Development of a module for identifying interests and self-potential for senior high school students

Ufti Rosyi

UIN Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo, Jl. Pramuka No.156, Ronowijayan, Siman, Ponorogo, Jawa Timur, Indonesia
e-mail: uftirosyi@uinponorogo.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Based on interviews conducted by the researcher with tenth-grade students at a senior high school in Ponorogo Regency, it was found that the students were unfamiliar with the process of subject selection under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This study aimed to develop a module that assists tenth-grade high school students in identifying their interests and self-potential to determine subject choices when entering the eleventh grade. This study employed a qualitative method and adopted research and development as its design. Data were collected through school-based interviews, which were then processed into descriptive explanations, producing categories that formed the basis of the module development. The assessment results revealed several categories, which were later organized into four chapters: the Merdeka Curriculum, identification of interests, self-potential, and a closing chapter. Based on these findings, the researcher compiled a module entitled "Me and How to Know Myself: A Module for Identifying Interests and Self-Potential to Guide Subject Selection for Senior High School Students" The dissemination results indicated that the module was positively evaluated regarding its design and content in addressing the needs of tenth-grade students. Therefore, it is recommended as a tool for high school classes to help students recognize their interests and self-potential in the context of subject selection when transitioning to Grade 11.

Keywords: Interest identification, module, Merdeka Curriculum

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has a structured national education system mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003, comprising Early Childhood Education (PAUD), Elementary School (SD)/Islamic Elementary School (MI), Junior High School (SMP)/Islamic Junior High School (MTs), Senior High School (SMA)/Islamic Senior High School (MA), and Vocational High School (SMK) (Republic of Indonesia, 2003). Since the 2006 School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) and subsequently the 2013 Curriculum, senior high school (SMA) or Islamic senior high school (MA) students have been required to choose a concentration—typically Mathematics and Natural Sciences (MIPA), Social Sciences (IPS), or Language—as part of broader curriculum reforms towards competence-based learning (Machali, 2014). Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 36 of 2018 stipulates that the SMA/MA curriculum structure consists of general subjects in Group A (Religious Education, Civics, Indonesian Language, Mathematics, Indonesian History, and English), Group B (Arts and Culture, Physical Education, and Entrepreneurship), and academic specialization subjects in Group C, which include the MIPA, IPS, and Language and Culture specialization clusters (Kemendikbud, 2018).

In 2022, the government began implementing a new Prototype Curriculum—later formalised as the Merdeka Curriculum—as a response to Indonesia's long-standing learning crisis identified in national evaluations and international assessments such as PISA (Nugraha, 2022; OECD, 2023; Randall et al., 2022). According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), this crisis has persisted for years and was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified learning loss and widened educational inequality (Kemendikbud, 2022; Sumilat & Mochtar, 2024). A key feature of the Merdeka Curriculum is the removal of rigid specialization pathways (MIPA/IPS/Language) at the senior high school level, giving students greater autonomy to choose subjects aligned with their interests and future plans (Hadi et al., 2023; Nugraha, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum was first implemented in approximately 2,500 schools through the Sekolah Penggerak (Driving Schools) program and 901 Centers of Excellence Vocational Schools (SMK PK). Since 2022, it has been offered as an optional curriculum pathway for all educational levels—from early childhood to senior secondary—even in schools that are not part of Sekolah Penggerak (Kemendikbud, 2022; Randall et al., 2022).

According to the design, senior high school students are divided into two phases under the Merdeka Curriculum: Phase E (Grade X) and Phase F (Grades XI and XII). In Phase E (grade X), students are not required to choose between MIPA/IPS/Language but instead receive all subject areas in balanced proportions. In Phase F (grades XI–XII), students are allowed to select subjects aligned with their talents, interests, and career plans. Based on the Ministry of Education and Culture's *Sekolah Penggerak* regulations (2021), subjects are grouped into five categories: general subjects, MIPA, IPS, language and culture, and vocational/practical subjects. Students in grades XI–XII are free to choose from these to support their career trajectories.

According to the model of guidance and counseling services (Kemendikbud, 2021), subject selection must be aligned with student interests and future career plans. Thus, grade X serves as a preparation year, during which students are expected to reflect on their abilities, talents, interests, and personalities. As argued by Seligman (1994), career maturity is vital for developing self-competence, career goals, planning, motivation, and self-efficacy. However, not all students consider their talents and interests in career planning, including their subject and study choices. Some decisions are influenced by parental expectations, peer pressure, job popularity, or occupational stereotypes imposed by parents (Srianturi & Supriatna, 2020).

For these reasons, the researcher developed a module to help Grade X students identify their interests and self-potential to support subject selection in Grade XI. The study also evaluated whether the module was deemed appropriate by experts and students as its intended users.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a *research and development* (R&D) approach. According to Sugiyono (2013), research and development is a method designed to produce specific products. A module is a collection of materials arranged and presented in written form, intended for independent learning (Daryanto, 2013). The module provided to the participants was designed to be **self-**instructional**,** adaptive**,** and user-friendly, aligning with the needs analysis of the participants. Specifically, it focuses on **a** competency-based interest identification module aimed at assisting senior high school (SMA) students in selecting academic subjects.

2.2 Research Focus

This study focuses on developing a module designed to help senior high school (SMA) students independently identify their interests. The module was created during the intervention stage based on theories relevant to students' developmental and educational needs. The developed module was subsequently evaluated by experts and students as prospective users. Expert evaluation was conducted by specialists or practitioners in the field of Educational Psychology, followed by an evaluation from students as the module's end users.

2.3 Participant

The participants in this study were tenth-grade students from SMAN X, a public senior high school (SMA) in Ponorogo Regency. These students had not yet selected their elective subjects and were still uncertain about which subjects they would choose in the future. The selection of tenth-grade students as participants was based on government regulations regarding the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which states that students at this level are still in Phase E, during which they are required to take all subjects. Furthermore, according to Super and Jordaan (2007), tenth-grade students are in the *exploration stage*, a developmental phase in which individuals actively explore and identify potential careers that align with their skills, talents, and interests.

2.4 Data collection

This study began with a preliminary survey stage aimed at understanding the general overview and the need for interest identification in subject selection as students progressed to the eleventh grade. The survey also sought to explore the factors influencing students' subject choices and the methods by which they could identify their academic interests. The researcher conducted initial interviews with subject teachers, guidance and counselling (BK) teachers, and the vice-principal for curriculum affairs. In addition, interviews were conducted with students as participants to identify their needs during the process of interest identification. The interview guide draft was developed based on Super and Jordaan's (2007) career development theory, specifically the exploration stage (ages 15–24), which includes the tentative and crystallization of preference phases. Subsequently, the evaluation of this module was conducted and directed toward two parties: first, expert reviewers who are specialists in educational psychology, and second, students as prospective users of the module.

2.5 Data Analysis

The analysis method employed in this study was primarily qualitative. This technique was applied during data collection in both the assessment and intervention stages of the study. Data analysis in the assessment stage was conducted qualitatively by examining the participants' responses obtained through interviews. In contrast, data analysis in the intervention stage was conducted quantitatively by calculating the number or frequency of responses from the module feasibility test.

2.6 Module Development Procedure

Following Sugiyono (2014), the R&D steps were adapted as follows: (a) Potential and Problems – The potential and main issue addressed in this study lie in the fact that the process of subject selection has not yet aligned with students' personal interests. As a result, many students continue to experience difficulties in determining their academic majors when entering higher education; (b) Data Collection - Data collection in this study was conducted using the interview method. The interviews were conducted with teachers who had been involved in the process of academic track selection at the school, as well as with students who directly made these choices. This approach was employed by the researcher to identify aspects that need to be developed in the process of implementing interest identification among senior high school students; (c) Module Design: In this study, the product developed using the research and development (R&D) design is a module. The module was designed to provide guidance for identifying interests and personal potential among senior high school (SMA) students; (d) Design validation by experts: In this study, the design validation was carried out by experts. The purpose of this validation process was to evaluate the module based on expert insights in the relevant field, in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the product; (e) Module revision - The module revision stage was conducted to make necessary improvements based on the results of the design validation, addressing any deficiencies identified in the module. The module revision stage was conduct: to make necessary improvements based on the results of the design validation, addressing any deficiencies identified in the module; (f) Dissemination and user evaluation - Dissemination refers to the process of introducing the product to students as potential users. Subsequently, the students provided evaluations and feedback on the module to assess its usefulness and its effectiveness.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Descriptive Result

Based on the assessment results, three categories emerged from the thematic analysis. The first two categories correspond to the two stages of interest development in adolescents proposed by Super and Jordaan (2007): the tentative stage and the crystallization of preference stage. The third category pertains to the Merdeka Curriculum. This category was established because the assessment results revealed students' understanding of subject selection based on their interests, which could not be fully represented within the two previous categories. Therefore, the researcher introduced a new category concerning students' knowledge of the Merdeka Curriculum:

3.1.2 Module Design

The implementation of this research pertains to the testing of the developed product, namely, the module for identifying interests and personal potential in subject selection for senior high school (SMA) students. This module was designed to complement government regulations regarding the selection of specialization subjects for high school students. The process of testing and refining a product prior to its broader introduction is referred to **as** module dissemination. This dissemination process was carried out by submitting the module for evaluation by experts or specialists in relevant fields.

The module was created to assist students in identifying their interests and self-potential when selecting subjects for their studies. It consists of materials, tips, reflections, and practice exercises.

Table 1. Modul "Me and How I Know Myself" *Design*

Chapter	Assesment Findings	Theories/Framework	Content
1.Merdeka Curriculum	Students were unaware of the grade XI subject-selection process	Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikbud, 2021; Ministerial Decree No. 56/2022)	Explanations and comparisons of curriculum
2.Knowing My Interest	Students could not align subjects with their interests	Theories of interest (Super & Jordaan, 2007)	Materials, exercises, interest analysis questionnaire
3.Me and My choices	Students lacked clarity on decision-making factors	Decision-making in career choice (Model of Counseling Services, 2021)	Reflection sheets, self-potential analysis, factors influencing choice
4.Relection	-	-	Summary, reflection, evaluation

Table 1 presents the module design. The developed module is titled "Me and How I Know Myself" a title selected to reflect the module's content on interests, presented in a language that is easily understood by its intended users. The module consists of four chapters, structured based on the assessment results and guided by Super and Jordaan's (2007) career development theory, which posits that adolescents undergo two phases within the exploration stage: the tentative stage and the crystallization of preference stage.

3.1.3 Expert Validation

Expert validation was conducted with three practitioners: one lecturer from the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Surabaya, one lecturer who also serves as the head of the postgraduate program at the Faculty of Psychology, State University of Makassar, and one guidance and counseling teacher from SMAN X. The selection of these experts for the validation process was based on recommendations and approval from the academic supervisor, as well as their recognized expertise and competence in evaluating the module. The expert validation process was carried out by providing the module to the experts along with an evaluation sheet to assess the content and quality of the module. The average score was 3.6 (out of 4), and experts agreed that the module was useful and feasible, with suggestions for improvement in design, content, and worksheets.

3.1.4 Student Trial

Four grade X students tested the module. They rated it positively, with an average score of 4. Students noted that it was clear, well-structured, and aligned with their needs, although they suggested adding more visuals. Students stated that the module appeared neat and attractive, the text was easy to read, and the design was appropriate to the topic. However, they suggested adding more illustrations or images to make the module more engaging and easier to comprehend. The students also agreed that the material presented in the module was highly beneficial and aligned with their needs, particularly in enhancing their understanding of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, interest identification, self-potential recognition, and factors influencing subject selection. They further explained that the module helped clarify aspects of the *Merdeka Curriculum* that they had not previously understood, and after reading the module, they were able to comprehend it more clearly. Therefore, the students agreed that this module is suitable and recommended for tenth-grade students as a tool to assist them in selecting their elective subjects.

3.1.5 Conclusion of the Module Dissemination Process

The module received positive feedback and favorable evaluations through expert validation and usability testing with tenth-grade students. The module effectively provides relevant information and addresses the needs of tenth-grade students to assist them with subject selection in accordance with the

Merdeka Curriculum. This module not only enhances students' understanding of the *Merdeka Curriculum* and its subject structure but also helps them identify their personal interests and potential. Furthermore, the module includes a discussion of various factors that should be considered when determining one's academic interests.

All materials presented in the module are written in language that is easy for students to understand, enabling them to grasp the content effectively. In addition, the module is designed with an attractive layout and a visual design that aligns with the topic. Nevertheless, several constructive comments and suggestions were provided based on the results of the expert validation and usability testing, which the researcher has taken into consideration for the improvement and refinement of the module. The revisions primarily concern the font used for the module title, which should be upright to appear more formal and easier to read. Additionally, corrections were made to numerous typographical errors identified by the researcher, as well as to several aspects within each chapter of the module, including the organization of chapters and subchapters.

Most of the feedback and suggestions provided by the students have been addressed and revised by the researcher, resulting in a more comprehensive and well-aligned module. The dissemination process conducted by the researcher, along with the developed module, is therefore recommended for use with tenth-grade students to assist them in selecting subjects as they progress to the eleventh grade.

3.2 Discussion

Based on the results of the initial assessment, it was found that all six tenth-grade student participants were not yet familiar with the process of subject selection. This process differs from previous years, in which students were required to choose between the Science (MIPA) or Social Studies (IPS) tracks in the tenth grade. Under the new curriculum, however, students are now expected to make their subject choices in the eleventh grade, meaning that they no longer simply choose between MIPA and IPS. Through the interview process, students explained that they were unaware that, upon entering the eleventh grade, they would be selecting elective subjects rather than choosing between MIPA and IPS, in accordance with the curriculum implemented at SMAN X the *Merdeka Curriculum.* According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud Ristek) in the *Guidelines for Elective Subject Selection* (2022), students are expected to select subjects that truly align with their interests, talents, and abilities. This alignment enables them to plan their future careers more confidently, as they gain a deeper understanding of themselves through exploration. Based on this, the researcher developed a module for identifying interests and personal potential for senior high school (SMA) students to assist tenth-grade students in the subject selection process.

The module was developed based on the results of the assessment, covering topics ranging from the *Merdeka Curriculum*, as previously described, to the identification of interests and personal potential. To address students' limited knowledge and understanding of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the first chapter of the module discusses this topic using language that is simple and accessible to students. As a result, after reading the module, students are expected to gain a clearer understanding of the subject selection structure within the *Merdeka Curriculum.*

The results confirmed that students in grade X were largely unaware of the subject-selection process under the Merdeka Curriculum. The module filled this gap by: (a) Explaining the Merdeka Curriculum (Chapter 1); (b) Guiding interest exploration with questionnaires and reflections (Chapter 2); (c) Providing frameworks for decision-making and recognizing self-potential (Chapter 3); (d) Concluding with reflective evaluation (Chapter 4).

The findings are consistent with Super' and Jordaan (2007) theory of adolescent career exploration and highlight the role of parental expectations, teachers, and socioeconomic conditions in shaping career decisions (Frimpong, 2016; Humayon et al., 2018).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Conclusion

Students require knowledge about the *Merdeka Curriculum* as well as a clear understanding of the process of subject selection. Furthermore, they need information on identifying their interests and personal potential, along with an understanding of the factors that may influence their subject choices. From these findings, it can be concluded that the developed module is beneficial, applicable, and recommended for use by tenth-grade senior high school (SMA) students to assist them in the process of selecting subjects when advancing to the eleventh grade. The module, titled *"Me and How I Know Myself: A Module for Identifying Interests and Personal Potential in Subject Selection for Senior High School (SMA) Students"*, consists of four chapters derived from the thematic findings obtained during the assessment stage, designed to meet the needs of tenth-grade senior high school students preparing to choose their elective subjects.

4.2 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that can be addressed in future research. The participants involved were students from public senior high schools (SMAN) in Ponorogo Regency. Future studies may expand the participant pool to include students from both public and private senior high schools (SMA) in larger cities, which could provide different perspectives and results. In addition, the module development process using the research and development (R&D) method did not proceed to the stage of effectiveness testing. Consequently, this study did not measure the conditions before and after the implementation of the module among the research subjects, namely tenth- grade senior high school students.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the results of thematic analysis and module evaluation, several recommendations are proposed by the researcher with the hope that they may serve as considerations for relevant stakeholders, namely:

4.3.1 Recommendation for future research

First, future researchers are encouraged to further explore the factors influencing interest selection by utilizing existing data specific to the Ponorogo Regency area. Second, researchers are advised to write the module materials using language that is easily understood by adolescents (i.e., everyday or contemporary youth language) to help students relate better and view the content from their own perspectives. Third, future studies should examine the effectiveness of the module through experimental methods by conducting pre-test and post-test procedures, thereby completing all stages of the research and development (R&D) process. Fourth, researchers may also extend this study by involving participants from other contexts, such as public and private senior high schools (SMA) located in major cities.

4.3.2 Recommendations for the Psychology Profession

The module developed in this study can serve as a useful tool for psychologists, particularly educational psychologists, to provide guidance and support for students in identifying their interests and potential. This is especially relevant for tenth-grade senior high school students (SMA) who are in the process of selecting academic subjects

4.3.3   Recommendations for Schools

For schools, this module can function as a reference for curriculum developers and guidance and counseling (BK) teachers in assisting students with subject selection. For curriculum developers, the module may serve as a resource for understanding the *Merdeka Curriculum* and its structure more comprehensively. For BK teachers, the module can be used as a supporting tool in guiding tenth-grade students who have not yet recognized their interests, particularly in preparation for subject selection when advancing to the eleventh grade.

4.3.4   Recommendations for Students

Tenth-grade students are encouraged to thoroughly read and reflect on each chapter of this module and to carefully review their completed worksheets. This process will help them better understand the subject selection process through the identification of personal interests and potential.

Ethical Approval
Not Applicable

Informed Consent Statement
Not Applicable

Disclosure Statement
The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

Data Availability Statement
The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author for privacy.

Notes on Contributors

Ufti Rosyi
Ufti Rosyi is affiliated with UIN Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo

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