



Islamic Higher Education as Moral Safeguarding: Religious Motivations among Coastal Communities in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Islamic Higher Education as Moral Safeguarding: Religious Motivations among Coastal Communities in Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the religious considerations underlying coastal families' decisions in choosing Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTI) for their children. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving coastal community members, parents, and religious figures. The findings reveal that strong religious traditions are the primary factor influencing coastal families in selecting PTI. Parents perceive PTI not merely as academic institutions, but also as moral and spiritual safeguards capable of protecting their children's faith and character within an open coastal environment vulnerable to negative social influences. This educational choice is driven by three major motivations: protecting children's morality, fulfilling the religious obligation to seek Islamic knowledge as an investment for both worldly and afterlife success, and preparing future da'wah cadres who can independently serve the spiritual needs of coastal communities. The community believes that the integration of religious and general sciences in PTI can produce graduates who are intellectually competent while possessing strong spiritual resilience to face the uncertainties of fishermen's lives. Islamic higher education is also viewed as a strategy to preserve family Islamic identity, attain blessed sustenance, and achieve a balanced life between worldly achievement and ukhrawi fulfillment. Therefore, the decision to choose PTI reflects the community's deep belief that true success is not solely measured by material prosperity, but also by closeness to Allah and the ability to contribute religiously and socially to coastal society. This study contributes to the development of sociological and religious perspectives on Islamic higher education by positioning PTI not only as educational institutions, but also as socio-religious mechanisms for moral protection, identity preservation, and spiritual resilience among coastal Muslim communities in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords:

pendidikan tinggi Islam, perlindungan moral, masyarakat pesisir, motivasi keagamaan

Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi motivasi religius masyarakat pesisir di Indonesia dalam memilih Perguruan Tinggi Islam (PTI) sebagai benteng moral dan spiritual bagi anak-anak mereka. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus untuk memahami pertimbangan keagamaan, sosial, dan budaya yang melatarbelakangi pilihan pendidikan masyarakat pesisir terhadap PTI. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan

dokumentasi yang melibatkan orang tua, tokoh agama, dan masyarakat pesisir. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tradisi keagamaan yang kuat menjadi faktor utama yang memengaruhi keluarga pesisir dalam memilih PTI. Orang tua memandang PTI tidak hanya sebagai lembaga pendidikan akademik, tetapi juga sebagai benteng moral dan spiritual yang mampu menjaga akidah, karakter, dan perilaku anak-anak mereka di tengah lingkungan pesisir yang terbuka dan rentan terhadap pengaruh sosial negatif. Pilihan pendidikan ini didorong oleh tiga motivasi utama, yaitu melindungi moralitas anak, memenuhi kewajiban agama dalam menuntut ilmu Islam sebagai investasi dunia dan akhirat, serta mempersiapkan kader dakwah masa depan yang mampu memenuhi kebutuhan spiritual masyarakat pesisir secara mandiri. Selain itu, masyarakat meyakini bahwa integrasi ilmu agama dan ilmu umum di PTI dapat menghasilkan lulusan yang kompeten secara intelektual sekaligus memiliki ketahanan spiritual dalam menghadapi ketidakpastian kehidupan nelayan. PTI juga dipandang sebagai sarana mempertahankan identitas keislaman keluarga, memperoleh keberkahan rezeki, dan mencapai keseimbangan antara keberhasilan duniawi dan kebahagiaan ukhrawi. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa keputusan masyarakat pesisir memilih PTI bukan semata-mata didasarkan pada pertimbangan akademik, tetapi juga pada kebutuhan perlindungan moral, penguatan identitas religius, dan keberlanjutan nilai-nilai Islam dalam kehidupan masyarakat pesisir. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam memperluas kajian sosiologi pendidikan Islam dengan menempatkan PTI sebagai institusi strategis dalam menjaga resiliensi moral dan spiritual masyarakat Muslim pesisir di Indonesia kontemporer.

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INTRODUCTION

Theologically, people living in coastal areas should send their children to Islamic universities as a form of responsibility to seek knowledge and as a form of worship to achieve blessings in life in this world and the hereafter, as well as to form good morals based on high divine values. Under ideal circumstances, education serves as a spiritual means of getting closer to God, with the primary motivation driven by devotion and contribution to the people, rather than just material needs. However, the current social conditions show a striking and very different contradiction from the theological intention. In the real world, many families on the coast choose Islamic colleges not because of a deep spiritual awareness, but rather because of practical considerations such as affordable costs or alumni networks that can help get jobs quickly, so that the meaning of religious education is eroded by a focus on worldly things (Solehuddin, 2026). This contradiction is evident when graduates of Islamic universities turn out to lack a deep understanding of religion and are more concerned with personal economic interests than da'wah or social service as expected from an early theological perspective, creating a social irony in a religious society. Instead of being a pioneer of moral change, Islamic higher education is often seen by them only as a tool to achieve social and economic status, forgetting the

basis of faith that should be the main reason for choosing such institutions. As a result, there is a real gap between the sincere intentions of parents and the results of secular education even though it is packaged in a religious concept, which ultimately weakens the Islamic identity of coastal communities in the face of the challenges of the times without sufficient spiritual support, as promised in the religious theological teachings on the importance of knowledge (Azizi, Albab, & Chotimah, 2026). This shows that practical economic rationality has outperformed value rationality, transforming the sacred mission into a mere market product.

This paradoxical phenomenon has become a concern for academics, as evidenced by five recent studies that show differences in educational motives. Azra (2020) revealed that the family's main motivation is more economic than sincere spiritual goals. Faizah (2021) emphasized that low costs are the main reason for choosing an Islamic campus instead of a state. Nurkhamid (2022) observed that graduates tend to have a pragmatic orientation in order to get a quick job without a deep religious mastery. Hidayat (2023) shows that the weak application of Islamic values is caused by excessive emphasis on worldly materials. Rahman (2023) revealed that the curriculum is often not in harmony with the theological needs of the local community. All of these findings confirm a shift in focus from sacred values to a more practical secular approach. However, there is still a considerable research gap from the five studies. They have not analyzed in detail how the cognitive dissonance between the theological goals of the parents and the pragmatic reality of the child occurs specifically in the typical cultures of coastal communities. Existing research tends to be general to the broader Muslim community, without investigating the unique sociological and theological dynamics of coastal areas that have different social and economic interactions compared to agricultural or urban areas, especially in the context of economic marginalization pressures that encourage rational choices. This results in the lack of a proper solution model to connect theological expectations with the reality of the field contextually. The absence of research that clearly links coastal cultural variables to the decline in theological motivation in Islamic higher education is an important gap that must be filled. Future research needs to prioritize the reconstruction of these motivations to be in line with local culture and beliefs, so that the initial purpose of Islamic education is not only a social myth that loses its spiritual essence in the face of the real economic challenges that coastal communities face every day to maintain their lives and dignity.

The purpose of this study is to dig deeper into the theological reasons that encourage coastal communities to send their children to Islamic colleges. This research will fulfill its objectives by answering three main questions, namely identifying the religious factors underlying these choices, exploring the influence of parents' religious beliefs and understanding on educational choices, and explaining why Islamic higher education is considered important for children's futures. The research location was specifically chosen in Gempolsek Village, Rowosari District, Kendal Regency, Central Java Province, because this village reflects the unique dynamics of Java's coastal communities who are increasingly aware of education but remain strong in Islamic traditions. The choice of this location was based on a social phenomenon in which the Gempolsek fishing community showed a significant increase in sending their children

to Islamic colleges, despite often having to face economic limitations common in coastal areas. Especially in Rowosari, there is an interesting balance between the hard work of fishermen and investment for the hereafter through education. In addition, Kendal Regency is known as an area with a strong tradition of pesantren and religious culture, so Gempolsek is an ideal case study to understand the complex relationship between the reality of maritime economics and theological aspirations in the world of education. This research is very important to provide an empirical picture of how spiritual values function as social capital for coastal communities in accessing higher education, as well as filling gaps in the literature on the sociology of Islamic education in the coastal areas of Central Java that are very specific (Ramli, 2026). Thus, the results of this research are expected to be a reference in the development of education policies that are sensitive to the cultural context and religiosity of the local community, as well as strengthen understanding of the role of religion in vertical social mobility among fishing communities.

This research is very relevant and urgent to be carried out immediately because there is still a lack of academic studies that specifically discuss theological aspects as social capital for coastal communities in accessing higher education. Historically, the common story of fishing communities has often been caught up in the view of subsistence economics that does not take their intellectual and spiritual aspirations seriously. The need for this research arises due to rapid social change in the coastal region of Central Java, where severe economic challenges must be balanced with the demands for religious legitimacy in every important life decision. Without a deep understanding of this theological motivation, the government's educational policies have the potential to become irrelevant or fail to answer the fundamental problems of local community motivation. Ignoring this aspect can lead to errors in understanding sociological data, ultimately leading to inappropriate empowerment programs. In addition, the situation in Gempolsek shows an interesting paradigm shift, where investment in Islamic education is considered much more important than simply increasing instant income from marine catches. If not immediately noted, these cultural dynamics could be eroded by the onslaught of secular modernization that is slowly eroding strong local values. Therefore, this research is not only to satisfy academic curiosity, but also as a strategic need to map community empowerment patterns based on authentic local wisdom. The results of this study will provide an empirical basis for decision-makers to design scholarship programs or curricula that are in accordance with the religious values of the community, so that educational development in coastal areas can run in an inclusive and sustainable manner. Thus, the importance of this research lies in the important opportunity to capture moments of social change before those patterns change or even disappear completely.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to dig deeper into the reasons behind coastal community education decisions. The qualitative method was chosen because of its ability to capture subjective human experiences that cannot be measured by statistics alone. In this case, an understanding of theological reasons requires a deep exploration of the internal values embraced by the community (Lacey & Luff, 2001). The case study design allowed the researcher to focus on the people of Gempolsek

Village in Kendal Regency, Central Java, Indonesia as a typical unit of analysis. The methodological process begins by building strong relationships between researchers and local communities to create a supportive atmosphere of trust. The researcher not only functions as an outside observer but also seeks to understand the empirical point of view of coastal communities about theology and education in a participatory manner. Through this design, the complex interactions between religious values and family strategic decisions can be analyzed thoroughly and contextually. Researchers will spend considerable time in the field to observe the socio-cultural context around the phenomenon in more depth. This is important because theological reasons are often hidden in the daily practices and oral stories typical of the fishing community. With this approach, the data obtained is not just an outward picture, but reflects the authentic socio-religious reality in the coastal area of Kendal.

The main techniques for collecting data include in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and the study of supporting documents to gain a thorough understanding. Interviews were conducted for 180 minutes for each participant, which was divided into three separate sessions to prevent burnout and gain more in-depth information as confidence increased. Eight parents from Gempolsewu Village, Rowosari, Kendal, were chosen as the main source of information because they have children who are currently or have attended Islamic higher education. Interviews are conducted in the local Javanese language so that the emotional expressions and cultural nuances of the interviewees are maintained, which is often lost when using formal language. After the recording process, the audio data is transcribed and transcribed into Indonesian with the full consent of the source to ensure the accuracy of the local meaning and context. Later, the text was carefully translated into English for the purpose of international scientific publication without losing its theological element. In order to maintain privacy and research ethics, the names of the sources are disguised as the initials with strict personal data security needs (Sgier, 2012). Observations were carried out naturally to assess daily interactions regarding religion in the home environment, while document analysis included village demographic data and educational archives. The implementation of this method ensures that the data collected is valid, ethical, and academically accountable at a global level. The combination of these techniques allows for triangulation of data sources from the beginning of the collection process in the field. The researcher recorded field notes during the observation to complete the interview results. The gradual translation process also helps to reduce the potential cultural biases that may arise when transferring local context into a global language, maintaining the integrity of the data throughout the research process.

Table 1 : Informan profile

No	Initials Name	Gender	Residence	Age
1	S	Male	Kendal	54
2	F	Women	Kendal	46
3	K	Women	Kendal	60
4	S	Male	Kendal	40
5	D	Women	Kendal	50
6	W	Male	Kendal	61

7	FT	Women	Kendal	38
8	Y	Women	Kendal	36

The validity of the data was tested by utilizing the source triangulation method and techniques to ensure the validity of the research results in the field as a whole. The researcher analyzed data from in-depth interviews, direct observations at home, and written documents to check the consistency of the sources' statements regarding religious beliefs. If there are discrepancies or inconsistencies in the data, the researcher will ask for clarification from the relevant sources to obtain a more accurate truth. The data that has been obtained and validated is then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three steps of activities that run simultaneously and are cyclical. The first step is data reduction, where researchers perform thematic coding of interview transcripts to sort out relevant information regarding theological and religious understanding. The second step is data presentation, where the processed data is arranged in the form of a conceptual matrix or logical narrative so that the pattern of relationships between variables is easier to understand. The third step is conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher formulates the final findings based on the data collected thoroughly. The implementation of this methodology is carried out in an iterative way during the research process, not just at the end of field activities. Researchers are constantly conducting critical reflection on the data obtained to ensure that there is no subjective interpretation bias that can affect the objectivity of the results. The Miles and Huberman (2014) model was chosen because of its systematic nature and is suitable for analyzing complex qualitative data, such as the religious understanding of coastal communities. Thus, this analysis ensures that the conclusions drawn are truly based on solid and tested empirical data. This rigorous validation and analysis process is the main basis for the reliability of research results in answering predetermined questions comprehensively and can be tested for truth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A. Religious reasons that encourage the Gempolsewu community in coastal areas to send their children to Islamic universities.

Research in Gempolsewu, Rowosari District, shows that strong religious traditions play an important role in the decision to choose an Islamic College. Parents here view Islamic campuses as the main protector of the faith for their children in an open coastal environment. They believe that religion-based education will provide a guarantee of salvation both in this world and in the hereafter. Thus, the hope of getting the blessings of sustenance from Islamic university graduates is the main motivation for local fishermen who depend on nature. These religious reasons can be divided into three main motives that are deep for the people of Gempolsewu. First, the desire to protect children's morals from the negative influences that often occur in coastal areas. Second, the obligation to seek knowledge in accordance with sharia as a rewarding investment for the future. Third, the hope is to give birth to da'wah cadres who are able to meet the spiritual needs of the coastal community of Rowosari independently. This choice also serves as a

strategy to maintain the family's Islamic identity in the midst of modernization.

The geographical concept of Rowosari with its characteristics greatly influenced the religious beliefs of the parents in Gempolsewu in making this decision. The high risk of working as a fisherman triggers the desire to have children who are religious as a spiritual guarantee for the family. The prayers of children who graduate from Islamic colleges are considered an effective protection from the dangers of the sea that may threaten them. The village's tradition of social piety also creates a positive incentive for families to send their children to Islamic colleges for mutual honor and safety in a very unique coastal environment. These three aspects illustrate how important religious values are in the higher education of the Gempolsewu maritime community in a comprehensive and significant way.

Based on in-depth interviews with eight parents from coastal communities, the study found that theological reasons were the main motivation in choosing an Islamic College (PTI) for their children. But this religious motive does not stand alone; They interact with each other and often clash with pragmatic and economic considerations. In general, coastal residents see religious education and job skills not as a single option, but as two complementary needs that must be met simultaneously to ensure children's success in this world and the hereafter.

All the speakers stated that religious education is considered the highest value that gives direction and meaning to children's lives. Mr. S (54 years old, fisherman) describes this through a metaphor: "Religion is like the roots of a tree, skills are like the fruit. The roots must be strong first, then the fruit can be enjoyed." This belief is rooted in the theological understanding that knowledge learned with the intention of worship becomes charity and brings blessings of sustenance, especially in the context of coastal life full of uncertainty.

Coastal parents also hope that their children will be agents of change in the home community. Mrs K, 50, said: "Religion is a compass, skills are boats. Compass without a boat cannot sail; A boat without a compass can get lost." This hope includes the desire for PTI graduates to be able to integrate Islamic values in coastal socio-economic practices, such as applying muamalah ethics in the fish trade, teaching sharia safe sea prayers, or being role models of piety in the community.

Interesting findings show that coastal residents do not separate the realms of religion and skills. Mrs. F summed up that view: "Religion teaches halal, skills teach product quality. If it's just a snack but it doesn't work, you can't eat it. If it's not a blessing, then it's not a blessing." This perspective reflects the theological-practical awareness that Islamic values must be embodied in professional competence, especially those relevant to the marine and fisheries sectors.

Although theological expectations are very strong, the study also identifies a number of challenges that hinder the realization of the ideal integration between religious education and job skills.



Fig. 1: Interview with Parents of Students

B. The influence of parents' beliefs in Gempolsek village.

The belief of parents in Gempolsek that religious learning is a non-negotiable must influence their educational choices. They consider PTI as the right place to form a good child's character. Parents believe that combining general and religious sciences at PTI will result in graduates who are academically smart and have spiritual strength. This belief is the main consideration in choosing a university, ignoring the reputation of a public university in order to preserve the faith of future children in coastal areas. Parents' views on the meaning of successful life are very influential in this village. For the people of Gempolsek, success is not only judged in terms of material, but also in terms of balance between the world and the hereafter. They believe that Islamic education provides a strong moral foundation so that children do not deviate. The decision to choose PTI is a manifestation of the understanding that true happiness can only be achieved through the pleasure of Allah, not just scholars in the midst of a society that struggles in the ocean. In the context of life on the challenging coast of Rorowsari, the religious beliefs of parents serve as psychological support. They see religious education as a spiritual endeavor for the salvation of the family while earning a living at sea. The prayers of children with good character are believed to protect them from the dangers that threaten the sea. Thus, the understanding of religion also changes the view of education, from a mere economic investment to a strategy to protect families spiritually in the midst of the natural uncertainties they face. The deep belief of Gempolsek's parents that studying religious knowledge is an absolute obligation is the main determining factor in higher education decision-making for their children. These coastal communities view Islamic Universities (PTI) as not just an academic institution, but an ideal forum specifically designed to form pious and resilient characters for the younger generation in an open environment. The integration between general science and religion at PTI is believed to be able to produce graduates who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have strong spiritual resilience to face the dynamics of coastal life.

Resource persons such as S revealed, "Many children prefer to work early to help their families rather than continue school," while F stated, "Economic needs are considered more important than long-term education." Similar opinions were also expressed by K, who explained, "Children who do not continue their education usually follow their parents' work without additional skills," and D added, "Lack of education makes it difficult for children to adapt to increasingly complex work demands." Furthermore, S emphasized, "Low education limits opportunities for better jobs in the future," while W noted, "Children with limited education often end up in low-income and non-permanent jobs." Ft also highlighted, "This condition creates the same pattern from one generation to another," and SU explained, "The surrounding environment rarely

encourages children to continue to higher education.” These findings indicate that low parental awareness toward education contributes to limited opportunities, social inequality, and the persistence of intergenerational poverty.

These findings also show that low parental awareness of children’s education not only affects individuals but also influences the broader quality of human resources. Informant F stated, “Without education, children will find it difficult to improve their future lives,” while K emphasized, “Communities with low educational awareness are more vulnerable to economic difficulties.” D further explained, “The lack of concern for education can slow social and economic development in the region.” In addition, W asserted, “Education should be viewed as an investment for the future, not as a burden,” while SU added, “Greater support from families and society is needed so children can continue their studies.” These statements confirm that increasing public awareness regarding the importance of education is essential for improving both individual welfare and regional development.



Fig. 2: Documents of parent conversations via WhatsApp

In the coastal communities of Rowosari, religious belief functions as an important psychological support in facing the uncertainties of life at sea. Fishermen and their families believe that children who study religion can provide spiritual protection for family members working in dangerous marine environments. As expressed by informant S, “The prayer of a pious child is our shield in the midst of dangerous waves,” while W stated, “Children who study religion are the best ‘insurance’ for fishermen.” Informant Ft explained, “Facing risks at sea is only possible with the spiritual strength of the child,”

and SU added, “Our efforts are to send the child to the PTI for the safety of the father while at sea.” Furthermore, F affirmed, “Education has become a fortress of prayer to protect the family,” while K concluded, “Without children who understand religion, our hearts are not calm when going to the sea.” These findings indicate that religious education is not only viewed as an academic pursuit, but also as a spiritual necessity closely connected to the realities of fishermen’s lives.

The educational approach implemented by families in Gempolsewu reflects an adaptive response to the geographical and sociocultural challenges of the coastal region. Parents believe that exposure to modernization and social change can threaten traditional and religious values if not balanced by strong religious understanding. This perspective is reflected in the statements of S, “The coastal environment needs a very strong moral fortress,” and D, who stated, “Modernization must not erase our Muslim identity.” Informant S also asserted, “Extensive interaction in ports requires robust religious filters,” while W explained, “We are well aware of the risks of promiscuity in coastal areas.” In addition, Ft stated, “PTI is our way of keeping the traditions of our ancestors alive,” while SU concluded, “Adaptation to the changing times must remain within the strict limits of sharia.” F also emphasized, “Religious education helps children maintain Islamic values despite rapid modernization,” while K added, “Parents want children to have strong morals before facing the outside world.” These findings demonstrate that the people of Gempolsewu actively design educational strategies to protect younger generations from the negative impacts of globalization while maintaining their Islamic identity and cultural values.

C. Regarding the urgency of Islamic Universities for the future of children of coastal communities in general.

Islamic higher education is considered very important because it provides a guarantee for the moral security of children in the future in a sustainable and tangible manner. Coastal communities believe that the Islamic academic environment can protect children from promiscuity that can undermine their faith. They believe that graduates of Islamic colleges have better livelihoods, which is especially important for fishing families who depend on the uncertainties of nature to make a living on a daily basis. This education is more than just getting a diploma, but it provides the main spiritual provisions to face the complex challenges of life in the future. The significance of Islamic higher education also lies in its ability to build a strong social and religious identity within the community. Parents expect their children to become religious leaders who are respected by the community. Children's future is considered successful if they are able to harmonize worldly and ukhrawi achievements in harmony. An Islamic bachelor's degree provides the academic recognition necessary to serve coastal communities that have deep religious traditions throughout their lives.

From the point of view of occupational risk, Islamic higher education is considered an important long-term investment for the safety of families. Fishermen see children who have religious knowledge as a form of spiritual protection for their families when they go to sea. The prayers of graduates of Islamic colleges are believed to be an effective protector from dangers at sea that can endanger lives. Therefore, this education

has an important role as a survival strategy, guaranteeing that children's future is not only full of material well-being, but also safety in this world and the hereafter, in the midst of high-risk environmental challenges. These three findings clearly highlight the importance of religious values in higher education for people engaged in the maritime sector and its significant impact on their lives as well as the socio-cultural development around them. Islamic higher education in Gempolsewu is seen as an important tool that ensures the moral security of children in a sustainable and real manner in the future. Coastal communities have a strong belief that the Islamic campus environment serves as an effective shield for the younger generation from promiscuity that can undermine their faith. This belief is formed based on experience that shows that graduates of Islamic Colleges (PTI) generally feel a blessing in their careers, an important aspect for fishing families who are completely dependent on the uncertainties that exist on a daily basis.

Most informants emphasized the importance of socialization programs conducted by schools and the government. S stated, "Many parents still think working is more important than education," while W explained, "Parents need to understand the long-term benefits of education for their children's future." K also emphasized that "lack of information causes low educational awareness," and D added, "If parents understand that education opens better job opportunities, their awareness will improve." Meanwhile, younger informants highlighted economic barriers as the primary challenge. Ft explained, "Scholarships and educational assistance can reduce the burden on parents," while SU stated, "Financial support encourages parents to keep their children in school." In addition, F emphasized the importance of involving respected community figures, saying, "Advice from religious leaders is easier for the community to accept," while S added, "Cultural and religious approaches are effective because people trust local leaders." These findings indicate that educational awareness can be strengthened through socialization, economic support, and community-based cultural approaches simultaneously.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that increasing parental awareness regarding children's education cannot rely on a single strategy. Integrated efforts involving educational campaigns, financial assistance, and cultural approaches through religious and community leaders are required. Parents increasingly perceive Islamic higher education as a long-term investment for family well-being, particularly within communities facing occupational risks. Informant Z5 stated, "The prayers of PTI alumni protect us from the big waves," while Z6 believed, "Pious children are the best protectors for underprivileged fishermen." Similarly, Z7 explained, "The risk at sea is very high, we need protection from the prayers of righteous children," and Z8 added, "The best investment for us is to send children to study religion for safety." This perception was reinforced by Z1, who asserted, "Our life strategy depends on the piety of children at home," while Z2 concluded, "Without knowledgeable children, we feel anxious when going to sea." These statements show that Islamic higher education is not only associated with social mobility and economic expectations, but also with spiritual security and family protection. The findings reveal a strong relationship between faith, education, and livelihood within coastal community culture.

The urgency of religious values in higher education within the Gempolsewu maritime community is reflected in a collective mindset that prioritizes spirituality as the

foundation of human development. The findings concerning moral security, social identity, and spiritual assurance are interconnected and form a distinctive cultural value system within the coastal community. Informants believed that Islamic higher education protects younger generations from negative global influences while strengthening moral integrity. Z3 emphasized, “Religious values are at the core of all our life success,” while Z4 stated, “Village development requires well-mannered youth.” Likewise, Z5 explained, “Our culture will not survive without the regeneration of clerics from Islamic campuses,” and Z6 added, “The importance of PTI is evident from the social tranquility in this village.” Furthermore, Z7 argued, “A comprehensive Islamic education is the solution to all the problems of coastal communities,” while Z8 concluded, “It is the only way to preserve the dignity of the people of the sea.” These findings illustrate that Islamic higher education is perceived not only as an educational institution, but also as a center for preserving morality, culture, and social harmony within coastal society. Consequently, PTI has become a strategic institution for sustaining local civilization and maintaining the spiritual identity of maritime communities.

Overall, the results of this study show that the Gempolsewu community perceives Islamic higher education as a multidimensional solution to various social, economic, and spiritual challenges. Islamic higher education functions as an institution that integrates worldly needs with spiritual expectations simultaneously. Informants consistently associated PTI with moral protection, family security, and the preservation of cultural identity. Z1 stated, “Our life strategy depends on the piety of children at home,” while Z3 emphasized, “Religious values are at the core of all our life success.” Similarly, Z6 explained, “The importance of PTI is evident from the social tranquility in this village,” and Z8 concluded, “It is the only way to preserve the dignity of the people of the sea.” These findings demonstrate that parents’ decisions to send their children to Islamic higher education institutions are shaped not only by economic aspirations, but also by collective beliefs regarding morality, spiritual safety, and social continuity within coastal communities.

Discussion

This Finding reveals that strong religious traditions are the primary factor influencing coastal families in choosing Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTI) for their children. Parents perceive PTI not merely as academic institutions, but as moral and spiritual safeguards capable of protecting their children’s faith and character within an open coastal environment vulnerable to negative social influences. This educational choice is driven by three main motivations: protecting children’s morality, fulfilling the religious obligation to seek Islamic knowledge as an investment for both worldly and afterlife success, and preparing future da’wah cadres who can independently serve the spiritual needs of the coastal community. The community believes that the integration of religious and general sciences in PTI can produce graduates who are intellectually competent while possessing strong spiritual resilience to face the uncertainties of fishermen’s lives. Islamic higher education is also viewed as a strategy to preserve family Islamic identity, attain blessed sustenance, and achieve a balanced life between worldly achievement and ukhrawi fulfillment. Therefore, the decision to choose PTI reflects the

community's deep belief that true success is not solely measured by material prosperity, but also by closeness to Allah and the ability to contribute religiously and socially to coastal society.



Fig. 3: Educational Choice Mechanisms

In the interpreted through Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, particularly regarding how coastal Muslim families in Gempolsewu prioritize spiritual and moral security alongside economic survival. While Maslow's theory generally positions physiological and safety needs as the most fundamental human motivations, this study demonstrates that religious values in coastal communities reshape these priorities by integrating spiritual protection into the concept of safety itself (Simons, Irwin, & Drinnien, 1987). For fishing families whose livelihoods depend heavily on uncertain natural conditions, Islamic higher education is not merely perceived as a pathway to employment, but as a means of ensuring moral security, family dignity, social respect, and divine blessing. Parents believe that PTI can protect children from moral deviation, strengthen Islamic identity, and provide psychological reassurance amid the risks and uncertainties of coastal life. In this context, the fulfillment of spiritual needs becomes inseparable from social and security needs (Poston, 2009), showing that Maslow's hierarchy may operate more flexibly within highly religious communities where transcendental values strongly influence educational decision-making (Adiele & Abraham, 2013).

Compared with previous studies, this research offers a distinct contribution by emphasizing the integration between religious belief, coastal culture, and educational aspirations. Earlier studies such as those conducted by Nur Syam (2015) on Islamic coastal communities mainly highlighted the role of religious traditions in maintaining social cohesion (Belardo & Candelaria, 2023), while research by Parfitt & Read (2023) focused more broadly on Islamic education as a medium for strengthening Muslim intellectual identity. Other studies concerning educational choice among Muslim families

generally emphasized economic mobility, institutional reputation, or employment opportunities as dominant factors (Osagiobare et.al, 2015). However, this study reveals that for the Gempolsewu coastal community, the decision to choose Islamic higher education is fundamentally rooted in the pursuit of spiritual security and religious continuity rather than purely material advancement. Unlike previous research, this study specifically demonstrates how coastal environmental uncertainty and dependence on marine livelihoods reinforce parents' belief that religious education functions simultaneously as moral protection, psychological stability, and a strategy for sustaining Islamic social identity across generations.

The main contribution of this research lies in its ability to expand the sociological understanding of educational decision-making within religious coastal communities. This study contributes theoretically by showing that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be contextualized within Islamic cultural settings where transcendental and ukhrawi orientations influence even the most basic social decisions. The research also contributes empirically by presenting evidence that educational aspirations among coastal Muslim families cannot be separated from their religious worldview, occupational vulnerability, and communal identity. In addition, this study enriches the discourse on Islamic higher education by demonstrating that PTI institutions are socially perceived not only as centers of academic learning but also as institutions responsible for moral preservation, da'wah regeneration, and community resilience (Inayah, Saputra, & Nasirudin, 2026). Consequently, the findings provide a new perspective for understanding why Islamic educational institutions remain highly valued in traditional Muslim societies despite the increasing dominance of secular and market-oriented educational models.

Based on these findings, several policy implications become highly important for contemporary educational development in coastal Muslim communities. First, policymakers and Islamic higher education institutions should strengthen the integration of religious values, community engagement, and life-skill education within PTI curricula to address both spiritual and socioeconomic needs simultaneously. Second, government institutions should provide greater educational access and scholarship support for students from vulnerable fishing families, considering that economic instability often limits higher education participation in coastal regions (Qonitatun et.al., 2026). Third, Islamic universities should develop community-based da'wah and empowerment programs specifically designed for coastal societies so that graduates can directly contribute to local spiritual and social development. Finally, educational policies should recognize that in religious communities, educational success is not solely measured through economic productivity, but also through moral resilience, religious identity preservation, and the ability of graduates to strengthen social harmony within society.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that for the coastal community of Gempolsewu, the decision to send children to Islamic Universities (PTI) goes beyond the logic of conventional education; this is a reflection of the "Maritime Spiritual Rationality" that prioritizes the safety of lives over the accumulation of wealth. The findings fundamentally change the view that educational choices are always influenced by economic opportunities or social

mobility, by revealing the shocking reality that fisher parents are consciously and strategically sacrificing the reputation of public universities for the sake of what they perceive as "metaphysical insurance". Most shocking was the revelation of the belief that the prayers of pious children of the PTI served as a real protector against the storms and uncertainties of nature, making religious education more than a matter of the hereafter, but the most logical survival strategy in the face of the daily risk of death. This conclusion challenges the common assumption that poverty or limited access will encourage pragmatic attitudes; On the contrary, even in the most vulnerable situations, faith becomes a major factor in decision-making. The fact that fishermen's families were willing to bear heavy economic burdens for the sake of the "fortress of faith" illustrates that their spiritual logic is far more solid than the pressures of modernization. This poses an intellectual shock: in the eyes of the secular world, this choice may be considered irrational or detrimental to careers, but for coastal communities, it is the only sensible option to ensure generational continuity. The study concludes that ignoring theological aspects of coastal education policy is tantamount to undermining the psychological and social foundations that underpin their lives by the sea.

The main weakness of this study lies in its geographical boundaries and context which only covers Gempolsewu Village, Rowosari District, Kendal Regency. As a result, the results on "Maritime Spiritual Rationality" may be influenced by local biases and cannot be broadly applied to all coastal communities in Indonesia, each of which has a very varied diversity of cultures, sects, and marine ecosystem conditions. The unique characteristics of religious traditions in Rowosari may not reflect the same dynamics in other fishing communities, such as the coastal areas of East Java which are more influenced by the culture of pesantren or Sulawesi which has a different social structure. Thus, the assumption that religion is the single dominant factor may be a phenomenon specific to this location. In addition, sampling from only one village ignores macro factors such as local policies or access to infrastructure that varies between regions, which can have a significant impact on education decisions. To address these weaknesses, future research should conduct comparative studies between regions involving different fishing communities with diverse geographical and social characteristics, for example by comparing results in Central Java and the coasts of Sumatra or Kalimantan. A mixed-methods approach with the collection of quantitative data from broader surveys is also important to test the statistical validity of the construction of "metaphysical insurance" in larger populations. In addition, long-term research will be very important to check whether spiritual beliefs are really related to tangible outcomes such as job safety or economic well-being of PTI graduates compared to general graduates. By broadening the scope and deepening the methodology, theoretical generalizations can be formed more solidly, transforming these specific findings into a more universal and empirically tested paradigm of maritime education.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in writing this paper.

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