

# Cultural factors influencing higher education achievement: A comparative study of Batak, Minang, and Javanese societies in Indonesia

I Ketut Surata<sup>1</sup>, Ni Nyoman Teristiyani Winaya<sup>2</sup>,  
Luh Mei Wahyuni<sup>3</sup>

Politeknik Pariwisata Bali, INDONESIA<sup>1</sup>

Politeknik Negeri Bali, INDONESIA<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Email: [surata@ppb.ac.id](mailto:surata@ppb.ac.id)

**Abstract** - This study aims to examine the relationship between ethnicity and educational attainment in Indonesia, specifically focusing on the Batak, Minangkabau, and Javanese communities. By analysing the factors contributing to their educational success, the research seeks to highlight the role of cultural values, historical context, and socio-economic factors in shaping the academic achievements of these ethnic groups. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a document study method to analyse data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, 2024) and other relevant sources. This method involves reviewing published reports and statistical data from 2024 that outline the educational attainment of various ethnic groups in Indonesia. The study focuses on comparing the number of graduates from Batak, Minangkabau, and Javanese communities, considering factors such as population size, access to education, and socio-cultural influences. The findings suggest that the Batak and Minangkabau communities, despite being from less populous regions, have achieved remarkable success in higher education. The Batak's emphasis on intellectual and social success, along with their cultural focus on maintaining family honour and wealth, plays a key role in motivating higher education pursuits. In contrast, the Javanese community, despite better access to education, lags behind in terms of the percentage of university graduates. This study concludes that cultural factors such as value systems, traditions, and social norms are significant drivers of educational success. By focusing on the promotion of education within families and communities, ethnic groups can contribute significantly to Indonesia's national educational advancement. The research suggests that increased focus on education in all ethnic communities can lead to greater educational equity in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** ethnic groups, educational attainment, Batak of Indonesia, Minangkabau, Javanese, Indonesia ethnics

## 1. Introduction

Education serves as a critical pillar in the development and progress of a nation. It shapes individuals' opportunities, contributes to economic growth, and fosters societal development. As a fundamental human right and a crucial component of national advancement, education not



only enhances personal competencies but also plays a vital role in economic productivity and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2021). A well-educated population can drive innovation, improve governance, and facilitate sustainable development.

In Indonesia, education has evolved significantly over time, reflecting the nation's commitment to improving literacy and educational access. However, disparities persist among different ethnic groups, influencing their levels of educational attainment. Various factors, including socio-economic status, cultural values, historical context, and access to educational resources, contribute to the uneven distribution of education across the country (BPS Indonesia, 2023). The influence of these factors underscores the complexity of Indonesia's educational landscape, which is shaped by both systemic policies and cultural norms.

A key indicator of Indonesia's educational progress is higher education attainment, which is crucial for workforce competitiveness and socio-economic mobility. While government initiatives such as the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) policy have sought to improve access to quality education (Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, 2022), significant disparities remain between ethnic groups. In 2024, data revealed an interesting pattern regarding ethnic disparities in higher education achievements, with the Batak community exhibiting the highest proportion of university graduates. This finding was unexpected, considering that larger populations such as the Javanese, who primarily reside in Java – a region with higher accessibility to educational resources – did not lead in higher education attainment (BPS Indonesia, 2024).

The Batak ethnic group, indigenous to North Sumatra, has a long-standing tradition of valuing education. Historically, Batak communities have prioritized formal education, often sending their children to schools and universities outside their region, particularly in Jakarta and overseas (Simanjuntak, 2020). This cultural emphasis on education is rooted in a belief that higher education is a means of social mobility and family prestige. Additionally, the proliferation of Batak professionals in law, medicine, and academia reflects the community's historical inclination toward education-driven career paths (Lubis, 2021). Contrary to expectations, regions with greater economic opportunities and better educational infrastructure, such as Java, do not always exhibit the highest university graduation rates among their dominant ethnic groups. The Javanese, despite being the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, have a diverse socio-economic composition, with a significant portion of the population engaged in agriculture and traditional industries rather than higher education (Hidayat, 2022). Furthermore, economic disparities within Java itself contribute to unequal access to higher education, particularly for those in rural areas (Rahardjo, 2023).

Several factors may explain why the Batak community excels in higher education attainment. First, cultural capital plays a significant role. According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction (1986), families that emphasize education as a core value transmit knowledge, expectations, and support systems that encourage academic success. The Batak community's strong emphasis on formal education aligns with this theory, as education is often seen as a non-negotiable pathway to success.

Second, migration patterns contribute to educational attainment. Many Batak individuals migrate to urban centres such as Jakarta and Medan, where they have greater access to higher education institutions and professional opportunities (Siregar, 2023). Unlike other ethnic groups that may prioritize local employment, Batak families often encourage their children to pursue higher education in diverse locations, leading to higher university enrolment rates.

Lastly, government policies and scholarships have played a role in supporting educational access. Programs such as the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) have enabled students from various ethnic backgrounds to pursue higher education domestically and internationally (LPDP, 2023). However, differences in application rates and success in obtaining scholarships across ethnic groups may still contribute to disparities in higher education outcomes.

Given the significance of these findings, further research is needed to explore the interplay between cultural values, economic conditions, and government policies in shaping educational disparities. Understanding why certain ethnic groups, such as the Batak, outperform

others in higher education attainment can inform policy improvements aimed at reducing educational inequalities nationwide. Moreover, addressing barriers to higher education among other ethnic groups can ensure more equitable access to quality education for all Indonesians.

**The Importance of the Study:** This study is important for understanding the underlying reasons behind the academic success of certain ethnic groups over others. By investigating the Batak and Minangkabau communities' success in higher education, the research sheds light on the role of cultural values, familial expectations, and community-driven efforts in shaping educational outcomes. Furthermore, the study provides insights that could influence policy decisions to improve educational access and success across all ethnic groups in Indonesia.

**Review of Previous Related Studies:** Previous studies have examined the role of ethnicity in education, particularly focusing on the disparities between urban and rural populations, access to quality education, and the impact of family income and social status. However, few studies have delved into the specific impact of cultural values and ethnic identity on educational outcomes. Research by Butar-Butar (2020) and others has highlighted the strong educational commitment within the Batak and Minangkabau communities. These studies suggest that cultural emphasis on success, intellectual achievement, and social status within these ethnic groups contributes to their strong educational performance.

The references provided explore various themes related to aspirations, education, ethnicity, and cultural identity, presenting diverse perspectives and methodologies. The studies highlight the complexity of aspirations across different cultural, gender, and ethnic groups, emphasizing the influence of socio-cultural contexts on educational and vocational goals.

One notable contribution is the examination of students' aspirations and motivational goals among Javanese and Sundanese ethnicities, which sheds light on how cultural backgrounds shape educational aspirations (Murniati et al., 2014). Similarly, studies focusing on the cultural values of East Sumatra and other ethnic groups offer essential insights into how traditional practices influence identity formation and aspirations (Basyarsyah & Syaifuddin, 2002; Husni, 1978; Prints, 2014).

Another critical theme is the interplay between gender and social transformation in shaping aspirations. For instance, research underscores the importance of addressing gender disparities in educational settings to promote equity in access to opportunities (Mansour, 1997). This is supported by studies on minority and female students, which demonstrate significant differences in educational and vocational aspirations compared to their male counterparts (Mau, 1995; Mau & Bikos, 2000).

The role of socio-economic and regional factors in aspirations is another recurring topic. Research on students from rural areas highlights the disparities in educational and occupational aspirations due to limited resources and opportunities (Ohlendorff & Ratlerty, 1982; McNerney & Coleman, 1998). Similarly, aspirations in specific cultural contexts, such as Minangkabau and Batak students, reveal how cultural values and learning perceptions impact academic outcomes (Nirwana, 2003).

Some studies offer theoretical frameworks to understand aspirations better. For example, the theory of student aspirations outlines key components influencing students' goals, emphasizing the importance of fostering positive perceptions and a sense of self-worth (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). Research on Turkish-American youth further explores how bicultural experiences shape aspirations, adding a valuable perspective to the discussion (Suslu, 2014).

Despite their contributions, the studies vary in methodological rigor and scope. While some provide comprehensive theoretical models, others are limited by their regional focus or lack of longitudinal data. For instance, reports on aspirations in regional Victoria and rural Louisiana offer important localized insights but may not fully capture broader patterns (McClelland, 2013; Ohlendorff & Ratlerty, 1982). Additionally, dissertations and unpublished works, while valuable, require more critical scrutiny due to potential biases and limitations in data collection methods (Nirwana, 2003; Suslu, 2014).

To critically review the literature on ethnic diversity and identity in Indonesia, it is essential to explore how studies highlight the interplay between ethnicity, migration, cultural



identity, and socio-political dynamics. Several works have investigated the impact of ethnicity on societal structures and individual identities, providing a multifaceted view of Indonesia's demographic and cultural landscape.

The research by Ananta et al. (2015) offers a robust statistical analysis of Indonesia's ethnic diversity, emphasizing its distribution at national, provincial, and district levels. The study effectively quantifies diversity, yet it primarily focuses on statistical representations without delving into the socio-political implications of such diversity. Similarly, Arifin et al. (2015) extend this discussion by exploring the relationship between ethnic diversity and internal migration. While their data-driven approach is commendable, the lack of qualitative insights limits the understanding of personal narratives and cultural nuances.

Mavridis (2015) bridges this gap by linking ethnic diversity to social capital. The study reveals how diversity can foster community collaboration, though it also highlights challenges, such as intergroup tensions. This nuanced perspective is crucial but could be expanded further by integrating micro-level ethnographic data. Complementing this, Goebel (2013) critiques the conceptualization of ethnicity in Indonesia, suggesting it is often treated as a static category rather than a dynamic construct shaped by historical and political processes.

Chen (2022) and Rikardi (2023) focus on the ethnic Chinese community, shedding light on discrimination and prejudice against this group. Rikardi emphasizes the role of realistic threats in fostering prejudice, while Chen examines the impact of regional elections on *pribumi* discourse. Both studies offer critical insights but would benefit from broader comparative analyses with other ethnic groups to provide a holistic understanding of inter-ethnic relations.

The exploration of cultural identity is further enriched by Lumban Batu (2020), who investigates heritage language and self-identification among students in Jakarta. This study effectively captures the complexities of ethnic identity formation but remains geographically limited. Similarly, Ikasari et al. (2024) use an ethnolinguistic lens to examine the interplay of ethnic and religious identities among Chinese-Christian schoolgirls. This study highlights the intersectionality of identities but could expand its scope to include male participants for a more balanced perspective.

Torop (2005) and Takari et al. (2014) focus on customary practices, such as inheritance laws and marriage traditions, to understand ethnic dynamics. These works provide valuable cultural insights but would benefit from updated methodologies to reflect contemporary practices. Additionally, Lan (2011) critiques Indonesia's approach to multiculturalism, proposing a more viable framework. This critical perspective is necessary for addressing systemic issues but could be strengthened by empirical evidence.

Migration studies by Hadi and Tirtosudarmo (2016) and Pardede and Venhorst (2024) underscore the influence of ethnicity on migration patterns. Hadi and Tirtosudarmo link migration to local politics, while Pardede and Venhorst analyse the number of migrations. Both studies provide important contributions but lack an exploration of migrants' lived experiences. Auwalin (2020) fills this gap by examining ethnic identity and migration decisions, yet its focus on macro-level trends limits individual narratives.

Suastini (2019) discusses the role of education in maintaining ethics, emphasizing its potential in fostering national unity. While the study is relevant, it lacks a critical examination of how educational policies address ethnic disparities. This critique aligns with Ananta et al. (2023), who explore the mediation of ethnic diversity between internal migration and economic growth. The study effectively highlights diversity's economic implications but overlooks its cultural and social dimensions.

Hidayat and Farid (2021) investigate identity negotiation among ethnic Chinese in Madura, providing a localized perspective. Their qualitative approach is insightful but could incorporate broader comparative analyses. Similarly, Amin et al. (2017) analyse ethnic identity and other-group orientation among students, revealing intergroup dynamics. However, the study's educational focus could expand to other societal sectors.

In conclusion, the literature on Indonesia's ethnic diversity and identity reflects a rich tapestry of themes, including statistical analyses, cultural practices, migration, and intergroup



relations. While these studies provide valuable insights, there is a pressing need for interdisciplinary approaches that combine quantitative and qualitative methods to capture the complexity of Indonesia's ethnic landscape. Overall, the collection of studies underscores the multifaceted nature of aspirations and their ties to cultural, gender, and socio-economic factors. However, there remains a need for more cross-cultural comparative research and longitudinal studies to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing aspirations across diverse contexts.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What are the key cultural, social, and economic factors that have contributed to the Batak and Minangkabau communities' success in higher education? (2) Why does the Javanese community, despite its higher population and better access to educational resources, lag behind in terms of university graduates?

The objective of this research is to uncover the roles that culture and family values play in shaping educational success and to assess how these factors differ across ethnic groups in Indonesia.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, focusing on a document study approach to analyse the factors influencing higher education attainment among different ethnic groups in Indonesia. A qualitative approach is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of socio-cultural influences on educational outcomes beyond mere numerical data (Creswell, 2013). The research seeks to understand the interplay between cultural values, socio-economic conditions, and access to educational resources in shaping higher education trends among the Batak, Minangkabau, and Javanese communities.

### 2.2 Data Sources

The primary data for this study is sourced from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), Indonesia's central statistical agency, which provides comprehensive data on educational attainment across different ethnic groups. The study utilizes statistical reports from BPS (2024) to compare the percentage of university graduates from the Batak, Minangkabau, and Javanese communities. These official government statistics ensure the reliability and validity of the data used in the study.

In addition to government statistics, the research incorporates secondary sources such as academic literature, policy documents, and ethnographic studies related to ethnic identity, cultural values, and educational practices in Indonesia. Scholarly works from researchers like Koentjaraningrat (2009) and Geertz (1976) provide insights into the historical and cultural contexts influencing educational priorities in various ethnic groups. Reports from UNESCO and the Indonesian Ministry of Education are also referenced to understand broader educational policies and trends.

### 2.3 Data Collection Procedures

The document study approach involves systematically collecting and analysing documents relevant to the research objectives. The following steps are undertaken: **(1) Identification of Key Documents:** BPS reports on educational attainment are identified as the primary data source. Secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and policy documents, are selected based on their relevance to the study. **(2) Data Extraction:** Information related to university graduation rates among ethnic groups is extracted from statistical reports. Relevant qualitative insights from secondary sources are also noted. **(3) Categorization and Thematic Analysis:** Extracted data is categorized based on variables such as ethnicity, population size, access to educational facilities, and cultural attitudes toward education.

### 2.4 Technique of Analysis

This study employs a comparative analytical approach to examine differences in educational attainment among the Batak, Minangkabau, and Javanese communities. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns and correlations between educational outcomes and socio-cultural characteristics. **(1) Comparative Analysis:** Educational statistics from BPS (2024) are compared across different ethnic groups to identify disparities and trends. **(2) Thematic Analysis:**



Qualitative aspects, such as the role of cultural values, family expectations, and community support, are examined using a thematic coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). (3) Interpretation & Contextualization: Findings from the statistical analysis are interpreted in the context of broader socio-cultural and historical influences, drawing on existing literature to provide depth and context to the numerical data.

### 3. Results & Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

Education is a fundamental pillar of socio-economic development, serving as a catalyst for individual success and national progress. It influences career opportunities, economic stability, and social mobility, making it a key factor in determining long-term prosperity. However, despite efforts to enhance educational accessibility in Indonesia, disparities persist among ethnic groups. This study examines the factors contributing to ethnic disparities in higher education attainment, with a specific focus on the Batak and Minangkabau communities, which exhibit the highest percentage of university graduates despite facing geographical and economic challenges. Understanding these patterns provides crucial insights into the cultural, socio-economic, and policy-driven influences that shape educational trends.

Indonesia is an archipelagic country with diverse ethnic groups, each exhibiting unique cultural attitudes toward education. The Batak and Minangkabau communities, indigenous to Sumatra, have historically placed a high value on academic achievement. According to Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, 2024), the Batak community leads in the percentage of university graduates, closely followed by the Minangkabau. These figures are significant, considering that other major ethnic groups, such as the Javanese and Sundanese, have greater access to educational institutions but demonstrate lower rates of university attainment (BPS, 2024).

One of the key factors influencing these trends is cultural values. The Batak ethnic group, particularly the Toba Batak, emphasizes education as a path to social prestige and economic mobility (Simanjuntak, 2020). This emphasis is deeply rooted in their traditions, where acquiring higher education is associated with bringing honour to the family and community. Similarly, the Minangkabau, known for their matrilineal society, have a long-standing tradition of intellectual pursuit, often encouraging members to seek knowledge outside their homeland. This cultural norm, known as *merantau* (migration), fosters a mindset that values education as a means of achieving personal and collective success (Navis, 2019).

Socio-economic factors also play a critical role in shaping educational attainment. Although the Batak and Minangkabau communities may not have the same level of economic prosperity as other ethnic groups in Java, they have developed strong support systems that prioritize education. Financial resources are often pooled within extended families to ensure that younger generations can pursue higher education. In contrast, the Javanese and Sundanese communities, despite their proximity to major universities, may experience lower higher education rates due to economic constraints that prioritize immediate income generation over long-term academic investment (Setiawan, 2021).

Government policies have also contributed to these disparities. While national education policies aim to provide equal opportunities for all ethnic groups, the distribution of resources remains uneven. Rural communities, where many Batak and Minangkabau reside, have benefited from targeted scholarship programs and affirmative action policies. However, the effectiveness of these programs varies depending on local governance and the implementation of educational initiatives (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023).

The high educational attainment among Batak and Minangkabau communities can be attributed to strong cultural values, family support, and community-based educational priorities. Meanwhile, economic constraints and policy implementation challenges contribute to lower university completion rates among other ethnic groups. Addressing these disparities requires a holistic approach that considers cultural dynamics, economic incentives, and improved educational infrastructure to ensure equal access to higher education across all ethnic groups in Indonesia.

### 3.1.1 Educational Attainment Among Ethnic Groups

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the opportunities available to individuals and in fostering the development of nations. It is widely recognized as a cornerstone for social mobility and a driver of national growth. In Indonesia, however, disparities in higher education attainment persist among various ethnic groups, largely due to socio-economic, cultural, and historical factors. These disparities have long influenced the educational outcomes of communities across the archipelago, with some ethnic groups consistently outperforming others. Among these groups, the Batak and Minangkabau communities stand out for their notably high educational achievements, despite facing significant challenges such as geographical dispersion, limited access to resources, and socio-economic disadvantages.

The Batak people, originally from North Sumatra, are known for their strong cultural emphasis on education. Historically, the Batak community has placed a high value on learning and academic success, which can be traced back to the colonial era when missionary schools were introduced in the region. The Batak were among the first ethnic groups in Indonesia to embrace formal education, which helped pave the way for their higher educational attainment. According to research by Naipospos (2017), the Batak community's emphasis on education is deeply ingrained in their cultural identity, with many members pursuing higher education to achieve upward social mobility.

Similarly, the Minangkabau community, indigenous to West Sumatra, also demonstrates a remarkable level of educational achievement. The Minangkabau are known for their matrilineal society, which has contributed to a progressive outlook on education, especially for women. Women in Minangkabau society are encouraged to pursue education, as they are seen as the bearers of cultural continuity and social stability. This cultural norm has led to higher educational attainment, particularly among female members of the community. As noted by Muchtar (2014), the Minangkabau people's commitment to education has been a key factor in their ability to excel academically, despite the challenges posed by limited access to resources.

Several factors contribute to the higher educational success of the Batak and Minangkabau communities. First, both groups have a strong cultural value placed on education, seeing it not only as a means for individual advancement but also as a way to preserve and strengthen their cultural heritage. Furthermore, both communities benefit from strong social networks that facilitate access to education. For instance, Batak students often benefit from networks within their diaspora communities, which provide support for educational pursuits. Likewise, the Minangkabau community benefits from a robust network of religious schools (madrasahs) and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) that promote education among the youth.

Moreover, economic factors also play a significant role in the educational outcomes of these communities. Despite facing economic challenges, both the Batak and Minangkabau peoples have found ways to prioritize education. This is evident in the strong participation of both groups in higher education, particularly in urban areas where universities and other educational institutions are concentrated. Research by Siregar (2018) highlights the importance of family investment in education within these communities, which has led to higher rates of enrolment in universities and other institutions of higher learning.

When compared to other ethnic communities in Indonesia, the educational outcomes of the Batak and Minangkabau are notably higher. Ethnic groups in more remote and less developed regions often face greater barriers to accessing quality education, including limited infrastructure, lower levels of family income, and a lack of educational institutions. These disparities result in lower rates of higher education attainment, which hinders social mobility and perpetuates cycles of poverty. In contrast, the Batak and Minangkabau communities' cultural emphasis on education has enabled them to overcome these barriers and achieve higher educational success.

The educational success of the Batak and Minangkabau communities in Indonesia can be attributed to a combination of cultural, social, and economic factors that prioritize education as a means of personal and communal advancement. While challenges remain for other ethnic groups in Indonesia, the success of these two communities demonstrates the potential for overcoming barriers to education through cultural resilience and strong social networks. Future policies



aimed at reducing educational disparities should focus on replicating these successful strategies while addressing the unique challenges faced by other ethnic communities in Indonesia.

**3.1.2 Educational Attainment by Ethnic Group**

According to data from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, 2025), the Batak and Minangkabau communities have the highest percentage of university graduates in Indonesia. Table 1 below illustrates the distribution of bachelor’s degree holders among major ethnic groups.

Table 1 Percentage of Bachelor’s Degree Holders by Ethnic Group  
in Indonesia (BPS, 2025)

Ethnic Group	Percentage of Bachelor’s Degree Holders
Batak	18.02%
Minangkabau	18.00%
Bali	14.54%
Bugis	14.54%
Betawi	14.38%
Melayu	12.67%
Banjar	11.24%
Javanese	9.56%
Sundanese	7.59%
Madurese	4.15%

Despite the dominance of the Javanese population in Indonesia and their relatively higher access to educational infrastructure, the Batak and Minangkabau communities outperform them in higher education attainment. This discrepancy indicates the importance of cultural and societal influences on educational success, beyond just access to resources.

The Batak and Minangkabau communities prioritize education as a means of social mobility and personal growth. The Batak, particularly the Toba Batak subgroup, have a strong tradition of valuing knowledge and intellectual pursuits (Sianipar & Simanjuntak, 2023). Families encourage children to pursue higher education as a pathway to achieving social status and financial stability. Educational achievement is seen as a source of family pride, with graduates often expected to contribute back to their community (Nasution, 2022).

Similarly, the Minangkabau culture places a strong emphasis on education, influenced by their matrilineal kinship system. Education is regarded as a tool for economic independence, and young men are often encouraged to seek knowledge outside their home region, a tradition known as *merantau* (Azra, 2021). This cultural norm promotes exposure to diverse educational opportunities and fosters resilience among Minangkabau students, ultimately contributing to their high university graduation rates.

Although both the Batak and Minangkabau communities face economic challenges, they mitigate these barriers through strong social networks and community-driven support systems. Many Batak families emphasize collective financial contributions to support education, ensuring that students can afford tuition and living expenses (Siregar, 2023). Similarly, Minangkabau students benefit from scholarships and sponsorships provided by community associations, which help reduce financial burdens and encourage academic achievement (Amir, 2021).

Moreover, educational institutions affiliated with these communities play a significant role in fostering academic excellence. The Batak community has established numerous Christian-based schools and universities, such as Universitas HKBP Nommensen in North Sumatra, which prioritize rigorous academic training and leadership development (Hutabarat, 2023). Likewise, the Minangkabau have strong Islamic educational institutions, such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), which provide a foundation for higher education aspirations (Abdullah, 2022).



Despite their achievements, the Batak and Minangkabau communities still face challenges in higher education, including limited access to top-tier universities and economic constraints that affect students from lower-income backgrounds. While community-based support systems help alleviate some financial difficulties, government policies should aim to provide more equitable access to higher education across all ethnic groups. Policies promoting scholarships, mentorship programs, and cultural integration in education can further enhance academic success among all Indonesian communities (Rahman, 2024).

The educational achievements of the Batak and Minangkabau communities highlight the significance of cultural values, societal support, and institutional frameworks in shaping academic success. While access to resources is crucial, the cultural emphasis on education as a means of social mobility plays a decisive role in higher education attainment. By recognizing and integrating these cultural factors into national education policies, Indonesia can work towards reducing educational disparities and promoting equal opportunities for all ethnic groups.

### **3.2 Discussion**

#### **3.2.1 Batak Educational Values**

The Batak people have a long-standing tradition of valuing education as a means of social mobility and economic advancement. Their cultural philosophy, “Anakkon hi do hamoraon di au” (“My child is my treasure”), emphasizes parental commitment to their children’s education (Simanjuntak, 2020). This belief system encourages Batak families to invest heavily in higher education despite financial constraints. Moreover, Batak community networks provide moral and financial support to students pursuing higher education (Saragih, 2021).

#### **3.2.2 Minangkabau Matrilineal Tradition and Education**

The Minangkabau, known for their matrilineal social system, place significant emphasis on education as a means of empowerment (Amri, 2019). Education is seen as a pathway to greater social standing, and many Minangkabau families encourage their children to migrate for higher education (Naim, 2017). Their tradition of *merantau* (out-migration) to seek knowledge and economic opportunities has fostered a culture of academic achievement (Nasution, 2022).

#### **3.2.3 Socio-Economic and Geographic Challenges**

Economic disparities contribute significantly to differences in educational attainment. The Javanese and Sundanese, despite having greater access to educational institutions, often experience economic constraints that deter university enrolment (Purwanto, 2020). Many families in rural Java prioritize vocational education or early employment over higher education to support household incomes (Ismail, 2018).

#### **3.2.4 Geographic Disadvantages**

Limited access to quality education in remote areas affects ethnic groups such as the Madurese and Banjar. High transportation costs, lack of universities, and inadequate infrastructure hinder their ability to pursue higher education (Basri, 2021). In contrast, Batak and Minangkabau students often migrate to major cities for better educational opportunities, driven by cultural values that encourage seeking education outside their home regions (Suryani, 2023).

#### **3.2.5 The Role of Community Support**

Community networks play an essential role in fostering educational success by providing students with the resources, mentorship, and support they need to excel academically. In the context of Indonesia, both Batak and Minangkabau societies emphasize a collective responsibility for education, where the community actively contributes to ensuring the educational success of its members. These ethnic groups have long prioritized education as a means to promote social mobility, cultural continuity, and economic advancement. By investing in support systems such as scholarships, mentoring programs, and alumni associations, these communities provide financial and academic assistance to students, significantly contributing to higher graduation rates and overall educational success (Saragih, 2021).

The Batak and Minangkabau communities have historically been proactive in creating and maintaining networks that foster educational achievement. Batak students, for example, often benefit from a strong network of alumni who provide financial aid and mentorship, ensuring that students can access opportunities that would otherwise be beyond their reach. Similarly, the Minangkabau community places great importance on supporting its younger



members in their pursuit of education. In both communities, education is seen as not only an individual responsibility but also a communal endeavour. This collective approach creates a supportive environment for students, enabling them to navigate challenges such as financial constraints or academic difficulties. According to Saragih (2021), these community-driven initiatives are particularly effective in ensuring that students persist in their educational journeys and achieve higher graduation rates.

While these community networks have contributed to the success of Batak and Minangkabau students, the Indonesian government has also implemented various policies aimed at reducing educational disparities and promoting greater access to higher education. Among these policies are scholarships and financial aid programs like the Bidikmisi (now part of the KIP Kuliah program) and the KIP Kuliah, which are designed to provide financial assistance to students from low-income families (BPS, 2024). These programs are a significant part of the government's strategy to reduce educational inequality and ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to higher education. However, despite the availability of such programs, the way in which different ethnic groups utilize these opportunities varies, and this is largely influenced by cultural attitudes toward education.

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping how ethnic communities in Indonesia approach education and access government-sponsored programs. The Batak and Minangkabau communities, for instance, tend to place a high value on education due to their long-standing cultural traditions that emphasize learning and academic achievement. This cultural prioritization of education often results in a higher utilization of government programs and support systems. In contrast, other ethnic communities, particularly those from more rural or economically disadvantaged areas, may not engage with these opportunities to the same extent due to different cultural attitudes or a lack of awareness about available resources.

Moreover, regional disparities in investment in education further complicate the situation. Java, the most populous and economically developed island in Indonesia, is home to the majority of the country's universities, making access to higher education relatively easier for students living in urban areas. However, cultural attitudes and socio-economic factors in other regions, such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, or Eastern Indonesia, can hinder access to education. For example, the Javanese and Sundanese communities, while culturally rich and historically influential in Indonesia, exhibit lower participation rates in higher education compared to the Batak and Minangkabau communities. This lower participation can be attributed to a combination of factors, including traditional views on education, limited awareness of the benefits of higher education, and the higher cost of pursuing education outside local communities (Darmawan, 2022).

The government has made significant efforts to address these regional disparities by investing in infrastructure, such as building more schools and universities in underserved regions. However, addressing the cultural factors that influence educational participation is just as important. For instance, in rural areas where communities may not traditionally prioritize higher education, the government could work alongside local leaders to promote the value of education and its role in improving both individual and communal well-being. Programs that encourage community participation and engagement can be instrumental in changing cultural perceptions about education and increasing enrolment rates in higher education.

To improve educational equity across Indonesia, policies must be multifaceted, incorporating both infrastructural improvements and cultural awareness strategies. Policies aimed at reducing educational disparities should focus not only on expanding access to scholarships and financial aid but also on encouraging cultural values that prioritize education. For instance, governments and NGOs could collaborate with community leaders to organize awareness campaigns that highlight the long-term benefits of higher education, such as better employment opportunities, social mobility, and the ability to contribute to community development. This cultural shift could help bridge the gap in university attainment rates between different ethnic groups.

In addition to enhancing financial support and promoting cultural awareness, improving infrastructure in underserved regions is essential for ensuring equal access to education. The construction of more universities and vocational training centers in rural and remote areas can reduce the need for students to migrate to urban centers, which often entails significant financial and social costs. Moreover, expanding online education programs can help overcome geographic barriers and provide students with greater flexibility in accessing higher education.

In conclusion, while significant strides have been made in Indonesia to improve access to education through government programs and community support networks, cultural factors and regional disparities continue to influence educational outcomes. A holistic approach that addresses both cultural attitudes and infrastructural challenges is essential for improving educational equity. By fostering values that prioritize education, enhancing financial support, and improving infrastructure in underserved regions, the Indonesian government can help bridge the educational gap and ensure that all ethnic communities have equal opportunities to succeed in higher education.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study concludes that cultural values, family expectations, and community-oriented approaches play a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes among ethnic groups in Indonesia. The Batak and Minangkabau communities, in particular, demonstrate the importance of prioritizing education as a tool for personal and social advancement. Their success in higher education can be attributed to strong cultural foundations that encourage intellectual achievement and societal respect for education.

The Batak community, known for its strong emphasis on education, has historically regarded academic success as a pathway to upward social mobility and professional achievement (Sihombing, 2020). This cultural expectation is reinforced through family values that encourage children to excel in school and pursue higher education. Additionally, the Batak community's strong network of mutual support, both within families and in broader social structures, contributes to the higher number of university graduates within this group. Parents and relatives often pool resources to support a child's education, demonstrating a collective investment in academic success (Tobing, 2019).

Similarly, the Minangkabau people, who follow a matrilineal kinship system, place significant emphasis on education as a means of securing a prosperous future (Nasution, 2021). This ethnic group has a long tradition of producing intellectuals, scholars, and professionals who have contributed to various fields in Indonesia. The Minangkabau's emphasis on *merantau* (migrating for education and career opportunities) further reinforces the importance of acquiring knowledge and seeking advancement through education (Yusra & Syahrul, 2018). The community often supports students financially and emotionally, ensuring that they can complete their higher education despite economic challenges.

While the Javanese community has greater access to educational resources, cultural and socio-economic factors contribute to a lower rate of university graduates. Javanese culture, which traditionally values harmony and social stability, does not always place as much emphasis on individual academic achievement as the Batak and Minangkabau cultures (Geertz, 1960). Many Javanese families prioritize vocational training or immediate employment over long-term academic pursuits, leading to lower university graduation rates. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities within the Javanese population also play a role in determining educational outcomes. Rural areas in Java, despite having access to schools and universities, often lack the financial means to support children through higher education (Suryadarma et al., 2006).

This highlights the need for a more holistic approach to education that not only focuses on access to resources but also on fostering cultural attitudes that prioritize education as a key driver of success. Educational policies should incorporate community engagement strategies that promote the value of higher education within all ethnic groups. One potential approach is to implement mentorship and scholarship programs that encourage students from communities



with lower university graduation rates to pursue higher education. Governments and non-governmental organizations should work closely with community leaders to address cultural barriers and reinforce positive attitudes toward education.

The research suggests that promoting cultural values that emphasize education and community support can significantly enhance educational outcomes in all ethnic groups. For example, educational campaigns that highlight the success stories of individuals from various ethnic backgrounds can serve as motivational tools for younger generations. Additionally, integrating culturally relevant teaching methods into school curricula can make education more appealing and meaningful to students from diverse backgrounds.

In the future, efforts to improve educational equity in Indonesia should consider the cultural dynamics at play and encourage communities to invest in education as a pathway to social and economic development. Government policies should not only focus on infrastructure and financial aid but also on fostering educational aspirations within families and communities. Encouraging inter-ethnic knowledge sharing and collaborations can further strengthen Indonesia's educational system and promote national unity through shared educational goals.

Moreover, the role of technology in bridging educational disparities should not be overlooked. Online learning platforms and digital resources can provide equal access to quality education for students from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The government and private sector should work together to expand digital literacy programs and ensure that all communities can benefit from technological advancements in education (Purwanto et al., 2022).

Ultimately, achieving educational equity in Indonesia requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates cultural awareness, economic support, and technological innovation. By recognizing the diverse educational traditions and values of different ethnic groups, policymakers can create inclusive strategies that empower all communities to succeed academically and contribute to national progress.

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