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Cultural Barriers of Masalembu Island Fisherman Children in Continuing School

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Abstract

Masalembu Island is one of the outer islands of the sea area of Sumenep Regency. Most of the population are fishermen from three main tribes: Madurese, Bugis, and Mandar. One of their big problems in education is the large number of children who do not continue their education, either to high school or university level. This qualitative research aims to explore the cultural barriers for the children of Masalembu Island fishermen that cause them not to continue school. The snowball technique produced six participants, namely three children of fishermen, two heads of fishing families, and one teacher. Researchers used semistructured interviews and observation methods to collect data, which was then analyzed using five techniques carried out iteratively: data collection, data organization, reading and making memos, description and classification, and interpretation. Analysis of research findings produced five main themes regarding the cultural barriers for fishermen's children to continue school: children as economic support for the family, views on the role of women, juvenile delinquency, the passive role of parents, and failure of college graduates to meet cultural expectations. In short, the cultural barriers of Masalembu Island fishermen children in continuing school are related to the mismatch between children's roles at school and their cultural roles in the family.

Keywords

Cultural Barriers; Fishermen's Children; Masalembu Island; Continuing School; Qualitative

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Masalembu Islands are one of the outermost areas of the Sumenep Regency area, which consists of many islands. There are 126 islands in the Sumenep district, of which 48 are inhabited, and 78 are uninhabited (BPS Kabupaten Sumenep, 2021). The Masalembu Islands, which consist of three main islands, namely Masalembu Island, Masakambing Island, and Karamian Island, are the northernmost islands of Sumenep Regency. This archipelago is unique, including a society that combines several tribes, namely Madurese, Bugis, and Mandar (Randa, 2017). In addition, Masakambing Island was designated as an Essential Economic Zone to conserve the nearly extinct Abbotti's Yellow-crested Cockatoo (Habibi & Syabana, 2023).

One of the problems in the education sector in the island region is the school enrollment rate, which is still low, especially at the high school level. The Pure Participation Rate at Sumenep Regency High



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School level in 2020 is still at 65.01 (BPS Kabupaten Sumenep, 2023). The most significant contributor to the low school enrollment is from the island region, including Masalembu Island. The population on Masalembu Island is dominated by people who have not finished elementary school, namely 41%, while the number of people who have graduated from high school is only 12% (BPS Kabupaten Sumenep, 2021).

One of the causes of low school participation is socio-cultural problems. The culture of fishing communities where parents still do not prioritize schooling for their children but instead send them to work or get married has been a finding from several researchers in many rural areas in Indonesia (Sofya et al., 2018). Efforts to overcome such socio-cultural problems can begin by conducting a more in-depth study of the culture and views of the community regarding the meaning of school for them, the difficulties they face, and the hopes of parents regarding their children in the future.

Based on the background of the problem above, research is needed regarding the cultural barriers to continuing education for Masalembu Island fishermen's children. Exploring the culture of the Masalembu Island fishing community, especially regarding people's views regarding the benefits and functions of the school, can be the basis for efforts to increase school participation at the high school and even tertiary levels. Cultural exploration, which includes people's views of life and experiences, can be carried out using a qualitative approach (Miles et al., 2020).

The phenomenon of children dropping out of school in coastal areas (fishing communities) has been of much concern to researchers in Indonesia, such as the low interest in continuing studies on fishing communities in East Lombok (Asmiati et al., 2022), studies of children dropping out of school in Acehnese Fishermen (Aminah et al., 2023), or communication studies on fishing families who dropped out of school in Situbondo (Ainiyah, 2015). These studies show that dropping out of school or low interest in continuing to higher education is quite common in fishing communities in various regions in Indonesia.

The character of the fishing community in the coastal areas of Sumenep, including the archipelago area, still firmly adheres to old values and traditions. The community routinely carries out various traditional ceremonies of a spiritual nature to ask the Almighty for safety and abundant catches (Habibi et al., 2021). The considerable influence of socio-cultural aspects in the lives of the Sumenep fishing community also includes economic activities and environmental management (Habibi, 2023).

In the educational aspect, fishing communities in the Sumenep Madura area also have similar problems. Research often finds two reasons for the high school dropout rate in the Sumenep fishing area: many children working at school (Amalia, 2017) and early marriage (Rofika & Hariastuti, 2020). In another study, the fishing community in Sumenep considered higher education necessary. Still, it has not significantly impacted their efforts to send their children to higher education (Nisa', 2016). Sociocultural exploration of the causes of many children not continuing to school in the archipelago, especially Masalembu Island, has not been carried out. This is the rational background for the importance of this research.

2. METHODS

The type of research used is qualitative research. Researchers use the interpretive paradigm to guide all activities and decision-making during the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The basic principle of the interpretive paradigm is to treat participants as collaborators (not as objects) together with researchers to determine the truth and patterns of information from research results (with a rational role) in a voluntary and participatory manner (Moustakas, 2011). From the start, participant selection was carried out openly, where the research objectives were conveyed to potential participants so that they could determine their choice of participation.

Concerning the research objective of exploring the cultural barriers for Masalembu Island fishermen's children to continue their studies, both to high school and tertiary level, the selection of participants in this research was determined based on the main criteria, namely residents of Masalembu Island who live in fishing areas, both those who work as fishermen and other professions directly related to the school activities of fishermen's children. Using the snowball technique, six participants were obtained: three children of fishermen, two heads of fishing families, and one teacher.

The selection of residents initially born in the Masalembu Island fishing village was based on their wealth of experience, especially cultural experience with their identity and self-view as Masalembu people, especially as fishermen. As we know, cultural identity is built by a long experience from generation to generation, a person as part of a community group with unique habits and values that are held as the basis for it (Andreassen et al., 2020).

The selection of participants begins with a gatekeeper who better understands the situation at the research location (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). The gatekeeper in this research was part of the research team, namely a Wiraraja University student who came from Masalembu Island. With a relatively lengthy discussion, the gatekeeper provided input regarding possible people who could be asked to become participants (Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). Then, in a snowball manner (Naderifar et al., 2017; TenHouten, 2017; Parker et al., 2019), potential participants were contacted to ask their willingness. The gatekeeper also acts as a liaison between researchers and the fishing community of Masalembu Island to establish good relations not just for research functions but also for other social benefits in the future.

This research used two main data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews and observation. Interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, especially regarding the obstacles children face in continuing their education. Observations are used primarily to explore initial and supporting data from the results of interviews that have been conducted. The interview protocol was prepared by adapting Creswell & Creswell (2018). Researchers use observation mainly to confirm or deepen certain information obtained through interviews. One example is when children help their parents work as fishermen (for example, fixing boats, transporting catches, or splitting fish to be dried).

Data analysis in this research adopted Creswell & Poth's qualitative analysis steps, which consist of five steps: data collection, data organization, reading and making memos, description and classification, and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The initial information we collected was about the conditions of students at school and the problems they generally experienced. The relationship between students' problems and their daily activities in helping their parents led researchers to dig deeper into the role of Masalembu fishermen's children in their homes. Reading the transcripts step by step gave researchers more insight into the cultural experience of fishermen's children.

As with the general character of qualitative research, analysis is carried out simultaneously with data collection related to the researcher's role as an instrument (Karagiozis, 2018; Wa-Mbaleka, 2020; Yoon & Uliassi, 2022) and a research data analyst. In addition, the data collection and analysis process in qualitative research is iterative (Morgan & Nica, 2020; Neale, 2020; Snodgrass et al., 2020), which impacts a process that can repeat itself and return to certain stages according to the latest information needs.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Result

Masalembu Island is the largest island of the three members of the Masalembu Archipelago. This island consists of two villages, namely Masalima Village and Sukajeruk Village. As an archipelagic area, fishing is one of the primary professions of the people of Masalembu Island. The traditional Masalembu fishermen's house is a stilt house made entirely of wood (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Traditional Masalembu Fishermen's House

Based on the results of research observations, the children of Masalembu Island fishermen have helped their parents with their work since childhood. These activities to help parents are still carried out even though the children have gone to school. Generally, there are differences in the types of activities carried out by boys and girls. Boys usually help their parents dry the seaweed and clean the boats. In contrast, girls usually help their parents care for the house, processing fish and making kolowe (processed mango fruit) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Fishermen's daughters drying kolowe

Masalembu fishermen's children also participate in ritual events like sea picking. This ritual, which aims to express gratitude to God for abundant marine products, is also carried out by fishermen in other areas of Madura. In the sea-picking ritual, children play a role, from preparation to reading prayers, releasing offerings into the sea, and wearing typical clothing.

Analysis of interview results regarding the cultural barriers for Masalembu Island fishermen's children to continue their studies, both at high school and university levels, resulted in five main themes, namely: (1) Children as economic support for the family, (2) views on the role of women, (3) juvenile delinquency, (4) the passive role of parents, and (5) failure of college graduates to meet cultural expectation.

Children as Economic Support for The Family

Children of fishermen on Masalembu Island have started helping their parents with their work

since elementary school. As explained previously, girls and boys usually do different activities. Daughters help their mothers, while sons help their fathers with their work. Culturally, fishermen's children have positioned themselves as supporting the family economy. The following is an expression from Participant A, a male fisherman's son, regarding his activities of helping his father:

"Molae dhari SD kaule nolongi eppa' nyiap aghi kaparlowan majheng. Saamponna SMP kaule molae ajhar noro' majheng. Polana lebur nangale reng-oreng majheng nompa' parao. Samangken pon biasa, niser mon eppa' ta' etolongi."

'Since elementary school, I have helped my father prepare for fishing. Starting from junior high school, I learned to catch fish in the sea. I was interested in seeing older people catching fish by boat. Now it has become a habit, and it is a pity that Dad does not have anyone to help.'

This condition means that many fishermen's children do not have a strong focus on their lessons at school. Fishermen's activities such as cleaning boats and fishing equipment, catching fish at sea, processing catches, or selling catches require much energy. Children often feel tired, do not have time to study, or do not even go to school. These conditions are as stated by participant F, who is a school teacher, as follows:

"Mon teppa' nolongi majheng otabe bede acara keluarga, nak-kanak biasana ta' masok sakolah. Pernah settong bekto kaule entar ke romana siswa se ta' masok, deddina nak-kanakna gi' tedung polana kaso"

'When they are helping their parents to the sea, or there is a family event, the children usually do not attend school. Once, I visited the house of a student absent from school, and it turned out he was sleeping because he was tired.'

In these conditions, most fishermen's children cannot excel in school and ultimately do not have a severe orientation regarding their schooling. Only a few fishermen's children can complete all learning activities with total concentration.

Views on The Role of Women

Based on the results of interviews and observations, information was obtained that on Masalembu Island, there are still many early-age marriages. Girls especially experience this. When they enter adolescence, there will usually be proposals from people around them. There are even cases where girls are married off by their parents before graduating from junior high school. This stems from the view that women's nature is to be homemakers; they do not need economic independence or higher education. Participant B's statement, the daughter of a female fisherman, shows this view.

"Ca'na ebu nak-kanak bine' kodu ajhar abanto kalakoan e roma. Jha' les-males, tako' towana ta' bisa amassa', ta' bisa ngurus ana.' Tekka asakola ta' olle loppae ka kawajibanna jereya."

'Mother said that girls should learn to do the housework. Do not be lazy. Moreover, I am afraid that you will not be able to cook or care for the children when you grow old. Even though you go to school, you must not forget your obligations.'

Based on interviews and observations, fishermen's wives on Masalembu Island do not only care for housework such as cooking, washing, and looking after children. They are also critical in supporting the family's economy, such as processing fish caught by their husbands or selling them directly. During the wind season, the wives also look for alternative livelihoods for the family, such as processing local resources into something that can be sold. For example, processing mangoes into kelowe (see Figure 2) as a substitute for kitchen acid (because on Masalembu Island, the acid price is expensive) for personal use or sale.

Juvenile Delinquency

Teenage boys on Masalembu Island like traveling on motorbikes in groups or "gatherings," in the terms used by the community, forming gangs. This social interaction is another obstacle to children's

being active and excelling at school. The following is Participant A's statement.

"Manabi pon geng-gengan, biasana pon tak' kapekkeran ka sakola'an, nggi ta' abanto reng towa alako. Kadeng mangkat ka sakola asaragam, e tengnga jelen asalen, laju mangkat pol-kompol sareng genknga."

'In a gang, you usually never think about school or helping your parents with their work. Sometimes, they go to school wearing uniforms; on the way, they change clothes and then gather with their group or gang.'

The specific activities of teenagers, especially boys, in gang groups cannot be described in this study due to the difficulty in getting boys who are gang members as participants.

Teenage relationships that also hinder children from being active at school are dating. On the other hand, the Masalembu Island fishing community still adheres quite firmly to their traditional customs of not allowing young men and women to be too intimate. Teenagers who continue to have relationships will make their parents embarrassed and worried that adultery will occur. Generally, they will be married off and drop out of school.

The Passive Role of Parents

All parents who participated in the research expressed their desire for their children to be successful in school and not become fishermen like their parents. The difficult economic conditions of traditional fishermen on Masalembu Island mean that fishermen do not expect their children to have the same profession (becoming fishermen). Participant D's following statement is an example of this hope.

"Sadhajana oreng majheng tak terro anakna majheng jugen. Terrona nak-kanak bisa bajheng asakola, ma'le towana bisa deddi oreng sukses, andi' kalakowan se pengaselanna tetep ban cokop ... Mon bisa deddi ponggebe, reng towana pastena arassa bangga."

'All fishermen do not want their children to become fishermen too. I want the children to be serious about going to school so that when they are old, they can be successful and have a job with a steady and sufficient income. If they become a civil servant, their parents will feel proud.'

The jobs most valued by the fishing community on Masalembu Island are teachers and civil servants. The highest success in going to school is to have both professions. Therefore, parents want their children to take school seriously. However, unfortunately they cannot provide support and guidance in their child's daily learning process. Regarding this matter, participant E stated:

"Kaule reng budu, lambe' namong lulus SD. Kabennya'an oreng towa e ka'anto nggi enga' kaule. Ta' bisa abanto pangajaranna anak e sakola'an. Molana kaule pasra ka guruna."

'I am stupid. I only graduated from elementary school. Many parents here are also like me. So they cannot help direct children regarding their lessons at school. That is why I surrendered to the teacher.'

The condition of low educational background means that many fishermen do not have the experience to support and direct their children to excel in school. The fishermen entrust entirely their children's formal education to the teachers. This condition is exacerbated by economic difficulties, meaning that children also have to act as additional support for the family economy.

The Failure of Higher College Graduates to Meet Cultural Expectations

The fishing community of Masalembu Island views school as a way to change the fate of their children so that they do not work as fishermen either. The following is figurative language expressed by Participant E regarding their hopes for the future of children who attend school.

"Ge-moge towana bisa negghu' bolpen, ta' negghu' jering enga' kaule."

'Hopefully, when he grows up (my child) can hold a ballpoint pen, not a fishing net like me.'

However, this hope becomes weak when they see that there are college graduates who fail to change their destiny and remain as fishermen, farmers, or shop assistants like other children who do not go to school. Participant F's statement shows this situation.

"Bennya' na'-kana' se lulus kuliah namong se abali ka Masalembu tetep alako majheng ben ajaga toko. Na'kana' paneka laju deddi conto je' akuliyah ta' meste alako nyaman."

'Many fishermen's children graduate from college, but those who return to Masalembu Island continue working as fishermen and shopkeepers. They are an example that studying does not guarantee a comfortable job.'

Children of fishermen who can go to college excel and end up having jobs different from their parents' jobs, which means they can fulfill the cultural expectations of the fishing community and usually do not return to Masalembu Island. Thus, college graduates who are close to the daily lives of fishing communities are the ones who fail to meet their cultural expectations.

Discussion

The themes that emerge based on data analysis from the research results above show that the cultural barriers for Masalembu Island fishermen's children to continue school include society's views regarding the role of children in the family (themes 1, 2, and 3), the role of parents regarding children's formal education (theme 4) and the role of schools for society (theme 5).

The views of the Masalembu Island fishing community regarding the role of children in the family, which are the findings of this research, are divided into three parts, namely the role of children as economic supporters of the family, the role of girls as prospective housewives and teenage relationships that conflict with the expected role. The role of fishermen's children as economic supporters of the family strengthens similar findings in research conducted by Masri (2017), Triwardhani & Chaerowati (2019), Putri & Wulandari (2020), and Kamil & Nassa (2021). Culturally, fishermen's children have been supporting the family economy since middle school. This condition makes fishermen's children unable to fully concentrate on their learning activities at school, especially boys who have started joining their fathers in fishing at sea.

The role of daughters as economic family supporters is in line with the various activities carried out by fishermen's wives, according to Damsiki (2020), Kasim et al. (2021), and Novikarumsari et al. (2023), which illustrates the pattern of role distribution in fishing families. In this research, a fisherman's daughter is seen by the Masalembu Island fishing community as a potential fisherman's wife who does not need formal education up to a high level. Girls who marry and drop out of school are not seen negatively. Early marriage also occurs when children have a reasonably intimate relationship (dating) that is not yet accepted by society's culture. The phenomenon of early marriage triggered by dating behavior is also a finding from other research on fishing communities on the coast of Madura (Pranata & Fahrullah, 2021).

The following cultural barrier that prevents Masalembu Island fishermen's children from continuing school is the fishermen's views regarding the role of parents in the child's formal education process. Research data shows fishermen on Masalembu Island hand over all responsibility for children's formal education at school to teachers. The view that parents do not actively participate in formal education is mainly due to the fishermen's low educational background. Parents do not have sufficient experience to direct and support their children's learning process at school. Regarding parental support, Rudini et al. (2020) found that the support of fishermen's parents for their children's formal education only occurs among fishermen with a high economic level.

The final cultural barrier found in this research was the failure of college graduates who returned to Masalembu to meet community expectations. For Masalembu Island fishermen, going from school to college serves to change their children's profession, no longer being a fisherman or other menial jobs. For them, the school's success is in making its graduates become civil servants or employees with a fixed salary (which is symbolized by the job of holding a ballpoint pen). Generally, college graduates successfully get civil servant jobs, both civil servants and in companies, in cities outside Masalembu Island with a significant need for civil servants or company employees. In contrast, college graduates who returned to Masalembu Island failed to find jobs. This condition demotivated many fishermen to fight for their children to be active in school.

In general, we can see that the main cultural obstacle for Masalembu Island children to continue school is the mismatch between children's roles at school and their cultural roles in the family. Cultural aspects are the roots of people's behavior because it is in a culture that people make sense of the world and their lives (Geertz, 1973; Blackledge & Hunt, 2019). This research also confirms Vygotsky's theory (Vygotsky, 2017) that society from different cultures and professions will result in different appreciation of the type of knowledge they learn. The cultural problems of fishermen's children on Masalembu Island to continue their education, which are the findings in this research, are very important to receive attention in efforts to improve the quality of education of fishermen's children on Masalembu Island and other fishing areas in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

The research has produced significant findings regarding the cultural barriers to continuing education for Masalembu Island fishermen's children. These obstacles include the strong view regarding the role of children as economic supporters of the family, girls as potential housewives, juvenile delinquency, the passive role of parents in children's formal education, and the many examples of the failure of college graduates to meet the cultural expectations of fishing communities. Culture, as a manifestation of people's understanding of the world and what they use to live their daily lives, needs special attention in every effort to improve the quality of public education. Aspects of fishermen's children's juvenile delinquency that have not been explored in more depth in this research need to be studied further.

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