A systematic literature review on the development and contextualization of career goal scales

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Abstract. Career goals are crucial in guiding academic persistence, career decision-making, and long-term success. However, existing instruments to measure career goals have been predominantly developed in Western contexts, with limited attention to non-Western settings such as Indonesia or Asia. This study aims to systematically review the development of career goal instruments among emerging adults to address this gap. A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted following the PRISMA protocol across four databases Google Scholar. The review identified three key instruments developed between 2015 and 2025: the Career Goal Discrepancy Scale, Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale, and Individual–Parent Career Goal Discrepancy Scale. These scales reflect a shift from focusing solely on negative discrepancies to incorporating positive goal pursuit and relational influences, particularly parental expectations. While the instruments demonstrate robust psychometric properties, they remain limited in cultural adaptability and contextual relevance outside Western settings. The findings highlight the need to develop more culturally grounded career goal measures. Practically, this review offers guidance for Indonesian researchers and practitioners in adapting or constructing instruments that better capture the career goals of university students transitioning to the workforce.

1 Introduction

In the context of career life, career goals are a crucial aspect that determines an individual's readiness to face academic and professional transitions. Individuals who have clear career goals tend to be better able to plan for the future, adapt to changes in the job market, and build resilience in the face of challenges [1–3]. Recent studies also show that career goals play an important role in increasing employability and career adaptability in an era of modern work that is full of uncertainty [4–6]. This confirms that research on career goals remains relevant and increasingly urgent in the current era of workplace transformation [7].

Career goal measurement is generally rooted in classical theoretical frameworks, such as Goal-Setting Theory [8] and Social Cognitive Career Theory [9,10], which emphasize clarity, commitment, and systematic planning as core factors in career goal formation. As

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research has progressed, several instruments have been developed in various countries with variations in concepts, dimensions, and validation approaches. However, the majority of these scales originate from Western contexts and do not fully consider the relational and cultural nuances that greatly influence career goal formation in Asia.

The absence of such a systematic review highlights an important gap in research, especially given the urgent need for culturally contextual and adaptive instruments to measure career goals in various educational and professional settings. Suppose instruments developed in the West are used without adaptation. In that case, there is a risk that the assessment results will be biased and inaccurate, which in turn could affect career counseling practices, educational planning, and human resource development policies in developing countries.

Based on this, this study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of scales used to measure career goals, focusing on the population and cultural context in which the scales were developed or applied, as well as the validity techniques, dimensional structure, and conceptual approaches used. Through this review, it is hoped that a comprehensive mapping will be obtained that not only fills the gaps in previous research but also serves as a basis for the development of career goal measurement instruments that are more contextual, applicable, and culturally sensitive, particularly in supporting individual career readiness in Indonesia. Thus, this study makes an original contribution as the first systematic review that explicitly integrates theoretical, methodological, and cultural aspects in the development of career goal scales in non-Western contexts.

2 Method

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to systematically and structurally trace and analyze the development of career goals scales. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant study results in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the dimensions, validity, and context of career goals scales in various populations.

2.1 Data Collection Process

Literature search was conducted through Google Scholars as the main data source, with publications ranging from 2015 to 2025. The search period was set at 2015–2025 to capture developments in career goal measurement instruments over the past decade. Keywords used in the search process included "career goals" AND "career goals scale" OR “career goal measurement” OR “career intention instrument”.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The articles included in this study met the following inclusion criteria: (1) they were indexed scientific journal articles that explicitly discussed the development, adaptation, or validation of career goals scales; (2) they were available in full text format; and (3) they were written in English or Indonesian. Meanwhile, excluded articles include non-systematic literature reviews, non-scientific articles, and studies that merely mention career goals as a variable without discussing the scale in depth. The selection process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which includes four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The data obtained were then mapped in an analysis matrix table to facilitate comparison and interpretation. The entire review process was conducted independently by two

researchers to ensure consistency and reduce potential bias. The following are the details of the prism diagram in the following systematic literature review:

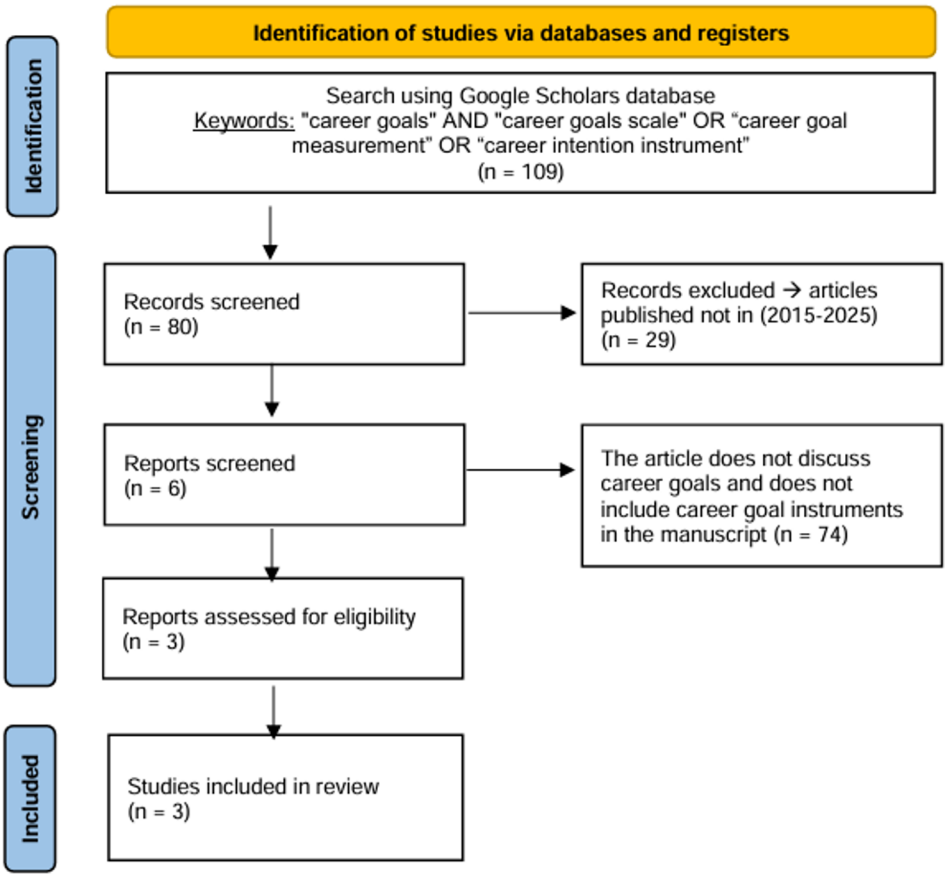

Fig 1. Research Method

3 Result

Based on a systematic literature review, it was found that there are three scales that can be used to measure career goals in individuals. The results of the literature review show that the approach to measuring career goals has undergone significant development, from initially focusing on negative discrepancy to positive discrepancy and social relations in the formation of career goals.

Table 1. Development and Characteristics of Career Goals Scales from the Literature Review

Scale / Authors	Dimensions	Sample / Context	Strengths	Limitations
Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [11]	Achievement Discrepancy, Effort Discrepancy, Standard Discrepancy,	Australia; young adults (N = 615)	Very high reliability (α = .95); comprehensively measures negative discrepancies in career goals	Measures only negative discrepancies; uses only internal comparator (self)

Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [12]	Ability Discrepancy & Ability Achievement Discrepancy, Effort Discrepancy, Standard Discrepancy	Indonesia; first-year university students (N = 498)	Focuses on positive discrepancies; high reliability (ω = .91)	Still new; requires replication across broader populations and contexts
Individual–Parent Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [13]	Ability Discrepancy, Choice Discrepancy, Enthusiasm Discrepancy	Indonesia; undergraduate students (N = 426)	Contextually relevant in collectivist culture; good reliability (α > .80 across all dimensions)	Primarily focused on family influence; does not assess self-driven or positive discrepancies

4 Discussion

A review of the literature shows that the development of career goal scales has focused on various forms of career goal discrepancies, including negative, positive, and those arising from differences in perception between individuals and their parents. The three main scales identified in this review are the Career Goal Discrepancy Scale by [11], the Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale by [12], and the Individual-Set and Parent-Set Career Goals Scale by [13]. These scales demonstrate the evolving dynamics in the conceptualization and operationalization of career goals, particularly in measuring various aspects of discrepancy.

In this review, I traverse the development, validation, and the context of scales defining career goals and their significance for young non-Western adults. There has been a clear evolution, from the singular focus on negative mismatch as chronicled in [11] to a more sophisticated framework that includes positive mismatch, proposed by [12]and relational to parental mismatch, emphasized by [13]. These shifts are noteworthy, redefining career aspirations as not only deficits that need closure, but latent strengths within familial and cultural contexts that can be integrated to become generative resources for goal attainment. A comparative evaluation of the scales has distinct but interrelated contributions. [11] measure is methodologically robust in quantifying self-perceived deficits, but is constrained to self-assessed negative deviations. [12] Measure is theoretically strong, but the validation coverage is thin, thus requiring more replication in diverse young adult samples. [13] maintain the influence of parental goal articulation to successfully operationalise the socialized career development pattern and its relation to the collectivist cultural paradigm. Its application in more individualistic settings appears to limit the ease to which parental influences modify the goal setting processes in fully formed adults.

From a psychometric perspective, all three instruments demonstrate strong reliability and validity; however, further examination of measurement invariance across cultural contexts remains a priority. From an applied standpoint, these instruments provide complementary focal points for intervention design: negative misfit scores highlight specific barriers to desired outcomes; positive misfit scores reveal untapped strengths worth developing; and parental misfit scores reveal intergenerational misalignments that may perpetuate disadvantages.

4.1 Career Goals Scale Development

The development of the scale began with the Career Goal Discrepancy Scale developed by [11] with the aim of measuring negative career goal discrepancies. This particular scale measures how far an individual's career progression or performance is relative to the goals or standards that have been set. This scale was designed to address the gap in existing scales that measure "the perceived gap between an individual's career goals and the progress that is being made toward achieving those goals." The attention is on the discrepancy's negative aspect, where it is perceived that there is insufficient progress made in reaching the career goals. The Career Goal Discrepancy Scale is a 12-item scale that measures negative discrepancies across four dimensions: Achievement Discrepancy, Effort Discrepancy, Standard Discrepancy, and Ability Discrepancy. Example items include: "My plans are not working out to get the career I really want," "I am working hard, but still doubt I will end up with the career I would really like," "I have set my sights on a particular career, but I don't think that I am going to reach it," and "I am not sure I am capable of meeting the requirements for the career I really want."

In a follow-up phase of the broader inquiry, the inquiry of the symmetrical complement to the negative performance discrepancy was undertaken by [12], who operationalised the Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale as a cultivated empirical instrument. The development of the tool was loyal to the imperative of overcoming the analytic myopia of predecessor assessments, which privilege the Noordo achievement of expected objectives and neglect any examination of performance that exceeds prescribed norms du resil or linked degree to overachievement. This new initiative thus aspires to a systematic appraisal of positive career goal deviation, which interrogates the magnitude of advancement by actual advancement of achievement and collates word application. The Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale thus seeks to operationally expand the operational space of goal reconciliation functional, given that it is goal deviation. The instrument consists of 15 items formulated as self-report statements, distributed across three major dimensions: Ability Discrepancy, Effort Discrepancy, and Standard Discrepancy. Each dimension represents a distinct aspect of positive deviation in career goal attainment to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as exceeding their expected ability, effort, or performance standards. These items are designed to systematically capture perceptions of overachievement in different facets of career development. Exemplars of included items adopt a directed positive polarisation, such as the statement, "I possess a set of proficiency, varied arena surplus the threshold necessary to fulfil the projected career objectives I have dialogue and revised when it is and "I master exposures capture, , and "I exceeds am exerting anticipate efforts necessary that actual my exceeds threshold target.

In a complement initiation [13] usable either the Individual-Parent degree of activity Performance deviation, contextual gap, a working gap is a significant instrument engineering-system for degree which is rooted in the socio-form and cultural empathy of manners. The primary aim is a systematic quantification of the gulf extant between independently articulated vocational aspirations and the trajectories inscribed by parental agents, thereby elucidating an intergenerational register of civic discord. The metric is premised upon the supposition that vigorously canvassed autodetermined ends may repudiate loyalties, obligations, or elective mythologies historiographically affixed by parental agents, a repudiation that reveals itself through manifested cognitive, affective, and behavioral sequelae. The battery comprises fifteen rigorously sequenced items and renders variance in terms of three theoretically demarcated dimensions: Ability Discrepancy, Choice Discrepancy, and Enthusiasm Discrepancy. Each dimension is in turn operationalized by a measure of the discrepancy between opposing parental and youth self-representations, this being mapped onto three sequential axes of self-ascribed competence, vocational preference, and affective investment. Benchmark items include: "The experiential evidence of capacity

is lacking in the vocational direction toward which parental agents insist"; "I am acutely aware of the affective and cognitive discord between the goals inscribed by my parental agents and my self-assessment of psychic capacity"; and "Parental agents, exhibiting manifest distinctiveness, privilege tracks that differ directly from my own preference and contest that divergence openly." Each item, thus, becomes a granular instance of the metric's thematic architecture, encoding the emotional and cognitive subtleties that characterize the culturally conditioned parent–child dyad.

The three assessment instruments subjected to this evaluation exhibit comprehensive validation protocols encompassing content validation, construct validation, and internal consistency examinations, although distinct emphases emerge in accordance with the unique characteristics of the respective latent variables being assessed. The Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [11] achieves exceptionally high internal consistency, as reflected by a Cronbach's alpha (α) value of .95. Similarly, the Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [12] attains solid total score reliability, with a coefficient omega (ω) of .91, thereby reaffirming its internal cohesion. The Individual–Parent Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [13] yields comparably strong internal reliability, with α coefficients exceeding .80 across all dimensions, denoting stability of the measurement across diverse content areas. Collectively, these statistics indicate that each instrument has benefited from multiple statistical assessments and from a coherent conceptual justification, thereby guaranteeing that the intended construct is reliably operationalised. The observed divergence in conceptual scope among the instruments—negative, positive, and relational domains, respectively—attests to a methodic endeavour to construct a more integrative measurement framework, furnishing an enhanced understanding of the mechanics underpinning career goal formation and the discrepancies associated therewith.

4.2 Cultural Relevance

Cultural relevance constitutes a non-negotiable consideration in the design and application of career goal scales, as the formulation, quantification, and fulfillment of occupational objectives remain contingent upon the prevailing values, norms, and socio-institutional arrangements of a given society. The three scales subjected to the current review exhibit marked methodological and conceptual differentiation, and this divergence is inextricably linked to the sociocultural environments in which the instruments were conceived and administrated. The Career Goal Discrepancy Scale, as operationalised by [11], was born of a sample of emerging adults (N = 615) within an Australian analytic frame, which articulates an individualistic orientation to career aspiration. The scale privileges the individual as the referent of success, situating goal orientation and evaluation within an arena of personal benchmarks. The scale's latent measure then tends to erase communal appraisal by operationalising career goal discrepancy as the differential between actual career position and a personal, interiorised, and self-derived standard, without, at the measurement stage, codifying the exogenous variables—such as familial expectation, market-driven appraisal, or institutional subscription— that in an intermediate analytic or situational frame would inflect that same goal and its self-reported proximity.

Conversely, the Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [12] and the Individual–Parent Career Goal Discrepancy Scale [13] originate from Indonesia, a collectivist society where career aspirations are not solely individual but are shaped and scrutinized by parents and immediate networks. In collectivist settings, evaluative and decision-making processes regarding vocational trajectories demand consensus, underscoring the communal nature of career advancement. Within the Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale, vocational success is framed from a collectivist perspective, so that personal accomplishment is quantitatively assessed against the degree to which it is recognised and endorsed by the community,

rendering self-actualisation inseparable from social affirmation. Parallelly, the Individual–Parent Career Goal Discrepancy Scale operationalises the fissures between self-set goals and parental anticipations; such divergences, characteristic of collectivist contexts, can catalyse intra-generational tension. Empirical findings associated with these measures corroborate that such discrepancies generate pronounced career-related distress, thereby establishing family dynamics as a mediating lens through which individual vocational well-being must be appraised within the Indonesian milieu.

These cultural orientation differences indicate that cross-cultural adaptation of instruments cannot be achieved through language translation alone, but requires conceptual adjustments that take into account the meaning and relevance of indicators within the local value system. Without such adjustments, there is a risk of interpretive bias that could reduce the validity of findings. Therefore, adaptation procedures should include measurement invariance analysis to ensure measurement equivalence across cultural contexts. Based on this, it is known that incorporating cultural contextual variables into instrument design and data analysis is important in scale development and career research. Understanding the cultural values underlying perceptions of career goals can help counselors design more appropriate interventions, such as constructively involving families in career planning processes in collectivist cultures, or encouraging autonomy and individual exploration in individualistic cultures. This culturally sensitive approach not only enhances the accuracy of assessments but also the effectiveness of interventions.

Nevertheless, this review has several limitations. The reliance on a limited set of databases, particularly Google Scholar, may have excluded relevant studies indexed elsewhere. The search strategy, despite the inclusion of multiple keywords, may still have overlooked some instruments, and publication bias may have favored the visibility of validated scales over unpublished or less formal measures. These factors should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Notably, the review highlights the need for culturally grounded instruments that reflect the realities of emerging adults in Indonesia and similar non-Western contexts. Existing scales, though valuable, were developed within specific cultural frames that may not align with the lived experiences of Indonesian students transitioning to the workforce. This underscores the consequences of applying Western-developed measures without adaptation, a gap identified in the introduction. Future research should build on this review by testing these scales across different Indonesian subcultures, examining their longitudinal stability to capture goal evolution over time, and comparing them with instruments developed in other Asian contexts. Such efforts will strengthen both the theoretical understanding of career goals and the practical relevance of assessment tools, ultimately supporting more culturally responsive career guidance and interventions in Indonesian higher education and beyond.

5 Conclusion

The conclusion of this systematic literature review shows that the development of career goal scales has evolved significantly from an initial focus on internal negative discrepancies to recognition of the importance of positive discrepancies and external influences, particularly the role of parents in a collectivist cultural context. These findings highlight that the research objective of understanding the development of career goal scales can be addressed by demonstrating a paradigm shift from one-dimensional discrepancy measurement toward a multidimensional and contextual approach. The development of scales such as the Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale and the Individual-Set and Parent-Set Career Goals Scale represents a significant contribution that enriches the understanding of psychology as a science, particularly in the field of career psychology. These new scales not only fill

methodological gaps but also introduce culturally relevant perspectives, particularly from non-Western contexts, which have been underrepresented in the literature. This enables researchers to test more complex hypotheses regarding career goal dynamics and provides practitioners with more accurate tools for culturally sensitive and comprehensive career interventions, particularly in identifying and managing various forms of career goal discrepancy.

6 Implication

This review highlights a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of career goals from a deficit-oriented focus on negative discrepancies to a more comprehensive approach that includes positive discrepancies and relational influences. Theoretically, this underscores the importance of integrating self-regulatory, strengths-based, and socio-cultural perspectives when assessing career goals. It also demonstrates that existing scales, though psychometrically robust, may not fully capture the cultural and contextual nuances relevant to emerging adults in non-Western societies. This finding directly addresses the study's objective of mapping the theoretical foundations and dimensional structures of career goal scales. For career counselors, psychologists, and human resource professionals, the identified scales offer complementary tools for assessment and intervention. The Career Goal Discrepancy Scale can be used to identify barriers that hinder individuals from achieving their career aspirations, the Positive Career Goal Discrepancy Scale provides insight into unrealized potential and overachievement, and the Individual–Parent Career Goal Discrepancy Scale assists in mapping intergenerational conflict in collectivist contexts. Linking back to the study's objectives, these applications show how existing instruments can inform practice while also highlighting their cultural limitations. Practitioners in Indonesia, in particular, should exercise caution when applying Western-developed scales and consider contextual adaptations to ensure culturally sensitive assessments. This review delineates multiple strategic pathways to enhance the measurement of career goals. Initial recommended action entails the examination of measurement invariance across distinct cultural settings to ascertain that established scales perform equivalently across heterogeneous population groups. A related but distinct action further necessitates the recruitment of participants who extend beyond the traditional sample of university undergraduates; specifically, studying emerging adults who imminently transition into the labor market can substantively enhance the generalizability of findings. Longitudinal validation studies represent a third crucial advance, permitting the investigation of the temporal dynamism inherent to career aspiration formation. Finally, executing comparative analyses of existing career-goal instruments formulated in diverse Asian cultural contexts will deepen cross-cultural analytical horizons, thereby furnishing a robust evidential foundation upon which to construct measurement scales that are responsive to the distinctive contextual textures of Indonesia.

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