

Career Decision-Making in Indonesia: Cultural Values among Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau Pengambilan Keputusan Karier di Indonesia: Nilai-Nilai Budaya pada Etnis Jawa, Sunda, dan Minangkabau

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Abstract:

Career decision making is a complex process that is not only influenced by internal factors but is also guided by cultural values that shape the way individuals weigh their life choices and priorities, making this research important to be conducted. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of ethnic identity and cultural values in the career decision-making process among early-career employees from Javanese, Sundanese, and Minang ethnic groups in Indonesia. The research method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The participants in this study were three early-career employees each representing one ethnicity (2 F, 25 yo; 1 M, 26 yo). Participants were selected purposely and interviewed in depth. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify relevant patterns and themes. The results of the study indicate that internal individual factors and cultural values can have a complex influence on individuals in making career decisions. The value of collectivism is found in the Javanese ethnic with the family philosophy of "mangan ora mangan sing penting ngumpul" (togetherness values). Likewise, the Sundanese ethnic group is known to prioritize the values of "luhur budi," "handap asor," and "someah hade ka semah," focusing on harmonious social relations, specifically by respecting others and choosing to avoid conflict. The Minang ethnic group found something different, namely the spirit of "merantau," where individuals prioritize proactive adaptation strategies based on high mobility to be able to seek opportunities outside their hometown. These differences indicate that cultural values can influence individuals' preferences, strategies, and ways of facing career challenges. Taken together, the dynamics of cultural values can be the basis for developing an adaptive career decision-making model. This research is expected to be the basis for designing culture-based interventions that support individuals in planning and managing their careers effectively.

Keywords:

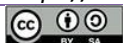
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1. Introduction

Career decision-making is a multidimensional process that can be influenced by intrapersonal, interpersonal, and sociocultural factors. Indonesia is a country with a multicultural society. In the context of a multicultural society, cultural values and ethnic identities play an important role in shaping how individuals evaluate, consider, and decide on their career choices. Studies show that multicultural identity can influence an individual's career orientation (Martin & Gao, 2023). Furthermore, the development of career identity and multicultural identity also interact with each other, then forming a unique career path based on the age and identity patterns of individuals (Martin

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et al., 2024). Therefore, in today's era of uncertainty and dynamic job transitions, cultural values have become crucial in shaping career decision-making among early-career employees.

Previous studies have revealed the important role of social context in shaping individual career aspirations and choices, for example family (Bejanyan et al., 2015; Sawitri et al., 2015; Sawitri & Creed, 2017), community, teachers and peers (Amini et al., 2023) which influence the career choice process. Several studies have used the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SSCT) approach to explore how social, contextual and opportunity structure factors influence career choices (Amini et al., 2023; Andresen et al., 2020; Brown & Bimrose, 2016). Nevertheless, this study comes from an individualistic society and is considered to be insufficient to describe how collectivistic cultural values influence the decision-making process. A body of research collectively highlights the limitations of career theories that ignore structural and cultural factors that may influence individual career choices and behavior (Davey, 2020; Garbin et al., 2024). Within collectivist cultural contexts, such as in Indonesia (Sawitri et al., 2015), Korea (Kim et al., 2016), Vietnam (Van Trang et al., 2020) dan Taiwan (Chen et al., 2023), cultural norms including family obligations, parental respect, and social harmony are often dominant factors in determining one's career direction, sometimes even greater than personal aspirations.

Cultural values provide a frame of reference that shapes an individual's perception of the meaning of work, success, and career responsibilities in their life (Ayob et al., 2022; Benson et al., 2020; Smale et al., 2019). Moreover, it also influences the way they choose and take risks in their careers (Ayob et al., 2022; Fisk & Overton, 2020; Kim et al., 2025; Yasdin et al., 2025). In Indonesia, ethnic cultural values can also determine individuals in considering career choices. For example, a life philosophy such as "*mangan ora mangan sing penting kumpul*", which comes from Javanese culture, illustrates how important togetherness and loyalty are even when the person is short of money. This value signifies that relational attachment and social harmony are more important than fulfilling personal needs (Tandywijaya, 2020; Ulfah et al., 2023). Through the lens of career decision-making, it can explain why Javanese people tend to consider the wishes of their family or group rather than competitive or individualistic personal aspirations. The study reveals that Javanese cultural structures that exist in society, such as *rukun* (social harmony, or harmonious unity in Javanese cultural terms) (Santoso, 2012), *sungkan* (respect) (Ulfah et al., 2023), and *tepo seliro* (tolerance) (Intania et al., 2021) are felt to be very strong and determine social decision-making, including those related to education and career.

In addition to Javanese culture, Sundanese cultural values also have a strong influence on shaping individuals' perspectives and strategies in making decisions. One of the basic principles in Sundanese social and cultural relations is the value of *silih asih*, *silih asah*, *silih asuh*, each of which reflects the dimensions of harmonious relationships, education and principle guidance (Alhafizh et al., 2021). The concept of these values reflects how Sundanese society prioritizes individual empowerment in achieving quality of life (Huzaema et al., 2024). In the career decision-making process, these values may manifest as emotional support and social expectations (*asih*), clarity in life strategies (*asah*), and a careful attitude of safeguarding to achieve goals (*asuh*) (Alhafizh et al., 2021). These values establish a highly relational guidance system in which individuals perceive the need to involve their families in making important decisions, including those related to careers. Sundanese society emphasizes politeness and the desire to maintain harmony, thereby leading to the avoidance of conflicts between personal aspirations and social expectations. In the career context, individuals may consequently select a career path that is not their ideal personal choice but is considered the most appropriate for preserving respect and affection toward the family.

The Minangkabau culture is characterized by a matrilineal kinship system and the life philosophy of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*, which collectively shape individuals' worldviews and orientations in navigating life (Asyari, 2016), including in career decision-making. Within this culture, religious values and social responsibilities toward the maternal family are highly esteemed (Tono et al., 2019). At the same time, Minangkabau culture promotes the spirit of independence through the tradition of *merantau*, a social practice that encourages individuals, particularly men, to leave their hometowns in pursuit of experience, education, or employment

elsewhere (Ismira et al., 2018; Manik et al., 2023). The tradition of *merantau* is regarded not merely as an economic necessity but as a social rite to demonstrate independence, resilience, and the honor of oneself and one's family (Asyari, 2016; Manik et al., 2023). In the context of career decision-making, this value serves as a driving force motivating Minangkabau individuals to take risks and embrace opportunities beyond their place of origin. Minangkabau society views *merantau* as a means of expanding knowledge, gaining experience, and interacting with new environments, which may ultimately lead to settling in economically promising locations (Bunaiya et al., 2021). This illustrates that although Minangkabau culture maintains strong family ties, individuals are simultaneously given space and encouragement to pursue career decisions oriented toward achievement and exploration. Nevertheless, such decisions remain framed within strong cultural values, such as preserving family reputation, safeguarding the *marwah kaum* (collective honor of the kinship group), and fulfilling expectations as *urang awak* (fellow Minangkabau people) who succeed in the diaspora.

Therefore, understanding career decision-making cannot be separated from the cultural context in which individuals are situated. This study aims to explore the subjective experiences of early-career employees from three major Indonesian ethnic groups (Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau) in order to understand how their cultural values influence this process. A phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the nuances of meaning and the dynamics experienced by individuals as they navigate this complex and contextually embedded process of career decision-making.

Cultural Values and Career Decision-Making

Cultural values play an important role in shaping individuals' perceptions of work, success, and social responsibility. Previous studies identified four cultural orientation profiles based on individualism and collectivism, in which groups with high individualism values demonstrated protean career attitudes, career adaptability, and proactive career behaviors compared to groups with lower individualism (Kim et al., 2025). Moreover, studies based on the Hofstede model show that Indonesia's individualism score is very low, indicating the dominance of collectivism in social life and the workplace, as a result career decisions are often influenced by family and groups expectations, prioritizing harmony in social relationships (Artina et al., 2020). This reflects that internalized cultural values influence career attitudes and behaviors. In collectivist societies, career decision-making is often not conducted individually but rather through a process of negotiation with family, social networks, and prevailing ethnic norms. For instance, in South Korea, family expectations, informational support, and financial support are crucial factors influencing career decision-making (Kim et al., 2016). Similarly, in Indonesia, perceptions of congruence with parents have a significant impact on career aspirations (Sawitri & Creed, 2017). These findings suggest that, in Asian cultures, career decisions are frequently guided by values of harmony, respect for parents, and collective achievement (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Li et al., 2021; Vautero et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, studies have shown that Sundanese and Javanese individuals possess different personal values and work cultures but are equally good at work (Assyofa et al., 2024), while the Minangkabau community emphasizes independence and the culture of migration as part of the process of self-development and achieving success (Syapitri et al., 2025). Together, these cultural orientations provide a strong evaluative framework for how individuals consider their career choices. Indonesian society tends to prioritize stability, family recognition, and social loyalty as central considerations in making life decisions, including career choices. Based on this discussion, the first research question is formulated as follows:

RQ1. How do influenced cultural values affect the career decision-making process among early-career employees?

Ethnic Identity, Intergenerational Expectations, and Career Decision-Making

Ethnic identity is not only symbolic but also normative and functional in shaping behavior, including career decisions. Previous studies have shown that ethnic identity has a positive relationship with career decision-making self-efficacy (Kim & Choi, 2019; Lewis et al., 2018; Mejia-Smith &

Gushue, 2017). Therefore, it can be stated that ethnic identity plays an important role in connecting various psychological factors with career decision-making ability. For young working-age groups, the tension between individual aspirations and family or ethnic community expectations constitutes a complex issue influenced by cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors. Among refugee youth in Australia, evidence demonstrates tensions between personal aspirations and the expectations of families and ethnic communities (Ziaian et al., 2023). Similarly, among Asian-American youth, stronger family obligation attitudes are associated with higher aspirations (Kiang et al., 2015). These findings suggest that ethnic identity may influence the alignment of individual aspirations with family and community expectations. In addition, the study results show that educational and family background may generate diverse aspirations, which underscores the tension between individual goals and familial or societal expectations (Buzov et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2025). In Indonesia, Angelia and Hasan (2017) found that the tradition of *merantau* motivates Minangkabau youth to leave their villages, as they are not yet considered useful for their home community. Meanwhile, Javanese culture strongly emphasizes the importance of maintaining social harmony and family values, and tends to avoid conflict (Hasanah et al., 2019; Rajiani & Kot, 2020; Waston et al., 2024). Based on these cultural norms, individuals from Javanese backgrounds are more likely to prioritize family harmony over personal achievement. In Sundanese society, the values of *silih asah*, *silih asih*, *silih asuh* are deeply embedded in social and cultural practices, encouraging harmony and human development through wisdom and social support (Indah et al., 2024; Saepudin et al., 2020). These values provide a framework for decision-making that is oriented toward parental considerations and social support. Based on this body of literature, the second research question is formulated as follows:

RQ2. How do intergenerational dynamics reflect ethnic identity manifested in during the career decision-making process of early-career employees?

Research Gaps on Culture and Context in Career Decision-Making

The importance of cultural context has been widely discussed in career development; however, most existing studies have employed quantitative approaches within individualistic and collectivistic societies (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Garbin et al., 2024; Hamouche et al., 2023; Kantamneni et al., 2018; S. Kim et al., 2025; Lewis et al., 2018). In Indonesia, although studies have begun to examine the influence of cultural values on career choices (Fajriani et al., 2024; Febriani, 2023; Saefulloh et al., 2023; Sulusyawati & Melati, 2019), in-depth exploration through a phenomenological approach that uncovers subjective meanings in ethnic contexts remains limited. Existing research has not sufficiently explored how young individuals from different cultural backgrounds in Indonesia integrate cultural values with modern challenges such as digitalization, labor mobility, and multigenerational pressures. Therefore, cross-ethnic understanding of cultural patterns that shape the career decision-making process becomes essential to address this gap. Based on this consideration, the third research question is formulated as follows:

RQ3. What are the typical and similar cultural patterns in the career decision-making process of Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau ethnic individuals who are in the early phase of their careers?

2. Methods

Study Context

This study was conducted within the context of Indonesia's multicultural society, which is characterized by strong ethnic diversity and deeply rooted value systems. The primary focus of the research is on young working-age individuals (*early-career employees*), namely those who are in the transitional phase from education to the workforce and have less than five years of work experience. This group is considered highly relevant to study, as they are in the stage of making long-term career decisions that may be shaped by cultural and familial dynamics.

Specifically, the study focuses on three major ethnic groups in Indonesia, Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau, each of which possesses distinctive cultural value systems transmitted across generations. These three ethnic groups were selected because they represent different patterns

of values and social systems in interpreting work and life orientation. Cultural values function not only as symbolic identity but also as evaluative and motivational frameworks in career choice processes (Yao & McWha-Hermann, 2025). The influence of these cultural values may be reflected in the form of support, pressure, or negotiation between personal aspirations and social expectations. The study was carried out by reaching participants residing in urban and semi-urban areas of Indonesia through online interviews. This approach enabled participant selection based on ethnic and early-career criteria without being constrained by geographic location, while also facilitating the exploration of cultural meanings that emerge within the context of social mobility and career digitalization.

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to understand how ethnic cultural values influence the career decision-making process of young working-age individuals. This design was chosen because it enables researchers to explore in depth the subjective meanings constructed by individuals through their interactions with the socio-cultural realities they experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Phenomenology is grounded in the assumption that human experiences carry inherent meaning, which can only be understood through the direct interpretation of those who live the experience. Accordingly, this research does not merely focus on “what” individuals decide, but also on “how” and “why” such decisions are made within the context of cultural values, ethnic identity, and the social relations that shape them.

The phenomenological design is also relevant for bridging individual experiences with broader cultural structures. In this context, the experience of career decision-making is understood as the intersection between internal values (such as personal aspirations and ethnic identity) and external values (such as family expectations and societal norms). Phenomenology is therefore considered appropriate for capturing the complexity of Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau experiences in interpreting work and success. As an interpretative approach, this study adopted the principles of the phenomenology of practice and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which positioned the researcher as an interpretative partner in understanding participants’ meaning-making worlds (Crawford, 2019; Miller et al., 2018). The analytical process was conducted reflectively and contextually, taking into account participants’ cultural backgrounds as well as the researcher’s positionality as a member of society with an inherent value framework.

Participant

The participants in this study were early-career employees from three major Indonesian ethnic groups: Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau. All participants were in the early-career stage, defined as having less than five years of professional work experience and being under the age of 30. They held at least a bachelor’s degree (S1) and were employed across various sectors, both governmental and private. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who met the criteria and could reflect career decision-making experiences within the cultural value systems of their respective ethnic backgrounds. Selection was based on the consideration that participants possessed the verbal capacity to articulate personal experiences, demonstrated cultural awareness, and were able to narratively reflect on the relationship between cultural values and their career decisions.

The participants consisted of three individuals, with each representing one ethnic group: Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau. The focus on cross-ethnic representation aimed to explore both the uniqueness and the potential similarities in career decision-making processes within each cultural context. The Javanese participant (F, 25 yo, 2y employed) originated from Bantul (with Javanese parents originating from the Yogyakarta Special Region), the Minangkabau participant (M, 26 yo, 3y employed) from Medan (with Minangkabau parents originating from the Chaniago and Tanjung clans), and the Sundanese participant (M, 25 yo, 2y employed) from Tasikmalaya (with Sundanese parents originating from the Priangan region). Although the sample size was limited, this approach aligns with the principle of depth of meaning in phenomenological research (Englander, 2012). To preserve confidentiality, participants’ identities were anonymized using codes (e.g., P1–

Javanese, P2–Minangkabau, and P3–Sundanese). Each participant was interviewed in-depth for a duration ranging from 60 to 120 minutes, employing a semi-structured format.

Data Collection Procedures

The data in this study were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted online using the Zoom platform. A semi-structured format was chosen because it provides a systematic framework for thematic exploration, while still allowing participants to freely develop their personal narratives (Longhurst, 2009). It also allowed researchers to remain flexible and ask additional questions when deemed necessary to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon. The interview guide was formulated based on a framework of career experiences and cultural values within Indonesian ethnic groups. Each interview was recorded using digital audio devices, with the consent of the participants. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian and retained participants' native expressions, including the use of local terms or ethnic phrases, to maintain an authentic cultural context. The collected data were transcribed verbatim, double-checked for accuracy, and prepared for thematic analysis. The interviews were structured in six main phases: opening, sociodemographic data collection, exploration of ethnic identity, career experiences, cultural value influences, and closing, as presented in Table 1 below.

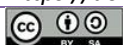
Table 1. General Structure of Phenomenological Interview

Interview Phase	Main Topics	Content
Opening	Information and ethical aspects	Explains the study purpose, ethical aspects, and obtains participant consent for audio recording. All participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without consequence.
Introduction	Sociodemographic data	Demographic information collected included age, gender, ethnicity, region of origin, education level, current job, length of service, and marital status.
Exploration	Ethnic identity and cultural values	The interviews explored the meaning of ethnic identity, the core life values derived from the culture of origin, and, where relevant, participants' experiences of cultural difference.
Exploration	Career decision-making experiences	Exploration how participants made their initial career decision, influencing factors (family, environment, personal value), along with the dynamics and challenges experienced.
Exploration	Influence of cultural values on the career process	Exploring the extent to which cultural values (collectivism, tradition, spirituality) influence career choice and strategies, together with the role of social support and family expectation.
Closing	Final questions and appreciation	Participants were given the opportunity to share any other relevant and important points. The session concluded with thanks and appreciation for their participation.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data in this study were analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis approach (Naeem et al., 2023), which emphasizes a systematic process of extracting meanings and conceptualization. This approach was chosen because it provides both flexibility and structure in interpreting participants' subjective narratives in a deep and contextual manner. The process began with transcription and familiarization with the data (Step 1), in which all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read to gain an overall understanding of the context. The researchers then identified significant quotations and selected keywords (Step 2) based on their relevance to the research focus, such as cultural experiences, decision-making, and social relations. The next stage, open coding (Step 3), involved assigning labels to segments of participants' narratives according to the essential meanings that emerged. These codes were subsequently grouped into sub-themes and main themes (Step 4), taking into account conceptual connections and the frequency of their occurrence in the data.

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Examples of emerging themes included “the influence of family values on career decisions” and “adjustment to social expectations.”

The next stage was conceptualization (Step 5), which involved connecting the themes with theory and cultural context through the interpretation of identified keywords, codes, and narrative patterns. The researchers employed field memos and critical reflection to capture both cross-ethnic themes and findings specific to certain ethnic groups, while maintaining sensitivity to the social positions and values carried by participants as well as by the researchers themselves. In the final stage (Step 6), a conceptual model was constructed to represent the dynamic relationship between ethnic cultural values and career decision-making among early-career employees. This model not only reflects the empirical findings but also offers insights that can be applied in designing culture-based interventions within the context of career development in Indonesia.

Subsequently, table 2 presents an illustration of the data analysis process, which yielded three main themes representing the dynamics of culture-based career decision-making: influence of cultural values in decision-making, intergenerational strategies in decision-making, and socio-cultural challenges in the career context. Each main theme consists of sub-themes developed through the grouping of codes based on shared meanings and conceptual connections. For instance, sub-themes such as “deference to parental authority,” “family honor (*marwah*),” and “maintaining family harmony” were classified under the main theme of intergenerational strategies in decision-making. The grouping of themes was conducted inductively and iteratively, considering the consistency of meaning across participants as well as its relevance to the formulated research questions. Relationships between codes, sub-themes, and themes were gradually established through analytic memos and in-depth researcher reflection. As part of the validation process, the researchers sent excerpts of transcripts along with their coding to one qualitative research expert and one local cultural expert from the relevant ethnic background. The feedback obtained was integrated into the final formulation of themes to ensure content validity, cultural contextualization, and interpretive sensitivity to the data.

Table 2. Illustration of Data Saturation Process and Thematic Analysis Development

No	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding	Illustrative Participant Quote
1	Influence of Cultural Values in Decision-Making	The Javanese cultural values of <i>nrimo</i> (acceptance with sincerity) and <i>legowo</i> (sincere willingness) function to set boundaries on ambition	“Just follow what my parents say”, “Moderation in ambition”	Family compliance and acceptance of prevailing conditions	Compromise strategies in career decisions	“When my parents have already given directions, I prefer to follow. Even though I actually have other desires, I am afraid of disappointing them.”
		The Minangkabau tradition of <i>merantau</i> (outmigration for self-development) function as a driving force for career mobility	“If we do not migrate, we are considered as not having progressed”, “ <i>Merantau</i> reflects the pursuit of opportunities”	Social mobility and self-validation	Mobility and <i>merantau</i> as career strategies	“As a Minangkabau, <i>merantau</i> is already an obligation. Through it, we learn independence and uphold the family’s good name.”
		The Sundanese values of <i>luhur budi</i> (noble character), <i>handap asor</i> (humility), and <i>soemah hade ka semah</i> (hospitality) serve as guiding principles for career ethics	“Must be <i>someah</i> , don’t offend people”, “Don’t want to stand out”	Interpersonal politeness and relationship maintenance	The value of politeness as a career guideline	“I was taught to always practice <i>someah hade ka semah</i> , so when choosing a job it must also be one that allows me to continue respecting others.”

No	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding	Illustrative Participant Quote
2	Intergenerational Strategies in Decision-Making	Deference to parental authority (Javanese)	"Following parents' wishes", "Worried about disappointing"	Maintaining family harmony	Compromise and coexistence strategies	"I prefer to follow the path suggested by my parents, because I am afraid of being seen as not <i>manut</i> (obedient)."
		Upholding family dignity and bringing pride to the community (Minangkabau)	"Becoming a role model for younger siblings", "Upholding the family's good name"	Social expectations and collective pride	Family honor (<i>marwah</i>) as the basis of decision-making	"My achievements are not only for myself, but also so that the people in my village can feel proud."
		Avoiding conflict with parents and family (Sundanese)	"According to parental direction", "Not wanting to disappoint"	Avoidance of family conflict	Harmony as a decision-making strategy	"I usually follow my parents so that there is no conflict."
		Maintaining geographical proximity to family (Sundanese)	"Not wanting to be far from parents", "Feeling more comfortable working in Bandung"	Geographical proximity	Proximity as a form of devotion	"I feel more at ease working in Bandung, close to my parents, so I can go home often."
3	Socio-Cultural Challenges in the Career Context	Concern about resisting family norms and values (Javanese)	"Afraid of being seen as not <i>manut</i> (obedient)", "Confused due to differing values"	Pressure of family norms	Concern about resisting family norms	"I hesitate to make decisions on my own because I am afraid of going against my parents."
		Conflict between personal aspirations and social expectations (Minangkabau)	"Wanting independence but bound by expectations", "Finding it difficult to be honest about personal choices"	Personal aspirations vs. Collective norms	Conflict between aspirations and social expectations	"I feel constrained because I have to consider my family's expectations."
		Dilemma between personal principles and the demands of social politeness (Sundanese)	"Not wanting to refuse family suggestions", "Afraid of others' comments"	Social politeness as a constraint	Dilemma between personal principles and social demands	"I know it does not suit me, but I feel reluctant and afraid to refuse my family's direction."

3. Results

The findings of this study provide an in-depth account of how cultural values embedded within Javanese, Minangkabau, and Sundanese ethnic communities shape how young working-age individuals understand, consider, and make career-related decisions. The results demonstrate that the process of career decision-making does not take place in a culturally neutral space. Cultural values function as frameworks of thought, systems of evaluation, and guides for action that shape preferences, strategies, and responses to career dynamics. In this context, cultural values not only constrain or direct choices but also serve as sources of meaning and motivation in individuals' working lives. Based on the analysis of interview data, three main themes emerged that represent how cultural values influence career decision-making: cultural values orientation toward career, intergenerational strategies in decision-making, and socio-cultural challenges in the career context. These three themes were derived from the integration of various sub-themes reflecting the distinctive tendencies of each ethnic group, as well as cross-cultural dynamics that enrich the ways individuals manage career choices within Indonesia's pluralistic society. The following section presents these findings systematically according to each theme.

Theme 1: Influence of Cultural Values on Career Decision Making

This theme illustrates how cultural values shape individual preferences and the meanings attached to careers. Cultural values function as a lens for evaluating what is considered appropriate, ideal, or fitting within the context of an individual's life, including in career pursuits. Although the three ethnic groups emphasize the importance of responsibility in career matters, how they articulate it are influenced by their respective cultural value systems.

Sub-theme: Nrimo and Togetherness in Javaness Tradition

Participants from the Javanese ethnic group emphasized the importance of maintaining family harmony, including in career decisions. Philosophies such as "*mangan ora mangan sing penting ngumpul*" (eating or not, the most important thing is being together) form the basis of an attitude that accepts work conditions as long as family togetherness is preserved.

"Actually, I wanted to work outside the city, but my parents did not agree. In the end, I stayed here; what matters is being close to family. So, it can be said that it is more about nrimo, and as an expression of tepo seliro within the family." (P1 – Javanese)

The attitudes of *nrimo* and *tepo seliro* not only temper personal ambition but also reinforce career choices that avoid intergenerational conflict.

Sub-theme: Merantau as the Minangkabau Ethos of Career Mobility

In contrast to the Javanese participants, the Minangkabau participant demonstrated a strong motivation to leave the place of origin. The cultural value of *merantau* encouraged exploration and the pursuit of opportunities beyond the home region.

"In my family, it is actually unusual not to merantau. From the beginning, I was directed to seek experiences elsewhere, even though it was difficult to leave the village." (P2 – Minangkabau)

Merantau is understood not only as geographical mobility but also as a symbol of self-affirmation and the attainment of independence.

Sub-theme: Luhur Budi and Career Courtesy in Sundanese Culture

The Sundanese participant associated career decisions with the principles of *handap asor* (humility) and social politeness. They tended to choose occupations that would not generate social unease or conflict with their parents. The value of *luhur budi* (noble character) reflects the importance of maintaining social cohesion in career choices.

"I would feel uncomfortable if I had to work far from my parents. Sundanese people are taught to be someah (courteous) and to consider the feelings of others as well." (P3 – Sundanese)

In addition, the preference to remain and work in the place of origin, such as Bandung, serves as a concrete expression of collective values and loyalty to the family.

Theme 2: Intergenerational Strategies in Decision-Making

This theme illustrates how young working-age individuals devise strategies for making career decisions by taking into account culturally bound social relations, particularly with parents and the extended family. In the Indonesian collectivist cultural context, the process of career decision-making often does not occur individually but rather as the result of negotiation between personal aspirations and family expectations, especially from the older generation. These strategies are not uniform but are shaped by the distinctive value structures of each ethnic group.

Sub-theme: Obedience to Parental Will (Javanese)

Participants from the Javanese ethnic group demonstrated a strong tendency to follow parental wishes in determining their career direction. This pattern is influenced by the value of *ngajeni* (respect), as well as the philosophy of harmony that places social relations above personal

achievement. In this context, career choices are not weighed solely based on interests and opportunities but also on the potential for conflict or social discomfort that might arise if they were to contradict family will.

"I know that the field I am interested in is different, but my parents directed me toward another field. I chose the path suggested by my family so that everything would remain rukun (harmonious) and run smoothly." (P1 – Javanese)

This strategy reflects an effort to maintain intergenerational relational stability by aligning personal aspirations with family norms.

Sub-theme: Preserving Family Marwah and Becoming the Pride of the Village (Minangkabau)

For Minangkabau participants, career decision-making strategies were more oriented toward achievements that could elevate the social status of their families in their place of origin. The spirit of *merantau* functions not only as an exploratory drive but also as a collective mechanism to uphold the family's good name. Individual career success becomes part of the broader reputation of the extended family and the home village.

"When we succeed in the diaspora, the family's name is also elevated. I feel that responsibility, so that my family can also feel proud in our place of origin." (P2 – Minangkabau)

Based on this, it can be stated that the strategies adopted are often instrumental in nature, involving the pursuit of career paths that provide social prestige and enhance the family's standing.

Sub-theme: Avoiding Conflict with Parents and Maintaining Emotional Closeness (Sundanese)

For Sundanese participants, career decision-making strategies were dominated by carefulness in maintaining emotional relationships with parents and those around them. Values such as *someah hade ka semah* (courteous and respectful to guests), *leuleus jeung luyu* (gentle and adaptive), and an orientation toward social harmony were reflected in the choice to avoid decisions that might provoke confrontation or cause concern for parents. Even when individuals expressed a desire to explore broader opportunities, they tended to adjust their choices to emotional and geographical distances that would be acceptable to their families.

"My parents never forbade me, but if I were to work far away, they would definitely worry. So, I chose to stay in Bandung in order to remain close." (P3 – Sundanese)

This strategy was not always based on explicit prohibitions but rather on sensitivity to the implicit and indirect feelings and expectations of parents.

Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Challenges in the Career Context

This theme reflects the various tensions and dilemmas experienced by young working-age individuals when the cultural values they embrace, or encounter do not fully align with their personal aspirations in career decision-making. While cultural values may serve as facilitating guidelines, in the context of transition to the modern world of work, they can also become sources of psychological pressure and internal conflict, particularly when individuals must navigate between independence, family expectations, and social norms.

Sub-theme: Concern About Resisting Family Norms and Values (Javanese)

Participants from the Javanese ethnic group expressed feelings of guilt and concern when considering career choices that did not align with family expectations. Within a value system that emphasizes *tepo seliro* (self-restraint to preserve the feelings of others), barriers emerge against openly expressing personal desires. As a result, certain career decisions were made not on the basis of personal interests or potential but rather to avoid disappointing the family.

"I once hesitated to take a job outside my field of interest because from the beginning my family had said that stability was the most important thing. I was afraid of being seen as not manut (obedient)." (P1 – Javanese)

This conflict manifested as the internalization of concern, which subsequently constrained the space for exploring career opportunities that were genuinely desired.

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Sub-theme: Conflict Between Personal Aspirations and Social Expectations (Minangkabau)

For Minangkabau participants, the spirit of *merantau*, which encourages independence and self-affirmation outside the home region, also carries social pressure to “succeed” according to standards recognized by the community. The expectations of the extended family and the village community position career decisions as a collective project that must meet certain benchmarks of success. When reality does not align with these expectations, participants experience tension between personal idealism and perceptions of social failure.

“People in the village see that if I live in the city, I must be successful. But in reality, it is not that easy. Sometimes I feel like a failure not because of myself, but because of other people’s expectations.” (P2 – Minangkabau)

This dilemma is not only emotionally challenging but also creates a moral burden to persist in a career path that may not align with the participant’s actual circumstances.

Sub-theme: Dilemma Between Personal Principles and the Demands of Social Politeness (Sundanese)

Sundanese participants exhibited distinctive challenges related to values of politeness and social harmony, such as *someah* (courteousness), *handap asor* (humility), and the reluctance to offend others. These values often resulted in discomfort when expressing differing opinions or declining inappropriate suggestions. In the career context, this led to a sense of powerlessness in making firm decisions, driven by the fear of being perceived as impolite or selfish.

“I often feel confused about how to respond when people ask about my work. I actually have my own plans, but it feels uncomfortable to reject the advice of my parents or those around me.” (P3 – Sundanese)

The challenge faced was not merely about occupational choices but rather about navigating the decision-making process without violating the polite values that had been internalized since childhood.

General Framework of Research Findings

Based on the synthesis of findings from the three ethnic groups studied, Javanese, Minangkabau, and Sundanese, a conceptual framework was constructed to illustrate the flow of relationships between cultural values, psychological dynamics, and career decision-making outcomes. This framework was designed by considering both the similarity of content and the variations in dynamics that emerged among individuals from each ethnic group. Figure 1 demonstrates that the career decision-making process of young working-age individuals unfolds within three main layers. The first layer, namely cultural values (input), represents systems of beliefs, norms, and social practices that are internalized from an early age. The values of *nrimo* and collectivism among the Javanese, the spirit of *merantau* and safeguarding family *marwah* among the Minangkabau, as well as *luhur budi*, *someah*, and *handap asor* among the Sundanese form the foundation of how individuals ascribe meaning to their careers.

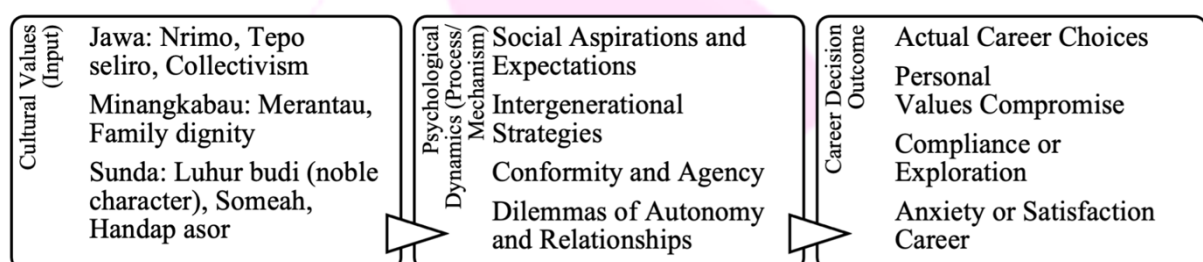


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Research Finding

The second layer explains the psychological dynamics (process) that serve as mediating factors between cultural values and actual decisions. At this stage, negotiations occur between

personal aspirations and social expectations, the application of intergenerational strategies in responding to family pressures or demands, as well as dilemmas between individual agency and conformity to social norms. These dynamics are complex and reflective, illustrating that career decisions are not purely rational but are also embedded with affective and relational considerations.

The third layer represents the outcomes of the career decision-making process (output). At this stage, the values and dynamics experienced by individuals are translated into actual decisions, such as choosing employment close to the family, pursuing a career in the diaspora, or adopting compromises that are acceptable to all parties. These outcomes also encompass emotional dimensions, such as the emergence of concern due to social pressure or satisfaction from being able to preserve deeply held values. This framework illustrates that career decision-making is a multidimensional process formed through the interaction between internalized cultural values, experienced psychological dynamics, and the social demands faced by individuals within their respective cultural contexts.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to explore how cultural values shape the career decision-making process of young working-age individuals from Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau ethnic groups. The findings were organized into three main themes, each addressing the research questions concerning cultural orientation, intergenerational relational dynamics, and forms of value negotiation in the career context.

Cultural Values and Career Preferences

In general, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which shows that cultural values serve as a primary framework in shaping individual preferences (Olsen, 2015). However, more specifically, there are unique ways in which cultural values play their roles in influencing the attitudes, behaviors, and challenges faced by individuals in the career decision-making process within each ethnic group. Among the Javanese, the philosophy of *mangan ora mangan sing penting ngumpul* (whether eating or not, the most important thing is being together) is reflected in the tendency to explore and make career decisions that allow for physical and emotional closeness to the family. This aligns with the findings of Sawitri and Dewi (2015), who demonstrated that value congruence between family and individual plays a significant role in directing career exploration. Meanwhile, among the Sundanese, the values of *someah hade ka semah* (courteous and respectful to guests) and *handap asor* (humility) reinforce adaptive attitudes toward the social work environment and encourage individuals to choose career paths that are relationally harmonious rather than solely based on personal ambition. Career adaptability (such as concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) is crucial for individuals in adjusting to work environments that are consistent with their personal values and social context (Li et al., 2025; Stauffer et al., 2014).

In contrast, the Minangkabau ethnic group demonstrated a tendency toward values that encourage mobility and exploration, which are manifested in the spirit of *merantau*. This finding is consistent with the study by Lou and Li (2023), which showed that the same motivational values may operate differently across cultures. Within collectivist societies, achievement values are often understood as efforts to meet social expectations and to preserve group honor, including in career decision-making. Accordingly, *merantau* among the Minangkabau is not merely an economic strategy but also an expression of identity and a means of attaining social recognition through success.

Intergenerational Strategies and the Role of Family

Across all ethnic groups, relationships with parents emerged as the primary arena of negotiation in the career decision-making process. Participants described that they did not simply follow parental will but engaged in mediation strategies, such as gradually communicating their choices, making compromise decisions, or postponing decisions until the family was ready to accept them. Such strategies were adopted because parental and familial support exerted a positive influence on making appropriate career decisions. These findings are consistent with several studies showing

that social support from parents consistently enhances career decision-making self-efficacy among Vietnamese youth (Loan et al., 2025), and is positively associated with career exploration among China youth (Liu et al., 2025), which in turn influences individuals' readiness for career decision-making.

In addition, young people are often engaged in negotiation processes with their parents regarding career choices. This involves mediating their preferences and gradually presenting their options so they may be accepted by their parents. This aligns with the findings of a study in China (Wang, 2023), which demonstrated that in the context of overprotective parenting, individuals mediated career expectations and self-efficacy to align with parental expectations, thereby reducing career indecision. Similarly, studies in South Korea (Kim et al., 2016) and Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe & Dissanayaka, 2024) showed that career decision preparation and individual career choices were influenced by parental and familial support. Both studies underscore the negotiation process in which individuals balance their choices with parental expectations. Based on these insights, the negotiation of values with parents in this study can be understood as a relational strategy characteristic of collectivist cultures in adaptively responding to career dynamics.

In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, the family is not merely a source of information or encouragement but also a normative institution that defines the boundaries of what is considered "appropriate" choices. The tension between the values of the older generation (stability, secure employment, family proximity) and the younger generation (flexibility, self-actualization, meaning) was clearly reflected in the participants' narratives. Nevertheless, not all tensions culminated in conflict; many were managed through strategic negotiation involving values of mutual respect and patience.

Relational Negotiation and Cultural Adaptation

The career decision-making process also revealed that individuals actively negotiated between personal preferences and collective norms. Values such as respect, preserving family reputation, and maintaining relational balance served as the basis of participants' considerations when choosing or postponing career decisions. Glazer and Karpati (2014) noted that in collectivist cultural systems, decisions are rarely made individually but rather represent the accumulation of family expectations, social perceptions, and identity commitments.

The findings of this study identified distinct strategies of value adaptation across ethnic groups. Javanese and Sundanese participants tended to formulate strategies of compromise and coexistence, such as prioritizing family harmony, preserving social politeness, and aligning personal ambitions with collective norms. By contrast, Minangkabau participants exhibited a more proactive model of adaptation characterized by high mobility, particularly through *merantau* and the pursuit of employment opportunities outside their home region. This exploratory path not only reflects the spirit of independence but also functions as a means of self-affirmation and a way to uphold the family's good name.

These differences in adaptation patterns indicate that cultural values function not merely as a contextual backdrop but also as psychological and social resources shaping how individuals strategically approach career choices. This finding resonates with Gunkel et al. (2013), who highlighted that local cultural values significantly influence four career attitudes: career planning, career adaptability, career optimism, and career knowledge. Within the Asian cultural context, independence and social support play crucial roles in mediating individual adaptation to career challenges, demonstrating that ethnic values are not only background factors but also active determinants shaping career development pathways.

Cultural Commonalities and Distinctiveness in Career Decision-Making

The findings of this study reveal that ethnic cultural values play a significant role in shaping the career decision-making process of young working-age individuals in Indonesia. Despite originating from different cultural backgrounds, participants from Javanese, Minangkabau, and Sundanese ethnic groups demonstrated similar collectivist orientations. Careers were not perceived as solely personal matters but rather as embedded within social relationships and as responsibilities

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toward family and community. All three groups viewed parental and familial expectations as carrying substantial weight in determining career direction, with decisions ideally avoiding conflict or disharmony. Strategies of compromise and adjustment to social norms thus emerged as common approaches to addressing career dilemmas. These findings are consistent with prior studies showing that collectivist cultures tend to frame major decisions within social harmony (Gelfand et al., 2013) and relational norms (Truong et al., 2017). This supports the view that in collectivist societies, career decisions are rarely made individually but instead reflect consideration of social values, family structures, and broader group expectations.

Yet, beneath these shared foundational values, each ethnic group exhibited distinctive cultural expressions that influenced their career strategies and preferences. The Javanese displayed attitudes of *nrimo* (acceptance) and *tepo seliro* (self-restraint to maintain social harmony), characterized by acceptance of circumstances and efforts to preserve harmonious relations with the social environment. Philosophies such as “*mangan ora mangan sing penting ngumpul*” (whether eating or not, the most important thing is being together) underscore that family togetherness is valued above individual ambition, thereby shaping preferences for stable jobs that do not generate conflict. By contrast, the Minangkabau exhibited a spirit of mobility and self-affirmation through the value of *merantau*. For them, career decision-making was often oriented toward achievements outside the home village as a form of devotion to the family and as a means of safeguarding social *marwah* (honor). Narratives of success were not measured solely by position or salary but also by the extent to which individuals could serve as role models for younger siblings and as sources of pride for their community of origin.

On the other hand, the Sundanese emphasized values of politeness such as *luhur budi* (noble character), *handap asor* (humility), and *someah hade ka semah* (courteousness and respect for others) in career decision-making. Their career choices often reflected consideration of family emotional comfort and geographic proximity to parents as expressions of respect and care. Although they possessed the potential to pursue broader opportunities, the Sundanese participants in this study tended to prioritize remaining close to home as a form of filial duty and politeness. They also demonstrated high sensitivity to family expectations and made strong efforts to preserve harmony, even when it required sacrificing personal preferences.

5. Conclusions

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that although collectivism serves as a common thread across ethnic groups, the forms of expression and strategies in career decision-making are strongly shaped by the unique nuances of local cultural values. These differences underscore that understanding cultural dynamics in the career context cannot be sufficiently captured through the individualism–collectivism dichotomy alone; rather, it requires acknowledging the diversity of interpretations, practices, and reasoning embedded within each local culture. Such insights provide a foundation for developing more contextually grounded career intervention approaches, particularly in multicultural countries such as Indonesia.

The practical implications of these findings extend to policymakers in education, human resource development, and providers of career counseling services. First, career guidance approaches must be sensitive to the cultural values that influence individual career choices. It is not sufficient to focus solely on interests and talents; counselors and educators also need to recognize that career preferences are often shaped by family expectations and cultural ethos such as harmony, sacrifice, and social mobility. Accordingly, culture-based career assessments and culturally informed counseling are highly relevant in multicultural contexts such as Indonesia. Second, career development programs such as internships or industry-based vocational training need to accommodate intergenerational needs. Facilitating dialogue between young employees and their families, involving local community leaders in reinforcing the meaning of career, and presenting success narratives rooted in local culture can help bridge perception gaps between generations. Third, training for peer mentors, academic advisors, and HR practitioners may include modules that explore the influence of cultural values on careers. This would better equip professionals in education and employment sectors to support individuals facing dilemmas between personal choices and collective norms in their careers.

Furthermore, strategies for relocation or workforce mobility, particularly for ethnic groups that place a strong emphasis on family closeness, are recommended to be accompanied by technological facilities, psychosocial support, or alternatives such as hybrid work systems.

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was limited and included only three major ethnic groups, thereby not fully representing the cultural diversity of Indonesia. Second, data were collected through online interviews, which may have restricted the capture of emotional nuances and non-verbal expressions that are critical in phenomenological exploration. Third, the research perspective remained focused on individuals and did not incorporate collective narratives from families or communities as significant social actors in the career decision-making process. Future research may expand the scope to include broader regions and ethnic groups, employ data triangulation by involving families, and apply longitudinal methods to monitor the dynamics of values over time. In addition, the development of cultural value assessment instruments in the career context remains highly needed to support contextually relevant career assessment.

6. CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Nur Pratiwi Noviati, Anissa Lestari Kadiyono, Marina Sulastiana, and Fitriani Yustikasari Lubis contributed to the conceptualization, review, discussion, data analysis, and editing of the article.

7. Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that this research has no financial interests, conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could influence the results of the research reported in this article.

8. Declaration of Generative AI and Assistive Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that generative artificial intelligence tools, specifically *ChatGPT-5*, were used to support the writing process of this article, particularly in enhancing English clarity and correcting grammar, as English is not the authors' first language. Reference management software (*Mendeley*) was also used to organize and format citations, and utilized online databases and digital search engines to locate relevant academic references. The content, interpretation, argumentation, and final conclusions are entirely the responsibility of the author.

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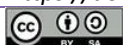
10. Ethical Approval

This study has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Islam Indonesia, with letter number 1102/Dek/70/DURT/EA/VI/2025, which was declared ethically appropriate. This approval was granted based on the fulfilment of 7 ethical standards according to WHO 2011 and referring to the CIOMS Guidelines 2016, including social values, scientific values, equitable distribution of burdens and benefits, risks, inducement or exploitation, confidentiality and privacy, and informed consent. All participants received a research information sheet and voluntarily stated their written consent before the interview began. Participants were also assured of full rights to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality of identity was maintained with an anonymizer code, and data was stored securely. Interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform, and consent for recording was also confirmed verbally and recorded before the session began.

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