



The influence of group career construction counselling on Tanzanian high school students' career decision-making difficulties

Jacobus Gideon Maree  and Grace Makunja Magere 

Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of a group career construction counselling intervention on the career decision-making difficulties of Tanzanian students. Convenience and purposive sampling were used to select 35 high school participants from a single public school in Tanzania. A qualitative approach was employed and an intrinsic single-case, descriptive, intervention career design was implemented. An eight-week career construction counselling intervention was executed. The data were generated using different qualitative data sources. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the intervention enhanced most of the participants' career decision-making capacity, bolstered participants' psychological selves, improved their career adaptability, and bolstered their ability to make informed career decisions. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies in various contexts with different participants. Career construction counselling interventions for students of different ages and strategies to establish the long-term impact of these interventions should be devised.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 12 January 2023

Accepted 9 March 2023

KEYWORDS

Group career construction counselling; career decision-making difficulties; career decision-making; psychological selves; Tanzanian high school students

Introduction

Transitioning successfully from high school through college/university and entering the job market requires significant and appropriate career decisions on the part of students. However, such transitioning can be daunting due to the myriad options and choices available today. At the same time the postmodern world continues to evolve rapidly, while the accelerated use of information communication technology (ICT) further complicates career choices and options (Maree, 2018a).

According to Kazi and Akhlaq (2017), career decisions have a lasting impact on individuals. When they experience difficulties during career decision making and receive little assistance in addressing these difficulties, the quality of their performance, satisfaction levels in life, and overall well-being can be compromised. A key aim of career counselling is to facilitate the decision-making process, in particular to help individuals overcome the difficulties they encounter when navigating career choice transitions (Amani & Sima, 2015; Maree, 2016). Career counsellors can play a crucial role in this challenging transition stage by assisting high school students in making appropriate career decisions.

CONTACT Jacobus Gideon Maree  kobus.maree@up.ac.za

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Overview of career decision-making difficulties

The term 'career decision-making difficulties' is used to describe the challenges experienced by individuals before, during, and after making career decisions (Anghel & Gati, 2019). Sound career decision making is important, especially for high school students (Paixão & Gamboa, 2017). Choosing a career at this critical stage has a lifelong effect and becomes even more challenging for many individuals who may feel confused and anxious due to the increase in career options in the occupational world (Gati et al., 1996; Vaiopoulou et al., 2019). If these difficulties are not dealt with promptly, inappropriate career decisions may be made that will likely affect students' future well-being, the standard of living, and job satisfaction (Akpochafo, 2020; Gati & Amir, 2010; Gati et al., 2010).

Researchers have identified two main types of career difficulties: career indecision and career indecisiveness (Gati & Saka, 2001; Gati et al., 1996). Career indecision is generally considered a normative developmental stage in career decision making and includes cognitively associated difficulties. Career indecisiveness on the other hand is usually considered a more persistent condition that is associated with emotional and personality-related issues (Gati & Saka, 2001; Levin et al., 2020). Resolving these two types of difficulties calls for different interventions. Career indecision requires psychoeducational and psychosocial information on how to make a career decision, and career indecisiveness requires career counselling.

Based on decision-making theory, Gati et al. (1996) developed a taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties consisting of three major difficulty clusters: lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. Lack of readiness refers to difficulties that occur before the decision-making process takes place. The other two clusters comprise difficulties that arise during the decision-making process. Lack of information has four categories of difficulties: lack of knowledge about the steps involved in making a career decision, lack of information about the self, lack of information about various occupations, and lack of information about the ways of accessing additional information. Inconsistent information has three categories of difficulties concerning the use of information: unreliable information (difficulties arising from unreliable or ambiguous information), internal conflicts (difficulties caused by contradicting preferences), and external conflicts (difficulties caused by contradictory interaction with significant others).

Researchers across the world have found an association between different variables and career decision-making difficulties such as gender, maturity, culture, personality, self-efficacy personality and emotional intelligence, and locus of control (Albion, 2000; DiFabio et al., 2013, 2015; Gati & Saka, 2001; Goliath, 2012; Kırdök & Harman, 2018, 2018; Migunde et al., 2015) Our literature review on specific factors that contribute to the career decision-making process (Gati et al., 1996) revealed four trends. First, cultural contexts play a major role in career decision making (Zhou & Santos, 2007). Second, varying and contradicting findings emerged on how male and female students differ in their experience of career decision-making difficulties (Migunde et al., 2015). Third, while extroversion and neuroticism personality factors were found to have a significant relationship with career decision-making difficulties in the Italian context (DiFabio et al., 2013), extroversion and self-awareness were negative predictors of career decision-making difficulties in the Turkish context (Kırdök & Harman, 2018). Fourth, access to career counselling was found to significantly increase individuals' level of career adaptability (Maree, 2022).

Career decision making and identity development among adolescents

According to Marcia (1966), making life choices, especially career decisions, leads to the development of commitment, widely regarded as a building block of identity. Marcia (1966) identified four categories of identity formation that individuals experience in their lives based on two key components, namely exploration and commitment. The four categories are discussed briefly below (Marcia, 1966, 1989).

Diffusion status: Individuals in identity diffusion status lack a sense of identity, are not engaged in the exploration of ideological and interpersonal issues, and do not commit to personal values, beliefs, and goals (low exploration, low commitment).

Foreclosure status: Individuals in foreclosure status have reached a solid level of commitment by adopting their parents' attitudes without consideration or exploration (high commitment, low exploration).

Moratorium status: Individuals in moratorium status have actively engaged in exploring various opportunities but have not yet made any choice or commitment (high exploration, low commitment).

Achievement status: Individuals in achievement status have done exploration and have made a clear commitment to their choices (high commitment, high exploration).

Theoretical framework

The present study was guided by career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2002).

Career construction theory

Career construction counselling (CCC), as a specific example of life design intervention (Maree, 2020; Savickas et al., 2009), is based on a narrative concept of career development and career management (Savickas, 2013). Savickas (2002, 2013, 2019) formulated career construction theory (CCT) by combining the psychodynamic, differential, and developmental approaches to create a meta-theoretical framework known as career construction counselling. According to Savickas (2002), CCT is based on a social constructivism/constructivist perspective, which is about how individuals construct their reality. CCT considers how individuals construct their lives and careers, impose direction on their vocational behaviour, and make meaning of their careers to adapt to the changing nature of the work environment in the 21st century (Maree, 2013; Savickas, 2013). CCT aims at clarifying individuals' understanding of their potential by identifying their key life themes, which in turn enhance their career decision making (Cardoso et al., 2018; Maree, 2019a, b). Three central perspectives on what the self entails constitute the foundations of CCT, namely 'self as an actor, self as an agent, and self as an author' (Savickas, 2013, p. 151).

The central focus of CCT is thus on enhancing people's career adaptability and the elicitation of their life themes (Savickas, 2013).

Career adaptability

Career adaptability refers to 'individuals' resources for coping with current and anticipated developmental tasks, occupational transitions, and work trauma that to some degree alter their social integration' (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662). Savickas (2013) states that career adaptability is a set of attitudes, competencies, and behaviours that individuals can use to ensure a good fit with their work. He proposes four dimensions of career adaptability that 'represent general adaptability resources and strategies that individuals use to manage critical tasks, transitions, and traumas as they construct their careers' (p. 158). These dimensions are explained by Bimrose and Hearne (2012) as follows:

Career concern : Individuals' ability to develop a positive attitude towards the future (showing interest in future careers).

Career control: Individuals' ability to make decisions about future careers and to exercise a degree of control over their lives.

Career curiosity: Individuals' interests and ability to explore the educational and vocational opportunities that are available (active exploration).

Career confidence: Individuals' ability to solve problems by believing that they can achieve what is necessary to realize their goals.

Life themes

Savickas (1995) argues that career decision-making difficulties “experienced by adolescents and young adults may occur partially because they have not recognised their life themes” (p. 365). Savickas (2002) regards life stories/themes as the key factor in making meaningful career decisions and achieving career adaptability. Career-related stories articulate individuals’ distinctiveness, explain why they make decisions, and clarify the meanings that direct those decisions (McIlveen & Patton, 2007). The extent to which individuals can narrate or tell their stories indicates the extent to which their actions will add meaning to others (Maree, 2013). The narration of career-life stories, according to Savickas et al. (2009), promotes decision making as it helps individuals transform issues related to career choice into a bigger form of lived meaning that improves their ability to make sound decisions.

Rationale for the study

Students in Tanzania, especially those in public secondary schools and at higher learning institutions, often experience career decision-making difficulties, as do their peers in the rest of the world. Many Tanzanian high school students, especially those in government schools, continue to have little or no exposure to career programmes and career information services. As a result, they complete their secondary education with little knowledge of career choices. The government introduced counselling services in all secondary schools to rectify this shortcoming (Mabula, 2012). The heads of secondary schools were authorized to assign specific teachers to provide career counselling services to students (Mabula, 2012). However, despite this government intervention, career counselling in government secondary schools remains inadequate. The majority of students consequently have to rely on cultural and social influences to make career decisions (Mabula, 2012), which often result in inappropriate career choices. Yet, the authors of this article were unable to find a single study done in Tanzania on factors contributing to this worrying situation. They could also not find any programmes or support aimed at helping students resolve their career choice difficulties.

Goal of the study

This study set out to explore the influence of a group career construction counselling intervention on the career decision-making difficulties of a group of public high school students in Tanzania. The following section reviews the research questions used in the study.

Research questions

Two research questions guided the study:

i. **Exploratory question**

How did the intervention through the conduits of narratability, career adaptability, and intentionality influence the participants’ career decision-making capacity?

ii. **Comparative question**

What were the main differences between the participants’ pre- and post-intervention themes and subthemes?

Method

Participants and context

The target population consisted of Form 5 students from a government high school in the Morogoro municipality in Tanzania. Convenience and purposive sampling were used as the sampling techniques to select one fairly homogeneous group of Form 5 students from a single school. The students were selected because they were at the critical stage of transition either from high school to college

or entering the world of work. About 100 students willing to participate were asked to reflect by themselves on whether they had already made their career decisions and to write their responses down on a piece of paper. The primary researcher (the second author of this article) read all the students' responses and selected 35 students who reported having difficulties in making a career choice and who also expressed the need for career guidance and counselling. The mean age of the males was 18 years and 5 months and that of the females 18 years and 9 months.

Mode of inquiry and design

Intervention research (Rothman & Thomas, 1994) based on career construction counselling (employing a qualitative mode of inquiry with a constructivist worldview orientation) was conducted to investigate the research problem. An intrinsic, single-case, descriptive, intervention study research design was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data generation instruments

The data generation sources included interviews (pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews), observations, and documents (the *CIP*, the primary researcher's journal/diary, and the participants' journals: Table 1).

Rigour of the study

Strategies used to increase the trustworthiness of the research are discussed below (Table 2).

Rigour of the main data-gathering instrument

The Career Interest Profile (CIP, v6) (2017)

The *CIP* is based largely on career and (to a lesser extent) self-construction theory. The questionnaire consists of four sections designed to help individuals i) identify family influences in their career choices; ii) identify their key life themes; iii) identify their career interests and concerns, and iv) advise themselves on how to turn challenges into hope (Maree, 2017) (see Table 3). Numerous research

Table 1. Summary of the data-gathering methods/techniques.

Data generation methods/techniques	Description	Methods of documentation
Interviews: Pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews were conducted	The pre-intervention interviews were conducted to determine the participants' career decision-making difficulties and their need for career counselling intervention. The post-intervention interviews were conducted to determine the influence of career construction-based counselling on the participants' career decision-making difficulties.	Written responses were obtained from individual participants.
The <i>Career Interest Profile (CIP v6)</i> (2017)	This questionnaire helps assesseees narrate their career-life stories, reflect on their own stories, and listen to and advise themselves.	The participants wrote their responses down in the questionnaire.
Observation	The participants' experiences, behaviours, actions, and interactions during the intervention were observed to uncover hidden meanings and feelings.	Experiences, actions, behaviours, and interactions were noted.
Document review	Specific documents such as policy documents and brochures relating to the research were reviewed.	Specific information relevant to the research problem was noted.
Journal/Diary	The participants' and the primary researcher's reflections were noted.	Written responses were generated from each participant's reflection.

Table 2. Strategies to increase the trustworthiness of the research.

Strategy	Elements of strategy employed	Clarification of elements
Credibility	Triangulation	Multiple data sources such as interviews, observation, and notes from the primary researcher's reflective journal were used.
	Member checking	Data obtained from the semi-structured focus group interviews were submitted to the participants to authenticate the primary researcher's interpretation.
	Reflective journal	The primary researcher kept a reflective journal in which personal observations, experiences, events, and challenges were recorded during the data generation process.
Dependability	Prolonged involvement in the site	Data were generated for two months to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants and the study context.
	Audit trail	A detailed chronology of research activities and the research process was kept for review later by peer researchers to see if they arrived at the same conclusions.
Confirmability	Methodological description	A detailed methodological description was given to help determine the integrity of the research results.
	Triangulation	Different methods of data generation were used to avoid the primary researchers' possible own bias.
Transferability	Researcher's own bias	The primary researcher's beliefs and assumptions underpinning the decisions made and methods used are acknowledged in the research report. The services of an external coder (an experienced educational psychologist) were acquired to validate the findings of the thematic data analysis and to enhance the interrater (intercoder) validity of the study (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).
	Provision of a detailed and thick description	Sufficient information on the participants and the research context was provided.
	Drawing of conclusions	Generalisations of the findings were avoided as the focus was on understanding the particular participants' experiences of career construction.

Compiled from Elo et al. (2014) and Zohrabi (2013).

Table 3. Summary of the *CIP*.

Part	Type of information generated	Career counselling paradigm	Theoretical foundation
1	Participants report on biographical information and family influences.	Career education	Developmental
2	Participants are requested to write down three most preferred careers and three least preferred careers.	Vocational guidance	Differential
3	Participants are requested to identify and rank the five most preferred career categories from a total of 19 career categories.	Vocational guidance	Differential
4	Participants are requested to respond to narrative questions.	Career counselling	Developmental and storied

projects (nationally as well as internationally) have confirmed the rigour (validity, trustworthiness, and credibility) of the *CIP* and its value in enhancing the elicitation, clarification, and (co-)construction of career-life stories in diverse settings (Maree, 2021, 2022).

Data analysis and interpretation

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse the qualitative we had gathered (Clarke & Braun, 2013a b; Clarke & Braun, 2017). We (the two researchers in the study) agree with the following view expressed by Bernard and Ryan (2010, p. 107): 'No matter how hard we try, there are no purely inductive or deductive studies'. Accordingly, even though we did not purposely implement elements of a deductive approach to data analysis (during Phases 3 and 4 of the data analysis), we drew on Gati et al. (1996) taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties in order to name subthemes accurately. During Phase 1, we familiarized ourselves with the data. In Phase 2, codes were generated. In Phase 3, themes were tentatively identified, and in Phase 4, these themes were reviewed and subthemes identified. In Phase 5, themes and subthemes were defined and named. In Phase 6, a research report was written.

Ethical considerations

The research was approved by the relevant university's institutional board. Approval was obtained also from the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) of the Morogoro region in Tanzania, who later introduced the primary researcher to the District Secondary Education Officer, who in turn issued permission to conduct the study in the selected high school. The management of the school gave permission to conduct the research. Informed consent (or assent, where applicable) was obtained from the participants and their parents, and the research was carried out in line with applicable ethical principles and guidelines.

Intervention procedure

Table 4 (below) gives details of the study's intervention procedures.

Table 4. Intervention procedures.

Activity	Procedure	Number of sessions	Time (minutes)	Specific career construction intervention step
Week 1: Orientation of the participants	Overview of what the study entailed and what was expected of the participants. Establishment of a working relationship and trust to make the participants feel comfortable and free to express themselves.	1	60	Defining participants' reason for seeking career counselling ('career problem').
Week 2: Pre-intervention activities and setting goals	Pre-intervention group interview. The participants wrote down in their journals their goals and the expected outcomes of the intervention.	2	120	Determining the goals the participants expected to achieve.
Week 3: Joined the activity and defined the participants' goals	The participants were told that reflection was an important part of the intervention and asked to list their goals.	1	60	Promoting reflection and reflexivity
Week 4: Completion of the <i>CIP</i>	The participants completed Parts 1, 2, and 3 of the <i>CIP</i> . Part 4 (narration questions based on the participants' personal life stories).	2	160	Exploring the present subjective career identity.
Week 5: Reflection and journal entries	The participants revisited previous activities and different parts of their <i>CIP</i> : i. Biographical information, family influence, and career information (career education). ii. Five most preferred careers and five least preferred careers (vocational education).	2	120	Reflection and shaping of the subjective story.
Week 6: Reflection and journal entries	The participants narrated and listened to their stories, reflected on their life experiences, and wrote their reflections down in their journals.	1	130	Discussing the participants' perceptions.
Week 7: Discussion and follow-up	The participants verified and commented on the interpretation of the information, drew on the information obtained during the preceding activities, and discussed newly identified career goals.	1	70	Putting the 'career problem' in a new perspective and devising a plan of action to actualize their career identities.
Week 8: Concluding session	A post-intervention interview was conducted and follow-up activities were discussed.	2	160	Long-term and short-term follow-up.

Outcomes/findings

The researchers used six data sources to collect the qualitative data. These sources are indicated with the letters (A-F) to enable readers to identify specific sources.

A: Pre-intervention interview.

B: The different *CIP* activities were divided into sections with detailed information and participant responses relevant to the research question. Each *CIP* quotation had a number for the section description. For example, career-life story, section 4 is indicated by B4.

C: Journal entries (written reflections).

D: Focus group interview.

E: Primary researcher's journal.

F: Post-intervention interview.

The participants' responses are shown by the number allocated to the participants, for example 1–35. The page and line numbers are also indicated. The data references thus have four digits, for example A;5;1;8–9, where A stands for the data source (in this case, the pre-intervention interview), five stands for the participant number, one stands for the page number of the specific source, and 8–9 stands for the line numbers on that page (see Table 5).

An overview of the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data is provided in the following section. Identified themes and subthemes are discussed below.

Four main themes and a number of subthemes emerged from the data analysis (see Table 6).

Table 5. The four-digit coding system used to reference data (transcripts).

Data source	Participant numbers	Page numbers	Line numbers
A Pre-intervention interview	1–35	1–9	1–307
B <i>CIP</i> activities	1–35	1–5	1–212
C Journal entries (participants)	135	1–4	1–147
D Post-intervention focus group interview	1–09	1–4	1–144
E Primary researcher's reflective journal	1–35	1–3	1–86
F Post-intervention interview	1–35	1–7	1–224

Table 6. Summary of themes and subthemes.

Main themes	Subthemes
Theme 1 Career choice-related difficulties	Lack of information Lack of motivation and support Inconsistent information Lack of confidence Job scarcity Subject choices (combinations) and grades
Theme 2 Career development programmes available to help the participants manage career decision difficulties	Career support available at school Need for support Suggestions/Advice
Theme 3 The participants' positive and negative experiences of the intervention	Positive experiences Negative experiences
Theme 4 The effect of the intervention on the participants' career decision-making difficulties	Self-knowledge/awareness Self-regulation Career decision making enhanced Self-efficacy Self-confidence Bolstered career identity New perspectives and plans Resilience

Responses to substantiate identified themes and subthemes are provided below. (The responses of the participants are verbatim with only very light editing in order to preserve the authenticity of the responses.)

i. Theme 1: Career choice-related difficulties: brief description

Career choice-related difficulties include impediments or hindrances to choosing a career and may inhibit an individual from making an appropriate career choice (Saka et al., 2008).

a. Lack of information

A:30;6;1–307: 'In general, for me until now my ability of making my career decision is low, and I think is because of inadequate information.'

b. Lack of motivation and support

A:17;4;1–307: 'I don't have people to help me choose here at school or home. I'm not motivated at all, that's why I have not made my choice. Now that you are here you can help me.'

c. Inconsistent information

B4;23;4;1–212: 'I don't know how I will choose the right career which will suit me. I face difficulty to decide because my mind tells me that "no" you will not manage the career you are trying to choose.'

d. Lack of confidence

A:10;3;1–307: 'I don't have the confidence to decide because I'm not sure. In our school, there are some teachers who are supposed to help students with career decisions, but they never do.'

e. Job scarcity

A:6;2;1–307: 'I had a dream of being a doctor (specialist), but due to lack of employment opportunity I found myself falling into economic sector which is not my choice.'

f. Subject choices (combinations) and grades

A:22;8;1–307: 'Initially I wanted to be an accountant, but sadly I was selected to study history, geography and language (HGL), which I'm not sure if it can lead me to the career I want.'

ii. Theme 2: Career development programmes available to help the participants manage career decision difficulties

Career development programmes are career support programmes that aim to provide students with early career knowledge to assist them in determining career goals (Lapan et al., 2003).

a. Career support available at school

A:18;9;1–307: 'The school has no programme that can assist us students in the matter of career choice. Frankly, we have a club (subject club) but mostly with a poor organization. They just entertain us.'

b. Need for support

A:16;5;1–307: 'My hope is to get help from qualified people or counsellors. I want to discover a career which can help me to be comfortable in my future career-life.'

c. Suggestions/Recommendations by the participants

F:5;6;1–224: 'I wish my school could initiate programmes that deal with career choice like frequent dialogues and debates, counselling sessions and talent classes to find out what we may do with our training in the future.'

iii. Theme 3: The participants' most positive and negative experiences of the intervention

This theme sheds light on the unique way in which the participants experienced the intervention.

a. Positive experiences

F:8;7;1–224: 'I feel happy to be part of this programme. I managed to achieve some of my expectations on career issues such as choosing my career, knowing my identity and my talents.'

D:5;4;1–144: 'During the counselling session of one-to-one what I experienced was the space to speak about myself clearly, freely you know, yes.'

b. Negative experiences

B4;15;3;1–213: 'I did not enjoy some questions because they caused me to remember the painful situation I experienced.'

F:31;2;1–224: 'I must admit that it was difficult for me to tell my personal story in a group. I was a bit shy to express myself.'

iv. Theme 4: Effect of the intervention on the participants' career decision-making difficulties

This theme clarifies the effect of the intervention on the participants and covers the participants' feedback on the benefits of the intervention.

a. Career exploration

C;30;2;1–147: 'I have learned a lot of things like career selection. I now know that I have to explore different career options that suit me according to my interests and my personality.'

b. Self-knowledge

F;3;5;1–224: 'This programme helped me a lot because I gained more knowledge about myself, like I have discovered my personality and my interests.'

c. Self-regulation

C;15;2;1–147: 'I need to study hard and make more effort than before because no sweet without sweat. I have realized that no one can identify me but myself.'

d. Career decision making enhanced

C;15;2;1–147: 'I had different questions that confused me. After counselling, I am able to know what I want to do and what I don't want to do to achieve my goals. I want to become a lawyer and I will engage in activities to find out more about this career.'

e. Self-efficacy

F;28;3;1–224: 'I didn't believe in myself, that I am capable of fulfilling my dreams, but through this counselling I found that I have what it takes to achieve my dreams. I believe I can do it.'

f. Self-confidence

E;14;2;1–86: 'I feel confident about my career. I learned that in order to achieve my goals I must be courageous and take risks.'

g. Bolstered career identity

C;32;1;1–147: 'The story of my life has helped me discover who I am and that my choices are influenced by my past experiences.'

h. New perspective and plan

C;31;1;1–147: 'I have learned that people change according to the environment and time. Through this study, we learned that people need to make the "right" choices in advance and realize where we can go based on the real environment in which we live.'

i. Resilience

F;10;6;1–224: 'I am now confident and courageous to face any challenge that will come my way, just to fight for what I love to do. I will never give up my dreams.'

In the next section the findings of this study are related to the literature on the topic.

Discussion

The goal of the study was to explore the influence of a career construction counselling intervention on the career decision-making difficulties of a group of public high school students in Tanzania. The following section reviews the research questions in the light of the study's findings.

Exploratory research question

How did the intervention through the conduits of narratability, career adaptability, and intentionality influence the participants' career decision-making capacity?

The intervention helped the participants explore their personal career-life stories, thus helping them establish coherent career plans, make choices, manage diverse transitions in life, and design meaningful work-lives. The intervention promoted what McAdams (2013, p. 273) calls 'three developmental layers of psychological self, namely the person as an actor, the person as agent, and the person as author'. The intervention thus to varying degrees enabled the participants to transition from performing as (1) social actors, (2) demonstrating motivated agency to (3) integrating their career-life stories as autobiographical authors (McAdams, 2015).

Social actor

According to McAdams (2010), the first layer of personality relates to dispositional traits, that is, 'early temperament differences morph into the broad traits of personality that may be observed in adulthood' (McAdams, 2010, p. 174). According to (Super, 1990), career development improves when individuals gain self-knowledge and career information. This study found that the majority of the participants exhibited a better understanding of themselves in terms of their traits, social roles, and interests as a result of the intervention. They were able to discover their strengths, challenges ('weaknesses'), and interests (as well as various other facets of their personalities). Moreover, they were given an opportunity to reflect and meta-reflect on their distinctive qualities, skills, abilities, and strengths, which increased their belief in their capability to choose and enact fields of study and careers. These findings support the findings of Cardoso et al. (2022), Maree and Che (2018), DiFabio and Maree (2013), and Ruiters and Maree (2022) who found life design counselling helpful in increasing learners' self- and career knowledge.

Motivated agent

The second layer of personality relates to characteristic adaptations, that is, 'to act in accord with self-determined plans, rooted in decisions, choice, and goals' (McAdams, 2010, p. 177). This study found that the majority of the participants displayed an enhanced capacity to specify their personal goals, motives, and hopes, to plan for the future, and to make informed decisions after the intervention. This finding confirmed that their psychological self as motivated agent was enhanced. As the participants engaged in the intervention, they demonstrated a positive change in their views on self-regulated behaviour, which influenced their sense of control. Most of the participants demonstrated greater self-determining behaviour and self-regulating agency. The pre-intervention interview revealed that the majority of the participants were 'stuck' and confused without clear plans and hope. During the intervention, some of the participants' perspectives on their future changed dramatically as they obtained clarity regarding where they were heading. The study confirmed that career construction counselling based on narratives helped the participants change their perspectives by modifying their mistaken career choice ideas and by making informed future career plans. They were able to make sense of their stories through which they could transform challenges into opportunities and hope. These findings are in line with Ferrari et al. (2010) finding that adolescents with a future orientation have fewer career decision-making difficulties and a higher level of academic achievement. Cabras and Mondo (2017) found that individuals who are oriented towards the future demonstrate an enhanced sense of purpose and direction in pursuit of their career goals and accomplish their goal-oriented tasks (the participants were able to plan more appropriately for their future and make choices regarding who they wanted to become and what they wanted to achieve in life). This finding also resonates with Locke and Latham's (1990) finding that when students set learning goals, their enthusiasm and dedication to achieve certain career goals are augmented.

Autobiographical author

The third layer of personality relates to narrative identity, that is, 'an internalized and evolving story of the reconstructed past and imagined future that aims to provide life with unity, coherence, and purpose' (McAdams, 2010, p. 171). This study found that the majority of the participants integrated their life stories as autobiographical authors during the intervention, which enabled them to connect the unconnected past with the present and future. A more coherent story thus emerged that provided meaning and purpose to their lives. This finding supports Argyropoulou and Kaliris (2018), Hartung and Vess (2016), and Savickas (2019) view that when individuals are encouraged to tell their career-life stories, together with their reflections and meta-reflections on those stories, they learn how to make meaning of their career-lives and how doing so enhances their career decision making. As the participants engaged in self-reflection on their narratives, most of them demonstrated an enhanced sense of

autobiographicity, which enabled them to clarify their career identities. This finding concurs with the argument of Cardoso et al. (2022) and Savickas (2012) that individuals' identities are shaped positively by the career-life stories they recount that give meaning and purpose to their life trajectories. The intervention in this study fostered narrative identity that enabled the participants to construct a more coherent sense of self. This in turn reinforced their sense of security, which is essential in dealing with career challenges (Cardoso et al., 2022). Maree (2018b) maintains that an established sense of career identity is vital as it joins individuals' career-life stories together and assists them in negotiating challenging and repeated work-life transitions.

Comparative research question

What were the main differences between the participants' pre- and post-intervention themes and subthemes?

As the participants engaged in the career construction counselling sessions, they demonstrated positive career development changes. Before the intervention, most of them lacked confidence (self-efficacy) to make a career choice as they did not believe in their capability to achieve their goals. However, in most cases, the participants' self-efficacy increased after the intervention. The majority of the participants were able to reflect on their distinctive qualities, skills, abilities, and strengths, which increased their belief in their capability to achieve their career goals and fulfil their purpose in life. This finding supports the findings of Cardoso et al. (2022), Maree and Che (2018), DiFabio and Maree (2012), and Ruiters and Maree (2022) who also found life design counselling helpful in increasing learners' self-efficacy and sense of self. Most of the participants in the present study displayed increased levels of self-understanding, growth, and the capacity to make sound career decisions after the intervention. Maree and DiFabio (2018) and Taber (2019) also stress the importance of helping individuals gain insight into their decision-making challenges and empowering them to take decisive control of their careers. Forward movement and progress were achieved as the participants started to make meaning of their lives and develop a sense of purpose for their future careers. The findings on the participants' forward movement and the progress they displayed during the intervention support Maree's (2022) view that dealing with individuals' need to experience a sense of purpose and meaning in their career-lives is a requirement for establishing the link between their life purpose objectives and their related career preference. This study's findings also support previous researchers' findings on the usefulness of career construction counselling in decreasing individuals' career decision-making challenges (Babarović & Šverko, 2016; Maree, 2016, 2021).

Limitations of the study

First, the participants were selected purposively (non-randomly), which restricts the generalizability of the study. A randomized, controlled study with larger and more diverse groups could have allowed for the generalization of the findings in different contexts. Second, despite taking every possible step to increase the trustworthiness of the research, potential researcher subjectivity bias may have further limited the transferability of the research findings. Third, due to time limits and financial constraints, the primary researcher was unable to conduct more follow-up interviews to assess the long-term effects of the intervention. Fourth, the researchers' personal preference for the approach followed in the intervention may have influenced the intervention style. Fifth, other researchers may have different interpretations of the findings.

Implications of the research for future research, policy, and practice

The training of career counsellors in the approach explained and executed in this study should be prioritized to ensure that career counselling in Tanzania (and elsewhere) stays abreast of the

most recent developments and responds appropriately to fundamental changes in the workplace. Researchers, career counsellors, and practitioners wishing to implement career construction counselling interventions should receive the necessary training before implementing such interventions, particularly with individuals from disadvantaged environments. When implementing a group-based intervention, researchers or counsellors should also make provision for one-to-one (individualized) sessions where individuals are given the opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions freely (many individuals feel uncomfortable and shy in group settings). Other researchers wishing to research the topic of this study should consider replicating it in different contexts with different participants to assess the usefulness and effectiveness of the intervention in Tanzania and elsewhere. Future researchers should also consider doing longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of the intervention. Lastly, future studies should consider assessing career decision-making difficulties using quantitative and qualitative instruments that can measure individuals' objective and subjective features.

Conclusion

For various reasons, sound career decision making is important for high school students (Paixão & Gamboa, 2017). Given the circumstances prevailing in secondary schools in developing country contexts (such as Tanzania), high school students in these contexts especially are at risk of making unrealistic choices if they do not have access to career counselling intervention programmes. Therefore, a need exists to examine possible strategies to deal with the career decision-making difficulties of high school students in these contexts. To varying degrees, our intervention saw the participants transition from performing as (1) social actors, (2) demonstrating motivated agency to (3) integrating their career-life stories as autobiographical authors (McAdams (2013). The participants' career decision-making capacity was influenced positively and their improved decision-making ability could be seen in their enhanced self-understanding (self-identity), career identity discovery, and increased adaptability resources. We conclude that the kind of intervention conducted in this study can enhance the capacity of participants in similar contexts to deal with their career decision-making difficulties by reflecting critically on their life stories and drawing successfully on them. This should help them manage their career decision-making difficulties and transition successfully from high school through college/university and enter the job market requires. We hope that our research will make a contribution in this regard.

Acknowledgments

We thank the students for participating in the research. We also thank Tim Steward for his editing of the text.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the National Research Foundation.

Notes on contributors

Jacobus Gideon Maree is an educational psychologist and a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria. He holds doctoral degrees in Education (Career counseling), Mathematics Education, and Psychology, and he lectures counselling for career construction to educational and counselling master's psychology

students. Since 2014, he has authored or co-authored 35+ peer-reviewed articles and 20+ books/book chapters and successfully supervised eight doctoral theses and seven master's dissertations. A regular keynote speaker at national and international conferences, he has received multiple awards for his work, and he has a B1 rating from the National Research Foundation.

Grace Makunja Magere is an educator and a lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling at the Sokoine University of Agriculture. She holds a doctoral degree in Learning Support Guidance and Counselling from the University of Pretoria and she is passionate about supporting secondary students struggling with making subject choices and career decisions. She endeavours to help them develop a career identity early in their lives by enhancing their career decision-making capacity and adaptability.

ORCID

Jacobus Gideon Maree  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9492-8445>

Grace Makunja Magere  <http://orcid.org/0009-0000-8247-4610>

Epilogue

Now, more than 12 months after the intervention, follow-up conversations with many of the participants indicated that they were making good progress with their studies. They have enrolled at different universities where they are pursuing degrees that reflect their preferred career choices as uncovered during the intervention.

References

- Akpochofo, G. O. (2020). Career decision-making difficulties among secondary school students in Nigeria. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(11), 5918–5925. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.082226>
- Albion, M. (2000). Career decision making difficulties of adolescent boys and girls. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 9(2), 14–19.
- Amani, J., & Sima, R. (2015). The status of career counselling services in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 2(8), 18–28.
- Anghel, E., & Gati, I. (2019). The associations between career decision-making difficulties and negative emotional states. *Journal of Career Development*, 48(4), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845319884119>
- Argyropoulou, K., & Kaliris, A. (2018). From career decision-making to career decision-management: New trends and prospects for career counselling. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(10), 483–502. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.510.5406>
- Babarović, T., & Šverko, I. (2016). Vocational development in adolescence: Career construction, career decision-making difficulties and career adaptability of Croatian high school students. *Primenjena Psihologija*, 4, 429–448. <https://doi.org/10.19090/pp.2016.4.429-448>
- Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, G. W. (2010). *Analysing qualitative data: Systematic approaches*. SAGE.
- Bimrose, J., & Hearne, L. (2012). Resilience and career adaptability: Qualitative studies of adult career counselling. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 81(3), 338–344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.08.002>
- Cabras, C., & Mondo, M. (2017). Future orientation as a mediator between career adaptability and life satisfaction in university students. *Journal of Career Development*, 45(6), 597–609. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845317727616>
- Cardoso, P., Duarte, M. E., Pacheco, L., & Janeiro, I. N. (2022). Life design group-based intervention fostering vocational identity, career adaptability, and career decision-making self-efficacy. *Cypriot Journal of Education*, 17(SI.1), 1453–1467. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v17iSI.1.6674>
- Cardoso, P., Janeiro, N. I., & Duarte, E. M. (2018). Life design counseling group intervention with Portuguese adolescents: A process and outcome study. *Journal of Career Development*, 45(2), 183–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845316687668>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013a). Teaching thematic analysis. *Psychologist*, 26(2), 120–123.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013b). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *Psychologist*, 26(2), 120–123. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n451>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 297–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- DiFabio, A., & Maree, J. G. (2012). Group-based life design counselling in an Italian context. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.06.001>
- DiFabio, A., & Maree, J. G. (2013). Career counselling: The usefulness of the career interest profile (CIP). *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 23(1), 41–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2013.10820592>

- DiFabio, A., Palazzeschi, L., Levin, N., & Gati, I. (2015). The role of personality in the career decision-making difficulties of Italian young adults. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 23(2), 281–293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072714535031>
- DiFabio, A., Palazzeschi, L., Peretz, A. L., & Gati, I. (2013). Career indecision versus indecisiveness: Associations with personality traits and emotional intelligence. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 21(1), 42–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072712454698>
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 4(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>
- Ferrari, L., Nota, L., & Soresi, S. (2010). Time perspective and indecision in young and older adolescents. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 38(1), 61–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880903408612>
- Gati, I., & Amir, T. (2010). Applying a systemic procedure to locate career decision-making difficulties. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 58(4), 301–320. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2010.tb00180.x>
- Gati, I., Amir, T., & Landman, S. (2010). Career counsellors' perceptions of the severity of career decision-making difficulties. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 38(4), 393–408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2010.503700>
- Gati, I., Krausz, M., & Osipow, H. S. (1996). A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision making. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 43(4), 510–526. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.43.4.510>
- Gati, I., & Saka, N. (2001). Vocational development in adolescence: Career construction, career decision-making difficulties and career adaptability of Croatian high school students. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 79(3), 75–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2001.tb01978.x>
- Goliath, D. (2012). *Career indecision amongst undergraduate university students at an academic institution in the Western Cape*. University of the Western Cape.
- Hartung, P. J., & Vess, L. (2016). Critical moments in career construction counseling. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 97, 31–39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2016.07.014>
- Kazi, A. S., & Akhlaq, A. (2017). Factors affecting students' career choice. *Journal of Research and Reflections in Education*, 11(2), 187–196.
- Kirdök, O., & Harman, E. (2018). High school students' career decision-making difficulties according to locus of control. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 6(2), 242–248. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2018.060205>
- Lapan, R. T., Tucker, B., Kim, S. K., & Kosciulek, J. F. (2003). Preparing rural adolescents for post-high school transitions. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(3), 329–342. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00260.x>
- Levin, N., Braunstein-Bercovitz, H., Lipshits-Braziler, Y., Gati, I., & Rossier, J. (2020). Testing the structure of the career decision-making difficulties questionnaire across country, gender, age, and decision status. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 116, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103365>
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Prentice-Hall.
- Mabula, N. (2012). Career services provision to secondary school students in Tanzania: Is it a dream or reality? *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 2(2), 242–257. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v2i2.1674>
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3(5), 551–558. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023281>
- Marcia, J. E. (1989). Identity and intervention. *Journal of Adolescence*, 12(4), 401–410. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1971\(89\)90063-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1971(89)90063-8)
- Maree, J. G. (2013). *Counselling for career construction. Connecting life themes to construct life portraits: Turning pain into hope*. Rotterdam: The Netherlands: Sense.
- Maree, J. G. (2016). Career construction as a way of resolving career indecision. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(3), 170–192. <https://doi.org/10.20853/30-3-665>
- Maree, J. G. (2017). *Career Interest Profile version 6 (CIP v6)*. JvR Psychometrics.
- Maree, J. G. (2018a). Advancing career counselling research and practice using a novel quantitative+qualitative approach to elicit clients' advice from within. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(4), 149–170. <https://doi.org/10.20853/32-4-2558>
- Maree, J. G. (2018b). Perspective: Promoting career development in the early years of people's lives through self- and career construction counselling to promote their career resilience and career adaptability. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(4), 421–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1438748>
- Maree, J. G. (2019a). Group career construction counselling: A mixed-methods intervention study with high school students. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 67(1), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12162>
- Maree, J. G. (2019b). Self- and career construction counselling for a gifted young woman in search of meaning and purpose. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 19(2), 217–237. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-018-9377-2>
- Maree, J. G. (2020). Integrative career counselling for early career individuals. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 50(2), 228–238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246319899592>
- Maree, J. G. (2021). Counselling for career construction for an artistic child with career undecidedness: Implications for early child development. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 26(1), 432–448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2021.1976236>
- Maree, J. G. (2022). Using integrative career construction counselling to promote autobiographicity and transform tension into intention and action. *Education Sciences*, 12(72), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12020072>

- Maree, J. G., & Che, J. (2018). The effect of life-design counselling on the self-efficacy of a learner from an environment challenged by disadvantages. *Early Child Development and Care*, 1, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1495629>
- Maree, J. G., & DiFabio, A. (2018). Integrating personal and career counseling to promote sustainable development and change. *Sustainability*, 10(11), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10114176>
- McAdams, D. P. (2010). The problem of meaning in personality psychology from the Standpoints of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and life stories. *The Japanese Journal of Personality*, 18(3), 173–186. <https://doi.org/10.2132/personality.18.173>
- McAdams, D. P. (2013). The psychological self as actor, agent, and author. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8(3), 272–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612464657>
- McAdams, D. P. (2015). Three lines of personality development: A conceptual itinerary. *European Psychologist*, 20(4), 252–264. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000236>
- McIlveen, P., & Patton, V. A. (2007). Dialogical self: Author and narrator of career life themes. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 7(2), 67–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-007-9116-6>
- Migunde, Q., Othuon, L., & Mbagaya, C. (2015). Career maturity and career decision making status of secondary school students in Kisumu Municipality, Kenya. *International Research Journals*, 6(3), 50–54.
- O’connor, C., & Joffe, H. (2020). Intercoder reliability in qualitative research: Debates and practical guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919899220>
- Paixão, O., & Gamboa, V. (2017). Motivational profiles and career decision making of high school students. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 65(3), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12093>
- Rothman, J., & Thomas, E. J. (1994). *Intervention research: Design and development for human service*. ((Ser. Haworth social work)). Haworth Press.
- Ruiters, S. E., & Maree, J. G. (2022). Life design counselling with a learner from a vocational school setting. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 36(2), 258–279. <https://doi.org/10.20853/36-2-4668>
- Saka, N., Gati, I., & Kelly, K. R. (2008). Emotional and personality-related aspects of career-decision-making. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 16(4), 403–424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072708318900>
- Savickas, M. L. (1995). Constructivist counseling for career indecision. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 43(4), 363–373. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1995.tb00441.x>
- Savickas, M. L. (2002). Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behaviour. In D. Brown (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp. 149–205). Jossey-Bass.
- Savickas, M. L. (2012). Life design: A paradigm for career intervention in the 21st century. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 90(1), 13–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-6676.2012.00002.x>
- Savickas, M. L. (2013). Career construction theory and practice. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counselling: Putting theory and research to work* (2nd ed., pp. 147–183). John Wiley & Sons.
- Savickas, M. L. (2019). *Career counselling* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association.
- Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J.-P., Duarte, M. E., Guichard, J., & Vianen, A. E. M. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3), 239–250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.04.004>
- Savickas, M. L., & Porfeli, E. J. (2012). Career adapt-abilities scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3), 661–673. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.011>
- Super, D. E. (1990). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In L. Brown & D. Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (2nd ed., pp. 197–261). Jossey Bass Publishers.
- Taber, B. J. (2019). Career counselling interventions to enhance career adaptabilities for sustainable employment. In J. G. Maree (Ed.), *Handbook of innovative career counselling* (pp. 103–135). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2020.1773394>
- Vaiopoulou, J., Papavassiliou-Alexiou, I., & Stamovlasis, D. (2019). Career decision-making difficulties and decision statuses among Greek student teachers. *Hellenic Journal of Psychology*, 16(1), 74–94.
- Zhou, D., & Santos, A. (2007). Career decision-making difficulties of British and Chinese international university students. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 35(2), 219–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880701256684>
- Zohrabi, M. (2013). Mixed method research: Instruments, validity, reliability and reporting findings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(2), 254–262. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262>