

## **Optimizing Student Development through Effective Assessment Practices: Insights from School Counselors in Indonesia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, education has gained significant attention from academics and practitioners. The transformative initiatives introduced by Indonesia's Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, have reshaped the educational landscape, particularly through the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) program. This qualitative study, utilizing a descriptive approach, investigates the use of assessments by school counselors (BK teachers) and their implementation in guidance and counseling services. The research involved 11 informants, including school principals, BK teachers, and students, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using observations, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed following Miles & Huberman's methodology. Findings reveal that while BK teachers follow structured steps in using assessments, they face challenges such as the lack of standardized instruments, limited time, and inadequate technological integration. Despite these obstacles, BK teachers strive to improve their practices by effectively communicating assessment results, integrating technology, and implementing actionable insights. The study underscores the necessity for better resources and applications to support the effective use of assessments. Assessments are crucial for understanding students' strengths and needs, providing tailored guidance, and facilitating academic, social, and emotional development. This data-driven approach enhances early problem identification, informed interventions, and the development of students' unique potentials. The study concludes that effective assessment implementation, supported by a positive school environment and adequate resources, is vital for enhancing the quality of guidance and counseling services, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and student well-being.

**Keywords:** assessment tools, school counseling, merdeka belajar, qualitative research, educational development



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### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era, education has captured the interest of both academics and practitioners. The transformative speech by the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, has significantly reshaped the landscape of our current educational system. The concept of "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) has become the guiding principle for the future direction of Indonesian education. Policies now appear more practical, as evidenced by the replacement of the National Examination with the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM), comprehensive assessments in USBN, simplification of lesson plans (RPP/RPL), and the implementation of the zonation system for new student admissions (Sherly et al., 2020).

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In line with the policies implemented by the Minister of Education and Culture, school counselors (BK teachers) as service providers in schools must adapt and accommodate these policies by thoroughly understanding the technical execution of the Merdeka Belajar program. There are several aspects of this program that require the involvement of BK teachers, such as determining the Minimum Competency Assessment, which focuses on literacy and numeracy. In the realm of guidance and counseling, assessment is paramount in identifying the needs of students in the classroom. Both test and non-test assessments are necessary to develop appropriate programs for students, considering their conditions and issues (Siregar, 2020). These assessments have become more practical with the use of applications developed by educational experts.

Several assessment tools, such as the Analysis of Student Needs (AKPD) and Sociometry, can serve as references for BK teachers in designing service programs for students. These tools assist BK teachers in identifying past and current issues faced by students, enabling them to provide appropriate interventions. This ensures that students receive services tailored to their needs, such as determining suitable career paths (Agung, 2018) and fostering effective social relationships (Pradana, 2019). The application of these assessments is not limited to high school (SMA/MA) students but extends across all educational levels, from early childhood education (PAUD) to higher education (Arjanto, 2015; Jeanete O Papilaya, 2023; Mahaly, 2021b; Permadin & Herdi, 2021).

What is the relevance of these assessments to BK teachers in schools? Firstly, understanding students: assessments provide comprehensive information about students' conditions, including academic abilities, interests and talents, strengths and weaknesses, as well as social and emotional capabilities. Secondly, planning services: assessment results can be used to tailor guidance and counseling services to meet students' needs. Thirdly, program evaluation: BK teachers can evaluate the effectiveness of the programs implemented, determining whether the services provided have benefited the students. Lastly, building relationships with third parties: assessment results offer an objective view of students' conditions, facilitating communication with parents, teachers, or other relevant professionals if necessary. These points underscore the importance of assessments for BK teachers in delivering effective guidance and counseling services in schools.

However, there are various types of assessments that can be implemented by BK teachers in schools, but many still find it challenging and are unfamiliar with these tools. Research by Herlinda et al. (2020) indicates that BK teachers are not yet proficient in using assessments, find the applications difficult to use, and that these applications are often unavailable in schools. Preliminary observations conducted by the researcher in several high schools in Ambon revealed that some BK teachers were unfamiliar with AKPD and Sociometry assessments, although they had heard of them. Others were aware but had not implemented them due to a lack of resources. This concern highlights the need for BK teachers to professionalize their skills in identifying student issues and conducting appropriate programs. The potential benefits of effectively utilizing assessments and data in service implementation are significant.

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## **METHOD**

This research is categorized as qualitative research utilizing a descriptive approach. The informants in this study consist of 11 individuals, including 2 school principals, 6 school counselors (BK teachers), and 3 students from different schools. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the informants had the necessary knowledge and experience relevant to the study. The selected principals were those with significant experience in managing their respective schools and implementing assessment policies. BK teachers chosen were those actively involved in the application of assessment tools within their counseling services. Students were selected to provide insights into the impact and reception of these services.

To collect data, the researcher employed multiple instruments, including observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation. Each instrument served a specific purpose. Observations were conducted to gather real-time information about the implementation and utilization of assessment tools by BK teachers, focusing on the processes and practices observed in the school setting. Interviews were conducted with two principals to understand the execution of assessment policies at their schools, six BK teachers to evaluate how they utilized assessment tools and the challenges they faced in their implementation, and three students from different schools to gather data on the implementation of counseling services from the recipients' perspective. Additionally, photographs, videos, and relevant documents were collected to corroborate and strengthen the data obtained from interviews and observations.

The data analysis process followed the qualitative data analysis methodology proposed by Miles & Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appeared in written-up field notes or transcriptions. Initial coding was used to categorize the data. Data display involved organizing and assembling the information in a way that enabled drawing conclusions, creating matrices, charts, graphs, and networks to visualize the relationships and patterns in the data. The final step, conclusion drawing and verification, involved interpreting the displayed data to draw meaningful conclusions and verifying these conclusions through triangulation and member checking to ensure their validity.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, the research employed triangulation by cross-verifying data from different sources and methods. Member checking was also conducted by sharing the findings with the informants to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations. The study adhered to ethical research practices by ensuring informed consent from all participants, maintaining confidentiality, and avoiding any potential harm to the informants. The research process was designed to respect the participants' privacy and autonomy throughout the study. By utilizing a comprehensive qualitative approach with robust data collection and analysis methods, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation and challenges of assessment tools in school counseling services.

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## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the research findings on the utilization of assessments by school counselors and their implementation in guidance and counseling services, several key aspects can be detailed. The current assessment practices by school counselors involve four essential steps: understanding the meaning of the assessments conducted, knowing the purpose of using assessments, selecting appropriate assessment instruments, and utilizing the assessment results according to needs. These steps are carried out by BK teachers by considering the students' conditions and readiness to receive counseling services. However, the implementation of assessments by school counselors faces six significant challenges: the unavailability of standardized instruments, limited time, an imbalanced ratio of BK teachers to students, suboptimal integration of technology, minimal support from school personnel, and a lack of updated skills and knowledge. These challenges hinder BK teachers from maximizing the application of assessments in their services. Despite these challenges, BK teachers are making efforts to utilize assessments effectively. These efforts include communicating assessment results, providing feedback on the results, integrating technology in assessments, implementing assessment results into service actions, and recommending other instruments in services. These efforts offer new directions for guidance and counseling services by translating assessments into practical actions.

Interviews with school principals revealed that assessments are crucial needs to be addressed by teachers, especially BK teachers. However, there is difficulty in obtaining counseling applications that significantly aid the implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools. While such applications are vital for facilitating and enhancing the effectiveness of counseling services, access remains challenging. This limitation presents a significant obstacle, as the lack of adequate application support impedes optimal assessment and service delivery. The principals expressed hope for solutions that would improve access to BK applications, either through provision by relevant authorities or the development of more affordable and accessible applications for schools. This would enable BK teachers to deliver better services and support students' development maximally. Hamalik states that school guidance provided by BK teachers is an aspect of the educational program aimed at helping students adapt to their situations and plan their futures according to their interests, abilities, and social needs. Guidance, therefore, is assistance given to students to recognize and solve their problems to lead a happy life. Thus, discussions about guidance and counseling should always consider the essence of education (Mahaly, 2021a; Tohirin, 2011).

Interviews with BK teachers highlighted that assessments are vital tools in school guidance and counseling for comprehensively understanding students' personalities. By understanding students' strengths, weaknesses, and needs, BK teachers can provide appropriate assistance and monitor student development regularly. Assessments help accurately identify students' needs, which is crucial in determining the right services. The benefits of assessments extend beyond evaluating the success of service programs to optimizing student development in various aspects, including academic, social, and spiritual. However, it was found that BK teachers lack adequate

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BK applications to identify students' needs and schools effectively. Sudibyo states that in guidance and counseling, school counselors or BK teachers conduct needs assessments on students and the school environment before implementing guidance and counseling services. Tools such as the Inventory of Developmental Tasks (ITP), Problem Disclosure Tools (AUM), Problem Checklist (DCM), Analysis of Student Needs (AKPD), Sociometry, and Interest and Talent Tests can be used alongside interviews, questionnaires, or observations to gather information. Environmental needs include support from parents, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders. Based on these needs assessments, analysis and planning for guidance and counseling programs are carried out (Divinubun et al., 2021; Permadin & Herdi, 2021). Students' needs can range from academic, emotional, social, to personal development issues. Environmental needs involve support from parents, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders. Identifying these needs allows counselors to plan relevant and effective programs to help students address their issues and reach their potential optimally. Thus, needs assessment is a key step in providing effective guidance and counseling services in schools.

Interviews with students revealed that assessments conducted by teachers are beneficial in two main aspects. First, assessments help teachers deliver guidance and counseling services in schools more effectively. By understanding each student's potential, interests, and needs, the guidance provided can be more targeted and personalized. Second, from the students' perspective, assessments are also very useful. Through assessments, students can better recognize their true needs and potentials. This enables them to understand their interests and talents better, ultimately aiding them in planning their future careers more effectively. These assessments serve not only as tools for teachers but also as mirrors for students to understand themselves better and formulate the necessary steps to achieve their career goals.

The benefits of these assessments create a strong synergy between teachers and students in career planning processes. Teachers can use data from assessments to identify areas where students need additional support or specific interventions. For example, if an assessment shows that a student has a high interest in science but lacks confidence in the subject, the teacher can design a guidance program focused on improving the student's skills and confidence in that area. Meanwhile, for students, these assessments provide concrete insights into their strengths and weaknesses. They can focus on developing the necessary skills and seeking opportunities that align with their interests. For instance, a student who discovers a talent in art through assessment may be more motivated to participate in relevant extracurricular activities or choose an educational path that suits their talent. Given these benefits, it is essential for schools to continuously develop and integrate effective assessment methods into their guidance and counseling programs. The use of technology and data-driven approaches can further optimize this process, ensuring that each student receives guidance tailored to their needs. This not only helps students plan their futures but also equips them with the necessary skills to succeed in an increasingly complex and competitive world. Komalasari also states that assessment is a critical element, especially in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data or information about students and their environment.

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This process aims to obtain a comprehensive picture of various individual conditions and their environment, which forms the basis for developing appropriate BK service programs (Rahmad et al., 2019). Komalasari's explanation suggests that assessment, which involves gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data about students and their environment, aims to obtain a comprehensive picture of various individual conditions and their environment. With in-depth and comprehensive data, guidance and counseling teachers can design more targeted and appropriate BK service programs to meet the specific needs of students. This is crucial to ensure that the interventions provided can effectively support students' academic, social, emotional, and psychological development. Additionally, proper assessment helps in the early identification of problems students may face, such as learning difficulties, emotional issues, or social barriers. Thus, interventions can be implemented early to prevent these problems from escalating. Furthermore, through assessment, the unique potential and talents of each student can be identified and developed, allowing BK programs to focus not only on problem-solving but also on positive development and skill enhancement. This data-driven approach ensures that every intervention step is based on strong and relevant evidence, making guidance and counseling services more responsive and adaptive to the real needs of students. According to Hanggara, school guidance and counseling programs should be designed and managed based on assessments and needs assessments, considering the school environment. This is important because needs assessments determine the quality of services provided. With proper assessment, BK programs can more effectively and relevantly meet students' needs, enhancing overall education quality and student well-being (Asmita & Fitriani, 2022). Additionally, BK programs designed based on comprehensive assessments can help identify specific student needs, such as academic, social, emotional, and career issues. Consequently, the services provided can be more directed and aligned with the actual conditions students face. Supportive school environments are also crucial for the success of BK programs, including support from school administrators, teachers, and parental and community involvement. A positive and collaborative environment can facilitate the more effective implementation of BK programs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research findings indicate that while school counselors employ structured steps in utilizing assessments—such as understanding the purpose, selecting appropriate tools, and applying results—several challenges hinder their effective implementation, including the lack of standardized instruments, limited time, an imbalanced student-to-counselor ratio, inadequate technology integration, minimal school support, and outdated skills. Despite these obstacles, counselors strive to enhance their practices by communicating results, providing feedback, integrating technology, implementing actions based on assessments, and recommending additional tools. Principals acknowledge the importance of assessments but note difficulties in accessing effective counseling applications, highlighting a need for better resources. Assessments are recognized as essential for understanding students' strengths and needs, aiding in personalized

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guidance, and supporting academic, social, and emotional development. The data-driven approach facilitated by proper assessments enables early problem identification, informed interventions, and the development of students' unique potentials. Effective implementation of assessments, supported by a positive school environment and adequate resources, is crucial for enhancing the quality of guidance and counseling services, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes and student well-being.

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