

A Review of the Managerial Practices of Guidance and Counseling Services in Supporting Students' Learning Autonomy in Junior High Schools under the Merdeka Curriculum (A Study at Public Junior High Schools in Bireuen Regency)

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the managerial practices of Guidance and Counseling services in supporting students' learning autonomy within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the holistic development of students' competencies, including self-directed learning as a key component of the Pancasila Student Profile. In this context, guidance and counseling services play a strategic role, particularly in assisting students in identifying their potential, designing learning goals, and managing time and learning strategies independently. This research employed a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving counseling guidance teachers and students at a junior high school. The results reveal that well-planned, organized, and continuously evaluated Guidance and Counseling services contribute positively to students' learning autonomy. However, challenges such as limited-service time and lack of managerial training for counseling guidance teachers remain. The findings recommend strengthening the managerial capacity of counseling guidance teachers to optimize service delivery in alignment with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Managerial, Merdeka Curriculum, Services.*

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the fundamental pillar in developing high-quality human resources who are adaptable to the demands of a changing era. In the pursuit of nurturing lifelong learners, the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum as a form of curriculum reform that is more flexible, contextual, and student-centered. This curriculum emphasizes character development, the strengthening of basic competencies, and the enhancement of students' independence in the learning process. A core characteristic of the Merdeka Curriculum is its focus on learning autonomy, defined as the ability of students to manage time, set goals, and evaluate their own learning outcomes in an independent and responsible manner. This concept aligns with Zimmerman's theory of self-regulated learning (2022), which highlights the importance of metacognitive skills, motivation, and strategic behaviors in achieving effective autonomous learning.

In support of these objectives, school-based Guidance and Counseling services play a pivotal role. Guidance and Counseling services not only aid when students face personal or academic problems, but also aim to guide and facilitate students in developing their full

potential. The role of counseling guidance teachers in fostering self-directed learners is therefore strategic, especially in designing service programs that align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Consistent with Super's career development theory (2020), Guidance and Counseling services are expected to continuously facilitate students' personal and social development, including their journey of discovering their individual learning identity.

Managerial practices in Guidance and Counseling services reflect how Counseling guidance teachers or counselor teams design student-centered service strategies, allocate resources effectively, and collaborate with subject teachers, homeroom teachers, principals, and even students' parents. Effective managerial practices contribute to the creation of a conducive learning environment that encourages students to take control and responsibility over their learning process. Nevertheless, various challenges still arise in the field, such as a limited number of Counseling guidance teachers, administrative burdens, insufficient managerial training, and a lack of understanding regarding the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum into Guidance and Counseling services.

Such conditions are also observed in several public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) in Bireuen Regency, Aceh Province. As a region actively working to improve educational quality, Bireuen faces challenges in delivering Guidance and Counseling services that are both effective and aligned with the direction of the Merdeka Curriculum. In this context, examining the managerial practices of Guidance and Counseling services becomes important to understand the extent to which these strategies support the development of students' learning autonomy.

To ensure the effectiveness and utility of Guidance and Counseling services, strong managerial practices are required encompassing planning, organizing, implementation, and professional, systematic evaluation. These practices embody how Counseling guidance teachers or counseling teams tailor services to students' needs, allocate resources appropriately, and establish cooperation with other education stakeholders. Good service management adheres to the principles of school-based management (Caldwell & Spinks, 2018), which emphasize the importance of school autonomy in managing resources to improve the quality of learning.

Effective managerial practices help cultivate a supportive learning atmosphere and empower students to take ownership of their learning. Research by Suryadi (2020) has shown that structured Guidance and Counseling service management positively impacts student engagement and motivation. Similarly, Hamdani and Nurhasanah (2022) found that counseling guidance teachers with strong managerial competence can build effective service synergy and enhance students' learning autonomy.

Unfortunately, various challenges are still frequently encountered in the field, including a limited number of counseling guidance teachers, administrative burdens, a lack of training in service management, and minimal understanding of how to integrate the Independent Curriculum into Guidance and Counseling services. These issues are also evident in many junior high school education units, including those in Junior High School across Bireuen Regency, Aceh Province. As a region currently striving to improve the quality of its education, Bireuen Regency faces significant challenges in implementing effective Guidance and Counseling services that align with the goals of the Independent Curriculum. In this context, it is essential to examine the managerial practices of Guidance and

Counseling services to assess the extent to which current management strategies support the development of students' learning independence.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine and analyze the managerial practices of Guidance and Counseling services in supporting student learning independence within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, with a specific focus on public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) in Bireuen Regency. The findings of this study are expected to offer both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of more adaptive and effective Guidance and Counseling services in addressing the challenges associated with implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was chosen to enable the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the managerial practices of Guidance and Counseling services in supporting students' learning autonomy, particularly in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at public junior high schools in Bireuen Regency. The study focuses on how Counseling guidance teachers plan, implement, and evaluate services from a managerial perspective, and the extent to which these services contribute to enhancing students' learning autonomy.

The research subjects included Counseling guidance teachers, school principals, and students who were directly involved in Guidance and Counseling activities. Subjects and study sites were selected purposively based on specific criteria: schools that had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, employed active Counseling guidance teachers who regularly carried out service programs, and demonstrated institutional support for Guidance and Counseling implementation. The study was conducted at several public junior high schools in Bireuen Regency that met these criteria.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with Counseling guidance teachers, school principals, and students to gather insights on the management of Guidance and Counseling services and perceptions of learning autonomy. Observations were carried out during various Guidance and Counseling activities including classroom guidance, individual counseling, and group sessions to obtain factual data on service delivery. In addition, document analysis was conducted by reviewing relevant materials such as Guidance and Counseling work plans, service schedules, evaluation notes, and school curriculum policy documents.

The main research instrument was the researchers themselves (human instruments), supported by interview guides, observation sheets, and document analysis protocols. These instruments were developed based on indicators of managerial practice (planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation) as well as dimensions of student learning autonomy.

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Assingkily, 2021). Data reduction was carried out to filter and simplify raw data into meaningful information. Subsequently, data were displayed in descriptive narrative form and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying findings to ensure the validity of the results.

To ensure data credibility, the researchers applied source triangulation and methodological triangulation comparing information from different sources and using various data collection techniques. Member checking was also conducted by returning findings to participants to confirm the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Managerial Practices of Counseling Services at Public Junior High Schools in Bireuen Regency

Before discussing the managerial practices of counseling services, it is important to understand the meaning of several key terms. Practice refers to the implementation of real and continuous actions within a specific context. Managerial relates to the systematic process of managing resources, including planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation, to achieve certain goals. Counseling services refer to the assistance activities provided by school counselors to help students develop their potential, solve problems, and improve learning ability and independence. Firman (2022) stated that the effectiveness of counseling service management is highly influenced by clear objectives, integration of the program with the curriculum, and ongoing evaluation. Without needs-based planning and implementation, the service tends to become merely administrative and fails to strengthen students' learning character. Therefore, counselors must be trained to think systematically in managing services.

Thus, managerial practices of counseling services can be understood as a series of management activities that are planned, organized, and continuously evaluated to positively impact student development.

The managerial practices implemented in public junior high schools in Bireuen Regency include the following:

1. Planning

Counselors develop counseling work programs integrated with the Merdeka Curriculum and student needs. Planning includes setting service objectives, determining the types of services (individual counseling, group counseling, classical guidance, etc.), and scheduling implementation. Programs are created based on identified student problems and needs.

2. Organizing

Organizing involves managing human resources, time, and facilities to support counseling services. Counselors coordinate with homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and school principals to ensure smooth operation and full support of counseling activities. The schedule is arranged so it does not interfere with core teaching.

3. Implementation

Counseling services are implemented according to the plan, providing responsive services based on student needs. For instance, individual counseling for students facing personal or academic issues, group counseling for social skill development, and classical guidance for strengthening motivation and learning independence.

4. Evaluation

Counselors conduct periodic evaluations of service effectiveness through student feedback, teacher input, and behavioral observation. This evaluation is used to improve and further develop counseling services in line with the Merdeka Curriculum.

At public junior high schools in Bireuen Regency, the managerial practices of Guidance and Counseling services have been implemented through several stages. These include the planning of BK programs aligned with students' needs and the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. The organization of services is conducted through the preparation of a structured Guidance and Counseling activity schedule and the involvement of various stakeholders, such as subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and school principals. The implementation stage comprises classical guidance sessions, as well as individual and group counseling, with a particular emphasis on fostering students' learning independence. Service evaluations are conducted periodically to assess program effectiveness and inform necessary improvements.

Students' Learning Independence in the Context of the Merdeka Curriculum

Learning independence refers to students' ability to manage, organize, and direct their own learning process actively without full dependence on teachers or others. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, learning independence is a primary focus, as the curriculum is designed to provide students with more freedom in choosing materials, methods, and pace according to their needs and interests. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, encouraging students to take responsibility and initiative in exploring knowledge.

In public junior high schools in Bireuen Regency, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has shifted learning patterns from teacher-dependent to more independent student learning. Students are increasingly initiating their learning goals, managing study time, and reflecting on learning outcomes. This transformation is supported by counseling services that help students recognize their potential and develop appropriate learning strategies.

However, the level of learning independence among students varies, influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include high learning motivation, discipline in learning processes, and the ability to manage time and strategies effectively. External factors include school support, adequate learning facilities, active roles of teachers and counselors, and family involvement that fosters a conducive home learning environment. Well-managed and professional counseling services are key in reinforcing learning independence. Effective services not only assist in overcoming learning obstacles but also help students recognize their potential, set realistic learning goals, and develop independent learning strategies. Hence, well-designed, and well-managed counseling services are crucial in creating a supportive learning environment. This is increasingly important in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires students to be more active and responsible in the learning process.

Therefore, the synergy between counseling services, family support, and school engagement can positively impact students in optimizing their learning potential and facing increasingly dynamic learning challenges. Overall, learning independence within the Merdeka Curriculum is not only a goal but also an ongoing process developed through a combination of curriculum policy, counseling services, and active student participation.

The Strategic Role of Counseling Service Management in Students' Learning Independence

In the context of counseling service management, the strategic role refers to the crucial position of counseling services as an integral part of supporting both learning processes and holistic student development. Counseling service management is responsible for designing, organizing, implementing, and evaluating services that not only assist students in solving personal or academic problems but also actively foster learning independence. Neviyarni (2018) emphasized the importance of student-centered, humanistic counseling service management where counselors function not only as helpers but also as learning partners who assist students in planning their learning and life goals in alignment with their interests and potential.

This strategic role includes several aspects, such as:

1. Development of Student Potential

Counseling service management plays a key role in identifying and developing each student's potential, covering academic ability, artistic or athletic talent, as well as psychological and social aspects that affect personal development. Effective service management helps students objectively recognize their strengths and weaknesses through observation, interviews, psychological tests, and self-reflection.

This potential development process is crucial, as students who are aware of their strengths and limitations are better equipped to determine their learning direction and select appropriate strategies to achieve academic goals and personal development. Moreover, self-awareness fosters initiative in learning and promotes the ability to manage the learning process independently. As a result, students become more confident in facing challenges and are better prepared to overcome obstacles that may arise during their learning journey.

In practice, counseling service management not only focuses on potential identification but also designs programs that facilitate talent and interest development, such as group counseling for social skills, time management training, and motivation-building sessions. Counselors also serve as mentors in setting realistic learning goals and monitoring students' progress.

Through an integrated and sustainable approach, guidance, and counseling services support students in optimizing their potential, enabling them to become not only active learners but also individuals who take full responsibility for their own learning processes and outcomes. This aligns with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes the development of student character and independence, fostering their growth as lifelong learners.

2. Fostering Attitudes and Motivation for Independent Learning

Self-directed learning attitudes and motivations are critical factors influencing students' success in navigating the learning process effectively. Within the context of Guidance and Counseling service management, the development of these attitudes and motivations becomes a central focus aimed at fostering students' capacity to learn actively without being overly dependent on teachers or external guidance. Self-directed learning attitudes encompass a sense of responsibility for one's own learning, a strong internal drive to achieve academic goals, and perseverance in overcoming various academic challenges.

The Guidance and Counseling service management plays a pivotal role by offering structured guidance and counseling interventions that assist students in recognizing the importance of intrinsic motivation as the primary driver of learning. Through both individual and group approaches, BK teachers encourage students to internalize the belief that academic success is largely determined by their own efforts, discipline, and initiative. This internally generated motivation tends to be more enduring and effective compared to externally imposed drivers such as parental or teacher pressure.

Moreover, the Guidance and Counseling services serve a crucial function in identifying and addressing psychological or emotional barriers that may hinder learning motivation, including fear of failure, low self-esteem, and a lack of self-confidence. By applying appropriate counseling techniques, Counseling guidance teachers help students confront and manage these challenges, thereby fostering a positive mindset and greater self-efficacy for independent learning.

The sustainable development of self-directed learning attitudes and motivations is essential to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which grants students greater autonomy in managing their own learning. With the support of well-managed the Guidance and Counseling services, students can be equipped with essential self-regulation skills such as planning, time management, and self-evaluation which enabling them to become effective and autonomous learners.

3. Providing Support and Resources

The management of Guidance and Counseling services plays a vital role in delivering comprehensive support to facilitate the development of students' independent learning. This support encompasses psychological, social, and academic dimensions, and is designed to be responsive and tailored to the individual needs of each student. In addition to providing personal guidance, effective Guidance and Counseling service management is also responsible for ensuring the availability of physical resources and instructional materials. These include comfortable and conducive counseling spaces, appropriate learning media, and reference materials that support students throughout the independent learning process. The presence of such resources constitutes a critical supporting factor that enables Guidance and Counseling services to function optimally. When students are supported with both adequate guidance and a well-prepared learning environment, they are more likely to feel motivated and confident in taking the initiative to manage their own learning. Furthermore, these provisions empower students to confront and overcome challenges that may emerge during the learning journey, thereby fostering a more sustainable and self-regulated approach to education.

4. Strengthening a Supportive Learning Environment

Strengthening a supportive learning environment is a critical component in fostering student learning independence, particularly within the framework of the Independent Curriculum. A conducive learning environment extends beyond the provision of physical infrastructure and facilities; it also encompasses social and managerial elements that collectively cultivate an atmosphere conducive to the growth of student potential and autonomy.

In the context of Guidance and Counseling services, the creation of such an environment is achieved through the implementation of effective managerial practices that are responsive to the diverse needs of students. Sound Guidance and Counseling service management can facilitate the development of a safe, comfortable, and empowering environment, enabling students to take initiative and assume responsibility for their own learning processes.

Challenges and Obstacles in the Management of Counseling Services at Public Junior High Schools in Bireuen Regency

The management of Guidance and Counseling services at Public Junior High School in Bireuen Regency faces a range of obstacles and challenges that significantly influence the quality and sustainability of these services in fostering students' learning independence. One of the primary challenges is the limited number of Counseling guidance teachers relative to the student population. In several schools, a single BK teacher is responsible for hundreds of students, resulting in services that are often reactive addressing problems as they arise rather than proactive in providing consistent developmental guidance. This imbalance hinders the optimal and continuous support that students require.

Moreover, the heavy administrative workload borne by Counseling guidance teachers constitutes another major impediment. In addition to their core counseling duties, they are frequently tasked with report preparation, program planning, and participation in various school activities. This workload reduces their capacity to design and implement innovative guidance programs tailored to students' evolving needs, particularly those aimed at cultivating learning autonomy. The absence of adequate support personnel and the lack of clear role distribution within the BK service team further impede the effectiveness of service delivery.

Infrastructural constraints also pose significant limitations. Many junior high schools in Bireuen Regency lack adequate and private counseling rooms, which are essential for creating a secure and confidential environment for student consultations. Additionally, the scarcity of essential resources such as guidance handbooks, instructional media, and relevant technological tools limits the ability of Counseling guidance teachers to adopt diverse, student-centered approaches aligned with the learning preferences of today's youth.

External challenges further compound these issues. There is still a widespread lack of understanding among students, subject teachers, and parents regarding the strategic role of Guidance dan Counseling services. The Guidance and Counseling is often misperceived solely as a remedial space for problematic students, rather than as a holistic developmental support system. Consequently, participation in the Guidance and Counseling programs such as group guidance and self-development activities remain low, and parental involvement in the counseling process is minimal.

Additionally, the limited availability of managerial training for Counseling guidance teachers hampers the development of systematic service planning, implementation, and evaluation based on data-driven decision-making. Managerial competencies are crucial to ensure that BK services transcend routine activities and yield tangible impacts on student growth, particularly in promoting self-directed learning.

To address these multifaceted challenges, synergy among schools, education authorities, and community stakeholders is essential. Policy interventions should prioritize

improving the Counseling guidance teacher-to-student ratio, enhancing infrastructure, and providing continuous training focused on both technical and managerial aspects. With such support, the Guidance dan Counseling services in Public Junior High School in Bireuen Regency can be transformed into more effective, responsive, and impactful systems that actively contribute to the development of independent and self-regulated learners.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the managerial practices of Guidance and Counseling services at Public Junior High School in Bireuen Regency have demonstrated systematic efforts in supporting student development, although they still face various limitations. The stages of Guidance dan Counseling service management from planning and implementation to evaluation have generally been implemented across schools; however, their execution has not yet reached optimal levels. This is primarily due to constraints such as limited human resources, inadequate facilities, and uneven managerial support across institutions. The cultivation of student learning independence, as mandated by the Independent Curriculum, demands not only the ability to manage oneself, but also the capacity to set personal learning goals and take responsibility for the learning process and outcomes. In this regard, the Guidance and Counseling services hold a strategic role in shaping students' attitudes, motivation, and readiness to engage in self-directed learning through well-targeted and structured guidance and counseling programs. The strategic value of Guidance and Counseling service management is reflected in its ability to identify and nurture students' potential, foster positive learning attitudes and motivation, and provide relevant psychosocial and academic support. When managed effectively, Guidance and Counseling services can function as key facilitators in the development of independent learners, consistent with the core values of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasize character formation and the autonomy of students in navigating their educational journey.

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