

Siap Kuliah College Admission Counseling: A Culturally Responsive Career Counseling Framework

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Abstract

In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, career and educational decisions are often influenced not only by individual aspirations but also by family expectations, values, and sociocultural norms. Traditional college counseling frameworks often prioritize individual autonomy, which may not fully align with students' lived realities in collectivist cultures. The Siap Kuliah Program, developed by Sekolah.mu, offers a family-inclusive counseling model that bridges the gap between student individuality and familial influence in higher education planning. This paper outlines how Siap Kuliah's counseling framework supports shared decision-making in career and university selection within a collectivist cultural context.

Literature Review

Career guidance is a fundamental component of career development services in Indonesia, where career counselors guide students in understanding their potential and the possible careers they can pursue. In this context, culturally responsive career guidance is important. Lee (2012) argued that career counselors must move beyond traditional career development theories and should be aware that career decisions are shaped not only by individual interests and abilities but also by cultural values, family expectations, socioeconomic conditions, discrimination, and access to opportunities.

In the Indonesian context, cultural responsiveness within the career counseling process is essential. Indonesia is considered a collectivist country wherein parents play an important role in their children's career decisions. Sawitri et al. (2014) found that parental expectations played a key role in adolescents' career aspirations and actions. This finding indicates that, during the career counseling process, adolescents are likely to consider their parents' perspectives and expectations. Accordingly, Indonesian high school students' career aspirations are shaped by family and peer dynamics, as well as by sociocultural norms, which can sometimes overshadow personal interests (Mok et al., 2021; Widyana et al., 2025).

Overview of the Siap Kuliah Program

Established in 2022, Siap Kuliah is a comprehensive, personalized college preparation program for high school students. Moving beyond traditional test-drilling methods, the program adopts a holistic framework that enriches and strengthens school-based learning by integrating competency development with admission test preparation. Crucially, the model facilitates parent–student dialogue while maintaining a child-centered focus.



Figure 1. *Siap Kuliah Framework*

By adopting a holistic approach, Siap Kuliah considers students' potential (cognitive ability, personality, and drive) to identify the best undergraduate program and further cultivate their competencies (general, technical, and experience-related) to prepare them to thrive in university. The Siap Kuliah program encompasses a structured sequence of modules designed to prepare students for diverse admission pathways to both domestic and international higher education institutions. This comprehensive program is delivered through three integrated phases: exploration, discovery, and preparation. It includes comprehensive assessment, college admission counseling,

tutoring for admission preparation, and pre-university skills workshops. Depending on whether a student enrolls in Year 10, 11, or 12, the program duration ranges from six months to two years, ensuring continuous support tailored to the student's specific needs.

Counseling Framework

Admission counseling constitutes the second phase of the Siap Kuliah program. At the end of this phase, students create a list of best-fit university programs aligned with their profiles, along with a structured action plan to prepare for admission. During the counseling phase, the counselor facilitates discussions with students and parents to select university programs, considering internal factors (students' aspirations, cognitive abilities, interests, and values) and external factors (parental aspirations and overall family circumstances).

According to the latest iteration of the program, admission counseling comprises five sessions. The first session focuses on discussing the assessment results, covering aspirations, cognitive potential, interests, values, and learning and life skills. A distinctive feature of Siap Kuliah is the qualitative assessment of both students' and parents' aspirations. This assessment provides insight into students' prior knowledge of careers, goals and plans, portfolios of extracurricular activities, and college readiness. It also identifies potential discrepancies between students' and parents' aspirations and has proven to be a valuable tool for facilitating sometimes difficult conversations about family circumstances and career decision-making.

In the second session, the counselor proposes a list of recommended majors and universities based on the student's profile. This list is not exhaustive but serves as a starting point for exploration and discussion.

During the third and fourth sessions, the counselor facilitates discussions to refine and rank the options as reach schools, ideal schools, and safe schools. Reach-school options are typically highly selective programs that require additional effort from the student. Ideal-school options are moderately competitive programs whose requirements match the student's current achievements. Safe-school options are less competitive programs with a higher likelihood of admission. This component of the admission counseling process has evolved over time. Earlier iterations included only one or two sessions to discuss program alternatives. However, internal evaluations and feedback from students and parents indicated that the number of sessions was insufficient. Nevertheless, this stage of counseling remains flexible, allowing counselors to use all three, fewer, or additional sessions depending on the student's needs. In the final session, the counselor formulates a structured action plan to prepare the student for the admission processes of the selected programs. This action plan is subsequently transferred to the tutoring team to inform planning for the academic tutoring program and to the internal team for scheduling future checkpoints.

Parental Involvement in Siap Kuliah Admission Counseling

Within Siap Kuliah, parental involvement in the admission counseling process has evolved over time. Initially, the program adopted a fully student-centered approach and aligned university program selection closely with the student's aspirations. This strategy was intended to prevent parents from imposing their aspirations on their children and assumed that students could make decisions regarding university

selection autonomously. However, we quickly found that this approach was not fully effective. During the transition from high school to university, decision-making is also shaped by families' financial circumstances and the openness of communication between parents and children. Although students are often aware that their parents will finance their higher education, they frequently lack a clear understanding of their family's financial circumstances and whether their parents can afford their preferred university or major. These observations prompted us to reevaluate our approach.

From the outset, we included a Parents' Aspiration Form in our assessment package. However, given our initial emphasis on a student-centered framework, this form functioned primarily as supplementary information for counselors rather than as a basis for discussion during counseling sessions. Following an evaluation of the program, we repositioned the form as an integral element of the counseling process. Parental attendance at counseling sessions, which had previously been optional, was also made mandatory. In the current version of the program, we have expanded our exploration of parents' expectations, concerns, and constraints; paid closer attention to observable parent-child dynamics; and actively facilitated structured dialogue between students and their parents during counseling sessions. Although we emphasize the importance of student-parent discussion, our counselors must also assess whether separate sessions with the student and parent are necessary. Depending on family dynamics, some students require a private session with the counselor so that they can speak more freely about their aspirations and concerns, particularly when

their views do not align with their parents' expectations.

Facilitating student–parent discussions has proven essential in ensuring that students develop both clarity about and ownership of their final choice of university and program. When students lack an understanding of the rationale underlying their decisions or merely comply with parental preferences, difficulties frequently emerge in subsequent stages. These difficulties are most prominent during personal statement tutoring. In such cases, students often struggle to articulate their motivations coherently because they do not fully understand or endorse the reasoning behind their selection. During the early implementation of our program, insufficient dialogue and agreement between students and parents resulted in inefficiencies, as personal statement tutors were required to refer students back to the counseling stage due to persistent uncertainty regarding their academic direction.

Outcomes and Impact

Student Outcomes

Siap Kuliah students reported that the counseling sessions enhanced their awareness of their own interests and strengths. They also indicated that the program increased their confidence in articulating personal goals and engaging in collaborative decision-making. From the counselors' perspective, the most prominent outcome of Siap Kuliah counseling is the development of students' ability to engage in reflection and gain a clearer understanding of their strengths and limitations, interests, preferences, and personal context. Another area developed through Siap Kuliah is students' knowledge of higher education, particularly universities, majors, and learning strategies for college students.

Parent Outcomes

Parents participating in the Siap Kuliah program reported that the admission counseling process enhanced their understanding of their children's potential and emerging independence. Enhanced empathy and improved communication in the process of aligning expectations were also identified as benefits of the counseling process. Additionally, during the counseling sessions, parents were able to gain insights into effective communication strategies by observing approaches demonstrated by the counselor during interactions with their teenage children. Our counselors concurred with these observations and further noted that parents improved their knowledge and understanding of the current landscape of higher education and career options.

Impact on Students' University Admission

As of March 2026, 48 students who had completed the Siap Kuliah program reported their university admission results. All 48 students received at least one letter of acceptance (LoA), with offers from universities in Indonesia and abroad. Of the 73 LoAs received by these 48 students, 52% were from programs listed in their initial plans developed during Year 10 or Year 11. The remaining 48% of LoAs were from programs outside the list, largely reflecting adjustments to the shortlist during the one-to-two-year program due to factors including changes in academic performance, new information gathered over time, personal and family circumstances, and the evolving preferences of adolescent learners.

Conclusion

The Siap Kuliah admission counseling program offers a replicable model for practitioners supporting students whose academic and career pathways are strongly

influenced by parental involvement. Conducting college admission counseling in Indonesia without systematically involving parents tends to result in both process inefficiencies and suboptimal outcomes. Evidence from Siap Kuliah underscores the importance of culturally responsive counseling approaches in delivering effective and contextually appropriate services for students.

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