




BUILDING SOCIAL PRESTIGE OF EDUCATION THROUGH LOCAL CULTURE OF BELIS FOR MANGGARAI PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT. This research aims to explore the relationship between Belis culture and the social prestige of education for the Manggarai community. The main focus of this research is to analyze how Belis culture can influence access to and motivation for education, especially for women, as well as its impact on social dynamics in the community. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The research subjects involved three main groups: teachers, students and parents, and community leaders. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation and focus group discussions (FGDs). The results show that the Belis culture, which is a dowry given in marriage, plays a significant role in building the social prestige of education, with highly educated women receiving greater rewards in the form of higher Belis values. On the other hand, while this culture provides incentives for women to pursue higher education, economic pressures are a major challenge for families who cannot afford the high Belis obligations, resulting in limited access to education for children, especially girls. This research suggests that the Belis culture be utilized as a driver of educational motivation, by integrating educational incentives for families committed to the quality of their children's education. In addition, to reduce social inequality, efforts to improve access to education through family economic empowerment need to be made.

Keywords: Belis Culture, Social Inequality, Indigenous People, Education, Social Prestige

INTRODUCTION

The people of Manggarai, located on Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), are known for their rich local culture and traditions that are preserved to this day. One culture that is still maintained and continues in their lives is Belis, which is a dowry given by the groom to the bride in the form of money or valuable goods, such as livestock (Y. S. Lon & Widyawati, 2018). The Belis tradition is not only a symbol of respect, but also an indicator of social prestige, reflecting the position and status of the family in society (Rodliyah et al., 2017). In the Manggarai tradition, the value of Belis affects many aspects of community life, from social and economic relations to its influence on education. Although it has a positive impact in strengthening social relations, this tradition also brings economic challenges for families, especially for male families who must fulfill the high value of Belis (Turyani et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in the context of education, this tradition can be an obstacle, despite efforts to

balance tradition with the need for better education for the younger generation (Januardi et al., 2024).

An interesting phenomenon in cultural practice for the Manggarai community is the relationship between Belis culture and social prestige of education. Research results show that the higher a woman's education level, the higher the value of Belis set by prospective husbands (Putri et al., 2021). This creates two interrelated sides: on the one hand, the Belis culture can be a motivation for women to pursue higher education in order to obtain a larger Belis value (Ambrosius Yufendi, 2024). However, on the other hand, it also poses a challenge for men, who feel the need to achieve academically in order to fulfill their Belis obligations. This phenomenon becomes even more complex when social inequalities arise, especially for economically disadvantaged families. Some families who are unable to fulfill their Belis obligations are forced to sacrifice their children's education, leading to limited access to proper education (Lon, 2016).

Along with the increasing understanding of the Manggarai community towards the importance of education, there is a positive trend that shows that the Belis culture is now increasingly functioning as a driver for the community to build the social prestige of education. The community is increasingly aware that the high value of Belis often correlates with the level of education (Hilnicputro, 2022). Therefore, many families have begun to prioritize education, especially for women, to improve the social status of the family. For women, higher education not only provides an opportunity to increase their social prestige, but also opens up better economic opportunities (Murtiana, 2017). On the other hand, men who want to fulfill the obligation of a high belis feel encouraged to pursue education and achieve academic achievements in order to get a decent job in the future so that they can fulfill the required amount of dowry in the belis culture. Thus, education functions as a tool to achieve a higher social status and contribute to improving the family's economic condition.

Although Belis culture helps to improve social status, there are adverse effects that need to be considered. One of them is the psychological pressure that can be experienced by women, who often feel burdened by high expectations regarding the amount of Belis that will be obtained (Mataradja, 2024). This pressure can interfere with their motivation to study, especially if they feel that higher education is just a way to fulfill the cultural expectation of Belis. For less well-off families, the situation can be even more difficult, as they are forced to choose between fulfilling their Belis obligations or supporting their children's education. This can exacerbate social inequalities and add to the burden of families in difficult economic conditions.

The mismatch between the purpose of education as an effort to shape character and the emphasis on social achievement through Belis culture is the cause of the gap phenomenon that occurs in Manggarai society (Mu'ammad & Pd, 2019). Most poor families who are unable to fulfill the Belis obligation are forced to sacrifice the education of their children, both boys and girls, in order to fulfill the high social expectations regarding the amount of Belis (Oliveira & Segel, 2022). As a result, the educational gap between the well-off and the less well-off has widened, with families with greater financial means more easily able to support their children's education (M. S. Anwar, 2022).

Although a number of previous studies have discussed the traditional culture of Belis, most of them are limited to the definition and basic aspects of the culture, without investigating its impact on social prestige in the context of education in Manggarai. Previous research has mostly focused on

the description of Belis culture without considering the interaction between this culture and the development of education in more depth. In addition, there is very limited research that examines the influence of Belis culture on students' learning motivation and access to education.

Some previous studies such as those conducted by Kurnia et al., (2022) show that Belis culture is not only a marriage tradition, but also a means of transmitting character values that support social life. Despite being an economic burden, Belis culture contributes greatly to the formation of community character and can be utilized to improve the quality of social life and education. Belis culture has an important role in strengthening social and economic relations, this tradition is still maintained because it is considered as a tribute to women and as a big family binder that maintains social harmony (Laudasi et al., 2020). In addition, the culture of Belis has shifted in meaning, from a tribute to women to an economic burden for men. This shift affects marriages, especially church marriages, and increases the risk of domestic violence. Efforts are needed to restore the meaning of Belis that values women and strengthens family ties (Dewa et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between Belis culture and education and its impact on learning motivation and access to education in the Manggarai community. The results of this study offer a new solution that has not been widely discussed in previous literature, namely how the Belis culture can be used as a driver to increase educational motivation, both for women and men, by integrating education as part of cultural obligations (Robinson et al., 2020). One proposed solution is to provide educational incentives for families who are able to fulfill the Belis obligation, but are also committed to improving the quality of their children's education (Jamet et al., 2018). This research aims to explore the relationship between Belis culture and the social prestige of education in Manggarai society. This research will analyze how Belis culture can influence access to and motivation for education for children, as well as how it shapes social dynamics in the Manggarai community. In addition, this research aims to explore whether the Belis culture can be used as a driving force to improve the quality of education in Manggarai and reduce existing social inequalities.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach because the main objective is to explore an in-depth understanding of Belis culture and its influence on the social prestige of education in Manggarai society. The qualitative approach is very suitable for this

research because it allows researchers to understand the meaning and social context involved in Belis culture, as well as the perspectives of individuals involved in the practice (Sugiono, 2016). The qualitative approach provides researchers with the space to explore complex social phenomena holistically (Moleong, 2019). In this case, Belis culture is not only seen as a marriage tradition, but as a social phenomenon related to social status and education in Manggarai society.

The research method used is a case study, which was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of the cultural phenomenon of Belis in a very specific social context in Manggarai. Case studies allow researchers to focus on a single phenomenon within a very limited context, providing a more detailed understanding of how the cultural practice of Belis interacts with the education system, as well as its impact on society (Sugiono, 2016). This is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of Belis culture in the formation of social and educational prestige.

This research was conducted in the Langke Rembong sub-district of Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The research subjects consisted of three main groups who provided different perspectives on the influence of Belis culture on education, namely: First, Teachers: The teachers' group was chosen to provide insights into how Belis culture affects the education system in Manggarai as well as their perceptions of the value of education within the cultural context. Second, Students and Parents: This group was chosen to explore their views on the importance of education and how Belis culture affects the education process in their daily lives. Thirdly, Community Leaders: Community leaders provide deeper insights into the social meaning of Belis culture, as well as how this culture plays a role in shaping the social structure and values in Manggarai society.

Three main data collection techniques were used in this study to obtain more comprehensive and in-depth data: First, In-depth Interview which is used to explore the subjective views and personal experiences of individuals related to the influence of Belis culture on education. This technique provides an opportunity for informants to speak freely and honestly, allowing researchers to gain insight into the influence of Belis culture on their lives, both from a social, cultural and educational perspective. With this approach, researchers can dive deeper into the views and experiences of informants. Second, Participatory Observation: The researcher is directly involved in various occasions related to Belis culture, such as traditional ceremonies and other cultural rituals, to obtain empirical data on how Belis culture is applied in daily life. Participatory observation

allows researchers to directly observe the social interactions that occur in the context of Belis culture and how it relates to the educational process, both in the family and community (Adji, 2024). Third, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs were used to collect the views of the community collectively on the impact of Belis culture on education. These group discussions allow interaction between the participants who can provide information to each other and enrich the researcher's understanding of the issue under study. FGDs also provide a more holistic picture of how the community sees the relationship between the Belis tradition and access to education (Krisnandi et al., 2019).

This research uses two data analysis techniques to process and interpret data systematically, namely: First, Thematic Analysis: This technique was used to identify the main themes that emerged from the data collected through interviews and observations. Thematic analysis helps researchers to categorize data based on themes that are relevant to the research focus (Braun & Clarke, 2019). With this technique, the researcher can see the patterns that develop regarding the influence of Belis culture on education, as well as the social impact caused by the culture. Second, Narrative Analysis: This technique is used to analyze personal stories or individual experiences related to Belis culture and education. Narrative analysis helps researchers understand how individuals describe their experiences and how these stories reflect their social and cultural views. This technique is very useful in exploring the meaning contained in personal experiences related to Belis culture. Third, Data Triangulation: To ensure the validity of the findings, data triangulation is conducted by comparing data obtained from various sources, such as interviews, observations, and FGDs. This triangulation serves to confirm the consistency of the findings and ensure that the research results can be trusted and have strong validity. By using various data sources, researchers can get a broader and deeper picture of the phenomenon under study (Moleong, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Contribution of Belis Culture to the Social Prestige of Manggarai Community Education

Belis culture in the Manggarai community, East Nusa Tenggara, is a tradition that has long been preserved as an integral part of the marriage procession. Belis, which comes from the word “beli” meaning “to give a dowry,” serves not only as a ritual in marriage, but also as a symbol of respect for the woman and her family (Kurnia et al., 2022b). The Manggarai community views women as highly valued assets in the family, and the provision of Belis

is a form of appreciation that reflects the social status of women in this cultural context (Neonnub & Habsari, 2018). Over time, the Belis culture has not only been linked to the social and economic dimensions of the marriage procession, but has also begun to be linked to women's education levels. Research shows that the higher a woman's education level, the greater the value of Belis received by her family in the marriage procession. This indicates that women's education is starting to be seen as an important factor that influences the social status and recognition of women in Manggarai society (Lon & Widyawati, 2016).

In addition, women's education is an important factor in the process of negotiating the amount of Belis. (Rahmah, 2022) found that women with higher education tended to receive larger Belis, indicating that women's education is now valued more in the context of Belis culture. This illustrates a significant shift in Manggarai culture which previously focused more on economic and social aspects, but is now starting to integrate education as a rewarding factor in the Belis tradition (Saleh, 2024). The awarding of higher Belis to women with higher education reflects changes in the Manggarai social structure. The community has now begun to value education as a social achievement that improves women's status in society. The higher a woman's education, the more respect she receives, both for herself and her family, which in turn increases their social status in the hierarchy of society. As explained by Bell (2016), this change reflects the appreciation of women's efforts in achieving higher education, which not only benefits the individual, but also benefits the social status of women's families.

With this change in view, women's education is no longer seen as an individual right, but also as an element that strengthens women's social prestige in the community. Larger belis are given as a form of recognition for women's educational achievements, which in turn enriches the social status and improves the position of women's families in Manggarai society (Anwar et al., 2024). However, despite the positive impact of recognizing women's education through Belis culture, challenges arise related to the existing economic inequality. High Belis obligations, especially for families with economic limitations, can create difficulties in fulfilling these obligations. With the high cost determined by the level of education, families with economic limitations may feel burdened. Therefore, research underscores the importance of efforts by the government and educational institutions to provide wider and more affordable access to education, especially for women from disadvantaged families, so that they can still access higher education and achieve social

recognition commensurate with their educational attainment (Dasrimin, 2024).

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that the Belis culture in Manggarai society has undergone a profound transformation. Belis, which was once considered a symbol of social transaction in marriage, now also functions as a form of appreciation for women's education, which has a wide impact on changes in their social status. The higher a woman's education, the greater the recognition and respect she receives, which in turn accelerates social transformation in Manggarai society. (Edwards, 2017). With the recognition of education, women can now see that their educational achievements will be recognized and rewarded in the form of Belis, which opens up opportunities for them to access higher education and improve their social position in society. (Edo & Yasin, 2024). Therefore, Belis culture plays an important role in strengthening the social prestige of women's education and accelerating social change in Manggarai society.

The results of this study show that Belis culture not only functions as a traditional symbol in marriage, but also as an important indicator in social change that increasingly values women's education. This process provides opportunities for women to gain access to better education, with the understanding that their educational achievements will be socially recognized, which in turn enriches the social value and status of the family in Manggarai society (Thania, 2024).

Education as a Driving Factor for Social Prestige

Education has a very significant role in improving the social status of women and their families, especially in the Manggarai community. The higher the level of education a woman has, the higher the social status she can achieve in the community (Agenssa & Premanandam, 2024). This phenomenon not only affects individual women, but also has a direct impact on the social status of their families. This is because in Manggarai society, women's social status is often measured by their family's reputation and social standing.

Women who successfully access higher education are often seen as symbols of progress and development in their families and communities. They are considered to have the ability to contribute more in various areas of life, whether economic, cultural or educational. For example, women who successfully pursue higher education are often seen as examples of success that bring honor to their families. (Yare, 2021). The social status of the family will also increase because the community gives greater recognition to families that have female members with higher education.

The results show that for the Manggarai community, education for women is not only seen as an individual achievement, but also as an indicator of family social prestige. This social process shows a paradigm shift, where women who were previously seen only in domestic roles are now considered to have the capacity to play an active role in community development (Tanggur et al., 2024). With higher education, women and their families have better access to social, economic, and political opportunities (Tuwu, 2018). Education provides opportunities for families to obtain more respectable jobs and also increases the capacity to educate the next generation.

Social mobility theory provides an additional perspective to these findings, underlining that education can be a major factor that changes a person's social position in society (Supriatin & Nasution, 2017). Therefore, women's education in Manggarai is not only an indicator of personal success, but also a social symbol that increases a family's prestige and position in society. In addition, research results also reveal a close relationship between women's academic achievement and social prestige in Manggarai society (Tanggur & Vera, 2021) (Tanggur, Shole, et al., 2024). Women's education is more than just a means to acquire knowledge, it is also a status symbol that reflects success and progress. High academic achievement is often seen as an indicator of social advancement, and women who successfully complete higher education or obtain higher academic degrees are considered to have higher social standing (Tuwu, 2018). The higher the level of education achieved by women, the greater the respect received, both by the individual woman herself and by her family. The higher the level of education achieved by a woman, the greater the esteem in which she is held, both by the individual woman herself and by her family. Women who successfully pursue higher education often gain a more respectable position in the social structure, and their academic achievements also expand economic opportunities (Tanggur, Shole, et al., 2024). In many cases, highly educated women are more likely to get better jobs, which in turn contributes to improving the social status of their families (Suparno et al., 2023).

Manggarai society increasingly values women who have higher education, considering them not only personally successful, but also as bearers of honor for their families (Tanggur, Shole, et al., 2024). Education is thus one of the main factors in attaining higher social status in this community. However, to accelerate changes in social status, there needs to be greater concerted efforts to support access to education for women. This includes the

provision of better educational facilities, the reduction of social and cultural barriers that hinder women's access to education, and the empowerment of women so that they are more motivated to pursue higher education (Thania, 2024).

Women's Education Motivation in Belis Culture

The results showed that through in-depth interviews and observations of the daily lives of the Manggarai community, it was found that Bellis culture plays an important role in shaping women's views on higher education. Many women feel a strong urge to continue their education as part of the social norms and cultural expectations that exist in the community. Bellis culture, with all its values and symbols, provides motivation and belief that higher education is an important step in achieving respect and a higher position in society. In the belis tradition, the higher a woman's education, the higher the value of the belis she receives. As a result, women who want to improve their social status through belis culture often feel encouraged to continue their education to a higher level (Firmando, 2021). This forms a strong relationship between belis culture and educational attainment, where highly educated women are considered capable of bringing honor to the family.

Belis culture in Manggarai has long been seen as a symbol of respect for women and their families. However, through in-depth interviews and observations, this study reveals that Belis culture also functions as a social incentive that encourages women to pursue higher education. In the view of the Manggarai community, women who successfully pursue higher education are often regarded as a symbol of prestige, and families with highly educated female members are rewarded and given more respect within the framework of Belis culture (Supriatin & Nasution, 2017). Women who have a higher education will have an impact on the amount of belis that must be fulfilled by a man if he wants to propose to a Manggarai woman. This shows that higher education for women is not only seen as a personal achievement, but also as a factor that strengthens the social position and honor of the family in society (Edo & Yasin, 2024).

Furthermore, in interviews with several young women who have pursued higher education, they revealed that the expectation of receiving a high amount of Belis at the time of marriage played a major role in motivating them to continue their studies. They believe that highly educated women are seen as more respected in Manggarai society (Haloho, 2022). "In Manggarai, families that have highly educated women are seen as more respected, so the Belis that must be fulfilled is also large. That's

what pushes me to keep struggling so that I can finish my education,” said one of the research informants. This suggests that the Belis culture serves as a social incentive that gives women the confidence to pursue higher education (Wong et al., 2020). Thus, higher education for women is also considered a way to improve the social status of the family in the view of the local community and can be a role model in the community and a symbol of family success (Putranto, 2018). As a result, more and more families are encouraging their daughters to pursue higher education in the hope that it will improve the family's social status. One informant who works as a teacher in an elementary school stated, “Belis culture not only teaches respect, but also teaches the importance of education for women. This is a big incentive for us to continue our education to a higher level.” In this context, Belis culture plays an important role in improving the quality of women's education, as well as strengthening the social position and honor of families in Manggarai society.

Women's Learning Motivation in Building Educational Social Prestige through Belis Culture for the Manggarai Community

The results show that the Belis culture for the Manggarai community has a significant impact in encouraging women's learning motivation, especially in their efforts to achieve higher educational achievements. Belis culture has been known as a symbol of respect in marriage, but this research shows that it also acts as a strong motivating factor for women to improve their educational achievement (Neonnub & Habsari, 2018). In the Manggarai tradition, the higher the level of education a woman has, the greater the value of the belis received by her family, which is considered a recognition of the woman's success and social status. This creates a strong motivation for women to strive harder in education, with the hope of obtaining a higher belis value, which in turn can increase their family's social prestige in the eyes of the community.

Although belis culture is a significant external driver, women's learning motivation is also influenced by intrinsic factors, such as the desire to develop themselves and achieve personal goals (Octavia, 2020). Therefore, the role of belis culture as an external motivator must be understood in a broader context, where women's education is not only seen as a means to fulfill social expectations, but also as a tool to improve their own quality of life. This intrinsic motivation suggests that women who pursue higher education are driven not only by belis culture, but also by a desire to reach their full potential as individuals (Javed et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is important to note that the influence

of belis culture on women's motivation to learn may vary depending on the level of education they attain, be it primary, secondary or tertiary education, which requires further analysis to understand the impact at each level of education.

The belis culture also influences women's participation in higher education (Tanggur, et al., 2024). The findings of this study show that women who come from families that understand the link between education and belis culture are more likely to continue their studies to university level. In the Manggarai community, the higher the level of education women have, the greater the value of belis received by their families. Therefore, higher education is not only seen as a personal achievement, but also as a valuable social investment (Tosepu, 2018). In this context, higher education is perceived as a way to improve the social status of the family, which encourages women to strive to continue their education to a higher level. The data above shows that belis culture has a major impact in encouraging women to learn and achieve in education. By viewing education as a means to improve social status through belis, this culture encourages many women to pursue higher education (Kurnia et al., 2022b).

CONCLUSION

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that Belis culture in Manggarai society plays a very significant role in building the social prestige of education, especially in valuing women's education. In this tradition, the higher the level of education of a woman, the greater the value of Belis received, which reflects the recognition of the educational achievements of women and their families. Women's education is no longer seen only as a personal achievement, but also as a symbol of social prestige that provides recognition in the community. Belis culture serves as a strong incentive for women to pursue higher education, as the higher the education, the higher the rewards received in the form of Belis. Thus, women's education becomes a means to improve their social status and that of their families, which in turn improves women's social position in society. This reflects a change in perspective in Manggarai society, which has now begun to value education as a factor determining women's social status, which was previously more limited to domestic roles. However, although Belis culture gives a positive boost to the social prestige of highly educated women, this phenomenon also presents challenges, especially regarding economic inequality. Families that are unable to fulfill the high Belis obligation may find it difficult to access higher education, especially for women who come from

financially disadvantaged families. Therefore, to ensure that the value of education can be felt equally by all women, efforts need to be made to address economic disparities and support the sustainability of access to education for women from different social strata. Overall, Belis culture in Manggarai has become a bridge between education and social prestige, creating social incentives that encourage women to pursue higher education. However, to ensure more equitable benefits for all, it is important to create a more inclusive environment, taking into account the social, economic and cultural barriers that can still hinder women's access to education. In this regard, family economic empowerment and the provision of better educational facilities can play a key role in strengthening the positive impact of Belis culture on the social status of women's education.

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