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Exploring Theological Education: Opportunities for Educational Technology Integration

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Exploring Theological Education: Opportunities for Educational Technology Integration

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Abstract

Theological education is pivotal in societies, yet its implementation within indigenous maritime communities remains underexplored. This study examines the Bajo people of Buton Regency, a community where cultural traditions, geographic isolation, and socioeconomic realities intersect to influence educational access. Despite strong adherence to theology, significant structural barriers and the absence of formal theological institutions challenge the transmission of religious values. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this study explores the community's perceptions of theological education. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, with triangulation ensuring validity. Findings reveal that formal theological schools are absent, and the nearest institutions are 8–18 kilometers away—a prohibitive distance due to cost and limited transportation. In response, the community relies on highly valued non-formal (study circles) and informal (family-based) education. These structures are prized for their cultural relevance, flexibility, and communal ownership. For the Bajo, theological education is a vital source of moral development, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. The community's engagement is shaped by these practical realities. Structural barriers, not a lack of motivation, limit access to formal schooling, making non-formal and informal learning central to religious life. These findings underscore the need for context-sensitive, community-based educational models, potentially supported by appropriate educational technologies.

Introduction

Education serves as the fundamental cornerstone for societal advancement and civilization development, with its quality directly determining the progress of nations and communities (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020; Barro, 2013). The advancement of any society is significantly influenced by the educational level of its population, as education represents the most valuable investment and strategic asset for both nations and humanity as a whole (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). Through education, societies can achieve higher levels of civilization, as it plays a crucial role in shaping families, communities, and nations while determining their existence and development trajectory (Barro, 2013). In the context of Muslim-majority societies, theological or Islamic education holds particular significance in character formation and moral development of younger generations,

extending beyond religious knowledge transmission to encompass essential moral and ethical values for community life (Sulaiman & Rahman, 2021; Abdullah & Hashim, 2020). The role of Islamic education in society development cannot be understated, as Islam positions education as a primary concern, evidenced by the first revelation from Allah emphasizing the importance of reading and learning (Quran 96:1-5). Islamic educational institutions operate through three interconnected pillars: informal education within family environments, formal education in schools and madrasas, and non-formal education within community settings (Sulaiman & Rahman, 2021). This tri-centered educational approach ensures comprehensive human resource development when properly implemented, contributing to optimal societal advancement. Contemporary Islamic education faces significant challenges including limited access to quality education, inadequate human resource quality and educational relevance, and weak educational management systems, alongside insufficient implementation of scientific and technological excellence among academics (Abdullah & Hashim, 2020).

In light of these challenges, recent advances in educational technology offer promising tools for overcoming barriers to access and quality, especially in remote and underserved communities. Mobile learning platforms, offline digital Qur'an apps, and community-shared audiovisual materials can complement traditional Islamic instruction and bridge infrastructure gaps without displacing culturally embedded practices (Afriani, 2023). Educational technology, when designed with cultural and infrastructural sensitivity, has shown the potential to support religious education through flexible, learner-centered delivery models, including asynchronous and multimodal approaches (Trucano, 2016). For communities like Bajo Bahari—where internet connectivity, electricity, and transportation are limited—low-tech solutions such as solar-powered audio devices, preloaded Islamic content on mobile phones, and portable digital libraries could offer contextually appropriate alternatives. Moreover, these tools can be integrated into existing non-formal systems such as TPQ and Majelis Taklim to enhance engagement and retention, particularly among youth and women. While not a substitute for community-based learning, educational technology may act as a bridge—extending the reach and effectiveness of Islamic education in geographically isolated, resource-constrained environments.

Despite extensive research on Islamic education globally, there remains a significant gap in understanding how indigenous maritime communities, particularly the Bajo people, perceive and engage with Islamic educational initiatives. The Bajo community, known as one of Indonesia's most seafaring ethnic groups, presents a unique case study due to their distinctive cultural practices, maritime lifestyle, and settlement patterns along coastal areas throughout Indonesia (Lapian, 2019; Fausayana & Rabani, 2020). Buton Regency in Southeast Sulawesi province exemplifies this diversity, hosting various ethnic groups including the Bajo community in Bajo Bahari Village, Wabula District, which became a definitive village in 2011, previously being part of the mainland Holimombo Village (Lapian, 2019).

Research on community perceptions toward Islamic education reveals varying acceptance levels influenced by cultural backgrounds, traditional practices, and socioeconomic factors (Sulaiman & Rahman, 2021). However, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how maritime communities, specifically the Bajo people, conceptualize, interpret, and respond to Islamic educational programs within their unique cultural context. The Bajo community's traditional maritime lifestyle, characterized by months-long sea voyages and deep ocean-

oriented worldview, presents distinctive challenges and opportunities for Islamic educational implementation that warrant systematic investigation (Lapian, 2019; Fausayana & Rabani, 2020). Furthermore, while the entire Bajo community in Bajo Bahari Village practices Islam, their understanding and internalization of Islamic teachings require enhanced attention from Islamic education stakeholders, with village leadership indicating that only approximately 60% of the community adequately comprehends and internalizes Islamic values prior to formal Islamic educational institution establishment.

This study addresses the identified research gap by examining Bajo community perceptions of Islamic education in Bajo Bahari Village, Buton Regency, through comprehensive qualitative analysis. The research investigates three primary dimensions: (1) community leaders' perceptions of Islamic education implementation, (2) fishermen community members' perspectives on Islamic educational programs, and (3) the impact of these perceptions on community participation and Islamic value internalization. By employing in-depth interviews with community leaders and fishermen, this study aims to contribute valuable insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and Islamic education practitioners seeking to develop culturally responsive and effective Islamic educational programs for maritime communities. The findings are expected to enhance understanding of perception formation mechanisms within indigenous communities and provide practical guidance for improving Islamic education quality and community participation in coastal areas.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive field approach, emphasizing the need for direct engagement with the community to understand complex, dynamic, and meaningful social phenomena (Moleong, 2017; Ali & Asrori, 2014).

Type and Location of Research

The study is categorized as field research, requiring the researcher to be present in the community to address practical issues arising in society. The research is descriptive in nature, focusing on current facts and attitudes within the population (Sugiyono, 2017). The qualitative approach aims to analyze social life from the informants' perspectives within their natural context (Moleong, 2017). The research was conducted in Bajo Bahari Village, Wabula District, Buton Regency, chosen for its unique maritime culture and the community's traditional perceptions about Islamic education.

Scientific and Methodological Approaches

The scientific and methodological approaches in this study are firmly rooted in the phenomenological tradition, which seeks to understand phenomena from the participants' own perspectives within their natural context (Moleong, 2017). This approach is particularly relevant in qualitative research where the aim is to capture the richness, complexity, and meaning of lived experiences as they are interpreted by the individuals themselves (Ali & Asrori, 2014). In practice, the phenomenological method involves the researcher immersing themselves in the

field, engaging in direct observation, and conducting in-depth interviews to reveal how participants perceive and make sense of their world, suspending any preconceived notions or theoretical biases (Sohn et al., 2017; Groenewald, 2004). The research process is flexible and iterative, allowing for the continuous refinement of understanding as new data and insights emerge (Groenewald, 2004).

Research Design and Data Collection

The research design is flexible, allowing for changes during the study to better capture the social context. Data collection techniques included:

- a. In-depth interviews with 17 key informants, such as community leaders, fishermen, religious educators, and teachers.
- b. Participant observation of community engagement in Islamic education and the internalization of Islamic values.
- c. Document analysis of relevant books, reports, and official records (Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Suryabrata, 2004).

Data Sources

- a. Primary data: Directly obtained from fieldwork through interviews and observations, emphasizing the emic perspective (Sugiyono, 2017).
- b. Secondary data: Sourced from literature, research reports, and documents related to the research topic (Suryabrata, 2004).

Data Processing and Analysis

Data analysis followed the stages of thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis to provide a deep understanding of the phenomena. The process included data condensation, data display, and drawing/verification of conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The analysis was iterative, allowing for hypothesis refinement as new data emerged.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, the study employed triangulation, member checking, and audit trails (Rukajat, 2018). Prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, and peer debriefing were also used to enhance trustworthiness (Emzir, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and minimizing

potential harm to participants. The researcher avoided intruding on participants' privacy and ensured that all data collection instruments were used ethically.

Psychological Approaches

Three psychological approaches were used to interpret community behavior:

- a. Behavioristic: Focused on observable behaviors and environmental interactions.
- b. Cognitive: Examined thought processes and perceptions regarding Islamic education.
- c. Humanistic: Explored personal growth and subjective experiences in relation to education.

Applying behavioristic, cognitive, and humanistic psychological approaches in educational research is urgent and necessary to holistically understand and transform community learning processes. The behavioristic approach is crucial for its empirical focus on observable behaviors and the role of reinforcement and environmental stimuli in shaping educational outcomes, providing a foundation for effective behavior change interventions (Murtonen et al., 2017). The cognitive approach is indispensable because it illuminates how individuals process information, construct knowledge, and adapt to new educational paradigms—insights that are essential for designing instruction that fosters meaningful learning and higher-order thinking. Meanwhile, the humanistic approach addresses the affective and motivational dimensions of learning, emphasizing personal growth, autonomy, and self-actualization, which are vital for nurturing lifelong learners who are engaged and resilient in the face of social change (Hill, 1999). Integrating these three approaches not only ensures a scientifically robust analysis but also empowers educational practice to be adaptive, learner-centered, and responsive to the complex realities of diverse communities.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by observation guides, interview protocols, cameras, recording devices, and documentation checklists (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2017).

Results

This section presents the key findings from the field research conducted in Bajo Bahari Village, focusing on the community's perceptions of Islamic education. The results are organized into four major categories: (1) availability and access to Islamic education institutions, (2) implementation of Islamic education, (3) content of Islamic education, and (4) community perceptions and attitudes.

Availability and Access to Islamic Education Institutions

The availability and accessibility of Islamic education in Bajo Bahari Village are notably limited, particularly in terms of formal religious schooling. This limitation has significant implications for the way Islamic education is

perceived and practiced in the community.

Formal Islamic Education

Bajo Bahari Village does not host any formal Islamic educational institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, or Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). The village instead relies on two general formal education institutions — SD Negeri 115 Buton (elementary level) and SMP Satu Atap 50 Buton (junior high school level). While these schools include *Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti* (Islamic and Character Education) as part of the national curriculum, they are not specialized in delivering in-depth Islamic teachings or creating an immersive Islamic learning environment. Consequently, students in Bajo Bahari receive only a limited exposure to religious education within the formal school framework.

Non-Formal Islamic Education

To address the absence of formal Islamic schools, the community has established two significant non-formal Islamic institutions:

- Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (TPQ) Al-Bahrun: A community-based initiative aimed at teaching Qur'an reading, tajwid, basic Islamic doctrines (aqidah), and moral education (akhlak) to children and adolescents. Classes are held regularly in the village mosque using a halaqah (study circle) model, which is highly interactive and culturally familiar to the community.
- Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrun: Primarily attended by adult women, this religious study group convenes weekly and serves as a space for Islamic learning, spiritual development, and community bonding. It covers Qur'anic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, and religious observances, and plays an important role in adult religious education and social-religious networking.

Both institutions were founded through collaboration between local religious leaders, village authorities, and community members, illustrating the village's proactive stance in sustaining Islamic learning despite structural limitations.

Access Challenges to Formal Islamic Institutions

Although there is interest in accessing more comprehensive Islamic education, logistical barriers significantly hinder participation:

- The nearest Madrasah Tsanawiyah is located approximately 8 kilometers away in the district capital of Wabula, while Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Buton is about 18 kilometers away in the regency capital, Pasarwajo.
- For families living in a fishing-based, lower-income community with limited transportation infrastructure, daily commuting to these institutions is not feasible.

- As a result, no children from Bajo Bahari are currently enrolled in these formal Islamic schools.

The findings reveal that despite a strong desire for comprehensive Islamic education among Bajo Bahari residents, significant logistical barriers impede access to formal institutions. The nearest Madrasah Tsanawiyah is about 8 kilometers away in Wabula, and Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Buton is 18 kilometers away in Pasarwajo. For this fishing-based, lower-income community with limited transportation, daily commuting is not feasible. Consequently, no children from Bajo Bahari are currently enrolled in these formal Islamic schools. This situation stems not from a lack of motivation, but from geographic isolation and structural inequalities. As a result, the community relies heavily on local informal and non-formal alternatives to fulfill their religious educational needs. These access challenges do not reflect a lack of motivation or value placed on Islamic education, but rather structural inequalities and geographic isolation. This gap underscores the community's dependence on local, informal, and non-formal alternatives to fulfill their religious educational needs.

Given these limitations, educational technology—such as preloaded digital Qur'an applications, solar-powered audio devices, and offline learning modules—could serve as culturally appropriate and low-cost supplementary tools for religious instruction in Bajo Bahari. These solutions are particularly relevant in communities where transportation barriers and economic hardship prevent regular attendance at distant madrasahs. Offline mobile devices can deliver structured Qur'anic lessons, tajwid tutorials, and basic Islamic studies without the need for internet connectivity. Solar-powered media players can be distributed through local institutions like TPQ or Majelis Taklim, allowing families to access audio-based learning during evening hours or when elders are unavailable to teach. Rather than replacing traditional instruction, these technologies can reinforce existing non-formal and informal systems by supporting repetition, self-paced study, and household participation. From a pedagogical perspective, such tools align with the principles of distributed learning and community-based education, making them suitable for marginalized maritime contexts. Their adoption could reduce dependence on distant institutions while expanding access to quality religious education at the household level.

Implementation of Islamic Education

The implementation of Islamic education in Bajo Bahari Village is characterized by its flexibility, community engagement, and reliance on non-formal and informal mechanisms. In the absence of formal Islamic institutions, religious education is delivered through multiple settings: state schools, community-initiated religious centers, and family environments. This multilayered approach reflects the community's resourcefulness and cultural embeddedness in practicing their faith.

Integration of Islamic Education in Public Schools

Although SD Negeri 115 Buton and SMP Satap 50 Buton are general public schools, they incorporate Islamic education through the “Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti” curriculum. This subject is part of the national education framework and is delivered by appointed Islamic education teachers. The content includes Islamic beliefs (aqidah), practices (ibadah), ethics (akhlak), and historical elements, thereby providing foundational

religious knowledge to students. In addition to the standard curriculum, both schools run a specialized program known as “Pengajian Siswa” (Student Qur’an Recitation Program):

- At SD Negeri 115 Buton, the program is conducted before dismissal time and emphasizes Qur’an reading, moral advice, and communal prayer practices.
- At SMP Satap 50 Buton, the sessions are held after *Asr* prayer. Male teachers lead male students and female teachers lead female students, ensuring culturally appropriate instruction.

These initiatives demonstrate the schools’ commitment to reinforcing Islamic values and practices, despite their generalist educational mandate.

Religious Instruction at TPQ Al-Bahrin

TPQ Al-Bahrin serves as the village’s primary non-formal religious educational institution for children and teenagers. Founded in 2011 alongside the village’s administrative formation, it was established to ensure that young people acquire the ability to read the Qur’an and understand essential Islamic teachings.

Key features of the TPQ program include:

- Evening classes from Monday to Thursday held at the village mosque.
- Use of the halaqah system, where students sit in a circle around a teacher for interactive, oral-based learning.
- A curriculum focused on Qur’anic literacy, tajwid, daily prayers, and moral education (akhlaq).

The TPQ is widely supported by families and community leaders, illustrating strong communal ownership and participation in sustaining Islamic learning.

Religious Enrichment through Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrin

Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrin is another central pillar of non-formal Islamic education in the village. Targeted at adult women, this group holds regular study sessions every Friday after *Asr* prayer. Its functions include:

- Teaching Qur’anic recitation and interpretation.
- Delivering religious advice and practical Islamic knowledge.
- Organizing religious gatherings and celebrations such as *Maulid Nabi* and *halal bi halal* events.

Additionally, the Majelis participates in inter-village gatherings hosted on a rotating basis across the Wabula subdistrict. This creates wider religious networking and knowledge exchange among women in different villages.

While TPQ Al-Bahrin relies primarily on oral, in-person instruction using the halaqah model, there is growing interest among some families in complementing these sessions with educational media—such as audio Qur’an

recitations, video recordings of ustadz explaining tajwid, and mobile applications with child-friendly religious content. These tools can reinforce classroom learning by enabling students to review lessons at home, especially in households where parents may not be confident in guiding Qur'anic recitation themselves. Moreover, the use of locally appropriate, offline materials—distributed via USB, memory cards, or basic mobile phones—can promote independent learning and facilitate parental involvement. Integrating such media into TPQ activities could improve retention, accommodate different learning paces, and support children who miss sessions due to fishing-related responsibilities or weather constraints. This blended approach—combining traditional pedagogy with simple educational technologies—offers a promising path for enhancing the reach and impact of TPQ-based religious education.

Informal Islamic Education within Families

Islamic education also occurs organically within households, where parents—especially fathers and elders—provide religious instruction through daily interactions, advice, and exemplary behavior. Examples of such informal teachings include:

- Encouraging children to avoid harming others, even animals, which reflects values of compassion and responsibility.
- Teaching ethical principles in fishing practices, such as not taking what belongs to others, reinforcing honesty and integrity.

This informal, value-driven education demonstrates that Islamic learning in Bajo Bahari extends beyond institutions and is deeply woven into everyday life.

Content of Islamic Education

The content of Islamic education in Bajo Bahari Village varies across formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments. Each setting offers unique contributions to the religious development of community members. While formal education introduces foundational knowledge, non-formal and informal education deliver a more practical and context-sensitive understanding of Islamic teachings, adapted to the community's cultural and socio-economic realities.

Content in Formal Education Institutions

Islamic education in SD Negeri 115 Buton and SMP Satap 50 Buton is delivered through the subject “Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti”. According to the interviewed teachers, this subject covers five core areas:

- Aqidah (Faith): Basic Islamic beliefs such as the oneness of God, the prophets, and the afterlife.
- Shariah (Islamic Law): Practical aspects of worship and religious obligations.
- Akhlak (Morality): Emphasis on good behavior, ethics, and respectful conduct.

- Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam (Islamic History and Civilization): Narratives from the Prophet's life and early Islamic societies.
- Ibadah (Worship): Ritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and purification.

The teachers also reported that student comprehension levels vary. Some students grasp religious concepts quickly, while others require repetition and simplified explanations. To address these differences, educators adopt patient, adaptive teaching methods, reinforcing content through the school's "Pengajian Siswa" program.

This program further enriches the curriculum by including:

- Qur'anic Reading: Improving fluency in recitation and memorization.
- Moral and Religious Advice: Delivered informally by teachers to reinforce classroom learning.
- Prayer Practices: Emphasis on communal prayer to build discipline and spiritual awareness.

Content in TPQ Al-Bahrin

As a dedicated non-formal institution, TPQ Al-Bahrin focuses on early Qur'anic literacy and religious understanding. The core components of its curriculum include:

- Qur'an Reading and Tajwid: Correct pronunciation and fluency in reading the Arabic text.
- Do'a (Daily Prayers): Memorization and recitation of daily supplications.
- Basic Religious Doctrine: Teachings on belief (aqidah), worship (ibadah), and morals (akhlak), designed to be easily understood by children and adolescents.

The system of instruction is traditional and oral, using the halaqah method in mosque settings, which is both intimate and effective for small-group learning. The learning environment is informal, respectful, and allows for peer support, making it well-suited to the cultural context of Bajo Bahari.

Content in Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrin

The Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrin provides more advanced and communal religious instruction for adult women. Its regular curriculum consists of:

- Qur'an Recitation and Tafsir (Interpretation): Focusing on both fluency and meaning.
- Yasinan and Sholawat: Communal practices to foster spiritual reflection and social bonds.
- Aqidah, Ibadah, and Akhlak Lessons: Delivered through sermons and interactive discussions.
- Religious Events: Participation in activities like *Maulid Nabi* and *Halal Bihalal* for reinforcing Islamic identity and community cohesion.

The group also joins monthly rotating **inter-village** Majelis Taklim meetings, providing members exposure to broader perspectives and reinforcing religious solidarity within the Wabula subdistrict.

Content in Family-Based Informal Education

In Bajo Bahari, many Islamic values are transmitted within the household in a natural, spontaneous manner. Parents and elders emphasize:

- **Moral Conduct:** Children are taught to avoid harming others and to behave respectfully.
- **Religious Ethics in Daily Life:** For example, parents teach their children not to take fish caught by others — an ethical lesson rooted in Islamic honesty and trust.

Although not delivered through a structured curriculum, this informal education plays a significant role in embedding Islamic values into the daily lives of Bajo youth. It complements institutional efforts and reflects the importance of lived, example-based learning in Islamic tradition.

Community Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Islamic Education

The perceptions and attitudes of the Bajo community in Bajo Bahari Village toward Islamic education are generally positive and rooted in practical, cultural, and social experiences rather than abstract or theological frameworks. The qualitative data reveals several interrelated themes regarding how Islamic education is viewed and why it is valued.

General Perception: Islamic Education as a Moral and Social Necessity

The majority of community members — including village leaders, teachers, parents, and religious figures — perceive Islamic education as essential for shaping character and ensuring moral integrity among children and adults alike. This perception is not limited to academic outcomes, but extends to social behavior, ethics, and spiritual well-being. As one village leader noted, Islamic education is necessary to "strengthen the faith and behavior of future generations in a rapidly changing world." This aligns with Alizamar and Couto's multidimensional theory of perception, which highlights that individuals perceive phenomena not just through knowledge, but also through beliefs, needs, values, assumptions, and attitudes.

Preference for Non-Formal and Informal Education

Due to logistical challenges in accessing formal Islamic institutions, the community demonstrates a strong preference and trust in locally-available, non-formal education:

- TPQ Al-Bahrūn and Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrūn are viewed as highly valuable resources, not only for teaching religious content but also for fostering communal unity and cultural continuity.
- These institutions are trusted largely because they are community-driven, culturally contextualized, and flexible in addressing learners' needs — especially for children and women who may not travel outside the village.

The positive perception is reinforced by visible benefits, such as improved Qur'an literacy among children and increased participation in religious rituals.

Perception of Barriers as Structural, Not Ideological

Importantly, the community does not reject formal Islamic education on ideological grounds. Instead, the lack of participation in madrasahs or pesantrens is attributed to **structural barriers**, such as:

- Long distances to school (8–18 km),
- Limited transportation and financial resources,
- The time-consuming nature of travel, particularly for children from fishing families who have household responsibilities.

Community members repeatedly expressed that if madrasahs were available within the village, they would support and enroll their children.

Influence of Local Leaders and Cultural Norms

The perception and participation in Islamic education are significantly shaped by local leaders, both religious and administrative. Their active involvement in establishing and maintaining TPQ and Majelis Taklim has legitimized these institutions and encouraged broad community engagement. Moreover, the cultural norms of the Bajo people, such as strong communal ties, respect for elders, and oral transmission of knowledge, align well with the non-formal, discussion-based formats used in Islamic education in the village.

Emphasis on Practical Application Over Theoretical Knowledge

Finally, the community values practical religious knowledge — such as how to pray correctly, behave ethically, and recite the Qur'an — over abstract theological discussions. This practical orientation is evident in both institutional programs and informal parental guidance. Religious education is thus perceived as successful when it directly improves daily behavior, enhances spiritual consciousness, and reinforces community harmony.

Discussion

Limited Access to Formal Islamic Education

One of the most prominent findings of this study is the complete absence of formal Islamic educational institutions—such as *madrasah* or *pesantren*—within Bajo Bahari Village. This institutional gap has a tangible impact on the community's ability to access structured and certified Islamic learning pathways, particularly for children and adolescents.

The nearest madrasah (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah* and *Madrasah Aliyah*) are located approximately 8 to 18 kilometers

away, situated in the subdistrict and regency capitals. While these distances may seem moderate in urban contexts, they pose significant challenges in a rural coastal setting where most households rely on fishing for their livelihoods and lack reliable transportation. For children of the Bajo community—many of whom also help with domestic or economic activities—daily commuting to distant schools is neither affordable nor logistically sustainable.

Importantly, the community's lack of participation in formal Islamic education should not be misinterpreted as religious indifference. On the contrary, qualitative interviews indicate a high level of interest and appreciation for Islamic learning. However, this interest is undermined by structural constraints that are beyond the control of most households. This finding is consistent with educational accessibility theory, which argues that proximity, affordability, and infrastructural access are critical determinants of enrollment and sustained participation in schooling—particularly in marginalized areas. Moreover, this scenario reflects what Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized as “cultural capital deficiency” within structurally disadvantaged communities. Although the Bajo community highly values religious knowledge, their lack of physical access to formal institutions limits their ability to accumulate the recognized credentials (e.g., madrasah diplomas) that carry social and institutional legitimacy.

The case of Bajo Bahari underscores a broader policy gap in rural Islamic education. National and regional education systems often rely on urban-centric planning, which overlooks the unique geographic and cultural realities of coastal or island communities. The community's unmet demand for accessible madrasah education points to a need for more decentralized, community-based models of formal Islamic schooling, supported by the Ministry of Religious Affairs or through public-private partnerships. In summary, the community's limited access to formal Islamic education is not the result of low demand or cultural resistance, but a consequence of systemic infrastructural and geographic barriers. The result is a structural exclusion from certified Islamic learning—an issue that must be addressed through policy innovation, localized planning, and infrastructure support tailored to remote and maritime communities.

The Role of Informal and Non-Formal Islamic Education

In the absence of formal Islamic institutions, the Bajo community of Bajo Bahari Village has effectively sustained religious learning through non-formal and informal educational structures. Two prominent institutions—Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (TPQ) Al-Bahrin and Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrin—serve as the principal pillars of religious education in the village. These institutions exemplify a community-driven response to structural exclusion from formal systems, offering access to Islamic knowledge in culturally relevant and locally accessible formats.

Community-Initiated, Culturally Embedded Models

Both TPQ and Majelis Taklim are grassroots initiatives, established by village leaders and supported collectively by residents. Their survival and success suggest that community ownership and social trust are key drivers in the continuity of non-formal education. These settings are not just educational venues—they function as spiritual,

social, and cultural hubs, where learning is closely tied to collective religious life and identity.

From an educational theory standpoint, this aligns with social constructivism, particularly Vygotsky's emphasis on the importance of social interaction and cultural context in the learning process. In TPQ and Majelis Taklim, religious knowledge is transmitted not through abstract instruction, but through dialogue, repetition, role modeling, and shared ritual. These methods are particularly effective in oral cultures like that of the Bajo people, where verbal transmission and collective participation are traditional modes of knowledge acquisition.

Non-Formal Education as a Functional Substitute

Although these institutions lack the formal certification of a madrasah or pesantren, they provide comprehensive coverage of essential Islamic content—Qur'anic literacy, aqidah, ibadah, and akhlak—ensuring that children and adults alike receive religious instruction. The teaching of tajwid (Qur'anic pronunciation), daily prayers, and basic theology reflects an adherence to core Islamic educational standards, despite the informal context. This substitution effect reflects the relevance of Alternative Education Theory, which posits that in underserved communities, non-formal institutions may become primary vehicles of educational transmission, not simply supplemental ones. In Bajo Bahari, TPQ and Majelis Taklim are not “second-best” alternatives—they are the central infrastructure through which Islamic education is sustained.

Although not yet widespread in Bajo Bahari, the integration of educational technology into non-formal learning environments offers a promising direction for future program development. Community centers or TPQs could introduce shared tablet devices loaded with curated Islamic content, or use audio-visual aids to reinforce Qur'anic literacy among learners. Digital tools—especially low-bandwidth or offline formats—are particularly appropriate for oral-tradition communities, enhancing student retention, motivation, and accessibility without requiring stable internet connections or high-cost infrastructure (Mintasih et al., 2021). The blended learning model, which strategically combines face-to-face instruction with offline or online educational media, has been shown to strengthen motivation, independent learning, and knowledge retention in Islamic education contexts across Indonesia (Setiawan, 2019; Idris et al., 2023). Such approaches may enhance existing non-formal Islamic learning structures—including TPQ and Majelis Taklim—by offering flexible, culturally consistent tools that respect local traditions while expanding educational reach.

Flexibility and Accessibility for Marginalized Learners

Another strength of these non-formal systems is their flexibility in schedule, pedagogy, and participation, which allows learners from various age groups and backgrounds to attend. For example:

- TPQ operates during evenings, accommodating school children and teenagers who are otherwise engaged during the day.
- Majelis Taklim sessions cater primarily to adult women, many of whom were unable to access religious learning in their youth.

Such flexibility aligns with the principles of lifelong learning and inclusive education, expanding access to religious knowledge beyond school-age populations and formal timeframes.

Religious Education Beyond the Classroom

These institutions also promote communal spirituality. Majelis Taklim gatherings include *Yasinan*, group *sholawat*, and seasonal religious celebrations such as *Maulid Nabi* and *Halal Bihalal*, integrating ritual, emotion, and identity into the educational experience. This reflects Durkheim's theory of moral education, which emphasizes that learning is not only cognitive, but also emotional and social—shaping individuals' values through collective experience.

Perception Rooted in Practical Outcomes and Cultural Relevance

One of the most defining features of the Bajo community's attitude toward Islamic education is that it is not shaped primarily by abstract theological concepts, but by the practical benefits and cultural alignment that Islamic learning brings to their daily lives. This functional, experience-based perspective explains why Islamic education remains valued and active, even in a context without formal institutions.

Islamic Education as Social and Moral Capital

For the Bajo people, Islamic education is perceived first and foremost as a means of moral development. It is expected to produce youth who are polite, responsible, honest, and spiritually grounded. Parents and local leaders often associate religious education with positive behavioral transformation, such as avoiding harmful actions, practicing respect, and maintaining honesty in fishing and trade. This perception corresponds to the pragmatic function of education in traditional societies, where learning is expected to generate tangible improvements in social behavior. It also reflects Bandura's Social Learning Theory, in which behavior is shaped through observation, imitation, and reinforcement—functions that are visibly embedded in the TPQ, Majelis Taklim, and family teachings of Bajo Bahari.

Religious Education as a Cultural Continuity Tool

The community's approach to Islamic education is deeply embedded in their cultural fabric. Rather than being an imported or externally imposed system, Islam has been integrated organically into the Bajo way of life. For example:

- Moral teachings are linked with daily experiences, such as advice not to steal fish traps or harm marine life.
- Qur'an recitation is learned not for competition or examination, but for its spiritual significance and communal belonging.

- Religious activities are interwoven with local traditions and celebrations, reinforcing cultural identity alongside faith.

This highlights the relevance of Edward Stewart’s Cultural Perception Theory, which suggests that perception is mediated through cultural values, rituals, and lived experiences. In Bajo Bahari, Islamic education is not an institutionalized requirement—it is a way of living Islam through culturally appropriate practices.

Trust in Localized, Tangible Impact

Community members express high levels of trust and appreciation for local religious institutions—TPQ and Majelis Taklim—precisely because these are visible, interactive, and responsive to their real-life needs. Learning is seen as effective when it results in:

- Children being able to read the Qur’an,
- Adults becoming more reflective and ethical,
- A stronger sense of community during shared religious events.

This perception is grounded in what sociocultural learning theory refers to as situated cognition—knowledge and values are constructed through meaningful activity in social contexts, not abstract information delivered in isolation.

Modest Expectations, Deep Commitments

Interestingly, while the Bajo community does not emphasize mastery of advanced Islamic sciences (e.g., *fiqh*, *tafsir*, or *usul al-din*), they firmly uphold the core values of Islam through consistent practice and moral emphasis. Their expectations are modest—basic literacy, moral integrity, and ritual observance—but their commitment to these goals is deep and consistent. This reflects a “practical religiosity” model, commonly found in rural or resource-constrained Muslim communities, where the goal of education is not scholarly distinction but faithful, righteous living. In conclusion, the perception of Islamic education in Bajo Bahari is shaped by what it does for the community—enhancing morality, strengthening communal bonds, and preserving cultural identity. This perception reinforces the idea that the value of education is not only in its structure, but in its impact on the human and social condition.

The Family as a Crucial Site of Islamic Socialization

The findings of this study affirm the enduring role of the family unit as a foundational pillar of Islamic education in Bajo Bahari Village. In a context where formal institutions are absent and non-formal learning is limited in scope and schedule, the family emerges as a vital site for the continuous, informal transmission of Islamic values, ethics, and behavior.

Moral Education Through Parental Guidance

In Bajo households, Islamic education primarily takes the form of daily moral instruction and role modeling. Parents—especially fathers and elders—impart lessons rooted in Islamic ethics, such as:

- Encouraging honesty, even in unsupervised environments like the sea.
- Teaching non-violence and respect toward others and even animals.
- Reinforcing the value of hard work, patience, and responsibility.

Such teachings are rarely formalized but are conveyed through short advice (*nasehat*), storytelling, and example. This aligns with Albert Bandura’s theory of observational learning, which asserts that much of human behavior is learned through observing and mimicking trusted figures—especially parents. In this model, education does not require a structured curriculum. It is embedded in interaction, trust, and relational proximity.

The Household as a Micro-Islamic Environment

The household in Bajo Bahari functions as a “micro-environment” for Islamic socialization. Islamic rituals—such as prayer, Qur’an recitation, and religious greetings—are introduced and habituated at home, often before children engage with formal or non-formal religious institutions. In many cases, the family becomes the child’s first classroom and the parent their first teacher, laying the groundwork for future religious understanding and practice. This corresponds with the triadic educational framework (school-family-community), where the family is the first and most enduring site of influence. In the context of Bajo Bahari, this model becomes dyadic (family-community) due to the lack of formal schooling, further elevating the family’s central role.

Value Internalization Through Repetition and Practice

The findings show that even simple, repetitive teachings—such as “do not harm others,” or “be honest at sea”—carry deep moral significance and are regularly reinforced through daily life. These practices contribute to what Islamic scholars refer to as *tarbiyah ruhiyyah* (spiritual cultivation) and *akhlaqiyah* (moral development), occurring through lived experience rather than theoretical discourse. This process is supported by constructivist learning theory, which maintains that learners build meaning and internalize values most effectively when new knowledge is linked to personal experience and contextual understanding.

Continuity Across Generations

Elderly figures in the village also play an informal yet respected role in guiding youth, especially in settings like the dock, the mosque, or family gatherings. These intergenerational interactions ensure that Islamic values are transmitted across time, creating a lineage of moral consciousness that extends beyond the reach of institutional education. This aligns with the concept of cultural transmission, which emphasizes the passing down of beliefs, practices, and values from one generation to the next, ensuring the resilience of religious identity even in changing

or resource-limited environments.

In summary, the family in Bajo Bahari serves as a powerful and consistent agent of Islamic education, particularly in the moral and spiritual dimensions. Far from being a passive setting, the home is a site of continuous informal learning, where values are not only taught but embodied. This reinforces the idea that Islamic socialization is not limited to classrooms but is cultivated through everyday acts of love, discipline, example, and care.

Leadership Influence and Community Engagement

The success and sustainability of Islamic education in Bajo Bahari Village cannot be separated from the role of local leadership—both formal and informal. Village leaders (*pemerintah desa*) and religious figures (*tokoh agama*) have served as initiators, organizers, and legitimizers of Islamic learning activities, including the establishment of TPQ Al-Bahrun and Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrun. Their involvement reflects the critical role of leadership in shaping educational participation and communal religious life.

Leadership as a Catalyst for Religious Mobilization

The establishment of both non-formal institutions in the village was not the result of external intervention, but of internal community mobilization, driven by respected figures. Interviews show that leaders not only provided organizational support but also offered moral authority and symbolic legitimacy, making participation in Islamic education a communal responsibility rather than an individual choice. This supports Burns' transformational leadership theory, which argues that visionary leaders can inspire and elevate collective goals by aligning them with shared values. In Bajo Bahari, leaders effectively reframed religious education from an optional activity to a core expression of village identity and faithfulness.

Trust and Legitimacy in Educational Leadership

In traditional societies like Bajo Bahari, where social cohesion is strong and trust in local figures is high, leadership plays a more intimate and interpersonal role in education. Unlike bureaucratic models, where religious learning might be mandated from the top down, the community in Bajo Bahari is more responsive to initiatives that emerge from within—led by people they know, respect, and often live among. This reflects the importance of “culturally proximate leadership”, a concept in development and education literature that emphasizes the effectiveness of leaders who are not only technically competent but culturally embedded and socially trusted. The successful operation of TPQ and Majelis Taklim illustrates this model in action.

Sustaining Participation Through Social Norms

The involvement of leaders also shapes social expectations around participation in religious education. When village heads and religious elders actively promote Qur'an recitation classes or Majelis Taklim sessions, they set a normative precedent—turning educational participation into a marker of moral citizenship and communal

belonging. This echoes Durkheim's theory of moral authority, where leaders embody and enforce the moral values of the community. In Bajo Bahari, their influence ensures that religious learning is seen not just as beneficial, but as socially obligatory—especially for women and children.

Collaboration Between Formal and Informal Structures

Another key insight is the cooperative relationship between formal village governance and informal religious education. For example, village officials not only approved but actively supported the formation of TPQ and Majelis Taklim, including providing meeting spaces, coordinating logistics, and participating in events. This collaboration mirrors community-based education models, where the integration of formal administrative support with informal learning structures enhances the sustainability and effectiveness of educational programs—particularly in resource-constrained settings.

Integration of Religious Content into Public Schooling

Although formal Islamic institutions are absent in Bajo Bahari Village, Islamic education is not excluded from the public school environment. Instead, religious content is strategically integrated into general education institutions, namely SD Negeri 115 Buton and SMP Satap 50 Buton. This integration demonstrates how secular educational spaces can be adapted to local religious needs, providing a vital bridge between national curriculum goals and community religious identity.

The Role of the Islamic Education Subject (PAI)

Both schools include the national subject *Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti* (Islamic Religious and Character Education), which provides instruction on:

- *Aqidah* (faith),
- *Ibadah* (ritual practice),
- *Akhlak* (morals),
- Islamic history and civilization.

This subject forms the formal religious backbone of the school curriculum and is delivered by certified Islamic education teachers. It ensures that even in a general educational setting, core religious literacy is preserved, and students develop a foundational understanding of Islamic principles. This reflects curriculum integration theory, which posits that subjects like religion can and should be interwoven into broader educational objectives, especially in culturally homogeneous communities where religion is central to identity.

Supplementary Religious Programs: "Pengajian Siswa"

Beyond the core curriculum, both schools run supplementary Qur'an recitation programs known as "Pengajian

Siswa.”

- At SD Negeri 115 Buton, sessions are held before the end of the school day.
- At SMP Satap 50 Buton, sessions are scheduled after *Asr* prayer and are gender-segregated to respect cultural norms.

These programs focus on Qur’anic literacy, tajwid, and moral storytelling, and are often led by classroom teachers, including general educators who volunteer to teach religious content. These informal yet structured initiatives extend religious learning beyond the textbook, reinforcing values and practical skills in a peer-supported setting. This use of school time for religious enrichment aligns with extended school learning models, which emphasize the importance of co-curricular activities in supporting holistic student development—especially in rural and faith-oriented communities.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Secular Settings

The adaptation of school environments to accommodate religious programs illustrates the application of culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers in Bajo Bahari not only teach Islamic content but do so in ways that align with local customs, dialects, and sensitivities:

- Gender-appropriate teacher-student interactions,
- Moral stories drawn from maritime life,
- Emphasis on discipline and humility, which resonate with local values.

This demonstrates that effective religious education is not about the institutional label (*madrasah* vs. public school), but about the intentional integration of faith, context, and pedagogy within available structures.

School as a Social Institution of Religious Transmission

In Bajo Bahari, the public school serves as more than just a place for academic instruction—it is a social institution that reinforces community religious identity. This echoes functionalist educational theory, which argues that schools help transmit societal values, including religious ones, particularly when they reflect the moral consensus of the local population. Parents, students, and teachers all participate in sustaining these religious components in the school, turning the school into a hybrid institution—both a secular and a spiritual space—tailored to the village’s unique socio-religious needs.

Conclusion

The Bajo community in Bajo Bahari Village perceives and engages with Islamic education through a lens of practical reality and cultural adaptation, shaped primarily by significant structural barriers rather than a lack of motivation. The complete absence of formal *madrasahs*, with the nearest institutions being geographically and

economically inaccessible, has compelled the community to develop a resilient and deeply valued ecosystem of non-formal and informal learning. This localized approach, centered on the community-driven TPQ Al-Bahrūn, the women's Majelis Taklim, and foundational teachings within the family, is prized for its tangible impacts on moral character, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. The community's positive perception is reinforced by the active involvement of local leaders and the successful integration of religious content within public schools, demonstrating a pragmatic focus on education that produces righteous living and reinforces communal identity.

Ultimately, this study underscores the critical need for context-sensitive educational policies that acknowledge and address the unique challenges of marginalized maritime communities. The Bajo experience reveals that a lack of participation in formal institutions is a consequence of systemic infrastructural barriers, not religious indifference. Their thriving non-formal educational structures serve as a powerful testament to how meaningful religious and moral development can be sustained when it is culturally embedded, community-owned, and practically applied. Therefore, future strategies should focus on developing flexible, decentralized, and community-based models that support and integrate these existing grassroots initiatives, ensuring that educational opportunities are genuinely accessible. Where feasible, the incorporation of context-sensitive educational technologies—such as solar-powered devices or mobile Qur'an learning tools—should be explored to strengthen these local efforts without undermining their cultural foundations.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations can be made for key stakeholders. For policymakers, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Buton Regency local government, it is crucial to address the primary structural barriers of geographic distance and economic hardship. The most direct way to do this would be to establish an accessible, state-subsidized formal Islamic educational institution, such as a local Madrasah Ibtidaiyah or a branch (filial) of the nearest Madrasah Tsanawiyah, within Bajo Bahari Village. In parallel, formal support should be provided to the existing non-formal institutions that the community trusts and values, namely TPQ Al-Bahrūn and Majelis Taklim Al-Bahrūn. This support should include operational funding, teaching materials, and professional development or incentives for the volunteer teachers to ensure the sustainability of these vital, community-driven programs.

For local educators and community leaders, the focus should be on enhancing the existing educational framework. They should collaborate to develop a culturally-responsive curriculum that integrates Islamic teachings with the Bajo community's unique maritime traditions and daily experiences, making learning more practical and meaningful. Building on current successes within public schools, they should also work to strengthen and formalize the supplementary "Pengajian Siswa" program by allocating dedicated resources and support for the participating teachers. Furthermore, to leverage the crucial role of the family in moral development, community leaders could use existing platforms like the Majelis Taklim to organize workshops that empower parents with effective methods for Islamic upbringing (tarbiyah) in the home.

Future studies could explore the implementation and impact of educational technology tools—particularly offline

and mobile solutions—in non-formal Islamic education contexts like Bajo Bahari. Such research could provide deeper insight into how culturally embedded learning environments adapt to technological interventions and which models yield the most effective outcomes for marginalized maritime communities.

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