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Indigenous Cultural Career Counseling Based on Mudik Values for Reducing Career Choice Dilemmas among Indonesian High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined career choice dilemmas among Indonesian high school students and preliminarily evaluated Mudik-based Indigenous Cultural Career Counseling (ICCC).

Methods and Materials: A survey of 537 students in Grades X–XII used proportionate stratified random sampling. Subsequently, 30 students with moderate-to-high dilemma scores were purposively selected and nonrandomly allocated to ICCC (n = 15) or regular career counseling (n = 15). Both groups received four 90-minute sessions. Career dilemmas were assessed using a newly developed 24-item inventory. Normalized reduction scores were compared using independent-samples or Welch's t tests.

Findings: Among surveyed students, 94.79% had moderate career dilemma scores, 3.35% high scores, and 1.86% low scores. Mean scores declined from 2.84 to 1.45 in the ICCC group and from 2.79 to 1.87 in controls. Mean normalized reduction was higher following ICCC (M = .7547, SD = .1071) than regular counseling (M = .5147, SD = .1981). The between-group difference was significant (MD = .2400, Welch's $t(21.54) = 4.128$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.119, .361], $d = 1.51$). Greater improvements were also observed across all four career dilemma indicators (nominal $p < .05$).

Conclusion: Mudik-based ICCC was associated with greater short-term reductions in career choice dilemmas than regular counseling. Nonrandomized allocation, the small intervention sample, and absent follow-up limit causal interpretation.

Keywords: Indigenous Career Counseling, Mudik Values, Career Choice Dilemmas, High School Students, Indonesia.

Introduction

Education-to-work transitions require young people to relate their aspirations and capabilities to changing opportunities. Youth employment remains an important policy concern internationally (International Labour Organization, 2024). In Indonesia, demographic change and population ageing make preparation for productive working lives particularly relevant (Kudrna et al., 2022). Research on village youth development also highlights the importance of connecting population structure with locally appropriate development planning (Sriwahyuni et al., 2025). These conditions provide a rationale for school-based career guidance without implying that unemployment can be attributed to counseling provision alone.

In this study, career choice dilemma refers to uncertainty about career direction and goals, future career development, career decision-making, and career path planning. It overlaps with career indecision but is operationalized here through a study-specific inventory. Career decision-making self-efficacy, preparation behavior, emotional intelligence, and adaptability have been examined in relation to decision difficulties among university students (Chen et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Zou et al., 2022). Although these findings cannot be transferred directly to Indonesian adolescents, they suggest that career support should address personal resources as well as occupational information. A sustainable career perspective similarly locates the school-to-work transition within an ongoing developmental process (Blokker et al., 2023).

Providing educational and occupational information may leave students needing further help to evaluate options and commit to a direction. Career course interventions have been studied in higher education (Azhenov et al., 2023), while a systematic review documents a range of career interventions for high school students (Wang et al., 2024). Research on career exploration also supports attention to how students investigate themselves and their environments (Kleine et al., 2021). These strands of research support structured counseling that integrates self-understanding, exploration, and planning.

Career choices also occur within family and cultural contexts. Life-course research examines how work trajectories interact with family circumstances (Han & Mortimer, 2023). A review of innovations in career counseling emphasizes cultural competence and attention to the individual's broader life context (Seyed Alitabar & Saberi, 2023). More broadly, cultural beliefs and narratives can shape experiences of distress and responses to support, providing a conceptual rationale for culturally sensitive practice (Seyed Alitabar, 2025). This broader argument does not itself establish the effectiveness of a specific career intervention.

Mudik, the Indonesian tradition of returning to one's hometown, has cultural and religious meanings associated with homecoming and social connection (Arribathi & Aini, 2018). Research on intentions to undertake Mudik during the COVID-19 pandemic also illustrates its significance as a socially embedded practice (Prasetyo & Sofyan, 2021). In the Indigenous Cultural Career Counseling (ICCC) framework, these meanings are translated into guided self-reflection, discussion of family expectations and support, peer feedback, and future-oriented planning. Responsibility, perseverance, communal accountability, and respect for different viewpoints are used as prompts for examining career goals rather than as assumptions about every student's beliefs.

The present study describes career choice dilemmas in a sample of Indonesian public senior high school students and provides a preliminary evaluation of a Mudik-based ICCC program. It examines whether integrating locally meaningful reflection and family-oriented dialogue with structured planning is associated with greater improvement than regular career counseling. The hypotheses were that most surveyed students would fall within the moderate descriptive category; that ICCC participants would show greater overall reduction in dilemma scores; and that they would show greater improvement across the four inventory indicators.

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Methods and Materials

Design and Participants

The study comprised a survey followed by a nonrandomized, matched pretest–posttest comparison. The survey included 537 students from selected public senior high schools in Indonesia, recruited using proportionate stratified random sampling across Grades X, XI, and XII. Students were aged 15–18 years (M = 16.42, SD = 0.91); 221 were boys (41.15%) and 316 were girls (58.85%). Grade X included 187 students (34.82%), and Grades XI and XII each included 175 students (32.59%).

Survey eligibility required active enrollment in a participating school and grade, age 15–18 years, student assent and written parental or guardian consent, and completion of the inventory. Students with incomplete responses, those who withdrew, and those unavailable during data collection were excluded. For the intervention phase, 30 students were purposively selected from the survey sample on the basis of moderate-to-high dilemma scores, willingness to participate in group counseling, parental or guardian consent, and availability for all sessions. Students receiving intensive psychological or career counseling from another provider, or unable to attend the complete schedule, were excluded.

Students were allocated nonrandomly to ICCC and regular counseling groups (n = 15 each), with matching as closely as possible on grade, gender, and pretest scores. Mean pretest item scores were 2.84 (SD = 0.31) in the experimental group and 2.79 (SD = 0.29) in the control group, $t(28) = 0.46$, $p = .648$. This nonsignificant comparison does not establish equivalence between the groups. All 30 students completed their assigned condition and posttest assessment; there was no follow-up assessment.

Model Development and Measurement

The ICCC model was developed through synthesis of relevant theories, integration of the counseling framework with a needs assessment, expert review, and an empirical preliminary evaluation. The intervention module specified its theoretical background, Mudik-related values, objectives, activities, counselor roles, and evaluation procedures.

The Career Choice Dilemma Inventory was newly developed for this study rather than adapted directly from an existing instrument. It consisted of 24 items covering four indicators, namely career direction and goals, future career development, career decision-making, and career path planning, with six items representing each indicator. Examples of the items included "I am uncertain about the career goals I want to pursue," "I find it difficult to determine the steps needed to develop my future career," "I hesitate when choosing between available educational or career alternatives," and "I do not yet have a clear plan for achieving my preferred career." Each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), producing a possible total score ranging from 24 to 96. Higher scores indicated greater career choice dilemma, whereas lower scores indicated clearer career direction and greater confidence in career planning and decision-making. For descriptive interpretation, mean item scores of 1.00–2.00 were categorized as low, 2.01–3.00 as moderate, and 3.01–4.00 as high; these intervals were derived from the theoretical range of the response scale and were used for descriptive purposes rather than as clinically validated cutoff scores.

Content validity was evaluated by five experts in career counseling, educational psychology, culturally responsive counseling, and psychological measurement, resulting in Aiken's V coefficients ranging from .82 to .94. Construct validity was examined using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, which supported a four-factor structure explaining 61.8% of the total variance and demonstrated acceptable model fit, $\chi^2/df = 2.18$, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .049, and SRMR = .047, with standardized factor loadings ranging from .56 to .81. In the present sample, the inventory demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92 for the overall scale and coefficients ranging from .79 to .87 across the four indicators.

Intervention and Comparison Conditions

A school guidance and counseling teacher delivered four ICCC group sessions of approximately 90 minutes each, totaling 360 minutes. Activities included guided reflection, group discussion, self-assessment, and goal setting. The process comprised four phases. During formation, students' needs were assessed and counseling goals established. The transition phase emphasized trust, participation, sharing, and mutual support. The working phase integrated spirituality or faith, respect for different viewpoints and religions, responsibility, perseverance, solidarity, communication, social concern, and achievement motivation into reflection on talents, educational experiences, family resources, and the changing world of work. The termination phase consolidated learning and commitments to future career plans.

Family-oriented dialogue involved students reflecting on family expectations, parental support, and social responsibility in career decisions. Family members did not attend the counseling sessions. Delivery was guided by the structured ICCC module and a session implementation checklist. Attendance was recorded at every session; all 15 experimental participants attended all four sessions and completed the posttest.

The control group received four regular career counseling sessions of approximately 90 minutes each. These covered career information, self-exploration, career alternatives, decision-making, and planning, without structured Mudik content or ICCC activities. The same school counselor facilitated both conditions using separate guidelines and schedules. Thus, the planned frequency and duration were comparable across groups.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized the survey profile. The primary intervention outcome was each student's normalized reduction score, referred to as n-gain: (pretest score − posttest score) / (pretest score − minimum possible score). Higher inventory scores indicated greater dilemma, so a positive normalized reduction indicated improvement. Calculations on mean item scores used a minimum of 1; the equivalent minimum for total scores was 24. Normalized reductions were examined for the overall scale and each of its four indicators. Group means of individual normalized reductions were used; these need not equal a ratio calculated from the two group-level means.

Normality and homogeneity of variance were assessed with the Shapiro–Wilk and Levene tests, respectively. Baseline scores were compared before interpreting intervention outcomes. Student's independent-samples t test was used when equal variances were assumed, and Welch's test otherwise. Between-group mean differences were presented with 95% confidence intervals, and Cohen's d was calculated using the pooled standard deviation. The significance threshold was .05; very small p values were reported as $p < .001$. The four indicator analyses were interpreted as secondary comparisons; no multiplicity adjustment was reported. The small, nonrandomized sample and absence of follow-up required cautious interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The Ethics Committee of the Indonesian Counselors Association (Ikatan Konselor Indonesia [IKI]) approved the study (EA-2026-0003). Procedures followed the IKI Code of Ethics and participating institutions' ethical requirements. Students received information about the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and right to withdraw without academic or counseling penalties. Students provided verbal assent, and parents or legal guardians provided written consent. Participants were identified by codes, and research data were stored securely with access restricted to the research team. Participation did not affect access to regular counseling. Control participants were offered the ICCC intervention after the posttest.

Findings and Results

Survey Profile

Most of the 537 surveyed students were classified in the moderate career choice dilemma category (509; 94.79%); 18

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(3.35%) were in the high category and 10 (1.86%) in the low category (Table 1). These categories describe scores in the participating sample and should not be interpreted as clinical severity thresholds or national prevalence estimates.

Table 1

Distribution of career choice dilemma levels among high school students

Category	Mean item score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	3.01–4.00	18	3.35
Moderate	2.01–3.00	509	94.79
Low	1.00–2.00	10	1.86
Total	—	537	100.00

Note. Categories were derived from the theoretical response-scale range for descriptive interpretation and are not clinically validated cutoffs.

For career direction and goals, 445 students (82.87%) were in the moderate category, 11 (2.05%) in the high category, and 81 (15.08%) in the low category (Table 2). The distribution indicates that uncertainty about direction and goals was common within this sample, although it does not identify the specific reasons for individual students' uncertainty.

Table 2

Distribution of career direction and goals scores among high school students

Category	Mean item score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	3.01–4.00	11	2.05
Moderate	2.01–3.00	445	82.87
Low	1.00–2.00	81	15.08
Total	—	537	100.00

Note. Categories were derived from the theoretical response-scale range for descriptive interpretation and are not clinically validated cutoffs.

Between-Group Differences in Improvement

Mean item scores decreased from 2.84 to 1.45 in the experimental group and from 2.79 to 1.87 in the control group. The experimental group had a higher mean normalized reduction (M = .7547, SD = .10710) than the control group (M = .5147, SD = .19806). The between-group mean difference was .2400, Welch's t(21.54) = 4.128, p < .001, 95% CI [.119, .361], with Cohen's d = 1.51 (Table 3). This standardized difference was substantial within the study sample, but the design limits causal interpretation and precision.

Table 3

Overall career choice dilemma improvement by group

Group	n	Pretest M	Posttest M	Mean n-gain	SD of n-gain
Experimental	15	2.84	1.45	.7547	.10710
Control	15	2.79	1.87	.5147	.19806

Note. Pretest and posttest values are mean item scores; lower inventory scores indicate less dilemma. Higher n-gain indicates greater normalized reduction. Experimental minus control: Δ = .2400, Welch's t(21.54) = 4.128, 95% CI [.119, .361], Cohen's d = 1.51, p < .001. The confidence interval refers to the n-gain mean difference. Group mean n-gain represents the mean of individual normalized reductions.

Normalized reductions were also higher in the experimental group for career direction and goals, future career development, career decision-making, and career path planning (Table 4). The nominal p values were below

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.05 for all four indicators. The largest mean difference was observed for career decision-making (.3327), followed by career path planning (.2620), career direction and goals (.2280), and future career development (.1947). These indicator comparisons were secondary and were not adjusted for multiple testing.

Table 4

Normalized reductions for the four career choice dilemma indicators

Indicator	Experimental M (SD)	Control M (SD)	Δ	t (df)	95% CI	d	p
Career direction and goals	.7567 (.14336)	.5287 (.18639)	.2280	3.755 (28.00)[a]	[.104, .352]	1.37	< .001
Future career development	.7300 (.12840)	.5353 (.18209)	.1947	3.384 (28.00)[a]	[.077, .313]	1.24	.002
Career decision-making	.7740 (.13474)	.4413 (.34174)	.3327	3.508 (18.25)[b]	[.134, .532]	1.28	.002
Career path planning	.7520 (.12491)	.4900 (.26490)	.2620	3.465 (19.93)[b]	[.104, .420]	1.27	.002

Note. n = 15 per group. Values are individual normalized reduction scores; higher values indicate greater improvement. Δ = experimental minus control mean; CI = confidence interval for Δ. [a] Student's independent-samples t test. [b] Welch's t test. Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation. Indicator p values are nominal and unadjusted for multiple comparisons.

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Discussion and Conclusion

The survey identified predominantly moderate career choice dilemma scores, and the preliminary intervention comparison showed greater normalized reductions among ICCC participants than among students receiving regular counseling. Research describing profiles of career indecision among late adolescents supports examining variation in students' needs rather than treating uncertainty as a uniform condition (Parola & Marcionetti, 2024). Work on personality and decision-making styles likewise indicates that decision difficulties warrant attention to individual differences (Aydemir Dev & Bayram Arlı, 2025). In the present study, however, descriptive categories were based on the theoretical scale range and did not establish clinically significant impairment.

The moderate career direction and goals scores suggest a need to help students clarify aspirations and translate reflection into feasible plans. They do not demonstrate that students already understood their preferred careers or lacked only implementation skills. Research on a structured career planning task among first-year university students and a qualitative study of guidance needs in a developing-country context provide related support for purposeful planning and responsive guidance (Harris-Reeves et al., 2025; Keshf & Khanum, 2021). Studies of undergraduates' perceptions of employability and students' and graduates' skill development further illustrate why occupational information and perceived preparedness should be considered together (Bonnard, 2025; Otermans et al., 2025). These populations differ from the adolescents studied here.

ICCC combined self-reflection, family-oriented dialogue, social responsibility, and future planning within a locally meaningful framework. The findings are consistent with the possibility that such integration improves students' engagement with career choices. Research on social and cultural influences on STEM preferences and cross-cultural career decision-making provides a broader basis for considering cultural context (Mansour, 2025; Shi, 2023). However, the present comparison does not establish that Mudik content was the active component, or that culturally grounded counseling is superior across settings.

Related evidence connects family influence with career decision-making self-efficacy and examines community responsibility in relation to sustainable careers and well-being (Koçak et al., 2021; Russo et al., 2025). Social support has also been studied alongside self-efficacy and career adaptability in vocational college students (Zhang et al., 2025). Among Chinese students in Thailand, cross-sectional findings linked cultural adaptation, self-career management, and career development (Zhao et al., 2025). Together, these studies make family, social context, and self-management relevant considerations for counseling, while their different populations and designs prevent direct confirmation of the ICCC mechanism.

Mudik's meanings of returning, reconnecting, and reflecting may provide useful prompts for relating personal aspirations to family expectations and social responsibilities. In the intervention, these meanings were operationalized through discussion and planning rather than through actual homecoming travel or family attendance. Possible changes in connectedness, future orientation, emotional maturity, and decision confidence were not separately measured. They should therefore remain hypotheses for process-focused research rather than explanations established by the present results.

Limitations and Implications

The intervention sample was small and nonrandomized, so selection effects and unmeasured baseline differences may have contributed to the results. Matching and a nonsignificant baseline t test do not eliminate these concerns. Selection on moderate-to-high scores also creates a possibility of regression to the mean. The same counselor delivered both conditions, and planned contact time was comparable; nevertheless, counselor expectations, differences in content or structure, and group processes may have influenced outcomes. Neither these influences nor intervention mechanisms were isolated.

The inventory was developed by the research team. Although expert review, factor analyses, and internal

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consistency estimates were reported, independent validation and replication are needed. The descriptive score intervals are not validated clinical cutoffs. The absence of follow-up prevents conclusions about durability, and the four secondary indicator comparisons increase the number of statistical tests. The reported estimates should therefore be treated as preliminary.

For practice, the findings suggest that structured, culturally responsive reflection could be considered within ongoing school career services, with attention to students' own beliefs and preferences. They do not justify assuming that all students identify with the same cultural values. Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, randomized allocation where feasible, independent outcome assessment, validated measures, and follow-up. Comparisons that isolate cultural content from counseling structure would help determine which components contribute to change.

Conclusion

Career choice dilemma scores were predominantly moderate in the participating schools. In the nonrandomized intervention sample, Mudik-based ICCC was associated with greater normalized reductions in overall and indicator scores than regular counseling of comparable planned duration. The results support further evaluation of this culturally grounded approach, while the small sample, study-developed measure, and lack of follow-up preclude definitive claims of effectiveness or broad generalization.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The Ethics Committee of the Indonesian Counselors Association (Ikatan Konselor Indonesia [IKI]) awarded our research project ethical approval under the reference number EA-2026-0003. All methods were in conformity with IKI Code of Ethics as well as the ethical codes of our institutions concerning human research in education environment

Data Availability

The data and resources used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to participant confidentiality and applicable ethical requirements.

Authors' Contributions

Juntika Nurihsan and Mubiar Agustin contributed to conceptualization and methodology. Juntika Nurihsan supervised the study and reviewed and edited the manuscript. Arie Rakhmat Riyadi and Santy Andrianie conducted formal analysis, data curation, and investigation. Abdul Saman and Juwanto contributed to investigation, data collection, and resources. Idat Muqodas contributed to methodology, validation, and manuscript review and editing. Santy Andrianie and Laily Tiarani Soejanto prepared the original draft; Laily Tiarani Soejanto also contributed to editing and project administration. All authors approved the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the work.

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