

## FACTORS AFFECTING THE BAJO TRIBE CONSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN SAPEKEN ISLANDS

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**Abstract:** *Equitable access for education can be a measure of a country's justice. Although almost all countries, including Indonesia, have echoed campaigns on education for all, this has not always been successful. Various obstacles were faced, such as socio-cultural constraints, especially for isolated tribes. This study aims to determine the factors that influence parents' construction in the Bajo Tribe towards children's education in the Sapeken Islands. This research is qualitative research with a phenomenological method. The study was conducted for one year with ten subjects. Data was obtained through participatory observation, then analyzed using the NVivo program. The results show that at least five factors influence the construct of Bajo parents on their children's education. The five factors include religious and moral values, relations with the outside world, availability of transportation facilities, educational facilities, and access to information.*

**Keywords:** *Bajo tribe, children's education, parent construction*

**Abstrak:** *Pemerataan akses pendidikan dapat menjadi ukuran keadilan suatu negara. Meskipun hampir semua negara, termasuk Indonesia, telah menggemakan kampanye pendidikan untuk semua, namun hal ini tidak selalu berhasil. Berbagai kendala dihadapi, seperti kendala sosial budaya, terutama bagi suku terasing. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pembinaan orang tua Suku Bajo terhadap pendidikan anak di Kepulauan Sapeken. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologis. Penelitian dilakukan selama satu tahun dengan sepuluh subjek. Data diperoleh melalui observasi partisipatif, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan program NVivo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa setidaknya ada lima faktor yang mempengaruhi konstruk orang tua Bajo terhadap pendidikan anaknya. Kelima faktor tersebut antara lain nilai agama dan moral, hubungan dengan dunia luar, ketersediaan sarana transportasi, sarana pendidikan, dan akses informasi.*

**Kata kunci:** *Suku Bajo, Pendidikan Anak, Konstruksi Orang Tua*

### INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the promises of Indonesia's independence contained in the state constitution. Fulfillment of the right to quality primary education is a measure of justice and equity in development outcomes and an investment in human resources needed to support the sustainability of

national development. The right to obtain primary education to fulfill human rights has become a global commitment. Therefore, education programs for all must be realized with an open and democratic education system that is gender-equal to reach people who live in remote areas and have economic constraints (Lin, 2018;

Lynch & Baker, 2005; Medina & Suthers, 2008; Rahmadi, 2020).

The government has made various efforts to fulfill the constitutional mandate, including expanding access to education as stated in the strategic plan (Renstra) of the Ministry of Education and Culture 2020-2024 (Kemdikbudristek Team, 2020). In implementing the project, the government faces obstacles, such as socio-cultural constraints. In isolated tribes, for example, they tend to be apathetic towards education. For example, the Anak Dalam tribe (Baharudin, 2010) and the Bedouin tribe (Asyari et al., 2017; Sutoto, 2017) are still anti-modern and regard education as a threat to traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. This assumption makes these two tribes tend to resist the presence of education.

One of the tribes that are considered an isolated tribe is the Bajo tribe (Ancung & Sutisna, 2021; Machmud et al., 2020; Tahara, 2013). The Bajo tribe originally lived on boats called bido (small ships), moving around in groups to different places according to their fishing location. They live life from birth on the ship and have a family until the end of life. Therefore, the Bajo people are often called sea nomads or sea gypsies (Machmud et al., 2020). Currently, most of them have lived and settled in coastal areas. The sea is the source of life for them. The Bajo people have the principle that *Pinde Kulitang Kadarak Bone Pinde Same ka Darak* which means moving the Bajo people to the land is nearly impossible.

In contrast to other isolated tribes who tend to be apathetic towards education and all forms of novelty, the Bajo people who inhabit the Sapeken islands, Sumenep Regency, have a relatively high appreciation of education. Based on field observations, the researchers saw that the enthusiasm of the Bajo people was very high for children's education. Factual data that supports this fact can be accessed

through the [www.sumenepkab.bps.go.id](http://www.sumenepkab.bps.go.id), which displays statistical data in the Sapeken sub-district where the Bajo tribe (BPS Sumenep, 2021a, 2021b). This enthusiasm can be seen because almost all Bajo children receive primary education.

In line with high enthusiasm for education, there is also a change in orientation towards the type of education. At first, *pesantren* was an educational institution that was quite popular in the Sapeken islands. Slowly, since the early 1990s, parents' interest in sending their children to Islamic boarding schools began to diminish. This change in educational orientation from *pesantren* to public schools is more or less influenced by the presence of oil and gas companies and the interaction between the Bajo people and the Javanese and Sumatrans. This condition is in line with what was found by Obie (2016) and Rustan et al. (2018) in their research, that one factor in the change in the Bajo tribe's view of education is their fairly intense interaction with more advanced outside tribes.

Seeing the high school participation rate of Bajo tribal children and parents' enthusiasm to send their children to school, this phenomenon is exciting to study. It is conceivable, a community that has been perceived as an isolated community, who lives in a very remote area, with minimal means of transportation to get to the city, and with limited access to information and communication. Still, in all these limitations, they have great enthusiasm for education.

Several studies have been conducted regarding the Bajo tribe, including the identity of the Bajo tribe (Tahara, 2013), the economic condition of the Bajo tribe (Isiyana Wianti et al., 2012; Sarapil et al., 2020; Therik, 2008), social changes (Obie, 2016; Risto, 2014; Rustan et al., 2018), and local wisdom of the Bajo tribe, traditions and meaning of the Bajo tribal tradition (Alam, 2018; La, 2011).

Although research on the Bajo tribe has been widely carried out as described above, there have not been many studies that have tried to explore how the Bajo tribe views children's education, especially the Bajo tribe who inhabit the Sapeken Islands. Meanwhile, several studies have examined how people outside the Bajo tribe carry out constructs regarding children's education. These studies show that public perceptions, especially parents, of children's education significantly affect the school enrollment rate (APS). This study seeks to answer the question of what factors influence the construction of the Bajo tribe in the Sapeken Islands regarding children's education.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is qualitative research with the phenomenological method. The researcher uses the phenomenological study to reveal the essence of meaning built by the Bajo people on their experiences and views regarding children's education. The body of this research is that researchers want to explore what the subjects think, what they experience, and what meanings they build about children's education.

The research was carried out for one year, starting from January-December 2021. The research subjects were the Bajo tribe living in the Sapeken Islands, Sumenep Regency, East Java. Subjects were selected purposively based on the following criteria: education level, age, family income, number of dependents in the family, the value of children in the family. Data was collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with ten informants. This data collection process refers to data collection activities from Creswell (2010: 112), a data collection circle. The data is then validated by triangulation, confirmability, and peer debriefing. The information that has been collected is then analyzed using the NVivo program.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### A. Bajo Tribe Identity

Tahara (2013) explains that there are still ethnic prejudices and stereotypes against the Bajo people as dirty, stupid, and even a group of robbers at sea in inter-ethnic interaction. As a group attached to stereotypes, the Bajo people develop a strategy by developing identity politics to recognize ethnicity that is equal to other groups. The rise of the identity of the Bajo people in Wakatobi is an example of their relationship with other groups.

Suyuti (2010) explains that social interaction between the Bajo and Bagai (not Bajo) is unavoidable to meet all the necessities of life. This interaction changed the cultural principle of *olai lesse'e* (the principle of anti-foreigner life) in the Bajo people. From that interaction, cultural communication also occurs. The Bajo people try to interpret what they receive from the outside. Some fundamental changes to the Bajo people, such as the settlement pattern that used to only live above the bid. Now the Bajo people began to settle on the coast. Likewise, the kinship system, language, religion, leadership, social organization, and knowledge and technology design are slowly changing. In line with that, Risto (2014) said that the Bajo tribe living in Toropot village, Bokon district, Central Sulawesi archipelago has changed. This change occurred because of the intensive social interaction between the Bajo and Bagai.

### B. Bajo Tribe Traditions and Rituals

Baskara and Astuti (2011) say that the Bajo tribe has an ethical system that applies as a set of rules that must be obeyed in their lives. The moral system of the Bajo tribe is called Pamali. Pamali is a kind of taboo system, which contains prohibitions or things that should not be done. Examples of Pamali that apply to the Bajo tribe in Sapeken related to marine life include: it is

forbidden to throw garbage in the sea, such as lime peels, leftover spices, and other trash, including spitting in the ocean. Another example is that it is forbidden to catch small fish before it is time to see them.

Because the Bajo tribe is marine, they must protect and maintain the sea as their living environment. The Pamali system is a form of local wisdom of the Bajo tribe to retain and sustain their survival at sea. Therefore, conservation policies and programs in Indonesia, in general, must consider the local genius of the community, such as values, wisdom, and customs in maintaining their living environment, especially in this case, the Pamali system of the Bajo tribe.

La (2011) examined the boat rescue ceremony (*Cera Leppa*), a tradition of the Bajo people. The Bajo people believe this money (*Cera Leppa*) is a vehicle to unite their souls with the boat and the sea because the three are united and cannot be separated from one another when at sea.

### **C. Bajo Tribe Economy**

According to, The fishing community of the Bajo tribe has undergone a transformation that refers to changes in rural communities based on growth and market capitalist mechanisms. The role of economic exchange indicates the shift of Bajo society towards capitalism and the penetration of values brought by the Chinese. The change in economic orientation towards capitalism is also caused by the significant role of the Mandati people, who are capitalists, who provide a conducive climate for doing business. In addition, religion is also a factor in Bajo capitalism. Local capitalism of the Bajo tribe also develops through ethics. Still, the ethics adopted by the local capitalist Bajo Mola community is not like the ethics adopted by full-fledged capitalists in the style of Western society, which is very individualistic.

A different condition regarding the Bajo tribe was found by Therik (2008), who said that the Bajo tribe living in Tanjung Pasir, Rote Island, experienced a very high dependence on Toke (the skipper). This condition makes labor anglers work hard to pay off debts to Toke that are increasingly piling up. Weather changes and sometimes unfriendly natural conditions have resulted in labor fishers experiencing many sad stories. Poverty, social inequality, and the pressures of life (exploitation) that intensively afflict fishers' households have exhausted their energy and thoughts to deal with or overcome them. Economic difficulties do not allow family members of labor fishers to be actively involved in various social responsibilities outside of the problems of life that are substantial for them.

### **D. Factors Affecting the Construction of the Bajo Tribe**

There is no single factor that causes something to happen. Likewise, the construction of the Bajo tribe regarding children's education does not occur because of one element. Still, an accumulation of individual and collective experiences becomes a common reason for doing something, in this case, the decision to send their children to school. This study found that five factors influenced the construction of the Bajo tribe regarding their children's formal education.

#### **1. Religion and Moral Values**

Since the Abu Hurairah Islamic Boarding School, was founded in 1978 and the Al-Amien Islamic Boarding School in 1980, the interest of the Bajo tribal community in the Sapeken Islands to send their children to Islamic boarding schools has been very high. Since then the pesantren has become very popular. Becoming a student is a dream for children who want to continue their education. Having santri children who can give

lectures and Friday sermons is a pride for parents. The Bajo tribe in the Sapeken archipelago began to recognize higher education than elementary school.

Currently, the development of pesantren is hampered by formal education. Although in terms of the number of pesantren, the number of students has decreased every year. Parents who send their children to Islamic boarding schools today are more concerned with the promiscuity of today's teenagers, so to fortify their children from promiscuity, some parents send their children to boarding schools. This is as stated by informant A1 below.

"As a parent, I am worried that children today are too free; as a result, many get pregnant out of wedlock, so I send my children to Islamic boarding schools; hopefully, the religious knowledge they receive can become a stronghold for them."

Religion is the first factor that influences the construction of the Bajo tribe regarding education. Everything related to religious practices and rituals, such as prayer and the Koran, is necessary to learn. Especially for the ability to read the Qur'an, every Bajo child must learn, so it is not strange if the early Bajo tribe can read Arabic letters, but they do not understand reading Latin letters. Even the khatam of the Qur'an is an absolute requirement for boys to be circumcised.

Initially, the Bajo tribe did not study religion through formal educational institutions. Still, with the unguu system, a teaching and learning system that is more similar to private tutoring, the teacher provides knowledge to students individually. This system does not limit the age of students. Children and adults learn religious expertise in this way. After pesantren and formal education were established, the autumnal system was abandoned because children could learn through educational institutions. The

autumnal system still survives, but it is more for studying mystical sciences.

## **2. Relationship with Like and the Outside World**

In the early 1990s, Pertamina conducted oil and gas exploration on Pagerungan Besar island. The limited human resources with expertise in the mining sector have forced Pertamina to hire experts from Java and Sumatra. Since then, there has been an intense interaction between the Bajo people and the bagai (immigrants). The arrival of oil and gas companies and workers from Java and Sumatra was the beginning of the Bajo tribe getting acquainted with the modern world. Through interactions with immigrants, the Bajo tribe learned modern equipment, such as machine drills and machine passages, which were previously foreign to them. Through this interaction, the Bajo people know these tools and learn how to use them.

The relationship between the Bajo tribe and immigrants also made the Bajo tribe realize that education is vital. Migrants from Java and Sumatra have higher educational qualifications than the Bajo tribe, and their minimum education is equivalent to high school. With this educational qualification and work skills, the newcomers occupy good positions in the company, at least as heads of work overseeing several unskilled laborers consisting of the Bajo tribe. Admiration mixed with jealousy often occurs in the Bajo tribal community towards income groups. This is illustrated by the following statement by informant A2 as follows.

"We send our children to school because we like to see the bosses in the company, their salary is significant, the work is also good. That's why I sent my children to sakole pamarente (formal school), who knows if their luck will be good".

The Bajo tribe began to link education with work skills in the company and the position and income received. Indeed, the payment received by migrants is much greater than the income received by the Bajo tribe, who only work as unskilled laborers. Before oil and gas companies came to Pagerungan Besar island, the Bajo tribe occasionally contacted Javanese people. However, this interaction is still limited to fish entrepreneurs who can more freely sail to Java with their boats. So that in the early stages, awareness about the importance of education for children appears among fish entrepreneurs.

### **3. Availability of Transportation Facilities**

Before the 1990s, apart from limited educational facilities, limited means of transportation were considered by parents in sending their children to school. At that time, the condition of the Sapeken islands was utterly isolated. Only toke-toke that sell fish can interact with the outside world because they have private boats that transport fish to Banyuwangi, Panarukan, and Bali.

In 1996, the government provided a means of transportation in a pioneer ship that could travel to Banyuwangi and Sumenep. The existence of this pioneering ship is beneficial for the Bajo tribe in the Sapeken archipelago, especially in the trade sector. Because with this ship, even though it's only once every two weeks, the Bajo people can use it to send archipelagic sea products to the ship's destinations, and vice versa, the Bajo tribe can routinely shop for trade goods from Java to be resold to Sapeken. Since then, trade in the Sapeken islands has been bustling. Until now, the Pioneer ship is still operating once a week.

The presence of the Pioneer ship as the only fastest and cheapest alternative transportation to reach Banyuwangi and Sumenep directly affects the economic development of the Bajo tribal community.

It has implications for the increasing number of children who continue their education to Banyuwangi and Sumenep. This was felt by the following informants, A3 and A4.

"Where else would the children be sent to school? That was all we knew at that time, namely the sakole guru (Teacher Education School) and sakole Mantri (Health Education School). The distance is also close, right only in Banyuwangi, in Pamkasan there is also. Especially now that there is a perintis ship, you could say it's just a step to get there".

Transportation facilities are significant for the Bajo tribe to access educational facilities in the city. Transportation is no longer an obstacle for children who want to continue their education, high school in Sapeken and high school in the regency city. Transportation between islands in the Sapeken archipelago is also available every day.

### **4. Availability of Educational Facilities**

Based on data on the number of schools obtained from BPS Sumenep (2021b), it can be seen that the total number of schools, both public and private, is 113 schools, consisting of 65 elementary (SD/MI), 29 junior high schools (SMP/MTs), and 19 senior high schools (SMA/MA). These schools are spread over nine villages and 17 islands inhabited throughout the Sapeken sub-district. There are up to 5-6 SD/MI on one island. This amount is certainly a lot, so every Bajo tribal child in the Sapeken archipelago can receive a minimum education at the elementary level. This is acknowledged by the following informants, A5 and A6.

"Today's children, if they are not sent to school, their parents are too stingy, then we used to have no school here, the children have to be sent to Banyuwangi, the cost is more first, who will be better off if not the parents too."

The availability of educational facilities, especially elementary schools in almost all inhabited islands, motivates parents to send their children to school. After these children graduate from elementary school, they will continue their education to junior high school in three islands, Sapeken, Throughout, and Pagerungan Besar. These three schools show rapid development every year. Every year the number of registrants increases, so these schools have to increase the number of classes. The three junior high schools in the Sapeken archipelago each have 12 categories. This increases the capacity of children who want to continue their education.

At least up to the junior high school level, access to educational facilities can still be reached. It's just that there is still one in the Sapeken archipelago for the high school levels, namely on the island of Sapeken. So that children who want to continue their education to high school, due to several obstacles such as economic constraints, are forced to enter the MA on their island or instead choose not to go to school. This deserves the attention of the local government. Considering the geographical condition of the Sapeken archipelago, there are at least two or three high schools. This is also the hope of the Bajo tribe that is a bit far from the island of Sapeken.

## **5. Access to information**

As with transportation facilities that can be used to reach educational facilities, initially, access to information about education was rare for the Bajo tribe. Information about education is almost only obtained from teachers and puskesmas employees who come from district cities assigned to islands in the Sapeken sub-district. This is as stated by informants A7 and A10 as follows.

"Initially, Pak Syaiful told us that there was a Mantri Sakole department in

Banyuwangi. He said that if my child graduated from high school, he was willing to take me to register before my son had a transfer, I was forced to take my son Java myself. I hope he doesn't get lost".

Apart from these teachers, information about education is also only accessible to those who often travel to cities. These people are the Toke and fishermen who go with them, and the number of these people is enormous. Limited interaction with higher education people and little knowledge about education itself influences parents' decisions about their child's education. As the experience of informants A8 and A9, Information about education is also widely obtained from employees in the company.

"When the Javanese people who live in my house often encourage me to send their children to school, actually I am a bit worried because I don't know anything, don't know where to go to school, how much it costs, but after I was told to them, it turned out that it was not too heavy too."

In fact, until now, most of the Bajo people in the Sapeken islands are still not free to access information about education. This can be seen from selecting the type of education for their children, which tends to be homogeneous. The Bajo tribe gives their children the freedom to choose the kind of education according to their financial condition and their children's wishes. The freedom to select the type of education for their children cannot be separated from the lack of information about the instruction obtained by the Bajo tribe. They only know the two most popular majors today, education and nursing. The rest is still unclear. Limited information regarding the types of education and majors has implications for the homogeneity of the chosen majors. Currently, almost all Bajo children who continue their studies at university choose education and nursing majors. As a result, many teachers and

nurses end up unemployed because their energy is not absorbed.

## CONCLUSION

Education campaigns for all have been echoed by various countries over the last few decades, including Indonesia. Even education is one of the promises of independence in the state constitution. To fulfill this promise of freedom, the government seeks to expand access to education for all citizens, as stated in the Ministry of Education and Culture's strategic plan for 2020-2024. However, these efforts have encountered obstacles in the field, especially in the interior tribes, who are still anti-renewal. The Bajo tribe is one of the tribes that is considered isolated. Even today, there is still a stereotype from more advanced societies that the Bajo tribe is a dirty, stupid, and anti-newness tribe.

The view above is, of course, no longer relevant to the fact that currently, the Bajo tribe has transformed into a tribe that is open to change, and one of these changes is achieved through education. The Bajo people in the Sapeken Islands are very enthusiastic about teaching. This can be seen from the very high school enrollment rate. This fact is also supported by the results of interviews with research subjects. The data obtained show that at least five factors influence the perception of Bajo parents on children's education. First, religion and moral values are considered to fortify Bajo tribal children from promiscuity that has plagued the entire younger generation. Understanding of religion and moral values can be obtained through pesantren education. Second, the relationship with the world and the outside so that the Bajo tribe gain additional insight about the importance of children's education. The third is the availability of transportation facilities, the primary capital to access educational facilities in Java, Madura, and Bali. Fourth, the availability of educational facilities is increasing, making

it easier for every Bajo tribal child to access education. Fifth, access to information is more accessible than a few decades ago.

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