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# DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT INCLUSIVE VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN SURAKARTA

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**ABSTRACT**

Effective vocational guidance is crucial for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. This preliminary study describes its implementation at the Inclusive State Vocational High School in Surakarta, focusing on the pre-production, production, and post-production stages. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary studies, this research involved guidance counselors and students with disabilities. Findings show that while the guidance process includes potential identification and transition facilitation, its effectiveness is hampered by significant challenges: limited resources, suboptimal learning adaptation, and insufficient networking with inclusive industries. This study highlights the need to develop a more adaptive and sustainable vocational guidance model for this context.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Vocational education is a form of education designed to prepare students to enter the workforce with specific skills. For students with disabilities, vocational education not only holds instrumental value as an economic provision, but also serves as a means of social empowerment and inclusion [1]. In the context of education in Indonesia, policy direction has emphasized the importance of implementing inclusive education through regulations such as Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities and Minister of National Education Regulation Number 70 of 2009 on Inclusive Education.

Nevertheless, in practice, the implementation of vocational education for students with disabilities in inclusive Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan or SMK) still faces various challenges. A study conducted by Asikin indicates that the majority of inclusive SMKs have yet to establish a systematic model for vocational guidance services, whether in terms of assessment planning, practical implementation, or post-training follow-up [2]. This is supported by data from the Center for Education Data and Statistics, which shows that out of all SMKs claiming to be inclusive, only around 35% have developed adaptive vocational service systems for students with disabilities, including curriculum modifications, learning media, and career counseling interventions [3].

In response to this situation, the vocational guidance approach proposed by Bachtiar becomes a relevant reference for further examination [4]. Yoyon Bachtiar divides the vocational guidance process into three main stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. The pre-production stage includes the identification of

interests, potential mapping, and career planning. The production stage focuses on the implementation of vocational skills, including curriculum adaptation and soft skills development strategies. Meanwhile, the post-production stage emphasizes work readiness reinforcement, product marketing, and transition to the business or industrial world.

Based on a preliminary study conducted at one inclusive SMK in Surakarta, it was found that the implementation of vocational guidance services for students with disabilities has included several stages as outlined by Bachtiar. In the pre-production stage, the initial assessment was based on psychological test results brought by the parents and interviews with the student's previous junior high school teachers. Unfortunately, the school does not yet have a Special Assistance Teacher (Guru Pendamping Khusus or GPK), resulting in assessment and Individual Service Plan (Rencana Pelaksanaan Layanan or RPL) planning relying heavily on the counseling teacher and informal communication with parents. The main sources of funding are BOS and BOP programs, along with collaboration with external parties such as psychologists.

During the service implementation stage, students with disabilities generally receive individual counseling, although they also participate in classical guidance sessions. Challenges encountered include communication barriers, difficulties in adapting to the material, and a tendency to lose focus during sessions. Counseling teachers also face obstacles in terms of monitoring due to the absence of GPK, as well as limited access to specialized training. Nevertheless, the counseling teachers demonstrate strong personal competencies in terms of patience and adaptive approaches, and continuously evaluate services through observation and student progress reports.

In the post-production stage, follow-up processes for students with disabilities are carried out personally through dialogues with parents and mapping of the students' challenges. If further intervention is needed, the school provides referrals to psychologists. Service evaluation is conducted based on the student's initial condition and the outcomes achieved, although standardized evaluation instruments are not yet in use.

While previous research and national statistical data have successfully identified the existence of this problem at a macro level, a distinct research gap remains. There is a scarcity of in-depth qualitative studies that analyze the processual dynamics of vocational guidance implementation at the day-to-day school level. Specifically, how a theoretical framework, such as the three-stage approach of pre-production, production, and post-production proposed by Bachtiar, is operationalized, adapted, and compromised amidst real-world constraints has not been thoroughly explored.

A comprehensive analysis of international research reveals a significant paradox in vocational guidance for students with disabilities: while global and national policies champion Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a crucial pathway to empowerment and social inclusion, the reality on the ground is defined by a pervasive "policy-practice disconnect" [5]. This gap is sustained by a complex web of interconnected barriers that systematically undermine student success. Key challenges include chronic underfunding, which leads to physically inaccessible infrastructure and a scarcity of adaptive resources ; a profound deficit in teacher training, leaving educators unprepared to manage diverse needs or adapt rigid, inflexible curricula ; and powerful socio-cultural obstacles, such as negative stereotypes, social stigma, and peer rejection, which create hostile learning environments [6]. The lived experiences of students are further complicated by intersectionality, where disability combines with race, class, and culture to create compounded disadvantages that educational systems are ill-equipped to address.[7] Consequently, students face a broken school-to-work transition and are often forced to bear the heavy burden of self-advocacy in unsupportive environments. Overcoming these issues requires a holistic framework for action, centered on robust policy enforcement, comprehensive teacher training, curriculum innovation based on universal design, and strong "triple helix" collaboration between educational institutions, industry, and government to create truly equitable and empowering vocational pathways.

Despite possessing a robust legal framework for inclusive education, notably Law No. 8 of 2016 and its supporting regulations like Permendikbudriset No. 48 of 2023, which mandate reasonable accommodation and the establishment of Disability Service Units (ULDs), vocational guidance for students with disabilities in Indonesia reveals a significant implementation gap [8]. In practice, vocational high schools (SMK) grapple with systemic and institutional barriers, including insufficient funding, a critical shortage of trained Special Guidance Teachers (GPK), and inadequate physical infrastructure [9]. This deficit forces Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers, who typically lack specialized training in special needs education, to manage complex student needs, leading to challenges in curriculum adaptation and effective communication [10]. Furthermore, the transition from school to work is severely hampered by a disconnect with the business and industrial world (DUDI), where social stigma, discriminatory hiring practices, and a general lack of preparedness to accommodate disabled employees persist. Consequently, while students report positive social development from inclusive settings , they face a fragmented support ecosystem and a difficult career trajectory, compelling many graduates to pursue entrepreneurship as a viable alternative to formal employment.

Addressing this gap holds significant urgency. Without a granular understanding of on-the-ground implementation challenges, national policy mandates for inclusive education risk becoming mere administrative

documents. The failure to translate policy into effective practice directly hinders the social and economic empowerment of students with disabilities, which is the ultimate goal of vocational education itself.

Through this study, the researcher aims to explore how vocational guidance for students with disabilities is implemented in inclusive SMKs in Surakarta using Bachtiar's stage-based approach, as well as to identify strategies, challenges, and best practices that can serve as references for developing inclusive and equitable vocational education [4].

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, aiming to provide an in-depth description of the implementation of vocational guidance practices for students with disabilities at an inclusive vocational high school (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, or SMK) in Surakarta. The research site is a state vocational high school in Surakarta that has adopted an inclusive education system, offering six majors: Computer Network Engineering, Fine Arts, Visual Communication Design, Craft and Product Design, Animation, and Fashion Design.

Primary data sources were obtained through semi-structured interviews and participatory observations involving school counselors and students with disabilities. Observations were conducted in vocational practice rooms, counseling service areas, and inclusive learning environments. Meanwhile, secondary data were collected from internal school documents such as the Individual Service Plan (Rencana Pelaksanaan Layanan, or RPL), counseling activity reports, and internal policies related to the inclusive program.

The research instrument was developed based on the model proposed by Yoyon Bachtiar, which includes three stages: pre-production (assessment, career planning, teacher collaboration), production (vocational practice assistance, soft skills development, problem solving), and post-production (career transition, work showcase, portfolio). Data validity was tested using triangulation of sources, techniques, and time [11]

### Research Instrument

The research instrument was developed based on the model proposed by Yoyon Bachtiar, which includes three stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. To operationalize this model into practical data collection tools, the three stages were broken down into key indicators that guided the development of the interview guide and observation format. This process involved:

- Interview Guide Development: A semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore the experiences and perceptions of school counselors and students with disabilities. Questions were structured thematically around Bachtiar's stages. For the pre-production stage, questions focused on assessment techniques, student potential mapping, and the career planning process. For the production stage, the guide explored methods of practical assistance, soft skills development, and problem-solving strategies during learning activities. For the post-production stage, questions addressed career transition support, portfolio development, and opportunities for work showcases.
- Observation Format Development: A participatory observation format was created to systematically record activities and interactions in real-time. The format was divided into sections corresponding to the three stages, allowing the researcher to document how theoretical concepts were implemented in practice within vocational practice rooms and counseling areas. This included observing teacher-student interactions, the use of adaptive tools, and the overall atmosphere of the inclusive setting.
- Document Analysis Guide: A checklist was used for analyzing secondary data, such as the Individual Service Plan (RPL) and activity reports. This guide helped in systematically extracting information related to how planning, implementation, and follow-up for each student were documented according to the pre-production, production, and post-production phases..

### Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study adopts a qualitative approach referring to the model developed by Miles et al. [12]. This model consists of three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification:

- Data Reduction

  This involves simplifying, selecting, and focusing raw data obtained from the field. In this study, data reduction was carried out through the selection of interview transcripts, observation field notes, and relevant documents to identify essential information related to the implementation of vocational guidance for students with disabilities at SMKN Surakarta. The data were then

organized based on categories aligned with the vocational guidance stages: pre-production, production, and post-production, as proposed by Bachtiar [4].

- Data Display
  Reduced data were presented in descriptive narrative form, thematic matrices, or tables to help the researcher identify patterns and relationships among themes. The purpose of data display is to organize information for in-depth analysis, particularly in portraying the dynamics of vocational guidance, the involvement of school counselors, and the experiences of students with disabilities in vocational learning processes.
- Conclusion Drawing and Verification
  Conclusions were derived from interpreting the presented data and were continuously verified throughout the analysis process to maintain the validity and consistency of the findings. Conclusions are not considered final until sufficient data support valid interpretation.

Through these three stages, the study provides a comprehensive depiction of how the vocational guidance model for students with disabilities is implemented in the context of inclusive vocational education, and how each stage (pre-production, production, post-production) is carried out at SMKN Surakarta.

### Data Validity

The researcher applied the validity approach proposed by Satori and Komariah, which involves source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation [11].

1. Source Triangulation was conducted by comparing and confirming information obtained from two primary research subjects: school counselors and students with disabilities. This approach allows the researcher to examine the consistency and differences in perceptions between service providers and recipients of vocational guidance, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

2 Technique Triangulation was performed by combining various data collection methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis (such as individual service plans, counseling records, and vocational learning documentation). Using this technique, interview data were verified against observation results and document reviews to obtain a holistic and comprehensive picture of vocational guidance implementation.

3. Time Triangulation involved collecting data repeatedly at different times—morning, afternoon, and during vocational practice sessions. The goal was to assess data stability and minimize temporal bias, ensuring that the information collected authentically reflects the dynamics of the vocational guidance process in the inclusive school setting.

By systematically applying these three triangulation methods, this study ensures a high degree of data validity and accurately captures the authentic practices of vocational guidance for students with disabilities at SMKN Surakarta.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research refers to the vocational guidance model developed by Bachtiar, which divides the guidance process into three stages: pre-production, production, and post-production [4]. The pre-production stage involves assessing students' potential and interests, as well as career planning. The production stage emphasizes the development of technical and soft skills through vocational learning experiences. The post-production stage focuses on portfolio development, public showcasing of students' work, and preparation for the transition to employment or entrepreneurship.

This model is applied in the context of inclusive vocational education, where students with disabilities receive equal access to career guidance and skills training services. In its implementation at vocational high schools (SMK), vocational guidance is not limited to technical skills but also emphasizes social, emotional, and cultural support. Thus, the interaction between school counselors, vocational teachers, and the school environment becomes a strategic factor in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of these services.

## 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### Pre-Production Stage: Planning and Potential Identification

In the pre-production stage, the process of identifying the needs and potential of students with disabilities in inclusive vocational schools still relies on initial assessments conducted by external institutions such as psychologists or recommendations from previous schools. School counselors (BK teachers) base their planning on psychological test results and communication with parents, in line with the findings of Ella Salsabila and

Ahmad Syarqawi, who state that comprehensive assessments from multiple sources are crucial for determining appropriate vocational interventions [13]. However, the absence of Special Education Support Teachers (Guru Pendamping Khusus or GPK) remains a barrier to conducting in-depth and continuous assessments.

This finding is consistent with broader studies on inclusive education in developing countries, where the shortage of specialized support staff is often cited as the primary bottleneck preventing the effective implementation of individualized education plans. Bachtiar's model emphasizes the importance of early mapping of interests, talents, and vocational readiness [4]. This reflects a holistic assessment approach, as also outlined in Ministerial Regulation No. 70 of 2009 on Inclusive Education. In practice, although there are efforts to adapt the Individual Service Plan (Rencana Pelaksanaan Layanan or RPL), curriculum modifications for students with disabilities remain minimal. According to Mukarromah, inclusive vocational education planning must consider differentiated learning needs [14].

In terms of funding, the use of BOS (School Operational Assistance) and BOP (Operational Cost Assistance) funds provides a primary solution but remains insufficient to support teacher training, provision of assistive vocational tools, or financing specialized support staff. Collaboration with psychologists and parents has become a widely adopted alternative, as recommended by UNESCO, which highlights the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration in the success of inclusive, vocational-based education [15].

### Production Stage: Implementation and Vocational Learning Support

The production stage in Yoyon Bachtiar's vocational guidance model focuses on strengthening technical skills, soft skills, and the adaptation process during vocational practice. In the inclusive SMK studied, school counselors support the learning process emotionally and socially. Students with disabilities who experience adaptation difficulties are often provided with individual counseling services, reflecting the practice of student-centered counseling [16].

Services in vocational classes tend to be similar to those provided to regular students, albeit with more flexible approaches. For instance, students with slow learning capabilities receive repeated explanations or extended time for practical assignments. This aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates for flexibility in content delivery and learning processes [17]. The use of assistive devices or modified tools in practice has not been fully optimized, primarily due to limited funding and inadequate teacher training.

This situation contrasts sharply with best practices in well-resourced inclusive systems where technology-assisted learning is a cornerstone of vocational training for students with disabilities, thus highlighting a significant resource and knowledge gap in the observed setting. Supporting soft skills such as discipline, collaboration, and responsibility presents its own challenges. Research by Prihatin et al. suggests that fostering soft skills in students with disabilities requires repeated practice, feedback, and positive reinforcement [18]. In this inclusive school, these values are reinforced through personal approaches and individual counseling, although not structured as a sustainable program.

While personal approaches are valuable, the absence of a structured program indicates that soft skills development is treated as an incidental, rather than an intentional, component of the vocational curriculum, potentially limiting its long-term impact on students' employability.

### Post-Production Stage: Evaluation and Career Transition

The post-production stage in Yoyon Bachtiar's model aims to equip students with disabilities with skills to present, market, and develop their vocational work. Observations reveal that the school lacks a systematic scheme to guide students with disabilities toward employment or entrepreneurship. Not all students are provided with portfolio development or career transition training, despite findings from Ferdianti et al. which suggest that vocational portfolios can boost confidence and job readiness among students with special needs [19].

Vocational guidance services are evaluated without formal instruments, relying instead on counselor observation of student progress. This evaluation is narrative in nature and not documented through measurable rubrics or indicators, which contradicts the principles of educational program evaluation proposed by Tyler and recommendations from the Directorate General of Vocational Education, which state that vocational learning assessments should include indicators of work competence achievement [20], [21].

This ad-hoc evaluation method, while potentially rich in qualitative detail, makes it difficult to systematically measure program effectiveness or report outcomes to stakeholders, a critical component for program sustainability and improvement. Follow-up actions tend to be reactive rather than preventive. If students exhibit behavioral challenges or learning difficulties, parents are contacted and referred to external psychologists. A lack of coordination with industries or art communities limits opportunities for showcasing student work or arranging internships. According to OECD, the success of vocational education for students with disabilities is strongly influenced by external networks that support the transition to the real workforce [22].

### Reflection

Among the three stages implemented, it is evident that the efforts toward vocational guidance in inclusive vocational schools already have a solid foundation, especially in terms of the counselors' commitment and service adaptation. However, the biggest challenge lies in the lack of full integration of these services into the school's overall management system. The absence of GPK, minimal teacher training in inclusive vocational approaches, and a lack of partnerships with the business sector are systemic barriers that must be addressed through cross-sectoral policies.

This study aligns with findings from Putra et al., which highlight the implementation gap between national policies and field practices in inclusive vocational schools [23]. Therefore, comprehensive interventions are needed in the form of teacher training, development of assessment instruments, affirmative funding for inclusive vocational education, and enhanced collaboration between schools, parents, industries, and disability communities.

### Policy Implication

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of vocational guidance for students with disabilities in inclusive vocational schools still faces structural and operational challenges, particularly in individual assessments, service differentiation, and sustainability of post-school transition programs. Therefore, inclusive education policies must be holistic and supportive to ensure the fulfillment of vocational rights for students with disabilities in accordance with Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, Ministerial Regulation No. 70 of 2009 on Inclusive Education, and the principles of Education for All and the UNCRPD.

First, policies to strengthen vocational assessment services must be implemented at the school unit level through the mandatory placement of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK) in inclusive SMKs. GPKs serve as the frontline in conducting continuous assessments, supporting the learning process, and bridging communication between teachers, students with disabilities, and parents. Without the presence of GPKs, school counselors will continue to face difficulties in designing services based on individual needs.

Second, adaptive vocational curriculum policies must be formulated to allow modifications in content, process, and outcomes of vocational learning in inclusive SMKs. This may refer to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promote learning accessibility through diversified media, methods, and assessments. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), in collaboration with the Vocational Education Quality Assurance Development Center (BBPPMPV), should publish specific guidelines for implementing adaptive vocational curricula for students with disabilities.

Third, the competencies of school counselors and vocational teachers must be strengthened through continuous training on inclusive vocational education, adaptive career counseling, non-verbal communication strategies, and formative vocational assessment techniques. This training may be facilitated by local governments through the Education Office, involving teacher education institutions and professional organizations such as ABKIN.

Fourth, policies on educational transitions to the workforce for students with disabilities must be mainstreamed into the strategic plans of inclusive schools. Local governments need to facilitate networks between inclusive SMKs and industries, art communities, and inclusive entrepreneurs. Internship programs, work showcases, and social entrepreneurship mentoring are tangible forms of commitment to fair and equitable job access.

Fifth, to ensure sustainability, regular monitoring and evaluation of inclusive vocational programs must be conducted involving schools, parents, and disability communities. Evaluation should not only assess academic achievements but also measure students' independence, life skills, and career readiness.

Therefore, the findings of this research provide a crucial foundation for stakeholders to formulate and strengthen inclusive vocational education policies that are equitable, adaptive, and transformative for students with disabilities at the vocational secondary education level.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of vocational guidance for students with disabilities at inclusive Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan or SMK) in Surakarta has encompassed the three main stages outlined in Yoyon Bachtiar's model: pre-production, production, and post-production. In the pre-production stage, the process of identifying student potential and planning services relies heavily on initial psychological assessments conducted by external institutions, as well as communication with parents and previous teachers. However, the absence of Special Education Support Teachers (Guru Pendamping Khusus or GPK) limits the continuity of assessments and hinders the development of accurate individual planning.

In the production stage, students with disabilities participate in vocational training that is technically and pedagogically adapted through individualized materials, methods, and time allocations. This approach is

implemented via intensive individual counseling, though it has yet to be fully integrated into the vocational learning system in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. The main challenges include the lack of assistive tools, insufficient teacher training, and the absence of a differentiated curriculum.

The post-production stage has not been fully implemented as a systematic transition program toward employment or entrepreneurship. Service evaluations are carried out narratively without standardized instruments, and follow-up actions largely depend on the initiative of school counselors and collaboration with parents and external psychologists. Activities such as vocational art showcases or portfolio development have not yet been optimized as strategies to enhance the independence of students with disabilities.

Thus, despite the spirit of inclusivity and strong commitment in service provision, the implementation of vocational guidance still faces structural, technical, and policy-related challenges that require more systemic and integrated interventions.

Based on the findings described above, it is evident that while the implementation of vocational guidance in inclusive vocational schools demonstrates a foundational commitment to inclusivity, significant gaps remain in its structural, technical, and programmatic integration. These limitations suggest the need for targeted interventions to enhance the quality and sustainability of services provided to students with disabilities. To inform these interventions, it is valuable to reference established models from international contexts. For example, many developed countries apply the Person-Centered Planning (PCP) approach, where vocational service planning is entirely centered on the aspirations, strengths, and unique needs of each student, rather than merely fitting them into pre-existing programs. This model provides a benchmark for overcoming the assessment and planning weaknesses identified in this study. Furthermore, the Dual Vocational Education and Training (VET) System, famously implemented in Germany, integrates school-based learning with robust industry apprenticeships. This offers a proven blueprint for building the strong multi-stakeholder partnerships and seamless school-to-work transitions that are currently lacking.

In light of these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed to support the development of a more inclusive, adaptive, and effective vocational guidance system.

1. School Policy and Management

There is a need to strengthen internal school policies that support the comprehensive implementation of inclusive vocational guidance. This includes the appointment of Special Education Support Teachers (GPK), the development of tailored Individual Service Plans (RPL) for students with disabilities, and the creation of adaptive curricula based on differentiated learning needs.

2. Capacity Building for School Counselors and Vocational Teachers

Schools should facilitate continuous professional development for both school counselors and vocational subject teachers on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), instructional modifications, and vocational counseling strategies that address the individual needs of students with disabilities.

3. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Strong partnerships must be established among schools, parents, professional personnel (such as psychologists and therapists), and the creative industry sector to support the success of post-production programs. This can be realized through inclusive internships, vocational showcases, or integrated workforce training.

4. Development of a Vocational Evaluation System

Schools should begin developing standardized evaluation instruments to assess the vocational progress of students with disabilities both qualitatively and quantitatively. These assessments should cover technical, affective, and social dimensions and serve as a basis for portfolio development and more targeted career transition planning.

5. Further Research

Further studies using quantitative or mixed-method approaches are recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of vocational guidance programs in a broader range of inclusive SMKs across Indonesia. Comparative research across regions may also provide a more comprehensive overview of best practices in inclusive vocational education.

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