

School Dropout Among Children of the Towani Tolotang Community Parepare City

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to determine and analyze; 1) The perception of the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare city towards education, 2) factors causing children of the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare city to choose to drop out of school, 3) The impact of children dropping out of school on the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare city. The type of research used is qualitative research with a case study approach. The number of informants consists of 11 people, with the following criteria: 1) children of the Towani Tolotang community who have dropped out of school at the junior high and high school levels, 2) Parents of children who have dropped out of school and 3) Towani Tolotang community leaders. Data collection techniques used are observation, documentation, and interviews. Data validity checks are carried out by data triangulation. Data analysis used is data reduction, data presentation and conclusions.

The results of this study indicate that; 1) The perception of the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare city views formal education as not a top priority. The Towani Tolotang community places more emphasis on traditional values as the formation of children's intelligence and personality. So that traditional education is seen as equal or more important than formal education. 2) The factors causing children of the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare city to choose to drop out of school are; a) lack of interest in education; b) economic factors; c) parental education level; and d) socio-cultural conditions consisting of the residential environment and early marriage; 3) The impact of children dropping out of school on the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare city, namely: a) lack of job opportunities; b) dependence on others; c) feelings of inferiority; d) lack of skills and knowledge of children; and e) helping the family economy.

KEYWORDS: Dropping out of School, Towani Tolotang

INTRODUCTION

Education is recognized as a fundamental human need, a national asset, and the foundation of a country's progress. It functions as a key instrument that enables individuals to move from conditions of helplessness toward becoming empowered and productive members of society (Assa Riswan et al., 2022). Education also serves as a transformative process not only for individuals but for the wider communities in which they live. When implemented effectively, education liberates people from intimidation, ignorance, marginalization, backwardness, and exploitation.

Through education, individuals can cultivate their potential, produce meaningful contributions, and acquire knowledge and skills relevant to ongoing technological advancement. Ultimately, the quality of a nation is reflected in the educational level of its younger generation. Therefore, the education system must be directed toward producing a highly competent and competitive workforce capable of adapting to technological change, thereby increasing productivity and contributing to national development both now and in the future.

The Indonesian government has made significant efforts to advance human development by promoting inclusive education for all citizens so that school-aged children can continue their studies to higher levels (Hasanah & Jabar, 2017; Hakim, 2020; Assa Riswan et al., 2022). One of these initiatives is the compulsory education program, which guarantees the right to 12 years of schooling for all citizens aged 6–18. Various policies have been implemented to ensure equal access to education, with the aim of providing fair, high-quality learning opportunities without discrimination.

Despite these efforts, school dropout remains a persistent issue. Many children still discontinue their studies even though the government has provided support to encourage school participation. According to Zetta and Nurwati (2021), one major factor contributing to school dropout is the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by many families, which limits their ability to finance continued schooling. Although public funding has been allocated to the education sector, government policies have not

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fully eliminated the financial burden of schooling. Families are still responsible for costs such as uniforms, school supplies, transportation, and extracurricular activities. For households with unstable or low income, these expenses become overwhelming, resulting in children being unable to pursue higher levels of education.

Beyond economic challenges, cultural and environmental factors also play a role in children leaving school. Many dropout cases are linked to peer environments that negatively affect students' attitudes toward education. The environment significantly shapes human behavior and decision-making (Alifa, 2023).

The phenomenon of school dropout generates serious social implications, including perpetuating cycles of poverty, widening social inequality, and reducing youth participation in regional development. Over time, these issues contribute to an intergenerational cycle of school disengagement.

Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2024) indicate that in 2024, there were 866 school dropouts recorded in Parepare City. Of these, 326 occurred at the elementary level, 483 at the junior high level, and 57 at the senior high school level.

School dropout is found among various social groups in Parepare City, including the Towani Tolotang community, one of the local indigenous groups that maintains ancestral traditions and beliefs in daily life. The community adheres to a belief in the Supreme Being, known as Dewata Sawwae (Taufik & Hariza, 2023; Darmayani et al., 2024). Their cultural norms, values, and ways of life often differ from those of the majority population (Juhannis et al., 2021).

Preliminary interviews conducted during early field observations in Bacukiki District an area where many members of the Towani Tolotang community reside revealed that 23 children from this community had discontinued their schooling. Most dropout cases occurred at the junior and senior high school levels.

School dropout is a persistent social problem within the education sector, with deep-rooted causes that are often difficult to address (Tefa, 2023). Its consequences extend beyond individual learners, affecting the broader community as well. For the Towani Tolotang children in Parepare City, dropout poses long-term implications for their future opportunities and overall socio-economic mobility.

Considering these conditions, the researcher is motivated to conduct a study titled "School Dropout Among Children of the Towani Tolotang Community in Parepare City."

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is grounded in post-positivist philosophy and is used to examine phenomena in their natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. The study adopts a case study design, enabling an in-depth exploration of events, activities, processes, and programs related to one or more cases (Assyakurrohim et al., 2023).

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The interview process involved five Towani Tolotang children in Parepare City who had discontinued schooling, five parents of dropout children from the Towani Tolotang community, and one community leader. Observations were conducted by visiting the research site and examining the daily activities of Towani Tolotang children who had left school.

Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data display, and the drawing of conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. *Community Perceptions of Education Among the Towani Tolotang in Parepare City*

Education is a fundamental need, a national asset, and a central pillar of societal progress. It serves as a pathway enabling individuals to rise from conditions of vulnerability toward a productive and empowered life. The effectiveness of an educational system is not solely dependent on government policies or the quality of educational institutions; it is also shaped significantly by the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the community toward the value of education.

Community perceptions play a vital role in shaping levels of participation, support, and the overall success of children in formal education. However, the perception of education as an essential life priority is not universally shared, particularly among certain social or cultural groups. Within the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare City, attitudes toward formal education vary, yet many families do not view education as a primary life necessity. Some parents believe that education does not directly influence improvements in socioeconomic status. This perception arises from social realities many individuals with higher educational attainment remain unemployed, while others with minimal schooling achieve economic success. As a result, education is often not regarded as the main determinant of life success.

Furthermore, some community members view basic literacy reading, writing, and arithmetic as sufficient for navigating daily life and avoiding exploitation. Beyond this basic threshold, education is perceived as unnecessary.

A distinctive perspective within the Towani Tolotang community is the emphasis placed on customary values and ancestral teachings as the foundation for shaping the character and intellect of children. Traditional education is viewed as equally important as formal schooling. An individual who understands customary rituals, ancestral teachings, and social etiquette is

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regarded as educated in a cultural sense. Consequently, many families prioritize the transmission of traditional knowledge ritual practices, respect for ancestral heritage, and moral conduct—over academic learning. These cultural values are believed to develop character and moral integrity, sometimes considered more important than formal academic knowledge. This belief contributes to the perception that formal education does not need to be prioritized, since customary teachings already provide moral and social guidance deemed essential for becoming a good and respectable member of society.

B. Factors Influencing School Dropout Among Towani Tolotang Children in Parepare City

The phenomenon of school dropout among Towani Tolotang children in Parepare City is shaped by several interrelated factors. These factors include:

Lack of Interest in Schooling

Student interest plays a critical role in sustaining engagement in the learning process. A lack of interest often contributes to disengagement and ultimately dropout (Mujiati et al., 2018). Among Towani Tolotang children, disinterest in schooling often stems from a stronger attraction to work. Many children believe that employment offers immediate and tangible benefits compared to continued schooling. This perception encourages the belief that working is more meaningful and productive, whereas education is seen as time-consuming with uncertain long-term returns. Such views foster feelings of apathy, demotivation, and a diminished desire to pursue education.

Another contributing factor is the academic pressure experienced at school. Excessive homework and difficulties understanding lessons create stress and frustration. Without adequate support from teachers or parents, students lose motivation and gradually withdraw from learning activities, increasing the likelihood of leaving school altogether.

Economic Constraints

Economic hardship is a major driver of school dropout (Rokhmaniyah et al., 2022; Wildatu Syarofah, 2021). When families struggle to meet basic needs, educational expenses become an additional burden. Most Towani Tolotang families in Parepare work as corn farmers or vegetable vendors, resulting in unstable and often insufficient income. Parents face difficulties covering the costs of uniforms, learning materials, transportation, and daily allowances. Financial stress intensifies when parental income declines due to age, health issues, or increasing household responsibilities. Consequently, many children discontinue schooling because their families can no longer afford educational expenses.

Financial pressures also push children into the workforce. Many begin working at an early age in agriculture, markets, or as laborers to help supplement family income. Over time, school becomes a lower priority, and work becomes their main focus, leading them to permanently leave formal education.

Parents' Educational Background

Parents' educational attainment influences their ability to guide and motivate their children academically (Nasibu et al., 2023). Many parents in the Towani Tolotang community who have children that dropped out of school themselves have low educational backgrounds, often limited to primary school completion. This shapes beliefs that basic literacy skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic—are sufficient. With limited understanding of the broader value of education, parents often struggle to assist their children academically. Children who lack academic support at home become discouraged, perform poorly, and may eventually decide to discontinue schooling.

Sociocultural Factors

Neighborhood Environment

A child's environment significantly influences their life choices (Andale et al., 2024). In Towani Tolotang communities, many adolescents who have dropped out of school serve as role models for younger children. Observing peers who leave school and still earn income creates a social norm that makes school dropout appear acceptable—even desirable. Children are easily influenced by peers who appear financially independent despite having low educational backgrounds, encouraging them to follow the same path.

Early Marriage

Early marriage is another sociocultural factor contributing to dropout. In the Towani Tolotang community, early marriage is often considered normal and even encouraged as a strategy to protect moral values or reduce financial burdens. Parents may believe that marrying off their children especially daughters reduces household expenses because responsibility shifts to the spouse. Once married, girls typically withdraw from school due to household responsibilities and societal expectations.

C. Impacts of School Dropout Among Towani Tolotang Children in Parepare City

Limited Employment Opportunities

Without diplomas or technical skills, dropout children face significant obstacles in accessing formal employment. They are often restricted to informal, low-wage jobs offering no long-term stability. Moreover, limited digital literacy reduces their competitiveness in a labor market increasingly shaped by technology. Many therefore follow their parents into traditional occupations such as agriculture or manual labor.

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Feelings of Inferiority

Feelings of inferiority are common among school dropouts (Masykuri et al., 2025). Towani Tolotang children who leave school often feel less capable than peers who continue their studies. Differences in knowledge, communication skills, and life aspirations contribute to shame, social withdrawal, and a sense of inadequacy. These feelings become more pronounced during interactions involving academic topics or future career discussions.

Reduced Knowledge and Skill Development

Formal education provides structured learning essential for developing intellectual and practical skills (Ubabudin & Nasikhah, 2018). When children discontinue schooling, they lose access to systematic learning, leading to limited general knowledge and weak technological skills. This creates challenges in adapting to a rapidly digitalized society and reduces their ability to compete in the job market.

Contribution to Family Income

Although dropout is generally viewed negatively, in low-income households it may have a perceived short-term benefit. Some Towani Tolotang children contribute significantly to household income by working in agriculture, construction, or other labor-intensive jobs. Their earnings help cover daily necessities, easing the financial burden on parents. Despite this temporary relief, it often reinforces the cycle of poverty and low educational attainment in the community.

D. Analysis Using Social Action Theory

Social Action Theory, developed by Max Weber, provides an analytical framework for understanding human behavior within its social context (Afifah, 2022). The theory suggests that human actions are not solely determined by social norms or external forces; individuals possess agency and make decisions based on their interpretations of meaning (Miftahul Fikria & Agoes Moh. Moefad, 2024).

Based on the findings, three of Weber's four types of social action are reflected in the motivations behind school dropout among Towani Tolotang children:

Instrumentally Rational Action

This type of action involves calculated decisions oriented toward achieving specific goals. In this case, children and parents weigh the costs and benefits of continuing education. Given the high financial burden and unclear economic returns of schooling, many conclude that working offers more immediate and tangible outcomes. Dropping out is therefore seen as a strategic decision aimed at supporting family survival.

Value-Rational Action

Decisions are shaped by deeply held cultural or moral values. For the Towani Tolotang community, adherence to customary principles such as *mareso*, *temanggingi*, and respect for elders strongly influences choices. Traditional values are sometimes considered equal to or more important than formal education. Thus, leaving school may reflect commitment to cultural expectations rather than purely economic considerations.

Traditional Action

Actions driven by longstanding customs and habitual patterns also influence dropout behavior. Many previous generations within the community did not complete formal education, creating a legacy of low educational attainment. Children grow up viewing dropout as normal and unsurprising, leading to repeated patterns across generations.

CONCLUSIONS

The Towani Tolotang community in Parepare City generally holds a perception that formal schooling is not yet a primary priority. Many members of the community place greater emphasis on customary values and religious beliefs as the foundation for shaping children's character and intelligence. Traditional education is often viewed as equivalent to, or even more important than, formal education. Several factors contribute to school dropout among Towani Tolotang children in Parepare City, namely limited interest or motivation toward schooling, economic constraints, parents' low level of education; and sociocultural conditions, which include neighborhood influences and early marriage. The impacts of school dropout within the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare City include reduced employment opportunities, feelings of inferiority or low self-confidence, limited skills and knowledge; and the need for children to support their family's economic conditions.

Parents, as the child's first educators, are expected to provide strong moral support and sustained motivation to encourage their children to continue formal schooling. They should also pay closer attention to the continuity of their children's educational journey. A shift in mindset is needed so that education is viewed as a fundamental necessity, equipping children with the knowledge and skills required to face future challenges. Traditional leaders within the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare City are encouraged to take an active role in promoting the importance of formal education. As influential figures who shape community values and behavior, they hold a strategic position in guiding public perceptions. It is hoped that traditional leaders can help cultivate a collective awareness that formal education is a basic right for every child and an essential component of personal and social development and the government is expected to provide more serious and targeted attention to educational

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issues within the Towani Tolotang community in Parepare City. Continuous efforts are needed to prevent school dropout, including regular monitoring and mentoring of school-aged children. Strong collaboration among traditional leaders, government institutions, and parents is essential to address the multiple factors contributing to dropout. Such coordinated efforts will help ensure that no future generation within the Towani Tolotang community is hindered in accessing proper education.

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