

## Brief Report

# Students' Aspiration and Motivational Goal: A Comparative Study Between Javanese and Sundanese Ethnicities

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The present study compared two ethnicities, Javanese and Sundanese, within the Indonesia context on their educational aspiration and motivational goals. High school students, 127 students from Javanese background and 285 students from Sundanese background participated in the study. Students' educational aspirations had three dimensions: ambition ( $\alpha = .748$ ), enjoyment in school and life ( $\alpha = .662$ ), and importance of schooling to the future ( $\alpha = .816$ ); motivational goals had three dimensions: learning goals ( $\alpha = .864$ ), performance approach goals ( $\alpha = .862$ ), and performance avoidance goals ( $\alpha = .709$ ). The results for the Javanese participants showed that importance of schooling predicted students' learning goals, enjoyment in school and life predicted performance approach and performance avoidance goals. The results for the Sundanese participants showed ambition and enjoyment in school and life dimensions predicted students' learning goals. Students from Sundanese ethnic background had higher scores on ambition and importance of schooling to the future compared to Javanese students. They also had a higher score on learning goals than Javanese students.

*Keywords:* students' aspiration, motivational goals, ethnic comparison

Studi ini membandingkan aspirasi pendidikan dan motivasi berprestasi pada dua kelompok etnis di Indonesia: Jawa dan Sunda. Siswa Sekolah Menengah Atas, 127 siswa berlatar belakang Jawa dan 285 siswa berlatar belakang Sunda, berpartisipasi dalam studi ini. Aspirasi pendidikan diukur dari tiga dimensi, yakni ambisi ( $\alpha = .748$ ), menikmati kehidupan bersekolah ( $\alpha = .662$ ), dan pentingnya bersekolah untuk masa depan ( $\alpha = .816$ ); motivasi berprestasi diukur dari tiga dimensi: tujuan belajar ( $\alpha = .864$ ), pengharapan akan evaluasi positif ( $\alpha = .862$ ), dan penghindaran akan evaluasi negatif ( $\alpha = .709$ ). Hasil menunjukkan pentingnya bersekolah memprediksi tujuan belajar pada siswa beretnis Jawa, dan menikmati kehidupan bersekolah memprediksi pengharapan akan evaluasi positif dan penghindaran akan evaluasi negatif. Pada siswa beretnis Sunda dimensi ambisi dan menikmati kehidupan bersekolah memprediksi tujuan belajar siswa. Skor ambisi dan pentingnya bersekolah untuk masa depan dari siswa beretnis Sunda lebih tinggi dibandingkan skor dari siswa beretnis Jawa. Mereka juga menunjukkan skor lebih tinggi dalam tujuan belajar dibandingkan siswa beretnis Jawa.

*Kata kunci:* aspirasi siswa, motivasi berprestasi, perbandingan etnis

The present study examined the relationship between students' aspiration and their motivational goals based on ethnicity. Within the Indonesian context, the level of enrollment in higher education has been known

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to be smaller as the levels of enrollment in schools progressed like a pyramid. There were 67.98% of students in Junior High School, 47.81% in Senior High School, and only 11.99% of students in the University level (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2013a). Numerous factors might contribute to this situation, such as inequality of economic power in Indonesia (The World Bank, 2013) which forced families in low economic status to have their children work in order to help with their financial issues rather than attending schools.

Economic status may not be the only factor influencing school enrollment as student's aspiration could motivate him or her to aim for a higher education in order to have a better life. In fact, there have been uplifting news recently where students from low socio-economic background have been reported to have high level of academic achievement, for example Reini, the daughter of a pedicab driver graduated as the best student in her class and awarded a presidential scholarship to pursue a master degree in the United Kingdom. A student's aspiration is important to motivate students to aim for a higher education and this is likely to affect his or her motivational goals and achievement. When students have a high level of aspiration for their study, they are more likely to do anything in order to achieve their dream of having a higher education.

One factor that could be an important factor influencing students' educational aspiration is ethnicity. For comparison, the percentages of high school students enrolled in 2011 showed that 49.27 % of students enrolled in Jakarta, 59.68% in Yogyakarta, and 57.83% in North Sumatera (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2013b). In Indonesia, there is culture within culture (sub-cultures) as people in different regions of Indonesia identify themselves as the members of sub-ethnicities. In Yogyakarta (Central Java), people are likely to identify themselves as Javanese, whereas people in some parts of West Java identify themselves as Sundanese. People in North Sumatera is more likely to identify themselves as members of Batak ethnic group and people from West Sumatera identify themselves as members of Padang ethnic group.

Culture can influence or motivate people to act in a certain way (Banks, 1993; Schwartz, 2006). For example, people from Javanese background seem to prefer a gentle, non-aggressive approach in their effort to achieve something, whereas people from Batak or Minang ethnic background seem to favor a more aggressive approach to achieve their dreams or aspirations. Ethnicity has been found to be a differential factor when it comes to attribution or one's perception of the causes of one's academic successes and failures (Sutantoputri & Watt, 2012, 2013; Yan & Gaier, 1994), academic performance (Sutantoputri & Watt, 2013), and motivation (Woodrow & Chapman, 2002).

Indonesia, one of the most populated countries in the world, consisted of many ethnicities; with each ethnicity has their own cultural values. This is acknowledged as *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, a national slogan which literally means Unity in Diversity. As a person's

cultural background can influence his or her to think and act in a certain way, it is assumed that a person's educational aspiration can also be influenced by his or her ethnic background. Educational aspiration may be identified from social norms and daily customs within a society that are then translated into behaviors (see Muluk & Murniati, 2007). It seems likely that students from different ethnic background might have different educational aspiration, and their aspiration could predict their motivational goals. The present study is a preliminary study that compares several ethnic groups in Indonesia in regard to their aspiration and motivation. The present study is focused solely on Javanese and Sundanese ethnic background.

### **Educational Aspiration and Culture**

Aspiration is defined as the entire goals that an individual aims to achieve in the future (Sherwood, 1989). This means that aspiration has a leaning toward future orientation as well as the motivation part toward the goals. When a person has a high aspiration for his or her life, it means that he or she has high dreams or ambitions which then motivate him or her to fulfill them. Cultural ecological theory (Ogbu, 2003) indicates the importance of context when examining students' achievement strivings, particularly historical, social and cultural influences as parts of the context could influence students' achievement. Values that are transmitted in one's culture are more likely to have a significant impact on one's perception, and this includes a perception of education as well.

Being raised in a culture that does not appreciate or encourage education leads to a perception of lacking of support and the perceived lack of support could be a deterrent or debilitating factor to its people. Previous studies have shown that self-serving bias, how people are more likely to attribute positive events to themselves and negative events to other causes, is more likely to occur in Western cultures than in Eastern cultures (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Salili, 1996). Even among people in Eastern cultures, there were significant differences in their learning toward self-serving bias, where participants from China and Korea showed a larger bias compared to their Japanese and Pacific Islanders counterparts (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004).

The findings (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayaman, 1999; Mezulis et al, 2004; Salili, 1996) have shown that culture can shape people's thinking and behavior.

As a country with many ethnicities, Indonesian does not only have national values, but also share other values based on the ethnicities. These values are more influential as they might be closer to home. It is the reason why one's educational aspiration is closely related to one's culture (Murniati, 1998). This means that one's educational aspiration is related to the core value in one's society. Educational aspiration could be identified through values, norms, and habits in a society (Muluk & Murniati, 2007).

Previous studies with Indonesian participants have found that ethnicity is a significant predictive factor for the perception of academic success and failure, achievement motivation and achievement (Sutantoputri & Watt, 2012; 2013). The present study hypothesized that cultural values would influence students' educational aspiration and that these values would be closely related to their ethnic backgrounds. Different ethnicities (or sub-ethnic groups) in Indonesia would yield different aspiration level. Furthermore, students' aspiration levels would be a predictive factor for their achievement motivation.

### **Achievement Goals Motivation and Culture**

Achievement motivation is one of the common phrases in the learning context which refers to the type of motivation that drives students to achieve their goals (Dweck & Elliot, 1983). Goals can be defined as the cognitive representations of different purposes which a student may adopt in a learning situation (Urduan & Maehr, 1995). In the learning context, there are three well-known goal orientation concepts: mastery or learning, performance approach and performance avoidance (Dweck, 1986). As students adopt a particular goal orientation, this goal will direct and motivate them to achieve. Students with mastery or learning goal orientation are motivated to develop their competence for their own pleasure, whereas students with a performance approach goal orientation are motivated to demonstrate their abilities or competence to outperform others as they want to look better than other students. Students with a performance avoidance goal orientation are motivated not to be perceived or thought incompetence in comparison to others. These students are motivated to show any lack of competence which they think would be seen by others.

Studies have shown that learning goal orientation has been found positively related to a high level of engagement in learning (Ames, 1992), interest in study (Senko & Harackiewicz, 2005), and persistency

(Harackiewicz et al., 2002). In general, this type of motivation has a positive effect on students. As students with a performance approach goal orientation are motivated to show their competence to others, they have been found to prefer surface processing to deep learning when studying, for example by using rote memorization and repetitive rehearsal (Greener & Miller, 1996) which takes a shorter period of time than deep learning and covering a lot more of study material that are possibly come out in an exam without having a deep understanding on the material. Nevertheless, this type of motivation can provide a benefit as a drive to show off one's competence can lead to persistent, effortful, and examination performance (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999).

Compared to the other two types of motivation, performance avoidance goal orientation has been found to have a negative effect on students as it is positively related to self-handicapping, such as withdrawal and cheating (Urduan, 2004). Students might choose not to do something (withdrawal) as they are afraid of making fool of themselves instead of trying to perform. They might choose to cheat to improve their grades, as their grades are important to their image. A previous study with Latino, European American, and Asian background of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in the U.S. has found that Asian Americans had higher levels of performance avoidance goals than their students in other ethnicities (Witkow & Fuligni, 2007). The study showed that differences in ethnic backgrounds within a society might be related to motivational goals. In a multi-cultural society such as Indonesia, this would mean that different ethnicities in different parts of Indonesia have different motivational goals.

### **Javanese Ethnicity**

Javanese society is a patriarchal society with a distinct obligation of fulfillment within the society which is translated into hierarchical relationships (Mulder, 1994). Parents have their obligation to raise their children (Lestari, Faturochman, & Kim, 2010), to become "dadi wong" (a respected member of society with a certain spiritual power and sometimes attached to certain socio-economic status; Triratnawati, 2005), which literally means to become a full human being. A person is considered attaining this if he or she is respected by the members of society where he or she lives, this might take material or non-material possession. The examples of non-material possessions in a broader sense are family harmony and obedient children.

Children are raised to defer to their parents and the elderly as a sign of respect and a good upbringing. To go against parents' will and wishes may result in a negative consequence as the Javanese people believe the concept of "kualat" (supernatural punishment as a result of going against the order of God). It is Javanese parents' obligation and wishes to raise their children well so that they will be "Dadi Wong" (becoming a respected member of the society). In their pursuit of "Dadi Wong", the children must first learn to be Javanese ("Dadi Jawa"), which entails of showing respect to the elderly, in other words deferring to their wishes.

The Javanese culture which emphasizes on social hierarchy and order/harmony may result in tendency to conform to the society, particularly if one wants to be accepted as a member of the society. If a family considers that education is important, then the children are more likely to have high levels of educational aspiration, whereas if a family does not consider education to be important, then the children are more likely to have low levels of educational aspiration.

### Sundanese Ethnicity

People from Sundanese ethnicity background consider themselves to be different from the Javanese people, even though they live in Java Island (Surahman, 2010). Sundanese people live mostly in West Java, in places like Bandung, Cianjur, Sumedang, Garut, and Tasikmalaya Sundanese people highly value intelligence, character, spirit (*semangat*), and good behaviour (Irawan, 2012). Their way of living emphasizes on strong family and harmony values within the society. Sundanese people highly value craftiness or clever knowledge, and wisdom if they are used for good purposes. Having a good character such as being "bageur" (a good person) is considered to be something to strive for; this includes having a dignity and being loyal. Another highly valued concept in Sundanese society is having a spirit which relates to human effort, to eagerly striving while accepting God's will.

As Sundanese people highly value intelligence, having a good character which also indicates internal motivation to do the best while believing and accepting God's will, it would not be presumptuous to assume that students from this ethnic background would have a high educational aspiration level as a sign of their intelligence and effort ethos, which also indicates their motivational goals.

## Method

### Participants

Data were gathered from Indonesian high school students in Jogjakarta for the Javanese ethnicity, and in Sukabumi for the Sundanese ethnicity. There were 127 Javanese students, consisted of 34.6% males and 61.4% females. For the Sundanese ethnicity, there were 285 students consisted of 32% males and 68% females.

### Measures

Two types of questionnaires were employed to measure the variables in the present study. Student Aspiration Survey (Plucker, 1996) was used to measure educational aspiration of the students. There were three dimensions of student aspiration that were used: ambition ( $\alpha = .748$ ), enjoyment in school and life ( $\alpha = .662$ ), and importance of schooling to the future ( $\alpha = .816$ ). Students' motivational goals were measured with Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, Maher, Huda, Andermann, Andermann, Freeman, Gheen, Kaplan, Kumar, Middleton, Nelson, Roeser, & Urda, 2000). There were three motivational goal dimensions: learning goal ( $\alpha = .864$ ), performance approach goal ( $\alpha = .862$ ), and performance avoidance goal ( $\alpha = .709$ ).

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using multiple linear regressions with the three dimensions of student aspiration (ambition, enjoyment, and importance) as the independent variables and the three dimensions of motivational goals (learning, performance approach, and performance avoidance) as the dependent variables for each ethnicity. A series of analysis of variance was conducted to test the significant differences based on ethnicities.

## Results

The regression analysis ( $p < .01$ ) for Javanese ethnicity showed that the importance of schooling to the future predicted learning goal ( $\beta = .400$ ). Javanese students who considered school to be important for their future were more likely to adopt a learning goal. Enjoyment of school and life was found to predict performance approach ( $\beta = .274$ ).

and performance avoidance goal ( $\beta = .267$ ). Students who enjoyed their school life were more likely to have a desire to demonstrate their competence. Nonetheless, for some students, the enjoyment of school life made them to be more likely avoid the perception of incompetence.

For Sundanese ethnicity, the regression analysis ( $p < .01$ ) showed that ambition predicted learning goal ( $\beta = .210$ ). Students who had high levels of ambition for their future were more likely to adopt a learning goal orientation. Similarly, the enjoyment of school life was found to predict the learning goal ( $\beta = .211$ ). Sundanese students who enjoyed their school life were more likely to have a desire to develop their competence.

Analyses of variance based on ethnicity (Javanese and Sundanese) showed that there were significance differences on two dimensions of aspirations (ambition,  $F(411.1) = 25.09, p < .00$ ; and importance of school to the future,  $F(411.1) = 29.82, p < .00$ ) and one of the motivational goals (learning goal). A significant difference on one of the motivational goals (learning goal) was also found significant,  $F(411.1) = 18.08, p < .00$ . The Sundanese participants had higher scores across the three dimensions compared to their counterparts. They had higher levels of ambition for the future ( $M = 5.72, SD = .50$ ) than the Javanese students ( $M = 5.33, SD = 1.06$ ). They also had higher scores on the importance of schooling toward the future ( $M = 5.58, SD = .63$ ) than Javanese students ( $M = 5.09, SD = 1.17$ ). They had also higher scores on learning goal ( $M = 5.42, SD = .77$ ) than Javanese students ( $M = 4.96, SD = 1.32$ ).

## Discussion

The results showed that Javanese students who perceived that attending school is important to their future were more likely to adopt a learning goal orientation. The results also showed that their enjoyment of school life was related to a performance approach or performance avoidance goal. These results might show the underlying belief of "Kawula Manunggal Gusti" (Iklila, 2008). The concept itself literally means to become one with the Divine. The Javanese people highly value harmonization with the order of Nature, to harmonize oneself with the Divine (becoming one with the Divine), furthermore, the harmony value also applies to the relationships within the society, such as keeping a peaceful relationship with others which may lead to a high level of conformity in the society.

As this underlying concept is communicated through values, norms and customs in the society, it might be internalized by the students. They might feel the need to understand the whole picture, such as understanding why school is important to their future and therefore, they might prefer to develop their own competence to achieve their personal goals in the future. The harmony concept which is highly valued in Javanese society along with the concept of becoming one, might lead the students to learn to enjoy their company, to blend in with it, to become one wherever they are. Furthermore, this concept of harmony and becoming one with one's group might also related to their belief of "dadi wong" which implicitly emphasized on the importance of being respected by others on behalf of their family. This might lead them to a desire to show to others how competent they are, or to have a preference for not being perceived as incompetent.

Sundanese people highly valued intelligence, good character, good spirit, and appropriate behavior. This might explain why ambition for the future and enjoyment of school life predicted learning goal among Sundanese participants. As Sundanese people appreciate intelligence and the strive to become a better person in life, having abilities in order to be able to have a good life and to help others, they were more likely to have ambition for their future and show efforts to develop their competence. As having a good character also means to be helpful and useful in the society, which means using one's intelligence to benefit others, the concept of being related to others within the society is also implicitly consistent with the psyche of Sundanese people. This could explain why their enjoyment of school life was positively related to their learning goal. The harmony of being a member of one's society (i.e. school) is coupled with a drive to make oneself better in order to be a useful member of society.

The results also showed that there were significant differences based on ethnicity in ambition, importance of school for the future, and learning goal. The Sundanese participants were found to obtain higher scores across the three dimensions than their counterparts. Cultural ecological theory explains that socio-cultural factor needs to be taken into consideration in the learning process (Ogbu, 2003). This is appropriate due to the influence of cultural values of students. As shown from the results, the Sundanese participants were found to have higher levels of ambition for their future than the Javanese participants. The underlying beliefs which are translated into values,

norms, and customs within each society might cause the differences. The Javanese belief of “eling lan waspada” which relates to the relationship between one with the Divine and one with his/her fellow human beings favors one to be humble. This, along with becoming one concept, might make the Javanese people to be more accepting (“nrimo”). On the other hand, Sundanese people, although they also share deep religious belief, might believe that using one’s intelligence to be a useful member of society is a good thing as intelligence and *semangat* are highly valued in their culture (Irawan, 2012). Out of the 12 leadership characteristics which are highly valued by Sundanese people (Suryani NS, 2012), *morogol-rogol* (spirited by high work ethos) and *lapitan* (multi-talents, knowledgeable) values might explain why the students perceived that having ambition is valuable, especially when education was seen as a tool to achieve a better life. This may explain why the students’ scores were high on the importance of schooling to the future. In contrast, having an ambition in Javanese culture might be perceived as something crass and a disturbance to the social harmony. Overall, the high level appreciation toward intelligence might be one of the plausible reasons why the Sundanese participants had the highest scores on learning goal. It is possible that these participants perceived that developing one’s competence for one’s sake is a definite way to be intelligent rather than just showing off their competence to others. They might rather learning doing things, learning and mastering new materials rather than avoiding to be perceived incompetent by others.

## Conclusion

The results have shown that within the Indonesian context, ethnicity is an important factor for learning. The results indicate that in a multi-cultural society such as Indonesia, there are sub-cultural differences in values, norms, and customs, which could influence the members of sub-cultures in different ways. Future studies are recommended to further explore the influence of ethnicity on students’ performance and use this knowledge to help students improving their learning.

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