

Goal Commitment as Mediator of Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Career Decision Difficulties among Vocational High School Students

Thalia Zamira*, Puji Lestari Suharso

Universitas Indonesia, Prof. Dr. Slamet Iman Santoso, St., Depok, West Java, 16424, Indonesia
*Corresponding author, e-mail: thaliazamira@gmail.com

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Abstract

Vocational high school students were provided with a curriculum designed to facilitate their transition into the workforce. Elicitation studies have indicated that vocational high school students experience difficulties in making career decisions. The internship program is designed to enhance students' emotional intelligence and goal commitment, thereby preventing career decision-making difficulties. This research aims to investigate the mediating effect of goal commitment in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties. This quantitative correlational research was conducted in a vocational high school in Bogor with a total of 173 participants using a self-report questionnaire of CDDQ, TEIQue-SF, and HWK Scale. Mediation analysis was processed using Hayes PROCESS. Results showed that goal commitment plays a partial mediation role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties ($c' = -0.19, p < 0.001$; $c = -0.25, p < 0.001$). This research will also present the limitations and suggestions for future study.

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1. Introduction

In the current era of globalization, the necessity for young people with excellent preparedness to work is increasing. In light of the intensifying competition for employment, which is driven by rising competency standards, vocational education can serve as an option for students to prepare themselves for entry into the industrial world. In Indonesia, vocational higher education is designed to bridge the gap between the needs of industry and the demand for graduates to secure employment. In this country, vocational education has been provided beginning from the high school level. This objective is reflected in the vocational high school curriculum, which is widely utilized in Indonesia. Vocational high school students are required to engage in practical work or internships during their final year of education (Kemenristekdikti, 2016). The internship program is designed to enhance the employability of vocational high school graduates, who are expected to possess the requisite skills to compete in the industrial world.

The vocational high school curriculum emphasizes the specificity of students in terms of their direct engagement with the career world in accordance with their field of study. However, Sahida (2022) discovered that vocational students experience difficulty or doubt in determining the steps to pursue a career, as well as a lack of knowledge about the employment and further education options available to them. The results of informal interviews with 10 final-year vocational high school students and graduates on February 18 to 20, 2022, indicated that vocational high school students experience uncertainty regarding the choice between continuing their studies or entering the workforce. Eight participants attributed this uncertainty to the multitude of career options available, while these students have yet to determine a clear direction regarding their future career aspirations. Furthermore, three participants expressed doubt that the vocational school and apprenticeship

programs they had pursued would lead to successful careers in the future. Other findings from Ramdhani and Purba (2022) in the Kompas newspaper (November 10, 2022) indicate that students at vocational high schools face challenges in competing in the job market due to a mismatch between the competencies they develop during their studies and the skills required by the industrial world. Although there are numerous career options available to vocational high school students, the choices they make may not always align with their academic studies or the demands of the industrial world. Further, this raises questions concerning career decisions.

The term "career decision-making difficulties" refers to the challenges individuals may face when attempting to make career decisions that align with their abilities (Gati et al., 1996; Gati & Saka, 2001). These difficulties can manifest in various forms, including uncertainty, indecision, and self-doubt. Career decision-making is a universal experience, yet not everyone navigates it in the same way. The career decision-making process is similar for all individuals, with the exception of those who experience significant obstacles Kulcsár et al. (2020). While every individual must experience a period of indecision regarding their career choices, vocational students are expected to have prepared career choices that align with their personal values in order to avoid prolonged unemployment following graduation.

If the phase during which individuals are unable to make career decisions that align with their personal goals is not addressed, it can result in career indecisiveness or a state in which individuals are unable to make their own career choices (Salomone, 1982; Slaney, 1988; Osipow, 1999). Career indecisiveness has a number of negative consequences. Individuals who are in college or employed but experience career indecisiveness may be more likely to drop out of college (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014) or leave their jobs (Chen et al., 2004; Renn et al., 2014) than those who do not experience it. If the negative impact is sustained over a long period of time, it will cause problems for the individual's future and possibly result in unemployment. Therefore, it is imperative to prevent this situation from occurring. This is particularly important for vocational students who may experience doubts about their career decisions. It is crucial to equip them with the required skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their future careers.

In order to prevent the development of more severe career decision-making difficulties, it is essential to identify the factors that can cause such problems. The factors that cause career decision-making difficulties can be divided into two categories: internal factors that originate within the individual and external factors that originate outside the individual. Internal factors can include gender (Albion & Fogarty, 2002), personality (Di Fabio et al., 2012), career decision-making self-efficacy (Chuang et al., 2020; Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2012), career decision-making profile (Chuang et al., 2020), emotional intelligence (Farnia et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2003), and lack of commitment to goals (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2012). Meanwhile, external factors can include cultural factors (Mau, 2004; Willner et al., 2015), parental support (Parola & Marcionetti, 2022), and the presence or absence of mentors who can provide access to information regarding career decision-making (Lease, 2004).

Although both internal and external factors contribute to career decision-making difficulties, internal factors, especially personality, have been extensively studied by numerous experts (Di Fabio et al., 2012; Gati & Saka, 2001). These studies have demonstrated a correlation between various aspects of personality and the inability of individuals to make decisions. Di Fabio et al. (2012) further proposed that career decision-making difficulties originate from an individual's inability to identify themselves and their emotions. Upon closer examination, the aforementioned suggestion by Di Fabio is related to emotional intelligence, as the capacity to accurately perceive one's own abilities and to process information within oneself is one of the components of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey et al., 2000).

A review of several studies on emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties revealed a correlation between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties (Farnia et al., 2018; Drastiana, 2016; Brown et al., 2003). Research conducted by Farnia et al. (2018) indicates that an individual's emotional intelligence, manifested in the ability to identify one's own emotions and abilities, can serve to mitigate the difficulties commonly encountered in the process of

making career decisions. Research from Farnia et al. (2018) corroborates the initial opinion of Salovey et al. (2000), which posits that emotional information is a significant indicator in the formation of decisions, judgments, priorities, and actions. It also aligns with that of Valach et al. (1996), who posit that emotional factors should be incorporated into career decision-making processes because emotions can motivate individuals to take action, including making career decisions that align with their needs. Consequently, it can be posited that decisions made by an individual must also consider the emotional factors that arise in the context of uncertain and ambiguous circumstances (Gelatt, 1989).

Some research findings indicate that emotional intelligence has a positive impact on adolescent development, including psychological well-being (Fernandez-Berrocal et al., 2006), self-concept (Indrayana & Hendrati, 2013), and mental health (Davis & Humphrey, 2012). Among vocational school students, research has also demonstrated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and student learning motivation (Asy'ari et al., 2014) and a reduction in behavior classified as juvenile delinquency (Yunia et al., 2019). In the field of career development, research conducted by Farnia et al. (2018), Drastiana (2016), and Brown et al. (2003) has demonstrated that individuals with high emotional intelligence may experience less difficulty in navigating the career decision-making process. However, recent research has indicated the absence of a relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties (Lubis et al., 2021) or that the relationship is only weak (Hasanah, 2018). The weak results are thought to be due to a lack of emotional intelligence, which has not been able to reduce career decision-making difficulties. In light of these inconsistent results, it is postulated that other variables may be influencing the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties. Moreover, the research by Lubis et al. (2021) was conducted on high school students, which is equivalent to vocational school students who are in the exploration phase of their career development. This suggests that further investigation is required to ascertain the relationship between emotional intelligence and difficulties in making career decisions.

To further examine the possibility of other influencing variables of the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties, this study attempts to explore other factors that cause career decision-making difficulties, as well as the typical experience of vocational students with a work-oriented curriculum. Vocational students have the opportunity to do internships as part of their curriculum. This program facilitates students' understanding of the occupational world and the pathways they can pursue in accordance with their academic disciplines while also enabling them to set their career objectives. This phenomenon underscores the significance of goal-oriented commitment among vocational students, enabling them to direct their careers with confidence. Previous literature demonstrates the necessity for commitment to achieve goals in order to avoid hesitation in making career choices (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2012). Therefore, the variable that can bridge the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties is the goals that vocational students have and want to achieve.

Goal commitment represents an effort or determination to achieve goals, as reflected in the behavior of increasing effort to achieve goals, having persistence to achieve goals, and a sense of not wanting to lower the target goal and leave the target (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987). The existence of goal commitment in an individual can be characterized by high dedication in exerting efforts to achieve goals and a sense of responsibility to achieve the desired goals from the outset (Klein et al., 2012). Conversely, individuals who lack goal commitment are characterized by a lack of effort to achieve goals and many distractions that are felt due to a lack of focus on things that are relevant to achieving the goals set (Renn, 2003). Consequently, individuals must possess a high degree of goal commitment in order to achieve the objectives they have set for themselves.

In the context of individuals who are making career decisions, individuals who are emotionally intelligent are more likely to be able to adapt, have a sense of optimism, and be able to control their emotions and direct these emotions into appropriate behavior. Further, this will encourage them to have a desire to continue striving to achieve their goals, which in turn will prevent them from experiencing difficulties in making career decisions. Conversely, individuals with less emotional intelligence lack a sense of responsibility, a clear view of their future, and a strong goal commitment.

Consequently, they experience difficulties in making career decisions. This correlational quantitative research aims to demonstrate whether goal commitment acts as a mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties in final-year vocational students.

2. Method

This correlational quantitative study aims to examine the relationship between variables in a situation (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). The study was conducted to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence as the independent variable and career decision-making as the dependent variable, with goal commitment serving as a mediator. The selection of participants was carried out using a purposive sampling method, in which the researcher went directly to the vocational school in the hope of finding participants who immediately met the criteria. The participants in this study were vocational students in their final year of study who had undergone internship activities. The inclusion of this criterion was intended to ensure that students had completed the vocational high school curriculum and gained direct experience in the world of work (internship). The study was conducted offline, with researchers visiting all classes from all majors in the vocational high school to administer the test on the day of data collection. The questionnaire was completed by the students within the specified timeframe. A total of 189 students from five different majors participated in the study.

The instruments employed were the Career Decision Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) from Gati et al. (1996), the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form (TEIQue-SF) by Petrides (2009), and the Hollenbeck, Williams, and Klein Goal Commitment Scale (HWK Scale) by Hollenbeck et al. (1989). All instruments used are adapted into Indonesian language with CDDQ utilizing 6-point Likert Scale and TEIQue-SF and HWK Scale utilizing 7-point Likert Scale. All measuring instruments were pilot-tested on 30 vocational students to assess their reliability and internal validity. The reliability of the measuring instruments, as expressed by Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.8 points for the CDDQ, 0.83 points for the TEIQue-SF, and 0.79 points for the HWK Scale, all of which exceeded the minimum reliability limit of 0.7 points (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2013). The internal validity of the measuring instruments was assessed through the corrected item-total correlation, which yielded a range of 0.31 to 0.74 points. This falls within the range of internal validity as defined by Anastasi and Urbina (1997), which is 0.3 to 0.8 points. The results demonstrate that all measuring instruments have met the established validity and reliability requirements, rendering them suitable for use in actual data collection. Consequently, no changes or eliminations were made to the measuring instruments, as they were deemed valid and reliable. This study conducted no expert judgment process in evaluating the feasibility of the measuring instruments during the pilot study. Prior to data collection, an ethical review process was conducted and submitted to the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia. This research was deemed to have passed the ethical review through an ethical certificate with the number 112/FPsi.Ethics Committee/PDP.04.00/2022, which was issued on August 3, 2022.

Once the ethical certificate had been obtained, the study proceeded to distribute the research proposal to five schools. One state vocational school in Bogor was the sole recipient of the proposal, along with the permission letter and informed consent file that had been prepared by the researcher. This vocational school was selected as the site for data collection as it had a school counseling guidance unit with a work program that aligned with the research topic. Given that the participants were minors, the researcher sent an informed consent form for parents, signed by the counseling guidance representative, after the school disseminated a broadcast about data collection activities in the coordination group with parents. Once the permission procedure was completed, data collection commenced. The garnered data were processed using Hayes' (2013) mediation analysis test, which directly tests the mediating effect of variables without the need to ascertain whether there was a significant correlation between variables. A Pearson product-moment correlation test was conducted to ascertain the strength and significance of the relationship between the research variables.

3. Results

A total of 189 individuals participated in the study. However, 16 participants did not fill out the questionnaires completely, thereby, they were excluded from the statistical analysis. Consequently, only 173 data points were included in the final analysis. The sample was comprised of individuals from five different vocational majors: Banking and Microfinance, Hospitality, Animation, Broadcasting, and Classical Music. The demographic data of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Participants

		N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	43	24.9
	Female	130	75.1
Major	Banking and Microfinance	52	30.1
	Hospitality	31	17.9
	Animation	24	13.9
	Broadcasting	13	7.5
	Classical Music	53	30.6
	Total	173	100

The data that has been sorted for completeness was then processed to create a visual representation of the research variables. Table 2 describes the variables owned by research participants.

Table 2. Variables Owned by Research Participants

Variable	Min	Max	M	SD	Category
Difficulty in career decision-making	12	72	3.60	12.10	Medium to high (leaning towards "somewhat agree")
Emotional intelligence	30	210	4.19	18.17	Medium (leaning towards "neutral")
Goal commitment	17	119	4.93	11.04	Moderate to high (leaning towards "somewhat agree")

Hypothesis testing was performed using goal commitment acting as a mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and O of vocational students, as illustrated in Figure 1. In Figure 1, *LoS on $p < 0.05$, ** LoS on $p < 0.001$.

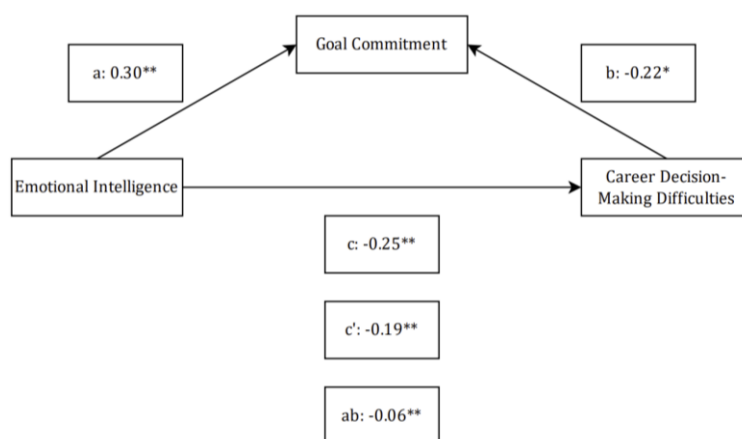


Figure 1. Results of Mediation Analysis

Figure 1 indicates that emotional intelligence has a significant direct effect on career decision-making difficulties, with the variable goal commitment serving as a partial mediator ($ab = -0.06$, $BootLLCI = -0.18$, $BootULCI = -0.19$). This suggests that goal commitment only partially mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties among final-year vocational students. The study also identified that goal commitment could enhance the impact

of emotional intelligence on reducing the prevalence of career decision-making difficulties among final-year vocational students ($c = -0.19, p < 0.001$; $c = -0.25, p < 0.001$). The primary hypothesis, which posits that goal commitment acts as a mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties, is accepted.

The correlation test conducted on all variables demonstrated that all variables were significantly correlated. First, it was found that the emotional intelligence variable, designated as the independent variable (IV), exhibited a significant negative relationship with the dependent variable, career decision-making difficulty ($r = -0.390, p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that high emotional intelligence is proven to reduce the level of career decision-making difficulties among vocational students. Furthermore, a significant negative relationship was also found between goal commitment and career decision-making difficulties ($r = -0.348, p < 0.01$). This indicates that the higher goal commitment of vocational students represents a lower level of career decision-making difficulties experienced by them. Finally, a positive and significant relationship was found between emotional intelligence and goal commitment ($r = 0.506, p < 0.01$). The results indicate that vocational students with higher emotional intelligence tend to exhibit higher levels of goal commitment.

Furthermore, it was demonstrated that in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties, there was a 15.21% ($r^2 = 0.1521$) proportion of the variance in career decision-making difficulties that could be explained by emotional intelligence. In the relationship between goal commitment and career decision-making difficulties, there is 12.11% ($r^2 = 0.1211$) of the variance in career decision-making difficulties that can be explained by goal commitment. The effect size of these two correlation analyses is relatively small (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). Conversely, the variance of goal commitment that can be explained by emotional intelligence has an effect size that tends to be strong, with a value of 25.6% ($r^2 = 0.256$).

4. Discussion

This study differs from previous studies in that it establishes a correlation between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties. This finding contrasts with the conclusions of Lubis et al. (2021), who investigated high school students and found no association between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties. The discrepancy between this study and the research of Lubis et al. (2021) lies in the utilization of distinct emotional intelligence models. Lubis et al. (2021) employed the ability model, whereas this study employed the trait model. The discrepancy in the models employed in these two studies can also be attributed to the distinct data collection instruments being utilized. In Lubis et al.'s research (2021), the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), which is rooted in the ability model perspective, was employed. In contrast, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form (TEIQue-SF), rooted in the trait model perspective, was utilized in this study. The literature from Di Fabio and Saklofske (2014) previously indicated that the relationship between the trait model of emotional intelligence is stronger than the ability model of emotional intelligence, aligning with the results of our studies. Consequently, the use of the trait model perspective in this study is considered an appropriate approach to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties.

Testing the primary hypothesis of the study yielded new findings indicating that goal commitment functions as a mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties. Although acting as a partial mediator, goal commitment was demonstrated to bridge the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties. This result is consistent with previous research indicating that emotional intelligence enables individuals to utilize their emotional abilities to achieve specific goals (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Wong & Law, 2002). Additionally, the career decision-making process necessitates effective goal management to ensure optimal decision-making (Kraimer et al., 2011).

The goal commitment only acts as a partial mediator due to the relatively weak relationship between research variables. In the Pearson correlation test results, it was found that the effect size between variables was relatively small. The effect size of the goal commitment as the mediator variable on the dependent variable, namely career decision-making difficulties, is relatively modest.

Consequently, even a high level of goal commitment is insufficient to reduce career decision-making difficulties, given their weak relationship. Conversely, the effect size between the independent variable of emotional intelligence and the dependent variable of career decision-making difficulties is more pronounced, indicating a stronger IV-to-DV relationship. This relationship does not necessitate the mediation of a third variable to exert an effect.

The existence of an effect size that tends to be small indicates the potential for other variables to have a greater effect in reducing career decision-making difficulties. When compared with the main theory proposed by Gati et al. (1996) and Gati and Saka (2001), which suggest that there are various factors that can cause career decision difficulties, emotional intelligence can be classified as one of the factors that can accompany other factors in causing career decision difficulties. The factor of lack of emotional intelligence can be categorized as a factor of a lack of information about the self or a lack of knowledge and awareness of individuals regarding their potential to choose an appropriate career. The same argument can be made regarding the relationship between goal commitment and career decision-making difficulties, which also tend to be small. In the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) proposed by Lent et al. (1994), the influence of significant goals on individuals serves as one aspect of the interaction between environmental factors and personal factors in shaping career choices. Consequently, further research is required to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that influence career decision-making, both internal and external factors. This is particularly pertinent for vocational students, for whom a more complete picture of their career decision-making journey is essential.

Although the effect size of emotional intelligence on career decision-making difficulties and goal commitment is typically modest, a relatively robust effect size was observed in the relationship between emotional intelligence and goal commitment. This result is believed to arise from the fact that both variables are internal factors that influence an individual's quality. Emotional intelligence is a multifaceted construct that encompasses various facets of individual personality, including the capacity to process and regulate emotions, adapt to specific circumstances, and recognize one's own strengths and limitations (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The multifaceted nature of the emotional intelligence construct suggests a potential relationship with the initial assumption that individuals who are able to perceive, process, and utilize emotional information will be better able to direct actions aligning with the set goals.

A further analysis was conducted on each of the dimensions of emotional intelligence, encompassing emotionality, self-control, well-being, and sociability, as well as the additional two aspects measured on TEIQUE-SF, namely self-motivation and adaptability. The results demonstrated that participants exhibited the highest scores on the well-being dimension, followed by adaptability and sociability. As outlined by Petrides (2009), the author of the TEIQUE-SF theory and measurement tool employed in this study, well-being encompasses aspects of self-esteem, optimism, and happiness in daily life. Adaptability, in turn, includes an individual's capacity to adjust to unfamiliar circumstances. Meanwhile, sociability comprises an individual's ability to be assertive, socially aware, and the management of other people's emotions. Some dimensions exhibited the highest mean values compared to other dimensions, which can be attributed to the level of goal commitment and career decision-making difficulties exhibited by participants. As extensively acknowledged, goal commitment also has a relationship with optimism. Research from Monzani et al. (2015) reveals that individuals with high levels of optimism trigger high goal commitment, which then enables these individuals to perceive themselves as having given enough effort to achieve their goals. The level of optimism and feelings of happiness in undertaking activities that facilitate career development among vocational high school students will foster an increase in their goal commitment, motivating them to persist in their efforts to achieve the best possible outcomes. Consequently, career decision-making difficulties can be avoided.

In addition, adaptability has been demonstrated to be associated with difficulties in career decision-making. Savickas' (1997) career adaptability theory posits that individuals must possess the requisite psychosocial abilities to navigate career transitions, engage in career development, and cope with traumatic experiences in the workplace (if such experiences arise). Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated the necessity for career adaptability in order to prevent

individuals from encountering difficulties in making career decisions (Karacan-Ozdemir, 2019; Hirschi et al., 2015; Parola & Marcionetti, 2015). Those with high career adaptability are able to plan future career decisions, demonstrate responsibility for themselves, exhibit curiosity about themselves and available career choices, and demonstrate confidence in making career choices (Savickas & Porfelli, 2012).

Although the measurement of adaptability in this study serves as only one of several aspects of emotional intelligence, without a specific focus on career adaptability, the theory has proven that adaptability is indeed necessary for individuals to undergo career transition. In the context of vocational students who are facing indecision and uncertain conditions due to the great number of available choices, the individual's ability to adapt to the world of work can be trained through an internship program. There are two primary objectives of the internship, including providing students with an opportunity to gain experience in their chosen field and facilitating the development of skills to enable them to adapt to the demands of the world of work. The process of recognizing career options, matching them with personal needs and circumstances, and developing these competencies can prevent individuals from experiencing difficulties in making career decisions (Gati et al., 1996).

A limitation of this study is that only one vocational high school with five majors participated. With the lack of schools participating in this study, the results are not fully representative of all vocational schools in Indonesia, particularly those with different majors. To produce a more comprehensive picture, a more diverse and representative sample is needed from various regions in Indonesia. Furthermore, the utilization of a measuring instrument with a 7-point Likert scale represents a further limitation. The use of an odd number of Likert scales has the consequence that the midpoint represents a "neutral" answer, which means that it is not visible whether participants agree or disagree with the statements listed on the measuring instrument. The presence of a neutral response option in emotional intelligence and goal commitment scales (TEIQue-SF and HWK Scale) has a potential to serve as a safe option especially when confronted with negative items, as it does not reflect the actual circumstances of the participants.

5. Conclusion

This study has successfully addressed the primary hypothesis, namely the mediating role of goal commitment in the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties. To further develop this research, future research is suggested to increase the sample size from different schools and vocational majors. This would allow for the testing of potential differences in results between schools. Furthermore, it is recommended that the measuring instrument used in future studies employ an even number of Likert scales to prevent the tendency of "neutral" responses from becoming the majority of participants' answers. Another avenue for future research is to examine career adaptability as a variable that can be developed within this research model.

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