



The Role of Environment and Information in Student's Decision to Choose Vocational Education

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the factors that influence the decision of 12th grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Unggulan Tekno Sains in choosing vocational education. This study uses a qualitative method with structured interviews with eight students as respondents. The findings show that the main motivation of students is the desire to acquire practical skills that are in line with the demands of the world of work. External factors that also influence their decisions include parental encouragement, teacher guidance, and peer influence, with teachers playing a dominant role as the main source of information regarding the prospects of vocational education. However, students face challenges in the form of limited socialization from the school and government institutions, resulting in a lack of understanding of the benefits of vocational education. This information gap also reinforces the negative stigma surrounding vocational education. Students suggest more extensive promotion to improve public perception and strengthen understanding of vocational education as a strategic pathway to the workforce. These improvement efforts are believed to increase student participation and societal acceptance of vocational education.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Islamic Education, Motivation, Environmental Influences, Educational Support

Abstrak :

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi keputusan siswa untuk menempuh pendidikan kejuruan di kelas XII Madrasah Aliyah Unggulan Tekno Sains dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui wawancara dengan delapan siswa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa terutama termotivasi oleh aspirasi untuk memperoleh keterampilan praktis yang sesuai dengan tuntutan dunia kerja. Faktor-faktor utama yang mempengaruhi antara lain dorongan orang tua, bimbingan guru, dan pengaruh teman sebaya, dengan guru memainkan peran penting sebagai sumber informasi utama terkait prospek kerja. Namun, siswa menghadapi tantangan karena terbatasnya upaya sosialisasi baik dari sekolah maupun lembaga pemerintah, yang mengakibatkan kurangnya kesadaran tentang manfaat pendidikan kejuruan. Kesenjangan ini berkontribusi pada stigma negatif yang terus berlanjut seputar jalur kejuruan. Para siswa menyatakan perlunya upaya promosi yang lebih luas untuk meningkatkan persepsi publik dan memperkuat pemahaman mereka tentang pelatihan kejuruan sebagai jalur yang layak dan strategis untuk mendapatkan pekerjaan. Mengatasi masalah ini dapat secara signifikan meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dan penerimaan masyarakat terhadap pendidikan kejuruan.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Kejuruan, Pendidikan Islam, Motivasi, Pengaruh Lingkungan, Dukungan Pendidikan

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education in Indonesia has become one of the education pathways that is getting more attention, especially in the midst of the workforce's need for skilled professionals

(Prasetya et al., 2024). According to Sudira (2019) Vocational education offers a different approach compared to traditional academic pathways, as it focuses on mastering practical skills that are relevant to industry needs. The need for a skilled workforce is increasingly important in the current era of globalization and technological development, as explained by Muslim et al. (2023) where a workforce with technical and practical skills is one of the main aspects in supporting the nation's competitiveness. Furthermore, Rosina et al. (2021) argue that vocational education with a curriculum tailored to the needs of the world of work is able to provide a ready-made workforce needed by various sectors.

The decision to choose a vocational education pathway is often challenging for students, given the many factors that influence this choice (Boateng et al., 2024). Environmental factors play an important role in the decision-making process, as expressed by Suyitno et al. (2024) who highlighted that support from parents and peers has a significant impact on students' confidence to choose vocational education. Family support is often the most decisive factor, as parents exert great influence over their children's educational preferences. In addition, Rice et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of the teacher's role in providing comprehensive information regarding the benefits and opportunities offered by vocational education. Adequate information from teachers can help students make more informed decisions regarding the educational path that suits their interests and potential (Ndukwe & Daniel, 2020).

Peer influence is no less important. Students often feel more confident in choosing vocational education when they see their friends taking the same path (Alvarez et al., 2024). Peers are often a source of motivation and inspiration, especially when they share their experiences about vocational education. Aldossari (2020) asserts that students are often influenced by peers' decisions in choosing vocational education pathways. However, as stated by Rosantono et al. (2021), in addition to social influence, the availability of accurate information about vocational education is a major factor in students' decision-making process. Schuster & Margarian (2021) found that access to information from various sources, including teachers and the internet, helped shape students' perceptions of vocational education and the future prospects it offers.

However, unfortunately, many students still face obstacles in accessing adequate information related to vocational education (Eyadat & Mustafa, 2023). Jiao (2023) explained that despite efforts to improve the socialization of vocational education, negative stereotypes about this pathway are still very strong in society. Vocational education is often seen as a "second" choice after the academic pathway. Grundall & Mack (2023) added that this stigma is often an obstacle for students in seeing the great potential of vocational education as an equal pathway that offers bright career prospects. According to Jena & Sahoo (2024) the lack of effective socialization from schools and the government regarding the advantages of vocational education also exacerbates this perception.

In the context of vocational education, understanding how the role of environment and information influences students' decisions is crucial (Nütylähti et al., 2023). This study specifically highlights grade XII students in Madrasah Aliyah, a secondary education institution in Indonesia that offers a combination of general and religious education. As explained by Juhaidi et al. (2023) Madrasah Aliyah provides three years of education and plays a significant role in preparing students for the world of work. With the growing interest in vocational education, these schools are also encouraging students to consider a more applicable and employability-oriented education pathway, as noted by Syahputra et al. (2023). Vocational education is increasingly considered a strategic option for students in the face of evolving labor market demands, especially in sectors that require technical skills (Pan et al., 2025).

This study aims to investigate the specific challenges faced by students in choosing vocational education, particularly in relation to limited early exposure and inadequate support from their environment. Although previous studies, such as Bentsalo et al. (2024), have identified common barriers, little is known about how these challenges are influenced by cultural and policy

dynamics in countries such as Indonesia. This study addresses this gap by examining the Indonesian context, which remains underrepresented in the literature. Unlike previous studies that focused on students' perspectives, this study also integrates the views of schools and policymakers to develop more comprehensive recommendations. By offering a more holistic approach, this study provides new insights for improving outreach and reducing stigma toward vocational pathways. These findings are expected to support the development of an inclusive, responsive, and labor market-oriented education system Sudira (2019), as well as increase student interest in vocational pathways.

Ultimately, this study focuses not only on the factors that influence students' decisions, but also on efforts to improve the career socialization and guidance system in secondary schools. With a better understanding of the role of environment and information, students can more easily access vocational education and see it as a pathway equivalent to the academic pathway in building a future career (Muslim et al., 2023). Suharno et al. (2020) also argue that strengthening the vocational education system in Indonesia can help produce a competent workforce that is able to adapt to the changing needs of the industrial world.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to explore the factors that influence students' decisions in choosing vocational education. Data were collected through structured interviews with eight 12th grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Unggulan Techno Scientist Malang. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results with direct observations in the field and confirming findings through member checking with students and teachers.

Respondent

The respondents in this study were 8 grade XII students at Madrasah Aliyah Unggulan Techno Scientist. The number of respondents is limited by the total number of grade XII students in the school, which is 8 people. The selection of respondents was done purposively to ensure that the data obtained represented a variety of student experiences and perspectives regarding the decision to choose vocational education. Demographic information such as name, absence number, and class were also recorded in each interview

Research Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was a structured interview guide. The interviews covered several main topics, which are summarized in the following interview grid:

Table 1. Background and Motivation

No.	Aspects	Indicator	Question	Reference
1	Background	Education history	Can you tell us a bit about your educational background?	Boud & Solomon (2001)
2	Motivation	Reasons for choosing vocational education	What made you interested in choosing vocational education?	Ryan & Deci (2000)
3	Motivation	Factors that influence decisions	What are the factors that influenced your decision to choose vocational education?	Wigfield & Eccles (2000)

Table 2. Environmental Influence

No.	Aspects	Indicator	Question	Reference
1	Parental Influence	Parental support and influence	How influential were your parents in your decision to choose vocational education?	Grusec & Davidov (2007)
2	Friend Influence	Peer influence	Did your friends also choose vocational education? How has it affected you?	Wentzel (1999)
3	Teacher Influence	The teacher's role in guiding	What is the role of the teacher in guiding you to choose vocational education?	Hattie (2008)

Table 3. Information and Perception

No.	Aspects	Indicator	Question	Reference
1	Source of Information	Source of information on vocational education	Where do you get information about vocational education?	Tinto (1994)
2	Perception of Prospects	Perception of job prospects for vocational graduates	What is your perception of the job prospects of vocational education graduates?	Fouad & Bynner (2008)
3	Interest Match	Suitability of vocational education with interests and talents	Do you feel that vocational education suits your interests and talents? Why?	Super (1980)

Table 4. Future Expectations

No.	Aspects	Indicator	Question	Reference
1	Hope	Expectations after graduating from vocational education	What are your expectations after graduating from vocational education?	Lent et al. (1994)
2	Future Career	Outlook on future career	How do you see your future career after graduating from vocational education?	Savickas (2005)

Table 5. Obstacles and Challenges

No.	Aspects	Indicator	Question	Reference
1	Obstacles	Obstacles in choosing and undergoing vocational education	What obstacles did you face in choosing and undergoing vocational education?	Heckman & Rubinstein (2001)
2	Support	Expected support to overcome obstacles	What support do you expect to overcome these obstacles?	Eccles & Wigfield (2002)

The interviews in this study were structured based on five main dimensions listed in Tables 1 to 5, each designed to explore factors that influence students' decisions in choosing vocational education as a whole. Table 1 focuses on background and motivation, exploring students' educational history, their reasons for choosing vocational education, and the internal and external factors that motivate their decisions. This aspect is based on the learning motivation theory proposed by Boud & Solomon (2001), Ryan & Deci (2000), and Wigfield & Eccles (2000). Table 2 describes the influence of the social environment, such as parental support, peer influence, and the role of teachers in providing guidance. This instrument refers to the concept of socialization from Grusec & Davidov (2007), the theory of peer interaction from Wentzel (1999), and teacher effectiveness from Hattie (2008). Table 3 highlights the sources of information used by students, their perceptions of the job prospects for vocational graduates, and the alignment of vocational education with their personal interests and talents. This aspect was developed from the literature of Tinto (1994), Fouad & Bynner (2008), and Super (1980) to understand the role of perceptions and access to information in decision-making. Furthermore, Table 4 explains students' expectations for the future after graduation, including hopes for employment or continuing education, with reference to career theories from Lent et al. (1994) and Savickas (2005). Finally, Table 5 discusses the obstacles faced by students and the forms of support they expect, using an approach from Heckman & Rubinstein (2001) related to non-cognitive skills and motivation, as well as educational support from Eccles & Wigfield (2002). Each interview session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted in person in a conducive atmosphere to ensure that respondents felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and experiences. The interview process was conducted independently by the researcher and carefully recorded to ensure data accuracy. All dimensions were systematically organized to capture students' experiences, perceptions, and needs in a holistic manner, resulting in valid, contextual, and relevant data for the development of vocational education policies.

Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with each respondent. These interviews were conducted in a familiar school environment for the students, to facilitate a comfortable and open atmosphere. Each interview was recorded (with the respondent's permission) and then transcribed for analysis purposes. In addition to the interviews, researchers also conducted field observations to record the conditions of the school environment that might influence students' decisions, such as support from teachers and facilities provided for the vocational education pathway.

Data Analysis

After the interview data was collected, it was analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis techniques. The steps taken in data analysis include:

- a. Transcribe the interviews to get a complete picture of the conversations that took place.
- b. Data coding, where key themes that emerged from the interviews were grouped into specific categories, such as parental influence, the role of teachers, access to information and future expectations.

Table 6. Coding Table

Category	Code	Description
Background	LB_RP	The respondent's education history, including previous education levels and reasons for entering current education.

Motivation	M_AL	Reasons for choosing vocational education, including interest in practical skills or other factors.
Motivation	M_FK	Factors influencing respondents' decision to choose vocational education (e.g. teacher, parent or friend advice).
Parental Influence	PO_DU	Parents' support for respondents' vocational education choices, including their attitudes and influence.
Friend Influence	PT_PG	The influence of peers in supporting or motivating respondents to choose vocational education.
Teacher Influence	PG_BG	The role of teachers in providing information and guidance related to vocational education.
Source of Information	SI_VOK	Sources of information used by respondents to find out about vocational education (teachers, internet, friends).
Perception of Prospects	PP_PK	Respondents' perceptions of the employment prospects of vocational education graduates, including views on career opportunities.
Interest Match	KM_SM	The match between the chosen vocational education and the respondent's personal interests and talents.
Future Expectations	HM_HL	Respondents' expectations after graduating from vocational education, including career expectations or continuing education.
Future Expectations	HM_KR	Respondents' views on future careers after graduating from vocational education.
Obstacles	K_KD	Obstacles faced in the process of choosing and undergoing vocational education, such as lack of information or support.
Support	D_DK	Support expected by respondents to overcome obstacles faced in vocational education.

Coding Explanation:

- 1) Background (LB): Relates to previous educational experience and initial motivation for choosing vocational education.
 - 2) Motivation (M): The main reasons that drive students to choose vocational education, as well as the external factors that influence their decision.
 - 3) Environmental Influence (PO/PT/PG): Describes the extent to which parents, peers and teachers influence students' educational choices.
 - 4) Source of Information (SI): Sources that students access to get information about vocational education.
 - 5) Perceptions and Expectations (PP/KM/HM): Focuses on how students assess career prospects and the suitability of vocational education to their interests.
 - 6) Constraints and Support (K/D): Describes the difficulties students face in undergoing vocational education, as well as the support they need.
- c. Identification of main themes, where the coded data is analyzed to identify certain patterns related to students' decisions in choosing vocational education.
- d. Data interpretation, where researchers draw conclusions based on thematic patterns that have been found, to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence student decisions.

Data Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, this study used source triangulation techniques. Researchers compared information obtained from various respondents, as well as from other sources such as field observations and additional information from teachers. In addition, the researcher also conducted member checking, where the results of the

interviews were confirmed back to the respondents to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in accordance with the intentions conveyed by the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Background and Motivation of Students Choosing Vocational Education

Based on the interviews conducted, the main motivation for students in choosing vocational education is a strong desire to acquire practical skills that can be directly applied in the workplace. Table 7 presents a summary of the interview results with eight 12th grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Unggulan Techno Scientist Malang. Based on the interviews conducted, the main motivation for students in choosing vocational education is a strong desire to acquire practical skills that can be directly applied in the workplace. The students believe that vocational education offers programs that are more relevant to industry needs, thereby preparing them to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. In addition to internal factors such as personal motivation, external factors also play an important role. Teacher support in providing information about job prospects and the benefits of vocational education, as well as encouragement from parents who desire a more economically stable future for their children, are key considerations in decision-making. It is this collaboration between intrinsic motivation and external support that ultimately drives students to choose the vocational path. The findings show that all respondents were motivated by practical skills, seven students felt strong support from their parents, and six students cited peers as a factor that boosted their confidence. All students also acknowledged the role of teachers as their primary source of information, while five students relied on teachers and the internet as their main references. Eight students had a positive perception of the job prospects for vocational school graduates, and seven of them hoped to start working immediately after graduation. However, six students revealed that limited initial information was the main obstacle in learning about vocational pathways. Therefore, they hope for improved outreach and guidance from schools and the government. Overall, Table 7 illustrates that students' decisions are influenced by a combination of personal motivation, environmental influences, and access to adequate information.

Table 7. Interview Results Table

Category	Number of Respondents	Brief Description
Motivation	8	Respondents were motivated by practical skills that could be applied immediately after graduation.
Parental Influence	7	Most respondents felt that their parents supported their decision to choose vocational education.
Friend Influence	6	Friends play a significant role in providing confidence to choose vocational training.
Teacher Influence	8	Teachers are considered the main source of information and guidance on vocational education.
Source of Information	5	The internet and teachers are the main sources of information on vocational education.
Perception of Job Prospects	8	Most respondents were optimistic about the job prospects of vocational graduates.
Graduate Expectations	7	Respondents expect to be able to work immediately after graduating from vocational education.
Obstacles	6	The main obstacle faced is the lack of initial information about vocational education.

Expected Support	6	Students wish there was more socialization and guidance from the school and government.
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Environmental Influences: Parents, Teachers and Peers

The social environment plays an important role in influencing students' decision to choose a vocational education pathway. Parents, peers and teachers contribute significantly to this decision-making process. Support from parents is often a major factor, especially as they want a more stable future for their children through skills that can be directly applied in the world of work. In addition, peers can also provide encouragement and motivation, especially when there are friends who are also considering the vocational education path. Teachers, on the other hand, play an equally important role by providing in-depth information on the benefits and career prospects of vocational education. Teachers also provide relevant guidance and help students understand whether this pathway matches their interests and talents. This combination of support from the social environment greatly influences students' final decision.

Table 8. Interview Coding Results Table

Code	Category	Description
M_AL	Motivation	The reasons students choose vocational education include practical skills.
M_FK	Motivation	External factors that influence student decisions, such as teachers and parents.
PO_DU	Parental Influence	Significant parental support in student decisions.
PT_PG	Friend Influence	Peer influence in giving students confidence.
PG_BG	Teacher Influence	The teacher's role in providing information and guidance.
SI_VOK	Source of Information	Students' sources of information about vocational education include teachers and the internet.
PP_PK	Perception of Job Prospects	Students' perceptions of job prospects for vocational education graduates.
KM_SM	Interest Match	The suitability of vocational education to students' interests and talents.
HM_HL	Future Expectations	Students' expectations after graduating from vocational education include immediate employment.
HM_KR	Future Expectations	Students' views on future careers after graduation.
K_KD	Obstacles	Obstacles faced by students in choosing and undergoing vocational education.
D_DK	Support	The support students expect from the school and the government.

Sources of Information and Perceptions of Job Prospects

Most students obtain information related to vocational education from two main sources, namely teachers and the internet. Teachers play a very important role in providing students with an understanding of what vocational education is, how the learning system works, and the

various opportunities that vocational graduates can access. With their experience and knowledge, teachers are able to provide a clear picture of the career prospects for students who pursue this educational pathway. On the other hand, the internet is a very accessible source of information, where students can search for various references, articles and videos that provide additional insights into vocational education. Advances in technology allow students to quickly access information about vocational education institutions, study programs, and job vacancies that are relevant to the skills learned in this education pathway.

Students' perceptions of the job prospects of vocational education graduates tend to be very positive. Most of them are optimistic that the technical and practical skills acquired during vocational education will provide a competitive advantage when they enter the workforce. This belief is reinforced by the increasing demand for workers who have specific skills in various industrial sectors. Students believe that by focusing on developing skills that match market needs, they will find it easier to get a job after graduation. In addition, some students also see that vocational education opens up opportunities for entrepreneurship, as the skills they learn allow them to work independently or open their own businesses. This optimism shows that vocational education is not only seen as an alternative, but as a strategic choice to face competition in an increasingly competitive world of work.

Discussion

Student Motivation in Choosing Vocational Education

Students' motivation in choosing a vocational education pathway is mostly closely related to the desire to acquire applicable and relevant skills in the world of work. Many students feel that vocational education provides more practical training compared to pure academic education, which tends to be more theoretical. This is in line with Self-Determination theory which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation in choosing an educational path. Individuals who have an intrinsic desire to master certain skills will be more encouraged to choose an educational pathway that allows them to develop these competencies. In the context of vocational education, Ryan & Deci (2017) explain that intrinsic motivation plays a major role in helping students focus on practical skills that are beneficial for working life. For students interested in practical and technical skills, vocational education is a logical choice because it provides direct access to work-oriented learning.

In addition to intrinsic motivation, external factors also play a significant role in students' decision to choose vocational education. Support coming from parents and teachers is crucial in giving students confidence in their choice. Parents who understand the benefits of vocational education tend to give full support to their children, creating a supportive atmosphere at home. This is reinforced by the findings in a study conducted by Hariko & Anggriana (2019) which states that family support, especially parents, plays an important role in shaping students' beliefs towards their educational choices. With this support, students feel more confident that their choices will have a positive impact on the future, especially in terms of employment opportunities. This support is not only in the form of verbal encouragement, but can also be in the form of advice and practical considerations regarding future careers that can be achieved through vocational pathways.

Teachers also play a central role in helping students understand the advantages of vocational education. According to Trilling & Fadel (2009) teachers can act as facilitators in connecting students with the world of work and provide guidance that is relevant to the evolving needs of the industry. In addition to providing details about available programs, teachers often act as mentors who help students find an educational path that suits their interests and talents. Teacher involvement in this process ensures that students receive sufficient guidance to make

informed decisions based on accurate and relevant information. In addition, the teacher's role also assists students in planning their future careers with concrete and realistic guidance.

Previous research also supports the important role of the social environment in students' educational decision-making. For example, Rigopoulos et al. (2021) asserted that support from parents and teachers strongly influences students' career choices, particularly in vocational education, where this pathway focuses more on developing skills relevant to the world of work. This support serves as a buffer that helps students face challenges in their learning process. When parents provide full support, students are more likely to feel comfortable and confident in their choices, even if the path taken is different from the mainstream such as academic education. In the context of vocational education, this support becomes even more crucial given the many practical demands that students must face when preparing to enter the world of work.

Environmental Influence on Education Decisions

Environmental influences, especially from parents, teachers and peers, play an important role in students' decision to choose vocational education. Parents often provide significant support, both emotionally and financially, which encourages their children to choose this educational pathway. Research conducted by Vautero et al. (2021) found that family support is a key factor in shaping student motivation, especially when it comes to choosing a career-related education path. This finding is in line with Social Influence theory, which states that individual decisions are often influenced by the social interactions around them. When students feel supported by parents and peers, they are more confident in choosing an educational path that may be different from the mainstream, such as vocational education.

In addition to support from parents, peers also have an influence that cannot be ignored. A study by Hadi et al. (2023) mentioned that peers often serve as social agents that encourage students to make similar decisions, especially in the context of education. Peers who also choose vocational education can strengthen students' beliefs that this path is the right choice. This is in line with the concept of Social Influence theory, where individuals tend to imitate the behavior or decisions of their social groups. In this case, positive social interactions can shape students' perceptions of the career prospects of vocational education, thus strengthening their decision to follow this pathway. This social support becomes an important foundation for students in overcoming doubts or uncertainties that they may face.

The role of teachers is equally important in helping students understand the advantages of vocational education. Teachers often serve as the main source of information on the long-term benefits of this educational pathway. Based on research by Baumeister and Magee et al. (2022), relevant guidance from teachers can have a significant influence on students' decisions, especially in providing more in-depth knowledge about job prospects and skills needed in the industrial world. Teachers who provide personalized guidance also help students identify their potential and direct them to the most suitable career path. Another study by Ansong et al. (2024) showed that students who received guidance from teachers were more likely to feel confident in their choice of vocational pathway, as they had a clearer roadmap of their future.

Social Influence theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how the social environment influences student decisions. According to this theory, individuals are often influenced by social interactions with parents, friends and teachers in making important decisions, including choosing an educational pathway (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A supportive environment not only gives students confidence, but also allows them to explore possibilities with a better understanding of their options. With solid social support, especially from parents and teachers, students feel more confident that vocational education not only suits their interests, but also offers bright career prospects. This support ultimately strengthens students' decision to choose vocational education as a strategic pathway for their future.

Constraints and Expected Support

Although students have strong motivation and are supported by their social environment such as parents, peers and teachers, they still face various obstacles in the process of choosing vocational education. One of the main obstacles faced by students is the initial lack of information available regarding this educational pathway. Many students feel that the information they receive from schools or the government is very limited and lacks depth. The limited socialization of the benefits and job prospects of vocational education makes students hesitant to choose this pathway. In fact, vocational education can be a strategic choice for those who want to acquire practical skills that can be directly applied in the world of work. This lack of information not only hinders students in understanding the benefits of vocational education, but also limits their options in making the right decisions about their future.

This lack of socialization and information points to the need to improve the communication and promotion system regarding vocational education, both from schools and the government. The government, through the ministry of education, has the responsibility to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various education pathways available to students, including vocational education. According to research conducted by Al-Rahmi et al. (2021) many students in various countries face similar obstacles, where information regarding non-academic educational pathways is not optimally socialized by the government and educational institutions. More structured and equitable socialization, both through in-school activities and mass media, is expected to provide students with a better understanding of the advantages of vocational education and the job prospects that come with it. This will enable students to make more informed and strategic decisions regarding their future careers.

Students also expect schools to play a more active role in providing career guidance that is more targeted and relevant to the needs of today's workforce. Schools, especially at the upper secondary level such as Madrasah Aliyah and Vocational High Schools (SMK), have an obligation to provide comprehensive information on vocational education pathways. Teachers in schools can provide more in-depth information about vocational programs, as well as help students to identify their interests and talents so that they can choose the most suitable education pathway. Research by Sadoughi & Hejazi (2021) confirmed that career guidance provided personally by teachers has a significant impact on students' decisions in choosing vocational education pathways. In this context, teachers should be equipped with adequate knowledge and training on vocational education so that they can be a reliable source of information for students.

In addition to the role of schools and teachers, students also expect greater support from the government, not only in terms of information but also in terms of vocational education facilities and infrastructure. The government needs to ensure that vocational schools have adequate facilities to provide learning experiences that are in line with industry needs. As stated by Muslim et al. (2023) the success of vocational education depends not only on the curriculum, but also on the quality of facilities and strong links with the industrial sector. Well-equipped facilities, such as technical laboratories and workshops equipped with modern equipment, will help students develop practical skills that match the demands of today's working world. In addition, cooperation between vocational schools and local companies is also important in providing internship opportunities or practical work programs that can prepare students to work immediately after graduation.

Greater support, both in terms of information, guidance and facilities, is expected to help students better prepare for vocational education and face challenges in the world of work. With more targeted career guidance and more adequate facilities, students will have better opportunities to develop relevant skills and gain practical experience before entering the workforce. In addition, better socialization from the government will help change the lingering negative perceptions of vocational education, so that it can be seen as an equally valuable option to academic education. Ultimately, these improvements in information and support systems will

help create a younger generation that is better prepared and competent to face the challenges of an increasingly competitive workforce.

CONCLUSION

This study found that students' main motivation in choosing vocational education is to gain practical skills that can be directly applied in the world of work, with strong support from parents and teacher guidance playing an important role. Environmental influences, including peers, also affect students' decisions, with parents and teachers providing significant encouragement. Although optimism towards the job prospects of vocational graduates is high, students face obstacles in the form of a lack of initial information and socialization from schools and the government. Therefore, increased socialization and the removal of negative stigma towards vocational education are necessary to help students make informed decisions and be ready to undergo vocational education with full confidence.

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