

Improving student career readiness through transferable skills-based guidance modules

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Abstract

Research on developing transferable skills to enhance career readiness in traditional Islamic boarding schools is still limited, with studies generally focusing on vocational and university students. This gap necessitates the development of interventions relevant to the educational system in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. Many graduates of Islamic boarding schools face challenges in securing employment, and few enter the professional field. The research aims to enhance students' career readiness through a transferable skills-based career guidance module, focusing on the abilities and knowledge that can be applied in various jobs and career levels, particularly in relation to career development in the era of disruption. The research method uses a quasi-experiment. The research sample consisted of 25 students from a Salafi Islamic boarding school in Banten, selected purposively based on the criteria of fifth- and 7th-semester students living in Islamic boarding schools and willing to participate in a series of research activities. Data collection used Transferable Skills Analysis (TSA) developed by Suryahadikusumah et al. (2022) and Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI) developed by Dodd et al. (2022). The study's results showed that the transferable skills-based career guidance module was effective in improving students' career readiness, with an average pretest score of 45.12 and a posttest score of 62.72. This effectiveness was also supported by the Z value obtained in the Wilcoxon Test, which was 4.380 with a significance (2-tailed) of 0.000. The most significant changes in career readiness were the dimensions of career management and seeking information and assistance. This research contributes to providing a relevant intervention for the Salafi Islamic boarding school education system, which is expected to facilitate students' comprehensive career preparation and open up broader career opportunities.

Keywords: *career guidance, transferable skills, module, career readiness.*



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Introduction

Career selection and future planning are critical issues for Islamic boarding school students, particularly for traditional (Salafi) students. Salaf is a traditional Islamic boarding school model that focuses on the study of Islamic texts with a concise learning system led by a kyai (Yamin et al., 2023). A career for students is not just about finding a job, but also maximizing the personal

qualities they have developed at the Islamic boarding school, enabling them to become independent and contribute to society. Welcoming the 5.0 era, Islamic boarding school students are challenged to develop personal qualities across all aspects of life, with an orientation toward the future and the welfare of the community (Minhaji & Arifin, 2021).

Society 5.0 is projected as an era of an intelligent society that can integrate AI and IoT to solve social problems and improve the quality of human life, thereby creating new vocations and skill sets that enable individuals to survive and adapt to these changes. Career readiness in the 5.0 era requires individuals to possess more complex and specialized skills. In the 5.0 era, individuals are expected to adapt to future challenges, including higher-order thinking skills, technical competence, technical knowledge, data fluency and analysis, and computational thinking (Lubis & Lubis, 2024). Career readiness in this context fosters individual character as lifelong learners, continuously honing their skills and staying current with technological developments.

Dodd et al. (2022) argue that the best definition of career readiness is an individual's ability to understand, plan, and achieve their career goals. Individuals with strong career readiness know themselves, understand various career options, and plan steps to achieve their career goals. Furthermore, career-ready people are open to new opportunities, continuously develop themselves, and are adaptable to workplace changes (Nadya & Farozin, 2021; Rasyidi et al., 2021). Gysbers (2013) defines career readiness as a state in which a person possesses the knowledge, skills, and strong characteristics necessary to plan for the future. These skills and abilities encompass knowledge, behavioural performance, time management, interpersonal skills, and sufficient abilities to embark on a career path (Skakni et al., 2023). Based on this definition, preparing for a career requires more than just a diploma or certificate; prospective graduates also need to develop a range of skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Good career readiness will help someone feel more confident, adaptable, and booming in their career.

Issues with career readiness and planning are commonly found among Islamic boarding school students, particularly the lack of vocational and technical skills necessary to enter today's industry, as Salafi Islamic boarding schools focus on the study of scriptures and basic life skills. 80% of Islamic boarding school graduates return to society with low competitiveness, making it difficult for them to access employment opportunities, including entrepreneurial opportunities (Umam, 2016). The identification of various problems faced by Islamic boarding school students (*pesantren*) reveals issues related to aspirations, including persistent confusion about careers and the future, difficulties in channelling interests, and a need for self-development (Khusumadewi, 2021). As millennials and early adults, Islamic boarding school students are vulnerable to a crisis of future preparation (Azizah et al., 2023). Students are expected to be independent upon graduating from boarding school; however, if they lack adequate career preparation, they may struggle to navigate the transition from boarding school life to career independence. Several studies have shown that graduates of Islamic boarding schools encounter challenges in securing employment, with only a small percentage entering professional fields (Takjiah & Yanto, 2020). Unemployment among graduates of Islamic boarding schools remains a significant problem for the community (Hasim & Ramly, 2021).

Meanwhile, based on interviews with graduates of the Riyadul Awamil Islamic Boarding School, they generally pursue careers as preachers, while the majority of students residing there are also students. Ideally, students at these Islamic boarding schools have a wider range of career options, despite residing in traditional Islamic boarding schools. Ideally, *santri* students possess added value compared to resident students, as they pursue dual education, both academically and in terms of the ability to face future challenges (Suhermanto, 2017). Students' development activities related to creativity and innovation are a key factor in this problem (Putri et al., 2022). Therefore, career readiness among students is crucial and needs to be addressed to ensure their future success and even to advance in their chosen professional paths.

Previous research has shown that career development among Salafi Islamic boarding school students generally involves training in life and entrepreneurial skills. In this study, career-readiness

development was conducted through a transferable skills-based career guidance module. Holmes (2013) emphasized that an individual's understanding of transferable skills can strengthen positive career development. The transferable skills framework refers to UNICEF's formulation, which includes 1) problem-solving, 2) negotiation, 3) emotional management, 4) empathy, and 5) communication skills. Mastering transferable skills can enhance career readiness by enabling individuals to adapt and thrive in diverse work environments, take on new roles and responsibilities, and navigate uncertain, changing career paths (Johnston, 2017). The implementation of transferable skills development to improve career readiness began with a self-assessment of transferable skills mastery, upskilling through the content provided in the module, and integrating transferable skills mastery into job application preparation.

With transferable skills, individuals are better prepared. Suryahadikusumah et al. (2022) advocated for the inclusion of transferable skills in career guidance to equip graduates with essential attitudes and skills for the transition from academia to the workforce. Research on developing transferable skills to enhance career readiness in traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) remains limited, with studies primarily focusing on vocational and university students. This gap necessitates the development of interventions relevant to the educational system in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. This research is expected to facilitate students' thorough preparation and open up broader career opportunities.

Method

The research method used a quasi-experimental approach. This study tested the intervention on a limited sample group without a comparison group, aiming to obtain contextual findings in traditional Islamic boarding schools. The effectiveness and extent of the intervention's impact on the sample can be demonstrated, in line with the research's ultimate goal of improving the career readiness of Islamic boarding school (*santri*) students through a transferable skills-based career guidance module. The research sample consisted of 25 students, selected purposively based on the criteria of fifth- and seventh-semester students residing at Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) who had a low career readiness based on a pretest, were confused about career choices, and were willing to participate in a series of research activities.

Data collection used the Transferable Skills Analysis (TSA) and Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI). The transferable skills analysis instrument in this study, developed by Suryahadikusumah et al. (2022), was designed to allow respondents to evaluate individual abilities in transferable skills, consisting of a) communication skills, b) management skills, c) creativity, d) social skills, e) business skills, f) critical thinking, and g) numeracy, this instrument has 44 items. The Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI) is an instrument used to measure the career readiness of students from Islamic boarding schools (*santri*), developed by Dodd et al. (2022). It comprises 20 items with good content and construct validity, as demonstrated by the CFA test. This instrument was used during the pretest and posttest. The SCRI is used as a self-evaluation of the career readiness of adolescents and young adults based on four dimensions: a) career planning, b) transition skills, c) information and support seeking, and d) career management.

The transferable skills-based career guidance module is titled "Up-Skill (Guide to Entering the World of Careers)." The 31-page module consists of four main sections: 1) introduction to transferable skills, 2) exploration of transferable skills, 3) planning and adjusting a career plan, and 4) preparation for entering the world of work. The structure of the transferable skills-based career guidance module is illustrated in the following chart.

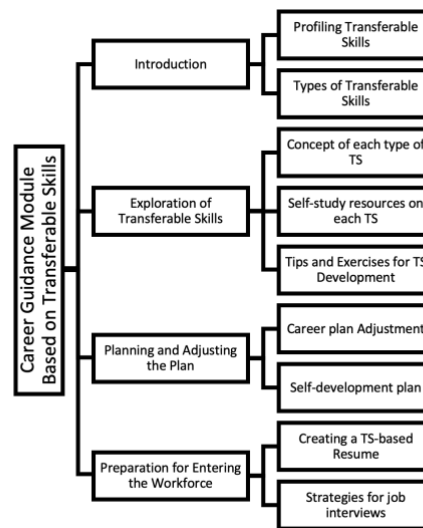


Figure 1. Career Guidance Module Structure Based on Transferable Skills

The research process began by identifying the level of transferable skills using TSA and the career readiness of students using SCRI in a preliminary study. A module was trialled with a sample group for approximately one month. Implementation was carried out in three mentoring sessions. The first session featured orientation and an introduction to the module structure. A two-week break followed to check progress and discuss the module content. Finally, a reflection session and posttest were held.

After administering the module to the sample group, the researcher measured changes in the students' career readiness. The data were then analyzed statistically to assess the module's effectiveness using the Wilcoxon Test. The hypothesis-testing criteria were: when the Asym.sig two probability values were < 0.05 , indicating the intervention was effective, and there was a significant difference.

Findings

After the students used the transferable skills-based career guidance module, researchers compared pretest and posttest data obtained from the Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI). Based on the comparison of pre- and posttest scores, changes were identified in the students, as presented in the following descriptive analysis table.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Results of Pretest and Posttest

	N	Pretest N	Mean	Posttest N	Mean
Sex					
Male	18	18	45.22	18	62.89
Female	7	7	44.86	7	62.29
Career Readiness Level					
High		2		12	
Medium		7		13	
Low		16		0	
Career Readiness Score	25		45.12		62.72

Based on Table 1, the average career readiness score for Islamic boarding school students before the intervention was 45.12. This value suggests that students generally still lack career readiness. The study sample needs to increase their awareness and understanding of the world of work, expand their knowledge and skills, increase their motivation for self-development, and develop a clear career plan. Following the intervention, the average career readiness score for students at the Islamic boarding school

increased to 62.72. This value indicates that the students generally have high career readiness. The study sample has learned to increase their awareness and understanding of the world of work, expand their knowledge related to preparing for the workforce, enhance their skills, and engage in self-development relevant to career planning, particularly in transferable skills, which were previously low.

Overall, the career readiness of Islamic boarding school students improved after using the transferable skills-based career guidance module. The percentage of students with high readiness increased from 8% before the intervention to 48% after the intervention. The percentage of students with moderate readiness also increased from 28% to 52%. However, no students with low readiness were found after the intervention.

The effectiveness of the transferable skills-based career guidance module in enhancing career readiness was assessed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. This test confirmed a significant difference in the average career readiness scores obtained before and after the students read and followed the guidance in the developed module. The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Wilcoxon test result

	Pretest_CR - Post_CR
Z	-4.380
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

The Wilcoxon test results showed a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the career readiness variable. The z-value obtained was 4.380 with a significance level (2-tailed) of 0.000. The transferable skills-based career guidance module provided was very effective in improving the career readiness of Islamic boarding school students. All participants showed an increase in career readiness after completing the career guidance module. No participants experienced a decrease or had the same score between the pretest and posttest.

The module's effectiveness was also assessed by observing changes in each dimension of career readiness before and after completion. A comparison of the average scores for each dimension of career readiness is presented in the following table.

Table 3. Career Readiness Improvement

Dimension	Mean		Gain
	Pretest	Post- Test	
Career planning	2.704	3.328	0.624
Transition skills	2.488	3.128	0.64
Information & help seeking	1.944	3.048	1.104
Career management	1.888	3.04	1.152

Based on Table 3, the career readiness dimensions that experienced the most significant changes were career management and seeking information and support. The career management dimension refers to an individual's ability to manage activities related to career success, including confidence in strategizing when a chosen job does not meet expectations. Meanwhile, information and support seeking refers to an individual's ability to locate and access reliable information and sources of support when navigating career changes.

Discussion

The use of modules to help Islamic boarding school students make informed decisions about their future careers and successfully transition from college to the workforce. As Rahmi & Asnah (2023) noted, modules are an effective tool for career guidance. The module remains relevant because it integrates technology, such as barcodes, that link with digital content to improve students' transferable skills and readiness. As an instructional tool, modules enable students to learn independently, understand career planning, and develop decision-making skills relevant to their future education.

Perera et al. (2018) also recommend the use of a module system in career guidance. In their study, they recommended a career-readiness development module comprising three parts: self-assessment, job

search techniques, and branding strategies. In their study, Perera et al. used the Employability Skills Development (ESD) tool, which significantly improved career readiness among recent graduates, with 89.55% expressing confidence in their ability to face career challenges.

Meanwhile, in this study, the module was designed to focus on improving transferable skills integrated into the Mastery of Transferable Skills stage. This can enhance career readiness by enabling individuals to adapt and thrive in diverse work environments, take on new roles and responsibilities, and navigate uncertain and changing career paths (Johnston, 2017). With transferable skills, individuals are better prepared to face the challenges and opportunities that arise in their careers.

Mulhall & Campbell noted the impact of modules on career management. Modules equip readers with essential competencies, enabling them to manage their careers effectively. Modules can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and employer needs, fostering adaptability and proactive career strategies in a dynamic job landscape (Mulhall & Campbell, 2018). The role of modules in career management is to foster self-awareness and decision-making, which are crucial for securing graduate-level employment after graduation (Taylor & Hooley, 2014). Career management skills are developed in line with the module's material, as discussed previously. Changes in the information and support-seeking dimension are regular, as modules generally contain the information readers need. The module is a structured guide and resource to support career planning, decision-making, and readiness related to future education and employment (Fadhullah et al., 2023).

Critical to improving career readiness are self-awareness, job search skills, and self-promotion skills, all of which are essential for success in the modern job market (Nik Yusoff et al., 2024). Johnson et al. emphasize the importance of self-awareness of one's interests, competencies, values, and personality for future employment (Wong et al., 2016). The career guidance module begins with increasing awareness of existing skills and reflecting on them. In the context of this research, the skills referred to are transferable.

The module's structure integrates a guidebook and counselling materials. The guidebook outlines the stages of career planning implementation, while the material provides career information, including a) self-awareness, b) opportunity identification, c) career selection and planning, and d) career planning follow-up (Ituga, 2023). The module structure focuses on improving transferable skills in line with the demands of Society 5.0. The module emphasizes adaptability, critical thinking, and numeracy skills as essential competencies for careers in the 5.0 era.

Initially, users will understand their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values. Participants can identify the most relevant career options by acquiring transferable skills that are applicable to various fields. Next, students will engage in various materials, tips, and exercises to enhance their skills. In another section, they will reassess themselves to align their career plans. The module is designed in this format so that students not only read but also actively develop a more thorough career plan and prepare for it. Perianto & Setiowati (2019) recommend that an ideal career guidance module should encompass aspects of self-awareness, career path exploration, and skills development.

The implemented career guidance module is designed to familiarise students with thorough career preparation, establish clear career goals, and build the personal resources necessary to persist and advance in their chosen careers. A significant limitation of this research or module lies in the students' reliance on external parties for ongoing evaluation and development. Although the module addresses current career issues, students still require evaluation and reflection from their career advisors regarding their prepared career plans. The presence of an advisor is essential for providing constructive feedback and helping students identify untapped potential. Furthermore, due to the ever-changing dynamics of the workplace, students are also required to regularly self-evaluate their progress and challenges in order to adjust their career plans and continue to develop. This ongoing need for external guidance and rigorous self-evaluation indicates that the module alone is insufficient as a stand-alone intervention, thus limiting the achievement of full career maturity.

Conclusion

The transferable skills-based career guidance module in this study proved to be significantly

effective in improving students' career readiness, with the most prominent changes occurring in the career management and information and support seeking dimensions. The contribution of this research is to provide a relevant intervention for the Salafi Islamic boarding school education system, which is expected to facilitate students' comprehensive career preparation and open up broader career opportunities. However, this study has a significant limitation: the students' dependence on external parties, such as career counsellors, for ongoing evaluation and development. This suggests that this module is not sufficient as a single intervention to achieve full career maturity. As a recommendation, future researchers are advised to pilot this research with a broader group. In practice, mentors should provide constructive feedback and encourage students to self-evaluate their progress and address any challenges they encounter regularly.

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