

Mediating Role of Ethnic Identity on the Relationship between Ethnicity and Life Satisfaction among Indonesians Adolescents

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Abstract

Indonesia is known as a multi-ethnic and multi-culture country then Javanese is the largest ethnic group among the population. Ethnicity and culture is an aspect which determine a person's identity. As another domain of identity, ethnic identity is a predictor of psychological well-being, including life satisfaction. Adolescent's life satisfaction is a subjective evaluation to specific domain including family, peer, school, environment and self. This study explored the mediating role of ethnic identity on the relationship between ethnicity and life satisfaction. Participants-844 adolescents (mean age = 14,76 years old; 58,8% females)-classified into three groups based on their ethnicity: Javanese adolescent, mixed-Javanese adolescent and non-Javanese adolescent. Indonesian version of Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) was used to identify adolescent's ethnic identity whereas Indonesian version of Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) was used to identify adolescent life satisfaction in specific domains. The results showed that ethnicity predicted ethnic identity ($p = 0.028$) and were able to serve as a mediator of relationship between ethnicity and some specific domains of adolescent life satisfaction which were school context Discussion and limitations of the study will be reviewed further in the article.

Keywords: adolescent, ethnic identity, life satisfaction, psychological well-being

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Introduction

Membership in an ethnic group is sometime become part of people's personal identity. People is considered have characteristics that often become stereotypes of their ethnic groups. Mostly be a part of a particular ethnic group is given, because it deals with the birth and phenotype. However each person develop a distinct identity linked to their ethnic background.

People awareness of membership in a particular ethnic group is often associated with ethnic identity. Ethnic identity as a part of social identity inseparable from Tajfel's perspective (1981) which proposed that social identity is part of the self-concept that is rooted in his knowledge of his membership in some group and value or emotional aspects associated with his membership. From life span development perspective, self-identity is constructed from early life and continues throughout life, yet become a prominent concern in adolescence and young adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Similarly, ethnic identity, which has greater meaning for adolescents compared to previous periods.

Ethnic identity is constructed by two dimension, commitment and exploration (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Commitment refers to the sense of belonging to their ethnic group, which is considered the most important component of ethnic identity. Adolescents who have a strong commitment to their ethnic group, have strong attachment with their ethnic group as well as easy to imitate the values that exist within ethnic groups. Although it is assumed that ethnic identity is a picture of how strong the commitment, but in order to achieve a strong and secure ethnic identity, it should be accompanied by a strong exploration well (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Whereas exploration refers to efforts to seek information and experiences related to their ethnic group that became one of the important things in the process of formation of social identity. Adolescents explore their identity by doing some activities, such as studying the customs of ethnic groups, attending cultural events, or reading literature related to their ethnic group.

Adolescents from ethnic majority group lead some advantage in forming strong and secure ethnic identity, that are easiness to get a behavior reference in an attempt to explore and support their commitment. On the other hand, adolescents from ethnic minority groups, tend to have fewer behavioral reference related to their ethnic groups compared with adolescents from ethnic majority group. Nevertheless, ethnic minority adolescents usually have strong support from their family circle to strengthen ethnic identity (Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2004) so that their ethnic identity is often as strong as the ethnic majority (French & Seidman, 2006) or even stronger than the ethnic majority group (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). In particular, strong ethnic identity of minority ethnic groups have great benefits for adolescents which is prone to be prejudiced and has a weak position in inter-ethnic conflicts.

Between majority and minority ethnic groups there is a group called bi-ethnic. Bi-ethnic adolescent have a diverse ethnic groups background, usually both parents are from different ethnic group. Adolescents from this group more prone to have a weak ethnic identity or experience ethnic identity confusion. This is caused by susceptible to a conflict of values, frames of reference, or the guidance of a different behavior from both parents who have different ethnic group (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011).

Ethnic identity becomes relevant study on the plural and heterogeneous groups, where there is majority and minority in it (Rosenthal, 1987) as well as in Desai (2013) and Umana-Taylor & Fine (2004). I think it would be very interesting for conducting research related to ethnic identity in Indonesia which is often talked as the most diverse country, mainly refer to its diverse ethnic group. In Indonesia, at least, there are over 300 ethnic groups, mostly native ancestry, like Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese, or Batak and another in small amount foreign origin, like Chinese, Arab, Indian. Javanese is a largest ethnic group (42% of the population) and most of them live in Java Island, the most populous island in Indonesia. Javanese dominate many aspects in Indonesia, including the social and political.

In this study, Javanese adolescents were identified as part of the majority ethnic group while adolescents from other ethnic groups were identified as minority ethnic group, for example Madurese, Batak, Tionghoa, or Arab. Furthermore, adolescents whose parent were from different ethnic group, one were Javanese whereas his/her spouse were from minority ethnic group, were identified as a bi-ethnic adolescents.

Ethnic identity has been identified as factor affecting adolescent self-adjustment. It has a positive correlation with minority adolescent's self-esteem (Phinney, 1991, Martinez & Dukes, 1997). From another study conducted by Roberts, et.al (1999) claimed that ethnic identity is positively correlated with coping skills and optimism. Adolescents with strong ethnic identity exhibit higher levels of quality of life, where quality of life is a common indicator of well-being (Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). In adolescence, ethnic identity has a more significant contribution in establishing wellbeing, than ethnic identity in adulthood or elderly (Smith & Silva, 2011).

Previously, study about quality of life and subjective well-being focused in adult and elderly population only. Nowadays many experts show an interest to study quality of life in children and adolescents as well (see Wallander & Koot, 2016, Gilligan & Huebner, 2002). Generally, quality of life is predicted by existence of positive affect, absence of negative affect, and sense of life satisfaction. In this study, I focused on the adolescent's life satisfaction as a one of the important indicator in subjective well-being.

Life satisfaction is defined as a cognitive evaluation of one's life as a whole and/or specific life domains (Huebner, 1994). Adolescent life satisfaction in a specific domain provides a more detailed picture because often each domains have a different characteristics. The specific life domain proposed by Huebner (1994) consists of family, peer, school, environment, and self. I assumed that ethnicity and ethnic identity will not have a significant contribution in predicting life satisfaction of family and self. However ethnicity and ethnic identity have a role in shaping adolescent life satisfaction in broader social contexts, such as peer, school, and living environment.

Method

Participant in this study were student in several junior and senior middle school in Malang, Indonesia. Total participant were 844 (mean age = 14,76 years old; 58,8% female) classified into three groups based on their ethnicity: Javanese adolescent (N=587), mixed-Javanese adolescent (N=170), and non-Javanese adolescent (N=87).

Participant were asked to give response to set of questionnaire which consist of demographic information, Indonesian version of Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R), and Indonesian version of Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS).

The ethnicity classification derived from demographic information. Participant classified into three groups based on their parent ethnicity. They were identified as Javanese adolescent if both parent were Javanese, represented as majority ethnic group. The mixed-Javanese adolescent were identified if one of parent were Javanese, represented as bi-ethnic group and non-Javanese if none of parent were Javanese, represented as minority ethnic group.

Indonesian version of Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) were adapted from measurement proposed by Phinney & Ong (2007). There were 12 items consist of 5 items identify exploration and 7 items identify commitment toward ethnics group. The items were scored on a 4-point Likert scale with end points of 1 (strongly disagree) and 4 (strongly agree). The mean of total items were coded so that higher mean indicated higher ethnic identity. Reliability coefficient in proposed study (Phinney & Ong, 2007) were 0.83 (exploration), 0.89 (commitment) whereas in current study were 0.864.

The last measurement, Indonesian version of Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) were adapted from previous measurement proposed by Huebner (1994). The measurement were scored on a 4-point Likert scale with end points of 1 (strongly disagree) and 4 (strongly agree). There were 5 specific domains: family (7 items), friend (7 items), school (8 items), living environment (7 items), and self (7 items). Internal consistency coefficients from previous study was acceptable range from 0.70 to 0.90 (Huebner, 1994; Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, & Gilman, 1997) whereas in current study were 0.817 (family), 0.776 (friend), 0.798 (school), 0.781 (living environment), and 0.686 (self).

Result

Table 1. Mean and SD of ethnic identity and specific domain of life satisfaction in each ethnic group

Variable	Javanese		Mixed-Javanese		Non Javanese	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ethnic Identity*	3.011	0.387	2.921	0.403	2.957	0.480
Family LS	3.324	0.470	3.270	0.487	3.353	0.451
Friend LS*	3.373	0.395	3.312	0.396	3.261	0.426
School LS**	3.101	0.456	3.041	0.427	2.921	0.555
Living Environment LS	3.134	0.527	3.024	0.544	3.072	0.525
Self LS	3.162	0.369	3.153	0.362	3.117	0.336

Note. Anova analysis result for each ethnic group: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Data presented in table 1 indicated that there were significant effect from ethnicity to ethnic identity ($F=3.588$, $p=0.028$). From post-hoc analysis it was found that ethnic identity from Javanese adolescent differ with bi-ethnic adolescent ($p = 0.028$) but not differ with mixed-Javanese adolescent ($p=0.469$). No significant difference found in

ethnic identity between mixed-Javanese and non-Javanese adolescent ($p=0.777$). It also was found that there were significant differences between ethnicity in certain domain of life satisfaction, i.e. friend ($F=3.971$, $p=0.019$) and school ($F=6.934$, $p=0.001$), but no difference in life satisfaction in another domains, i.e. family ($F=1.197$, $p=0.303$), living environment ($F=3.014$, $p=0.050$), and self ($F=0.600$, $p=0.549$). Table 2 was presented that ethnic identity was a significant predictor for all domains in life satisfaction and all domains in life satisfaction relate with one another.

Table 2. Variable, Cronbach's alpha values, and correlation between variables

Variable	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Ethnic Identity	.864	2.987	.402	1					
2. Family LS	.817	3.315	.471	.308**	1				
3. Friend LS	.776	3.349	.399	.315**	.285**	1			
4. School LS	.798	3.075	.464	.320**	.343**	.361**	1		
5. Living Environment LS	.781	3.105	.531	.336**	.526**	.282**	.408**	1	
6. Self LS	.686	3.155	.363	.453**	.330**	.464**	.354**	.266**	1

** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$, ^{ns} not significance

Because I was interested to know whether there was mediator role of ethnic identity in the relationship between ethnicity and life satisfaction in each domain, then I conducted mediation analysis using Hayes' Process Tool. The focus of the analysis was on what life satisfaction domain, ethnic identity able to be a mediator.

1. Mediation analysis in family life satisfaction

There was no significant indirect effect of ethnicity on family life satisfaction through ethnic identity, $b = -0,004$, BCa CI [-0.033 0.001]. In this case ethnic identity unable to be a mediator in the relationship between ethnicity with life satisfaction in family domain.

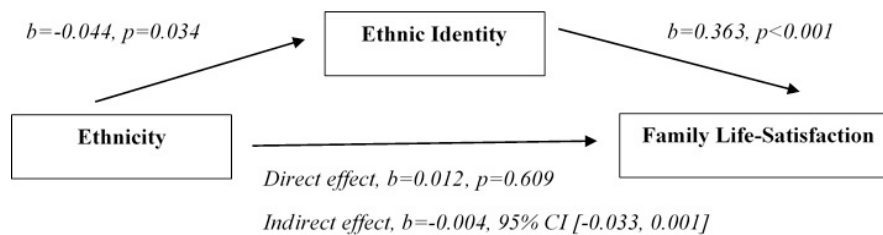


Fig 1. Mediation Model between Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Family Life Satisfaction

2. Mediation analysis in friend life satisfaction

There was no significant indirect effect of ethnicity on friend life satisfaction through ethnic identity, $b = -0.013$, BCa CI [-0.030, 0.000]. In this case ethnic identity unable serve as a mediator in the relationship between ethnicity with life satisfaction in friend domain.

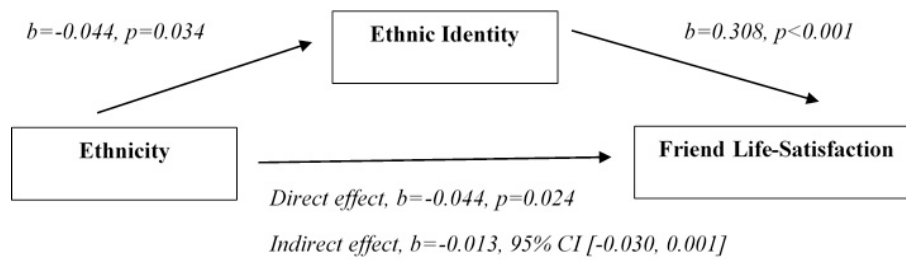


Fig 2. Mediation Model between Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Friend Life Satisfaction

3. Mediation analysis in school life satisfaction

There was significant indirect effect of ethnicity on school life satisfaction through ethnic identity, $b = -0.016$, BCa CI $[-0.034, 0.001]$. In this case ethnic identity serves as a mediator in the relationship between ethnicity with life satisfaction in school domain.

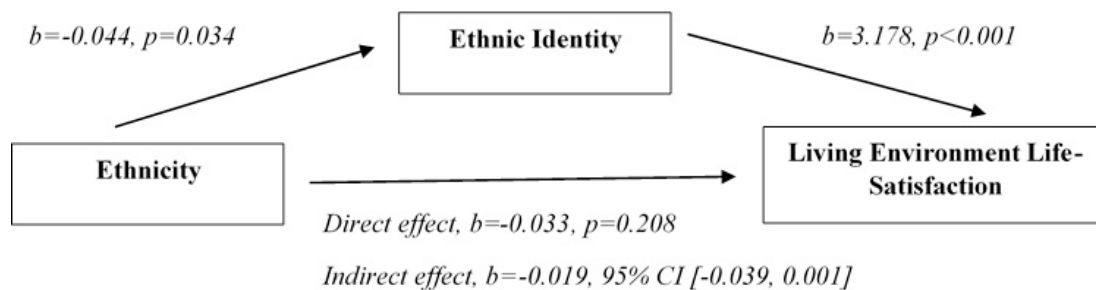


Fig 3. Mediation Model between Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and School Life Satisfaction

4. Mediation analysis in living environment life satisfaction

There was no significant indirect effect of ethnicity on living environment life-satisfaction through ethnic identity, $b = -0.019$, BCa CI $[-0.039, 0.001]$. So ethnic identity unable to serve as a mediator in the relationship between ethnicity and life satisfaction in living environment domain.

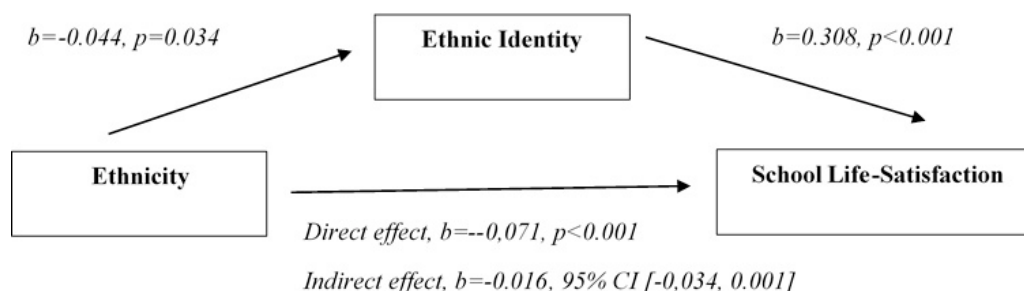


Fig 4. Mediation Model between Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and School Life Satisfaction

5. Mediation analysis in self life satisfaction

There was significant indirect effect of ethnicity on self life satisfaction through ethnic identity, $b = -0.019$, BCa CI [-0.039, 0.001]. So ethnic identity become a mediator in the relationship between ethnicity and life satisfaction on self domain.

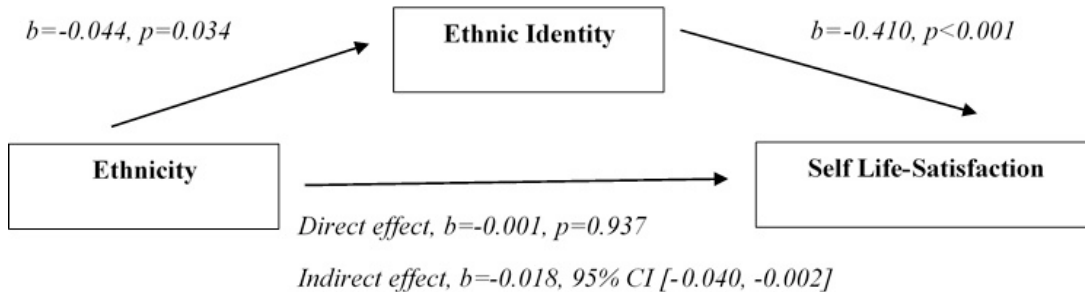


Fig 5. Mediation Model between Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and School Life Satisfaction

Ethnic identity only mediates ethnicity and life satisfaction in 2 domains, i.e. school and self. Since significant relationships are found between ethnicity and school life satisfaction, but not between ethnicity and self life satisfaction, so the mediational model of relation between ethnicity and self life satisfaction was not meet some condition of mediational model, which were variations in levels of the predictor (ethnicity) did not significantly account for variations in outcome i.e. self life satisfaction (see Baron and Kenny, 1986). Thus further discussion focus on the mediating role of ethnic identity in the relationship between ethnicity and life satisfaction in school domain.

Conclusion

In this study, it was found that ethnic identity in Javanese adolescent was higher compared with another group. This is quite natural, as the adolescents from majority ethnic group have a wider opportunity to explore and form a strong commitment to their ethnic group. While bi-ethnic adolescents are the ones with the weakest ethnic identity among other. As a mention before, this group has a risk for experiencing ethnic identity confusion, due to multiple ethnic references from parents who have different ethnic backgrounds.

No significant differences were found in the family, living environment, and self domains of life satisfaction, so that adolescent ethnicity does not affect life satisfaction in those domains. In the rest domains of life satisfaction, Javanese adolescent has a higher level than another groups and non-Javanese adolescent is the group that has the lowest level of life satisfaction in friend and school domains. Being an adolescent from minority ethnic group seems to be related to the low life satisfaction-relative compared to the majority ethnic group or whose ethnic group has a linkage with majority group (in this case is bi-ethnic group), in the context of peer group. This result was similar to Huebner's (1994) finding suggesting that children of Black (minority groups in Huebner's study) had lower life satisfaction in friend domains among another ethnic group.

Ethnic identity have mediating role in only a domain life satisfaction that is in the school domain. Both on ethnic identity and life satisfaction in school, Javanese adolescents, as a majority group, have the highest levels among other. Different case were found in the other two ethnic groups. Compared with the mixed-Javanese adolescent, non-Javanese adolescent had lower ethnic identity but instead, had higher life satisfaction in school. It seemed that although ethnic identity from minority ethnic group are stronger than bi-ethnic group, they are not strong enough to promote a life satisfaction in school equally to other ethnic groups. Hence it seems that ethnic identity becomes suppression that makes the mediation relationship in this research seem confounding.

It is necessary to observe the characteristics of the participant school environment. Participants are students in Malang, one of the small town in Java where majority of those people is Javanese. Generally the atmosphere in school is not far apart from the Javanese culture and tradition, example for daily language using. In school context, students are not only required to be able to build an adequate relationship with peers but also with adults, such as teachers. Whereas in Javanese culture, interaction among adults and young people, is relatively more complex and has strict ethics. Moreover mostly school requires students to take local cultural lesson, including studies on Javanese language and Javanese culture. This condition is certainly become challenge for minority ethnic students. Although they have strong ethnic identity and it has positive correlation with life satisfaction in school context, but value of life satisfaction was not increase equivalent compared with majority or bi-ethnic groups. In contrast to the bi-ethnic student experience, although they face challenge to form ethnic identity but the comfort of being in an environment which is still have tied with one of their ancestry cultures supports a better life satisfaction in school context.

Some limitations of this study are the researcher did not pay attention to the composition of students in schools where the study was conducted. Some schools have a composition that tends to be heterogeneous while others are homogenous. In a heterogeneous school, mostly comparison of the composition of ethnic groups spread evenly while in homogeneous schools there is one ethnic that becomes dominant. Moreover, the number of compositions among participants of the majority, minority, and bi-ethnic ethnic groups seems to differ greatly. In future studies, these limitations should be concerned.

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