



## Sociocultural Interactions and Community Education: An Anthropological Study in Indramayu, West Java

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### Abstract

This study examines the impact of sociocultural interactions in rural Indramayu on education perspectives, highlighting challenges and opportunities in accessing culturally relevant education. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed in three sub-districts: Kandanghaur, Gabus Wetan, and Bongas, where the majority of residents are farmers and fishermen. Findings suggest that local values, such as cooperation and harmony, influence perceptions of education as a means to enhance livelihoods beyond agriculture and fisheries. However, economic priorities often prevent children from pursuing higher education. Opportunities arise through local wisdom-based education, integrating practical skills and sustainable resource management. Globalization enhances access to knowledge and technology, but it also poses a threat to cultural preservation. This study highlights the importance of striking a balance between technological advancements and the preservation of local cultural values to foster sustainable rural development.

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## Introduction

Education is one of the main instruments in the social and economic development of a region. At the village level, education is not only seen as an effort to transfer knowledge, but also as part of a broader socialization process that relates to the social values, culture, and norms prevailing in the local community (Indy, Waani, & Kandowangko, 2019). Therefore, when examining the education process, it is essential to consider the sociocultural context in which village communities, with their diverse traditions and customs, significantly contribute to the development and forms of educational interactions that occur there (Bagley, 2023).

In Indonesia, particularly in Indramayu District, West Java Province, the sociocultural interaction between the village community and the formal and non-formal education systems exhibits unique dynamics (Röttger-Rössler, 2024). Indramayu district, where the majority of the population works as farmers and fishermen, is characterized by a strong social and cultural structure, with various local wisdoms that are still preserved in daily life. This creates differences in how rural communities perceive education and their engagement in the learning process at the family, school, and community levels (Firdaus, Asmuni, & Kurniawan, 2021). However, in the development of the education system in these areas, there is often a mismatch between the educational approaches applied and the needs and socio-cultural characteristics of local communities (Villa et al., 2021). Several factors contribute to this, including limited access to formal education, a lack of understanding about the importance of education, and a tradition that prioritizes physical labor or practical skills over academic education (Stearns, 1986). Coupled with the rapid development of technology, the interaction between rural communities and the outside world has also undergone significant changes, both in terms of opportunities and challenges for the education sector.

In the 1990s, in a sub-district in Indramayu district, it was found that the community's perspective on education was negative, lacking support, and even scorn and verbal bullying of children who attended school. People in the area thought that children who went to school were arrogant. Hearing the confessions of students who were in trouble because they had been absent from school for several days is a phenomenon that needs further research. Once there is an explanation of why the community views and thinks that way, it can be understood, because this concerns

the orientation of life that is economically marginalized and less affected by economic development.

Anthropological studies in education can help provide a deeper understanding of the importance of integrating local cultural perspectives into the education system (Satria et al., 2020). Anthropology enables educators and educational practitioners to recognize that the culture, habits, and social values adopted by students have a significant impact on their learning and information processing (Bagley & Hillyard, 2014). This can serve as the basis for designing educational methods that are more inclusive and relevant to the comprehensive needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. With anthropological understanding, education can serve as a bridge to reduce social and cultural disparities between different groups of people (Wankhede & Sengupta, 2005). Through a more diverse and culturally sensitive approach to teaching, it is hoped that a society will be created that is more tolerant, respectful of differences, and able to coexist in social harmony.

Thus, the background of this study is based on how anthropology can contribute to overcoming educational challenges, especially in the context of a multicultural Indonesian society. The aim is to ensure that education is not only a means of transferring knowledge but also a tool to strengthen cultural identity, promote social equality, and highlight the importance of education for the development of society, both physically, mentally, and spiritually (Opare, 2007). In this context, it is essential to conduct an anthropological study of education to gain a deeper understanding of how sociocultural interactions influence rural communities' perspectives on education. This perspective encompasses how villagers perceive education within the context of local traditions and culture, and how they adapt to the demands of modern education while maintaining their social and cultural identity. Educational anthropology provides a relevant framework for examining these dynamics, focusing on the relationship between educational practices and the social and cultural structures that exist in society.

## **Theoretical review**

In the context of research on the development of sociocultural interactions from the educational perspectives of rural communities, this literature and theory review will highlight basic concepts related to social, cultural, and academic interactions, and how these theories can be applied to understanding the dynamics

of education in rural communities (Bauch, 2001). This research aims to link social and cultural developments with the rural community's views on education, taking into account local wisdom and the challenges that arise in the education system in the area.

### *Sociocultural Interaction and Education*

Sociocultural interaction refers to the social processes that occur when individuals or groups interact with each other in society, where certain norms, values, and cultures are exchanged, learned, and socialized (Browne, 2024). In the context of education, sociocultural interaction refers to the relationship between the teaching and learning processes and the social and cultural structures that exist within a community. According to Bourdieu (1993), in his theory of social and cultural capital, education is inextricably linked to the influence of broader social structures. Bourdieu (1993) explains that education often reflects and reinforces existing social hierarchies in society, with certain social classes having greater access to educational resources. In this case, rural communities with a strong social structure and local norms and traditions may face challenges in accessing more modern, formal education, which is not always aligned with their values and social structure (Chapman et al., 2002).

Mahmud and Suntana (2020), in the Anthropology of Education, discuss the issue of counterculture, which refers to a culture that diverges from the prevailing culture in broader society. Members of the counterculture typically do not conform to the dominant cultural patterns. Instead, counterculture tends to be based on resistance to dominant patterns (Dai, 2016). The counterculture is essentially revolutionary in nature, thus considered an attempt to effect fundamental changes in the dominant culture (Edwards, 2019). However, most countercultures are not inspired by such revolutionary intentions. In the context of this research, when society negatively views people who send their children to school as being arrogant, those who view education as a positive thing are clearly countering a different perspective.

### *Culturalism Theory in Education*

Culturalism theory in educational anthropology, as proposed by Bruner (1997) and Geertz (1973), emphasizes the importance of culture in shaping the ways we think, learn, and interact with the world. In the context of rural education, culturalism

encourages us to view education as both a product and a process closely tied to the local culture (Lyu & Henward, 2025). Education is not only about absorbing knowledge from outside, but also about respecting local knowledge and how it can be acquired and delivered within the relevant cultural context. In Indonesia, this theory is crucial because education in villages cannot be divorced from local values, including the local wisdom that exists within the village community (Roberts & Green, 2013). For example, in farming communities, the values of hard work, cooperation, and connection with nature are part of the informal education process within the community. Therefore, the culturalism approach encourages respect for local knowledge and recognizes the importance of context-based education tailored to local contexts.

### **Functional Structural Theory in Education**

Functional structural theory, developed by Parsons (1951), focuses on how social structures function to maintain stability and order in society. In the context of village education, this theory explains how the education system socializes younger generations into the community's social and cultural values, enabling them to participate productively in community life (Epstein, 2018). Education plays a significant role in shaping individuals to conform to the social norms and values prevalent in society (Fargas Malet & Bagley, 2024). At the same time, society itself will change the educational process. Based on this theory, education can be seen as one of the mechanisms for integrating social changes that occur in society. In villages with strong traditions and more closed social structures, education can serve as a channel for introducing new ideas and social changes that help address the issue of unequal access to education (Kastner & Motschilnig, 2022). However, these changes also need to be balanced with an understanding of the need to maintain local cultural identity, to avoid cultural disorientation in the midst of educational modernization.

### **Socialization Theory in Education**

Educational socialization theory, as developed by Émile Durkheim (1922), focuses on how individuals, through education, learn to adapt and function in society. In the village context, socialization through education occurs not only in formal schools but also in daily interactions within families and the broader community. Children acquire social values and norms prevalent in village communities through various forms of non-formal education, including oral traditions, rituals, and collaborative work in the rice fields (Okitsu & Edwards, 2017). In villages, education is

often more holistic, involving all aspects of social life. Children learn not only about science, but also about the values of hard work, community, and social responsibility through direct experiences in the community (Rose, 2003). This indicates that in rural communities, education is often embedded in broader cultural socialization and encompasses more than just formal schooling in schools.

### *Postcolonialism and Globalization Theory in Education*

In the context of globalization, education in Indonesian villages also faces significant challenges related to the influence of global culture and rapid technological advancements. Postcolonial theory, heavily influenced by the thoughts of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon (Nayar, 2011), examines how colonialism and global cultural dominance can shape the way people perceive education and local wisdom. In rural communities, the education process is not only about absorbing knowledge from outside, but also about maintaining and preserving local cultural identity in the face of growing globalization (Röttger-Rössler, 2024). This approach also leads to an understanding of how education can serve as a tool for resisting global cultural homogenization by strengthening local culture within educational institutions. For example, education in Indramayu Regency, which is based on agriculture or fishing, can continue to develop by utilizing local knowledge and incorporating elements of modern education that are in line with the times.

### *Inclusive Education Theory*

Inclusive education theory focuses on how education can reach all levels of society, including marginalized groups. Sociology of Education and Critical Pedagogy propose that education should accommodate the social and cultural diversity that exists in society, including diversity at the village level (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008). Inclusive education is expected to reduce inequality in access to education and provide equal opportunities for children from various socio-cultural backgrounds to obtain quality education. In villages, inclusive education involves recognizing the diversity of local cultures, languages, and traditions in the education system. In this regard, research focusing on inclusive education can explore how village schools can provide education that is not only open to all social groups but also takes into account local cultural values within the community (Yuan et al., 2025).

Based on existing theories, it is evident that the development of sociocultural interactions in the context of education in rural communities is closely tied to the norms, values, and traditions prevalent in these communities. Education is not only

about the absorption of knowledge but also the process of socializing cultural values. Therefore, education in rural communities must be contextual, oriented to local needs, and capable of bridging the gap between local knowledge and modern knowledge in the face of the challenges posed by globalization and social change.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach, which focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of social phenomena through the collection of unstructured descriptive data (Strauss & Corbin, 2003). The qualitative approach is more suitable for exploring the perspectives of village communities on education and understanding how social and cultural interactions influence the education process at the local level. In educational anthropology, a qualitative approach enables researchers to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the social and cultural context surrounding education, including values, traditions, and norms (Nur & Utami, 2022).

Qualitative descriptive research aims to describe social phenomena in a more natural and uncontrolled context. Researchers collect data on the educational practices and sociocultural interactions of village communities and then tell them in the form of a rich narrative, incorporating relevant social, cultural, and historical contexts. This research aims to understand how villagers perceive education and how their cultural values shape these educational perspectives.

The research was conducted in the three sub-districts of Kandanghaur, Gabus Wetan, and Bongas in Indramayu district, West Java province, which are characterized by village communities with distinctive traditions and social structures. Indramayu, where most of the population works as farmers and fishermen, is unique in the social and cultural interactions that influence the education system. The selection of this location aims to observe how rural communities, still rich in local traditions, interact with a more formal and modern education system.

The subjects of this study are rural communities in Indramayu District, consisting of various social groups, including farmers, fishermen, and family members involved in children's education. More specifically, the research subjects include:

- 1) Teachers and educators in primary and secondary schools in the village, both those who teach in formal and non-formal schools.

- 2) Students from various levels of education who come from the village community, whether they come from families of farmers, fishermen, or other social groups.
- 3) The village community in general, community leaders, and families involved in the informal education process.

The data collection methods in qualitative research are carried out through the following techniques:

#### *In-depth Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore individuals' perspectives on education, social norms, and cultural values within the village community. These interviews will be conducted with teachers, students, parents, and community leaders who play a role in the development of education in the village. The interview technique enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the community's subjective experiences and views on education.

#### *Participatory Observation*

The researcher will be directly involved in the daily life of the village community by conducting participatory observations at school and in community activities, such as gotong-royong, family gatherings, or other social activities that reflect sociocultural interactions. Through these observations, researchers can gain insight into the educational context within the social life of the community and how culture and social norms directly influence education.

#### *Documentation*

Documentation, including school archives, village education policies, and educational materials used in the village community, will also be collected to enrich the data obtained from interviews and observations. This documentation provides an overview of education policy and its implementation at the local level, as well as the influence of regional social and cultural norms on education.

### **Results and Discussion**

This research aims to investigate how the sociocultural interactions within village communities in the Indramayu district shape their perspectives on education. Using an anthropological approach to education, this research employs participatory observation and in-depth interviews to collect data on educational practices in the

village, as well as the relationship between the community's cultural values and social norms, and existing formal and non-formal educational systems.

Culture and society are two words that cannot be separated, considering that culture itself is born in society, and every society always produces culture. Tylor (1987) states that culture is a complex whole comprising knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and other abilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society. Meanwhile, Koentjaraningrat (1983) refers to culture as the entire system of ideas, feelings, actions, and works produced by humans in society that are made their own through learning. By understanding the importance of culture, we can respect and appreciate differences in cultural backgrounds and coexist peacefully. This understanding enables us to find the right solution by recognizing the roots of the problems that exist in society.

Society is a group of people who live together, interact with each other, and form a social system. They share values, social norms, and common goals, and live in a particular area. Max Weber posits that society is a structure of social action, based on the meaning individuals attribute to their actions (Ali et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Parsons (1951) describes society as a social system comprising various subsystems (economic, political, and cultural) that interact with one another to achieve balance. Soemardjan (1990) says that society is composed of people who live together and produce culture.

From the definitions of culture and society that the author describes above, it is clear that the relationship between the two is very close; in fact, that relationship cannot be separated from one another.

Based on the analysis of the data obtained, the research results show a complex relationship between sociocultural interactions and the educational perspectives of rural communities. In this discussion, the research results will be presented in several main themes, including:

- 1) The Role of Local Culture in Shaping Views on Education
- 2) Challenges and Opportunities in Village Education
- 3) The Influence of Globalization on Village Education

Education as a Socialization Process in Village Social Structure

### *The Role of Local Culture in Shaping Views on Education*

Village communities in Indramayu district have a strong attachment to local cultural values, including the tradition of cooperation, hard work, and a close connection to nature through farming and fishing activities. These values strongly influence the way they view education. Based on interviews with parents and community leaders, formal education is often considered a pathway to employment outside the agriculture and fisheries sectors, although it is not always the top priority in their lives.

In many cases, rural communities prioritize education that can be directly applied in their daily lives, such as agricultural, fisheries, or handicraft skills (Anas, Riana, & Apsari, 2015). Non-formal education based on these practical skills is more valued, as it is considered more in line with the economic and social needs of rural communities. For example, many homemakers prioritize education on how to farm well or job training over sending their children to pursue higher education, which is often perceived as not immediately applicable in daily life.

Field observations also reveal that children in villages often receive education not only in school but also through the community's social life, such as in the rice fields, at the market, or in other social activities. This learning emphasizes the development of practical and social skills necessary for survival in their environment.

From the results of interviews and open-ended questionnaires, it was found that many parents still prefer not to continue to the senior high school level. They like to work as fishermen and farmers in communities whose geographical land contours are well-suited for agriculture, as in the Kandanghaur sub-district, where the community is particularly well-suited for fishing, considering that their residence is very close to the North Sea of Java. This is certainly different from the communities in the *Gabus Wetan* and *Bongas* sub-districts, whose people make a living as farmers. Even these two sub-districts, known for being rice suppliers that serve as granaries not only in the district but also on a national scale, are distinct.

### *Challenges and Opportunities in Village Education*

One of the main findings of this research is the unequal access to quality education in rural areas. Although government policies aimed at improving access to education are in place, various challenges still face village communities. Limited education infrastructure in villages is a significant problem, which includes a lack of

supporting facilities in village schools, such as inadequate classrooms, limited teaching materials, and a shortage of training for teachers to employ locally appropriate teaching approaches. In addition, many families cannot afford to pay for their children's education beyond a certain level, as most rural communities rely on the agricultural or fishing sectors, which require children's labor to assist their parents (Prima & Andisa, 2021).

However, behind these challenges lie also opportunities to strengthen local wisdom-based education. Some rural schools have begun to introduce educational approaches that are more grounded in the regional context, such as character education that teaches the values of cooperation, togetherness, and sustainable management of natural resources. In some areas, village communities have also begun to establish non-formal education institutions, such as community learning groups and skills training programs, which help improve the quality of education without relying entirely on the formal education system.

The challenge for communities in Indramayu in terms of education is that the burden of education costs still feels heavy. But there are also opportunities for the community. They hope that the KIP scholarship will target those who are economically disadvantaged. With government assistance in providing scholarships, they hope that their desire to send their children to school to improve their prospects will be greatly encouraged. When asked what type of education they need, the answer is religious education, character education, and education that can develop children's talents. In general, people in Kandanghaur, Gabus Wetan, and Bongas sub-districts view education as very important. This indicates a significant shift in the educational paradigm. In the past, their children who attended school were stigmatized as arrogant or as coming from families perceived as elitist. This is the way of thinking, for them children who graduate from junior high school, especially women who are already working, can help their parents economically, while teenagers who continue their education at the high school level spend a lot of money on school fees, and children who spend money are of course said to be arrogant, and this is inversely proportional to high school-age children who are already working who are already earning and contributing to the improvement of the family economy.

### *The Influence of Globalization on Village Community Education*

The influence of globalization is a significant factor in the development of education in rural areas. In recent years, the emergence of information technology

and social media has provided rural communities with broader access to information. However, this phenomenon presents two conflicting aspects: on the one hand, globalization provides opportunities to enrich the knowledge and improve the skills of the younger generation through access to more diverse information; on the other hand, it also challenges long-held local wisdom and traditional values.

Rural communities, especially the younger generation, are increasingly exposed to cultures and lifestyles influenced by the outside world through the internet, television, and social media (Regiani et al., 2023). This raises a dilemma between modernizing education and preserving local cultural values. For example, although many young people are interested in continuing their education in big cities or working in industry, there is still a strong expectation to connect their education to local practices, such as organic farming, handicrafts, or nature conservation. Although technology-based education is increasingly important, many villagers feel that formal education, which emphasizes modern science, is often irrelevant to their needs. Formal education in elementary and secondary schools tends to prioritize theory-based teaching, while practical skills relevant to village life are rarely taught.

### *Education as a Socialization Process in Village Social Structure*

From the perspective of educational anthropology, education is not only a transfer of knowledge, but also a means to socialize social values, shape cultural identity, and strengthen the social structure of society. In the villages of Indramayu Regency, education is often more communitarian in nature, where families, traditional leaders, and the surrounding community play a role in guiding the younger generation to understand their social roles.

Formal education provided in schools is often only one part of a broader socialization process. Children also learn many things from their social interactions in society, such as family values, cooperation, and the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature (Tabi'in, 2017). In this case, education in rural communities is more holistic, encompassing physical, social, and spiritual dimensions. This differs from education in urban areas, which is more focused on developing academic and professional skills. This socialization process is also evident in the way communities educate their children to work together on farms or at sea, which is considered a more practical form of life education. However, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of formal education in opening up opportunities

outside the agricultural sector, and rural communities are coming to understand that formal education can enrich their insights and improve the quality of life.

The lack of opportunities to learn in classrooms has resulted in many illiterate fishermen and farmers. Consequently, community leaders are making efforts to break through this barrier by forming fishermen's study groups that conduct learning at sea for those who are still illiterate. So, in between fishing, fishermen are taught to read and write on the deck of their ships or boats. When this program was launched, it drew the attention of numerous education observers and government officials. However, its sustainability was not, as many obstacles arose in the field. For instance, when studying, they were less focused due to the waves that rocked their boats, or their focus was lost when they had not caught enough fish. In general, the community once again views education as necessary, and they propose various types of education that are suitable for educating their children. This indicates that significant social and cultural changes have occurred over several decades. However, according to the interview results, there are still people whose children are sufficiently educated up to elementary or junior high school. Still, they have to help their parents with work, such as fishing or farming. Even if some are interested in continuing their education at high school or vocational school, they will encourage their children to apply for work abroad, such as in many destinations for Indonesians in general, including labor markets in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Korea. When they succeed in working in the expected destination countries, they will naturally occupy a position in the middle class of society, in terms of social structure. If that happens, of course, they will gain prestige and honor, because they are no longer a family occupying a lower social class position.

## Conclusion

Village communities in Indramayu Regency have views that are strongly influenced by local cultural values, such as cooperation, hard work, and harmonious relationships with nature. Formal education is viewed as a means to secure jobs outside the agricultural and fisheries sectors. Still, it is often considered less relevant to the daily lives of village communities, which prioritize practical skills and skills that can be applied in their immediate surroundings.

Although government policies aim to improve access to education in villages, several challenges persist, including limited educational infrastructure, a lack of teaching resources, and economic difficulties that hinder people's access to higher

education. Most parents prefer their children to work to help the family economy, rather than continuing their education to a higher level.

Village communities have begun to develop non-formal education programs based on practical skills and sustainable natural resource management, in response to local needs. This presents an opportunity to create an education model that is more suitable for the social and cultural context of village communities.

Globalization has a double impact on village community education. On the one hand, access to technology and information increases the knowledge and skills of the younger generation. But on the other hand, globalization also challenges the preservation of local cultural values and village community traditions, so a balance is needed between technology-based education and the conservation of local wisdom. Education in rural communities is not only seen as formal teaching in schools, but also as a broader social process in which children learn social values, culture, and practical skills from their surroundings. This socialization process occurs both within the family and in society, as well as in other social activities.

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