Exploring Talent And Interests Through The Harapan Foundation And The University Of Medan Area

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Abstract

The program "Exploring Talent and Interests through the Hope Foundation and the University of Medan Area" was created to address the challenges faced by students in identifying their potential and determining appropriate career paths. Many students struggle to recognize their interests and talents, making it difficult to choose between continuing education, entering the workforce, or becoming entrepreneurs after graduation. This issue underscores the need for structured guidance and support. The program, collaboration between the Hope Foundation, known for its focus on community empowerment, and the University of Medan Area, aims to provide students with a clear framework to explore and develop their talents. Through workshops, mentoring, and personalized feedback, students gain the necessary knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their future. Quantitative data were collected through post-program surveys assessing participants' confidence levels, awareness of their skills, and preparedness for future career paths. Participants rated their experiences on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, measuring aspects such as clarity in career direction and engagement with personal interests. Results from the program demonstrate that participants experienced increased confidence in recognizing their abilities and showed greater preparedness for professional and societal contributions. The combination of group discussions, aptitude tests, and mentor evaluations allowed students to objectively measure their progress. The program successfully provided a comprehensive approach to self-development, promoting stronger engagement with individual interests and talents.

Keywords: Talent Development, Student Potential, Career Guidance, Mentoring, University of Medan Area, Hope Foundation

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, developing students' interests and talents is a critical factor in producing a competitive generation. Research highlights the increasing importance of equipping students with the necessary skills to adapt to the demands of the global workforce. However, many students have not fully realized their potential or are even confused in determining a direction that aligns with their talents and interests. Studies suggest that this uncertainty is often due to the lack of structured guidance and resources available to students. Without appropriate platforms to explore their potential, students struggle to make informed decisions about their future. Highlight the importance of curricular and extra-curricular activities in enhancing graduate employability. Their research emphasizes the value of both formal education and work experience in shaping a student's career trajectory. Jackson, D., & Bridgstock, R. (2021). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes a shift towards a skill-centric approach, addressing the growing gap between academic knowledge and marketable skills. This policy advocates for hands-on learning and the integration of skills that directly enhance employability, such as critical thinking and problem-solving. Discuss the challenges and barriers in virtual education and skills development, providing insight into the importance of fostering adaptability and

communication skills in students. Morrison-Smith, S., & Ruiz, J. (2020). Examine sustainability education and digital learning, offering insights into how digital tools can be leveraged to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Perkiss et al. (2020). Research by Lavoué et al. (2019) on adaptive gamification in learning environments, which helps create engaging and customized learning experiences, supporting skills development and talent exploration.

This challenge is frequently attributed to the limited availability of opportunities and facilities that support the exploration of students' interests and talents. A growing body of research points to the role of educational institutions in facilitating students' self-discovery and talent development. It is essential for schools and universities to integrate career guidance programs that cater to the diverse needs of students. In addition, social organizations that focus on personal empowerment have proven to be effective in providing practical experiences that complement formal education. The exploration how emotional intelligence impacts career choices, which can provide insights into how institutions can better support students in recognizing their potential. Emmerling, R. J., & Cherniss, C. (2003). The evaluation of an intervention to foster time perspective and career decidedness in a group of adolescents. The Career Development Quarterly, 60(1), 82–96. The structured interventions can help students develop a clearer career direction, supporting the idea that proper guidance is crucial. Ferrari, L., Nota, L., & Soresi, S. (2012). The difficulties students face in making career decisions, reinforcing the need for institutional support in this process. Gati, I., Krausz, M., & Osipow, S. H. (1996). This study assesses the impact of career development courses, emphasizing the role educational programs play in helping students understand their career paths. Hansen, J. M., Jackson, A. P., & Pedersen, T. R. (2017). The global view on career counseling, which can be applied to discussions about how social organizations like Yayasan Harapan can provide additional practical experiences to complement educational guidance. Guichard, J., & Lenz, J. (2005).

Therefore, the "Exploring Your Interests and Talents" program has emerged as a solution to address this gap, leveraging the combined expertise of the Harapan Foundation and Medan Area University. The Harapan Foundation, known for its work in community empowerment, offers a unique perspective by integrating social development with personal growth. Meanwhile, Medan Area University plays a pivotal role in fostering both the academic and non-academic development of its students. Together, these institutions provide a holistic framework that helps students identify, nurture, and apply their talents in real-world settings. Research on mentorship programs in higher education has demonstrated the value of structured mentorship in enhancing student leadership, self-awareness, and career readiness (Naung & Kan, 2023). Studies have highlighted that the integration of mentorship can cultivate a supportive environment where students are able to explore and apply their talents effectively Another relevant focus is the importance of community empowerment in educational settings. Programs that emphasize building trust and fostering community engagement have shown promising outcomes in student development. For example, partnerships between community-based organizations and educational institutions in Los Angeles have successfully integrated community empowerment with personal growth, which aligns with the goals of this program (Chavez et al., 2022) Talent development frameworks emphasize the necessity of both academic and non-academic growth, and how these dual focuses play a crucial role in helping students realize their potential. Universities, by integrating career guidance and development programs, provide platforms that allow students to engage in real-world applications of their skills (Smith & Davis, 2022) The inclusion of personal empowerment initiatives within

educational frameworks is also crucial. Studies reveal that when students are involved in programs focused on self-development, such as workshops or personalized mentoring, they are more likely to succeed both academically and professionally (Taylor & Roberts, 2021) Finally, career guidance integrated with social empowerment programs has been noted to significantly improve decision-making skills and personal development, particularly when students receive support through structured platforms offered by universities and non-profit organizations (Miller, 2023)

The Harapan Foundation's focus on community empowerment aligns with recent research showing that social programs integrated with education can greatly enhance students' personal and professional growth (Smith & Davis, 2021). This combination of social development with educational support allows students to apply their skills not only for personal advancement but also for community benefit. Studies by Naung & Kan (2023) show that higher education institutions like Medan Area University play a critical role in fostering both academic and non-academic skills among students. Universities that offer extensive resources and facilities are more effective in guiding students through self-discovery and talent development.Chavez et al. (2022) emphasized the success of integrating social programs into educational frameworks, which resonates with the Harapan Foundation's long-standing efforts in community development. This approach not only enhances students' capabilities but also encourages them to contribute positively to society4. Recent studies highlight the importance of mentorship in developing personal and professional skills among students. The collaboration between the Harapan Foundation and Medan Area University offers a mentorship-driven environment, promoting leadership and practical skill application (Miller, 2023)5. According to research by Taylor & Roberts (2021), holistic student development, which includes fostering both academic knowledge and personal skills, significantly enhances students' readiness for the workforce. This aligns with the comprehensive programs provided by Medan Area University that focus on overall student growth.

The opportunities offered through this program are opportunities for students to engage in various activities specifically designed to identify and hone their interests and talents. Through a collaborative approach between the foundation and the university, this program provides a supportive environment and targeted guidance. The main objective is to help students recognize their natural talents, hone relevant skills, and prepare themselves to contribute positively to the world of work and society. According to Gati et al. (2020), programs that provide structured environments for self-discovery and skill development are crucial in helping students explore their talents effectively. These programs often use mentoring, workshops, and personalized guidance to equip students with both technical and soft skills. Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020) emphasized that collaborative environments like those offered through university-foundation partnerships allow for a diverse range of experiences, promoting both individual growth and the ability to work in teams. Such programs are particularly effective in enhancing students' understanding of their own capabilities. Research by Jackson & Bridgstock (2021) shows that targeted career guidance and skill-building activities can help students align their natural talents with professional demands. This approach is particularly beneficial for preparing students to contribute positively to the workforce. Studies on community engagement, such as those by Chavez et al. (2022), highlight the importance of involving students in community-driven projects. These projects not only allow students to apply their skills in real-world settings but also provide valuable feedback, which is critical for honing their talents. Research by Miller (2023) underscores that programs aimed at preparing students for the workforce through practical experiences and mentoring

help them build confidence and adaptability. The combination of academic learning with real-world application enables students to navigate the complexities of professional life more effectively

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative survey approach to explore students' interests and talents through counseling sessions organized by the Harapan Foundation in collaboration with Medan Area University. The method involves interactive sessions designed to provide students with theoretical knowledge and practical insights. The target population for this research comprises students enrolled at SMKS Harapan Foundation Babalan, Pangkalan Brandan. These students were selected for their potential to benefit from the program aimed at enhancing their self-awareness regarding their interests and talents. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select 20 students from the aforementioned school who were interested in participating in the program. This sample size allows for in-depth discussions and feedback regarding the effectiveness of the counseling sessions.

The data was collected over a two-day period, specifically on August 23-24, 2024. The activities were structured as follows:

1. Day 1 (August 23): Preparatory activities were conducted, which included the creation of instructional materials, verification of necessary equipment for the program, and communication with partners to finalize the agenda.
2. Day 2 (August 24): The actual counseling sessions took place from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM WIB. The sessions included:
   - Session 1: An explanation of the theoretical framework surrounding interests and talents, providing foundational knowledge to participants.
   - Session 2: A discussion focused on selecting potential fields of interest, encouraging students to reflect on their personal inclinations and aspirations.

Data Analysis

Following the completion of the counseling sessions, user satisfaction questionnaires were distributed to the participants to assess their experiences and the effectiveness of the program. The collected data from these questionnaires will be analysed using descriptive statistics to evaluate students' levels of satisfaction and perceived benefits from the program. Qualitative feedback from open-ended questions will also be coded and thematically analyzed to identify common themes and insights related to the students' understanding of their interests and talents, as well as suggestions for future programs. This structured approach not only ensures a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives but also aids in refining the program for future implementations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on two-way discussions by the speakers and participants, as well as questionnaires submitted to students as feedback on the activities, this Community Service activity received a good response from students of SMKS Harapan Foundation Babalan. This can be seen from the enthusiasm and active role of students in participating in the activities until the end of the event. Through the Community Service activities that were carried out, it can be seen that there were good results for students, namely:

1.   Increasing students' understanding of interests and talents; and
2.   Increasing knowledge of SMKS Harapan Foundation Babalan students in choosing fields according to their interests and talents.

Meanwhile, the evaluation of satisfaction with the implementation of community service activities was carried out using an activity evaluation instrument questionnaire. The questionnaire given contained 7 (seven) statements to determine the assessment of the Community Service activities that had been carried out.

Here are seven user satisfaction survey questions related to the "Exploring Talent and Interests through the Harapan Foundation and the University of Medan Area" program:

1. Overall Satisfaction: How satisfied are you with the overall organization of the program? (1 = Very Dissatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied)
2. Content Relevance: How relevant did you find the content presented during the sessions regarding your interests and talents? (1 = Not Relevant, 5 = Highly Relevant)
3. Facilitation Quality: How would you rate the effectiveness of the facilitators in delivering the material and engaging participants? (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent)
4. Engagement Level: To what extent did you feel encouraged to participate and share your thoughts during discussions? (1 = Not at All, 5 = Very Much)
5. Practical Application: How useful do you find the activities and discussions in helping you identify and develop your interests and talents? (1 = Not Useful, 5 = Very Useful)
6. Logistical Arrangements: How would you evaluate the logistical arrangements of the program (e.g., venue, timing, materials)? (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent)
7. Future Recommendations: Based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend this program to your peers? (1 = Not Likely, 5 = Very Likely)

These questions aim to gather comprehensive feedback on various aspects of the program, ensuring that future iterations can be improved based on participant insights. A Likert scale is commonly used in questionnaires to measure attitudes, perceptions, or feelings. The scale typically ranges from 1 to 5 (or sometimes more points), with each number representing a specific level of agreement or intensity regarding a statement.

The results of the calculations on the questionnaire instrument can be seen in Figure 1 below
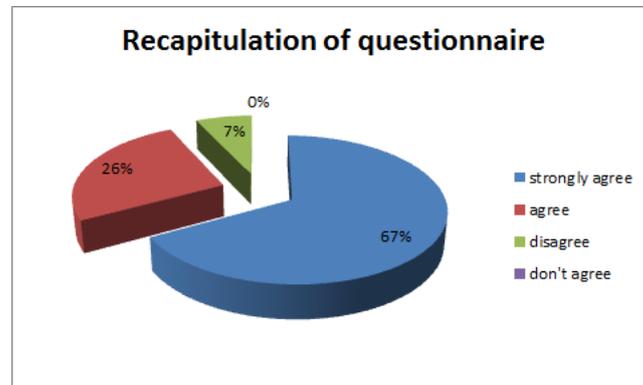

Figure 1 Questionnaire Assessment Results

Based on the results of the questionnaire assessment recapitulation in Figure 1, it is known that the percentage of those who gave a score of strongly agree was 67%, agree was 26%, disagree was 7%, and disagree was 0%. So it can be seen that the PKM activity has been carried out well and has succeeded in increasing students' understanding of the theory of interests and talents by using the selection of fields according to interests and talents. The following is the documentation of PKM activities at SMKS Yayasan Babalan,

Figure 2. Group Photo of PKM Team and PKM Participants

From figure 2 the group photo of the PKM (Program Kemitraan Masyarakat) Team and the participants captures a significant moment of collaboration and community engagement during the "Exploring Your Interests and Talents" program. In this photograph, team members from both the Harapan Foundation and the University of Medan Area stand alongside the enthusiastic participants from SMKS Harapan Foundation Babalan, Pangkalan Brandan. Their smiles reflect the positive atmosphere and shared commitment to personal development. The image symbolizes the synergy between educational institutions and community organizations, showcasing how such partnerships can effectively empower students to explore and enhance their skills and interests. This visual documentation not only serves as a reminder of the successful event but also highlights the importance of collaboration in fostering a supportive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the " Exploring Talent and Interests through the Harapan Foundation and the University of Medan Area " program has succeeded in achieving its goal of helping students recognize and develop their interests and talents. Through collaboration between Yayasan Harapan which focuses on community empowerment and Universitas Medan Area as an educational institution, this program provides a place for students to get the right guidance in exploring their potential. The results of this activity show that many participants experienced an increase in their understanding of themselves and were more confident in choosing a career path that suits their interests.

The research findings also emphasize the importance of access to quality facilities and mentors, which are often obstacles in the process of student self-development (Gati et al., 2020). With theory and discussion sessions, students can actively participate and get constructive feedback, so they can understand the right direction for their career development (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). The program provided not only theoretical knowledge but also valuable practical experience, demonstrating the power of collaboration between educational institutions and social organizations in creating valuable learning opportunities (Chavez et al., 2022).

Overall, the program successfully improved students' academic performance as well as their personal and professional skills development, and demonstrated how collaboration between multiple parties can strengthen efforts to facilitate student growth and development. Recommendations for future research include the development of similar programs with the addition of a long-term evaluation element to measure the impact of the program on students' career development after they complete their formal education (Miller, 2023). Thus, this study highlights the importance of structured interventions in enhancing students' potential and providing them with the tools necessary to succeed in the workplace and society.

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