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## The Effect of Group Counselling with Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy to Increase Grit Level: A Study on Vocational High School Students

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# The Effect of Group Counselling with Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy to Increase Grit Level: A Study on Vocational High School Students

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**Abstract:** Students' indecision regarding their interests and their lack of persistence often lead to their careers being irrelevant to the competencies they possess. Grit, as one of the non-cognitive factors that helps a person stay persistent and focused in achieving goals, is needed to have consistency and the ability to overcome obstacles. Aiming to fill the gap in knowledge about previous studies that looked at this topic, this study's main goal was to increase the grit levels of grade XII students at vocational schools (SMKs) through group counseling using Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). This research looked at how MBCT-based group counseling can help students improve their mindful awareness, cognitive patterns, and ability to stay focused on their goals. This quasi-experimental study, employing one group pretest-posttest design, involved 4 grade XII students of a vocational school in Banjarbaru City who had low grit scores, measured using The Grit Scale. Statistical analysis using the paired sample t-test was applied to identify differences in scores between the two groups. The results of this study found that group counseling based on MBCT was effective in increasing grit levels in SMK students in Banjarbaru by increasing the ability of awareness and focus of students to develop new mindsets that lead to positive changes and more appropriate decision-making. With group counseling, a good psychological state will help improve one's self-quality and performance, thus creating potential vocational school graduates. To achieve these goals, vocational schools should have a program that focuses on developing learners' psychological aspects and teachers should be specifically trained to assist learners who have difficulties in their studies.

**Key Words:** Grit level; Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy; Vocational students; Group counseling; Indonesia

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## INTRODUCTION

Students who decide to pursue vocational high school (SMK) education are basically expected to have readiness to enter the workforce and build careers in accordance with the competencies and expertises they have acquired. However, most of them end up in careers unrelated to their skills or competencies (Nugroho *et al.*, 2021). This is due to the inability to set goals and low self-adjustment, giving rise to feelings of unpreparedness and vacillation about their interests (Lutfi *et al.*, 2019; Maulidina & Wibowo, 2021; Mariati, 2021). Such indecision of interest and inability results in learners lacking consistency and prone to giving up on goals, especially when faced with obstacles or circumstances that do not match their expectations (Weisskirch, 2018; Rusadi *et al.*, 2021). There are

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several factors that affect a person's goal-setting ability, including resilience (Warren & Hale, 2018), self-control (Justine & Theresia, 2019), self-efficacy (Oktaviana, 2018), and one of the non-cognitive factors that plays an important role in maintaining one's interest and goal setting, namely grit (Duckworth, 2016; Muhibbin & Wulandari, 2021).

Grit is defined as consistency of interest and persistence to achieve long-term goals (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). It is a psychological factor, a new concept that was proposed as a predictor of one's success (Duckworth, 2016). It involves various individual abilities in predicting success, such as self-control, self-regulation, growth mindset, and perseverance in carrying out tasks to resist unnecessary desires, not be distracted, and control thoughts, emotions, and behavior (van Zyl *et al.*, 2021). Individuals with high levels of grit will be more focused, organized and not easily distracted in achieving the goals they want to achieve (Christopher *et al.*, 2022). Whereas individuals with low levels of grit will more easily give up on achieving their goals when faced with problems, especially in completing their obligations (Karaman *et al.*, 2019). Individuals with low persistence and interest tend to have fickle interests, resulting in thoughts of changing majors or goal directions because they feel they are not getting results according to their initial expectations (Weisskirch, 2018; Rusadi *et al.*, 2021). Grit involves various individual abilities in predicting success, such as self-control, self-regulation and perseverance in carrying out tasks to resist unnecessary desires, not being distracted, and controlling thoughts, emotions and behavior (van Zyl *et al.*, 2021). Vocational students who are required to have career readiness during their adolescent development need grit to help develop self-control and a positive mindset and avoid distraction in achieving the goals to be achieved (Christopher *et al.*, 2022).

Several previous studies have found an important role of mindfulness in helping individuals improve their behavioral control and decision-making abilities (Raphiphatthana *et al.*, 2018; Schimschal *et al.*, 2021; Christopher *et al.*, 2022). Mindfulness is a psychological construct adapted from Buddhism that emphasizes the importance of attention to the present moment with accepting and non-judgmental behavior (Baer *et al.*, 2020). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) is one form of mindfulness-based intervention originally developed to help reduce anxiety and depression (Segel *et al.*, 2013). MBCT is a new approach that can help individuals form a new mindset to stay focused on achieving goals with the ability to concentrate on awareness and attention (Sipe *et al.*, 2021; Strauss *et al.*, 2021; Cheung *et al.*, 2022; Mohebi *et al.*, 2022).

MBCT approach group counseling can help increase grit by focusing awareness on more purposeful thoughts, feelings, and body sensations and seeking new cognitive patterns. With the MBCT approach, individuals learn to focus attention and awareness on current experiences (Baer *et al.*, 2020). The group form of counseling plays a role in creating a situation that brings support from peers with similar situations that make individuals not feel alone or isolated, thus supporting acceptance and optimal outcomes (Woods *et al.*, 2019).

This study aims to examine how the effectiveness of the MBCT counseling approach in improving grit in SMK Class XII students. Based on the literature review of some of the problems faced by SMK students, it can be concluded that the consistency of interest and goal-setting ability needs to be owned by SMK students to have a career according to their competition. The consistency of interest and goal-setting ability can be improved by having grit (Duckworth, 2016). Grit as a predictor of success will help individuals remain persistent, unyielding, and focused on achieving their goals consistently. In this case, grit can be enhanced by mindfulness-based interventions. Previous research found that mindfulness is positively related to grit, where the higher the level of mindfulness, the higher the level of grit and vice versa, and helps individuals in achieving life goals (Crane *et al.*, 2012; Cheung *et al.*, 2022; Christopher *et al.*, 2022).

## METHOD

This research was a quasi-experimental quantitative research model with one group pretest-posttest design. The one-group pretest-posttest research design is a research design that uses one group of subjects (single case) without a control group that provides measurements before and after treatment with the same measuring instrument. Measurement of the level of grit will be carried out before the

session (pre-test) and after the session (post-test). Differences in measurement results are considered as treatment effects.

## Participants

The participants selection criteria in this study were class XII students who had low grit scores as measured using the Grit Scale by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) which had been adapted by Rusli et al. (2021) and were willing to participate in this research counseling session by the Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSI) code of ethics article 49 concerning "Informed Consent in research" (HIMPSI, 2010).

The subjects in this study were XII-grade students at SMK PGRI Banjarbaru who had low grit scores and were willing to participate in this study. The subjects in this study were 8 students of class XII of SMK PGRI Banjarbaru who were 17-19 years old and had a low grit level according to the research criteria. Of the 8 subjects, 4 were willing to participate and continue the study until the end while the other 4 withdrew from the study.

Three students from the Accounting department and 1 student from the Heavy Equipment Engineering department, all with a low grit level, were taken as the research sample using the purposive sampling technique. All participants should have low grit levels and provide their voluntary consent to participate in the study by signing the informed consent provided

**Table 1.** Description of Research Subjects

| Variable          |                             |   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Gender            | Male                        | 3 |
|                   | Female                      | 1 |
| Age               | 17                          | 3 |
|                   | 18                          | 1 |
| Major departement | Accounting                  | 3 |
|                   | Heavy Equipment Engineering | 1 |

## Measures

The measurements in this study used the Grit Scale proposed by Duckworth & Quinn (2009) that has been adapted into Indonesian by Rusli *et al.*, (2021). Of the total 12 original scale items to be used with reliability value ( $r = 0.653$ ). The experimental material in this study was an intervention module designed by researchers with the title "Module for Group Counseling Intervention Using the MBCT Approach to Improve Grit" according to Woods *et al.* (2019) which has been validated through expert judgment. In this study, the validity test of the intervention module will use face validity and logical validity (sampling validity). Logical validity is conducted to measure the extent to which the content of the research module represents the aspects and objectives of the variables being measured. As for what was assessed from the experd was the suitability of the methods, materials, and evaluations used in this research module. This study conducted a manipulation test by measuring the level of mindfulness using the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) by Baer *et al.* (2006), adapted into Indonesian by Awaliyah and Listiyandini (2017).

## Procedures

The MBCT approach procedure in this study included 2 measurement sessions, namely pre-test and post-test, and 5 counseling sessions. Based on MBCT's original model of 8 meeting sessions, this study adapted into 5 meeting sessions with a total of 2 meetings per week; each session lasts 90 minutes. Each session was supervised by 3 observers; selected by the following criteria: (1) is a Psychology student; (2) had taken the Counseling Psychology course and passed with a minimum grade B; (3) willing to participate in all sessions. The treatment was made by 1 counselor that met the criteria: (1) Bachelor or Master of Psychology; (2) had an interest in counseling; (3) willing to participate and learn the method as provided in the module. The following table summarises the sessions used in this research intervention.

**Table 2.** Schedule and sequence of sessions

| Session                         | Duration   | Implementation  |
|---------------------------------|------------|---|
| I : Awareness                   | 90 minutes | Opening session and introduction to mindfulness<br>Mindfulness: raising practice & body scan meditations<br>Subject of counseling: analysis of circumstances, feelings, and perceived problems and behaviors to find the cause of loss of interest and focus on goals.<br>Homework assignment in the counseling logbook   |
| II : Mindfulness of the Body    | minutes    | Opening session and logbook discussion<br>Mindfulness practice: body scan meditation<br>Subject of counseling: analyzing obstacles that are perceived to be faced and focusing on experiences and feelings experienced in the past to identify bodily sensations felt based on those experiences<br>Homework assignment in the counseling logbook   |
| III : Mindfulness of the Breath | minutes    | Opening session and logbook discussion<br>Mindfulness practice: 3-minute breathing meditation<br>Subject of counseling: identifying feelings and experiences experienced, both pleasant and unpleasant, to elicit acceptance<br>Homework assignment in the counseling logbook   |
| IV : Thoughts Are Not Facts     | 60 minutes | Session opening and logbook discussion<br>Mindfulness exercises: body scan & 3-minute breathing meditations<br>Subject of counseling: changes that have been experienced along with obstacles encountered to identify inhibiting maladaptive behaviors and thoughts.<br>Homework assignment and goal setting plans  |
| V : Take The Best Care          | 90 minutes | Opening session with mindfulness practice: body scan meditation<br>Subject of counseling: changes and experiences felt by the subjects during the session from beginning to end<br>The 3-minute breathing mindfulness practice, followed by a discussion of change plans and goal setting<br>Ending with raising practice meditation and evaluation of the counseling sessions by the subjects for the research team. |

All procedures in this study involving humans followed ethical standards (the Code of Ethics of The Indonesian Psychologist Association) and ethical clearance by Ethical Clearance Unit Faculty of Medicine Lambung Mangkurat University with approval number No. 070/KEPK-FK ULM/EC/V/2023. All participants signed the informed consent before the sessions began.

## Data Analysis

This study used data analysis in the form of hypothesis testing to determine the effectiveness of MBCT approach group counseling in improving grit with the Paired Sample T Test statistical method which analyses the results of the study by testing the pre-test and post-test results to determine changes in grit levels using the IBM SPSS Statistic 26 program. Paired Sample T Test is a statistical test used for two dependent or correlated samples by paying attention to factual differences from paired data taken in one correlated sample (Kadir, 2015).

Then the calculation was carried out using Cohen's effect size (d) which is an effectiveness test by calculating the average difference between two treatments by measuring the average difference in standard deviations (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). After obtaining the effect size value, the results are interpreted to determine how much influence the technique used in this study has. The following is the effect size interpretation table from Gravetter and Forzano (2018):

**Table 3.** Cohen's Effect Size Evaluation Criteria (d)

| d Value | Description   |
|---------|---|
| d=0,2   | Small effect (mean difference of about 0.2 standard deviations)     |
| d=0,5   | Medium effect (mean difference of about 0.5 standard deviations)    |
| d=0,8   | 0.8 Large effect (mean difference of about 0.8 standard deviations) |

## RESULTS

The screening of 90 grade XII students at SMK PGRI Banjarbaru found that 7 (7.8%), 21 (23.3%), 54 (60%), and 8 (8.9%), based on their grit levels, were categorized very high, high, medium, and low, respectively. This study took 4 out of the 8 students with low grit levels who were willing to participate as subjects in the study and attend counseling sessions with the MBCT approach. The results of the measurements of the subjects' grit levels pre and post-counseling are as follows:

**Table 4.** Results of grit level measurement pre and post counseling

| Subjects | Pre Test<br>Grit Score | Grit Level | Post Test<br>Grit Score | Grit Level |
|----------|------------------------|------------|-------------------------|------------|
| A        | 24                     | Low        | 27                      | Low        |
| B        | 28                     | Low        | 32                      | Mediate    |
| C        | 25                     | Low        | 28                      | Low        |
| D        | 26                     | Low        | 35                      | Mediate    |

Table 4 shows an increase in the grit levels of all four subjects; two of the subjects experienced an increase from low to medium. This means that there was a difference in grit levels after attending the MBCT-based counseling session.

**Table 5.** Shapiro-Wilk analysis results

| Variable | Results   | Shapiro-Wilk<br>Statistic | Df | Sig. (2-tail) |
|----------|-----------|---------------------------|----|---------------|
| Grit     | Pre-Test  | 0,971                     | 4  | 0,850         |
|          | Post-Test | 0,927                     | 4  | 0,574         |

Based on Table 5, the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test analysis showed significance levels of 0.85 and 0.574 for the pre-test and the post-test, respectively. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to determine whether or not the study data were normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ). Based on the results of the analysis, it was concluded that the research data were normally distributed.

**Table 6.** Paired sample t-test results

| Paired Sample T-Test              |        |       |               |        |    |               |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|---------------|--------|----|---------------|
|                                   | Mean   | SD    | SD Error Mean | T      | Df | Sig. (2-tail) |
| Pair 1<br>Pre Test – Post<br>Test | -4,750 | 2,872 | 1,436         | -3,307 | 3  | 0,045         |

Based on Table 6, the results of the paired sample  $t$ -test analysis had a significance value of 0.045 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with a value of  $t = 3.307$ . This means there was a significant difference between the students' grit levels in pre and post tests.

**Table 7.** Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) measurement results

| Subjects | Pre Test | Post Test | Gained Score |
|----------|----------|-----------|--------------|
| A        | 92       | 98        | 6            |
| B        | 120      | 123       | 3            |
| C        | 88       | 101       | 13           |
| D        | 94       | 101       | 7            |

Table 7 indicated that there was an increase in the mindfulness scores of the four subjects after attending the MBCT-based counseling sessions. It can be interpreted that grit levels are in line with mindfulness scores.

**Table 8.** Cohen (d) effect size test result

|                 |           | Effect Size Cohen (d)  |            |
|-----------------|-----------|--|------------|
|                 |           | Mean   | SD         |
| Results         | Pre Test  | M2 = 25,75   | SD2 = 1,7  |
|                 | Post Test | M1 = 30,5  | SD1 = 3,69 |
| Effect Size (d) |           | $d = (M1 - M2) / \sqrt{SD2^2 + SD1^2}$<br>$d = (30,5 - 25,75) / \sqrt{[(3,692 + 1,72) / 2]}$<br>$d = 4,750 / 2,873$<br>$d = 1,653$ |            |

Table 8 expresses the effect size of 1.653 ( $d > 0.8$ ). It can be interpreted that the treatment has a significant effect, as shown by the increase in grit levels. The significance value of the difference in grit levels pre and post-counseling was 0.045 ( $p < 0.05$ ), meaning that the MBCT-based group counseling is effective in increasing the grit levels of grade XII vocational students in Banjarbaru City. Grit levels are supported by the increase in student mindfulness scores and the high significance of the treatment effect size ( $d = 1.653$ ).

This study aimed to test the effectiveness of MBCT-based group counseling to improve the grit levels of grade XII students of SMKs in Banjarbaru City. The results of the test showed a significance value of 0.045 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and an effect size of 1.653 ( $d > 0.8$ ). Based on these results means that MBCT-based group counseling is effective in improving the grit levels of grade XII vocational students in Banjarbaru City. The results of this study also showed that the MBCT-based group counseling can increase grit levels and there is a positive relationship between grit and mindfulness, as seen from the results of manipulation tests, that subjects experienced an increase in mindfulness scores.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis, the results of this study show the effectiveness of the MBCT group counseling approach to increasing grit, in line with research by Rusadi et al. (2021) who found an increase in grit after undergoing an MBCT session by increasing self-awareness of thoughts, behavior and daily experiences. Hanssen et al. (2019) stated that MBCT helps a person by improving well-being and reducing anxiety to help them focus and focus on what they are currently experiencing to continue living life. This is in line with Strauss et al. (2021) which states that MBCT helps increase a person's awareness and psychological well-being so they can stay focused on achieving goals.

The results of this study are also in line with research by Cheung et al. (2022) who found that mindfulness is positively related to grit, where the higher the level of mindfulness, the higher the level of grit. These results are also in line with Christopher et al. (2022) which states that mindfulness helps individuals to maintain their desire to achieve the goals they want to achieve. Raphiphatthana and Jose (2019) found that individuals with high levels of grit tend to focus more and develop a non-judgmental attitude towards the experiences they go through, which helps them to be less hard on themselves and not give up easily even when faced with failure. as well as obstacles. Bearance (2015) explains that with mindfulness, individuals can control their reactions to various situations to be able to maintain focus and attention to lead them to solve problems and overcoming the challenges they face. This can also be seen based on the results of observations by observers, where two subjects who initially often daydreamed due to a lack of focus and attention experienced changes in behavior to become more focused and directed and paid more attention to the counselor and the tasks given as the counseling time progressed.

The role of MBCT approach group counseling in this research is as a mindfulness-based intervention that is effective in increasing grit. There is still very little research examining the MBCT approach group counseling to increase grit, but the results of this study prove that the MBCT approach group counseling is effective in increasing grit. These results are in line with research by Matilla et al. (2020) who found that a mindfulness-based intervention program had a significant effect on increasing grit. Mindfulness-based programs increase individuals' self-awareness so that they can manage workload and stress through mindfulness and attention training. Self-awareness is the key for individuals to continue to focus on achieving long-term goals.

The results of this study found that the MBCT approach group counseling had a significant influence in increasing grit in class XII vocational school students in the city of Banjarbaru. Based on the results of the analysis, the four subjects in this study experienced an increase in grit scores, followed by an increase in mindfulness scores. The increase in grit indicates that the four students as subjects in this study experienced increased focus and perseverance in efforts to achieve their long-term goals (Rusadi et al., 2021). Students with a higher level of grit will be able to develop new thought patterns and not give up easily in overcoming challenges and obstacles in achieving their goals (Duckworth, 2016). They will view that success is a long-term process and requires persistence to achieve it. By changing ways of thinking that lead to new ways of acting, students will develop grit (Feldman, 2017). Developing mindsets helps students learn to be more persistent and resilient, so that they will see failures and obstacles as a process towards self-improvement. This can also be seen based on the results of observations by observers where the four subjects experienced changes in behavior in the form of increased initiative and openness to express opinions.

The results of this research categorization found that two of the four students as research subjects experienced an increase in the category from low grit level to medium grit level with the other two remaining in a low category. The increase in grit experienced is influenced by several factors. Two factors influence a person's grit, namely internal factors and external factors. Internal factors that influence grit are interest, training, goals, and hopes with external factors that influence namely upbringing, environment, and culture. Based on observations by observers and analysis of each subject's counseling logbook, the authors found several conclusions as follows. Two of the four subjects had good focus management and more consistent interest than the other two subjects. During counseling, two subjects with a more consistent level of focus and interest tended to participate more actively and have initiative when faced with tasks by the counselor as well as providing responses and expressing what was on their minds and feelings to the counselor. This is different from one of the other subjects who tends to be confused about finding expressions that can describe what he feels and thinks, including things he likes and experiences that are less pleasant for him. One in four subjects also does not have a significant goal to achieve. Based on the results of the analysis, the other three subjects had targets in achieving the goals they wanted to achieve after graduating from vocational high school. Two of the four subjects had planned to take courses to improve their skills and another was in the process of studying to prepare for the college entrance exam. Meanwhile, another subject does not yet have a target that he must achieve. Individuals will develop self-awareness and persistence when they know the long-term goals they want to pursue (Li et al., 2018).

To develop grit, individuals are expected to develop interests, do lots of things and practice, set good intentions, and have hope or be optimistic (Duckworth, 2016). With a lack of interest and practice, individuals will have difficulty developing grit. This also influences an individual's ability to focus and pay attention. Researchers also found that two of the four subjects in this study had a background that came from parenting without father involvement. By Kusumawardhani et al. (2018), the role of father's involvement in parenting was found to influence students' grit levels. Fathers have an important role in forming the concept of self-esteem and feelings of competence in children. Students with a good perception of fathers in their role as parents will have good communication skills and tend to always try hard to achieve their goals. On the other hand, students who do not have a father's role in their lives tend to be confused in forming their self-concept and determining the goals they want to achieve. In this case, parenting background has the possibility of influencing the increase in grit experienced by the subject.

It can be concluded that the MBCT approach group counseling can be an effective and possible intervention for increasing grit. This is seen based on the measurement results that have been analyzed, the counseling logbook for each subject, and the results of observations by observers. The four classes An increased grit score will also help them overcome the difficulties they will face and maintain a never-give-up attitude when faced with failure in the future. Accompanied by increased mindfulness, it will help students to further develop their self-awareness and ability to concentrate and focus on the experiences they have gone through.

This research still has limitations, such as the research time which clashes with school operational holidays so there are difficulties in adjusting the time and location where this research will be carried out. Several subjects withdrew so that the target of research participants was not met. This affects the



group dynamics which are expected to be more varied and become less fulfilled to support optimal research results.

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