


Counseling Teacher Social Support Influence Career Optimism Differently Based on Gender in Vocational High School

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<p>Submitted: 2024-09-23</p> <p>Published: 2024-12-31</p> <p>Keywords: Counseling, Teacher, Social Support, Career Optimism, Gender</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Author/s (2024)</p> <p>This article is under:</p>  <p>How to cite: Nugroho, A. I., Samudera, A., & Herwin, H. (2024). Counseling Teacher Social Support Influence Career Optimism Differently Based on Gender in Vocational High School. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 6(3). https://doi.org/10.51214/002024061107000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: Vocational high school graduates are prepared to go straight into the workforce but there is a problem with high unemployment. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of counseling teacher social support and gender on career optimism of vocational high school students. This study, conducted in March 2024, involved 348 male and female students aged 16-18 years from a Vocational High School. Using multiple regression analysis with the results showed that counseling teacher social support and gender had a significant effect on career optimism with a $p < 0.05$. The social support of counseling teachers was also tested for each aspect, only instrumental support had an effect on students' career optimism and men have higher career optimism. The findings reveal that there is a need for social support from counseling teachers in order to influence students' career optimism to face the world of work after graduating from school.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Individuals who do not intend to pursue education up to undergraduate or vocational level, may choose vocational high school as an optimal option (Fransisca et al., 2020). This is due to vocational high school focus on providing work skills (Suharno et al., 2020), so that graduates are ready to enter the workforce immediately after completing their education (Bunawar, 2022; Gea et al., 2022) and enable them to enter the workforce more quickly (Saleh et al., 2020; Sariwulan et al., 2020). In the job market, the majority of vocational high school graduates are prepared to become operators (Kamaludin et al., 2022). Job vacancies for operators are also widely available in the field (Fransisca et al., 2020). Therefore, to face the industrialization period, individual vocational high school graduates are needed who have special skills and a deep understanding of the prevailing work system (Maryanti et al., 2020; Spöttl & Windelband, 2021).

The productive age for working in Indonesia is age 15 to 64 (Humaidi et al., 2020). Vocational high school graduates are of productive age (Astuti & Setyonaluri, 2022). However, in reality, there are still many vocational high school graduates who are openly unemployed (Sopandi et al., 2021) are people who are not working at all or are looking for work (Hall & Kudlyak, 2022). Unemployment of vocational high school graduates in Indonesia amounted to 23.2% in 2022 (Tahir, 2023). More specifically, one area in Indonesia has high school graduates with the highest number of unemployed than graduates of other levels according to the central statistics agency in 2023.

Open unemployment can be caused by a lack of employability skills (Fajaryati et al., 2020; Pratap et al., 2021) mismatch of skills required by employers (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022) and lack of motivation to seek employment (Brouwers, 2020). This can be overcome by feeling optimistic about getting a job (do Céu Taveira et al., 2023). Optimism to get a job can also be called

career optimism (Aymans et al., 2020). Career optimism refers to an individual's tendency to expect the best outcome or emphasize the most positive aspects of one's future career development (Eva et al., 2020).

Based on survey data concerning risk preferences and beliefs regarding expected career advancement, we provide empirical support indicating that differences in job search behavior can be attributed partially to the greater risk aversion among women and the tendency for men to exhibit higher levels of overoptimism, along with slower adjustment of beliefs (Cortes et al., 2021; Cortés et al., 2023). Therefore, high optimism is needed to reduce risks such as anxiety or depression for career (Marton et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2022; Schug et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024).

Though there is a positive correlation between having optimism about one's career and harboring work hope, it is established that they are conceptually and empirically distinct from each other (Garcia et al., 2015). Career optimism, as an element within the realm of career adaptability, has been shown to have a beneficial impact on a range of career consequences including aspirations, decision-making, exploration, (Rottinghaus et al., 2012), and academic satisfaction (Boileau et al., 2021). Career optimism is correlated positively with significant work results such as job satisfaction (Burhanudin et al., 2020), employee engagement (Mappamiring & Putra, 2021), and performance (Eva et al., 2020; Hough et al., 2020). Crucially, there was a positive association discovered between optimism and markers of adaptability, such as acclimatization to college life (Zorver & Owen, 2021) and coping with unemployment (Manoharan et al., 2021). While optimism in career contexts was originally conceptualized as a dispositional trait (Reis et al., 2023), recent research indicates that optimism is not fixed; rather, it can be molded and reinforced through a nurturing environment (Newman et al., 2022).

Previous research has identified various forms of support, such as guidance from teachers or parents, as factors influencing the overall optimism levels of students (Poots & Cassidy, 2020; Siu et al., 2023), as well as their optimism concerning their career trajectories specifically (Öztemel & Yıldız-Akyol, 2021). A supportive environment provides individuals with sufficient resources in times of need, thereby increasing positive expectations about the future (Aslan & Koçak, 2023). These resources are usually in the form of instrumental support or socio-emotional support (Granziera et al., 2022; Tao et al., 2023). For example, it has been seen that overall instrumental support is favorably correlated with overall assessments of life quality (Lu et al., 2020), it has a strong connection to optimism (Garcia et al., 2015). Similar to this, positive outlooks during stressful conditions help to diminish negative attributions (McDonnell et al., 2022), and socio-emotional support from significant others promotes just that (Ornaghi et al., 2023). In general, healthy connections are crucial because they promote goal achievement and foster a pleasant environment and self-perception (Garcia et al., 2015).

However, not every source of encouragement will impact optimism in the same way (Garcia et al., 2015). Social cognitive theory states that the degree of status, competence, and control that contextual supports have over outcomes that are significant to an individual determines how important such supports are (Ayhan, 2020). Within the context of careers, teacher assistance is one source of support that has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on the career development of adolescents (Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Huang & Zhang, 2022). Teacher are thought to be the main sources of career-related instrumental and socio-emotional assistance (Anwuzia, 2023). Because of their commitment in the career development of their students and their direct interaction with them (Liu et al., 2020). Students hold their teachers in great respect and see them as important sources of information and instruction (Dimitropoulos et al., 2022; Morrison et al., 2021).

It can be concluded from the problems that have been studied that the research gap that occurs in this study is that vocational high school graduates rank first for open unemployment in Indonesia. Whereas vocational high school graduates should have more mature skills to work than other graduates. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of social support offered

by guidance and counseling teachers on career optimism among vocational high school students. The purpose of this study is to see how the social support of counseling teachers in general and from each aspect can affect students' career optimism based on gender. Additionally, the hypothesis proposed is that there is an influence of counseling teacher social support and its aspects on students' career optimism. The benefit of this research is to provide recommendations to schools, guidance and counseling teachers, and other related parties in Indonesia about improving career optimism with social support.

Study Aim and Hypothesis

The study aims to investigate the impact of social support from guidance and counseling teachers on career optimism among vocational high school students, considering gender differences. Hypothesis proposed is that there is an influence of counseling teacher social support and its aspects on students' career optimism.

METHODS

Design

This research utilizes a non-experimental quantitative approach, specifically the ex post facto type, examining hypotheses without intervention and exploring causal relationships between variables. Conducted on March 2024, the study involved distributing questionnaires directly to students at Vocational High School in Indonesia.

Participants

The population of this study amounted to 1701 in one of the vocational high schools in Indonesia was utilized, from which a sample of 348 students was selected for the research, comprising 265 males and 83 females (Age Mean=17.75; SD=0.55). Inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled in grades X to XII at vocational high schools in Indonesia. Probability sampling was utilized due to its ability to provide a representative sample of the population, ensuring greater generalizability of the findings.

Instruments

This study used two instruments to measure counseling teachers' social support and students' career optimism. To fit the context, the researcher modified the social support and career optimism instruments.

The career optimism instrument was modified for high school and vocational school students based on Rottinghaus et al (2012) theory, which includes five main aspects to measure optimism toward careers. Adjustments were made to reflect students' developmental stages and educational contexts, with the language and content simplified to be age-appropriate and relevant to their academic and vocational experiences. These modifications ensure the instrument is applicable to the specific needs and understanding of high school and vocational students. The scale consists of 12 items designed to assess a person's level of optimism regarding their future career development and prospects. The Likert scale spanned from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"), with higher overall scores reflecting a greater level of individual career optimism. Modified results of career optimism with a value of 0.9 according to Gregory and Aiken's formula, indicating that the items in this scale effectively measure career optimism. PCA factor analysis showed significant results, indicating a good factor structure with a p value <0.001 and KMO of 0.899. Furthermore, the CFA results showed the measured model has a good fit with the existing data, indicated by the chi-square/df ratio value of 1.9, CFI of 0.951, and TLI of 0.923. The scale also has high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.913 and McDonald's omega of 0.916, confirming its reliability and consistency in measuring individual career optimism.

The Counseling Teacher's Social Support Scale was modified to fit the educational context of high school and vocational school students, referring to the theory by Sarafino & Timothy (2011). The language and content were adjusted to be age-appropriate and relevant to students' experiences, ensuring the instrument effectively captures the level of social support provided by guidance and counseling teachers in a school setting. These modifications make the scale more suitable for assessing the specific support needs of high school and vocational students. The scale consists of 16 items designed to assess various dimensions of social support that a counseling teacher can provide. The Likert scale spanned from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"), with higher overall scores reflecting a greater level of counseling teacher social support. The validity of the counseling teacher social support scale was measured using Gregory and Aiken's formula, with the results of the analysis showing excellent validity, characterized by an Aiken's value of 0.9, confirming the effective ability of the items to measure the concept of social support. Factor analysis using PCA showed significant results with a p value <0.001 and KMO 0.916, indicating a good factor structure. Furthermore, the CFA results showed the measured model had a good fit with the existing data, demonstrated by the chi-square/df ratio value of 1.9, CFI 0.926, and TLI 0.904. The scale also showed very high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha 0.936 and McDonald's omega 0.954, reinforcing its reliability and consistency in measuring social support from guidance and counseling teachers.

Data Analysis

There are several steps used to see the interaction of independent variables on the dependent variable. First, the author uses multiple regression analysis techniques on all independent variables on the dependent variable to test the hypothesis. There are several things seen from the regression analysis, namely, the amount of R Square to find out how many percent (%) of the variance of counseling teacher social support, gender and career optimism. Second, this study looks at whether overall counseling teacher social support, gender has a significant effect on career optimism and then observed significant or insignificant regression coefficients of each variable. Furthermore, researchers try to see the comparison or level of gender differences on career optimism in students and female students of X vocational high school. The entire data analysis process used SPSS version 26 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study comprised 348 participants, comprising 265 males and 83 females, aged between 16-18 years (Mean = 17.74; SD = 0.55). All participants were students of X vocational high school who received guidance and counseling from teachers. About 6.32% of the students belong to class X, besides that about 12.93% are class XI and Class XII has a percentage of about 80.75%. This can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics Overview*

Characteristics		F	Percentage
Gender	Male	265	76.15
	Female	83	23.85
Age	16	19	5.71
	17	50	14.57
	18	279	79.71
Class	X	22	6.32
	XI	45	12.93
	XII	281	80.75

Table 2. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	.191	.037	.025	9.87203	.037

In this study, an R value of 0.191 was obtained, which means that the variation of all counseling teacher social support can affect changes in career optimism by 19.1%. The R Square value of 0.037 indicates that only 3.7% of the variation in career optimism can be explained by the model used, while the remaining 80.9% is influenced by other variables outside this study. The slightly lower Adjusted R Square of 0.025 indicates an adjustment for the number of predictors in the model.

Table 3. F Test Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3034.086	5	606.817	6.535	.000
	Residual	31756.957	342	92.857		
	Total	34791.043	347			

It is obtained that the F value has a magnitude of 6,535 and a sig value. 0.000 (sig<0.05), according to the results of the F test in table 3. So it can be interpreted that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of counseling teacher social support to influence career optimism differently based on gender in vocational is rejected, so there is a significant effect of counseling teacher social support variables to influence career optimism differently based on gender in vocational together. Meanwhile, H1 which states that there is a significant effect of counseling teacher social support influence career optimism differently based on gender in vocational is accepted.

After that, the author observes the regression coefficient of each variable counseling teacher social support influence career optimism differently based on gender. If sig.<0.05, the regression coefficient is significant, meaning that the counseling teacher social support variable has a significant influence on career optimism differently based on gender in vocational high school. The following is the amount of regression coefficient of each independent variable on vocational high school career optimism.

Table 4. Regression Equation

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	51.292	.598		85.718	.000
	Emotional Support	.231	.541	.023	.429	.669
	Achievement Support	-.084	.520	-.008	-.161	.872
	Instrumental Support	1.417	.517	.142	2.738	.006
	Informative Support	.531	.521	.053	1.019	.309
	Gender	-5.462	1.259	-.233	-4.337	.000

Based on table 4, the regression equation is concluded as follows: Career optimism = (51.292) + (0.231) Emotional Support + (-0.084) Achievement Support + (1.417) Instrumental Support + (0.531) Informative Support + (-5.462) Gender + e. The explanation of the regression coefficient value is obtained on the independent variable, namely:

Emotional Support

The regression coefficient value obtained is 0.231, a positive coefficient which indicates that the higher the emotional support, the higher the student's career optimism. Then the significance value obtained is 0.669 (sig>0.05). So, the null hypothesis is accepted and it can be interpreted that there is no significant effect of emotional support on students' career optimism.

Achievement Support

The regression coefficient value is -0.084, a negative coefficient indicating that the higher the achievement support, the lower the students' career optimism. Then the significance value obtained is 0.872 (sig> 0.05). So, the null hypothesis is accepted and it can be interpreted that there is no significant effect of achievement support on student career optimism.

Instrumental Support

The regression coefficient value is 1.471, a positive coefficient which indicates that the higher the social support of the counseling teacher, the higher the student's career optimism. Then the significance value obtained is 0.006 (sig <0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It can be interpreted that there is a significant influence of instrumental support on students' career optimism.

Informative Support

The regression coefficient value is 0.531, a positive coefficient indicating that the higher the informative support, the higher the students' career optimism. Then the significance value obtained is 0.309 (sig>0.05). So, the null hypothesis is accepted and it can be interpreted that there is no significant effect of informative support on students' career optimism.

Gender

The regression coefficient value is -0.5462 and the significance value is 0.000 (sig<0.05). So, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, so it can be concluded that gender has an influence on students' career optimism.

Table 5. F Career Optimism

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Between Groups	2228.404	1	2228.404	23.678	.000
	Within Groups	32562.639	346	94.112		
	Total	34791.043	347			

Based on the Anova output above, it is known that the significance probability value is 0.000. therefore, the significance probability value is 0.000 (Sig<0.05), so it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which means that there is a significant difference between men and women on career optimism.

Table 6. Differences between Men and Women

Model	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Male	265	51.4076	9.07633	.55755	50.3098	52.5054
Female	83	45.4698	11.48402	1.26053	42.9622	47.9774
Total	348	49.9914	10.01311	.53676	48.9357	51.0471

Based on the above analysis output, it shows that there is a significant difference between men and women in career optimism, with men having a higher mean value with (Mean = 51.4) and women a lower variability with (Mean = 45.4). This may indicate differences in performance or characteristics between men and women in the context of career optimism.

Discussion

The results of the analysis show that overall, there is a significant influence of the counseling teacher's social support variable on students' career optimism. This study found that the social support of counseling teachers on students' career optimism has a significant effect. This is in line with the results of previous research that social support can have a significant influence on career optimism in a person (Indrayana & Kumaidi, 2021; Luwluw Atqakum et al., 2022; Purnomo et al., 2023). This can be explained that if a person gets positive social support, his future optimism will also increase (Eva et al., 2020; Zahid & Antika, 2022). Previous research has also confirmed the strong relationship between career optimism and career satisfaction (Yen et al., 2023).

More specifically, in relation to career optimism, career experts argue that individuals with high levels of career optimism view new career opportunities as realistic (Eva et al., 2020). interpret career and work events positively (Akkermans et al., 2020), have positive expectations of achieving their career goals (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Lent & Brown, 2019) and believe that career failures are temporary (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020). Taken together, these findings suggest that career optimism helps to foster positive career attitudes and limit negative career attitudes.

When viewed from the influence of aspects on the social support of counseling teachers, the emotional support aspect has a positive coefficient on career optimism. This is in line with research Multasih & Suryadi (2019) who found the results that the increase in emotional support also affects the increase in optimism, then also optimism is part of emotional support (Vizoso et al., 2019). On the other hand, in this study, the emotional support aspect did not have a significant effect on students' career optimism. This finding is not in line with previous research, which stated that emotional support has a significant influence on an individual's optimism (Damra et al., 2023; Wardani & Sugiharto, 2020).

Emotional support is described by expressed empathy and concern for the individual. (Bry & Wigert, 2019; Jones et al., 2019), so that individuals feel comfortable (Liu et al., 2021; Prescott et al., 2019), noticed (Cheng et al., 2022; Romano et al., 2021), and loved (Li, 2019; Mowen et al., 2019). However, in this study, students did not get this and it is inversely proportional to the results of previous studies which say that the interaction of counseling guidance teachers with students makes students comfortable, cared for, guided and cared for (Intani & Sawitri, 2023). In addition, the teacher's reaction is critical and the student benefits significantly from strong emotional support in their daily interactions with the teacher. (Vehkakoski, 2020). Teachers with more in-depth knowledge of relationship management reported providing more emotional support and viewing their relationships with students more positively (Aldrup et al., 2020). But in this study, students lacked comfort and confidence in telling about their feelings to the counseling teacher.

Counseling guidance teachers also provide an appreciation support as a way to increase students' career optimism in this study. However, in this study, the null hypothesis is accepted, which means that appreciation support from counseling guidance teachers on students' career optimism is not significant. These results are not in line with previous research that appreciation support has a significant effect on optimism in general (Multasih & Suryadi, 2019; Smith et al., 2019) as well as career optimism (Öztemel & Yıldız-Akyol, 2021). More specifically, research from Ndari & Sawitri (2022) that the provision of appreciation support from counseling teachers makes students feel valued which then affects career planning or exploration. Career planning or exploration is part of career optimism (Delle & Searle, 2022; Eva et al., 2020; Goodwin, 2019).

Reward support involves an expression of positive appraisal of another person's ideas, feelings, or performance (Wardani & Sugiharto, 2020; Yuliawati & Suardana, 2021). Reward support is illustrated by teachers who always give praise for all efforts made by students, whether the effort is successful or not (Nita Rohayati et al., 2023; Tea et al., 2020). Not only giving praise, but reward support in social support can help to build competence (Halim, 2019; Putra & Muttaqin, 2020) and develop self-esteem (Aprilianto et al., 2021) which ultimately affects optimism in facing the world of work (Nugraha et al., 2021). However, in this study there was no effect of reward support on career optimism, which in turn cannot help build competence and develop students' self-esteem.

The only aspect of counseling teachers' social support that has a significant influence in this study is instrumental support. This is in line with previous research, where instrumental support has a positive effect on career optimism (Li et al., 2019; Olson et al., 2020). This instrumental support is support that provides advice as a way to make it easier to help students who realize it in the form of service or material assistance (Jolly et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2021).

Counseling teachers provide direct assistance to students according to their needs (Mutiara Angelina Putri Diana & Yonora Inggarsari, 2023), such as providing practical advice to overcome personal problems (Kassymova et al., 2019; Supriyanto et al., 2020). In addition, the counseling teacher provides specific direction and guidance to students in facing academic challenges at school (Alwina, 2023; Meyers et al., 2019; Rosadi & Andriyani, 2020). The direction and guidance as well as the academic challenge of the students in question, for example, are academic goals (Aihie & Ohanaka, 2019), academic conflict (Ginting et al., 2023; Mappiare et al., 2022), academic pressure (Pajarianto et al., 2020; Wuthrich et al., 2020), academic anxiety (Karaman et al., 2021), as well as related to future careers (Falco & Summers, 2019; Quinlan & Renninger, 2022).

Counseling teachers can be a comprehensive support platform, including students' future careers (Ion et al., 2022; Muslimah & Erfantini, 2021; Rosvall, 2020). It covers job prospects (Azizah et al., 2023), skills required (A. R. Nugroho, 2022), and labor market trends (Fatimah et al., 2024). This helps students feel more prepared and confident in choosing and planning their careers (Purworahayu & Rusmawati, 2020; Rahmadani, 2021). This can be realized by counseling teachers such as assigning career trees to students (Putri, 2019), job training (Nurmalasari & Erdiantoro, 2020; Rahmadani, 2021), motivational seminar and introduction to the profession (Supardi et al., 2023). So career service programs from counseling teachers are important to increase optimism related to students' future careers (Lindawati et al., 2022; Titting & Feriyanto, 2021).

The last aspect of counseling teachers' social support is informative support. This involves giving advice, or suggestions and feedback (Aljunianti, 2022; Mulyadi et al., 2020). However, in this study, informative support from counseling teachers did not significantly affect students' career optimism. This result is not in line with the results of previous research which found that informative support affects optimism about students' future careers (Ashudi et al., 2022; Hayani, 2021). This lack of informative support can be due to something like the lack of openness of students to counseling teachers (Rangkuti, 2021), students who do not implement the advice of the teacher (Afrina & Linda, 2023), and the lack of a guidance room and advice from the counseling teacher (Daulay et al., 2023).

Previous research explained that the lack of a guidance room was due to the limited number of counseling teachers and limited opportunities to provide services to all students individually (Ridha, 2019). So to be able to cover all students for counseling services, the counseling teacher uses a classical system which in reality is still less effective (Heriyanti & Bhakti, 2022; Lengkey, 2020). This is due to the basic counseling services at school that there are problems in classical services where the counseling teacher does not get class hours every week so that the services are not well programmed because classical services are only provided when there are problems and when there are vacant hours (Nugroho et al., 2021). In addition, there are problems in management (Hifsy et al., 2022) The lack of counseling facilities and infrastructure in public secondary schools in Indonesia is also a factor

in the lack of success of services that contain advice, suggestions, or feedback delivered to students (Marimbun & Pohan, 2021).

Counseling services from counseling teachers also still have problems, namely discrimination against students (Umami, 2022). This creates a lot of negative stigma from students towards counseling teachers (Fatimah et al., 2024; Nurismawan et al., 2022). Previous research found that related to student perceptions of guidance and counseling such as counseling guidance teachers are only seen as handling students who get into trouble (Kamil & Ilham, 2015) including delinquent, truant, undisciplined (Busmayaril & Hedayani, 2016). It can be concluded that there are still many students who are afraid to meet with counseling teachers and not optimal facilities for guidance and counseling services at school (Nugroho et al., 2021).

Turning to the results of the analysis of gender variables on career optimism, this study found that gender variables have a significant influence on career optimism. Research results from Ebner (2021) shows that gender has an influence on career optimism. In addition, the results of the analysis in this study also show a significant effect of gender differences between men and women on career optimism. This is because related to access to opportunities (Haryani & Nurhaeni, 2019) and career adaptability (Intani & Sawitri, 2023) which in turn determines future self-assurance (Aymans et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2024).

Access to these employment opportunities is illustrated Women are systematically overrepresented in the social sciences and humanities (Barone & Assirelli, 2020), while engineering and ICT are dominated by men (Makarova et al., 2019) which in fact is a vocational high school containing technical and ICT knowledge (Lukychova et al., 2022). This is also reinforced that women mostly choose biology or science fields and men prefer STEM fields, which when measured by math ability and combined with other variables there are significant gender differences (Afriana et al., 2016). Previous research has also found that male students have higher career maturity than female subjects (Ndari & Sawitri, 2022). So in the end, this career maturity will affect one's career optimism to face a career in the future (Chan, 2020; Li et al., 2023).

The findings emphasize that counseling teachers' social support and gender have a significant influence on vocational high school students' career optimism. However, when observing each aspect of social support, only instrumental support showed a significant influence on students' career optimism, while emotional support, achievement support, and informative support did not have a significant influence. In addition, there was a significant difference between males and females on students' level of career optimism. This shows that aspects of counseling teachers' social support, especially instrumental support, can positively influence students' career optimism, while gender also has a significant role in determining students' level of career optimism.

Despite the limitations, such as the limited sample using only one school which may not reflect students in the entire study area or due to different education systems in each school, this study shows the way for future research related to guidance and counseling programs. Guidance and counseling should not have a discriminatory culture and only deal with student delinquency problems, but it is also expected to change the negative stigma from students to guidance and counseling. The contribution of this study lies not only in the overall counseling teacher support on career optimism, but also the aspects of counseling teacher support that do and do not affect the career optimism of vocational high school students and how gender differences illustrate career optimism outcomes.

Implications

This study provides important implications for the development of guidance and counseling programs in schools, particularly in supporting students' career optimism. The findings demonstrate that social support from counseling teachers, especially instrumental support, plays a significant role in enhancing students' career optimism. These implications emphasize the need to strengthen the

instrumental support provided by counseling teachers, such as offering practical advice and concrete assistance to help students overcome academic and career-related challenges. On the other hand, the finding that emotional, appreciation, and informative support aspects did not significantly impact students' career optimism suggests that counseling teachers need to reassess their methods in delivering support in these areas. Although emotional and appreciation support are often associated with increasing students' confidence and emotional well-being, these results indicate that the approaches used may be less effective and require strategies that are more relevant to the current needs of students. Furthermore, the significant gender differences in career optimism highlight the need for more gender-sensitive approaches in counseling and guidance programs. Counseling teachers should consider these differences when designing interventions to support both male and female students, ensuring fair access to opportunities and paying attention to career adaptability and relevant skills. Looking ahead, this study suggests that schools should strengthen career counseling programs that are more comprehensive, focusing not only on addressing student disciplinary issues but also on supporting their career development. Additionally, efforts must be made to address the negative stigma surrounding counseling services, ensuring that students feel more comfortable and open to seeking support. Overall, the implications of this study are that social support from counseling teachers, particularly instrumental support, should be prioritized in helping students develop their career optimism. Furthermore, adopting more gender-sensitive approaches can enhance the effectiveness of career counseling in preparing students for the workforce.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has limitations, including its focus on a single vocational high school, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include a larger, more diverse sample across multiple schools to provide broader insights. Additionally, the use of self-reported data may introduce bias, so incorporating interviews or observations could enhance data accuracy. The cross-sectional design also limits understanding of long-term effects, suggesting the need for longitudinal studies. Further exploration is required to understand why emotional, appreciation, and informational support did not significantly impact career optimism, and how these aspects can be improved in counseling programs.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that both social support from counseling teachers and gender differences significantly influence the career optimism of vocational high school students. Among the various types of support, only instrumental support, such as practical advice and specific directions, had a significant positive effect on career optimism. Additionally, male students showed higher levels of career optimism compared to female students, emphasizing the role of gender in shaping career outlooks. These findings underscore the need for counseling teachers to prioritize practical support and consider gender-specific needs in their guidance programs. By focusing on tailored, structured guidance, counseling teachers can enhance students' career optimism and better prepare them for future career challenges, ultimately helping to reduce unemployment among vocational graduates.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Author 1 conceptualized the research, including the development of the background, methodology, and discussion sections. Author 2 was responsible for data collection and processing.

Author 3 supervised the entire research process. All authors have reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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