

The Relevance of Career Interest among PGPAUD Students to Study Program Alignment and Career Realism

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: June 24, 2025

Accepted: January 8, 2026

Available online on:

January 24, 2026

Keywords:

Career interest; suitability of study program; reality of the world of work; PGPAUD; early childhood education

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Published by Universitas

Muhammadiyah Tangerang

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between career interests of PGPAUD students with the relevance of the study program and the real situation in the workplace. This research is based on the misalignment between the study program taken and the career that will be chosen by some PGPAUD students, while the compatibility between the two is an important factor related to preparing superior and quality graduates in the field of early childhood education. This study uses quantitative methods with a descriptive correlational approach. The research sample was 36 PGPAUD students of Semarang State University Class of 2021, which was determined through a total sampling technique. Data collection was conducted using an online-based questionnaire with a Likert scale, which included three main variables, namely PGPAUD students' career interest (X1), career reality (X2), and study program suitability (Y). More than 50% of students gave positive responses regarding their interest in pursuing

a career in PAUD. In addition, the results showed a strong relevance between variables.

Introduction

Every individual basically has the hope to achieve a bright future through education. Higher education is one of the strategic ways to achieve these hopes because it not only plays a role in developing academic aspects, but also in shaping individual readiness to enter the world of work (Pramesti et al., 2024). In this context, a career is understood as a lifelong journey that requires mature decisions, based on experience, interests and potential possessed by individuals (Mudhar et al., 2024). A career is also understood as the result of a self-development process through increasing knowledge, expertise, experience and networks that can build self-competence and expand social connections (Husna et al., 2022). Therefore, higher education should ideally be able to prepare graduates not only theoretically, but also practically and professionally to face the challenges of the world of work. Higher education has a role in forming prospective graduates who are competent personally, socially, pedagogically, professionally, and who master learning tools well (Nisa & Setiawan, 2023). This research was conducted to analyze various factors that can affect the level of conformity or mismatch between students' career interests and career realities in the field, especially in the final phase of study.

The Early Childhood Education Teacher Education (PGPAUD) Study Program has an important responsibility towards prospective

graduates in building motivation and career readiness. Graduates are expected to have a strong and directed motivation to continue their career in a field that is in line with their knowledge. However, in reality, not all PGPAUD students have an interest in a career as an early childhood educator or in other fields relevant to their educational background. According to Icak Ajzen and Martin Fishben (1975), interest or tendency towards an action is the result of the desire to do or not do something (Nickerson, 2023). Interest is also a voluntary impulse (Khairiyah & Pasaribu, 2024). In the context of a career, career interest can be interpreted as a person's desire for a field of work. This desire does not just appear, but is influenced by various interrelated factors, both internal factors and external factors (Salsabilla, 2024). This condition raises questions about the extent to which the study program is able to shape and support students' career interests in a way that is relevant to the scientific field pursued.

The study program ideally should not only emphasize the theoretical aspects, but also provide and pay attention to contextual and applicable learning experiences, and encourage students to recognize and develop their potential. With that, an in-depth study is needed regarding the relevance between PGPAUD students' career interests with the suitability of study programs and career realities in the field. John Holland suggests that a person needs to have a directed goal and a mature career plan in order to find a path that matches interests and talents (Nulhusni et al., 2021). Career selection in accordance with the

study program is part of the competency development process during the study period (Waluyo, 2019). Research conducted by (Hasanah, 2023) resulted in a relationship between career interests and students' decisions in choosing majors in college. This study shows that as many as 27% of 105 students choose majors according to student career interests, from the results of other majors 11% of 70 students show career interests that match the majors and other majors also produce 10% of 40 students who choose majors according to their career interests. Based on John Hollan's theory, the importance of alignment between the individual and the chosen field of study is emphasized. Then (Mudhar et al., 2024) also conducted a similar study, this study shows that there are still many students who have career interests that are not aligned with the study program chosen by higher education. This mismatch occurs due to various factors, both internal factors such as interest, talent, and external factors such as choosing the wrong major, parental coercion or being forced to choose that major. From the results of the study, 18.6% had career interests in accordance with the study program, and 81.4% had career interests that were not in accordance with the chosen study program. The following phenomenon is due to the tendency of students to consider the income or salary they get compared to their educational background. This condition raises the question of how far the study program is able to shape and support students' career interests in a manner relevant to the scientific field pursued.

Alignment between career interests and study programs is very

important in preparing graduates who are not only academically superior, but also ready to face the dynamics of the world of work (Imanah & Zulfahmi, 2024). Determining a career path that matches interests and talents can build self-potential for a better future. On the other hand, a career that is not aligned with personal potential and desires can have an impact on emotional stability, long-term motivation and professional success (Rahayu et al., 2023). Universities have a strategic responsibility for students in shaping students' motivation and career direction from the beginning of their studies (Karier et al., 2023). Appropriately directed motivational encouragement not only supports student graduation, but also prepares students to become competent graduates (Kurniawan, 2019). In addition, they also have a high interest and are ready to contribute in a field that is aligned with the knowledge that has been taken. In this case Ginzber explains that there are 4 factors that influence a person in deciding a career, first, the reality factor, which is the result of environmental pressure in deciding something; Second, the influence of education, including educational experience and study field linkages; third, emotional factors, related to intuitive considerations; opportunity, individual perception, which affects the understanding of self quality (Usmawati, 2019). From Ginzberg, it can be concluded that the environment and educational history are the two main things that influence a person's career. So it is important for each individual to wisely choose the environment and the path of education taken because both play a major role in determining the direction and

quality of the future, especially in career planning (Fajriyanti et al., 2023).

Thus, this research is important as a foundation for curriculum development in creating career guidance that is more adaptive and responsive to the needs and potential of students. This research is expected to be a real contribution in creating PGPAUD graduates who are competent, relevant and ready to compete in the field of early childhood education.

Methods

This study uses quantitative methods with a descriptive correlational design approach that aims to examine the relationship between PGPAUD students' career interests and career realities in the field with the suitability of the study program that has been taken. According to Ghozali (2016), quantitative research functions to provide a descriptive description of a phenomenon based on objective measurement of variables (Veronica et al., 2022). Meanwhile, (Hasnunidah, 2017) explains that correlational design is used to identify the relationship between one variable and another.

A total of 37 PGPAUD students of Semarang State University (UNNES) Batch 2021 were involved in this study. Data were collected through a Google Form-based online questionnaire structured on a Likert Scale, with 5 answer choices that have different scores for each choice, namely strongly agree (SS) with 5 scores, agree (S) with 4 scores, disagree (KS) with 3 scores, disagree (TS) with 2 scores, strongly disagree (STS) with a score of 1. Likert scale is used to measure the

perceptions, attitudes and opinions of individuals or groups towards an event (Veronica et al., 2022). This instrument consists of two types of statements, namely positive items and negative items. Positive items are scored sequentially according to the Likert scale, while negative items are scored in reverse to maintain consistency of assessment. This research instrument is designed to measure three main variables, namely career interest of PGPAUD students (X1), students' perceptions of career reality (X2) and suitability of study programs with career direction (Y).

This study conducted a validity test to ensure that the instrument was able to accurately measure the intended variable. Based on the results of the validity test on 45 statement items, 18 items were declared valid. Therefore, items that do not meet the validity criteria have been evaluated and not used in the research questionnaire. After the validity test declared all items valid, continued with the reliability test using the Cronbach's Alpha test with the results of 0.875, so the instrument was declared correlated between items and was suitable for use as a research measuring tool because it was greater than 0.6, namely the r-table or crisis value. Instrument testing in this study was carried out using the help of the IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 application.

Result and Discussions

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it is known that students of the PGPAUD study program at Semarang State University (UNNES) Batch 2021 show a diversity of interests in the

direction of a loving career within the corridor of relevance to the scientific field pursued during the study period. The results of this study indicate that although not all students explicitly state that they want to continue their careers as early childhood educators or careers that are still on the same path in the field of early childhood.

Table 1. *Statistical scores for the Student Career Interest Relevance variable*

| Subvariabel | No. Item | SS | S | KS | TS | STS |
|------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Faktor Internal | P01 | 5 | 22 | 9 | 1 | 0 |
| | P02 | 8 | 24 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Faktor Eksternal | P03 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 14 | 4 |
| | P04 | 7 | 18 | 10 | 2 | 0 |

Notes. P stands for "Statement". For the abbreviations "SS" to "STS" is a Likert scale. Total responders were 37 students.

Internal factors in this instrument include self-confidence and commitment of PGPAUD students to a career in PAUD. In statement P01, the majority of students showed positive confidence: 13.5% are very confident and 59.5% are quite confident to continue a career in PAUD. However, 24.3% are still less confident and 2.7% are not confident, indicating that there are still doubts among students about their readiness. In statement P02, 21.6% of students stated that they were very committed to continuing to develop themselves as future educators, and 64.9% were quite committed. However, 10.8% were doubtful, and 2.7% showed no interest, indicating that a small proportion of students are not yet fully motivated to grow professionally.

Meanwhile, external factors include family influence and job

prospects. On P03, only 10.8% of students stated that their families strongly understand the importance of PAUD, and 37.8% moderately understand. The rest showed a low level of understanding, indicating a lack of support from the family environment. On P04, the majority of students were optimistic about job opportunities in ECD (48.6% fairly confident and 18.9% very confident). However, 27% were less confident and 5.4% were not confident, indicating that some students still doubted their job prospects in this field due to the influence of labor market conditions or confidence in their abilities.

Table 2. *Statistical scores for Career Reality Variables*

| Subvariabel | No. Item | SS | S | KS | TS | STS |
|----------------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Demand for professionalism | P05 | 10 | 24 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| | P06 | 13 | 22 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| | P07 | 7 | 19 | 9 | 1 | 1 |
| | P08 | 7 | 10 | 18 | 2 | 0 |
| | P09 | 3 | 5 | 17 | 10 | 2 |
| | P10 | 4 | 27 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| | P11 | 2 | 23 | 11 | 0 | 1 |
| | P12 | 1 | 5 | 15 | 7 | 9 |

Notes. P stands for "Statement". For the abbreviations "SS" to "STS" is a Likert scale. Total responders were 37 students.

Based on the results of the study, UNNES PGPAUD students class of 2021 showed a positive tendency towards career readiness in the field of early childhood education. In statement P05, 91.9% of respondents stated that they believe that PGPAUD graduates have been equipped with relevant competencies to enter the workforce. This is reinforced by P06, where 94.6% of respondents believe that formal education is very

important in shaping the professionalism of PAUD teachers.

A total of 70.3% of respondents in P07 expressed motivation to continue their studies to a higher level, although some (about 29.7%) still showed doubts. Statements P08 and P09 reflect different views on the importance of formal education compared to work experience. However, the majority still view formal education as the main pillar in shaping educators' competencies.

On P10, 83.8% of students felt that they had sufficient competence to undertake the profession as an early childhood teacher. P11 shows that most respondents feel physically and mentally prepared, although some still feel the need for strengthening. Meanwhile, P12 shows that 83.7% of respondents considered teacher competency standards very important, reflecting a high awareness of the quality and professionalism of PAUD educators.

Table 3. *Statistical scores for the Study Program Suitability variable*

| Subvariables | No. Item | SS | S | KS | TS | STS |
|------------------------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Determination of the study program | P13 | 5 | 19 | 9 | 3 | 1 |
| | P14 | 1 | 8 | 18 | 6 | 4 |
| Appropriate curriculum | P15 | 10 | 24 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| | P16 | 11 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | P17 | 1 | 3 | 21 | 6 | 6 |
| | P18 | 3 | 6 | 15 | 6 | 6 |

Notes. P stands for "Statement". For the abbreviations "SS" to "STS" is a Likert scale. Total responders were 37 students.

The results showed that the majority of PGPAUD UNNES Batch 2021 students chose the study program with careful consideration. In

statement P13, 64.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they chose PGPAUD with clear considerations, while the other 35.1% admitted that they lacked or did not have strong considerations. This statement is reinforced by P14, where 77.6% of respondents disagreed that the selection of study programs was done impulsively, and only 24.3% stated otherwise. This indicates that most students have a career orientation from the start, although there are still a small number who are not fully established.

Furthermore, in P15, 91.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the courses undertaken support career needs in the field of PAUD. This shows that students consider the lecture material relevant to the world of work. This is reinforced by the findings of P16, where all respondents (100%) felt that the teaching practice experience provided by the campus was effective in equipping them to face the challenges of the PAUD teacher profession.

In statement P17, 91.2% of respondents were confident that the learning received could be applied in ECD institutions, while 8.1% still doubted the applicability. Then, P18 shows that 75.6% of respondents rejected the notion that lectures only focus on theory, while 24.3% felt the material was still too theoretical.

The findings of this study are in line with (Hasanah, 2023) who examined the relationship between career interests and major selection. Only 27% of 105 students chose a major in accordance with their career interests. In other majors, compatibility was only shown by 11% of 70

students and 10% of 40 students. This reinforces John Holland's view of the importance of alignment between individuals and fields of study to support career success.

This study also found different results from previous studies, despite discussing similar topics. As many as 81.4% of students have career interests that do not match the study program, while only 18.6% are suitable. This mismatch is influenced by internal factors such as interests and talents, as well as external factors such as parental pressure or choosing the wrong major. This shows that many students consider income prospects more than suitability with their educational background (Mudhar et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study shows that there is a strong relevance between the career interests of PGPAUD UNNES students class of 2021, the suitability of the study program, and the reality of careers in the field. The majority of students have interests that are aligned with their scientific fields, accompanied by readiness and commitment to a career in that field. Internal factors such as self-confidence, motivation for self-development, and physical and mental readiness, also support career readiness, accompanied by external factors such as family support and belief in job prospects. Despite environmental constraints, student optimism remains high, and formal education is considered to play an important role in shaping professional competence. Therefore, the organization of higher education needs to be designed adaptively and

responsively to students' career needs and aspirations.

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