

Premarital guidance based on the prepare model (premarital preparation and relationship enhancement) to improve students' readiness for marriage

Winda Noviana¹, Feida Noorlaila Isti'adah², Anandha Putri Rahimsyah³

1. Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

2. Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

3. Universitas Muhammadiyah Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: santaviana.mey@gmail.com

Article Information:

Received : April 29, 2026

Revised : May 31, 2026

Published : June 1, 2026

Keywords:

marriage readiness,
premarital guidance,
PREPARE model, students

Abstract

The low level of marriage readiness among college students is a significant issue in the field of Guidance and Counseling, as it is linked to high rates of marital conflict and divorce among young married couples. Research on PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance services for college students remains relatively limited, particularly in the context of higher education institutions in Indonesia. This study aims to test the effectiveness of PREPARE (Premarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement)-based premarital guidance in improving students' readiness for marriage. The study employs a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental method through a one-group pretest-posttest design. The sample consisted of 20 students from Muhammadiyah University of Tasikmalaya selected using purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted using a marriage readiness scale, while data analysis was performed using a paired sample t-test, effect size, and the Reliable Change Index (RCI) using the JASP application. The results of the study indicate an increase in students' marriage readiness after participating in PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance services. These findings reinforce the relationship education approach as part of preventive services in Guidance and Counseling and can serve as a foundation for the development of premarital education programs in higher education settings.

Introduction

Marital readiness among young adults is currently a topic receiving increasing attention in the field of Guidance and Counseling due to its connection to the rise in various marital issues, such as couple conflict, relationship instability, and divorce among young married couples (Rhoades & Stanley, 2015). These issues are considered important because the quality of a couple's relationship is linked to psychological well-being, family stability, and the broader quality of social life in society (Falconier et al., 2015). According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of divorces in Indonesia in 2024 reached over 394,000 cases, with the primary causes being ongoing disputes and arguments, followed by economic issues and domestic violence (Central Statistics Agency [BPS], 2025). The high divorce rate indicates that some couples enter marriage without sufficient emotional and

psychological readiness, interpersonal communication skills, or conflict resolution skills (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). This situation not only impacts the quality of the couple's relationship but also affects the mental health of family members and the broader social well-being of the community (Williamson et al., 2016). Therefore, from a Guidance and Counseling perspective, preventive

services are needed to help individuals prepare themselves before entering marriage in a more mature, adaptive, and responsible manner (Silliman & Schumm, 2000).

This issue becomes increasingly relevant when considered in relation to the characteristics of college students as a group in emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is understood as a transitional phase toward maturity characterized by identity exploration, the formation of intimate relationships, and the search for long-term life direction (Arnett, 2014). During this phase, individuals are still in the midst of a dynamic psychosocial development process and thus have not yet fully attained the emotional maturity and stable relational readiness required to build a family life (Arnett, 2014). Marriage readiness is strongly linked to an individual's level of psychological well-being. An individual who can accept themselves positively, build healthy relationships with others, has a clear life direction, and demonstrates independence is generally better prepared to undertake various developmental tasks in early adulthood, including preparing to enter married life (Rahimsyah & Muhajirin, 2025). Furthermore, optimal psychological well-being plays a crucial role in supporting emotional maturity, sound decision-making, and an individual's ability to manage the responsibilities inherent in long-term interpersonal relationships.

In line with these findings, Nurmalasari et al. (2025) explain that marriage readiness among young adults is not solely determined by age but is influenced by various factors, such as psychological and emotional readiness, relationship experience, economic circumstances, and clarity regarding life values and goals. These findings indicate that marriage readiness is a process that develops gradually and is shaped by life experiences and an individual's interactions with their surrounding environment. Other studies indicate that college students' marriage readiness is influenced by several key factors, such as emotional maturity, interpersonal communication skills, economic readiness, and the ability to resolve relational conflicts (Ningrum et al., 2021; Putri & Pertiwi, 2024). Low readiness in these aspects has the potential to increase relationship conflict and household instability in the future (Lavner et al., 2013).

Other research indicates that adolescents and young adults aged 20–24 in Indonesia are still not sufficiently prepared to start a family, particularly in terms of financial, emotional, social, and physical readiness, as well as marriage planning (Murniati et al., 2024). These findings indicate that readiness for marriage is not determined solely by emotional maturity but is also influenced by social readiness, mental health, and economic stability, which have not yet developed optimally. Salsabila et al. (2025) also found that the marriage readiness of college students in Tasikmalaya falls into diverse categories and is influenced by emotional and relational readiness. These findings suggest that students require more systematic guidance to realistically and adaptively understand the dynamics of long-term relationships and the responsibilities of family life (Rauer et al., 2020).

Previous studies have shown that premarital guidance and relationship education play a significant role in improving the quality of couples' relationships and individuals' readiness for married life (Halford et al., 2015). Relationship education has been shown to improve the quality of communication between partners, strengthen dyadic coping skills, and increase interpersonal relationship satisfaction (Falconier et al., 2015; Williamson et al., 2016). Additionally, relationship education services have been reported to contribute to a reduced risk of divorce and an increase in the success of long-term relationships (Rhoades & Stanley, 2015; Markman et al., 2021). From a Guidance and Counseling perspective, relationship education is part of preventive and developmental guidance services aimed at helping

individuals develop relational skills before entering married life (Silliman & Schumm, 2000). For the emerging adulthood group, these services are considered important because they can help students develop emotional readiness, interpersonal communication skills, and the ability to build healthy relationships (Rauer et al., 2020).

One widely used approach in premarital interventions is the PREPARE (Premarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement) model, which was developed to help individuals understand relationship dynamics and their readiness for married life (Olson & Olson, 1999). The PREPARE model focuses on strengthening interpersonal communication, conflict management, marital expectations, financial planning, and readiness to fulfill roles within the couple's relationship (Olson & Olson, 1999). The effectiveness of the PREPARE model in predicting marital success has been demonstrated by research by Fowers and Olson (1986), which showed that couples with good relational readiness have a greater chance of maintaining long-term relationship quality. Research by Knutson and Olson (2003) also found that the use of PREPARE in premarital guidance significantly enhances couples' relational understanding. Furthermore, recent research indicates that premarital guidance contributes to improved psychological readiness and relational adaptability before individuals enter married life (Juniarly et al., 2024; Panzola et al., 2024). Based on these various findings, the PREPARE model is considered to have the potential to be applied as a preventive approach in Guidance and Counseling services for students in the emerging adulthood phase.

Although research on premarital guidance continues to evolve, studies on the effectiveness of PREPARE-based premarital guidance for college students remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of higher education institutions in Indonesia (Panzola et al., 2024). Most previous research has been conducted primarily on married couples, formal engaged couples, or family communities (Duncan et al., 2014), whereas college students, as a group in emerging adulthood, have not yet been the primary focus of research (Rauer et al., 2020). Furthermore, research on college students' marriage readiness in Indonesia remains dominated by descriptive approaches and has not extensively tested the effectiveness of interventions empirically through quantitative experimental designs (Salsabila et al., 2025). Research on marriage readiness among young adults aged 20–24 in Indonesia has also primarily focused on mapping marriage readiness indices and family readiness characteristics, without developing a counseling intervention model whose effectiveness has been directly tested (Murniati et al., 2024). These conditions indicate a research gap regarding the effectiveness of PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance services in improving students' marriage readiness through a quantitative experimental approach. Based on this gap, this study focuses on examining the effectiveness of PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance in improving the marriage readiness of students at Muhammadiyah University of Tasikmalaya.

Marital readiness is understood as an individual's readiness in terms of emotional aspects, interpersonal communication, conflict management, financial readiness, and readiness to fulfill roles in married life (Ningrum et al., 2021). Marital readiness is assumed to be improved through PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance services that emphasize the development of relational skills and an understanding of married life in a preventive manner (Olson & Olson, 1999). The PREPARE model was used as a conceptual foundation because it employs a systematic approach to help individuals understand relationship dynamics, improve communication quality, and develop readiness to handle relational conflicts before entering married life (Olson & Olson, 1999). This study employs a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design to test the effectiveness of PREPARE-based premarital guidance interventions on college students' readiness for marriage.

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of PREPARE-based premarital guidance in improving the marriage readiness of students at Muhammadiyah University of Tasikmalaya. Specifically, this study examines whether there is a difference in the level of marriage readiness among students before and after receiving PREPARE-based premarital guidance. Based on this objective, the research hypothesis is that there will be an increase in students' marriage readiness after participating in PREPARE-based premarital guidance.

Methods

Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design using a one-group pretest-posttest design. This design was chosen to align with the study's objective, which focused on testing the effectiveness of PREPARE (Premarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement)-based premarital guidance services in improving college students' readiness for marriage. Through this design, participants were first administered a pre-test to assess their level of marriage readiness before receiving the intervention. Subsequently, participants underwent the PREPARE-based premarital guidance program as the treatment, followed by a post-test to evaluate changes in their level of marriage readiness following the intervention. The one-group pretest-posttest design was used because it allows researchers to directly compare participants' conditions before and after the treatment within the same group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, a quantitative approach was chosen because the study focused on objectively measuring changes in variables through inferential statistical analysis using a paired sample t-test (Sugiyono, 2019).

Participants

The population in this study consisted of students from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 cohorts at Muhammadiyah University of Tasikmalaya, totaling 292 students. Population data were obtained by distributing a marriage readiness questionnaire to active students. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, a technique that selects participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). The inclusion criteria for this study included being an active student, being willing to participate in the entire intervention series, and completing the research instrument in full. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria included students who did not fully participate in the intervention or did not complete the research data.

Based on these criteria, 20 students (N=20) were selected as research participants and participated in the PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance service. This number of participants was deemed sufficient for a simple experimental study focusing on changes in scores before and after the intervention (Fraenkel et al., 2019). All participants provided informed consent prior to the study's implementation. Furthermore, this study adhered to research ethics principles, such as data confidentiality, voluntary participation, and participant consent throughout the research process (American Psychological Association, 2020). The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Demographics of Research Participants

| Characteristics | Category | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender | Female | 17 | 85.0 |
| | Male | 3 | 15.0 |
| Age | Age 18–21 | 8 | 40.0 |
| | Age 22–25 | 12 | 60.0 |
| Program | Guidance and Counseling | 14 | 70.0 |

| Characteristics | Category | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|---|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Class | PGPAUD | 3 | 15.0 |
| | PGSD | 3 | 15.0 |
| | 2022 | 9 | 45.0 |
| | 2023 | 9 | 45.0 |
| | 2024 | 2 | 10.0 |
| Relationship | In a relationship | 10 | 50.0 |
| | Single | 8 | 40.0 |
| | Engaged | 2 | 10.0 |
| Have participated in pre-marriage courses or training | Ever | 2 | 10.0 |
| | Never | 19 | 90.0 |

Instruments

The instrument used in this study is a marriage readiness scale based on the PREPARE (Premarital Preparation and Relationship Evaluation) model developed by Fowers and Olson. The PREPARE model views marriage readiness as a multidimensional relational construct that can be systematically measured through assessments of various relationship domains related to the quality and stability of marriage (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Olson & Olson, 1999). Therefore, the PREPARE-based marriage readiness scale was deemed appropriate for measuring students' relational readiness before and after participating in premarital guidance interventions.

The research instrument consists of 66 items formulated using a four-point Likert scale. Each response option has a score range of 1–4, differentiated based on whether the statement is positive or negative. For positive statements, the highest score is assigned to the “Strongly Agree” (SS) response, and the lowest score to the “Strongly Disagree” (STS) response. Conversely, for negative statements, scoring is reversed. The instrument's scoring pattern is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Scoring Patterns for Alternative Response Options (Likert)

| Alternative Answers | Positive Statement Score | Negative Statement Score |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Agree (SS) | 4 | 1 |
| Agree (S) | 3 | 2 |
| Disagree (TS) | 2 | 3 |
| Strongly Disagree (STS) | 1 | 4 |

The reliability criteria for the instrument in this study are based on Cronbach's Alpha values to determine the level of internal consistency of the research instrument. The categories for interpreting the instrument's reliability are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Instrument Reliability Criteria (Alpha Cronbach's)

| Value | Criteria |
|---------|-----------|
| <0,5 | Poor |
| 0,5-0,6 | Bad |
| 0,6-0,7 | Fair |
| 0,7-0,8 | Good |
| >0,80 | Excellent |

The results of the instrument reliability test in this study were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software and the Cronbach's Alpha technique to determine the instrument's level of internal consistency. The results of the instrument reliability test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results from IBM SPSS Statistics

| Reliability Statistics | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .885 | 66 |

Based on the results of the reliability test in Table 4, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.885 was obtained for a total of 66 items. This value indicates that the marriage readiness instrument has a very high level of reliability. According to instrument reliability criteria, a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.80 falls into the "highly reliable" category (Sumintono & Widhiarso, 2014). Thus, the research instrument is deemed to have good internal consistency and is suitable for use as a data collection tool in research (Sugiyono, 2019).

Procedure

The research was conducted through several systematically organized stages. The first stage began with a pre-test using a marriage readiness scale to obtain an initial picture of the students' level of marriage readiness before the intervention was administered. The next stage involved the implementation of the intervention in the form of premarital guidance services based on the PREPARE model. The intervention was conducted over three weeks, consisting of a total of five sessions. Each session lasted 60 minutes, bringing the total duration of the intervention to approximately 300 minutes. The frequency of the intervention was set at twice a week to ensure the process could proceed effectively while accommodating students' academic schedules.

The service intervention was designed based on an adaptation of the concept of relationship education and the development of relational skills within a premarital preparation program (Silliman & Schumm, 2000). In each session, participants engage in various activities, including group activities, self-reflection, concept explanations, discussions of experiences, interpersonal communication exercises, as well as problem-solving and conflict management exercises related to relational life and readiness for marriage. The series of services is designed to help participants understand the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in a more realistic, adaptive, and constructive way within married life.

The following is the schedule and sequence of PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance sessions conducted over 3 weeks, presented in (Table 5).

Table 5. Schedule and Session Content Outline

| Session | Focus of the Material | Core Activities | Purpose |
|----------------|--|---|---|
| Session 1 | Awareness and Realistic Expectations in Marriage | Participants complete the marriage readiness wheel, engage in self-reflection, and gain an understanding of aspects of marriage readiness such as communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and realistic expectations in a relationship. | Helping participants assess their level of readiness and develop a realistic understanding of married life. |

| Session | Focus of the Material | Core Activities | Purpose |
|-----------|--|---|--|
| Session 2 | Effective Communication and Conflict Resolution | Participants took part in role-playing exercises, healthy communication exercises, discussions about conflict experiences, and reflections on interpersonal communication patterns and conflict resolution. | Developing interpersonal communication skills, empathy, and constructive conflict resolution |
| Session 3 | Self-awareness, Understanding Your Partner, and Understanding Your Environment | Participants engaged in the "self-reflection in relationships" activity, self-awareness reflection, exploration of the influence of family and environment, and writing personal notes. | Helping participants understand their own personalities, emotions, relationship patterns, and the influence of the environment on interpersonal relationships. |
| Session 4 | Readiness for Married Life | Participants took part in a marriage life simulation, which involved simulating decision-making in married life based on different economic circumstances, family situations, and life priorities. | Developing decision-making skills, emotional readiness, and preparedness to face the realities of married life. |
| Session 5 | Commitment and Future Planning | Participants wrote a "letter to the future," engaged in self-reflection, and developed relationship commitments. | Helping participants build commitment, plan for the future, and prepare to enter married life with greater maturity |

After the entire intervention series was completed, the final stage of the study involved administering a post-test using the same instrument to assess changes in students' readiness for marriage following their participation in the PREPARE-based premarital guidance program. All stages of the study were conducted in a structured manner to ensure consistency in the implementation of the intervention and the accuracy of the data collection process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis

This study uses a simple experimental approach through a one-group pretest-posttest design without involving a control group. Data analysis was conducted with the help of the JASP application to identify changes in students' marriage readiness scores before and after participating in premarital guidance services based on the PREPARE model. Before testing the hypothesis, the data were first analyzed using the Shapiro–Wilk normality test to determine the distribution pattern of the research data. The use of the Shapiro–Wilk test was considered because the number of participants in the study was relatively limited ($N < 50$). Data were considered to meet the normality assumption if the significance value was above 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). After the normality assumption was met, hypothesis testing was continued using a paired sample t-test to determine the difference in students' marriage readiness scores between the pretest and posttest results after the intervention was given. All statistical analyses were conducted with a significance level $\alpha = 0,05$. In addition to hypothesis testing, this study also calculated the effect size using Cohen's d to determine the magnitude of the intervention's influence on changes in students' marital readiness scores. Cohen (1992)

explained that a Cohen's *d* value of 0.2 indicates a small effect, 0.5 indicates a medium effect, and 0.8 indicates a large effect. This study also used the Reliable Change Index (RCI) to determine the level of individual participants' changes after participating in the intervention. RCI analysis is used to identify whether the score changes that occur in each participant are reliable and clinically significant. Changes are considered reliable if the RCI value is above 1.96 (Jacobson & Truax, 1991).

Results

The study begins by presenting the distribution of pre-test and post-test scores on students' readiness for marriage following their participation in PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance; the pre-test and post-test results are presented in the form of a bar chart in Figure 1. The chart shows a comparison of each participant's scores before the intervention (pre-test) and after the intervention (post-test).

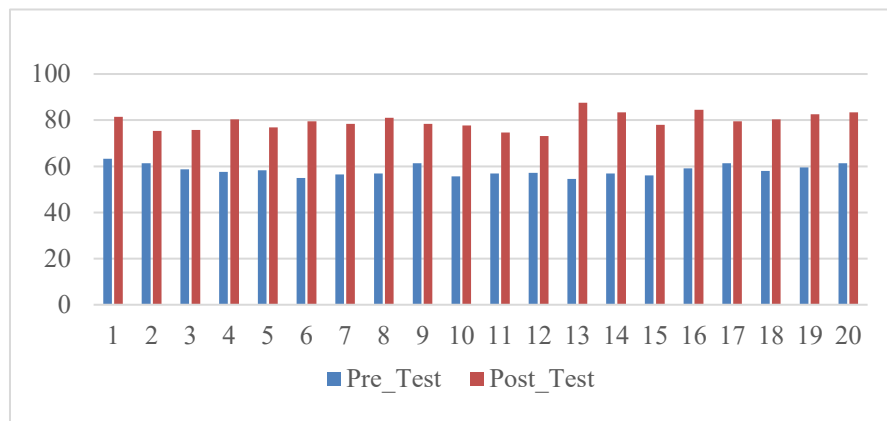


Figure 1. Pre-test and Post-test Data of Premarital Guidance

Based on the image above, the posttest scores show a tendency to be higher compared to the pretest scores for almost all research participants. Most students experienced an increase in scores after participating in premarital guidance services based on the PREPARE model. In addition, the score distribution in the posttest stage appears to be within a higher score range compared to the pretest results. This condition indicates a change in the students' level of readiness for marriage after the implementation of the premarital guidance services based on the PREPARE model.

To understand the distribution of students' marriage readiness based on gender, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the pretest and posttest scores, which included the mean, standard deviation, standard error, and coefficient of variation. The results of the marriage readiness distribution based on gender are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of Marriage Readiness Based on Gender

| | Gender | N | Mean | SD | SE | Coefficient of variation |
|----------|--------|----|-------|-------|-------|--------------------------|
| Pretest | Male | 3 | 59.97 | 2.406 | 1.389 | 0.040 |
| | Female | 17 | 57.95 | 2.392 | 0.580 | 0.041 |
| Posttest | Male | 3 | 75.63 | 2.661 | 1.536 | 0.035 |
| | Female | 17 | 80.28 | 3.317 | 0.804 | 0.041 |

Based on the analysis in the table above, the group of male students scored an average of 59.97 with a standard deviation of 2.406 in the pretest phase, while the group of female students scored an average of 57.95 with a standard deviation of 2.392. Following the intervention, the average scores in the posttest phase increased, with male students achieving

an average score of 75.63 with a standard deviation of 2.661, while female students achieved an average of 80.28 with a standard deviation of 3.317. Additionally, the coefficient of variation for both the male and female groups showed relatively low values in both the pretest and posttest phases. These conditions indicate that the data distribution in each gender group tended to be homogeneous with a relatively small degree of score variation. The posttest results also showed an increase in the average marriage readiness score in both gender groups after participating in the PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance service.

To obtain a more detailed picture of changes in students' marriage readiness scores across each dimension of the PREPARE model, a statistical analysis was conducted on each aspect using a paired-sample t-test. This analysis included a comparison of the mean, standard deviation, significance level, and effect size before and after the implementation of the PREPARE-based premarital guidance intervention. The results of the analysis of the increase in marriage readiness scores by aspect are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Data on Improvements in Marriage Readiness Scores by Dimension

| Scale | Pretest | | Posttest | | t | p | d Effect size |
|-------------------------------|---------|------|----------|------|---------|--------|---------------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| Realistic Expectation | 16.15 | 2.41 | 23.60 | 1.98 | -11.519 | < .001 | 2.576 |
| Personality Issues | 7.50 | 1.14 | 13.35 | 1.42 | -14.655 | < .001 | 3.277 |
| Communication | 9.0 | 1.45 | 15.40 | 1.90 | -12.072 | < .001 | 2.699 |
| Conflict Resolution | 9.50 | 1.35 | 13.80 | 1.36 | -10.004 | < .001 | 2.237 |
| Financial Management | 9.10 | 1.11 | 13.60 | 1.31 | -12.283 | < .001 | 2.747 |
| Leisure Activities | 16.10 | 2.69 | 23.75 | 1.99 | -8.935 | < .001 | 1.998 |
| Sexual Relationship | 18.60 | 1.31 | 26.75 | 1.83 | -17.278 | < .001 | 3.863 |
| Children and Parenting | 18.65 | 1.38 | 26.45 | 2.13 | -14.550 | < .001 | 3.254 |
| Family and Friends | 17.25 | 1.51 | 21.95 | 3.36 | -5.185 | < .001 | 1.159 |
| Equalitarian Roles | 13.25 | 1.77 | 18.05 | 1.23 | -11.588 | < .001 | 2.591 |
| Religious Orientation | 11.20 | 1.00 | 13.40 | 1.63 | -7.22 | < .001 | 1.616 |

The results of the paired-samples t-test for each dimension of marriage readiness (Table 7) show a significant increase in scores between before and after the implementation of the PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance intervention. In the Realistic Expectation dimension, the mean score increased from 16.15 (SD = 2.41) in the pre-intervention stage to 23.60 (SD = 1.98) after the intervention was administered, with a t-value (19) = -11.519 and $p < .001$. The effect size d value of 2.576 indicates a large effect size. These findings suggest an improvement in students' ability to develop more realistic expectations regarding married life.

A significant improvement was also observed in the Personality Issues dimension, where the mean score increased from 7.50 (SD = 1.14) to 13.35 (SD = 1.42), $t(19) = -14.655$, $p < .001$. An effect size of 3.277 indicates a very strong effect of the intervention on students' understanding of their own and their partner's characteristics in interpersonal relationships. Similar results were found in the Communication dimension, with an increase in scores from 9.00 (SD = 1.45) to 15.40 (SD = 1.90), $t(19) = -12.072$, $p < .001$, and an effect size of 2.699.

In the Conflict Resolution dimension, the mean score increased from 9.50 (SD = 1.35) to 13.80 (SD = 1.36), $t(19) = -10.004$, $p < .001$, with an effect size of 2.237. Meanwhile, in the Financial Management dimension, the mean score increased from 9.10 (SD = 1.11) to 13.60 (SD = 1.31), $t(19) = -12.283$, $p < .001$. An effect size of 2.747 indicates that the intervention had a significant impact on students' readiness to manage family financial aspects.

An increase in scores was also observed in the Leisure Activities dimension, where the mean score changed from 16.10 (SD = 2.69) to 23.75 (SD = 1.99), $t(19) = -8.935$, $p < .001$, with an effect size of 1.998. On the other hand, the Sexual Relationship dimension showed the highest increase in scores, from 18.60 (SD = 1.31) to 26.75 (SD = 1.83), $t(19) = -17.278$, $p < .001$, with an effect size of 3.863. These results indicate a change in students' understanding of interpersonal relationships and relational readiness in married life.

A significant change in scores was also observed in the Children and Parenting dimension, with an increase in the mean score from 18.65 (SD = 1.38) to 26.45 (SD = 2.13), $t(19) = -14.550$, $p < .001$, and an effect size of 3.254. In the Family and Friends dimension, the mean score increased from 17.25 (SD = 1.51) to 21.95 (SD = 3.36), $t(19) = -5.185$, $p < .001$, with an effect size of 1.159. Additionally, the Egalitarian Roles dimension showed an increase in scores from 13.25 (SD = 1.77) to 18.05 (SD = 1.23), $t(19) = -11.588$, $p < .001$, with an effect size of 2.591. In the Religious Orientation dimension, the mean score increased from 11.20 (SD = 1.00) to 13.40 (SD = 1.63), $t(19) = -7.220$, $p < .001$, with an effect size of 1.616.

Overall, all dimensions of marriage readiness showed a significance level of $p < .001$ with a large effect size category in each dimension. These findings indicate that PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance services produced significant changes in the scores of various dimensions of students' marriage readiness following the intervention.

To validate the results of the analysis of changes in students' marriage readiness scores, a Reliable Change Index (RCI) analysis was conducted for each study participant. The results of the changes in participants' scores after participating in the PREPARE-based premarital guidance program are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Pre-marital Guidance Using the PREPARE Model: Changes in Participants

| Participants | Pre | Post | Change | RCI | CS |
|---------------------|------------|-------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| AK | 63 | 81 | 18 | 16.24 | Y |
| AA | 61 | 75 | 14 | 12.63 | Y |
| DA | 59 | 76 | 17 | 15.34 | Y |
| FL | 58 | 80 | 22 | 19.85 | Y |
| FS | 58 | 77 | 19 | 17.15 | Y |
| FN | 55 | 80 | 25 | 22.56 | Y |
| HQ | 56 | 78 | 22 | 19.85 | Y |
| HH | 57 | 81 | 24 | 21.66 | Y |
| MN | 61 | 78 | 17 | 15.34 | Y |
| MM | 56 | 78 | 22 | 19.85 | Y |
| NS | 57 | 75 | 18 | 16.24 | Y |
| NS | 57 | 73 | 16 | 14.44 | Y |
| NN | 55 | 88 | 33 | 29.78 | Y |
| RG | 57 | 83 | 26 | 23.46 | Y |
| RR | 56 | 78 | 22 | 19.85 | Y |
| SS | 59 | 84 | 25 | 22.56 | Y |
| SS | 61 | 80 | 19 | 17.15 | Y |

| Participants | Pre | Post | Change | RCI | CS |
|--------------|-----|------|--------|-------|----|
| Y | 58 | 80 | 22 | 19.85 | Y |
| YE | 59 | 83 | 24 | 21.66 | Y |
| TS | 61 | 83 | 22 | 19.85 | Y |

As shown in Table 8, all study participants demonstrated changes in their marriage readiness scores that fell within the clinically significant category after participating in PREPARE-based premarital guidance. These results are indicated by the Reliable Change Index (RCI) values for all participants, which were above the threshold of 1.96 and fell within the clinically significant category (CS = Y).

Discussion

Marital readiness among college students is an important issue to examine because the phase of emerging adulthood marks a transitional period toward various adult roles, including that of a life partner and family member (Arnett, 2014). At this stage of development, individuals begin to form expectations and views regarding married life, but this is not always accompanied by sufficient relational readiness to face the demands of a long-term relationship (Willoughby & Hall, 2015). Several studies indicate that relationship education and premarital education contribute to developing communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and a more realistic understanding of married life (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Markman et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the application of the PREPARE model in the context of university students in Indonesia has been relatively under-researched. Given this situation, this study implemented a PREPARE-based premarital guidance service and found changes in marriage readiness scores across all measured aspects.

The research findings indicate that PREPARE-based premarital guidance services have the potential to enhance students' readiness for marriage across various dimensions of married life. Changes were observed not only in interpersonal communication and conflict resolution but also in emotional readiness, family financial management, sexual relationships, child-rearing, value orientation, and readiness to assume family roles. The Reliable Change Index (RCI) results also indicate that all participants experienced reliable score changes at the individual level. However, these findings must be interpreted with caution because the one-group pretest-posttest design used does not allow for strong causal conclusions regarding the direct effect of the intervention on the observed changes (M.S. et al., 2018; Shek & Sun, 2012).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study support the PREPARE conceptual framework developed by Olson and Olson (1999), which views marriage readiness as a multidimensional construct involving communication skills, conflict resolution, family resource management, value orientation, and readiness to assume family roles. During the intervention process, participants engaged in various activities such as self-reflection, group discussions, exploration of marriage expectations, and problem-solving exercises. This series of activities allowed students to review their relational readiness in a more structured manner. From a relationship education perspective, this type of learning process serves to enhance relational literacy so that individuals have a more realistic understanding of the demands and dynamics of married life before entering into a long-term commitment (Markman et al., 2021; Rauer et al., 2020).

One interesting finding is the relatively higher improvement in the areas of sexual relationships, children and parenting, and personality issues. This can be understood because these three areas generally have not yet been a significant part of students' experiences or formal education. Most participants are still in the stage of exploring their identities and do not yet have direct experience with child-rearing, marital dynamics, or adjusting their personalities in long-term relationships. Therefore, material that specifically addresses these

three aspects is likely to provide more meaningful new information and insights compared to other aspects that are closer to students' daily lives. Carroll and Doherty (2003) explain that relationship education programs tend to produce greater changes in areas previously less understood by participants because they serve to enhance self-awareness while expanding relational understanding.

The findings of this study are also consistent with various previous studies reporting that relationship education programs and premarital guidance contribute to improved communication quality, conflict resolution skills, and readiness for married life (Allen et al., 2017; Anindita & Adiyanti, 2020). Rauer et al. (2020) emphasize that relationship education during the emerging adulthood phase helps individuals develop the relational competencies necessary to build healthy and sustainable relationships. Similar findings were also reported by Saidiyah and Julianto (2017), who stated that communication skills and problem-solving abilities are key factors in preventing marital conflicts during the early years of marriage. The consistency of these findings suggests that strengthening relational competencies is one mechanism that can support marriage readiness in early adulthood.

However, the changes in scores observed cannot be entirely attributed to the direct impact of the intervention. Several other possibilities must be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, the testing effect may have caused participants to respond differently on the second assessment because they were already familiar with the content of the instrument from the pretest (Howard et al., 1979). Second, demand characteristics may influence participants to provide answers they perceive as aligning with the program's objectives after completing the full service series (Elegbede, 2025). Third, the use of self-report instruments creates the potential for social desirability bias the tendency for respondents to provide answers that are more positive or socially acceptable than the actual reality (Soland & Gilbert, 2026). Furthermore, the absence of follow-up measurements means this study cannot yet confirm whether the observed changes are sustainable or merely reflect an increase in awareness that emerged immediately after the intervention was completed.

Implications

The results of this study make a meaningful contribution to the development of preventive services in the field of Guidance and Counseling, although there are still a number of limitations in their implementation. The findings indicate that college students need an educational space to improve their relational readiness, emotional maturity, and ability to cope with married life. Therefore, premarital guidance services can be considered as part of student development programs in higher education institutions, particularly in addressing the various relational challenges faced by today's youth (Najmudin et al., 2025; Lestari et al., 2024). Theoretically, this study expands the application of the PREPARE model to the context of students in the emerging adulthood phase. These findings indicate that a relationship education approach can be used as a preventive strategy to help students develop relational readiness before entering into a marital commitment. Thus, the results of this study reinforce the importance of relational literacy as part of early adult developmental tasks.

Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations, including the use of a one-group pretest-posttest design, a limited sample size, the use of self-report instruments, and the lack of a follow-up evaluation to assess the sustainability of the changes observed. Therefore, future research is recommended to use a stronger experimental design involving a control group, expand participant characteristics to include individuals from various universities and cultural backgrounds, and adopt a longitudinal approach to test the long-term stability of marriage readiness (Pamungkas & Kinanthi, 2022; Asadpour et al., 2025). Additionally, a mixed-

methods approach could be considered to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and the change processes occurring during their participation in PREPARE-based premarital guidance services. Future studies could also explore the effectiveness of digital or hybrid PREPARE-based premarital guidance programs among university students.

Conclusion

The research findings indicate an increase in students' readiness for marriage after participating in PREPARE-model-based premarital guidance services. These results suggest that this service has the potential to support the development of students' relational readiness as part of preventive efforts prior to entering married life. In addition to emphasizing the importance of strengthening relational literacy during the emerging adulthood phase, this study also provides a foundation for the development of premarital guidance programs in higher education settings. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research is recommended to employ a stronger research design involving a more diverse group of participants.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude to the Guidance and Counseling Program at Muhammadiyah University of Tasikmalaya for its academic support, learning facilities, and conducive environment throughout the course of his studies and the writing of this article. This support played a significant role in bringing the research to its final stage.

Author Contribution Statement

WN served as the lead author and initiator in the development and writing of this article. FNI served as the supervising instructor, providing guidance throughout the research process and ensuring the academic quality of the study. APR served as the supervising instructor, offering input on the development of the research instruments and supporting the completion of this article.

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