

## Curriculum Evaluation of Guidance and Counseling Study Program Based on the Needs of the 21st Century Work World

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Curriculum, Guidance And Counseling, 21st-Century Skills, Literature Review

*Received :* 25 , March

*Revised :* 20, April

*Accepted:* 24, May

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### ABSTRACT

The curriculum of the Guidance and Counseling (GC) study program in higher education plays a strategic role in shaping graduates who are competent, adaptive, and relevant to the needs of the 21st-century workforce. The era of digital disruption, the complexity of psychosocial issues, and the demand for technological literacy and interpersonal skills require a more responsive curriculum transformation. This study aims to evaluate the alignment of undergraduate GC curricula in Indonesia with 21st-century competency needs through a literature review approach. Data were collected from scientific journals, educational policy documents, and GC curricula from various universities. The review results show that although the curriculum includes the fundamentals of counseling competencies, it still lacks in the development of soft skills, digital literacy, and interdisciplinary approaches. This study recommends strengthening curricula based on Outcome-Based Education (OBE), integrating the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, and enhancing collaboration with industry and social services. This review is expected to serve as a reference for the development of an adaptive and contextual GC curriculum.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid global changes, marked by technological advances, social transformations, and economic disruptions, require higher education to produce not only academically intelligent graduates but also professionally competent and adaptive individuals who can respond to current dynamics. The Guidance and Counseling (GC) study program, as part of professional education, also faces significant challenges in preparing graduates who are relevant to the 21st-century job market. The need for counselors who possess digital literacy, interpersonal skills, and the ability to adapt in various service contexts is becoming increasingly urgent (Fitriani & Prasetyo, 2021; Wibowo & Setiawan, 2021).

Amid the complexity of psychosocial problems and the growing need for technology-based counseling services, the GC curriculum must be thoroughly evaluated. This evaluation is essential to assess how far the curriculum has accommodated 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and information technology proficiency (Boholano, 2017; Dede, 2020; Nasar, 2025). If the curriculum fails to respond to these changes, graduates risk becoming uncompetitive in the workforce. Currently, the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach and the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy offer opportunities to design more flexible and outcome-oriented curricula. However, the implementation of these policies still faces several challenges, such as lack of interdisciplinary integration, weak development of soft skills, and limited contextual field practice (Ahmad & Lestari, 2019; Handayani & Sari, 2020).

Given this urgency, this study aims to evaluate the GC curriculum through a literature-based approach. The focus of the evaluation is directed at assessing the curriculum's alignment with the demands of the 21st-century job market and offering evidence-based development recommendations. The findings of this study are expected to contribute both academically and practically to higher education curriculum reform, particularly in the field of Guidance and Counseling.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Twenty-first-century higher education has undergone a significant paradigm shift. It is no longer solely about producing academically competent graduates, but also about developing individuals with adaptive skills relevant to the global job market. According to Sulisty-Basuki (2020), the curriculum must be responsive to technological, social, and cultural changes to produce flexible graduates who are prepared to face disruption. In this context, workforce-oriented curriculum development has become a necessity, including for the Guidance and Counseling (GC) study program.

One strategic approach widely adopted in higher education is Outcome-Based Education (OBE). This approach emphasizes the achievement of competencies as the outcome of the learning process, rather than focusing solely on the process itself (Astin & Antonio, 2019). In Indonesia, OBE implementation

has been formalized through the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) and the National Higher Education Standards (SN-Dikti), which regulate learning outcomes at every level of education (Kemendikbudristek, 2020). In the GC study program, applying OBE is essential to ensure that graduates possess the professional skills required by the times.

In parallel, 21st-century skills serve as a crucial indicator in evaluating curriculum relevance. These skills include four core competencies: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (4Cs), which are fundamental in navigating the complexities of the modern workplace (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Boholano, 2017). Additionally, digital literacy, global awareness, and socio-emotional abilities are important aspects that must be integrated into the learning process. This aligns with Dede's (2020) view that project-based and problem-solving learning are effective approaches for developing these skills. Unfortunately, most GC curricula in Indonesia still focus on cognitive aspects and classical counseling theories. Fitriani and Prasetyo (2021) found that digital skills—particularly in e-counseling and the use of interactive media—are not sufficiently integrated into course content. In fact, the need for technology-based counseling is increasing, especially in the post-COVID-19 era, which has seen a massive shift toward online counseling services. Therefore, curriculum revisions must take into account technological developments and the new dynamics of social interaction.

In addition to digital aspects, interdisciplinary skills are also urgently needed in curriculum development. GC graduates are now expected to work across sectors such as education, industry, health, and technology. According to Wibowo and Setiawan (2021), curricula that provide space for cross-disciplinary courses can enhance students' adaptive and collaborative abilities. For example, introducing concepts such as organizational psychology, mental health education, and information technology use can enrich the knowledge and skills of GC students.

Career literacy and self-management also deserve a larger portion in the GC curriculum. Handayani and Sari (2020) noted that students are often not equipped with career management skills such as goal setting, portfolio development, and professional growth strategies. A curriculum that emphasizes students' proactive roles in managing their careers will prepare them not only as counselors but also as agents of change in society.

Soft skills are equally important. The world of work demands graduates with empathy, work ethics, networking abilities, and conflict-resolution skills (Rohmah & Utami, 2021). However, in many curricula, soft skills development remains implicit and unstructured. This is a major weakness in producing graduates ready to interact and collaborate in multidisciplinary teams. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the affective domain in the curriculum, through courses, co-curricular activities, and field practices.

The GC curriculum must also be designed to encourage students to become lifelong learners. The concept of lifelong learning is increasingly relevant amid rapid changes in science and technology. Ahmad and Lestari (2019) emphasized that the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) approach offers flexibility for students to learn across disciplines, participate in internships, and engage in social projects. This flexibility should be maximized to shape graduates who continue learning and innovating throughout their careers. Furthermore, collaboration between universities and industry/communities is a crucial element in curriculum enhancement. Puspitasari (2020) noted that GC graduates who are involved in real-world practice during their studies adapt more quickly to professional environments. Therefore, integrating internships, teaching practicums (PPL), or collaborative research with external institutions should be mandatory in the curriculum. This can bridge the gap between theory and practice, which has long been a major weakness in higher education. Finally, it is important to emphasize that GC curriculum development must be reflective and dynamic. Curriculum evaluation should be conducted regularly by involving lecturers, alumni, employers, and the students themselves. Thus, the curriculum will not only be responsive to current needs but also adaptive to future developments. Collaboration among stakeholders will strengthen curriculum design that is not only academically sound but also contextual and applicable.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a literature review (library research) method. This approach was chosen as it is suitable for evaluating and analyzing conceptual information and previous findings related to the Guidance and Counseling (GC) study program curriculum in the context of 21st-century workforce needs. The literature review enables researchers to examine various relevant written sources to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Zed, 2014).

The data sources for this study included:

1. National and international scientific journal articles indexed in SINTA and Scopus (2015–2024),
2. Higher education policy documents from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), such as the KKNi and MBKM guidelines,
3. Curriculum documents from various public and private GC study programs in Indonesia, and
4. Textbooks and relevant research findings discussing OBE-based curricula, 21st-century skills, and innovations in higher education learning.

Data collection techniques were carried out by searching online databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda, ScienceDirect, and university journal portals,

using keywords such as “GC curriculum,” “OBE,” “soft skills,” “digital literacy,” and “21st-century skills.”

The data analysis technique followed a thematic approach through the following stages: (1) identifying major themes emerging from various sources; (2) grouping curriculum-related issues relevant to 21st-century workforce demands; (3) synthesizing information to identify gaps, strengths, and opportunities for developing the GC curriculum; and (4) formulating evidence-based recommendations from the reviewed literature. To ensure data validity and reliability, the researcher conducted source triangulation by comparing various literature and policy documents, prioritizing references published within the last 5–10 years to maintain the relevance and currency of the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this literature review show that most Guidance and Counseling (GC) study program curricula in Indonesia are still dominated by a conventional theoretical approach and have not fully adapted to the challenges of the 21st-century workforce. This is evident from the limited integration of technology-based courses, insufficient emphasis on soft skills, and restricted field experience directly aligned with the needs of industry and society (Fitriani & Prasetyo, 2021; Puspitasari, 2020).

In general, the curriculum structure includes core courses such as counseling theories, individual and group counseling, and professional ethics. However, this study found that digital literacy and technology-based counseling, such as e-counseling, are still underrepresented in many syllabi. Yet, technology-based approaches are crucial in contemporary counseling services, especially in the post-pandemic era where online interaction has become the new norm (Fitriani & Prasetyo, 2021).

Moreover, the development of interdisciplinary skills remains very limited. Students rarely have access to courses outside their major, such as industrial psychology, information technology, or career management. However, 21st-century work demands graduates with cross-disciplinary competencies and adaptability in constantly changing work environments (Wibowo & Setiawan, 2021). The absence of interdisciplinary elements leaves graduates less prepared to face the complexities of counselor roles in various non-traditional sectors.

Another significant finding is the lack of systematic development of soft skills. Although courses like group dynamics or micro-counseling potentially foster empathy, effective communication, and emotional intelligence, such developments are not explicitly and measurably designed in the curriculum documents. This may lead to graduates who are strong cognitively but lacking in interpersonal and leadership skills (Handayani & Sari, 2020; Rohmah & Utami, 2021).

Additionally, the Field Practice Program (PPL) or internship has not been fully integrated with actual workforce needs. In some educational institutions, PPL is still treated as an administrative activity rather than a meaningful learning experience. Ideally, PPL should be developed through strategic partnerships with partner institutions such as schools, psychological service agencies, hospitals, educational startups, or even industry. This collaborative model could increase students' exposure to real-world counseling contexts (Puspitasari, 2020; Ahmad & Lestari, 2019).

Furthermore, the study found a gap between formal curriculum documents and actual implementation in the field. Although the written curriculum vision aligns with 21st-century competence development, in practice, teaching is still lecture-based, using traditional pedagogical methods. This highlights the need for retraining faculty members to adopt active and transformative teaching methods, such as project-based learning, case methods, and reflective teaching (Dede, 2020).

Another weakness identified is the lack of ongoing curriculum evaluation. Some institutions are still using outdated curricula that have not been revised in the past five to ten years. However, the labor market is changing rapidly, especially with the development of artificial intelligence, technology-based education, and post-pandemic social dynamics. Therefore, regular curriculum updates are a strategic step in maintaining the relevance of higher education (Sulistyo-Basuki, 2020).

Nevertheless, there are also good practices that can serve as examples. Several universities have begun to develop curricula based on the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM/Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus) framework, by providing students with the flexibility to learn outside the classroom, including through internships, collaborative research, and community service. Such programs allow students to develop more holistic and contextual competencies (Ahmad & Lestari, 2019). This step deserves wider adoption as a responsive strategy to the demands of the times.

Thus, the findings of this study emphasize the need for a comprehensive transformation in the curriculum design of GC study programs. Future curricula must be participatory, evidence-based, and outcome-oriented. The integration of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), soft skills enhancement, interdisciplinary learning, and collaboration with the labor market is key to producing competent and relevant GC graduates who are prepared for the demands of the 21st century.

## **CONCLUSION And RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the literature review conducted, it can be concluded that the Guidance and Counseling (GC) study program curricula in Indonesia require significant revisions to better align with 21st-century workforce demands. Although there has been initial integration of professional skills within the curriculum structure, the strengthening of digital literacy, interdisciplinary approaches, and soft skills development remains suboptimal. Furthermore, field

practice experiences that lack contextual relevance, coupled with traditional teaching methods, undermine the competitiveness of graduates in today's dynamic and digital global era.

This study also identifies a mismatch between curriculum documents and their implementation in classrooms, which hinders the achievement of 21st-century competencies. On the other hand, the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach and the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy present strategic opportunities to drive systemic curriculum transformation. If implemented consistently and supported by faculty training and strong external partnerships, the GC curriculum can become more responsive, adaptive, and relevant.

Based on these findings, the author offers the following recommendations:

1. **Reconstruct the GC curriculum** by explicitly integrating 21st-century skills, including digital competencies, socio-emotional skills, and global citizenship.
2. **Strengthen interdisciplinary approaches**, either through elective courses from other study programs or through cross-disciplinary collaboration in the form of projects or contextual learning.
3. **Systematically develop soft skills** through active, reflective, and experiential learning, including within internship and field practice programs.
4. **Enhance collaboration with the workforce and community** as learning partners in the design and implementation of field practice programs and curriculum development.
5. **Conduct regular curriculum evaluation and updates** based on industry needs, alumni feedback, and tracer study results to ensure ongoing relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Curriculum transformation is not solely the responsibility of higher education institutions; it is also the result of collaboration among academics, practitioners, government, and industry. In this way, higher education—especially the GC study program—can become a driving force for national progress rooted in competence, ethics, and humanity.

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