

## EMPOWERING CAREER CHOICES: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING IN GROUP COUNSELING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

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### Article Information

Received : October 2, 2025

Revised : November 10, 2025

Accepted : November 16, 2025

### Abstract

Career decision-making is a process of selecting alternatives that must be undertaken by each individual by considering their abilities, potential, talents, and interests in accordance with their field. This skill is essential for senior high school students to determine their career direction, set clear goals, and commit to implementing the decisions they make. This study aims to describe the career decision-making abilities of students and to examine the effectiveness of group counseling using the Motivational Interviewing technique in improving these abilities. The research employed a quantitative method with a pre-experimental design, specifically a one-group pretest-posttest approach. The sampling technique was purposive sampling, involving 8 respondents out of a total of 94 eleventh-grade students. Feasibility tests conducted by experts and practitioners indicated that the model met the scientific criteria for guidance and counseling and was deemed suitable for use by school counselors. The trial results showed an increase in career decision-making scores from 163 (pretest) to 206.5 (posttest), representing a 26.7% improvement. These findings demonstrate that the Motivational Interviewing technique in group counseling is effective as an intervention to significantly enhance students' career decision-making abilities. It is recommended that school counselors consider adopting this technique as part of their career guidance programs to support students in making well-informed career choices.

**Keywords:** : *motivational interviewing, group counseling, career decision-making skills, high school education, adolescent career development*

### Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period marking the transition from childhood to early adulthood (Ahmad, 2022). As noted by Kanopka in Ahmad (2022), this stage is a significant segment in the human life cycle, serving as a transitional phase toward healthy adult development. For adolescents, particularly those in senior high school, this stage is filled with various life challenges and important decisions, such as selecting an academic program, deciding to enter the workforce, or pursuing entrepreneurship. These decisions are not always easy, as they require the ability to determine and commit to a career choice while navigating both supporting and inhibiting environmental factors. Failure to make an appropriate career decision at this stage can have long-term consequences for future success. Taviera, as cited in Nurrega et al. (2018), states that career exploration and decision-making can be a highly stressful period in an adolescent's life, as career choices are often perceived as a representation of future success. However, many adolescents delay or avoid making career decisions due to confusion, lack of self-confidence, or unclear direction, sometimes even delegating these decisions to others. Such avoidance

can lead to poor or incorrect career choices, which may have serious consequences for future career paths. Career decision-making is defined as a dynamic and continuous process of choosing among various career alternatives based on self-understanding and career knowledge (Hartono in Muslikhah et al., 2022; Conger in Muslikhah et al., 2022). This process requires consideration of personal abilities, potential, talents, and interests. According to W & Alhusin (2019), career decision-making theory emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge (such as talents, interests, and skills) and general knowledge (such as job opportunities, study programs, and labor market demands) as the foundation for making appropriate choices. In reality, many students still have low career decision-making skills due to a lack of motivation and limited access to relevant information. Such conditions risk causing difficulties in finding employment and contribute to high unemployment rates. A recent study by Ari and Eşkisü (2025) highlights that adolescent career decision-making is significantly hindered by irrational career beliefs and a low tolerance for uncertainty. Adolescents who hold unrealistic assumptions—such as believing there is only one perfect career path—tend to struggle with exploring alternatives and evaluating options objectively. Likewise, those with a low tolerance for uncertainty often experience heightened anxiety in ambiguous situations, which can lead to procrastination and reduced confidence in making career choices.

The interplay between these two factors creates substantial psychological barriers, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to foster adaptive thinking and resilience in the career decision-making process. Personality types used in vocational selection are identified through an interests-based inventory. Every type corresponds to a theoretical orientation model that describes a set of typical adaptive behaviors. Because people prioritize these orientations differently, they develop distinct life patterns and styles. Holland in the Career Typology Theory of Vocational Behavior believes that it is important to establish links or compatibility between individual personality types and specific career choices. The point is career selection and adjustment is a picture of one's personality. Individuals are said to reach maturity in their careers if they already have the readiness to make decisions about their career choices correctly and wisely. (John L. Holland in Andersen, P., & Vandehey, M. 2012)

Several studies in Indonesia have reported similar problems. Nurrega et al. (2018) found that the majority of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Sugihwaras Bojonegoro still lacked clarity about their interests and talents, while many twelfth-grade students struggled to choose a major even close to graduation. A preliminary study conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Sugihwaras Bojonegoro in November 2023 revealed that 75% of eleventh-grade students and many twelfth-grade students did not have a clear career plan, largely due to limited access to career information, particularly as most of them are boarding school students. Addressing this issue requires effective interventions to enhance students' career decision-making abilities. Group counseling is one such approach, as it facilitates interpersonal communication, peer support, and collaborative problem-solving. In the context of career guidance, group counseling enables students to openly discuss their challenges, share experiences, and develop more accurate career decision-making strategies. To further improve its effectiveness, this study integrates the Motivational Interviewing (MI) technique into group counseling.

The application of group counseling in addressing individual problems has been demonstrated by several previous researchers, as evidenced by the study conducted by David Aprial & Irman (2022) at SMA Nurul Ikhlas. Their findings confirmed that group counseling can be utilized to enhance students' career decision-making skills. This improvement process occurs particularly during the activity stage of group counseling sessions, where students are provided with the opportunity to process their cognitive and affective aspects through the power of group dynamics facilitated by the group leader.

The group leader plays a significant role in reshaping students' perspectives on understanding careers and making informed career decisions. Developed by Miller in 1983 and later refined with Rollnick, MI is a client-centered approach aimed at enhancing intrinsic motivation and resolving ambivalence (Apriyadi, 2022; P. S. Dewi & Apriatama, 2023). Although initially applied in physical and mental health contexts, MI has been adapted to various settings, including career decision-making. Through MI, students are encouraged to explore their values, clarify their goals, and align their career choices with their personal strengths. This study aims to (1) describe the career decision-making abilities of students at SMA Negeri 1 Sugihwaras Bojonegoro and (2) examine the effectiveness of MI-based group counseling in improving these abilities. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of career guidance theory and provide practical benefits for schools in equipping students with the skills needed to make appropriate and well-directed career decisions for their future success.

## Method

This study employed a quantitative experimental research design using a one-group pretest-posttest approach. It was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Sugihwaras Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia, selected due to the high number of students experiencing difficulties in career decision-making and the lack of previous research on this issue in the school. Coordination with the school principal and the guidance and counseling teacher was carried out to obtain formal approval and determine participants. The research population consisted of 94 eleventh-grade students. Using purposive sampling, eight students who met the criteria of having low career decision-making skills were selected as participants. The study used a one-group pretest-posttest design to assess changes before and after the intervention.

The implementation procedure began with administering a pretest using a validated career decision-making skills questionnaire to measure baseline abilities. Following this, group counseling sessions based on the Motivational Interviewing technique were delivered over several meetings in small groups, facilitated by a trained counselor. Each session encouraged participants to share experiences, explore personal values, clarify career goals, and develop strategies for making informed career choices. The counselor applied motivational interviewing principles, including empathy, developing discrepancy, accepting resistance, and supporting self-efficacy, to enhance participants' motivation. After the intervention, the same questionnaire was administered as a posttest to measure changes in career decision-making skills. All data were recorded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistics to compare mean scores, followed by inferential statistics to determine the significance of improvement.

The instruments used in this study consisted of three techniques: observation, interviews, and the Career Decision-Making psychological scale. The scale measured four key indicators of career decision-making skills: (1) self-understanding, (2) exploration of career information, (3) goal setting, and (4) decision-making readiness. Each indicator was represented by several statements using a Likert-type format (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Example items include: "I understand my own strengths and weaknesses related to my future career" (self-understanding). To ensure validity and reliability, the scale was reviewed by three experts in guidance and counseling and educational psychology for content validity. The construct validity was tested through item analysis using the corrected item-total correlation technique, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage) were used to identify changes in participants' scores before and after the

intervention. To determine the significance of improvement, a paired sample t-test was conducted using SPSS version 26, comparing pretest and posttest scores.

## Result and Discussion

This study aimed to describe the career decision-making abilities of students at SMA Negeri 1 Sugihwaras and to examine the effectiveness of group counseling using the Motivational Interviewing (MI) technique in enhancing these abilities. The research sample consisted of eight purposively selected eleventh-grade students who initially demonstrated low levels of career decision-making ability. The pretest results showed an average score of 163, categorized as low. After participating in eight sessions of group counseling using the Motivational Interviewing technique (90 minutes per session), the posttest results indicated a significant improvement, with an average score of 206.5, categorized as moderate. This represents a 26.7% increase in career decision-making ability.

**Table 1** Pretest and Posttest Score Comparison

Measurement Point	Average Score	Category
Pre Test	163	Low
Post Test	206.3	Moderate

The results indicate a substantial improvement in students' overall career decision-making abilities following the intervention. As shown in Table 1.1, the posttest scores increased by 26.7% compared to the pretest, moving from the "Low" to the "Moderate" category. To gain a deeper understanding of the improvement, the analysis was further broken down into the five key aspects of the CASVE model—Communication, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, and Execution. This breakdown allows for the identification of which specific components of decision-making skills were most positively impacted by the intervention.

**Table 2** Comparison of Career Decision-Making Aspect Scores

Aspect	Pretest Average	Post Test Average	Percentage Increase
Communication	31.88	41.13	28.99
Analysis	54.12	72.13	33.33
Synthesis	26.50	32.75	23.58
Valuing	26.13	31.75	21.48
Executing	24.38	28.75	17.87

The largest increase appeared in the Analysis component, indicating a substantial improvement in students' capability to collect, process, and evaluate information relevant to career choices.

## Statistical Significance

Normality tests using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method revealed a normal distribution for both pretest and posttest data ( $p > 0.05$ ). Subsequent paired t-tests found a highly significant difference in career decision-making abilities before and after intervention ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ), confirming the effectiveness of the group counseling intervention with MI technique.

**Table 3** Result of Paired Sample T-Test

Variable	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Before – After the provision of service	-43.50	12.90	-10.094	7	0.000

The *paired sample t-test* analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the scores before and after the provision of group counseling services using the *motivational interviewing* technique ( $t(7) = -10.094, p < 0.05$ ). The *mean difference* of -43.50 indicates a substantial improvement in scores following the intervention. This finding suggests that the counseling service was effective in positively enhancing students' career decision-making abilities.

### **Interpretation of Findings Through Theoretical Frameworks and Recent Literature**

The observed improvement in career decision-making abilities substantiates the CASVE model theorized by Peterson, Sampson, and Reardon (2018), which details a systematic decision-making process involving communication, analysis, synthesis, valuing, and execution stages. The observed improvements across all CASVE components indicate that students were better able to progress through these stages following the counseling intervention.

Enhancement in the Communication aspect signifies increased skills in internal and external dialogue regarding career options, facilitated by interactive group counseling that provides opportunities for reflection and peer feedback (Bandura, 2001). The significant gain in Analysis reiterates the intervention's success in fostering critical evaluation of career-related information, resonating with findings from Apriyadi (2022) and Nurrega et al. (2018) on cognitive approaches combined with MI.

### **The Role of Group Counseling and Motivational Interviewing**

Group counseling serves as a social context fostering shared experiences, emotional support, and mutual motivation among members (Lubis, 2016). Theoretically grounded in Yalom's (2013) principles, group dynamics such as cohesion and altruism enhance self-confidence and alleviate decision-making anxiety. This setting catalyzes positive behavioral change by leveraging collective strengths.

Furthermore, group counseling provides a safe space where each member has the opportunity to express feelings, thoughts, and personal experiences that are often difficult to disclose in individual situations. The interaction among members creates a natural process of social learning, such as giving and receiving feedback, practicing communication skills, and developing empathy. According to Corey (2016), a healthy group process enables each member to develop self-awareness while also improving interpersonal skills that are essential in daily life.

Group counseling also emphasizes the importance of openness and active participation. Group cohesion, namely the sense of togetherness and attachment among members, becomes a crucial element that facilitates the creation of trust. Meanwhile, the mechanism of altruism where members feel valuable because they can help others can strengthen self-concept and increase a sense of competence (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). These dynamics allow participants to realize that they are not alone in facing problems, thereby reducing anxiety and psychological burdens.

Motivational Interviewing uniquely contributes by specifically targeting intrinsic motivation and resolving ambivalence through its core principles: expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, rolling with resistance, and supporting self-efficacy (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). MI's client-centered nature empowers students to recognize discrepancies between current situations and career aspirations, stimulating proactive commitment to decision-making. These results align with Dewi et al. (2022) and Bradley & Erford (2015), who highlight MI's effectiveness in varied psychological contexts.

The application of Motivational Interviewing (MI) practice involves the flexible use of several fundamental counseling communication skills summarized by the acronym OARS: Open-ended Questions, Affirmations, Reflective Listening, and Summarizing.

According to Mulawarman and Afriwilda (2020), OARS serves as a crucial foundation in the motivational interviewing process. It aims to open a deep, trusting dialogue and assists clients in expressing their intrinsic motivation effectively. By implementing these techniques, counselors can facilitate a more vivid and personalized exploration of clients' issues and ambivalence, thereby easing the path for clients to discover solutions and commit to desired changes.

These findings provide empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of group counseling with a motivational interviewing approach in improving career decision-making skills. The improvement can be explained through the core mechanisms of motivational interviewing, which emphasize strengthening intrinsic motivation, exploring ambivalence, and developing realistic action plans. During the activity stage of the group counseling sessions, the dynamics of peer interaction offered students an opportunity to reflect on their values, interests, and career goals. The role of the facilitator or group leader was pivotal in guiding the discussion process, enabling participants to process not only cognitive aspects but also emotional regulation and self-confidence.

This result aligns with the study conducted by David Aprial & Irman (2022) at SMA Nurul Ikhlas, which demonstrated that group counseling can significantly enhance students' career decision-making skills through the power of group dynamics. Furthermore, these findings are consistent with career decision-making theory, which posits that active individual involvement in the problem-solving process leads to more mature and directed decisions (Gati & Levin, 2015).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that group counseling integrated with the Motivational Interviewing (MI) technique is effective in significantly improving students' career decision-making skills. The intervention led to a notable increase in students' ability to understand themselves, explore relevant career information, set realistic goals, and make well-considered career decisions. The statistical analysis demonstrated a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, confirming that MI-based group counseling fosters meaningful behavioral and cognitive changes related to decision-making readiness. The findings of this research are important because they provide empirical support for the integration of MI within school counseling practices. This approach enhances not only students' decision-making competence but also their intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy key factors that prepare them to face future academic and vocational challenges. By aligning counseling interventions with students' values and personal goals, counselors can cultivate greater engagement, ownership, and resilience in career planning. Within the broader context of previous work, this study strengthens existing evidence from both national and international research that emphasizes the effectiveness of group counseling in fostering adaptive psychological and cognitive skills. It also contributes a practical framework for school counselors in Indonesia, demonstrating that motivational techniques can be successfully adapted to educational settings. The implications of this study suggest that schools should prioritize group counseling models that integrate motivational approaches to help adolescents make informed and confident career choices within an ever-changing labor landscape.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have supported and guided me throughout the research and preparation of this paper. I also appreciate the cooperation of the management, teachers, and students of SMA N 1 Sugihwaras for their participation and support during the data collection phase. Special thanks to my institution, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sunan Giri for providing the

resources and academic environment that made this study possible. Lastly, I sincerely thank my family and colleagues for their continuous motivation and support. Without their contributions, this research would not have been possible.

### Author Contributions Statement

YS conceived the research idea, designed the study framework, led the implementation of the intervention, analyzed the data, and wrote the main draft of the manuscript. RP assisted in developing the research instruments, coordinating the counseling sessions, and supporting data collection. EN contributed to the literature review, data validation, and refinement of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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