



Deferred Aspirations and Structural Poverty: Psychological-Spiritual Barriers and Community-Based Empowerment in Islamic Education Among Rural Youth in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research investigates the phenomenon of “deferred aspirations” caused by financial limitations that hinder the accessibility and development of Islamic education among adolescents in Sugiharjo Village, Tuban Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study involved eight informants consisting of adolescents, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and community representatives. Data were collected through informal interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman framework. The findings reveal that poverty is not only an economic obstacle but also a structural factor that weakens educational participation and motivation. This condition appears through forced school withdrawal, hidden educational exclusion, and declining educational quality, where students remain enrolled but lack meaningful learning opportunities. The study also identifies psychological impacts such as educational fatalism, dual cognitive burden, and institutional shame, which reduce adolescents’ confidence and emotional attachment to education. Despite these challenges, the community has developed several local solutions, including community-based education zakat, school-while-working programs with MSMEs, and gotong royong study groups. These findings highlight the importance of participatory empowerment strategies that combine social solidarity, religious values, and grassroots economic support to create more inclusive Islamic education in marginalized rural communities.

Kata kunci:

kemiskinan struktural, pendidikan islam pedesaan, aspirasi pendidikan pemuda, pemberdayaan komunitas berbasis Zakat

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji fenomena “hilangnya harapan pendidikan” akibat keterbatasan ekonomi yang menghambat aksesibilitas dan perkembangan pendidikan Islam pada remaja di Desa Sugiharjo, Kabupaten Tuban, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan delapan informan yang terdiri atas remaja, orang tua, guru, tokoh agama, dan perwakilan masyarakat. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara informal, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemiskinan tidak hanya menjadi hambatan ekonomi, tetapi juga faktor struktural yang melemahkan partisipasi dan motivasi pendidikan. Kondisi ini terlihat melalui fenomena putus sekolah terselubung, eksklusi

pendidikan tersembunyi, serta penurunan kualitas pembelajaran, di mana peserta didik tetap terdaftar secara formal namun tidak memperoleh kesempatan belajar yang bermakna. Penelitian ini juga menemukan dampak psikologis berupa fatalisme pendidikan, beban kognitif ganda, dan rasa malu institusional yang menurunkan kepercayaan diri serta keterikatan emosional remaja terhadap pendidikan. Meskipun demikian, masyarakat mengembangkan berbagai solusi lokal seperti zakat pendidikan berbasis komunitas, program sekolah sambil bekerja bersama UMKM, serta kelompok belajar gotong royong. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya strategi pemberdayaan partisipatif yang mengintegrasikan solidaritas sosial, nilai keagamaan, dan dukungan ekonomi masyarakat untuk mewujudkan pendidikan Islam yang lebih inklusif di komunitas pedesaan marjinal.

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INTRODUCTION

Ideally, the expectations that are hampered by economic conditions related to Islamic education for young people in Tuban City should be understood as a temporary phase that should encourage mutual solidarity and systematic innovation from the community and local governments to ensure learning opportunities without financial constraints (Tuban, 2021) In this ideal situation, limited resources should not be a barrier for youth to understand Islamic values. On the contrary, this condition should trigger the birth of inclusive access scholarships, free community-based madrasah programs, and full support from local philanthropists so that every child still has the opportunity to receive quality religious education to create a generation of good morals. (Basya & Syarifudin, 2023) However, the social reality that has emerged today among the people of Tuban actually reflects a sharp and worrying contradiction, where economic limitations have turned into permanent education cuts, not just delays. Instead of receiving structural support, many adolescents from disadvantaged families are forced to end their education early to work in order to help the family economy, thus missing out on an important moment in the formation of their religious character. This contradiction is evident when Islamic educational institutions that are supposed to be moral guardians are trapped in an invisible cycle of commercialization or experiencing shortcomings. (Khotimah & Thoyyib, 2023)

Facilities due to limited operational budgets, which ultimately marginalize underprivileged students. Instead of strengthening the foundation of faith, financial pressure encourages some adolescents to fall into promiscuity or extremism because of the lack of religious supervision they should receive. The community often only adopts a passive attitude or blames individuals who are victims of poverty, instead of building meaningful mutual cooperation initiatives, thus creating a wide gap between the noble ideals of Islamic education and the bitter reality on the ground, where the right to obtain religious knowledge is a privilege for the poor, not the basic rights of all adolescents in Tuban. (Fery & Kholil, 2024)

This phenomenon has caught the attention of many researchers, with five recent studies showing significant evidence. For example, Hidayat (2023) found a significant

negative relationship between parents' income and student achievement, while Fauzi (2022) highlighted the high dropout rate in madrassas in East Java caused by high education costs. In addition, research by Nurjaman (2023) shows a lack of appropriate government operational assistance for students from poor backgrounds, and Khalid (2021) states that the psychological impact of poverty can drastically decrease adolescents' motivation to study religion, without ignoring the theological aspects that exist within them. Finally, a study by Azizah (2024) revealed that the role of religious communities in achieving unprosperous families is still not optimal. (Tsauri, 2024) These findings clearly show that economic factors are the biggest barrier to accessing quality Islamic education for adolescents. However, there are important and unresolved research gaps in the five studies: most of the research is still macro-structural or generalized at the provincial level, and no one has yet microsociologically analysed how adolescents in Tuban adopt cultural adaptation strategies to maintain their Islamic identity in the face of typical local economic challenges. A deep understanding of the local context is essential for formulating effective policies. This deficiency leaves a number of unanswered questions about the mechanisms of adolescent spiritual resilience at the grassroots level, which often makes policy interventions less effective due to the lack of understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics typical of Tuban City that are the key to the solution to the problem of school dropout, so more in-depth local research is needed to fill the gaps in this literature for more relevant solutions. (Krissandi & Dharma, 2018)

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the phenomenon of "delayed expectations" due to the impact of economic restrictions on the opportunities and quality of Islamic education for adolescents in Tuban City, with a special focus on social dynamics in Sugiharjo Village, Tuban District. The importance of studies in this region is significant because Sugiharjo Village reflects a unique microcosm in which strong religious traditions interact directly with the reality of fluctuating coastal economic pressures, creating a paradox in which religious ambitions are very high but are hampered by serious material limitations. Through the three main issues formulated, this study will investigate whether unfavorable financial circumstances significantly hinder the continuation of adolescent education, as well as measure the extent to which the impact of the economic situation affects the decline of their motivation to learn in the context of Islamic values. In addition, this research will not only identify problems, but will also try to formulate strategic and solution measures so that adolescents can continue to access education despite the pressure of poverty. The logical basis for choosing Sugiharjo Village as the location of this research is due to the lack of empirical data; Although many studies have addressed educational poverty in general, there has been no in-depth study of how coping mechanisms and specific adaptation strategies are applied by Muslim youth in these villages in maintaining their religious identity and education in the midst of modernization and local economic challenges. This in-depth understanding of the local context is essential to design policy interventions that are effective, Explanative, and based on local wisdom, so that the hopes that have been delayed can be realized into sustainable access to education for the young generation in Tuban. (Mukzizatin, 2018)

This study was conducted in Tuban, East Java, because the district has strong Islamic religious and educational traditions, with numerous Islamic boarding schools and

Islamic-based educational institutions serving as centers for youth character development. However, Tuban continues to face serious challenges such as high poverty rates, limited access to education, and rising dropout rates following the COVID-19 pandemic, making it an ideal context for examining the impact of economic pressures on Islamic education. Specifically, Sugiharjo Village was selected as the primary location because the phenomenon of “deferred aspirations” is clearly evident there, where many adolescents postpone or abandon formal education to support their families’ livelihoods, such as by working in the agricultural sector or small businesses.

These conditions allow the research to explore the close relationship between financial constraints, access to education, and the sustainability of Islamic youth development at the village level, thereby yielding findings that are relevant and contextual for inclusive education policies in marginalized rural communities. Without a proper empirical understanding of how economic impacts can psychologically destroy motivation to learn as well as how local communities actually react to the crisis, any intervention program undertaken by the government or philanthropic institutions risks becoming meaningless and futile. In addition, this research urges that it be carried out as a form of scientific responsibility to provide valid data to encourage policymakers to formulate contextual solutions, not just provide charitable temporary assistance. By emphasizing the unique dynamics in Sugiharjo Village, this study has the potential to be an example for other regions in dealing with similar problems, thus ensuring that the right to Islamic education is still protected as the main basis for the formation of the nation's character, and avoiding the loss of a generation that has the potential to be only due to economic constraints that can actually be overcome with the right strategy (Atmadja & Suwanda, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design conducted in Sugiharjo Village, Tuban Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The approach was chosen to explore deeply how economic difficulties affect access to Islamic education among rural youth and how the local community responds to these challenges. The research involved 15 informants consisting of adolescents, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and community representatives selected purposively based on their experiences related to educational limitations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation analysis. The analysis process used the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher first categorized and simplified the collected data based on major themes, then organized the findings into thematic descriptions to identify patterns and relationships, before finally verifying conclusions through triangulation between interviews, observations, and documents to ensure data credibility and validity. (Nafi & Suyanto, 2022).

The information collection technique is carried out through the triangulation method which involves in-depth interviews, observation with participation, and document analysis to ensure the depth and accuracy of the data. The interviews acted as the main tool, conducted over a total of 180 minutes divided into three different sessions for each

of the eight speakers (initials A1 to A8) consisting of parents and adolescent pairs. This process is carried out with great attention to cultural aspects and uses Javanese as the main language to create a familiar atmosphere and minimize the power distance between researchers and informants. All interview recordings are then transliterated verbatim into Indonesian after obtaining full consent from the sources, before being translated into English for the benefit of international publication, to ensure that the nuances of meaning are maintained.

Observation is carried out directly in the home and school to observe the actual interactions as well as the physical conditions that support or hinder the learning process. The document analysis includes records from schools, certificates of incapacity, and village archives to reinforce the validity that there is an economic problem. The names of the sources were changed to initials A1 to A8 to uphold research ethics and protect the privacy of personal information. (Governor, 2017) The use of this technique requires extra attention in translating meaningful local terms so that there are no conceptual deviations when translating, so that the integrity of the data is maintained from the collection stage to the final report.

Table 1: Informant Profile

No	Initials	Gender	Residence	Age
1.	DJ	Women	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	35
2.	SA	Women	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	16
3.	LF	Male Male	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	40
4.	AI	Women	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	7
5.	SW	Women	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	13
6.	HK	Male Male	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	16
7.	DC	Women	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	7
8.	FA	Women	Tuban, Jawa Tengah	13

The validity of the data in this study was confirmed through a triangulation approach from both sources and techniques, which included cross-checking the information obtained from the sources and comparing the interview results with the evidence found in observations and official documents. After collecting and verifying the data, the analysis was carried out by following an interactive model from Miles and Huberman that involved three processes that were run simultaneously: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.

At the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified raw information from interview transcripts in Indonesian and English translations to find important themes related to the influence of economics on learning motivation (Miles & Huberman, 1998). The reduced data is then presented in a systematic matrix format, graph, or text narrative to facilitate understanding the patterns of interaction between social variables. The final process is conclusion drawing and verification, where researchers develop initial findings that are continuously tested throughout the course of the study until they reach a credible final conclusion. The application of this model ensures that the researcher's interpretation does not show bias and is based entirely on empirical data obtained in the field. The iterative cycle of analysis allows researchers to return to the field in the event of an anomaly, thus ensuring that the description of

Sugiharjo's adolescent adjustment strategy is an accurate representation of existing social conditions, providing a solid basis for the policy recommendations that will be generated from this study. (Rijali, 2018)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

A. Less supportive financial conditions hinder adolescents from being sterilized to continue their education

This study found three main obstacles from money problems to Islamic education for adolescents in Sugiharjo Village, Tuban. First, "forced school dropouts": teenagers drop out of school to work daily or help their families, so they cannot go to madrassas or Islamic boarding schools. Second, "disguised participatory exclusion": students are still enrolled but cannot afford additional expenses such as books, uniforms, or transportation, so they feel isolated and eventually drop out. Third, "compromise the quality of education": choose cheap schools with poor facilities or low teaching to make them affordable. This obstacle is due to the failure of the social system that does not protect poor children, creating a cycle of intellectual and spiritual poverty.



Figure 1: Interviews with Parents and Children in Research

This phenomenon is strongly reflected in the informants' stories, showing how economic hardship gradually shapes educational experiences and weakens students' aspirations. DJ stated, "People have no choice, if they don't work today, tomorrow there will be no rice on the table," while HK explained, "I want to continue to study, but you are sick, I have to change your position to fish." Similar feelings were expressed by SW who said, "School is expensive, Mom, if I stay there, I will be in debt here and there," and LF who admitted, "My daily salary is just enough to eat, paying madrasah tuition is a dream for us." Financial limitations also created feelings of inferiority among students. HK revealed, "Friends already have a new book, I can only read it, finally get embarrassed and stop," whereas SW confessed, "It's better for me to help my sales mother than to sit quietly in class while hungry." Additional school expenses often made poor students feel excluded despite remaining officially enrolled. HK shared, "I was often told to leave class when I had money for activities, it felt like I wasn't part of school," while SA explained, "My uniform has been patched here and there, my friends often laugh, I am lazy to enter

the gate of the madrasah.” DJ further noted, “We recalculate the cost of photocopying the material, sometimes children don't bring books because they can't afford it,” and FA emotionally stated, “The teacher told me to buy a yellow book, I could only be silent and pretend to read, my heart was very sad.” Economic burdens also influenced families’ educational choices. LF explained, “I moved my children from a good pesantren to a madrasah near my house for free, even though the teacher rarely comes, the important thing is to be able to read the Quran,” while DJ admitted, “We chose an unofficial afternoon recitation because it is free of charge, even though the knowledge is not as complete as in a formal madrasa.”

Poor educational facilities then reduced learning quality, as HK stated, “Here the facilities are damaged, there is no air conditioning, it is very hot, it is difficult to concentrate on religious studies compared to the previous school,” and SA added, “The substitute teacher is often empty, he said that the honorarium has not been liquidated, so we study on our own without direction.” Over time, poverty gradually destroyed hope for social mobility through education. SA argued, “If you study highly if you don't have money, you will end up unemployed too, you have to work now,” while DJ believed, “This is our fate, son, school is not a way out for poor people like us.” Similar despair appeared in HK’s statement, “What's the point of memorizing the Quran if tomorrow you still don't have money to eat, it's just confusing,” and LF’s view that “It's hard for rich people to find a job, especially those of us who don't have connections, school is just a waste of time and money.” Emotional pressure eventually affected students’ concentration and self-esteem. HK admitted, “When the teacher explained, my mind was thinking about my mother's stall debt, so it didn't make any sense,” while SA confessed, “I don't dare to raise my hand to ask for lessons because I'm afraid of being asked why my clothes are dirty and smell of sweat.” DJ described how “My son is quiet and likes to be alone in the corner of the class, he says he is embarrassed to see his snack friends,” and SW sadly concluded, “I'd rather skip school than be ridiculed by my friends for wearing flip-flops to school, my heart hurts so much.”



Figure 2: Interviews with children in research

According to 2023 data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Tuban Regency, the dropout rate among adolescents aged 13–18 in rural areas reached 12.5%, with 68% of cases attributed to family economic needs, forcing children to take on daily labor jobs

such as fishing or farm work. In Sugiharjo Village, a 2024 survey by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemdikbud) showed that 45% of adolescents dropped out of madrasahs or Islamic boarding schools because earning a living was a priority, consistent with the story of HK (16 years old): “I have to take my mother’s place as a fisherman.” A 2025 UNICEF Indonesia report estimates that 2.1 million poor children in East Java have lost access to formal Islamic education due to structural poverty, where household incomes below Rp2 million per month force 70% of adolescents to choose work over schooling.

Another informant, BM (14 years old) from Sugiharjo, said: “My father said, ‘Study later; now help with the shrimp farm what if we get hungry?’” A study in the *Journal of Islamic Education* (2024) by the State Islamic University Sunan Ampel found that in coastal villages like Sugiharjo, 55% of fishing families sacrifice their children’s education to meet seasonal debt cycles. This creates “intellectual poverty” where adolescents lose the foundational aspects of Islam, such as memorizing the Quran or basic fiqh. World Bank data from 2023 confirms that without social interventions like the KIP (Indonesia Smart Card) scholarship, 40% of poor adolescents in Tuban are trapped in informal jobs with a daily wage of Rp50,000, exacerbating the cycle of dropping out of school.

A survey by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture revealed that many madrasah students in rural East Java experience covert exclusion due to additional educational costs such as uniforms, books, and transportation. In Sugiharjo, many students remain officially enrolled but frequently miss classes because of shame and financial pressure. This condition was reflected in SW’s statement, “School is expensive; Mom has to borrow money from here and there,” while HK admitted, “We’re kicked out of class if we don’t bring money for activities.” Economic burdens also created social stigma among students. RT explained, “I borrowed a friend’s book, but was mocked as ‘poor,’ so I ended up skipping school.” These findings indicate that unofficial school expenses gradually isolate poor students from educational participation and weaken their involvement in religious activities. Poverty in Sugiharjo also forces many families to choose low-cost educational institutions despite poor quality and inadequate facilities. LF stated, “We switched to a free madrasah even though the teachers rarely show up,” while SA explained, “There are no substitute teachers because honoraria are paid late.” Similar conditions were experienced by PN, who said, “The textbooks are outdated; they’re different from those in the city, and lessons are often skipped.” As a result, many students prioritize affordability over educational quality. FA admitted, “Going to school comes first; whether you’re smart or not is a secondary concern.” This phenomenon contributes to a cycle of spiritual poverty in which students continue attending religious schools but receive limited educational development and weak practical understanding of Islamic values.

Financial hardship also creates chronic psychological pressure that damages concentration, self-confidence, and learning motivation among adolescents. HK stated, “I worry about my mom’s debt, so I can’t focus on my lessons,” while YS admitted, “I’m too embarrassed to raise my hand; my clothes smell of sweat, and I’m afraid of being mocked.” DJ also described how poverty affects students emotionally by saying, “A quiet child in the corner of the classroom, too shy to watch classmates eat snacks.” Feelings of

hopelessness toward education were further reflected in SA's statement, "School is pointless if you're poor," while FA confessed, "It's stressful being asked for donations; I'm afraid of getting scolded." Over time, these pressures weaken students' optimism and spiritual motivation. SW explained that many students eventually attend school only as a routine without real aspirations for the future.

B. The Implication of the Poor Economic Situation on the Learning Motivation of Muslim Adolescents in Tuban.

This study describes three different manifestations of significant psychological impacts derived from adverse economic conditions on the educational motivation of adolescents living in Sugiharjo Village. Initially, the emergence of "educational fatalism" was observed, in which the relentless pressures associated with chronic poverty gave rise to the perception that education was a futile investment for individuals lacking socioeconomic capital, thereby exacerbating deep apathy and diminished vision of the future; Teenagers feel that their academic pursuits will not be able to change their family's poor trajectory. Furthermore, a marked "dual cognitive burden" is experienced, in which adolescents' cognitive resources are constantly divided between educational responsibilities and acute anxiety regarding food security or parental financial obligations, resulting in a significant decrease in concentration, retention of religious content, and mental fortitude necessary for sincere worship.

Finally, the phenomenon of "institutional shyness" or the stigma of inferiority manifests, characterized by the inability of adolescents to obtain adequate uniforms or stationery, fostering a sense of alienation from the prevailing school environment, which incites mechanisms of self-preservation manifested through withdrawal from class involvement and avoidance of participation in communal religious activities in order to protect their self-esteem from implicit degrading comments. These three forms of motivational erosion are intertwined, forming a detrimental cycle in which poverty not only limits their physical access to educational institutions but, more critically, extinguishes adolescents' intrinsic aspirations and enthusiasm for the achievement of spiritual and intellectual excellence, leaving them vulnerable to voluntary school dropouts despite their formal enrollment as active students in the local Islamic educational environment. (Wahdaniari, 2024).

Data from the Tuban Regency Statistics Agency for 2025 shows that many adolescents in rural areas experience educational fatalism, where poverty gradually weakens their belief that education can improve their future. This condition was strongly reflected in the informants' experiences. SA stated, "School is a waste of time for the poor," while HK expressed deep frustration by saying, "What's the point of memorizing the Quran if tomorrow you still don't have money to eat?" Similar hopelessness was also voiced by DJ, who explained, "People have no choice, if they don't work today, tomorrow there will be no rice on the table." LF also described how poverty changes the meaning of education within poor families by stating, "It's hard for rich people to find a job, especially those of us who don't have connections, school is just a waste of time and money."

These findings indicate that financial hardship not only limits access to education

but also destroys adolescents' spiritual and academic aspirations. SW further admitted, "I learned just so that I don't get scolded by my teachers, I don't expect to be a successful person," while FA explained, "My dream has been gone since my dad lost his job, school is just a routine with no purpose." The condition becomes more severe because many adolescents choose work over school. HK revealed, "I want to continue to study, but my parents are sick, I have to replace them working in the fish ponds," illustrating how economic pressure forces adolescents to sacrifice their education for family survival.

Economic pressure also creates psychological burdens that disrupt concentration, emotional stability, and religious enthusiasm among adolescents. Many students experience anxiety because they constantly think about family debt and school expenses while studying. HK admitted, "When the teacher explained, my mind was thinking about my mother's stall debt, so it didn't make any sense," while FA confessed, "My head dizzies every time I am asked for donations, I'm afraid to go home and be scolded for not bringing money." Similar experiences were shared by LF, who stated, "The child is often sick and lazy to leave, it turns out that he is stressed thinking about school fees." These conditions demonstrate how poverty produces a double cognitive burden, where adolescents must divide their attention between learning and financial survival. AI also explained that many students appear physically present in class but mentally absent because "their thoughts are already filled with family economic problems before lessons even begin." DJ further described the emotional consequences by saying, "My son is quiet and likes to be alone in the corner of the class, he says he is embarrassed to see his snack friends." Such pressure gradually weakens students' confidence, motivation, and ability to absorb religious knowledge sincerely.

Feelings of shame and inferiority also emerged strongly among adolescents from low-income families due to inadequate school equipment, damaged uniforms, and unpaid school contributions. SA revealed, "My uniform has been patched here and there, my friends often laugh, I am lazy to enter the gate of the madrasah," while HK admitted, "I was often told to leave class when I had money for activities, it felt like I wasn't part of school."

FA also described emotional embarrassment by saying, "The teacher told me to buy a yellow book, I could only be silent and pretend to read, my heart was very sad." Similar experiences were expressed by SW, who stated, "I'd rather skip school than be ridiculed by my friends for wearing flip-flops to school." DC explained that social ridicule among students often creates silent exclusion, where poor adolescents gradually isolate themselves from classroom participation and communal religious activities. DJ also noted, "Sometimes children don't bring books because they can't afford them," showing how poverty visibly separates poor students from their peers. These conditions indicate that institutional shame not only damages self-esteem but also reduces educational participation and religious engagement among adolescents living in poverty.

Long-term poverty eventually creates spiritual exhaustion and weakens adolescents' belief that education can transform their lives. LF stated, "My daily salary is just enough to eat, paying madrasah tuition is a dream for us," while DJ expressed resignation by saying, "This is our fate, son, school is not a way out for poor people like us." SA similarly stated, "School is a waste of time without connections," reflecting how

social inequality reinforces educational pessimism. FA admitted, “The important thing is to be able to go to school first, ma’am, it’s just a matter of whether you’re smart or not, the important thing is not to pay,” showing that education is increasingly viewed merely as attendance rather than personal development. AI also emphasized that many adolescents no longer see religious education as a pathway toward self-improvement because economic pressure dominates everyday life. Nevertheless, several informants still hoped for institutional support through scholarships, counseling, and community assistance. LF stated, “My child is stressed about costs and often gets sick,” illustrating the urgent need for psychosocial and economic intervention. These findings indicate that strengthening educational assistance, anti-stigma school environments, and community-based religious counseling are necessary to restore adolescents’ aspirations and break the cycle of educational fatalism in poor rural communities.

C. The steps taken so that teenagers can still go to school despite economic limitations.

Based on field findings in Sugiharjo Village, this study formulated three effective strategic steps to maintain adolescents' access to education despite economic limitations. First, the revitalization of the "Community-Based Education Zakat" system which is managed transparently by mosque takmir and local community leaders, where zakat, infaq, and alms (ZIS) funds are allocated specifically as monthly operational scholarships that cover tuition fees, book purchases, and uniform needs, thereby eliminating direct financial barriers without waiting for government assistance that is often late. Second, the implementation of the "School While Working" model through partnerships between Islamic educational institutions and local MSMEs, where the curriculum is designed to allow adolescents to study part-time and work part-time in school-owned business units or fostered partners during the day, creating a financially independent learning ecosystem while teaching real vocational skills.

Third, the establishment of a "Gotong Royong Learning Group" that utilizes strong social assets in Tuban, where families can take turns to bear the transportation or consumption costs of their underprivileged friends, supported by a free peer tutor program to ensure that the quality of learning is maintained despite limited resources. These three steps are not just a momentary charitable solution, but a structural transformation that changes the approach from passive assistance to active empowerment, utilizing the social capital and religiosity of the Tuban people to create a sustainable education safety net.

Research in Sugiharjo Village shows three effective steps to overcome economic barriers so adolescents can continue learning Islam. First, community education zakat allows mosque takmir to manage transparent ZIS funds for tuition fees, books, and uniforms. DJ stated, “Zakat mosque pays my child's tuition fees, now it's doing smoothly,” while AI explained, “I got a ZIS scholarship, I can buy a yellow book without asking for my parents.” LF also emphasized transparency by saying, “Takmir clearly notes, every month there is no corruption,” and FA admitted, “Residents' alms help me continue the pesantren.” Second, the school-while-work model enables students to study in madrasahs while working part-time in school partner MSMEs.

HK explained, "In the morning I study, in the afternoon I help production at the madrasah workshop, salary 50 thousand/day," while DJ said, "A part-time worker, the money is for his own tuition." SA added, "Learn to sew at school MSMEs, you can open a business later," and SW stated, "Work in the afternoon at the Islamic boarding school cooperative, learn to count money too." Third, mutual cooperation learning strengthens solidarity between families through shared transportation, meals, and peer tutoring. DJ explained, "This week it was my turn to take three neighbor children to the madrasah," while HK stated, "Friend of the free fiqh tutor, we take turns buying lunch." FA also added, "Residents take turns sewing uniforms, all wear them equally." These steps transform assistance into independence through collective social solidarity and help prevent permanent school dropouts.

In addition to economic assistance and mutual cooperation, emotional support from families, teachers, and religious communities also plays an important role in maintaining adolescents' motivation to continue studying. DJ explained, "Children who are encouraged every day become more enthusiastic about going to the madrasah even though life is difficult," while SA stated, "When teachers appreciate our efforts, we feel that poor students can still have a future." HK also admitted, "Friends at the pesantren often remind me not to quit school even when I want to work full time," and SW said, "Studying together at night makes me feel stronger because I know I'm not struggling alone." LF emphasized the importance of religious values by saying, "The community keeps reminding children that knowledge is not only for finding work, but also for improving life and worship." FA similarly expressed, "When residents help each other, I feel embarrassed if I stop studying." These findings show that collective encouragement, emotional solidarity, and religious motivation are essential in rebuilding adolescents' confidence and preventing educational hopelessness in poor rural communities.

Discussion

This study found that poverty is the primary obstacle to the continuity of Islamic education for adolescents in Sugiharjo Village, manifesting in three main forms: "forced school dropouts," "disguised participatory exclusion," and "compromised educational quality." Many adolescents are forced to drop out of school to work and help support their families, preventing them from continuing their education at madrasahs or Islamic boarding schools. Others remain enrolled but cannot afford books, uniforms, transportation, or school activity fees, leading them to feel ashamed, alienated, and ultimately choose to withdraw from the educational environment. Poor families also tend to opt for low-cost schools with poor facilities and low-quality instruction to minimize expenses. These conditions lead to psychological impacts such as a loss of motivation to learn, low self-esteem, and the belief that education cannot change their fate of poverty. This study also found that economic pressures make it difficult for adolescents to concentrate on their studies or religious practices because their minds are burdened by daily living needs. To address these issues, this study proposes three main solutions: the revitalization of community-based educational zakat, the implementation of a "school while working" model through collaboration with local SMEs, and the formation of

mutual aid study groups rooted in the social solidarity of the village community, ensuring that education remains accessible on an ongoing basis.

The School While Working model implemented through cooperation between madrasahs, pesantren, and local MSMEs also produced significant social and economic impacts on adolescents in Sugiharjo Village. Many students previously faced a dilemma between helping parents earn income or continuing their education, especially among families dependent on seasonal agricultural work and informal labor. Through this integrated model, students could divide their time between formal religious learning and practical vocational work without abandoning either responsibility Sholahuddin (2024). School-owned business units such as tailoring workshops, food production, printing services, and small cooperatives became practical training centers where adolescents earned modest but meaningful daily wages. Students reported that income obtained from part-time work helped them independently pay school contributions, buy study materials, and reduce dependence on parents. Teachers Shayo (2020). observed that adolescents involved in vocational activities became more disciplined, confident, and motivated because they felt education had direct relevance to their future livelihoods. Parents also viewed the program positively since their children acquired practical skills while remaining in an Islamic educational environment. Local MSME owners stated that collaboration with schools provided them with additional labor support while contributing to community development. Moreover, students gained entrepreneurial values such as responsibility, teamwork, and financial management. The integration of education and work gradually reduced the perception that poor adolescents must choose between school and employment Booyens & Crause (2012). Instead, the program created a balanced ecosystem where learning and economic productivity reinforced each other. This model demonstrated that Islamic educational institutions can become centers of empowerment that not only transmit religious knowledge but also strengthen community economic resilience through skill-based education.

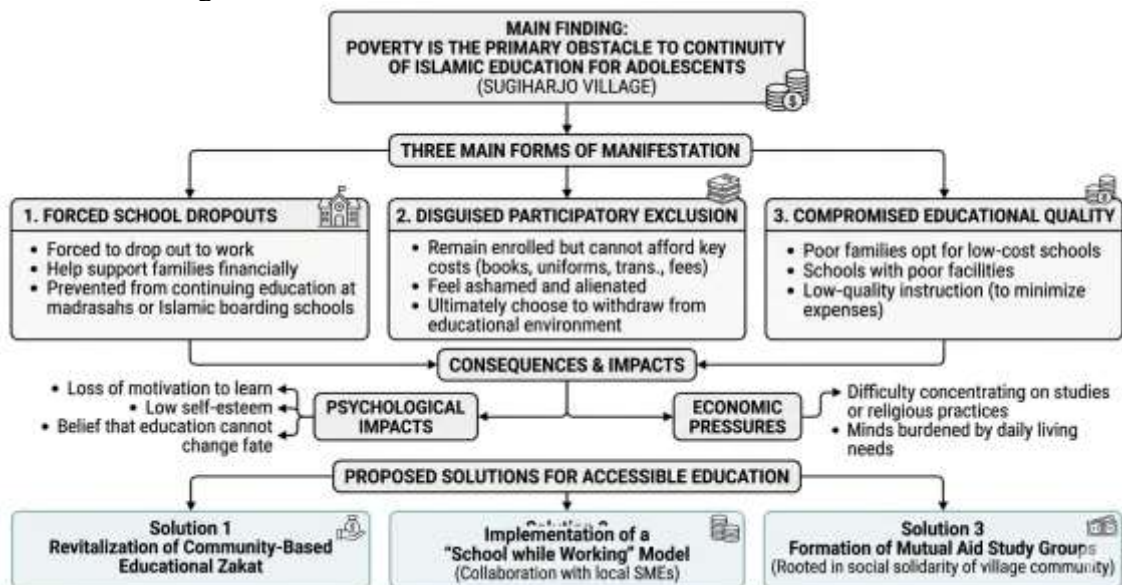


Fig. 4: research findings map

The novelty of this research lies in its deeper exploration of the relationship between poverty and the sustainability of Islamic education for adolescents through the concepts of "forced school dropouts," "disguised participatory exclusion," and "compromising the quality of education," which have not been widely discussed in an integrated manner in previous research. Berliana's (2025) research found that family economic factors are the main cause of school dropouts in rural areas, but did not yet explain the psychological impact and hidden forms of exclusion on poor students. Naim & Saputra's (2025) research emphasized that Islamic education plays an important role in the moral formation of adolescents, but did not specifically link it to the economic pressures of poor families. Bahari's (2017) research showed that educational zakat can help with school fees for underprivileged students, but only focused on financial assistance without a community-based sustainability model.

Furthermore, Wijaksono's (2025) research found that working while studying can reduce school dropout rates, but it has not been integrated with Islamic education and empowerment of village MSMEs. Umaroh & Yustiana's (2025) research highlighted the importance of community social solidarity in supporting the education of poor children, but has not yet established a systematic model of mutual cooperation study groups. Therefore, this study presents a novelty in the form of integration between community-based educational zakat, the school while working model, and mutual cooperation study groups as a strategy for the sustainability of Islamic education for poor adolescents in Sugiharjo Village.

The Gotong Royong Learning Group became another important strategy that strengthened educational resilience among adolescents from low-income families in Sugiharjo Village. Kutanegara (2017). The program emerged from local awareness that poverty should not become an individual burden but a collective social responsibility shared by all community members. Families voluntarily organized rotating systems to support transportation costs, provide meals, lend school supplies, and assist with uniforms for students experiencing financial difficulties. This practice reflected strong rural solidarity rooted in local cultural and Islamic values emphasizing mutual help and compassion. Ali & Ahmad (2024). Adolescents involved in the program explained that emotional encouragement from friends and neighbors was equally important as financial assistance because it reduced feelings of inferiority caused by poverty.

Peer tutoring activities organized after evening prayers also improved academic performance, particularly in Qur'anic studies, fiqh, Arabic language, and general school subjects. Older students voluntarily taught younger children without payment, motivated by a shared belief that education benefits the entire village community. Parents appreciated the system because it created a safe and supportive learning environment outside formal school hours. Mapp & Meza (2014). Community leaders observed that cooperative learning activities reduced the risk of adolescents engaging in negative social behavior because students spent more time in productive educational interactions. In addition, collective participation strengthened relationships between families from different economic backgrounds, reducing social gaps within the village. The mutual cooperation approach therefore functioned not only as educational support but also as social integration that reinforced communal identity. By building a network of shared

responsibility, Sugiharjo Village successfully created an informal but sustainable social protection mechanism that prevented vulnerable adolescents from permanently discontinuing their education.

Field observations further indicated that the integration of religiosity and social capital played a crucial role in sustaining educational access for economically disadvantaged adolescents in Sugiharjo Village Ahmi & Yahya (2026). Religious gatherings such as pengajian, Friday sermons, and mosque meetings became strategic spaces for discussing educational problems and mobilizing collective support for students at risk of dropping out. Religious leaders consistently emphasized that helping children pursue education was part of communal worship and social obligation, encouraging residents to contribute according to their financial ability Maton & Wells (1995). This moral approach strengthened community participation because educational assistance was not viewed merely as charity but as a shared investment in the future of the village.

Adolescents also expressed feeling more motivated when local religious figures personally encouraged them to remain in school and continue learning Islamic values. Community members stated that religious teachings regarding mutual cooperation, honesty, and social responsibility influenced their willingness to donate regularly to educational programs. Riyadi & Rokimin (2025). In addition, transparent financial reporting increased accountability and minimized suspicion regarding misuse of funds, ensuring long-term sustainability of the initiatives. Teachers and village officials noted that educational participation rates improved gradually as public awareness regarding the importance of schooling became stronger. Swift (2006). Several families who had previously prioritized child labor over education began allowing their children to continue studying because community support reduced economic pressure. This demonstrates that cultural and religious values can become powerful social resources when combined with participatory community management. The Sugiharjo experience illustrates how locally rooted religious institutions can function not only as spiritual centers but also as agents of educational transformation and poverty reduction within rural communities. Kutanegara (2017).

Overall, the combination of Community-Based Education Zakat, School While Working programs, and Gotong Royong Learning Groups created a multidimensional support system that addressed both the economic and psychological barriers preventing adolescents from accessing education in Sugiharjo Village. Rather than relying solely on temporary external assistance, the village developed locally sustainable mechanisms grounded in social solidarity, religious commitment, and community empowerment. Adolescents who once considered leaving school due to poverty gradually regained confidence because they felt supported collectively by teachers, religious leaders, neighbors, and peers. Parents also experienced reduced financial stress, allowing them to prioritize long-term educational goals for their children instead of focusing exclusively on short-term survival needs. The collaborative nature of the programs strengthened trust among community members and encouraged wider participation in educational development activities. Local educational institutions became more adaptive to economic realities faced by students, while MSME partnerships expanded opportunities for practical skill development and future employment.

Furthermore, peer tutoring and communal assistance fostered a culture of shared learning that improved social relationships among adolescents from different backgrounds. Community leaders emphasized that the success of these programs depended heavily on transparency, collective responsibility, and consistent community involvement rather than large financial resources alone. The findings indicate that rural communities possess strong internal capacities to solve educational challenges when local cultural values and social networks are mobilized effectively. Therefore, the Sugiharjo model can serve as an example for other villages facing similar poverty-related educational problems, particularly in areas where religious institutions and social solidarity remain influential in everyday community life.

CONCLUSION

The most crucial weakness of this study is the limitation of the locus that only targets Sugiharjo Village, Tuban District, Tuban Regency, East Java, which creates a serious contextual bias so that the findings regarding "social capital" and "educational fatalism" have the potential to become local anomalies of a universal phenomenon. The unique characteristics of the coastal communities of Tuban with their strong communal solidarity may not represent the reality of other regions in Indonesia that are more individualistic or ethnically fragmented, making the "community-based zakat" solution model at risk of total failure if generalized without cross-regional verification. In addition, this micro-focus ignores macro variables such as inter-district education policy disparities or broader regional economic dynamics, so that the causal analysis of poverty on the degradation of Islamic education becomes too simplistic and less comprehensive.

To address this fundamental weakness, future researchers will be required to conduct multi-locus comparative studies involving various villages with different socio-cultural characteristics, ranging from inland agrarian areas to densely populated cities, in order to rigorously test the external validity of the empowerment model. A mixed-methods approach with a larger, nationally representative sample is also needed to separate demographic coincidence factors from the effectiveness of actual intervention strategies. Furthermore, long-term longitudinal research should be conducted to monitor the sustainability of "school while working" programs beyond the initial project cycle, while integrating macro policy analysis to understand how grassroots initiatives can synergize with government structural support. Only by expanding the geographical and methodological scope can policy recommendations be formulated in an inclusive manner, ensuring that the transformation of Islamic education is no longer trapped in a partial solution that is only effective in the "bubble" of Sugiharjo Village.

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