

The Effect of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Based Group Counseling on Improving Students' Career Decision Making

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Abstract

Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah was established in 2018 to enhance the quality of Islamic education by integrating general academic knowledge with in-depth Qur'anic studies. Under the Al Falahiyah Islamic Boarding School Foundation, the institution is committed to nurturing a Qur'anic generation that is academically accomplished, morally upright, and globally competitive. This study aims to examine the effect of group counseling using a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approach on improving career decision-making among twelfth-grade students. The research employs a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. The sample consists of 30 students selected through purposive sampling, specifically those experiencing uncertainty in making career decisions. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS. The results show an increase in the mean career decision-making scores from pretest to posttest. Prerequisite tests confirmed that the data were normally distributed and homogeneous. The paired-samples t-test yielded a significance value of 0.018 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. These findings suggest that CBT-based group counseling is effective in enhancing students' career decision-making by fostering more rational thinking, increasing self-confidence, and strengthening their ability to make realistic and well-informed career choices.

Keywords: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Group counseling, Career decision.

1. INTRODUCTION

Career decision is an important aspect for final-year students because it determines their future direction, whether in continuing their education or entering the workforce. In late adolescence, students begin to develop their interests, consider various options, and

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set career goals (Anugraha, 2024). Many students still experience difficulties in making decisions due to a lack of self-understanding, limited career information, and low self-confidence, which often leads to confusion in determining their choices after graduation (Sadaf, 2023).

The career decision-making process is complex because it involves self-assessment, exploration of information, and consideration of various alternatives. Barriers can arise before, during, and after the decision-making process, including the presence of inconsistent information (Aprial & Irman, 2022). On the other hand, psychological factors such as anxiety also affect students' ability to make choices, highlighting the need for support that is not only informative but also cognitively and reflectively supportive.

The results of a preliminary study conducted through interviews with the Guidance and Counseling teacher at Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah indicate that career decisions of twelfth-grade students are often hindered by cognitive distortions, such as negative thinking patterns, overgeneralization, and a tendency to imagine failure. This condition leads students to become pessimistic and avoid exploring career options. In addition, around 65% of students demonstrate low self-confidence in making career decisions, as reflected in behavioral such as delaying decisions, avoiding career-related discussions, and relying on others. The interview results also reveal that many alumni work in fields that are not aligned with the competencies they studied. This condition reflects a lack of maturity in career decision-making during school, influenced by low self-confidence and limited ability to explore options rationally. As a result, graduates tend to choose jobs pragmatically, which may lead to job mismatch, low job satisfaction, and suboptimal career development.

In the context of vocational education, career decision-making issues become even more complex because students are expected to be work-ready in a short period, yet they do not fully possess reflective abilities and long-term career planning skills. Reports from the OECD show that many vocational education graduates do not have a clear career direction and tend to choose jobs pragmatically. National studies also reveal that the lack of career guidance services focusing on cognitive development contributes to high levels of job mismatch. These conditions highlight the need to strengthen the role of Guidance and Counseling (GC) services in vocational schools. GC services should not only focus on providing job information but also assist students in developing reflective abilities and cognitive maturity in making career decisions.

The Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approach with problem-solving techniques focuses on changing maladaptive thought patterns and behaviors through systematic cognitive restructuring (İme and Ümmet, 2024). Cognitive distortions influence how individuals perceive themselves and their future, including in career decision-making (Mardes dkk., 2023). In the school context, CBT-based group counseling has advantages because it utilizes social dynamics, allowing students to learn from interactions and shared experiences to develop more adaptive attitudes and behaviors (Iskandar & Lisbet, 2025). In line with this, various studies show that group counseling using cognitive techniques, such as cognitive restructuring and self-instruction, is effective in increasing self-confidence in career decision-making (Ad & Megalia, 2017). This study specifically emphasizes the use of problem-solving techniques within the CBT framework, as students' career decision-making problems are largely related to difficulties in identifying problems, evaluating alternatives, and developing realistic action plans (Jabbar dkk., 2019).

Conceptually, problem-solving techniques provide systematic steps that include problem formulation, exploration of various alternative options, analysis of the consequences of each choice, and the determination of appropriate decisions (Sam et al., 2021). These stages are aligned with the demands of students' career development during the transition phase from school to the workforce, which requires rational and goal-directed thinking skills. The integration of problem-solving techniques in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based group counseling is considered relevant in helping students develop more logical thinking processes, improve career maturity, and support more adaptive decision-making, particularly among students (Muwakhidah & Pravesti, 2017).

Various studies have also shown that the CBT approach is effective in improving goal clarity and students' decision-making abilities. One study by Muwakhidah (2017) found that CBT-based group counseling with problem-solving techniques can reduce indecision in career decision-making, enabling students to become more confident in determining their career direction after the intervention. However, empirical studies that specifically examine the effect of CBT-based group counselling with problem-solving techniques on career decisions among Madrasah Aliyah (MA) students are still limited, particularly in the context of vocational education in Indonesia. This indicates the presence of a research gap that needs to be addressed through quantitative research with an experimental design in order to obtain stronger and more comprehensive evidence.

Based on theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and preliminary survey results, it can be concluded that the career decision-making problems of twelfth-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah are closely related to cognitive aspects that influence how students understand themselves and their future careers. This highlights the need for counseling interventions that not only provide information but also systematically reconstruct maladaptive thought patterns. CBT-based group counseling with problem-solving techniques is considered a relevant approach to improving students' career decisions. Through this approach, problem-solving techniques help students identify career-related problems specifically, develop various alternative options, evaluate consequences rationally, and formulate realistic action plans. Thus, the intervention focuses not only on changing negative thought patterns but also on strengthening problem-solving skills in the career decision-making process. This study is specifically aimed at empirically testing the effect of CBT-based group counseling on improving career decision-making among twelfth-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Group Counseling

Group counseling is a professional psychological assistance service conducted through structured interaction in small groups to help individuals enhance self-understanding, develop interpersonal skills, and achieve more adaptive behavioral changes (S. T. Gladding, 2016: 1-2). From the perspective of group psychotherapy, the process of change arises not only from individual insight but also from the interpersonal dynamics that occur during group sessions. The counselor plays a role in managing the structure, norms, and goals of the group to ensure that the process runs in a directed and safe manner for its members (Gerald Corey, 2016: 4). Therefore, group counseling is

understood as an intervention method that utilizes group dynamics as a medium for change, enabling members to receive feedback, support, and social learning opportunities that accelerate psychological growth. The purpose of group counseling is to facilitate optimal individual development through increased self-understanding, social skills, and the ability to manage problems adaptively. In school settings, group interventions led by counselors are widely used to address various developmental goals and have been shown to provide positive implications for service practices (Sam Steen et al., 2021). Group counseling services are also positioned as preventive and developmental services that help students address problems before they develop into more serious obstacles.

2.2 Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a counseling approach that emphasizes the interconnection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; psychological problems are considered to be more influenced by how individuals interpret events rather than the events themselves. In CBT, cognitive distortions can shape maladaptive emotional responses and lead to avoidant or unproductive behaviors, so change is directed through cognitive modification. A core CBT technique relevant to career decision-making is cognitive restructuring, which involves identifying negative automatic thoughts and replacing them with more rational alternatives through thought recording, evidence testing, and reinterpretation. CBT also utilizes structured exercises and homework assignments to ensure that cognitive changes are practiced in real-life situations, making them more stable. Problem-solving techniques are used to help clients map out problems, generate alternatives, evaluate consequences, and choose the most adaptive course of action. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that CBT has strong empirical support; its effectiveness is influenced by the consistency of practice and the appropriateness of technique selection in accordance with the targeted changes (Andrew C. Butler et al., 2021).

2.3 Career decision

Career decision-making is the process of selecting an educational path, occupation, or personal development trajectory through the evaluation of alternatives and consideration of consequences based on self-understanding and relevant career information. Brown and Lent emphasize that career decision-making is a central process in career development, requiring the involvement of cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explains that career decisions are influenced by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals, which are shaped through learning experiences and environmental context.

3. METHODS

This study is a field research with a quantitative approach, as data are collected directly from subjects in the school environment and analyzed numerically using statistical methods (Kushendar, 2019). Quantitative research emphasizes systematic measurement of variables, the use of standardized instruments, and statistical analysis to scientifically examine relationships or effects between variables. The type of research

used is a quasi-experimental design, as it is conducted in a natural setting without full randomization of subjects or a strict control group. The design applied is the One Group Pre-test-Post-test Design, which involves a single group measured before and after being given a treatment in the form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) based group counseling (Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen because it is suitable for the context of guidance and counseling in schools and allows researchers to directly identify changes in students' career decision-making through comparison of pretest and posttest scores (As dkk., 2025).

Table 1. Research Design

Class	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Experimental Group	O ₁	X ₁	O ₂
Control Group	O ₃	X ₂	O ₄
Description:			
O1	=	Pretest of the experimental group	
O2	=	Posttest of the experimental group	
O3	=	Pretest of the control group	
O4	=	Posttest of the control group	
X	=	Treatment (CBT-based group counseling)	
KKP CBT			

The population in this study consists of all students of Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah in the 2025/2026 academic year, with a focus on twelfth-grade students as they are in a critical phase of making career decisions. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, namely twelfth-grade students who are active, willing to participate in the study, and meet specific criteria such as experiencing indecision in career choices and completing all stages of the research. The sample size ranges from approximately 6–10 students (ideally 8 students) to ensure the effectiveness of CBT-based group counseling implementation. This technique falls under non-probability sampling and was chosen because it aligns with the needs of quasi-experimental research (one group pretest–posttest), thus producing relevant and valid data to examine the effect of the treatment on students' career decisions (Mark & Thornhill, 2023). Data collection was conducted through questionnaires with a pre-test-post-test design to measure changes in career decision-making, supported by documentation as secondary data, while maintaining research ethics such as confidentiality and voluntary participation.

The research instrument is a tool used to collect data systematically so that it can be analyzed objectively (Sugiyono, 2019). In this study, a Likert-scale questionnaire was used to measure students' difficulties in career decision-making before and after the treatment (pretest and posttest). The instrument was adapted from the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ), which includes aspects such as lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information, and has been adjusted to the characteristics of twelfth-grade students. Each statement uses response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), and the scores are processed to determine the level of difficulty and to test the effect of the treatment. The instrument was also tested for validity and reliability to ensure its appropriateness for use.

Instrument validity and reliability testing are essential stages to ensure that the instrument can measure variables accurately and consistently so that the resulting data are

trustworthy (Sari dkk., 2023). Validity testing is conducted through content validity (expert judgment) and empirical validity using the Pearson Product Moment correlation, with the criteria that an item is considered valid if the calculated r-value (r-count) is greater than the r-table value or if the significance value is less than 0.05. Meanwhile, reliability testing aims to determine the consistency of the instrument in producing stable data. Both tests are conducted before the instrument is fully used to ensure its feasibility as a measurement tool in research (Creswell, 2022).

The data analysis techniques in this study are carried out systematically to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses using both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses with the assistance of SPSS. The initial stage includes data processing through editing, coding, and tabulation. This is followed by descriptive analysis to describe students' career decision-making conditions using mean, median, and standard deviation values. Before hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests are conducted, including normality testing (Shapiro–Wilk) and homogeneity testing (Levene's Test). Hypothesis testing is performed using the Paired Sample t-test if the data are normally distributed, or the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test if they are not, in order to examine differences between pretest and posttest scores. All analyses are conducted using statistical software to ensure more accurate and scientifically accountable results.

4. RESULTS

A series of data analyses were conducted to determine whether there is an effect of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based group counseling on improving students' career decision-making, particularly among twelfth-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah. The data obtained from the career decision scale were analyzed through several stages, namely descriptive statistical analysis, prerequisite tests (normality and homogeneity), and hypothesis testing using the Paired Sample t-test. All analysis processes were carried out with the assistance of SPSS to ensure that the results are more accurate, systematic, and scientifically accountable.

This study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah with a sample of 30 twelfth-grade students selected using purposive sampling techniques. The research instrument used was a Likert-scale questionnaire to measure students' career decision-making before and after the treatment. Data collection was conducted through pretest and posttest methods, where students first completed the questionnaire before participating in CBT-based group counseling, and then completed it again after the entire intervention process was finished.

After the data collection process was completed, the next stage was to perform data analysis according to the established procedures. Based on the results of the analysis conducted, the findings obtained are as follows Table 2.

Based on the results of the descriptive statistical analysis, it is known that the number of respondents (N) in this study was 30 students, and all data were fully usable with no missing values (missing = 0). Therefore, the analysis results can be considered representative and accurate in describing the research conditions. For the variable of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based group counseling, which represents the pretest scores, the mean score was 55.43, the median was 54.00, and the mode was 50, indicating that most students' scores were concentrated within the middle range. The standard deviation of 10.650 indicates a relatively large variation or dispersion in the data,

meaning there were considerable differences in students' levels of career decision-making before the treatment was administered.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

	Group Counseling (CBT)	Career decision
N	30	30
Mean	55.43	58.77
Median	54.00	58.00
Mode	50	57
Std. Deviation	10.650	6.947
Range	50	34
Minimum	30	41
Maximum	80	75

This is further supported by the relatively wide score range, from a minimum of 30 to a maximum of 80, indicating a gap in students' abilities to make career decisions in the initial condition. For the career decision variable after the treatment (posttest), the mean score increased to 58.77, with a median of 58.00 and a mode of 57. These values indicate a shift toward higher scores compared to the pretest. Additionally, the smaller standard deviation of 6.947 shows that the data distribution became more homogeneous or evenly spread than before. The score range also became narrower, from a minimum of 41 to a maximum of 75, suggesting that differences among students in career decision-making decreased after participating in CBT-based group counseling. This condition indicates that the intervention not only improved the average level of students' abilities but also helped equalize students' levels of understanding and readiness in making career decisions.

Table 3. Analysis Prerequisite Test (Normality Test)

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	Shapiro-Wilk Sig.	Conclusion
Group Counseling (CBT)	0.200*	0.126	Normal
Career Decision	0.066	0.087	Normal

Based on the results of the normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk method, the significance value for the group counseling (CBT) variable was 0.126, and for the career decision variable it was 0.087. Both significance values are greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the data for both variables are normally distributed. The use of the Shapiro-Wilk test in this study is considered appropriate because the sample size is less than 50 respondents, making it more sensitive in detecting data normality. With the normality assumption fulfilled, the data are suitable for analysis using parametric statistical tests, namely the Paired Sample t-test, to examine differences in scores before and after the treatment and to determine the effect of CBT-based group counseling on improving students' career decision-making.

Based on the results of the homogeneity test using Levene's Test, the significance values for the career decision variable were 0.217 (based on the mean), 0.687 (based on the median), 0.697 (based on the median with adjusted degrees of freedom), and 0.269 (based on the trimmed mean). All of these values are greater than 0.05, indicating that the

data variance is homogeneous. This means there are no significant differences in variance among the data groups, and the data demonstrate a good level of consistency. Since the homogeneity assumption is fulfilled, the data are suitable for parametric statistical analysis, allowing hypothesis testing to proceed using the Paired Sample t-test to determine the effect of CBT-based group counseling on improving students' career decision-making.

Table 4. Analysis Prerequisite Test (Homogeneity Test)

Variable	Levene Statistic	Sig.	Conclusion
Career Decision	1.761	0.217	Homogeneous

Based on the results of inferential statistical analysis using the Paired Sample t-test, the mean difference between pretest and posttest scores was -5.03333, indicating an increase in career decision scores after the treatment, since the difference was calculated as pretest minus posttest. The standard deviation of 11.03125 indicates variation in score changes among students, while the standard error of 2.01402 shows a relatively small estimation error, suggesting that the measurement results are quite accurate. The 95% confidence interval, ranging from -9.15247 to -0.91420, does not cross zero, meaning that the difference between pretest and posttest is statistically significant and not due to chance. The calculated t-value of -2.499 with 29 degrees of freedom (df) further confirms the existence of a difference between before and after the treatment.

Table 5. Inferential Statistical Analysis (Hypothesis Testing)

Variable Comparison	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Conclusion
CBT Group Counseling – Career Decision	-5.03	-2.499	29	0.018	Significant

The significance values obtained were 0.009 (one-sided) and 0.018 (two-sided), with the two-sided value being more commonly used in hypothesis testing. Since this value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, meaning that CBT-based group counseling has a significant effect on improving students' career decision-making. Substantively, these results suggest that the CBT intervention not only helps change students' maladaptive thought patterns but also enhances their ability to evaluate career options, make more rational decisions, and strengthen their self-confidence in determining their future direction. Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of CBT-based group counseling is effective in improving the quality of career decision-making among twelfth-grade students.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine the effect of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based group counseling on improving career decision-making among twelfth-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Takhasus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah. The research subjects consisted of 30 students selected using purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to

the research objectives, such as students who still experience indecision in determining their career choices. Data collection was carried out using a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to measure the level of students' career decision-making, employing a pretest and posttest method. Through this approach, the researcher is able to compare students' conditions before and after being given the treatment in the form of CBT-based group counseling, allowing changes to be observed directly and measured. This method also enables the researcher to assess the effectiveness of the intervention in improving students' ability to make career decisions in a more objective and systematic manner.

Based on the results of data analysis, it is known that all prerequisite tests in this study have been properly fulfilled, allowing the analysis to proceed to the hypothesis testing stage. The results of the normality test using Shapiro-Wilk show significance values of 0.126 for the pretest and 0.087 for the posttest, both of which are greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed. The results of the homogeneity test also show significance values greater than 0.05, meaning that the data variance is homogeneous or similar. The fulfillment of these two assumptions indicates that the research data meet the requirements for parametric statistical analysis. Therefore, the use of the Paired Sample t-test is considered appropriate and capable of providing accurate and scientifically accountable results in testing the differences between scores before and after the treatment.

The results of the study indicate that there is a significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores in career decision-making after receiving the treatment in the form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based group counseling. This is evidenced by the results of the Paired Sample t-test, which show a calculated t-value of -2.499 and a significance value (Sig. two-tailed) of 0.018. Since this value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This finding demonstrates a significant change between the conditions before and after the treatment, further supported by the increase in the average posttest score compared to the pretest score. Thus, it can be interpreted that students' ability to make career decisions improved after participating in CBT-based group counseling. Substantively, this improvement reflects changes in both cognitive and behavioral aspects, where students become more capable of identifying and modifying negative or irrational thought patterns, more rational in evaluating various career alternatives, and more confident in determining their future direction. Therefore, the CBT intervention not only has a statistically significant impact but also provides meaningful practical benefits in enhancing the quality of students' career decision-making, particularly in terms of goal clarity, readiness to make decisions, and the ability to consider options carefully and responsibly.

Theoretically, the results of this study are consistent with the concept of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, which emphasizes changing maladaptive thought patterns into more rational, logical, and adaptive ones. In the group counseling process, students not only gain new insights about themselves and their potential but also acquire learning experiences through interactions with other group members. Group dynamics allow students to share experiences, provide feedback, and learn from others' perspectives, which helps them view career-related problems more broadly and objectively. The application of problem-solving techniques within CBT helps students identify problems more specifically, consider various alternative options, analyze the consequences of each choice, and develop realistic action plans. This indicates that CBT interventions do not

only focus on cognitive aspects but also have an impact on practical skills in decision-making.

In the context of this study, the improvement in students' career decision-making after receiving the treatment indicates that CBT-based group counseling is able to help students reduce indecision, increase self-confidence, and strengthen their ability to determine their future direction. Students become more capable of understanding their interests, talents, and potential, and are more rational in considering available career options. In addition, students become better prepared to face the challenges of the workforce or further education, as they have developed a clearer picture of the career goals they wish to achieve. CBT-based group counseling not only brings changes in cognitive aspects but also has an impact on students' affective and behavioral aspects in the career decision-making process.

This study still has several limitations that need to be considered. One of the main limitations is the relatively small sample size, which means that the results cannot be widely generalized. In addition, the use of a questionnaire as the sole data collection instrument may introduce bias in respondents' answers, as the data obtained rely entirely on students' subjective perceptions. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers increase the sample size and combine data collection methods, such as interviews or observations, in order to obtain more in-depth, accurate, and comprehensive data. Future research findings are expected to provide a stronger understanding of the effectiveness of CBT-based group counseling in improving students' career decision-making.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based group counseling has a significant effect on improving career decision-making among twelfth-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Takhassus Al-Qur'an Al Falahiyah. This is evidenced through a series of data analyses, including descriptive statistics, prerequisite tests, and hypothesis testing using the Paired Sample t-test. The results of the descriptive analysis show an increase in the average career decision scores from before (pretest) to after (posttest) the treatment, indicating a positive change in students' ability to determine their career choices. Furthermore, the results of the normality and homogeneity tests indicate that the data are normally distributed and have homogeneous variance, thus meeting the requirements for parametric statistical analysis. In the hypothesis testing stage, a significance value of 0.018 (two-sided) was obtained, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This indicates that there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, meaning that CBT-based group counseling is effective in improving students' career decision-making. Substantively, this improvement reflects not only changes in cognitive aspects, such as more rational and systematic thinking, but also in affective and behavioral aspects, including increased self-confidence, clearer career goals, and greater readiness to make well-considered decisions. The implementation of CBT-based group counseling is therefore a relevant and effective intervention in helping students develop more adaptive, directed, and realistic career decision-making abilities.

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