendations can be considered. Students should actively engage in seminars, workshops, and mentoring activities to enhance self-awareness and skill development. Parents are encouraged to provide consistent guidance aligned with their children's strengths and aspirations. Teachers can support this process by integrating career-related discussions into classroom learning and connecting academic content with real workplace demands. Policymakers should institutionalize career orientation within national education systems by ensuring sufficient resources, training, and partnerships with industry stakeholders so that all students have equitable access to structured guidance. Future research may further strengthen this field by employing longitudinal and mixed method approaches to examine the long-term impacts of career orientation programs across diverse educational contexts and socioeconomic settings.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Hangivola Emyblonde Ratna: Conceptualization, Methodology, Project Administration, Observation, Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Writing Original Draft; **Muhammad Akbar:** Methodology, Supervision, Writing, Review and Editing; **Muliadi Mau:** Formal Analysis, Supervision, Writing, Review and Editing; and **Ralaivao Hanginiaina Emynorane:** Data Curation, Translation, and Data Analysis. All authors have read and approved the final version of this manuscript.

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) and other AI-assisted tools were used prudently, not excessively, during the research and preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, Grammarly was used for assist with language editing, paraphrasing, and enhancing the clarity and coherence of the manuscript. All AI-generated material was reviewed and edited for accuracy, completeness, and compliance with ethical and scholarly standards. The authors accept full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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