

## PROMOTING CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAMS AT MADRASAH ALIYAH

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### Abstrak

*Selama menempuh pendidikan di Sekolah Menengah Atas, seseorang akan dihadapkan pada berbagai situasi yang menuntutnya untuk mengambil keputusan yang tepat dalam bidang pendidikan, kejuruan, dan sosial. Hal ini menegaskan perlunya sekolah menyediakan program yang membantu siswa memutuskan apakah mereka ingin melanjutkan pendidikan atau langsung memasuki dunia kerja. Penelitian ini menganalisis secara mendalam bagaimana program pengembangan karier dan persiapan masuk universitas dirancang dan dilaksanakan di Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo'. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, dokumentasi, dan teknik observasi. Kemudian, dianalisis dengan pengkodean, analisis tematik, penyajian dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' telah membentuk Divisi Pengembangan Karier dan Prestasi, yang telah merancang dan melaksanakan berbagai program inovatif, termasuk: Portofolio Satu Siswa Tiga Medali, Campus Talk, Pembinaan Siswa Persiapan ke Perguruan Tinggi (Kampus Studi), Satgas Info dan Pendaftaran Lomba, dan Lokakarya Minat Bakat Siswa. Program-program ini dirancang untuk tidak hanya berfokus pada pengembangan akademis tetapi juga memberikan kesempatan bagi siswa untuk mengeksplorasi minat, bakat, dan potensi karier mereka. Keberhasilan program ini dapat dilihat dari tingginya persentase lulusan yang melanjutkan ke perguruan tinggi (97%) dan sisanya langsung bekerja. Kedepannya, penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar kepala sekolah di tingkat menengah atas mengembangkan program untuk membimbing dan mengarahkan siswa saat mereka mempersiapkan karier mereka setelah lulus.*

**Kata Kunci:** pengembangan karier, persiapan masuk universitas, Madrasah Aliyah.

### Abstract

As a person progresses through Senior High School, he or she will experience situations that demand them to make proper educational, vocational,



and social decisions. This emphasizes the need of schools providing programs that help students decide whether they want to pursue further education or enter the workforce right away. This study deeply analyzes how career development and university preparation programs are designed and implemented at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Irtiqo'. The qualitative approach of descriptive analysis was adopted. The data was collected through interview, documentation, and observation techniques. Then, analyzed by collection, coding, thematic analysis, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that Madrasah Aliyah Al-Irtiqo' has established an Achievement and Career Development Division, which has designed and implemented various innovative programs, including: Student Portfolio One Student Three Medals, Campus Talk, Coaching Students Preparation to College (Study Campus), Info Task Force and Race Registration, and Workshop Student Talent Interest. These programs are designed to not only focus on academic development but also provide opportunities for students to explore their interests, talents, and career potential. The success of these programs can be seen from the high percentage of graduates who continue to college (97%) and the rest who directly enter the workforce. Going forward, the study recommends that Senior High School principals develop programs to guide and direct students as they prepare for their careers following graduation.

**Keywords:** career development, university preparation, Madrasah Aliyah

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Students at the Madrasah Aliyah level are very important transitional phase, where they need to prepare themselves to continue to college or enter the workforce (Ndoye Upoalkpajor, 2020). This period is crucial as students begin to explore their interests, talents and career potential, while deepening their understanding of the various educational and professional options available (Zulfitri dkk., 2023). Therefore, career development and college preparation programs play a vital role in guiding students to make the right and strategic decisions for their future (Puebla, 2022). In the era of global competition, Madrasah Aliyah graduates not only need to be equipped with science and religion, but also critical thinking skills, problem solving, and readiness to face the world of work.

Students often find themselves confused about determining their career paths after graduating from Senior High School (Mamat Supriatna, 2024). Questions arise such as whether to continue to higher education, which major to choose, or what kind of job to pursue (Bucad, 2024). This

confusion stems from the lack of clear guidance on the steps they should take after graduation. Moreover, information regarding career paths and university options is often unstructured and not communicated comprehensively to students (Salape & Cuevas, 2020). In some schools, career guidance may not run effectively due to limited resources, including the availability of educators with specialized expertise or sufficient information channels (Mamat Supriatna, 2024). Another challenge is the lack of parental involvement in supporting this process, leaving many students' career decisions without the full backing of their family environment.

Theoretically, career development is a long-term process that aims to help individuals identify their interests, talents, and appropriate career opportunities (Salape & Cuevas, 2020). (Gottfried dkk., 2023) stated that career development is a cycle that involves exploration, establishment, and maintenance of careers throughout an individual's life. In the context of education, career development programs help students map their potential and make appropriate career decisions based on in-depth knowledge of themselves and the world of work. On the other hand, preparation for college involves academic guidance and adequate information about entry pathways, study programs, and scholarship opportunities that can support students' educational choices.

Several previous studies related to this topic show the importance of developing these skills in secondary education. (Pasaribu & Subhan, 2022) found that students at Integrated Vocational High Schools in Riau had excellent employability skills in career planning, with an emphasis on communication and technology as important factors. Research by (Haryanto dkk., 2018) emphasized the importance of career planning for high school students in preparing for their future education and careers, with career guidance that helps students recognize their potential and understand their environment. (Pujiastuti dkk., 2020) developed an employability skills-based career guidance program for vocational high school students, which showed that students' career readiness can be improved with appropriate skills. **(Manik, 2022)** revealed that career information services significantly improved the career planning abilities of vocational high school students, although some students still had difficulty planning their careers effectively.

These studies highlight the importance of structured interventions in career guidance to prepare students for the world of work and further education.

While previous studies have extensively explored career planning and employability skills in vocational and general high schools, there remains a gap in research focusing specifically on Madrasah Aliyah, particularly in the context of integrating career development with university preparation programs. Most prior research, such as those by (Pasaribu & Subhan, 2022; Pujiastuti dkk., 2020), emphasizes employability skills and career readiness in vocational settings, whereas studies like these focus on the general high school context. However, Madrasah Aliyah students face unique challenges, balancing religious and academic curricula while preparing for higher education and future careers. The role of structured programs that address both career development and university preparation specifically within this Islamic school context remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how Madrasah Aliyah prepares its students for these dual pathways, addressing both employability and academic aspirations.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at deeply analyzing how career development and university preparation programs are designed and implemented at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Irtiqo'. Data is collected through interviews, documentation, and observation techniques (Rukajat, 2018). Interviews are conducted with the Vice Principal for Achievement and Career Development, who is responsible for the planning and execution of these programs. Documentation involves reviewing relevant documents such as program work reports and evaluations. Observations are carried out directly in the school environment to observe how the programs are implemented and followed by students. The data analysis process was conducted in several stages: 1) Collecting data from interviews and documentation, 2) Categorizing and coding the data to identify key themes, 3) Thematic analysis to understand how the programs are implemented and their impact on students' career readiness, and 4) Drawing conclusions based on the findings that emerged during the analysis (Sugiyono, 2020).

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of the Career Development and University Preparation Programs at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Irtiqo'

In the 2024-2025 academic year, the Head of Madrasah Aliyah Al-Irtiqo' established a new division called the Division of Achievement Development and Career Pathways. As the Vice Principal leading this division, the role carries significant importance in supporting a structured academic program. The goal is for students not only to achieve academic excellence but also to have a clear roadmap for their future, whether in pursuing higher education or entering the workforce. Based on the program document from the Career Development and Achievement Division, several programs have already been designed by this division, including the following:

**Table 1.** Achievement and Career Development Programs

No	Programs	Target	Goals
1	Student Portfolio One Student Three Medals	All students	It is expected that Grade 10 and 11 students can get a description of the future from IQ Tests, Talent Interests, Majors, and Career Paths.
2	Develop the Potential of Teachers and Staff	All Teachers and staff	It is expected that all teachers can participate in the Teacher and Tendik Development and Achievement Activities.
3	Coaching Students Preparation to College (Study Campus)	Students grade 12	get information and overview related to entry paths, study programs and universities
4	Campus Talk	All Students	Get information related to the campus world, entry paths, and career paths
5	Workshop Student Talent Interest	11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> grade students	Get an overview of the future from the IQ Test, Talent Interests, Majors, and Career Paths
6	Info Task Force	All	Can collect all competitions and

	and Race Registration	Students	coordinate the registration process.
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The programs listed in the table above are the result of collaboration between the Achievement Development Division and the Guidance and Counseling Division. This collaboration is based on the interrelated roles of the two divisions in supporting student success. Some of the programs listed will be further explained as follows (B. P. Margono, komunikasi pribadi, Agustus 2024):

*Student Portfolio One Student Three Medals*, one of the main focuses of this program is to ensure that every student has the opportunity to participate in various competitions, both academic and non-academic, that suit their interests and talents. This program is expected to be able to explore students' top skills so that they can develop their maximum potential. The ultimate goal is to achieve achievements that can be recognized at the national level, with a minimum target of each student pocketing three medals before graduating. This is stated in the program's motto, namely “One Student, Three Medals”.

All achievements achieved by students are reported routinely to the madrasah forum and parents. This aims to provide recognition for student achievements, as well as build a track record of achievements that can be a source of pride for students and families. Thus, each student has a portfolio of achievements that can be used as provisions when continuing their education to a higher level.

*Campus Talk*, a forum held regularly to provide insight into career paths and the world of work to students. In Campus Talk, the school invites various external speakers, including professional practitioners, students, lecturers, university activists, and pre-entrepreneurs who have experience and knowledge related to the world of careers. These speakers provide materials and share experiences related to career opportunities in various fields, both in the education sector and industry. This program aims to broaden students' horizons regarding existing career choices, so that they are more focused in determining their steps after graduation.

*Task force information program and competition*, in its implementation, it carries out a number of strategic steps. First, the madrasah acts as an

information center for an information funnel tasked with finding and providing information related to various competitions or olympiads held outside the madrasah. After obtaining information, this field helps register students, as well as mapping their interests in the type of competition they want, be it science, mathematics, language, religion, or art. The emphasis on specialization in this field allows students to focus on their respective strengths. Second, accompany students in every stage of the competition, whether held online or offline. This assistance ensures that students have the technical and motivational support to participate optimally.

*The guidance of students' college preparation (study campus)*, the field of achievement development and career paths also carries out internal socialization which is carried out regularly. Every one to two weeks, grade 12 students participate in a deep talk session with the guidance and counseling team. In this session, the counseling teacher acts as a personal academic consultant who helps students map out their interests, talents, and desires in choosing a career path. This discussion not only involves students, but also considers the aspirations of parents and students' personal goals, so that the three elements can be well collaborated. With this approach, madrasah helps students make career decisions that are in accordance with their potential and personal conditions.

In addition, it also actively provides up-to-date information on college entrance and the world of work. In each socialization, students are given guidance regarding the various admission pathways, scholarship opportunities, and study programs that suit their interests. In addition, madrasah ensures that all student data is up-to-date in national systems, such as in EMIS and PD verval, to prepare for the college enrollment process that takes place from December to February.

In the aspect of preparing for higher education, the madrasah cooperates with various universities, including Jakarta International University. These partnerships provide students with broad access to information on study programs, entry points and scholarship opportunities. Madrasahs regularly hold seminars and socializations with speakers from universities, providing a comprehensive insight into higher education. This support helps students in the enrollment process and selection of campuses that suit their interests and talents.

Meanwhile, to prepare students to enter the world of work, Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' develops an internship program through cooperation with various industries and businesses. This program, coordinated by the madrasah's Public Relations, provides opportunities for students to gain hands-on work experience. Through internships, students can apply the skills they have learned into a professional environment. The main objective of this internship and training program is to equip students with the practical experience and insight needed to face the world of work. In addition, the program helps students build a professional network that is beneficial for their future. Madrasah also provides guidance throughout the internship process to ensure students can maximize the benefits of the experience.

The importance for schools to design and implement several programs that can develop students' careers in order to determine their careers both to enter the world of work and to continue their studies in college cannot be denied. Because it can help students not to be confused in determining their careers. This is as stated in the results of his research (Ndoye Upoalkpajor, 2020).

Theoretically, career development is an ongoing process that involves guidance to help individuals understand and direct their career journey. The career development theory proposed by (Pietrofesa & Splete, 1975) explains that individuals go through several important stages in their career journey. These stages include career exploration, formation, and consolidation. The exploration stage, which generally occurs during adolescence, plays a crucial role in determining future career direction. The school acts as a key facilitator in providing support to students (Di Palma & Reid, 2021). This support aims to help students identify their interests, talents and potentials, which will later become an important foundation in career decision-making (Gottfried dkk., 2023; Otu, 2024).

Various previous studies have proven the effectiveness of career development programs in secondary schools in improving students' readiness to face the challenges of the world of work. Research by (Han dkk., 2021) shows that effective career development programs in schools can increase student participation in higher education and narrow the gap



between education and the world of work. The study also emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in the process.

Career development programs not only impact academic aspects, but also have a significant social impact (Stipanovic dkk., 2017). The study by (Erdmann dkk., 2022) revealed that a comprehensive career guidance program can improve students' social skills, including the ability to communicate and work together in teams. At Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo', the Campus Talk program presents external speakers from various professional backgrounds, allowing students to build a wide social network. This is in line with the madrasah's efforts in building cooperation with higher education institutions and industries.

Several studies have shown that many students experience confusion after graduating from school in determining their careers, both related to education majors and jobs (Erdmann dkk., 2022; Manik, 2022; van Huizen dkk., 2021). This is often due to the lack of guidance and counseling facilitated in schools. John Holland's career readiness theory emphasizes the importance of the exploration process and interest mapping in preparing students' careers (Sheldon dkk., 2020). The "Student Portfolio One Student Three Medals" program at Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' is a clear example of the application of this theory. Students not only compete, but also have a well-documented track record of achievement. This is in line with the theory that students with a good portfolio of achievements will find it easier to make career and further education choices.

Referring to the Campus Talk program, Ali & McWhirter's (2006) study shows that career seminars play an important role in directing students to career paths that match their interests and potential. Inviting professional practitioners, academics, and employers in Campus Talk is also in line with social cognitive career theory, where students can gain a realistic view of their career choices. The career counseling program conducted by counseling teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' once every one to two weeks plays a central role in helping students map out their career potential. The study of (Ireh, 1999) shows that ongoing career coaching helps students better prepare for the transition from education to the world of work. In-depth discussions between students, parents, and counseling teachers emphasized the importance of three-party collaboration in the career

decision-making process (Mullen dkk., 2021). This is reinforced by the results of research that shows that guidance and counseling conducted to students is very helpful in determining their careers.

### **Program Evaluation**

Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' implements a continuous evaluation system to ensure the effectiveness of its programs in preparing students for higher education and the workforce. The evaluation is conducted through monthly reports that monitor each student's progress, including potential changes in their choice of majors and career paths. This process involves regular counseling sessions and updated socialization regarding study options, scholarship opportunities, and university admission routes.

The school uses several success indicators to assess students' readiness for higher education or entering the workforce. Firstly, the school evaluates students' involvement in various preparatory activities, such as internship programs, participation in academic and non-academic competitions, and the outcomes of personal career consultations. Secondly, the school also assesses the number of students successfully admitted to universities or directly employed after graduation.

Based on available data, 97% of Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' graduates continue their education at universities, while the remaining 3% directly enter the workforce. This percentage demonstrates the program's success in achieving its goal of adequately preparing students to pursue higher education or enter the professional world according to their individual interests and talents.

Program evaluation is an important part of ensuring the success and sustainability of programs implemented in institution (Chen dkk., 2024), especially in career development and college preparation programs. By conducting continuous evaluation, the school can ensure that students get the maximum benefit from the program. This evaluation helps identify components that are working well as well as areas that require improvement, so that strategic steps can be taken to improve the effectiveness of the program (Owen, 2020). In this context, (Chen, 2015) theory of formative and summative evaluation is highly relevant. Formative evaluation provides useful feedback during program implementation to enable needed

adjustments, while summative evaluation provides a final assessment of the achievement of program objectives. Both complement each other in creating a continuous cycle of improvement.

Therefore, comprehensive evaluation results are not only beneficial for program managers, but also for students, teachers and parents. By involving all parties, the evaluation process can gain greater insight into what students need to succeed in the future, both in college and the workforce. Teachers can gain important information on how they can adjust their teaching methods or career guidance, while parents can better understand the steps the school is taking to prepare their children for the challenges ahead. Ultimately, this evaluation is an invaluable tool for optimizing career development and higher education programs, ensuring that every student gets the right direction and opportunities for academic and professional success.

### **Challenges and Solutions**

In implementing the aforementioned programs, the Department of Achievement Development and Career Advancement undoubtedly faces several challenges. The main challenges include:

1. Declining student interest due to excessive activity load, causing difficulty in focusing on specific preparations such as olympiads.
2. Olympiad class programs that have not received intensive mentoring, resulting in suboptimal performance.
3. Lack of parental involvement in the college preparation consultation process.

To address these challenges, the department has implemented several solutions:

1. Adjusting student activity schedules to be more balanced, allowing them to focus more on programs crucial for their academic and career development.
2. Increasing the frequency and quality of olympiad class mentoring by involving more educators and expert mentors, aiming to provide more focused and intensive guidance. Organizing more intensive socialization and communication sessions with parents to raise

awareness of the importance of their support in the consultation process and college preparation.

By implementing these solutions, it hopes to create a stronger synergy between students, parents, and the school. The ultimate goal is to optimize career and college preparation programs, thus providing better outcomes for students' futures. Through this more balanced and integrated approach, Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' strives to continually improve the quality of student preparation in facing future academic and career challenges.

The findings related to the challenges faced above can be analyzed through the cognitive load management theory proposed by (Tindall-Ford dkk., 2020). This theory explains that too high cognitive load on students, such as excessive activities, can interfere with their ability to focus on specific tasks, including Olympic preparation. Therefore, schedule adjustments made by madrasah to balance student activities are the right step to reduce the cognitive load. The study of (Sweller, 2023) also supports that good cognitive load management can improve student performance, especially in areas that require focus and dedication such as academic Olympiads.

In addition, increasing the frequency and quality of guidance in Olympic classes, as well as parental involvement in the college preparation consultation process, is in line with the social-ecological engagement theory proposed by (Szulewski dkk., 2021). This theory emphasizes the importance of synergy between family, school, and community environments in supporting children's development. A study by (Otu, 2024) showed that parental involvement in children's education, especially in career and higher education planning, contributes significantly to learning outcomes and career readiness.

## **D. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo' has taken concrete steps to prepare students in career development and continuing education to college. The main step taken is the establishment of the Achievement and Career Development

Division. This division has designed and implemented various innovative programs, including: Student Portfolio One Student Three Medals, Campus Talk, Coaching Students Preparation to College (Study Campus), Info Task Force and Race Registration, and Workshop Student Talent Interest. These programs are designed to not only focus on academic development, but also provide opportunities for students to explore their interests, talents, and career potential.

The success of these efforts can be seen from the high percentage of graduates who continue to college (97%) and the rest who directly enter the workforce. Despite facing some challenges such as declining student interest due to overload and lack of parental involvement, the madrasah has shown good adaptability by implementing creative solutions. A holistic approach involving collaboration between students, parents and school authorities, as well as cooperation with higher education institutions and industry, demonstrates Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo's commitment to preparing its students for future academic and career challenges.

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