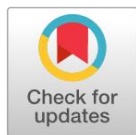


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Narratives of Geography, Culture, and School Exclusion on the Indonesian Coast: Evidence from Kedabu Rapat, Meranti Islands

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ABSTRACT

Background. In coastal 3T regions, referring to remote, outermost, and disadvantaged areas, access to basic education is still not simple. The policy looks clear on paper, but village life is more complicated. Free tuition helps, yet distance, transport cost, family work, and local views about schooling still shape the decision of parents. Earlier studies have discussed these issues, but fewer have shown how distance and culture meet in everyday coastal families.

Purpose. This research describes the social, cultural, economic, and geographical barriers that limit children's access to school and madrasah education in Kedabu Rapat Village, Kepulauan Meranti.

Method. The research used a quantitative descriptive design. Data were collected from 48 farming and fishing households selected through simple random sampling from 96 households with school-aged children. The data were analyzed through frequencies and percentages.

Results. Households with three to four school-aged children had the highest dropout proportion. In this group, 13 of 23 households, or 56.52%, reported children who no longer attended school. In the whole sample, 18 of 48 households, or 37.50%, reported dropout cases. Low parental motivation appeared in 33.34% of responses. The most common barrier was the combination of school distance and sociocultural belief, reported by 56.26% of respondents.

Conclusion. Geographical isolation creates more than a travel problem. It also makes farming and fishing look more practical than schooling, especially when family income is uncertain and the road to school is not easy.

KEYWORDS

Accessibility Barriers, Coastal Education, Socio Cultural

INTRODUCTION

Education issues in Indonesia, particularly in the coastal areas of Riau Province, known as an oil-producing region, still face fundamental challenges that remain unresolved to this day. In the peripheral areas of Kepulauan Meranti Regency, particularly Kedabu Rapat Village, the demographic burden of school-age children is very significant, with the population aged 6–15 reaching thousands of people. However, the service capacity of is exacerbated by the fact that the teacher-student public

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public schools and Madrasahs is still very limited. This condition ratio is only 9.35, a technical indicator showing that the availability of educational personnel has not been able to keep pace with the school age population in the island region (Central Bureau of Statistic, 2024).

Although the government has established a compulsory education program and waived basic education fees, the reality is that not all communities are highly enthusiastic about entering the world of formal education (Hasanah, 2025). Infrastructure gaps and geographical conditions in coastal areas lead to limited access, forcing children to drop out of school to help with family productive activities in the agricultural sector (Aulia Fanani, 2025). The low attention given to providing educational facilities in remote areas creates an uncondusive learning environment, thus widening the gap between national policies and the reality of local community participation (Aprilla, 2020).

The application of educational equity policies is often hindered by sociocultural aspects that the national framework has not been able to overcome (Indriaty et al., 2025). Educational sociology studies show that agrarian communities view school as less relevant than working to earn money (Marziana et al., 2025). Other social theories have also been unable to explain the administrative aspects and teacher quality in peripheral and island areas, which are indeed still lacking, resulting in student achievement far below expectations (Nurhayati & Astutik, 2025). Not only that, the distribution of teachers that is only focused in urban areas causes rural communities to receive a comparable quality of education (Calista & Kondo, 2025). Therefore, a specific research approach is needed to explore the root causes of the case from sociocultural assumptions and geographical barriers simultaneously in order to accurately address the phenomenon of low school attendance.

This research specifically aims to describe the quantitative sociocultural and geographical factors that limit educational accessibility in Kedabu Rapat. The important focus of this observation is to identify the low enthusiasm of the residents of the Meranti Islands to send their children to school and madrasahs. Through a descriptive statistical approach, this research attempts to understand citizens' perspectives on education for their future amidst the emphasis on a market economy. This research presents the relationship between agricultural work and the low educational expectations for their children. Through this research, it is hoped that there will be accurate information as a reference for correcting the learning system to be more inclusive and responsive to the sociological characteristics of the island residents in Riau Province.

The significance of this research lies in its focus on tackling the persistently low participation rate in education within peripheral and remote areas. In reality, simply providing school buildings and facilities does not automatically attract students. It must be accompanied by a genuine understanding of how important education is for their future (Hidir et al., 2023). This study argues that a community-based, human-centered approach which actively involves local informal leaders is far more effective in overcoming sociocultural barriers than the conventional technocratic method of merely building infrastructure (Aslan & Pugu, 2025).

What makes this research particularly urgent and novel is the need for a more sensitive understanding of the unique characteristics of 3T (remote, outermost, and neglected) areas. By showing that geographical distance does not merely act as a physical barrier but also functions as a socio-cultural catalyst that reinforces community resistance to formal education, this study offers fresh insight into the intertwined challenges faced by coastal families. In doing so, it provides a solid sociological foundation for crafting education policies that are truly responsive and supportive of future generations in Indonesia's most isolated coastal regions.

To fill this research gap, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions: To what extent do children from farming and fishing families in Kedabu Rapat Village participate

in school and madrasah education? What are the main sociocultural and geographical barriers that limit their access to education? How do geographical distance and sociocultural factors interact to influence school dropout rates in this coastal area? The Theory of Literature: Educational Accessibility and Socio-Cultural Barriers

Educational accessibility in a sociological format is not limited to the availability of facilities, but encompasses ease of access for society to reach those services without geographical, economic, or social barriers (Marziana et al, 2025; Rai Nasir Ali et al., 2025). The philosophy of accessibility explains that the farther the distance to a facility, the fewer students will be able to enjoy it (Sumardi, 2020). Unfavorable geographical distances, compounded by the scarcity of madrasah and school infrastructure in this 3T (RON) region, make it difficult for the community to continue their education (Doll et al., 2013). Therefore, the availability of school or madrasah buildings without the assistance of accessibility concessions only creates structures that are difficult for low-income residents around the coast to access.

These sociocultural barriers are an important aspect influencing perceptions of education (Fukaro, 2025). In agrarian and fishing communities, education is often viewed as "foreign investment" that does not yield practical economic profits, resulting in children being directed toward helping with productive professions to support daily financial needs (Dahliana & Huda, 2024; Doğuş & Çam Aktaş, 2026). This conventional sociocultural belief makes the intensity of working more important than going to school, which ultimately leads to resistance toward formal education (Sofradzija et al., 2021). Consequently, society considers education unimportant because even their uneducated parents and those around them can still work and earn various incomes from farming, gardening, or fishing.

Educational sponsorship with a religious character, such as religiously nuanced elementary schools with a strong coastal Islamic culture, has not been able to increase the community's desire to attend school. This is because these institutions are unable to compete in quality with regular schools, let alone those in urban areas (Nurdin et al., 2025). The digital divide and the lack of training for madrasah teachers, especially in 3T (remote, outermost, and disadvantaged) areas, lead to suboptimal educational patterns and hinder the production of competitive graduates (Amelia & Mufid, 2025), the need for integration between conventional values and the desire for learning innovation in schools and madrasahs to prepare a professional youth generation while still adhering to their local identity (Senna, 2024). Thus, formal education, both public and madrasah, demands policy updates that encompass the increase of digital infrastructure and comprehensive teacher empowerment across all 3T areas (Maulido et al., 2024).

The family's socioeconomic status is a fundamental predictor of how long a child will receive formal education. The economic situation of farmer, plantation owner, and fisherman households is highly dependent on the instability of harvest yields and market prices, leading to financial uncertainty that directly impacts their ability to afford education (Liu et al., 2022; Maulido et al., 2024). Although the operational costs of education are free in the Meranti Islands district, this does not automatically generate public interest in education, especially among families with low and uncertain incomes (Hidir et., 2025). This limitation of economic capital forces children and parents to think more logically, prioritizing family economics over other secondary needs, including education (Jumari et al., 2025). This proves that economic stability is one of the prerequisites for implementing compulsory education in 3T areas.

The low literacy and education levels of parents in farming and fishing communities also worsen the decline in their children's interest in schooling. Parents who did not complete their education have low expectations for their children's education as well (Raudah et al., 2021). The

lack of encouragement for education from the parents of fishing and farming children leads to low retention rates in school, especially when the harvest fails or the weather is bad for fishing. The disparity in parental attention toward their child's educational progress is often triggered by the intensity of activities in agricultural zones, which consume household time and energy through labor-intensive methods. Therefore, passion within the family plays a key role in determining whether a child will continue to stay in school or be forced into the early labor market.

The application of information technology in education in schools and madrasas in rural areas not only demands equal access to technology networks in the region. The ability of the community to purchase internet services is also a factor; although some internet access has reached this area, it is limited by the low capacity and purchasing power of the people (Defira & Hidir, 2021). Therefore, in addition to providing physical facilities and free education access, it is also necessary to provide assistance with internet features and networks for poor families so that the risk of learning exclusion for children of farmers and fishermen does not continue to increase (Maulido et al., 2024). If this continues, it will worsen the gap in the quality of education between rural areas and urban areas with more established accessibility. Empowering the local community's economic strategies is an integral part of efforts to increase participation and equity in Islamic learning institutions or national schools (Abdullah et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is a quantitative descriptive research pattern to analyze the occurrence of educational barriers in the area. The quantitative descriptive concept allows researchers to transform social reality into precise numerical information to explain community participation in regular schools and madrasas (Cohen et al., 2007). Through this approach, researchers can map various accessibility barriers represented by several respondents in the research population.



Figure 1. Research process from population identification to data collection

Figure 1 illustrates the main stages of the research process, beginning with the identification of the target population, namely households with school-aged children in the study area. After defining the population, a simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that each household had an equal opportunity to be selected as a respondent. This sampling method helped reduce selection bias and improved the representativeness of the data. The selected households then participated in the data collection stage through surveys designed to gather information about educational accessibility and related barriers. By following this systematic process, the study was able to obtain reliable and representative data, providing a solid foundation for analyzing educational challenges and generating evidence-based findings for policymakers and stakeholders.

The location was chosen in the village of Kedabu Rapat with the rationale that this village represents the urban fringe and coastal areas in a district with very unique geographical accessibility challenges. The population in this research consists of all residents of Kedabu Rapat who have school-aged children (6-12 years old) at the elementary or madrasah ibtidaiyah level. The information obtained was from 96 households, 50% of which were selected, resulting in 48 respondents drawn using simple random sampling (Rothomi & Rafid, 2023). This sample size was deliberately chosen because it covered exactly half of the total population. Representing 50 percent of all households with school-aged children gave the study sufficient breadth to reflect the real situation in the village while remaining manageable within the available time and resources. Simple random sampling was used so that every household had an equal chance of being selected. This technique minimized selection bias and strengthened the reliability of the findings, ensuring that the results could be confidently generalized to the entire group of farming families in Kedabu Rapat.

Data analysts use descriptive statistical methods to make it easier to understand educational barriers. His technical analysis links the utilization of educational access to a family's sociocultural barriers (Maulido et al., 2024). Descriptive statistical methods are considered capable of explaining this phenomenon and are easily understood by policymakers (Marziana et al., 2025). The results of this data processing are expected to provide a clear reflection of the geographical aspects and citizen participation in organizing in-depth reviews of educational problems in the Meranti Islands.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research results from Kedabu Rapat indicate that the participation of children from farming and fishing families in formal education, both public schools and madrasahs, faces systemic and demographic barriers. Based on family information, those with a larger number of school-aged children (3-4) have a significantly higher dropout rate compared to smaller families with 1-2 children, indicating a greater economic burden on the household in terms of their children's education. This situation demands administrative policies from the school and local government to implement innovations in improving service quality so that they can embrace children from low-income families (Wicaksana & Inayati, 2023). This is evident from the fact that 18 children are no longer continuing their education, with the majority coming from households with many children. The distribution of children's educational participation sourced from the number of children in farmer and fisherman families is presented in the diagram below:

Tabel 1. The trend of sending children to school among farming families

School-Age Children's Category Of Ownership (Persons)	Still In School	Drop Out	Total
1 – 2	20	5	25
3 - 4	10	13	23
Total	30	18	48

Parents' encouragement to send their children to regular schools or madrasas demonstrates variations influenced by future expectations and gender bias in rural agrarian areas. The findings confirm a bias gender where male children are more encouraged to pursue education for the family's economic advancement, while female children often face sociocultural barriers to their future education. The family environment greatly influences a child's development (Haironi & Naufal, 2022).

The types and motivations of parents for sending their children to school, as seen in the table below, are categorized as "low," encompassing 33.34% of all respondents. This indicates a fairly significant value in illustrating the community's lack of enthusiasm for formal educational institutions in their area. The grouping of parental motivations based on the child's will type and family expectation level is presented in the following table:

Tabel 2. The reasons behind the decision to enroll children in school

No	Category	Male	Female	Total	Percentages
1	High	12	3	15	31,25
2	Middle	13	4	17	35,41
3	Low	12	4	16	33,34
Total	37	11	48	100	

The barriers to education identified by the respondents are a combination of environmental factors, including physical and geographical obstacles, as well as the sociocultural consequences for local residents. A significant portion of respondents (56.26%) agreed that the combination of long school distances and traditional mindsets that prioritize work over education was the main reason their children dropped out of school or madrasah. Strengthening the personality and social skills of children in rural areas seems extremely important to protect them from a poor understanding of the importance of education (Shodiq, 2023).

Transportation limitations in the Meranti Islands area exacerbate the distance barrier, while the type of work of their parents, who are mostly farmers, planters, and fishermen, further weakens their understanding as a young generation that must possess many skills. Understanding of accessibility barriers to formal education in schools and madrasas for poor rural families, based on respondents' perceptions, is compiled in the table below:

Tabel 3. Accessibility of education. For farming families

No.	Category	Still in school	Droup Out	Total	%
1.	Social Culture	2	8	10	20,83
2.	Distance from school	8	3	11	22,91
3.	Combination 1 +2	20	7	27	56,26
	Total	30	18	48	100

The description from the table above regarding the profile of learning barriers in the Meranti coastal area explains that there is a relationship between the efficiency of educational bureaucracy and community participation in formal education. The implementation of national policies often faces implementation barriers within society, as bureaucracy sometimes becomes the main obstacle hindering the progress of local communities (Arnis Rachmadhani, 2020). Administrative issues in schools located in suburban areas and far from the city center lead to unequal access to facilities and minimal oversight of educational quality, which directly results in low standards for graduates (Robbaniyah et al., 2023).

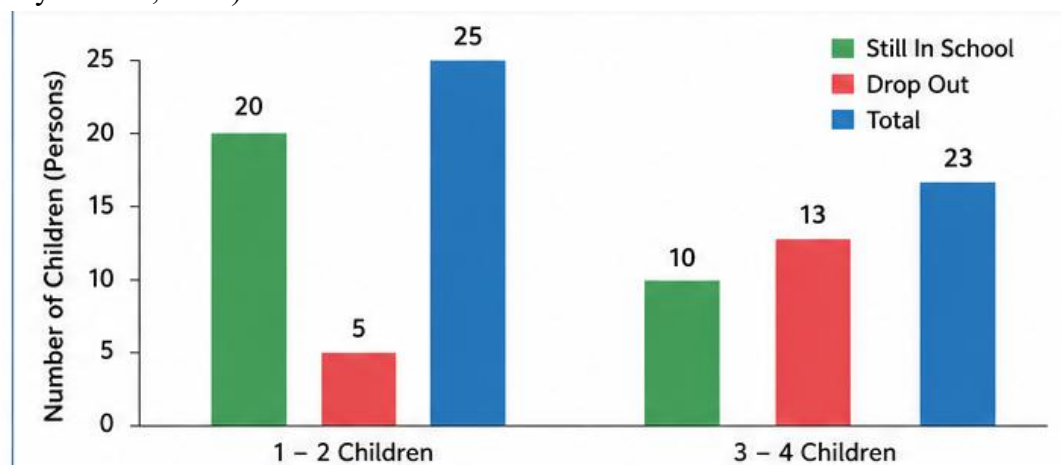


Figure 2. Educational participation and accessibility barriers among farming families in kedabu rapat village (N = 48)

Figure 2 presents a comprehensive overview of educational participation patterns and accessibility barriers among farming families in Kedabu Rapat Village. The findings indicate that families with one to two school-aged children tend to maintain higher school participation rates, whereas families with three to four children experience substantially higher dropout rates. The data also reveal variations in parental motivation for enrolling children in school, with the largest proportion of respondents falling into the middle-motivation category (35.41%), followed by low motivation (33.34%) and high motivation (31.25%). Gender disparities are evident, as male children receive greater encouragement to pursue formal education than female children. Furthermore, the most significant educational barrier identified by respondents is the combination of sociocultural factors and long distances to school, accounting for 56.26% of responses. Transportation limitations, traditional beliefs that prioritize work over education, and geographical challenges further contribute to reduced educational participation. Overall, the figure demonstrates that educational access among farming families is influenced by a complex interaction of household characteristics, parental expectations, gender norms, and environmental constraints.

Not only that, but the low quality of social interaction resulting from the less educational environment also contributes to children's preference for working activities that logically generate income over pursuing education (Montmarquette et al., 2007). Efforts to improve the quality and governance of education policies (even though it is free in this area) still need to be organized, with the distribution of facilities, teachers, free internet access, and other programs that can stimulate interest in education in the 3T (RON) region.

Analysis of research results in Kedabu Rapat proves that the economic focus of households on farming and fishing families with a large number of children (3–4) is a determining factor in their exclusion from formal education. The fact that the dropout rate reached 47.92% in this type of

extended family confirms that in agrarian and fishing communities, children are often viewed as a factor of production to protect the family's financial subsistence (Sana & Jan, 2021; Hasanah, 2025)

The parents' decision to stop their child's studies is a form of rational calculation regarding the opportunity cost they must bear due to the low daily income from the traditional agricultural sector. Therefore, the low educational participation in the Meranti region is not merely a matter of willingness but rather a consequence of structural economic vulnerability that forces the basic right of children to education to be neglected.

The integration between sociocultural barriers and geographical distance, which reached 56.26%, reveals that physical distance is not only a barrier to mobility but also a social justification for parents not sending their children to Madrasahs or schools. In the 3T regions of Riau Province, geographical isolation reinforces the community's perception that formal education does not have an immediate impact on improving living standards, so children's social interaction is more focused on mastering practical skills in the field (Alegana et al., 2021; Marziana et al., 2025).

Poor road conditions and the absence of public transportation to educational centers at the sub-district level create psychological barriers that lower parents' expectations for their children's academic future. This pattern shows that physical barriers and an agrarian mentality are intertwined in perpetuating the cycle of low literacy in coastal communities.

The gender-based motivational gap found in the field indicates that religious educational institutions like Madrasahs face significant challenges in dismantling traditional value biases that are still deeply ingrained. Although Madrasahs have a cultural identity close to the Muslim community in Riau, limitations in managerial quality and infrastructure often lead to these institutions being considered a second-class option compared to public schools (Marziana et al., 2025). The low parental involvement in supervising children's learning process at home further weakens the ability of formal education to change society's mindset regarding the importance of long-term human resource investment. As a result, efforts for social transformation through education in remote areas often clash with the stagnation of curriculum innovation, which is not fully responsive to the sociological characteristics of coastal regions (Indriaty et al., 2025).

Novelty of the Research: This research makes a new contribution by discovering the sociological fact that in the coastal region of Meranti, geographical distance acts as a "justification catalyst" for cultural resistance to formal education. While previous research tended to separate physical and cultural barriers, these findings indicate that both work simultaneously (56.26%) in creating a pragmatic-economic mindset among farming families. This novelty confirms that educational policy interventions in 3T areas will not be effective if they only focus on building Madrasah infrastructure without being accompanied by a "sociocultural engineering" strategy to change perceptions of the value of education in agrarian communities. This serves as a new theoretical foundation for formulating coastal socio-engineering-based education policies, which have not been widely explored in Indonesian educational sociology literature.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that access to education in Kedabu Rapat Village, Kepulauan Meranti, is hindered by the complex interplay of economic vulnerability, geographical barriers, and sociocultural resistance. Children from farming and fishing families with larger numbers of school-aged children face a 47.92 % dropout rate, while 56.26 % of respondents identify the combination of extreme distance and strong cultural beliefs as the dominant factor. These findings reinforce the central argument that geographical isolation does not function merely as a physical obstacle; it acts as a socio-cultural catalyst that legitimizes and perpetuates community resistance to formal

schooling. By integrating the philosophy of accessibility with sociocultural resistance theory, this research advances existing literature and deepens our understanding of educational exclusion specifically in coastal 3T (remote, outermost, and neglected) regions of Indonesia.

The study has limitations. It focused on only one coastal village and examined 48 farming families, so the results cannot be broadly generalized to all island communities. In addition, the research did not explore internal school management practices that might influence access. Future studies should compare coastal areas with and without digital connectivity to assess the impact of technology on school participation, and they should also investigate the role of local religious leaders in transforming long-standing cultural barriers. Practically, the findings suggest that education policies in 3T regions must go beyond building infrastructure; they need to combine physical improvements with sociocultural interventions that respect local values. Ultimately, this research offers a foundation for more responsive and inclusive education policies that can help break the cycle of educational exclusion and secure a brighter future for children in Indonesia's most isolated coastal communities.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Google Assisted to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) Carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Writing - review and editing.

Author 5: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

Author 6: Supervision; Validation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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