

Exploration of Students' Interest Levels in Continuing their Education to Higher Education

Nur Amin Liputo¹

Fahrudin Zain Olilingo²

Niswatin³

¹Postgraduate Program, Economic Education, Gorontalo State University, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the level of interest of grade XII high school/vocational students in Pohuwato Regency to continue their education to higher education. The study used Rasch Model analysis to evaluate the validity and reliability of the instrument, unidimensionality, assessment scale, distribution of interest based on the Wright Map, and difference in item functionality (DIF). A total of 278 students from various schools were selected as respondents through the proportional random sampling technique. The results of the analysis show that the instruments used have high validity and reliability, both at the item and person levels. The unidimensionality test shows the measurement according to the intended construct. The Wright Map shows a diverse distribution of students' interests, with most being at moderate to high levels, with only a few students showing low and very low interest. DIF analysis shows that several question items have differential functionality based on the demographics of school origin so that it shows that there is a bias and in the future needs to be improved to improve the fairness of the instrument. This research contributes to the development of a valid and reliable instrument to measure student interest and provides input for schools and policymakers to increase student support in continuing to higher education.

Keywords: Student Interest, Continuing Study, College, Rasch Model

Introduction

Education is a systematic process undertaken by individuals in the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and norms. Education has a very important role in social, economic, and cultural development. A good and effective education system can improve the quality of human resources. Well-educated and well-trained human resources will drive economic progress and social development. This was conveyed by Zhang (2022) education is one of the parameters of a country's growth and development, so that's why education is very necessary. The education system in Indonesia includes three stages, namely primary, secondary, and higher education levels. Primary education consists of elementary school (SD) for 6 years and junior high school (SMP) for 3 years. Secondary education consists of senior high school (SMA) or vocational high school (SMK) for 3 years. then higher education includes colleges and universities. At the higher education level, there are state universities and private universities. All universities offer a variety of study programs with various disciplines ranging from undergraduate programs (S1), master's programs (S2), and doctoral programs (S3). The education system in Indonesia is regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) which is responsible for education policies, standards, and supervision at all levels. In addition, institutions such as the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) and the National Education Standards Agency (BSNP) are also involved in regulating and ensuring the quality of education in Indonesia. Continuing education

to higher education or commonly known as college is very much needed for high school or vocational school graduates. This is in line with the objectives of high school education as stated in PP No. 29 of 1990 Article 3 where high school education is an education that in its implementation prioritizes preparing students to continue their studies at a higher education level. College graduates are believed to tend to have better career opportunities and higher salaries compared to those who only have a high school education. A college degree can open the door to more challenging, satisfying, and potentially better-paying jobs.

So with the aim of education, it is hoped that all high school/vocational school graduates, both in the city and in the village, can continue their education to college level. However, in achieving this, a student must have a great interest so that the student has a basis for his desires. Because interest is considered capable of being a stimulus for someone to be able to act more optimally and achieve a goal or desire. Interest can help students make themselves more active and able to optimize their potential in taking advantage of opportunities, including opportunities for students to continue their studies (Rafsanjani, 2022). According to Putri (2020), interest is a feeling of preference and a feeling of attraction to something or activity without anyone telling them. Interest is basically the acceptance of a relationship between oneself and something outside of oneself. Therefore, students who have a desire to continue their education to college will start with an interest from themselves. This interest arises from various factors that influence it. Namely internal factors and external factors. Internal factors refer to aspects within the student themselves, for example Self-Efficacy and Self Regulated Learning. And external factors that come from the environment or conditions outside the individual student, for example the educational environment. Another internal factor is Self Regulated Learning. Self-Efficacy and self regulated learning are two related concepts, but have differences in focus and application. Self-Efficacy focuses more on an individual's beliefs about their own abilities while Self-regulated learning focuses more on the processes and strategies that individuals use to regulate and control their learning. The term Self Regulated Learning was first coined by Albert Bandura in his theory of social learning theory. In this theory, it is explained that Self Regulated Learning is an effort to deepen and manipulate a network that is related to a field and can control and improve deep processes (McDaniel, 2020). Revealed another definition of Self Regulated Learning, namely the ability or potential that students have to be able to apply and maintain cognitive, influence and behavioral abilities that are systematically oriented towards achieving learning targets (Ghimby, 2022).

In addition to internal factors, there are external factors that also influence a student's interest in continuing their education to college, one of which is the Educational Environment. The three centers of education are educational environments consisting of three environments, namely family, school and society (Nurhalita & Hudaidah, 2021). The influence of the family environment can influence students' interest in determining their future, high family attention and encouragement can increase students' interest in going to college. Parental support plays a very important role in creating a supportive environment to foster abilities, interests, and continue to develop in training intelligence and self-confidence for the child to continue their education and continue learning (Saihu 2022). Parents who are actively involved in their child's educational journey create an environment that fosters a love of learning. By encouraging their children to set goals, provide guidance, and offer emotional support, parents can instill a strong work ethic and interest with a growth mindset (Amelia, 2024). So it can be concluded that when families pay high attention and support to their children's education, this can trigger students' enthusiasm for learning and interest in pursuing further education. Encouragement and support from parents and other family members can give a student confidence that he or she has the potential to achieve success through higher education.

The second educational environment is the school environment, because in the school environment there is a correlation between students and teachers who become the second home

after the family in the process of creating students' personalities and characteristics. When schools prioritize continuing education, students tend to view it as a lifelong endeavor and not just an obligation. Align with research from Amelia (2024), a supportive school environment offers a variety of resources, such as career counseling, workshops, and extracurricular activities, which encourage personal growth and encourage students to explore new areas of interest. So that schools can inspire a passion for continuous learning and empower students to continue their education to college. So the researcher assesses that the school environment not only provides formal knowledge and skills, but also provides full support for student progress in the future through information related to higher education where there is a lecture process, types of scholarships and how to get the scholarship. That way, indirectly, teachers open students' horizons of thinking about higher education or what is commonly known as college. The third educational environment is the community environment. The community environment also plays an important role in shaping students' interests and motivations to continue their education to college. The community environment includes norms, values, and social experiences experienced by individuals in it. Related to the community environment, researchers see that the urban community environment and the rural community environment are very different. Where people in the city consider that education is the most important aspect for a person's progress in the future so it is important for them to get a bachelor's degree to get a decent job. This is different from rural communities who tend to have a mindset that is more related to daily life needs, such as agriculture, animal husbandry, or other traditional jobs. In rural environments, education is sometimes considered less urgent than other practical needs. Therefore, people in villages tend to tell their children to immediately look for work after graduating from high school, or some even just stay at home.

SMK Negeri 1 Marisa is one of the Vocational High Schools in Pohuwato Regency. In the Initial Observation, the researcher chose SMK Negeri 1 Gorontalo to measure students' interest in continuing their education to college. SMK Negeri 1 Marisa has 10 expertise competencies or majors that can be chosen by prospective students according to their interests and talents. SMK Negeri 1 Marisa provides free education, all operational costs of which come from the Central Government. Therefore, most of the parents of SMK Negeri Marisa students work as miners, farmers, and private sector. Every year, SMK Negeri 1 Marisa graduates approximately 200 students in each class. From the results of the initial observation, the researcher found data that in the last 3 years, SMK Negeri 1 Marisa students who continued their education to college were only 20-30%. When the researcher interviewed several grade XII students, the reason they did not have an interest in continuing their education to college was that they lacked confidence in their own abilities to be able to compete with their other friends. They consider that learning in college or university is quite difficult, In addition to the cost of higher education is quite expensive, College is considered to require quite a large cost. Where they have to pay for Development costs, Single Tuition Fees/SPP, Housing costs, and Operational costs. So with the family economy that is quite difficult they do not get support from their parents. They are actually advised to work immediately after graduating. The description of this condition states that the role of teachers has not been maximized as expected, because teachers should be able to provide encouragement for these students through scholarship information available in the regions or from the Ministry.

By looking at the gap and research gap phenomena that have been explained previously, the researcher considers that there needs to be a follow-up to research related to the problems encountered, namely the interest in Continuing Education, the researcher intends to test the theory and results of previous research using different objects and samples, by collaborating between previous variables used to measure the variable of interest in continuing education to college as a form of novelty or newness in the study entitled "Exploration of the Level of Student Interest in Continuing Education to College"

Methods

This research was conducted in class XII of Senior High School and Vocational High School in Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo Province. The basis for the researcher's consideration in choosing schools in Pohuwato Regency was seen from the aspects of environmental conditions and the economic conditions of the community. This study uses a quantitative descriptive approach with the Research analysis technique using Rasch Model analysis to evaluate the validity and reliability of the instrument, unidimensionality, assessment scale, distribution of interests based on Wright Map, and differences in item functioning (DIF). A total of 307 students from various schools were selected as respondents through proportional random sampling techniques.

Result and Discussion

Wright Map Analysis

In this study, to determine the criteria for the respondent's interest level, it can be obtained from the mean logit value or item standard deviation, where based on table 1. where the mean logit person (SD) is +2.04 and the mean logit item (SD) is +0.53, then the criteria can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Interest Level Criteria based on Logit Value

Logit Value	Category
Bigger +4.09 logit	Very High Interest
+2.05 s/d +4.09SD	High Interest
0.00 logit s/d +2.04SD	Medium Interest
-0.01 logit s/d -2.04SD	Low Interest
Smaller -2.04 logit	Very Low Interest

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2024.

Table 2. Difficulty Level Criteria for Questions Based on Logit Values

Logit Value	Category
Logit > 0.75	Very difficult
0.00 < Logit ≤ 0.75	Difficult
-0.75 ≤ Logit ≤ 0.00	Easy
Logit < -0.75	Very easy

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2024.

In describing the distribution of interest levels based on individual logit values with the same scale (Wright Map), this can be seen in the image below:

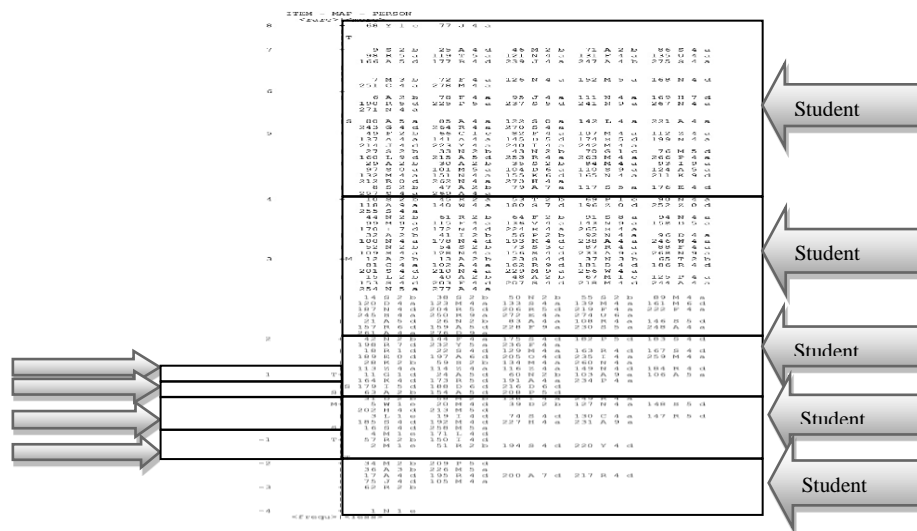


Figure 1. Wright Map

From the Wright Map data in Figure 1. There are 24 students who have very low interest in continuing their studies, 8 students with low interest, 46 students with moderate interest, 108 students have high interest and 92 students have very high interest in continuing their studies. Further observation is needed regarding the causes of the low interest of grade XII students in continuing their studies to college. Meanwhile, in the context of the item there is 1 item (p6) which is a question that is very difficult for respondents to answer, 4 items (p14, p7, p11, p15) are difficult questions, 9 items (p5, p17, p16, p12, p10, p1, p2, p4, p9) which are easy questions and 1 item (p3) is a very easy question. Where the very difficult question (item p6) is the item that answers the statement "Parents pay attention by preparing enough money for me to be able to continue my education to college".

This means that there are problems related to the role of parents in providing enough attention and money for students to continue their studies to college. Meanwhile, Item p3 is a very easy item. Item p3 is an item that answers the statement about "I enjoy discussing college with friends". This means that grade XII students at SMA/SMK Pohuwato Regency really enjoy discussing with friends and have the motivation to continue their studies.

DIF analysis

Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis is a process to identify whether an item on a test or measurement instrument provides an unfair advantage or disadvantage to a particular group that should have equal ability. In this study, DIF shows the presence of item bias that can be caused by non-cognitive factors, such as place of residence and school of origin.

A question item is said to contain bias if the probability value of the item is below 5% (0.05). Information on the existence of question items that have bias (DIF) is processed directly by winsteps and converted into Microsoft Excel. To find out more clearly, whether there is item bias in each category, it can be reviewed based on the table below:

Table 3. DIF Table of Residential Areas (Per District)

Person Classes	Summary DIF CHI-Square D.F. Prob	Between-Class Mean-Square t=ZSTD	Item	Number Name
10	8.9939	9.4378	.0747 -3.5269	1 p1
9	4.8902	8.7692	.0449 -3.7005	2 p2
9	3.6870	8.8842	.0492 -3.6351	3 p3
10	16.2374	9.0620	.2015 -2.4757	4 p4
9	3.3659	8.9093	.0534 -3.5742	5 p5

10	1.9956	9.9915	.0341 -4.1435	6 p6
9	14.7890	8.0633	.2072 -2.2826	7 p7
9	2.8457	8.9436	.0300 -3.9693	8 p8
10	6.8131	9.6565	.0898 -3.3567	9 p9
10	7.9352	9.5406	.1235 -3.0373	10 p10
10	6.4522	9.6939	.0666 -3.6267	11 p11
10	3.0517	9.9622	.0129 -4.7124	12 p12
10	5.9523	9.7447	.0559 -3.7739	13 p13
9	11.3168	8.1843	.0858 -3.1871	14 p14
10	3.8474	9.9211	.0447 -3.9489	15 p15

Based on the table provided, most items show statistically insignificant differences. The p-value or probability value on many items (such as p1, p2, p3, p5, p6, p9, p10, p11, p12, p14, p15, p16, p17) is greater than 0.05, which means the difference between classes or groups on these items is not significant enough. However, there are some items such as p4 and p7 with smaller p-values, which indicate the possibility of statistically significant differences on these items. In addition, the Mean Square value on most items shows small variations, indicating that the differences between groups on these items are not too large. Overall, most items show insignificant differences, although some items may show more prominent differences. To see a detailed picture, see the following graph:

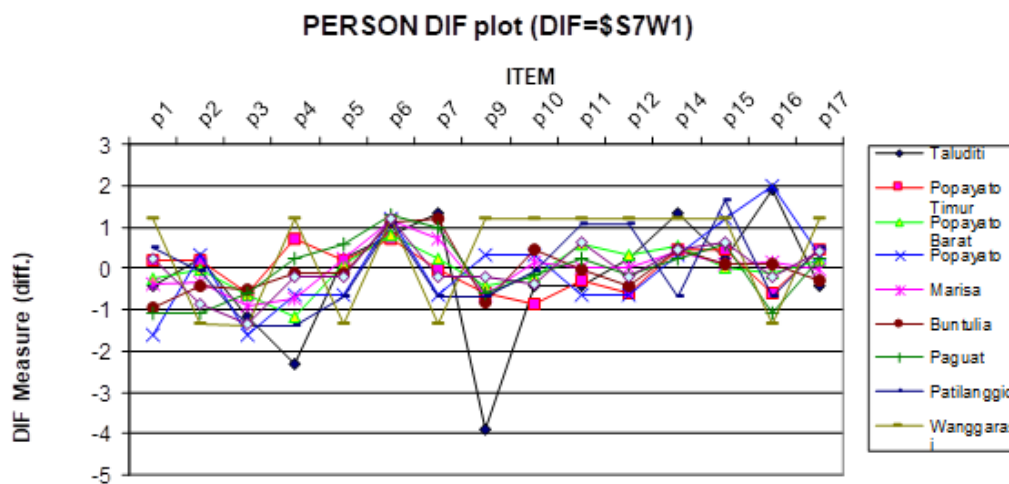


Figure 2. DIF Test Results based on Place of Residence

Based on Figure 2. shows the Person DIF plot based on the District level, for various groups (Tauditi, Popayato, East Popayato, West Popayato, and Marisa) on several items (P1 to P17). In general, most items have consistent DIF values between groups, with a relatively small range around the central axis (DIF = 0). However, there is a significant deviation in item P9, where one of the Tauditi groups shows a much lower DIF value than the other groups, indicating potential bias or differences in the level of difficulty of the item for the group. Overall, most items show moderate variation with DIF values not exceeding ± 2 , indicating that the items are relatively fair between groups, although some items (such as P9). To review the next DIF category, namely based on school origin, can be seen in table 4.11. below:

Table 4. DIF Table Based on School Origin

DIF class specification is: DIF=\$S9W1

Person Classes	Summary DIF CHI-Square D.F. Prob	Between-Class Mean-Square t=ZSTD	Item	Number Name
5	2.7053	4.6079	.2265-1.4206	1 p1

5	5.0412	4.2825	.1972-1.5375	2 p2
5	1.4027	4.8436	.0495-2.4487	3 p3
5	11.3718	4.0226	.5593-.5114	4 p4
5	1.5008	4.8264	.1263-1.8782	5 p5
5	2.1732	4.7036	.0775-2.1981	6 p6
5	9.7589	4.0445	.6902-.2576	7 p7
5	1.8974	4.7544	.1050-2.0052	8 p9
5	4.5071	4.3411	.1965-1.5404	9 p10
5	8.0243	4.0904	.4244-.8185	10 p11
5	3.3890	4.4944	.0767-2.2045	11 p12
5	.6731	4.9546	.0201-2.8530	12 p14
5	2.3165	4.6774	.0486-2.4586	13 p15
5	1.0909	4.8957	.0461-2.4854	14 p16
5	4.0696	4.3961	.2593 -1.3016	15 p17

Table 4. above shows the results of the Rasch analysis for 15 items tested related to Differential Item Functioning (DIF). The results of the analysis show that most items do not show significant differences between groups, as reflected by the p-value (PROB.) which is greater than 0.05 on items such as p1, p2, p5, and others. However, there are several items that show significant DIF, such as item p4, which has a p-value smaller than 0.05 (0.0226) and item p7 (0.0445), which indicates a difference in how the item is perceived between the classes being compared. The negative t-value (ZSTD) on several items also indicates that the item is more difficult for certain groups. Overall, these results indicate that most items show equality between groups, but there are several items that need to be analyzed further to ensure that there is no bias affecting the test results. To see a clearer picture, the DIF analysis can be reviewed based on the following plot graph:

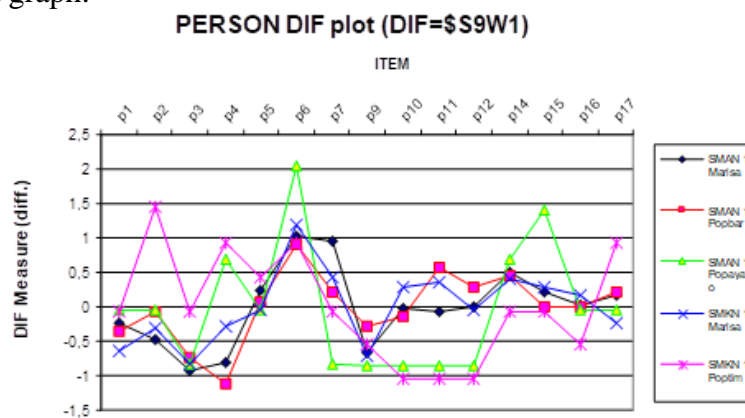


Figure 4. DIF Test Results Based on School Origin

Based on Figure 4. shows significant fluctuations in several categories (schools), with several data lines experiencing large changes along the horizontal axis. The graph shows the Differential Item Functioning (DIF) measurements for the SMAN 1 Marisa, Popayato, West Popayato, and SMKN 1 Popayato groups on items P1 to P17. In general, most items show consistent DIF values between groups, with small variations around the central axis (DIF = 0), reflecting similar item difficulty levels. However, there are significant deviations in items P6 and P10, where certain groups have higher or lower DIF values than other groups, indicating potential bias in these items. Overall, these items function fairly fairly between groups, although some items, such as P2, P6, P10 and P15, indicate significant bias. As in item p6, the SMAN 1 Popayato point appears to be far above the other groups. This may indicate a tendency for bias in the questions where SMAN 1 Popayato is advantaged. Most of the DIF values are within the

range of ± 1.5 , which indicates that the differences in item functions are still within moderate and acceptable limits.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to Explore the Level of Interest of Students in Continuing Education to Higher Education Case Study of Grade XII Students of Senior High Schools/Vocational High Schools in Pohuwato Regency using the Rasch Model. This analysis includes an evaluation of the suitability of the data to the model, the reliability of the instrument, the ability of the scale to measure the main dimensions, the distribution of interest levels and item bias analysis.

Analysis of Student Interest Level Instruments

Based on the results of the analysis requirements test, the instrument used in this study has a very high level of reliability, both for respondents and questions, with reliability values of 0.94 and 0.96, respectively. This shows that the instrument is able to effectively distinguish the level of respondent ability and accurately map the level of difficulty of the questions. In addition, the results of the analysis show that this instrument can classify respondents' abilities into five categories of study interest and four levels of question quality, indicating that the instrument is sensitive enough to measure abilities in detail. The high Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.96 further strengthens the consistency of the instrument in measuring the expected construct. The results of the validity test show that most of the items in the instrument have a good fit with the Rasch model. Of the 17 items tested, 15 items meet the fit criteria, while two items (p8 and p13) show potential inconsistency with the model because the Outfit MNSQ value exceeds the threshold.

The positive correlation between item scores and total scores indicates that most items make a significant contribution to the overall measurement. This instrument has a good level of validity, but improvements to inappropriate items are still needed to ensure measurement accuracy. The unidimensionality test revealed that this instrument successfully explained 65.3% of the data variance, reflecting the reliability of the model in measuring one main dimension. The proportion of unexplained variance of 34.7% is still within reasonable limits, with the first to fifth contrasts showing low values, indicating the absence of significant additional dimensions. Overall, this instrument can be considered unidimensional and suitable for further analysis, with good ability to measure the expected constructs. However, some improvements to certain items are needed to improve the validity and sensitivity of the instrument as a whole.

Analysis of the Interest Level of Grade XII Students in continuing their studies at university.

The results of the Wright Map analysis in this study revealed that the majority of grade XII students at SMA/SMK Pohuwato Regency have a high interest in continuing their studies to college. This finding is in line with the role of education as a systematic process to improve the quality of human resources (Wibowo et al., 2024). However, there are some students with low levels of interest, which are influenced by various factors, including family support and perceptions about the cost of higher education. As stated by Islakhiyah & Yanti (2018), education is the main instrument in optimizing the demographic bonus in Indonesia in 2020–2030, which can be a potential or a disaster depending on the quality of its young generation. Students' interest in continuing their education to college is not only influenced by internal factors such as self-efficacy and self-regulated learning, but also by external factors such as the family, school, and community environments.

Shows that self-efficacy contributes significantly to self-regulated learning, while classroom climate plays a major role in shaping students' learning motivation. On the other hand, a supportive family environment is an important foundation in building students' self-confidence to continue their education. The school and community environment also play an important role

in fostering students' interest. Schools can serve as catalysts by providing information related to scholarships, career opportunities, and the value of higher education. However, rural communities often have different perspectives on the importance of higher education compared to urban communities. Therefore, interventions are needed to overcome existing barriers, both through educational policies and programs that encourage students to have a greater interest in continuing their studies at university, as proposed by the research of Noveli (2023).

DIF analysis of high school/vocational school students' interests in continuing their studies at university

Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis in this study aims to identify item bias based on factors of residence and school origin. The results of the analysis show that most items on the test do not show significant bias, with p-values greater than 0.05. However, some specific items, such as P4 and P7, have p-values smaller than 0.05, indicating potential bias. The Mean Square value for most items shows small variations, indicating that the differences between groups are not too large. In the analysis based on residence, most items show insignificant differences between sub-district groups. The DIF plot graph shows that most DIF values are around the central axis (DIF = 0), reflecting a relatively consistent level of difficulty between groups. However, there is a significant deviation in item P9, especially for the Taluditi group, indicating potential bias or differences in the level of difficulty in the group.

Meanwhile, the analysis based on school origin also shows that most items do not contain significant bias, with p-values greater than 0.05. However, some items such as P4 and P7 have significant p-values, indicating differences between school groups. The DIF plot graph shows that most DIF values are consistent between groups, but there are significant deviations in items P6 and P10, especially in the SMAN 1 Popayato group, indicating potential bias. Overall, most items on the test can be considered to function fairly among the groups tested. However, some items, such as P4, P7, P6, and P10, require further analysis to ensure that bias does not affect the test results. The range of DIF values that are mostly within the moderate limit (± 1.5) indicates that the differences in item function are still acceptable, although special attention is needed for items that are indicated by bias. This difference indicates that the category of school origin can determine student interest.

Conclusion

The instrument used in this study has proven to have high reliability and validity. With excellent reliability values (0.94 for respondents and 0.96 for questions), this instrument can distinguish the level of respondent ability and map the difficulty of questions accurately. Most items meet the fit criteria, although there are two items that need to be improved. This instrument also shows good results in measuring the main dimensions and can be used for further analysis.

There are 24 students who have very low interest in continuing their studies, 8 students with low interest, 46 students with moderate interest, 108 students with high interest and 92 students with very high interest in continuing their studies. The majority of students in Pohuwato Regency have a high interest in continuing their education to college, although some students show low interest influenced by external factors such as family support and education costs. Family and school environments play an important role in shaping students' interests, and interventions in the form of educational policies and motivational programs are needed to increase the interest of students from rural areas.

The majority of items on the test do not show significant bias, but there are several items that show potential bias based on factors of residence and school of origin. Several items such as p4 and p7 with probability values below 0.05 in the School of Origin category and items P2, P6, P10 and P15 with extreme graph points on the plot indicate bias so that some groups are

advantaged/disadvantaged in answering questions so that the school of origin category can determine student interests

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