

A Qualitative Case Study of School Dropout Among the Laut Ethnic Group in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands, Indonesia

Karini¹, Kartini Sri Rahayu², Amanda Junianti³, Marisa Elsera⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Sociology Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Tanjungpinang, Indonesia

Keywords:

School Dropout
Laut Ethnic Group
Maritime Community
Social Exclusion
Educational Inequality

Article history:

Received 05/21/2026
Revised 06/14/2026
Accepted 06/27/2026

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study aims to analyze the factors contributing to school dropout among children from the Laut ethnic group in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, Lingga Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five informants, comprising two community leaders and three school dropouts, as well as field observations and documentation. The findings indicate that school dropout among Laut children is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by interconnected economic, cultural, familial, and social factors. The primary contributing factors include the economic instability of traditional fishing households, limited parental awareness of the importance of formal education, and strong maritime cultural values that prioritize seafaring skills over schooling. Furthermore, stigma, discriminatory treatment, and social labeling within the school environment create psychological pressure and social exclusion, increasing the likelihood of students leaving school prematurely. The study recommends strengthening household economic resilience, expanding scholarship opportunities, and promoting inclusive, stigma-free school environments to reduce school dropout and improve educational participation among the Laut ethnic community.

Corresponding Author:

Karini

Sociology Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Tanjungpinang, Indonesia

Jalan Sultan Masyur Syah, Dompok Tanjungpinang, 29124 Kota Tanjungpinang, Provinsi Kepulauan Riau

Email: 2405030055@student.umrah.ac.id

Published by : Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Prof. Dr. Hazairin, SH Bengkulu, Indonesia

ISSN : 2252-5270 & E-ISSN : 2620-6056



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1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen and serves as a vital instrument for improving the quality of human resources and expanding social and economic opportunities. In Indonesia, the right to education is guaranteed under Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. However, equitable access to education remains a significant challenge, particularly for communities experiencing socioeconomic vulnerability and geographic marginalization.

One of the persistent educational issues is the high rate of school dropout, which is closely associated with social and economic inequality. School dropout refers not only to the discontinuation of formal education but also reflects structural barriers that restrict children's opportunities to complete their education. Previous studies have shown that household economic conditions influence families' ability to meet educational needs, including transportation, school supplies, learning support, and other schooling expenses (Amelia & Agustina, 2022; Sulfiani et al., 2025). Consequently, children from economically disadvantaged families often face unequal educational opportunities compared with those from more financially secure households.

These challenges become more complex among indigenous and coastal communities. One such community is the Laut Ethnic Group in Lingga Regency, Riau Islands. The Laut Ethnic Group is a maritime indigenous community whose traditional livelihood depends on fishing and other marine-based activities (Elsera et al., 2022; Elsera et al., 2024). Although government settlement programs have encouraged some families to live in permanent housing, their maritime traditions and cultural values continue to shape daily life and influence family priorities, including decisions related to children's education.

The phenomenon of school dropout among Laut children in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, demonstrates that educational discontinuation is influenced not only by economic hardship but also by sociocultural conditions and experiences of discrimination within the school environment. Unstable household income among traditional fishing families, combined with social stigma, labeling, and

feelings of exclusion at school, reduces children's motivation to continue their education.

Tajur Biru Village is located in Temiang Pesisir Subdistrict, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province. The village is home to one of the largest Orang Laut settlements in the district. Although housing assistance programs have improved residential conditions, many families continue to depend on traditional fishing as their primary source of livelihood. The archipelagic geography, high mobility, and dependence on marine resources have created distinctive social and cultural patterns in which seafaring skills are often regarded as more valuable than formal education for sustaining family livelihoods.

The multidimensional nature of school dropout among Laut children highlights that educational discontinuation cannot be explained solely by economic factors. Cultural values, parental educational awareness, and experiences of social exclusion also contribute to children's decisions to leave school prematurely. This study aims to analyze the factors contributing to school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, Lingga Regency. Using a qualitative case study approach based on in-depth interviews with community members, traditional leaders, parents, and Laut children who had dropped out of school, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What is the educational participation of Laut children at the elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels in Kampung Baru? (2) To what extent does school dropout occur among Laut children in Kampung Baru? and (3) What factors contribute to school dropout among Laut children? The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence on the multidimensional factors underlying school dropout among the Laut Ethnic Group and contribute to the broader literature on educational inequality within indigenous maritime communities.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group within its social, cultural, and structural contexts. The case study method

enabled the researchers to explore the experiences, perspectives, and real-life conditions of the Laut Ethnic Group comprehensively within the social environment where the phenomenon occurred.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves intentionally selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This sampling technique was considered appropriate because not all community members possessed experiences and information related to the research focus.

The study involved five informants, consisting of:

- 1) Two community leaders of the Laut Ethnic Group, selected for their knowledge of the community's social and cultural conditions, as well as the educational dynamics in Kampung Baru.
- 2) Three children from the Laut Ethnic Group who had dropped out of school between the third and fifth grades, with an average dropout age of 8 to 10 years.

The children were selected because they had firsthand experience of dropping out of school and were directly involved in their families' social and economic activities. Meanwhile, the community leaders were selected based on their understanding of changes in educational patterns and the general conditions of the Laut Ethnic Group community.

Data were collected using three techniques. First, field observations were conducted to understand the living conditions of the Laut Ethnic Group and their social activities related to children's education. Second, in-depth interviews were carried out with all informants to obtain information regarding their experiences, perceptions, and the factors contributing to school dropout. Third, documentation was collected in the form of field notes, photographs of research activities, and other relevant supporting documents.

3. Results And Discussion

The findings indicate that school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, cannot be attributed to a single cause. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of multiple structural, socioeconomic, cultural, and psychosocial factors that reinforce one another. The qualitative evidence demonstrates that

economic hardship, limited parental educational awareness, deeply rooted maritime cultural values, and experiences of stigma within the school environment collectively shape children's educational trajectories. These factors do not operate independently; rather, they create a cumulative process that gradually weakens children's participation in formal education until dropping out becomes a perceived necessity rather than an individual choice. The findings therefore suggest that educational inequality among the Laut Ethnic Group should be understood within the broader context of social exclusion, where limited economic resources, cultural characteristics, and unequal treatment intersect to reduce educational opportunities. The following discussion examines these interconnected factors based on the empirical findings.

3.1. Family Economic Instability

The findings reveal that family economic instability constitutes the most immediate factor influencing school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group. Most households depend on traditional fishing as their primary source of income, making household earnings highly vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations, weather conditions, and fish availability. During periods of poor catches, families experience considerable financial uncertainty, limiting their ability to meet educational expenses such as transportation costs, school uniforms, stationery, learning materials, and daily allowances. Under these circumstances, education becomes secondary to fulfilling basic household needs.

Economic hardship also encourages children to participate directly in fishing activities to supplement family income. Rather than attending school regularly, children often accompany their parents to sea or engage in income-generating activities associated with the fishing sector. This finding illustrates how household survival strategies directly compete with children's educational participation.

According to Liska Listina (2023), school dropout is not merely an educational issue but a long-standing social problem closely associated with household economic conditions. From the perspective of social reproduction theory, limited economic and cultural capital significantly reduces children's opportunities to succeed within formal educational institutions. Families experiencing chronic

financial instability often possess fewer educational resources and limited capacity to invest in their children's long-term educational development. Consequently, educational inequality is reproduced across generations.

This situation is reflected in the statement of one community leader:

"The economic conditions we face affect these children's education."

The interview demonstrates that economic vulnerability is widely recognized within the community as one of the principal barriers preventing children from completing compulsory education. Household expenditure priorities are naturally directed toward food security and daily subsistence rather than educational investment. Within coastal communities such as Kampung Baru, where economic uncertainty is embedded in everyday life, formal education is frequently perceived as an additional financial burden instead of a pathway toward future socioeconomic mobility.

These findings are consistent with Nurdjaman et al. (2023), who found that children living in coastal communities and indigenous societies are considerably more likely to enter the workforce at an early age than continue their education. Similar patterns appear among the Laut Ethnic Group, where economic necessity frequently outweighs educational aspirations. As expressed by another community leader:

"The parents of children here do not consider education important; they prioritize going out to sea."

Although this perception appears cultural, the findings suggest that it is strongly influenced by prolonged economic insecurity. Parents prioritize immediate household survival because fishing represents the only reliable livelihood available to many families. Consequently, children's participation in economic activities gradually becomes normalized within the community.

Furthermore, children's continuous involvement in fishing activities shapes their own perceptions regarding education. Practical maritime skills acquired through direct experience are viewed as more immediately useful than academic learning, reinforcing preferences for employment over schooling. Thus, economic instability influences educational participation not only through

financial limitations but also by shaping attitudes toward the relative value of formal education.

These findings are also consistent with reports from the Central Statistics Agency, which indicate that school dropout rates remain concentrated among economically disadvantaged households, particularly in coastal and island regions characterized by limited access to educational resources. Therefore, the educational experiences of the Laut Ethnic Group should not be interpreted solely as individual family decisions but rather as manifestations of broader structural inequalities affecting marginalized coastal communities.

3.2. Low Educational Attainment and Parental Awareness

Besides economic constraints, the findings demonstrate that parents' educational background substantially influences children's educational continuity. Most parents within the Laut Ethnic Group possess only limited formal education, while some have never completed basic schooling. Consequently, formal education is generally not perceived as an essential long-term investment but rather as an activity with limited practical relevance to everyday life.

The findings indicate that parental educational aspirations remain relatively modest. Parents generally expect their children to acquire only basic literacy and numeracy skills before eventually participating in family fishing activities. The immediate contribution children can make to household livelihoods is often considered more valuable than prolonged participation in formal education.

Ririk, Mokodompit, M., and Sari, Y. P. (2023) similarly reported that most parents within the Bajo community had only completed elementary education, while others had never attended school. Such educational backgrounds influence parents' perceptions regarding the purpose of schooling. Rather than viewing education as an instrument of social mobility, many parents perceive it simply as a means of acquiring basic reading and writing abilities.

Parents' limited educational attainment also reduces their capacity to support children's academic development. Many experience difficulties understanding school requirements, monitoring academic progress, or communicating effectively with teachers. Consequently, children receive relatively little educational encouragement within the family environment. This limitation reflects a shortage of social and

cultural capital that extends beyond financial resources.

The findings further indicate that educational attitudes are transmitted across generations. Parents who experienced limited schooling themselves often perceive formal education as having little practical benefit, and these beliefs are subsequently passed on to their children. UNESCO (2017) similarly concluded that parents' educational attainment strongly influences children's educational participation, particularly within marginalized and geographically isolated communities where access to educational opportunities remains unequal.

Within the Laut Ethnic Group, educational values coexist with strong cultural traditions emphasizing practical maritime competencies, including navigation, fishing techniques, weather interpretation, and survival skills at sea. These competencies are considered essential for maintaining family livelihoods and cultural identity. Consequently, academic achievement is often viewed as less immediately relevant than acquiring traditional occupational knowledge.

Rather than representing parental indifference toward education, these findings suggest that educational decision-making is shaped by the interaction between limited educational experience, economic vulnerability, and cultural expectations. Parents prioritize forms of knowledge that they perceive as directly contributing to household survival under existing socioeconomic conditions.

Accordingly, the high incidence of school dropout among Laut Ethnic Group children cannot be explained exclusively by financial hardship. It also reflects the cumulative influence of limited parental educational attainment and restricted educational aspirations, both of which reduce sustained family support for children's formal schooling. These conditions contribute to the persistence of educational inequality within the community and reinforce the intergenerational transmission of limited educational participation.

3.3. The Strength of Maritime Cultural Values

Beyond economic and educational factors, the findings demonstrate that maritime cultural values constitute an important determinant of school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group. The community has historically maintained a close

relationship with the sea, where fishing activities are not merely an economic occupation but also represent cultural identity, traditional knowledge, and a way of life transmitted across generations. Consequently, children are introduced to maritime activities from an early age and gradually acquire practical skills considered essential for adulthood.

The findings indicate that boys, in particular, are expected to accompany their parents to sea at a relatively young age. Through daily participation in fishing activities, they learn navigation techniques, weather interpretation, fishing methods, and survival skills that are highly valued within the community. These competencies are perceived as more immediately applicable than academic knowledge acquired through formal education. As a result, children's educational aspirations are often redirected toward continuing family livelihoods rather than completing higher levels of schooling.

From an educational anthropology perspective, this phenomenon reflects the coexistence of two distinct systems of knowledge. On one hand, indigenous maritime knowledge is acquired through direct participation in everyday community life. On the other hand, formal education emphasizes standardized curricula that often provide limited recognition of local cultural knowledge. This difference creates a gap between the educational experiences offered by schools and the realities encountered by children within their communities.

The findings suggest that the formal education system has not fully accommodated the cultural characteristics of indigenous maritime communities. Learning materials, teaching approaches, and educational activities remain largely oriented toward mainstream social contexts, making it difficult for children from the Laut Ethnic Group to relate classroom learning to their daily experiences. Consequently, some children perceive school as an environment disconnected from their social reality, whereas maritime activities offer immediate relevance and tangible contributions to family life.

This cultural mismatch gradually shapes children's educational preferences. As their involvement in fishing activities increases, practical experience becomes increasingly valued over academic achievement. Rather than rejecting education entirely, many children

appear to perceive maritime knowledge as more beneficial for securing their future livelihoods under existing socioeconomic conditions.

These findings indicate that maritime cultural values should not be interpreted as barriers to education in themselves. Instead, educational exclusion emerges when formal schooling fails to acknowledge and integrate indigenous knowledge systems into the learning process. The persistence of school dropout among the Laut Ethnic Group therefore reflects the limited compatibility between local cultural values and institutional educational practices. Developing culturally responsive educational approaches that recognize indigenous identities may strengthen children's engagement with formal education while preserving their cultural heritage.

3.4. Stigma and Social Labeling in Schools

The findings further reveal that psychosocial factors contribute significantly to school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group. In addition to economic hardship and cultural influences, children frequently experience stigma, discrimination, and unequal treatment within school environments because of their ethnic identity and socioeconomic background. Such experiences create feelings of exclusion that reduce students' motivation to remain in school.

Several informants explained that they often felt different from other students because they came from fishing families and belonged to the Laut Ethnic Group. Negative stereotypes expressed by peers contributed to feelings of embarrassment, inferiority, and social isolation. One community member described this situation by stating:

"Sometimes these children also feel inferior or lack self-confidence because their peers often call them 'dirty' or 'neglected' Laut Ethnic Group children."

This testimony illustrates that discrimination extends beyond isolated incidents of teasing. Repeated negative labeling gradually influences children's self-perception and sense of belonging within the school environment. Rather than viewing school as a safe and supportive place for learning, children increasingly perceive it as a setting where they experience rejection and social exclusion.

The findings indicate that stigma affects educational participation

through psychological mechanisms. Children who repeatedly encounter discrimination tend to withdraw from classroom interactions, participate less actively in learning activities, and gradually lose interest in attending school. Over time, prolonged experiences of exclusion increase the likelihood of absenteeism, poor academic performance, and ultimately school dropout.

Social labeling also reinforces existing structural inequalities. Children from marginalized indigenous communities not only experience economic disadvantage but also confront symbolic barriers that undermine equal educational opportunities. Consequently, educational inequality among the Laut Ethnic Group cannot be understood solely through financial indicators but must also consider the quality of children's social experiences within educational institutions.

These findings highlight the importance of developing inclusive school environments that recognize cultural diversity and eliminate discriminatory attitudes toward indigenous students. Teachers, school administrators, and fellow students all play important roles in creating learning environments that promote mutual respect and equal participation. Inclusive educational practices should therefore extend beyond improving physical access to education by fostering a school culture that values diversity and protects children from stigma and social exclusion.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group results from the cumulative interaction of economic vulnerability, limited parental educational attainment, deeply rooted maritime cultural values, and discriminatory experiences within schools. These factors reinforce one another rather than operating independently, creating a cycle of educational disadvantage that is difficult to break through single-sector interventions. Consequently, reducing school dropout requires comprehensive policies that simultaneously strengthen household economic resilience, increase parental educational awareness, develop culturally responsive educational practices, and establish inclusive school environments where indigenous children can participate without experiencing discrimination. Such an integrated approach would contribute not only to improving educational participation

among the Laut Ethnic Group but also to reducing educational inequality experienced by marginalized coastal communities more broadly.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that school dropout among children of the Laut Ethnic Group in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, is a multidimensional phenomenon resulting from the interaction of economic, social, cultural, and structural factors rather than from a single determinant. Economic instability among traditional fishing households reduces families' capacity to finance educational needs, while parents' limited educational attainment constrains their awareness of the long-term benefits of formal education. These conditions are further reinforced by maritime cultural values that prioritize practical seafaring knowledge and livelihood skills over academic achievement, making formal education less central to children's future aspirations.

The findings also reveal that school dropout is influenced by social experiences within educational institutions. Stigma, social labeling, and unequal treatment contribute to feelings of exclusion, low self-esteem, and declining motivation to continue schooling. These findings suggest that educational inequality among the Laut Ethnic Group reflects broader processes of social exclusion in which economic disadvantage, cultural context, and discriminatory school environments interact to restrict children's educational opportunities.

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that school dropout among indigenous coastal communities should be understood through an integrated perspective that considers the interrelationship between household livelihoods, parental educational capital, cultural values, and school inclusion. Accordingly, interventions focusing solely on financial assistance are unlikely to achieve sustainable improvements unless accompanied by programs that strengthen parental educational awareness, promote culturally responsive education, and foster inclusive school environments that respect indigenous identities and eliminate discriminatory practices.

This study is limited by its focus on a single case study in Kampung Baru, Tajur Biru Village, and by its reliance on a relatively

small number of informants. Future research is therefore encouraged to examine similar issues across different indigenous coastal communities using comparative or mixed-method approaches to provide a broader understanding of the factors influencing educational participation among marginalized populations in Indonesia.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Acknowledgements

The author expresses the greatest gratitude to all the sources who were willing to take the time, provide information, experiences and perspectives that were very helpful in the data collection process of this research. The contribution and openness of the sources became an important part in the preparation of this journal article so that the research could be completed properly. The author also conveys appreciation for the support and cooperation that has been given during the research process.

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