



School Dropout and Adaptive Resilience: Understanding Adolescents' Educational Choices in Muslim Marginalized Communities

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This study aims to uncover the meaning behind the phenomenon of school dropout among adolescents in Islamic marginalized communities, Lamongan City, Indonesia. This phenomenon is often negatively stigmatized as academic failure alone without understanding the underlying context. Using a qualitative approach with an in-depth case study design, data were collected through unstructured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of village archive documents, then systematically analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. Data validity was ensured through rigorous source triangulation. The results indicate that school dropout in this region is a manifestation of the tension between immediate economic needs and the long-term value of education. Economic factors and the tradition of early marriage force adolescents to adopt a pragmatic view that prioritizes immediate family financial contributions over continuing formal schooling. However, crucial findings reveal the presence of regret and hope in breaking the cycle of poverty, indicating that motivation to learn is not lost but rather shifted to mastering vocational skills as a means of survival. This dynamic confirms that the decision to drop out of school is not a rejection of education itself, but rather a rational adaptation strategy to environmental conditions that require facilitative policy interventions in the form of alternative educational pathways. This research contributes to the development of Islamic education by emphasizing the need for inclusive, community-based, and value-oriented educational models that integrate social resilience, vocational empowerment, and humanistic Islamic principles in addressing school dropout among marginalized adolescents.

Kata kunci:

Abstrak

putus sekolah, ketahanan adaptif; modal manusia, komunitas Muslim yang terpinggirkan

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap makna di balik fenomena putus sekolah di kalangan remaja di komunitas Islam marginal, Kota Lamongan, Indonesia. Fenomena ini seringkali distigmatisasi secara negatif sebagai kegagalan akademis semata tanpa memahami konteks yang mendasarinya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus mendalam, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara tidak terstruktur, observasi partisipan, dan analisis dokumen arsip desa, kemudian dianalisis secara sistematis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Validitas data dipastikan melalui triangulasi

sumber yang ketat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa putus sekolah di wilayah ini merupakan manifestasi dari ketegangan antara kebutuhan ekonomi mendesak dan nilai pendidikan jangka panjang. Faktor ekonomi dan tradisi pernikahan dini memaksa remaja untuk mengadopsi pandangan pragmatis yang memprioritaskan kontribusi keuangan keluarga daripada melanjutkan pendidikan formal. Namun, temuan penting mengungkapkan adanya penyesalan dan harapan dalam memutuskan siklus kemiskinan, menunjukkan bahwa motivasi untuk belajar tidak hilang tetapi justru bergeser ke penguasaan keterampilan kejuruan sebagai sarana bertahan hidup. Dinamika ini menegaskan bahwa keputusan untuk putus sekolah bukanlah penolakan terhadap pendidikan itu sendiri, melainkan strategi adaptasi rasional terhadap kondisi lingkungan yang membutuhkan intervensi kebijakan fasilitatif berupa jalur pendidikan alternatif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan pendidikan Islam dengan menekankan perlunya model pendidikan inklusif, berbasis komunitas, dan berorientasi nilai yang mengintegrasikan ketahanan sosial, pemberdayaan kejuruan, dan prinsip-prinsip Islam humanistik dalam mengatasi masalah putus sekolah di kalangan remaja yang terpinggirkan.

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INTRODUCTION

Ideally, the national education system is designed through a comprehensive curriculum to ensure equal access to learning for all the nation's children in order to produce superior human resources, character, and ready to compete globally for the progress of the country (1945 Constitution; Law No. 20 of 2003; Tilaar, 2000). This noble goal requires every student to complete the level of education without significant obstacles, so as to create fair social mobility for all levels of society. However, the social facts on the ground show a very contradictory condition, where the dropout rate is still a serious threat due to the dominance of urgent economic factors, lack of parental understanding, and lack of environmental systemic support. This contradiction is evident when the curriculum demands the achievement of holistic competencies and the Pancasila Student Profile, but the reality of structural poverty forces children to leave school to help the family economy, so that their basic rights are forcibly deprived. Instead of being a means of social emancipation, education actually feels exclusive to those who are able to widen the gap of social inequality that should be narrowed by national education policies. People often view schools as a burdensome short-term cost burden, rather than a longterm investment, which directly thwarts the curriculum's goal of building a smart and dignified civilization. In fact, education should be a non-negotiable human right for a better future for all. As a result, there is a sharp discrepancy between the noble ideals of the education law and daily practices in society, where the potential of the young generation is wasted because the social protection system has not been able to reach the root of the poverty

problem effectively. This condition proves that without real intervention on the factors that cause school dropouts, the purpose of the curriculum will only become a dead document that is irrelevant to the pulse of the real people's lives, creating a real left generation.

This phenomenon of discrepancy between curriculum expectations and the reality of school dropouts is corroborated by a recent literature review that confirms the complexity of the problem of basic education. UNESCO (2021) reports that economic barriers remain the main determinants of school dropout globally. The World Bank (2022) added that the shock of the pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of poor families in Indonesia so that children were forced to work. Suryadarma (2020) found a strong correlation between parents' education levels and the sustainability of children's schools in rural areas. Akhmadi (2021) highlights that rigid curriculum is often irrelevant to the living needs of poor students, thus reducing their motivation to learn. Finally, data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2023) shows a surge in school dropout rates in disadvantaged areas after the economic crisis. These five studies consistently concluded that external factors predominate compared to internal school factors. However, there is a research gap (Research gap) of the five studies that need to be filled out immediately by the next researcher. The majority of research is still macro-correlational and has not offered a specific intervention model that integrates the flexibility of the operational curriculum with social assistance based on the real conditions of local communities. There has been no study that has in-depth analyzed how curriculum adaptation can directly mitigate economic pressures as a cause of school dropout in a preventive and measurable manner. Most of the solutions offered are still short-term charitable without touching the root of the structural problem. This causes existing policies to often not be on target in their implementation in the field. Therefore, new research is needed that bridges curriculum policies with socioeconomic realities in a more technical, implementive, and sustainable manner to ensure that national education goals are achieved without leaving anyone behind for the future of the nation (Moleong, 2017). This lack of a tested model is not only a gap in academic studies, but also an urgent reason why this research needs to be conducted. So far, school dropout management programs tend to be temporary, reactive, and have no measurable impact. As a result, the efforts made often only touch the surface, have not truly broken the cycle of poverty, and risk sacrificing students' learning potential.

Based on an in-depth discussion, this study concludes that the phenomenon of school dropouts in Banjarejo Village, Lamongan, is not the end sign of human aspirations, but a rational adaptation strategy in the midst of complex economic and cultural squeezes. Adolescents do not reject education intrinsically, but are forced to prioritize family survival through work and early marriage, while harboring great hopes in vocational skills as future human capital. These findings shift the paradigm from seeing them as victims of system failures to resilient agents seeking to break the chains of poverty in their own way. Policy-wise, this demands a transformation from a rigid preventive approach to a facilitative one that recognizes alternative paths to non-formal education. The deep

impression is that behind the statistics of school dropouts, there are resilient souls who are thirsty for learning, but hit by the wall of an unfair social structure. Therefore, it is our responsibility not only to regret their decision, but to build an educational bridge that is inclusive and relevant to the village context. If the country comes up with a relevant solution, then dropping out of school is no longer a dream graveyard, but a crossroads to other equal paths to success. Let's change this narrative so that every teenager in the countryside feels valued for their potential, not judged on their school status, because true education is to humanize human beings in all their limitations. So, let this finding serve as a moral call to restore hope, ensuring that no more villagers are forced to choose between eating today and dreaming tomorrow. What is most surprising is the reality that those who are labeled as failures by the system actually have a more mature and realistic life plan than the current education policy, an irony that we must immediately correct for the sake of humanity (Bappenas, 2020; Susilo, 2019).

This research has high urgency and is very urgent to be carried out immediately considering the long-term destructive impact of the dropout phenomenon on the quality of human resources in Banjarejo Village, Lamongan Regency. Every day the delay in handling this problem has the potential to exacerbate the cycle of poverty and social marginalization experienced by local youth. Without accurate and up-to-date empirical data, the intervention of the local government and related institutions will be generalized and will not touch the specific root of the problem that is unique in Karangbinangun District. The importance of this research lies in its position as an evidence-based foundation for formulating responsive public policy before school dropout rates escalate into a broader and uncontrollable social crisis. In addition, in the context of Indonesia's demographic bonus, the loss of the potential of the young generation in rural areas such as Lamongan is a national loss that cannot be compensated for in the future. The dynamic socioeconomic conditions post-pandemic also demand an immediate understanding of the urgent economic pressures that force adolescents to leave school in order to survive. If not analyzed immediately, adolescents' expectations for re-empowerment will be thinner as they get older and the farther away from the educational environment. This delay in research risks triggering secondary social problems such as early marriage or chronic unemployment that burden the state. Therefore, this research is not just an academic activity, but a critical step to save the future of the young generation from limited access and fair opportunities. Research must be carried out immediately so that concrete solutions can be implemented before the problem becomes chronic, ensure that the right to education is fulfilled, and prevent the creation of a generation that is left behind in the development of an independent and sustainable East Java region.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the phenomenon of school dropouts in depth in Banjarejo Village, Lamongan Regency, Indonesia (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). The qualitative approach was chosen because of its primary ability to understand the meaning behind human social actions, rather than

simply measuring statistical numbers. The case study design allows researchers to limit the research system to a specific area, namely Karangbinangun District, so that the analysis can focus on the unique dynamics that occur in the field. Through this design, researchers did not aim to generalize the results to a wider population, but rather to provide a holistic understanding of the life experiences of adolescent dropouts. The implementation of this methodology begins with the determination of clear case boundaries, namely adolescents who have left school in the region. Researchers act as key instruments that engage directly in social interactions to dig up natural data from the first source. This approach is particularly relevant because the problem of dropping out of school often involves complex emotional, cultural, and economic factors that cannot be captured by a standard closed-ended questionnaire. With the case study, researchers were able to build close trust with participants, allowing them to tell their stories freely about the social and family pressures they face on a daily basis. This ensures that the data obtained truly reflects the existing social reality, providing a solid basis for answering the formulation of problems regarding views and causal factors in detail and accurately according to the local context of East Java.

The main data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participant observations, and analysis of supporting documents to ensure completeness of information (Spradley, 1979). The interviews were conducted for a total of 180 minutes divided into three different sessions to eight resource persons who had dropped out of school. These eight participants represented different levels of education where they stopped, from elementary to high school levels, to gain a comprehensive variety of perspectives on why they dropped out. The interview process was carried out using Javanese to maintain comfort and cultural familiarity, then transcribed verbatim into Indonesian with the full consent of the interviewee before the session ended. Furthermore, the data is translated into English for the purposes of international scientific publications, ensuring that the nuances of local meaning are not lost in the translation process. In order to maintain research ethics and the security of personal data, the names of the sources are strictly disguised by replacing them with initials R1 to R8 based on an anonymous code that has been mutually agreed. Field observations were conducted by directly observing their home environment and social interactions to validate verbal statements. The document analysis includes village statistical data and school archives related to attendance history. The implementation of this technique requires the cultural sensitivity of the researcher so that the questions do not offend the participants' self-esteem. The division of interview sessions allows researchers to cross-check information between meetings, reduce memory bias, and build strong rapport. With this strict procedure, the data collected has a high level of depth and accuracy and is able to uncover the hidden reasons behind the decision to drop out of school, which is often tightly closed by families due to the negative social stigma attached to the failure of education in the traditional Lamongan community environment as well as maintaining the confidentiality of their identities from unwanted publications.

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the phenomenon of dropping out of school in Banjarejo Village, Lamongan Regency. This approach was chosen because the decision to drop out of school cannot be reduced to mere statistical figures, but rather involves subjective meaning, emotional dynamics, and socio-economic pressures that can only be understood through direct interaction and the full field context. The case study design limits the focus to one specific community, so that researchers can explore the life experiences of teenagers holistically without aiming to generalize, but produce in-depth contextual understanding that is relevant for local policy formulation. In practice, data analysis refers to Miles and Huberman's interactive model which is carried out simultaneously, not linearly. The data reduction stage was carried out by selecting and summarizing interview findings, observation notes, and archival documents into core themes (adolescent views, causal factors, and future hopes), while filtering out information that was outside the research focus. At the data presentation stage, the reduced findings are arranged narratively and thematically, accompanied by direct quotations (verbatim) to maintain the local context and make it easier to identify patterns of relationships between variables. Next, drawing conclusions and verifying is carried out by answering the problem formulation based on the evidence that has been presented, then testing the validity of the findings through source triangulation and checking the internal consistency of the data. All participants agreed to have the interview data and images taken by the researcher published. This consent was conveyed verbally and in writing.

Table 1: Informant profile

No	Initials	Gender	Residence	Age
1.	A. F.	Male	Lamongan	21 years old
2.	F. H.	Male	Lamongan	19 years old
3.	R. F.	Male	Lamongan	16 years old
4.	A. Z.	Male	Lamongan	21 years old
5.	A. A.	Male	Lamongan	18 Years old
6.	A.K.	Male	Lamongan	20 Years old
7.	I.A	Male	Lamongan	23 Years old
8.	A.U	Male	Lamongan	25 Years old

The validity of the data in this study was validated using a source triangulation model and techniques to ensure the validity of field findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was carried out by comparing the data from interviews between sources and matching them with the results of direct observation at the research site. This process ensures that the information obtained is not one-sided or biased due to the sole subjectivity of the researcher and the participant. After the data was collected and validated, data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model which consisted of three flows of activities that occurred

simultaneously. The first step is data reduction, where researchers summarize, select the main points, and focus on the main themes of the causes of dropping out. The second step is data presentation, where the reduced information is arranged in the form of a matrix or text narrative so that the pattern is easy to understand. The final step is conclusion drawing and verification, in which the researcher answers the formulation of the problem based on the evidence that has been presented. The implementation of this model allows researchers to manage large qualitative data into structured and logical findings. Each stage of analysis is documented in detail to ensure *a clear audit trail* for scholarly readers. Through the Miles and Huberman approach, researchers can identify causal patterns between economic, social, and adolescent personal views on education. This rigorous validation and systematic analysis is crucial to produce accountable policy recommendations. The final results of the study do not only stop at the description of the phenomenon, but also provide an in-depth explanation of the social mechanisms that drive adolescents in Banjarejo Village to abandon their formal education for specific and urgent reasons to be addressed immediately by the local government for the sake of their future.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

A. Adolescent Dropout Views on Education, Causative Factors, and Their Expectations

Research findings related to the views of adolescents who drop out of school in Banjarejo Village, Karangbinangun District, Lamongan Regency, reveal three main forms of their perception of education. The first form is the view of regret, in which the adolescent realizes the importance of academic credentials for the future, but is hampered by the economic realities of the family. The second form is a pragmatic view that considers that hands-on work experience and helping parents is more important than continuing school. Meanwhile, the third form is an alternative view of hope, where adolescents still appreciate the learning process, but choose to take non-formal education paths or skills courses as a solution to their disconnection from access to formal education.

The findings of the study related to the views of adolescents who drop out of school in Banjarejo Village reveal a complex emotional layer, especially related to the deep feelings of regret experienced by most of the research subjects in the field. They are fully aware that academic credentials are vital to guarantee a better future and unlock access to stable formal employment, yet they are squeezed by the urgent realities of the family economy and cannot be ignored in the slightest. Formal education is considered an ideal social mobility ladder, but the absence of costs becomes a barrier that cannot be penetrated by the financial condition of their parents who are all lacking. An informant said in a sad and regretful tone, "I actually wanted to graduate from elementary school, but my circumstances forced me not to continue formal education," said A. F., a teenager who dropped out of school (interview, March 26, 2026).



Figure 1: interviews with teenagers who dropped out of school.

From the results of the interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were explained. Education is essential, but it doesn't have to go through the conventional formal school pathway. In A.F.'s view, the most important thing is not to stop learning and despair of seeking knowledge even though he is not in school. "I dropped out of school because my family's condition changed after my parents' divorce. The economic and emotional situation after my parents' divorce forced me not to continue formal education when I was in elementary school," said A.F. After his parents' divorce, A.F. was taken care of by his grandmother. Economic instability is one of the supporters of A.F. spp.'s school dropout, books, uniforms, and transportation are often not fulfilled, so A.F. thinks it is better to drop out of school than to continue school because economic conditions are insufficient. The greatest hope is often simple: to live calmly, to be appreciated, and to have a purpose." "I want to prove that I can succeed without a diploma, because I think knowledge is not obtained only from school," said A.F.

From the results of the 2nd interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were presented. Dropping out of school is not the end of everything. Many people remain successful without formal education. However, F.H. regrets that education is not just a formality, but also a foundation for a brighter

future. "I regret dropping out of school, it turns out that education is so important," said F. H.

When F.H. was still actively doing formal education, he did not see any real benefits from school and from his future, so F.H. felt that school was wasting his time. "I feel that the lessons in the classroom are too monotonous and too boring so I often don't participate in teaching and learning activities," said F.H.

Education in Indonesia has undergone a structural transformation through the Independent Curriculum, but practice in the field is often stagnant. The monotonous way of learning often makes students feel bored. F.H. said, "I hope that classroom learning will be more interesting and I hope educators will be more creative so that they can raise the spirit of learning in the classroom." When F.H.'s hopes came true, he wanted to get a second chance to continue his formal education.

From the results of the 3rd interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were presented. The phenomenon of dropping out of school due to feelings of lagging is a representation of psychosocial crisis in a competitive and standardized education system. This often occurs in children who are not smart so that they lose their confidence in facing difficult subjects: "I have difficulty understanding the lessons explained so I feel embarrassed and afraid to face difficult lessons," said R.F.

Feeling left behind is the main factor in children dropping out of school. Dropping out of school is a strategy to protect self-esteem from falling behind. "I didn't understand the material explained, but my friends did. So I feel embarrassed and it's better not to be present than to look stupid," said R.F. This statement shows that psychological and cognitive barriers are internal triggers that drastically accelerate the process of dropping out of school. The lack of academic foundation from the previous level makes it difficult for them to grasp new material, so school becomes a stressful place, not a fun place to learn.

In the study of education, each child has a different way and tempo of learning. R. F. thought that he was left behind so he was ashamed to participate in teaching and learning activities. R. F. hopes to get special attention when it is difficult to receive lessons and also he hopes not to be labeled a "stupid child" just because he is slow in receiving knowledge.

From the results of the 4th interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were presented. Teenagers who fall into promiscuity will find it difficult to determine their focus. The education that has been undergone will be neglected because they are more concerned with what makes them happy and forget their obligation to learn. I was often invited by my friends to hang out until night. Over time, not only hanging out at night, but also getting drunk. Finally, I often wake up in the afternoon. Over time, I finally got used to waking up at noon and being addicted to liquor, so I forgot my obligation to study," said A.Z.

Promiscuity is one of the main factors for children dropping out of school. Promiscuity often occurs due to the inability to resist the influence of peers who invite

them to do negative activities. "After I got addicted and got into the habit of doing negative activities, my education began to be forgotten, over time I felt unfamiliar in the school environment, and I was more comfortable in the environment of my hanging out friends, finally I was expelled from school because I never went to school again." said A.Z., this promiscuity became an entrance to the loss of discipline and motivation to learn, A.Z. feels that school is no longer relevant compared to the momentary fun with his friends.

"I realize now that those friends will not guarantee my future," said A.Z. As A.Z. gets older, A.Z. feels sorry for prioritizing momentary pleasure over his education. A.Z. hopes to one day get a second chance to continue his education in a more directed environment and free from negative influences. And hopes that there will be character development for teenagers in all villages so that they do not fall into promiscuity.

From the results of the 5th interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were presented. Household instability is often also a major factor in children dropping out of school. Lack of parental support often has a direct impact on children's psychology so that children have difficulty learning. In the interview, A. A. had spoken, "when I had trouble understanding the lesson, I had nowhere to rely because my parents often had conflicts." This statement is one of the many factors for children dropping out of school.

Academic and emotional isolation due to an uncondusive family atmosphere is one of the factors of A.A., dropping out of school." at home no one can explain lessons that I find difficult to understand, my parents are busy fighting so I decided to quit school" said A.A., the statement confirms that academic and emotional isolation due to the family atmosphere makes A.A., lost his motivation to study and was lazy in school because A.A., felt that he did not have learning support from his parents.

A.A. has a very simple hope, which is a quiet home atmosphere without conflict and gets attention from her parents. "I just want parents to care if I'm having trouble learning, not to attach importance to their own egos so that my existence is not considered," said A.A. This shows that family emotional support is very important in children's sustainability. From the results of the sixth interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were presented. Exposed to the view that education is very important, but hampered by urgent economic realities. A.K. views school as a long-term investment, but his family's condition forces him to make a pragmatic decision to work immediately.

The main factors of dropping out of school are the inability of parents to finance school needs and the desire to help the family's income. "Actually, I want to graduate from high school, but if I go to school, who helps you earn a daily living at home? The cost of uniforms and transportation alone is already burdensome, especially when you are sick," said A.K. This statement reflects the inner conflict between personal aspirations and filial responsibilities.

When A.K.'s hope was asked, he hoped that the help from the government would be evenly distributed so that no one would suffer the same fate as me. "I really hope that the

government will get assistance from the state so that people like us also want to get an education, but are economically constrained so that hope disappears.

From the results of the 7th interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were presented. The view that direct work experience in the city is considered more economically promising than continuing school in the village. I.A. decided to drop out of school and migrate to a big city to work in the informal sector, such as factories and construction.

The main causative factors are the economic boost of the family and the perception that "work experience is more valuable than a diploma" among rural youth. "In the village, it is difficult to get money, if I go to the city, at least I can send money to my parents every month," explained I.A. This statement illustrates the rational calculation of teenagers in the face of limited local economic opportunities.

However, after some time working, I.A. realized that he had limitations due to not having a formal education. "It turns out that if you want a big salary or get a better job, you need a diploma. I feel sorry," he admitted. This regret triggered the hope of pursuing equality education (Package C) while still working. "I want to participate in online learning, so that I can get a diploma without having to stop working," I.A. hoped I.A. This case shows that the decision to migrate is not a rejection of education, but an adaptation strategy that needs to be responded to with flexible education policies, such as distance education programs or evening classes that are friendly to young workers.

From the results of the 8th interview, their views on education, the factors that cause school dropouts, and their expectations were presented. Exposed to the view that education is actually essential for the future, but the decision to continue school must be defeated by more pressing responsibilities. A.U. realized that without a diploma, access to formal employment would be very limited, but she felt she had no other choice after the events that changed the course of her life. This statement reflects a sharp inner conflict between personal aspirations to complete education and moral responsibilities as a fatherto-be. The U.S. does not intrinsically reject the value of education, but is forced to yield to the consequences of its actions. "If it hadn't happened, maybe I would have had a high school diploma by now. But yes, already, rice has become porridge. The important thing now is that I work so that I can support my children and wife," he added. This data shows that the consequences of promiscuity can trigger drastic school dropouts, even though the motivation to learn is still there.

The main factor that pushed A.U. to leave school was the out-of-wedlock pregnancy experienced by her partner. "When I found out that my girlfriend was pregnant, I was really shocked. His family was furious; My family was also disappointed. In the end, they have to get married, even though they are not both ready individually," A.U. recalled This statement illustrates the strong social norms that bind individuals to collective responsibility. In local culture, out-of-wedlock pregnancies are often considered a "disgrace" that must be immediately "closed" through marriage, even if both parties are economically or psychologically immature. Out-of-wedlock pregnancies are a tipping

point that triggers a series of decisions: early marriage, economic responsibility, school dropouts.

Despite A.U.'s dropouts, they haven't lost hope for a better future. "I am now learning to raise chickens with more experienced people. If you already have capital, you want to open your own business. So that you don't continue to be a worker," hoped A.U., with sparkling eyes. This statement is evidence of a critical awareness that education remains important, even though it itself fails to access it formally. A.U. also expressed a desire to pursue equality education (Package C) if financial conditions allow it in the future. If I have more money later, I want to join Package C. So that I can get a diploma, so that I can have a better job list. It is never too late to learn," said A.U. Harapan A.U. encompasses a broader dimension of the future, sustainably through next-generation education and self-development through alternative paths.

This statement reflects the sharp inner conflict between personal aspirations to get ahead and filial responsibilities to help families survive. They do not reject the value of education intrinsically, but are forced to succumb to the condition of the weak economic structure that squeezes daily life. This regret is not just a momentary emotion, but a critical realization that without a diploma, access to decent work will be very limited in the future. However, this awareness does not necessarily change their decision as survival priorities are above uncertain long-term investments. This data supports the finding that economic factors are not only external causes, but also shape adolescents to become more mature prematurely in rural areas with minimal employment.

In addition to regret, pragmatic views emerged as a rational response to the economic pressures that squeezed daily life in the Lamongan Regency area in general. Adolescents decide to drop out of school because they consider direct work experience and financial contributions to parents to have a higher urgency value than continuing formal schooling which is time-consuming. In the context of Banjarejo Village, helping parents work in rice fields, gardens, or migrating is considered a more tangible form of service compared to studying knowledge that does not necessarily guarantee immediate income for families in need. One of the informants explained the reason for his decision with a simple and mature economic logic, "Instead of running out of money for school but not necessarily being able to work, I would rather work now so that I have cash every day," said Informant 4. This pragmatic attitude shows a simple but effective cost-benefit calculation in the context of the structural poverty they face on a daily basis. They see formal education as a high-risk investment with uncertain returns, while working provides certainty of daily income for meals and basic necessities. This view is reinforced by a social environment in which success is often measured by instant economic ability, rather than an academic degree whose completion is delayed. Field data shows that the majority of adolescents who drop out of school are immediately absorbed into the informal sector or help family businesses without the slightest hesitation. This decision is not due to ignorance, but rather a strategy of adaptation to the limited resources in their environment. They prioritize short-term needs to maintain household stability so that they do not fall deeper into the poverty that envelops their families for generations.

On the other hand, there is an alternative view of hope that shows that the spirit of learning is not completely extinguished even though access to formal education is forcibly closed by circumstances. Adolescents who drop out of school still appreciate the learning process, but choose to take non-formal education or skills courses as a solution to their disconnection from access to expensive regular schools. They realize that specific skills are more needed for economic survival than general diplomas that are theoretical and less applicable in the real world of work. Another informant expressed his hope enthusiastically and enthusiastically, "I want to take a welding or sewing course, so that I have skills that can be sold if I need money later in the future," said Informant 5. This expectation indicates a strong desire to develop skills competencies that are recognized by the business world even without a complete and formal educational background. They see vocational education as a realistic middle ground to increase their self-capacity and selling value in a competitive job market. Supporting data shows a high interest in short-term job training that is immediately practical and can immediately generate money for families. Teens want to have skills that can be directly converted into economic income to help families cope with financial difficulties. This view is in line with the theory of human capital, where skills are valid and productive investments in their lives. They are not anti-school, but anti-school which is irrelevant to their urgent economic conditions and in need of a quick solution. Informal pathways are considered more flexible and friendly to the conditions of those who are already working full-time to earn a living.

Socio-cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping adolescents' views, especially related to the tradition of early marriage which is still prevalent in Lamongan Regency and its surroundings. For some adolescent girls, dropping out of school is often not an economic choice, but a consequence of social norms that require them to marry at a young age for the sake of the honor of the extended family. This marriage automatically ends their formal education period because domestic roles as wives and mothers are considered more priority than individual academic achievements in school. A female informant revealed the pressure she felt from the surrounding environment, "Here if someone has proposed, yes you have to get married, it's not good if you refuse even though your peers already have children," explained Informant 6. This statement illustrates the strong social pressures that force adolescents to leave school in order to meet the expectations of the community and strict traditions. Education is considered less relevant when social status as wives and mothers is waiting at their doorstep. This tradition creates a cycle in which education is not a top priority in the life cycle of village youth who are bound by strong customs. The research data showed a strong correlation between the age of early marriage and the high dropout rate at the study site. Married teens tend to drop out of school because of the demands of taking care of their household and children that consume their time and energy. Their view of education shifted to something that could be postponed or ignored in favor of more urgent social obligations according to local societal norms.

Overall, the dynamics of this view confirm that school dropouts in the region are not a rejection of education itself, but rather a strategy of adaptation to environmental

conditions that demands relevant and targeted policy interventions. Adolescents show resilience by shifting their motivation to learn into a desire to master vocational skills as a long-term survival capital for their future lives. They still have aspirations to break the chain of poverty even though the path taken is different from the general norms of formal education. The two informants closed the interview with strong statements full of determination and hope, "We don't want our children to have the same fate," and "Education is important, it's just that the path is different for us," said Informants 7 and 8. This sentence is proof that the determination to move forward remains in the midst of the structural limitations that have shackled their progress so far. They hope that the next generation will not experience the same thing and hope to return to equality education if conditions allow in the future. These findings shift the paradigm from seeing school dropouts as passive victims to active agents who design their own life strategies. They need the support of a system that recognizes alternative pathways as valid and equivalent to formal schools. Education policies in rural areas must be responsive to their economic aspirations, not simply force them back into rigid formal schools. By understanding this view, the solutions offered can be more targeted, namely in the form of facilitating relevant alternative educational paths. Finally, this study concludes that behind the label of school dropouts, there is a potential for human beings who want to develop, but they need a bridge that is in accordance with the context of their life reality in Banjarejo Village which is full of complex economic and socio-cultural challenges.

B. Factors Contributing to School Dropout Among Adolescents

The findings of a study in Banjarejo Village, Karangbinangun District, Lamongan Regency, revealed three forms of factors that cause adolescents to drop out of school, namely economic factors, socio-cultural factors, and individual internal factors. Economically, limited parental income forces adolescents to drop out of school to work to help support their families. From a socio-cultural aspect, the phenomenon of early marriage is still a fairly prevalent tradition that automatically ends their formal education period. Meanwhile, individual internal factors are characterized by low motivation to learn and difficulties in academic adaptation that are not accompanied by adequate tutoring support in the home environment, thus triggering the decision to leave the education system.

Economic factors are the most dominant determinants that encourage adolescents in Banjarejo Village to leave school early due to limited resources. Parents' limited income creates financial pressures that make the cost of education considered a heavy burden that the fragile economic structure of rural families cannot afford. When basic needs such as food and board are a top priority, long-term education investments are often sacrificed for the sake of precarious daily survival. An informant explained this condition clearly full of resignation, "My parents don't have money to pay tuition fees, if they are forced to go to school, they are in debt everywhere," said Informant 1. This statement illustrates the harsh reality where access to education is hampered by a solid wall of poverty and difficult to penetrate by ordinary family businesses. In addition, the inability to buy school supplies

is also a specific reason that is often cited as an early trigger for despair for adolescents. Another informant added details of the burdensome cost burden, "Books and uniforms are difficult to buy, let alone transportation money to school every day," explained Informant 2. This data supports the finding that economic factors are not just verbal reasons, but real structural barriers that limit choice. Families in the Karangbinangun area are often at a subsistence level, so any expenditure on school must be carefully considered and often lost out by food needs. As a result, adolescents feel guilty if they continue to ask for school fees and choose to quit to ease the burden on their parents who have worked hard but still struggle to meet the basic needs of their extended families in villages with minimal formal employment.



Figure 2: Interviews with teenagers who have dropped out of school.

A continuation of economic pressure is the demand to immediately contribute financially through direct work, which shifts the priority from studying to earning a living for the family. Adolescents feel a moral responsibility to help their parents support their families due to economic conditions that are increasingly squeezed from time to time in the region. Jobs in the informal sector or agriculture are a more attractive alternative because they provide instant income that can be directly used for urgent household needs. One of the teenagers who dropped out of school revealed his pragmatic reason based on

the logic of survival, "Instead of going to school but constantly asking for money, it's better for me to work in the rice fields so that there is a result for food," said Informant 4. This attitude suggests that practical economic value is valued more than abstract academic value and does not necessarily guarantee immediate income for hungry families. The social environment in Banjarejo Village also normalizes children to work from an early age as a form of devotion to parents who are morally legitimate in the eyes of the community. Field data shows that most adolescents who drop out of school are directly involved in family economic activities or migrate to the city to work in factories for a daily wage. This decision was taken not because they didn't like school, but because of the pressure of the situation that forced them to grow up faster than they should. They see work as an immediate solution to the problem of family poverty, while school is considered a delay in economic contribution that cannot be afforded by the limited financial condition of their parents in the rural area of Lamongan. This creates the perception that the contribution of labor is more valuable than the academic contribution in the eyes of families who are struggling to cope with the economic squeeze that is getting heavier year by year in the region.

In addition to economic factors, socio-cultural aspects play a very significant role, especially related to the tradition of early marriage which is still quite prevalent in the Lamongan Regency area. This phenomenon automatically ends the period of formal education of adolescents, especially for women, because domestic roles as wives and mothers are considered more priority than academic achievement in school. Social pressures from communities and extended families often encourage adolescents to marry as soon as they reach puberty or after an application for admission without considering their educational future. A female informant shared her experience related to this social pressure, "If someone has proposed, they are usually married immediately, they are not allowed to postpone it anymore according to the custom here," said Informant 6. This statement reflects the strong social norms that bind individuals to community traditions rather than personal educational aspirations that may be possessed. Early marriage creates a cycle in which teens get caught up in household responsibilities that take up significant time and energy to learn. Peer pressure also plays an important role, where teens feel left behind if they don't follow the prevailing marriage norms in their communities. This data confirms that cultural factors are not just about individual choices, but about adherence to strictly applicable collective norms. Formal education is often considered irrelevant when social status as a young family head is already waiting at the door. As a result, schools are abandoned not because of academic incompetence, but because of changes in social status that demand an instant adult role in the traditional and conservative structure of rural society. This shows how local culture can be a major obstacle to social mobility through education for adolescent girls, especially in the Karangbinangun area which still holds to the old customs of prioritizing marriage as the achievement of the main social status for adult women in the village.

On the other hand, individual internal factors also contribute to the decision to drop out of school, which is characterized by low motivation to learn and difficulties in

academic adaptation experienced by adolescents at school. When faced with increasingly difficult subject matter, many adolescents feel left behind and unable to keep up with the rhythm of learning in the classroom without adequate additional help from teachers or parents. This frustration builds up over time until it eventually triggers the decision to leave the formal education system because they feel inappropriate or fail academically. An informant admitted this internal weakness honestly, "I find it difficult to understand lessons, if I ask the teacher, I am afraid, so I am lazy to go to class every day," admitted Informant 7. This statement shows that psychological and cognitive barriers are internal triggers that drastically accelerate the process of dropping out of school. The lack of academic foundation from the previous level makes it difficult for them to grasp new material, so school becomes a stressful place, not a fun place to learn. Supporting data suggests that declining report card scores are often an early signal before they decide to leave school permanently. They feel that continuing school will only be a waste of time because they do not understand the material taught by the teacher in class. This condition is exacerbated by feelings of insecurity compared to peers who are more academically capable and receive more support. As a result, the motivation to stay in school slowly erodes to the point where dropping out of school is considered the best way out to avoid the constant embarrassment and academic failure they experience in a competitive formal school environment.

Individual internal factors are further exacerbated by the absence of adequate tutoring support in the home environment which should be a place for adolescent academic strengthening. Parents who have limited education and time due to hard work are unable to provide the learning assistance that children need when facing academic difficulties at school effectively. The absence of academic discussion space at home makes learning problems pile up without solutions until finally leading to a final and irreversible decision to drop out. The last informant described this condition sadly, "At home there is no one who can explain the lesson, my parents are busy at work so yes, I have just stopped," said Informant 8. This sentence confirms that academic isolation at home is the final blow to their already fragile learning motivation. Without a strong support system, adolescents feel alone in facing increasingly complex and difficult educational challenges. The research data revealed that the combination of internal difficulties and *lack of support* externally creates a vicious circle that is difficult for teenagers to break on their own. Teens feel they have nowhere to rely when they fail to understand the lessons, so dropping out of school becomes the only option that seems reasonable to them. Overall, these findings suggest that school dropouts in Banjarejo Village are the result of a complex interaction between economic squeezes, cultural pressures, and unaddressed individual internal vulnerabilities. These three factors reinforce each other and create conditions where formal education is considered an unaffordable luxury both financially, socially, and psychologically for teenagers in the rural area of Lamongan Regency.

C. Educational and Economic Hopes Among School Dropout Adolescents

The findings of the study related to the expectations of adolescents who drop out of school in Banjarejo Village, Karangbinangun District, Lamongan Regency, identified three main forms of aspiration that they hold dear. The first form is the hope of achieving economic stability on their own, where they aspire to get a permanent job in order to help the family financially without depending on their parents. The second form is the hope for the development of skill competencies, namely the desire to take part in job training or internships in order to have specific skills that are recognized by the business world even without a formal educational background. Meanwhile, the third form is the hope of breaking the chain of dropping out of school, which is reflected in their determination so that the next generation in the family does not experience the same thing, as well as the desire to return to equality education if conditions allow in the future.

The hope of achieving independent economic stability is the most dominant aspiration held by school dropouts in Banjarejo Village in response to the limitations they currently face. They aspire to get a permanent job that can guarantee their daily lives so that they no longer depend on the help of their parents who are also in need. Economic independence is seen as a form of maturity and moral responsibility to get out of the snare of poverty that has shackled their families for many years in the rural areas of Lamongan. An informant expressed his strong desire to be financially independent, "I want to have a permanent job so that I don't have to ask for my parents' money continuously, it's embarrassing," said Informant 1. This statement reflects the psychological pressure felt by teenagers when they have to continue to be an economic burden for families in the midst of difficult financial conditions. In addition, this hope is also driven by the desire to have a better social status in society through stable financial capabilities. Another informant added the reason behind the desire to work, "If you have your own money, you can help buy household needs without just waiting for the harvest," explained Informant 2. This data supports the finding that economic motivation is not just for oneself, but also to contribute to household stability. They see work as the main path to dignity and empowerment, replacing the role of schools that are considered incapable of providing instant economic security for their urgent lives in the village.

The next form of hope is closely related to the desire to help the family financially without relying on parents, which indicates a strong kinship solidarity among adolescents who have dropped out of school. They feel that they have an obligation to ease the burden of their parents who have worked hard but have not been prosperous due to limited land and job opportunities in Banjarejo Village. This hope is not just about meeting personal needs, but about the survival of large families that are interdependent in rural social structures. One of the teenagers explained his main motivation for helping the family, "Parents are old, I have to change their position to earn money so that they can rest a little," said Informant 4. This quote describes the shift in role from a protected child to the primary breadwinner due to the demands of oppressive economic conditions. They are willing to sacrifice their youth to learn to ensure that their parents do not experience more severe economic hardship in old age. Field data shows that most of the income they

generate from working is directly passed on to parents for basic needs. This confirms that their economic expectations are collective, not individualistic, which are rooted in the value of family cooperation. The decision to drop out of school is seen as a strategy to accelerate the economic contribution, although the long-term consequence is the loss of academic opportunities that they may have been able to get if they remained in formal school in the Karangbinangun area.

On the other hand, the expectation for the development of skill competencies is becoming a strategic alternative that adolescents choose to increase their self-selling value in the job market even without a formal educational background. They realize that a diploma is not the only key to success, but a specific skill that the business world recognizes is more needed for economic survival in this modern era. The desire to take part in on-the-job training or internships arose in response to the awareness that technical skills were more applicative than school theories that were less relevant to field conditions. An informant expressed his great interest in vocational training, "I want to participate in welding or automotive training, so that I have clear skills and can immediately work in the workshop," said Informant 5. This statement shows a pragmatic orientation towards competency-based education which is considered to be more of a guarantee of job security. They hope that by having a skills certificate, they can compete with formal school graduates who may have more theory but less practice. Another informant added the importance of this special skill, "Public schools are too long, if you have quick skills, you can get money for daily living," said Informant 7. This data supports the finding that adolescents who drop out of school are not anti-learning, but anti-the type of education that does not have a direct economic impact. They see the nonformal pathway as a bridge to accumulate valid human capital and be recognized by local industries in Lamongan Regency that need skilled labor.

The recognition of specific skills by the business world is another important hope that adolescents who drop out of school want to achieve as a validation of their capacity even without an academic degree. They want to prove that the absence of a formal diploma does not prevent them from becoming a competent professional workforce and trusted by employers in the industrial sector or self-employed businesses. This expectation is based on the belief that performance and actual work results speak for themselves rather than just educational documents that often do not reflect a person's practical abilities in the actual workplace. Teenagers hope that there will be a wide open internship opportunity for them to show their potential directly to business owners without discrimination based on educational status. Research data show that many working adolescents feel confident in their technical abilities even though their educational status is administratively recorded as dropping out of school. They want a more inclusive job recruitment system that assesses based on a portfolio of skills, not just transcripts of academic grades that they don't have. This is the basis for their expectations to be recognized on an equal footing with other workers with higher education backgrounds. This recognition is important to increase their self-esteem and motivation to continue to develop professionally in the

midst of the limited access to formal education they experience since adolescence in rural areas that often overlook this nonacademic potential.

Meanwhile, the hope of breaking the chain of school dropouts is reflected in their strong determination so that the next generation in the family does not suffer the same fate that is full of limited educational and economic options. They are committed to supporting their children's education later even if they themselves have to drop out of school early due to the current conditions that are not possible. In addition, there is a desire to return to equity education if financial conditions allow it in the future as a form of closure of regret that is still stored. An informant closes the interview with a promise to the next generation: "Later, if I have children, I must go to high school, don't be like me who stops in the middle of the road," promised Informant 6. This sentence is proof of the critical awareness that education is still important even though they fail to access it formally today. They see the bitter experience of dropping out of school as a valuable lesson not to be repeated by their children and grandchildren in the future. This expectation also includes the desire to take Package B or C as an administrative solution to complete their self-qualification. This data shows that dropping out of school is not the end of educational aspirations, but rather a break imposed by circumstances. They still have dreams of returning to school if the family's economic situation has improved and is stable. Thus, their hopes include a broader future dimension, namely sustainable socioeconomic improvement of families through better next-generation education and guaranteed access in Banjarejo Village

Discussion

The discussion in this study reveals that the phenomenon of school dropouts in Banjarejo Village, Karangbinangun District, Lamongan Regency, is a manifestation of the tension between urgent economic needs and long-term educational value, where economic factors and early marriage traditions force adolescents to adopt a pragmatic view that prioritizes the financial contribution of the family. Despite the structural limitations that trigger the decision to drop out of school, the existence of a view of regret and hope to break the chain of dropping out of school shows that the motivation to learn is not completely lost, but rather diverted to the desire to master vocational skills as a survival capital. Thus, this dynamic confirms that school dropouts in the region are not a rejection of education itself, but rather an adaptation strategy to environmental conditions that demands policy interventions that not only focus on prevention, but also the facilitation of alternative educational pathways relevant to their economic aspirations.

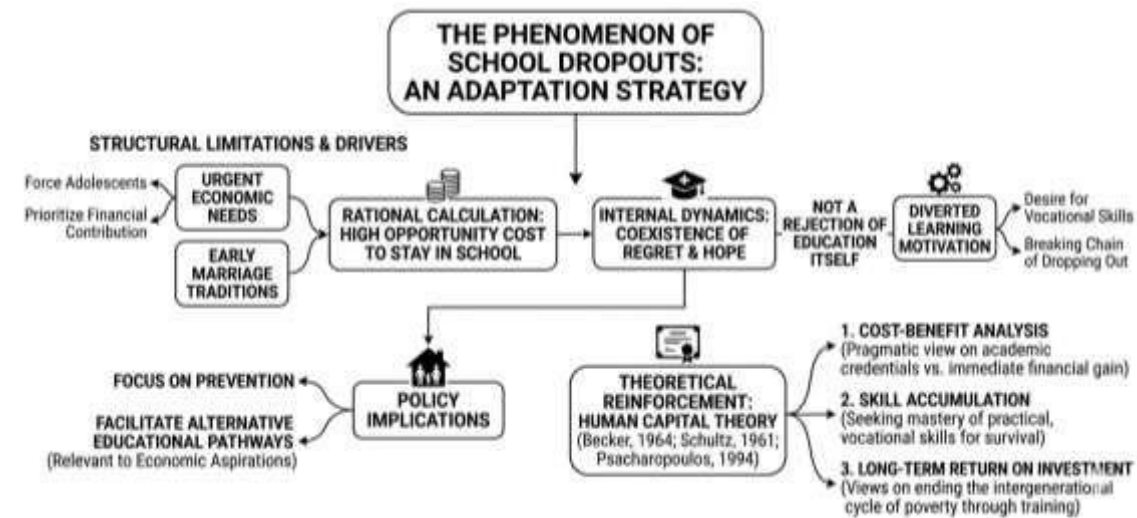


Figure 3: Analysis of research findings

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the validity of Human Capital Theory (*Human Capital Theory*) put forward by Gary Becker, who views education as a fundamental economic investment to increase the productivity and future income of individuals (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961; Psacharopoulos, 1994). Key indicators of this theory include an analysis of the cost-benefit of education, the accumulation of specific skills, and the long-term return on investment. In the context of Banjarejo Village, the findings of the study show a direct relationship where the decision to drop out of school is not due to an intrinsic rejection of educational values, but rather the result of rational calculations when the opportunity cost (*opportunity cost*) to stay in school too high due to family economic pressure and early marriage traditions that hinder capital accumulation. The cost-benefit analysis indicator is evident in the pragmatic view of adolescents who prioritize immediate financial contributions over unsecured long-term academic credentials. However, findings regarding expectations for mastering vocational skills and the desire to pursue equality education confirm indicators of skill accumulation, where subjects persist in attempting to build human capital through alternative pathways when formal pathways are hampered by rigid socioeconomic structures and internal limitations. Thus, the theoretical significance of this study confirms that school dropouts in the region are a strategic response to limited resources in maximizing human capital, not just individual failures in learning. This enriches the theory of human capital by showing that in conditions of structural poverty, forms of educational investment can transform from formal schools to relevant practical skills training as a rational life defense mechanism for the sake of real family economic sustainability and the breaking of the intergenerational chain of poverty.

The findings of this study substantially support several previous studies that identified structural poverty and cultural norms as the main determinants of school dropout in rural areas. Strong consistency is seen in the confirmation of economic factors and early marriage that are aligned with the literature *existing* about the barriers to education in East Java. However, there are significant differences regarding the perception of the future; While previous studies have often portrayed school dropouts as a

directionless vulnerable group resigned to fate, this study found active agency in the form of pragmatic views and expectations to master vocational skills (Ainuri et. all, 2026). These findings refute the common notion that dropping out of school is always synonymous with a complete loss of motivation to learn or pure individual failure. In contrast to previous research that tended to focus on static negative impacts and victimization, this study uncovered the dynamics of strategic adaptation in which adolescents shift educational investment from formal to non-formal pathways as a rational response to environmental pressures. Moreover, if older studies have highlighted internal factors more as character weaknesses, these findings position internal factors as an adaptive response to external conditions. Novelty (*novelty*) This research lies in the concept of "human capital-based adaptive resilience", which offers a new perspective that dropping out of school in Banjarejo Village is not just an academic failure, but a planned survival strategy to break the chains of poverty through practical skills paths. This enriches the discourse of inclusive education policy in rural areas by emphasizing the importance of facilitating alternative pathways that are relevant to the economic aspirations of local youth, thereby filling the literature gap on youth agency in the context of specific structural limitations in Lamongan (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022; Suryadarma, 2020; Akhmadi, 2021; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023).

Based on the novelty of these findings, the strategic step that needs to be taken now is the transformation of rural education policies from a rigid preventive-approach to a facilitative-inclusive approach that recognizes youth agency. The local government of Lamongan Regency needs to integrate social protection programs with vocational education through the "Dual Pathway" policy that allows school dropouts to stay in work while accessing certified skills training or equivalency education (Package B/C) with a modular curriculum that is flexible and relevant to local economic potential, such as integrated agriculture or digital entrepreneurship. In the context of education in villages, educational units and training institutions should collaborate to build "Community Learning Centers" that offer adaptive schedules (evenings or weekends) as well as credit recognition for work experience, so that the process of human capital accumulation continues without sacrificing the family's urgent economic contribution. In addition, policy interventions must target socio-cultural norms through a persuasive approach by involving religious and traditional leaders to postpone early marriage, while providing economic incentives for families who support children to continue their education (Hasan et. al, 2026). This approach should also strengthen a career guidance system at the village level that not only motivates a return to formal schooling, but also maps the skills interest of adolescents to be channeled into local industry internship programs. Thus, the policies taken no longer view school dropouts as a mere administrative problem, but rather as a momentum to design an empowering alternative education ecosystem, which validates adolescent survival strategies while opening up structural access to long-term economic independence and breaking the intergenerational poverty chain in rural areas (Fadjar, 2005; Tilaar, 2002)

CONCLUSION

Based on an in-depth discussion, this study concludes that the phenomenon of school dropouts in Banjarejo Village, Lamongan, is not the end sign of human aspirations, but a rational adaptation strategy in the midst of complex economic and cultural squeezes. Adolescents do not reject education intrinsically, but are forced to prioritize family survival through work and early marriage, while harboring great hopes in vocational skills as future human capital. These findings shift the paradigm from seeing them as victims of system failures to resilient agents seeking to break the chains of poverty in their own way. Policy-wise, this demands a transformation from a rigid preventive approach to a facilitative one that recognizes alternative paths to non-formal education. The deep impression is that behind the statistics of school dropouts, there are resilient souls who are thirsty for learning, but hit by the wall of an unfair social structure. Therefore, it is our responsibility not only to regret their decision, but to build an educational bridge that is inclusive and relevant to the village context. If the country comes up with a relevant solution, then dropping out of school is no longer a dream graveyard, but a crossroads to other equal paths to success. Let's change this narrative so that every teenager in the countryside feels valued for their potential, not judged on their school status, because true education is to humanize human beings in all their limitations. So, let this finding serve as a moral call to restore hope, ensuring that no more villagers are forced to choose between eating today and dreaming tomorrow. What is most shocking is the reality that those who are labeled as failures by the system actually have a more mature and realistic life plan than the current education policy, an irony that we must immediately correct for the sake of humanity.

Although this research succeeded in uncovering in depth the dynamics behind school dropout decisions at the village level, there are several methodological limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this research only focuses on one location with a limited number of participants (eight informants). As a result, the resulting findings are contextual and cannot be directly generalized to other rural areas that have different economic or cultural conditions. Second, the main data relies heavily on participant stories and memories through interviews. This has the potential to introduce bias, such as inaccuracies in remembering past events or the tendency of informants to adjust narratives to align with local social norms. Third, this research does not monitor the long-term development of adolescents who have chosen alternative educational pathways or postdropout skills training, so the success of their adaptation strategies has not been tested over the long term. This limitation also opens up opportunities for further research to use inter-regional comparative designs or mixed-methods approaches, as well as carrying out regular monitoring to measure the impact of inclusive education policies in a more objective and sustainable manner.

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