

Attribution and Motivation: Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion Differences among Indonesian University Students

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Abstract

The study explores the possibilities of gender, ethnicity, and religion differences on attributions (locus of control, stability, personal and external control), motivational goals (learning, performance approach, performance avoidance, and work avoidance), self-efficacy, intelligence beliefs, religiosity, racial/ethnic identity, and academic performance (mid-term test, final test, and GPA scores) within the Indonesian university settings. Racial/ethnic identity had three dimensions: private regard, ethnic importance, and social embeddedness; whilst religiosity had two dimensions: religious behaviour and intrinsic religiosity. 1,006 students (73.8% Native Indonesians and 24.8% Chinese Indonesians) from three public and two private universities participated. Males were significantly higher on work avoidance goals. Ethnic and religion differences were found on religiosity: Native Indonesians and Hindus reported higher intrinsic religiosity; Christians reported greater behavioural religiosity. Gender and religion interactions revealed lower locus of control among male Chinese, and lower final test score among male Muslim. Explanations for these differences are advanced and directions for further research outlined.

Keywords: Attribution, Motivational goals, Gender, Ethnicity, Religion

1. Introduction

Culture, a shared set of core values that regulate behaviour in a certain society (Triandis, 1995) can motivate one to act in a certain way (Scharwitz, 2006). In a society where someone is encouraged to put him/herself before the group (individualistic culture), one would expect individuals to be concerned with thinking well of themselves. In collectivistic cultures, one is expected to consider oneself as interdependent with other members of society and, to put the welfare of the group before oneself (Triandis, 1995). Thus, individual goals and attitudes are encouraged in individualistic cultures, whereas in collectivistic cultures one's personal goals may be subordinated to the goals of one's group (Triandis, 1995). Previous studies have indeed shown cultural differences on motivation (Witkow & Fuligni, 2007; Woodrow & Chapman, 2002) and attribution (Anderson & Butzin, 1974; English & Chen, 2007; Yan & Gaier, 1994).

The present study examined cultural differences within the Indonesian context. Three salient cultural factors were explored: gender, religion, and ethnicity. Indonesia, a multi-ethnic country, commonly classifies the people into Native and non-Native, of whom Chinese Indonesians are the biggest minority. In fact, when referring to non-Native it usually means Chinese Indonesians. The relationships between the two ethnic groups is not easy to describe, in fact as recently as 1998 there was a racial riot, in which Chinese Indonesians were victims of looting, killing, and mass raping of women (Blackburn, 2009; Coomaswamy, 1999; Jusuf, Timbul, Gultom, & Frishka, 2008). The riot in 1998 was not an isolated case, of which there have been several (Jusuf et al., 2008). Both Native and Chinese Indonesians may further classify themselves into sub-ethnic groups. The Natives may classify themselves such as Javanese, Balinese or Batakese, which usually relates to the place they or their ancestors were born and raised. The Chinese Indonesians classify themselves as either *babah* or *totok* (Ong, 2005). *Babah* are Chinese Indonesians whose ancestors married Natives, later on their descendants intermarried within the *Babah* sub-ethnic group or with others of Chinese descent; whereas *Totok* are Chinese Indonesians who do not have Native ancestors within the family. Both *Babah* and *Totok* perceive themselves as of Chinese descent. Due to historical background, Natives are usually

Muslim, whereas the Chinese Indonesians are Buddhist or Christian (Ananta, Arifin, & Bachtiar, 2008; Mackie, 2005).

The issue of race even permeates the educational setting, where it is common to find mostly Native Indonesian students in public, and Chinese Indonesians in private universities. As the largest Muslim nation in the world, the State and Islam have reinforced each other in promoting a patriarchal perspective on gender and sexuality (Blackburn, 2004; Clark, 2010). Due to the complexities of interwoven ethnic, religious and gender issues in Indonesia, differences in Indonesian students' attribution and motivation were expected. For example, females were expected to have external locus of control, stable, and uncontrollable attributions due to their living in a patriarchal and heavily religious society. There have not been many studies regarding Native vs. Chinese Indonesian students' motivations and attributions, and how these may intersect with other cultural dimensions which were our interest to explore. Related variables we included were self-efficacy, intelligence beliefs, along with academic performance (mid-term and final test scores, grade point average).

1.1 Attribution

People are motivated to understand and master their environments and themselves, in order to make their world more predictable (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). This also applies in academic settings where students make attributions about their success and failure, which can be powerful determinants of long-term achievement (Dweck, Goetz, & Strauss, 1980), and affect students' performance anxiety (Arkin & Maruyaman, 1979). In general, students make causal attributions for their academic success and failure to ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck (Weiner, 1979). These four reasons can be classified along three dimensions: locus of control (internal or external), stability (stable or unstable), and controllability (controllable or uncontrollable; Weiner, 1985). External locus of control refers to circumstances which are outside, and internal locus to circumstances which are inside, students' control. For example, attributing a bad result to lack of effort constitutes an internal locus of control, whereas attribution of failure to the bad mood of the teacher is an external locus of control. "Stability" refers to whether the causes are considered as something stable (e.g., task difficulty) or unstable (e.g., luck). "Controllability" refers to whether one perceives the causes as controllable or uncontrollable by oneself. One's interpretation of performance success or failure can produce different motivational goals (Dweck, 1975). Students who perceive their failure to be caused by unstable and controllable factors such as lack of effort, were more likely to try to attain mastery. Students who attribute their failures to stable and uncontrollable factors, such as lack of ability (in particular, if they believe that their intelligence is fixed), are more likely to lean toward learned helplessness (Diener & Dweck, 1978; Dweck, 1975).

1.2 Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement goal motivation defines goals as the cognitive representations of the different purposes which students adopt in achievement situations (Urduan & Maehr, 1995). Students are motivated to develop, attain, or demonstrate competence at an activity (Dweck, 1986); these goal orientations are significant predictors of cognitive, behavioural, and affective outcomes (Ames, 1994; Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Achievement goal motivations were first classified into learning vs. performance goals (Dweck & Legget, 1988). Performance goals are further classified into performance approach (to demonstrate competence) vs. avoidance goals (to hide incompetence; Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Work avoidance goal is another type of motivation explored in the present study, which refers to aiming to get by doing as little work as possible.

Learning goal. Students who hold a learning goal strive to develop their competence and task mastery. The measurement of success for students with a learning goal orientation would be the improvement of their competence and understanding (Butler, 1989). This goal has been found to encourage high level engagement in learning (Ames, 1992) and more active engagement (Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988), as well as students' effort (Meece & Holt, 1993) and persistence (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992).

Performance approach goal. Students who have a performance approach goal want to perform well in order to demonstrate their competence (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Similar to learning goals, performance approach goals also relate to persistence and effort (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999). Students with a performance approach goal have been found to invest considerable effort to outperform others (Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996).

Performance avoidance goal. Students with performance avoidance goals try to protect themselves from the perception that they are not competent (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). These goals have been repeatedly identified as maladaptive in previous Western studies, predicting poorer examination performance (Elliot,

McGregor, & Gable, 1999), negative affect, and low self-efficacy (Smith, Sinclair, & Chapman, 2002). These students are also more likely to engage in self-handicapping strategies (Urdu, 2004).

Work avoidance goal. Students with a work avoidance goal motivation use low-effort to no-effort when facing a task, minimising any effort required (Archer, 1994; Dowson & McInerney, 2001). In contrast to performance avoidant students who may employ low-effort strategies in order to avoid looking incompetent, for these students their lack of effort is not aimed at concealing a lack of ability (Archer, 1994), but their way of expressing negative attitudes toward schoolwork, coping with the constraints and demands of the learning situation (Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988), or their interests lie in other areas (Archer, 1994).

1.3 Self-efficacy and Motivation

Self-efficacy refers to students' beliefs about whether they possess the skills or abilities required to successfully complete particular tasks. Self-efficacy is related positively to learning and performance approach goals, and negatively to performance avoidance goals (Bong, 2001; Elliot & Church, 1997). Self-efficacy also predicts students' academic choices and participation (Hackett, Betz, Casas, & Rocha-Singh, 1992). Gender differences have been consistently identified in particular domains. For example, boys have higher self-perceptions in mathematics (Watt, 2004; Wigfield, Eccles, & Pintrich, 1996) and sports (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002); whereas girls have higher self-efficacy in domains which are stereotypically feminine such as reading and English (Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002). Gender interactions with ethnic differences have also been identified in general self-efficacy: among African Americans females had higher self-efficacy than males; whereas for Caucasian Americans males had higher self-efficacy than females (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008).

1.4 Intelligence Beliefs

Students' beliefs about their intelligence can affect their motivation (Dweck, 1986). Students who hold an "entity theory" believe that their intelligence is a fixed trait which cannot be developed, and is uncontrollable and stable. Those with an "incremental theory" believe their intelligence can be developed, and controllable and unstable. Which theory students hold thus influences their adoption of motivational goals. Those with entity beliefs are more oriented toward performance goals, and those with incremental beliefs are more oriented toward learning goals (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Derrick, & Wan, 1999).

1.5 Racial/Ethnic Identity

Strong identification with one's ethnic group has implication for motivation, academic achievement, and academic self-concept (Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001). Being identified with a particular ethnic group can have negative effects when it comes with negative stereotypes (Steele & Aronson, 1995), or can have positive effects otherwise. Four dimensions of racial/ethnic identity were explored in this study: perceived similarity, private regard, explicit importance, and social embeddedness (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Perceived similarity refers to one's subjective assessment of the degree to which s/he is a prototypical member of the self-categorised group; private regard refers to favourability judgments about one's racial/ethnic identities. Explicit importance is the individual's subjective appraisal of the degree to which a collective (racial/ethnic) identity is important to overall sense of self; social embeddedness refers to the degree to which one's collective identity is embedded in one's everyday ongoing, social relationships. Social embeddedness has been found to promote good academic results among Vietnamese-American adolescents who did better in school than those who identified with the mainstream American youth culture (Banskton & Zhou, 1997).

1.6 Religiosity

Religiosity refers to behaviour, emotions, and thoughts which are derived from beliefs about the sacred, associated with a particular religious tradition (Dedert, Studts, Weissbecker, Salmon, Banis, & Septhon, 2004). One religion may have a higher level of devotion to a Divine being than another (Cohen, Sieger, & Rozin, 2003), which could lead to different kinds of attributions (Young, Morris, Burrus, Krishnan, & Regmi, 2005). As religion is considered very important in Indonesia, as seen in the compulsory acknowledgement of one's religious affiliation on the national identity card, religiosity was included in this study, measured by three dimensions (Koenig, Meador, & Parkerson, 1997): organisational, non-organisational, and intrinsic. Organisational religiosity refers to overt behaviour such as going to church, mosque, or temple; non-organisational refers to private religious experience such as praying and reading one's holy book; intrinsic refers to the application of one's religious beliefs and experiences into daily life.

2. Method

2.1 Sample and Participants. Participants were 1006 students from three public and two private universities in Indonesia. The proportions of Chinese Indonesians in the public universities were 2.7%, 2.0%, and 1.6%. Proportions of Native Indonesians in the private universities were 24.0% and 28.7%. Across the sample:

- 73.8% were Native Indonesians, 24.8% Chinese Indonesians, 1.6% “Other” ethnic groups;
- 43.7% males and 56.3% females;
- 653 were Muslim, 171 Christian, 105 Catholic, 60 Buddhist, 10 Hindu, and 4 “Other” ;
- most Native Indonesians were Muslim (86.8%), 8.3% Christian, 3.6% Catholic, 0.1% Buddhist, and 1.2% Hindu;
- most Chinese Indonesian participants were Christian (41%) or Catholic (31.0%), and 23.6% were Buddhist.

2.2 Procedure and Data Analysis. Data were collected using paper self-report surveys in 2009, during negotiated classtime at each university. The differences among gender, ethnic, and religious groups were analysed in separate MANOVAs. Interaction effects were tested separately for each of: (i) gender and ethnicity, and (ii) gender and religion, due to their high collinearity. In view of the sample size, statistical significant was set at $p < .01$.

2.3 Instrumentation

2.3.1 Attribution. The Revised Casual Dimension Scale (McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992) was used to measure students’ attributions. The scale had 4 subscales: locus, stability, personal control, and external control. Each subscale had 3 items rated from 1 = the least likely to 9 = the most likely. Due to low loading, item 1 from the locus of control dimension was dropped, which increased the reliability coefficient alpha for the dimension from .64 to .69. Stability ($\alpha = .74$), personal control ($\alpha = .58$), and external control ($\alpha = .75$) dimensions retained their respective items. Although the reliability coefficient for personal control was below the generally accepted cut-off of approximately 0.70, it could not be improved by the omission of any items. Other subscales showed acceptable reliability.

2.3.2 Motivational Goals and Self-Efficacy. Motivational goals and self-efficacy subscales were rated from 1 = not at all true of me to 7 = very true of me. Learning and work avoidance goals were measured using a scale by Harackiewicz, Durik, Barron, Linnenbrink-Garcia, and Tauer (2008). The learning goals subscale had 7 items ($\alpha = .85$) and work avoidance goals subscale had 3 items ($\alpha = .86$). The performance approach goals subscale had 5 items ($\alpha = .89$) from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, Maehr, Hruda, Anderman, Anderman, Freeman, Gheen, Kaplan, Kumar, Middleton, Nelson, Roeser, & Urdan, 2000). Performance avoidance goals had a total of 6 items ($\alpha = .83$), consisting of 2 items from Harackiewicz et al. (2008) and 4 items from PALS (Midgley et al., 2000).

2.3.3 Theories of Intelligence. Students’ intelligence beliefs were measured using Dweck’s theories of intelligence scale (rated from 1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree). It had 4 items with $\alpha = .79$.

2.3.4 Racial/Ethnic Identity. A racial/ethnic identity scale from Peck, Brodish, Malanchuk, and Eccles’ work (2008) was used to measure students’ ethnic identity, tapping 4 racial/ethnic identity dimensions. The Private regard dimension had 4 items ($\alpha = .69$); Social embeddedness had 2 items ($\alpha = .63$); and (based on the factor analysis) the remaining factors combined into a new named dimension, Ethnic Importance, with 3 items ($\alpha = .70$).

2.3.5 Religiosity. Students’ religiosity was measured using the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL; Koenig, Meador, & Parkerson, 1997). Based on factor analysis, items for organisational and non-organisational religiosity were combined and named Religious behaviour, although with marginal reliability (2 items; $\alpha = .56$). Intrinsic religiosity retained its 3 items ($\alpha = .76$). Table 1 shows sample items for all subscales.

2.3.6 Academic Performance. Students’ academic performance was measured using mid-term and final test scores, also their grade point average for the term when data were collected.

3. Results

3.1 Gender Main Effects.

There were no significant main effects of gender on students’ attributions, learning goals, performance approach or avoidance goals, self-efficacy, intelligence beliefs, religiosity, racial/ethnic identity nor academic performance. However, there was one significant gender difference on work avoidance goals, $F(1, 976) = 9.11, p < .01$, on which males scored higher ($M = 3.21, SD = .24$) than females ($M = 2.51, SD = .23$).

3.2 Ethnicity Main Effects.

There was a main effect of ethnicity on only one variable: intrinsic religiosity, $F(2, 976) = 14.13, p < .01$. Native Indonesian participants had higher intrinsic religiosity ($M = 3.62, SD = .05$) than Chinese Indonesians ($M = 3.29, SD = .05$), or students from “Other” ethnic groups ($M = 2.96, SD = .11$).

3.3 Religion Main Effects.

Significant main effects of religion were found on both the religious behaviour and intrinsic religiosity factors: Christians had the highest religious behaviour ($M = 3.66, SD = .06$) and Buddhists the lowest ($M = 2.47, SD = .10$); Hindus had the highest intrinsic religiosity ($M = 3.70, SD = .12$), and participants with “Other” beliefs the lowest ($M = 2.80, SD = .20$).

3.4 Interaction Effects.

Three significant interaction effects were identified on the factors: locus of control $F(5, 976) = 3.36, p < .01$; intrinsic religiosity $F(5, 976) = 11.41, p < .01$; and final test score $F(5, 976) = 3.07, p < .01$.

- Male Chinese Indonesians had the lowest locus of control attributions ($M = 4.20, SD = .24$), and females from “Other” ethnic groups had the highest ($M = 5.05, SD = 5.29$).
- Female Native Indonesians had the highest intrinsic religiosity ($M = 3.64, SD = .08$) and females with “Other” beliefs the lowest ($M = 2.82, SD = .17$).
- Male Muslims had the lowest final test scores ($M = 52.69, SD = .53$) and males with “Other” beliefs the highest ($M = 91, SD = 9.17$).

4. Discussion

Males had higher work avoidance goals than females in this study, which deliberately limit engagement in learning, perhaps because their interests lay in areas outside the classroom (Archer, 1994) such as being popular. Students who engage in self-handicapping strategies have been found to have an avoidance temperament (Elliot & Church, 2003); it could be that the Indonesian students’ adoption of avoidance goals could be a kind of defence mechanism to protect themselves brought by the pressure of being male in a patriarchal society. A closer look into the relationships between work avoidance goals, self-handicapping, and additional cultural factors could further examine the relationship of gender with work avoidance goals.

Significant differences were found between the religious groups on both their religious behaviour and intrinsic religiosity, which was not too surprising since different religions have different beliefs and practices (Cohen, Sieger, & Rozin, 2003). Christians scored highest on religious behaviour, and Buddhists lowest. The religiosity scale was developed for Christians in the U.S. and could therefore unintentionally be biased against the other religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and “Other”) in Indonesia. Unlike Christians who consider attending church services as important, Buddhists do not put a lot of emphasis on ritualistic behaviour such as attending the temple (Smart, 1998), which could explain their lower scores. Hindus had the highest intrinsic religiosity, who put emphasis on practising dharma and karma in their life, from the belief that their actions will have consequences not only in the present, but in the after-life (reincarnation can happen many times and to different forms of life; Venkatachari, 1996).

It was interesting that there were no main effects of ethnicity or religious affiliations on attributional dimensions. It was expected that Chinese Indonesians would be more likely to have external locus of control and uncontrollable attributions due to being victimised in several riots. That Native and Chinese Indonesians did not consistently differ on their attributions could relate to the common segregation schooling for the two groups in Indonesia, in which Chinese Indonesians mostly prefer private school systems from kindergarten to university. This segregation is a remnant of the Dutch colonial schooling system, where there were three kinds of school: *Europeesch Lague Schools* for the European and upper class Chinese and Natives, *Hollandsch-Inlandsche Schools* (HIS) for the Natives, and *Hollandsch-Chineesche Schools* (HCS) for the Chinese (Ong, 2005). Although this segregated system was abolished after Indonesia’s independence in 1945, its effects remain. The common practice of Native Indonesians choosing public schooling and Chinese Indonesians private schooling could be due to the complex relationships between the two groups, whereby each may feel safer and more comfortable among their own ethnic group. Thus, they might not experience discreet or indiscreet racial treatment to affect their attributions in academic settings. If the measurement of attributions were linked to racial issues, perhaps the results might be different. That said, male Chinese students exhibited the lowest scores on locus of control, illustrating the complex interrelationships among ethnicity and gender in Indonesia.

It was expected that in a heavily religious and patriarchal society such as Indonesia that females might be more likely to have external locus of control attributions. So, it was quite intriguing that female participants who held “Other”

religious beliefs had the highest internal locus of control attributions. This might be due to the double pressures (gender and religion) they experience. Being female in a patriarchal and conservatively religious society might make Indonesian women want to be in control of their own lives. Women from cultures which have seen social movements toward gender equality might be more likely to reject traditional females roles, and respond in non-traditional ways (Cialdini et al., 1998). Female participants in this study were university students in the era of internet and globalisation, and had the advantage of studying a higher degree and being exposed to many and new progressive ideas. Another possibility could be that, although female students might still feel limited by social and religious norms and rules, they might want to have control over their lives in the way society allowed and approved. One way would be in academic settings, as being a good student would make one's parents and family proud. Thus, they may feel safe and sure about themselves in an academic setting, which could also account for their having lower work avoidance goals than males. As they were also found to have higher intrinsic religiosity, it could be that instead of rejecting socially imposed gender stereotypes, and norms of women such as devout women are highly valued, they might have accepted them. That gender and religion interactions showed significant differences on academic performance, i.e. final test score, imply that there is more to be explored about the connections between gender and religion in the Indonesian context. We have previously documented (Sutantoputri & Watt, 2012) that religiosity can be a better predictor for motivational goals than attributions in the Indonesian university context. To be a university student in Indonesia, especially in a private university, requires financial means which consequently implicates socioeconomic status into the interrelationships among religion, ethnicity and university setting.

5. Conclusion

In this study within the Indonesian context, there were no main effects of gender, ethnicity, or religious group on attributions, learning goals, performance approach or avoidance goals, self-efficacy, intelligence beliefs, or academic performance. All effects involving race and ethnicity on those outcomes were interaction effects, such as male Chinese having the lowest locus of control, illustrating the interwoven nature of these cultural aspects. The findings of this study give insights into cultural differences and show that, for the Indonesian context, religion seems a very important aspect even in academic settings. Also, the complex of ethnic, religious, gender and economic issues in Indonesia needs to be taken into account. Further differentiation of religious and ethnic cultural affiliations may give more nuanced and valuable further insights into how they shape students' attributions and motivations.

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Table 1. Sample Items

Subscale	No. items	Sample Item
Attribution		
Locus of control	2	Is the cause(s) something: ... that reflects an aspect of yourself?
Stability	3	... permanent?
Personal control	3	... manageable by you?
External control	3	... over which others have control?
Motivation		
Learning	7	Mastering the material in this class is important to me.
Performance approach	5	I want to do better than other students in this class.
Performance avoidance	6	I just want to avoid getting a low grade in this class.
Work avoidance	3	I want to do as little work as possible in this class.
Self-efficacy	5	I can do almost all the work in class if I don't give up.
Theory of intelligence:	4	To be honest, you cannot really change how intelligent you are.
Religiosity:		
Intrinsic	3	In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine (i.e. God).
Religious behaviour (private and organizational)	2	How often do you attend a place of worship and/or other meetings? How often do you spend in private religious activities, such as prayer, meditation, or reading the Holy Book?
Race/ethnic identity:		
Private regard	4	I feel good about my racial/ethnic identity.
Ethnic importance	3	Being Native/Chinese Indonesian is an important reflection of who I am.
Social embeddedness	2	I have a close community of friends because of my race/ethnicity.