

NEGOTIATING GIRLS' HIGHER EDUCATION IN DESA PETUARAN HULU: FAMILY STRATEGIES AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Diterima: 05 September 2025</i> <i>Direvisi: 10 September 2025</i> <i>Disetujui: 18 September 2025</i> <i>Tersedia Daring: 30 October 2025</i> Keywords: <i>Girls' Higher Education; Batak Toba; Agency; Gender Dynamics; Cultural Adaptation</i>	<i>This study examines the factors influencing Batak Toba girls' participation in higher education in Desa Petuaran Hulu, focusing on the interplay between cultural values, family decision-making, and socio-economic conditions. Previous studies on patriarchal societies have largely emphasized structural barriers, such as economic limitations and restrictive cultural norms, while paying less attention to how families actively negotiate these constraints. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving female students, graduates, and parents. The findings show that girls' educational participation is shaped by a dynamic interaction of internal and external factors. Internal drivers, including aspirations, agency, and self-development, play a central role in motivating girls to pursue higher education. External factors such as family support, socio-economic adaptation, and evolving gender expectations provide enabling conditions that sustain their educational trajectories. Despite limited economic resources, families prioritize daughters' education through adaptive strategies, indicating that financial constraints do not function as absolute barriers. A gendered pattern is also observed, where girls are more likely than boys to continue to higher education, reflecting a reconfiguration of roles within the household. This study demonstrates that educational participation in a patriarchal context is a negotiated process shaped by individual agency, family strategies, and ongoing cultural adaptatio.</i>

ABSTRAK
Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Perempuan, Batak Toba, Agensi, Dinamika Gender, Adaptasi Budaya Studi ini mengkaji faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi partisipasi perempuan Batak Toba dalam pendidikan tinggi di Desa Petuaran Hulu, dengan fokus pada keterkaitan antara nilai-nilai budaya, pengambilan keputusan dalam keluarga, dan kondisi sosial-ekonomi. Penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya mengenai masyarakat patriarkal cenderung lebih menekankan pada hambatan struktural—seperti keterbatasan ekonomi dan norma budaya yang membatasi—namun kurang memperhatikan bagaimana keluarga secara aktif menegosiasikan kendala-kendala tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan mahasiswi, lulusan perguruan tinggi, serta orang tua. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi pendidikan perempuan dibentuk oleh interaksi dinamis antara faktor internal dan eksternal. Faktor internal—yang mencakup aspirasi, agensi, dan pengembangan diri—memainkan peran sentral dalam memotivasi perempuan untuk menempuh pendidikan tinggi. Faktor

eksternal, seperti dukungan keluarga, adaptasi sosial-ekonomi, dan ekspektasi gender yang terus berkembang, menciptakan kondisi yang mendukung keberlanjutan jenjang pendidikan mereka. Meskipun sumber daya ekonomi terbatas, keluarga tetap memprioritaskan pendidikan anak perempuan melalui strategi-strategi adaptif, yang menunjukkan bahwa kendala finansial bukanlah hambatan mutlak. Ditemukan pula pola berbasis gender di mana anak perempuan lebih cenderung melanjutkan pendidikan ke jenjang tinggi dibandingkan anak laki-laki, yang mencerminkan adanya penataan ulang peran di dalam rumah tangga. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi dalam pendidikan di tengah konteks patriarkal merupakan sebuah proses negosiasi yang dibentuk oleh agensi individu, strategi keluarga, dan adaptasi budaya yang terus berlangsung.

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1. Introduction

As a fundamental human right and a critical factor in sustainable development and social mobility, education is widely acknowledged. However, persistent cultural norms that influence gender roles in societies continue to create unequal access to higher education. In patriarchal societies, girls are less likely to have access to higher education than boys because of long-held beliefs that men should lead in the public and private sectors (UN Women, 2022).

The most recent data from Indonesia suggests a substantial change in the level of educational participation based on gender. According to data collected by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2024), the number of girls enrolled in and graduating from college has been rising continuously and, in certain instances, surpassing that of boys. This development is consistent with global patterns in which girls display a higher level of determination in their educational pursuits as a result of their growing goals for work, independence, and social mobility (OECD, 2022; World Bank, 2022).

Within the Batak Toba community, these developments highlight an especially intriguing scenario. Boys have always held the key roles in lineage continuity, inheritance, and decision-making within the Batak Toba community, which is primarily organized around a patriarchal and patrilineal system. Dalihan Na Tolu exemplifies a cultural framework that perpetuates hierarchical gender relations, historically relegating women to subordinate positions (Christie, 1966; Harvina et al., 2017; Rigitta, 2021). However, there is growing evidence that implies that these cultural systems are not static but rather are becoming increasingly adaptive in response to changes in socioeconomic conditions and the process of modernization.

Previous research on women's education in patriarchal societies has primarily focused on structural barriers, including economic constraints and restrictive cultural norms (Nuraeni & Sulastri, 2024; Nursaptini et al., 2020). Despite their valuable insights,

these studies often portray women as passive subjects confined by external forces. How families deliberately invest in their daughters' education to overcome these limitations and climb the social and economic ladder in the long run has received less focus. It has been demonstrated through research conducted in Indonesian contexts that families, even when they are experiencing economic strain, rely on their own internal coping mechanisms, extended family support, and community-based aid to ensure the well-being and education of their children (Supsiolani et al., 2022).

Most of the existing literature tends to adopt a structural perspective that emphasizes limiting factors such as poverty, limited access, and rigid cultural norms (Longlands et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2021; Vaughan, 2016). This is in contrast to the fact that previous research has extensively documented gender inequalities in education within patriarchal societies. It is common for this research to presume that girls' lower educational engagement is significantly related to their socioeconomic status. On the other hand, new evidence suggests that these kinds of relationships are more complicated and depend on the context, particularly in communities that are very rooted in tradition and rural (Evans et al., 2021; OECD, 2022).

In the context of Indonesia, a number of studies have brought focus to the increasing prevalence of female educational attainment; however, some of these studies usually investigate the micro-level dynamics within families that are the driving force behind these shifts, particularly in ethnic groups that have traditionally been patriarchal (BPS, 2024; Kabeer, 2020). So, there is a lack of information in the current literature about how families deal with financial limitations and cultural expectations to put their girls' education first. To address this knowledge vacuum, this study looks at how female decision-making, cultural shifts, and socio-economic factors all interact to affect girls' opportunities to attend college. To fill this knowledge empty space, this study uses a patriarchal cultural framework to investigate what drives female college enrollment. Rather than viewing patriarchy solely as a barrier, this study explores how socio-economic conditions, cultural values, and gender norms interact dynamically to shape educational decision-making within families.

There has been a change in recent gender studies on education away from seeing women as helpless victims of systemic inequalities and toward seeing them as agents actively navigating educational options within restrictive contexts. According to research conducted in developing nations, the female educational participation rate is increasing not only as a result of state initiatives but also as a result of shifting household strategies and ambitions for social mobility (Evans et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2021). In addition, new studies indicate that patriarchal systems can change over time, enabling some areas, like education, to undergo transition while other institutions remain unchanged (Kabeer, 2020; OECD, 2022).

Rather than economic considerations alone, new research in Indonesia suggests that cultural reinterpretation and family decision-making have a larger role in determining whether or not girls attend college (BPS, 2024; Kabeer, 2020). According to the findings of Supsiolani et al. (2022), families in Indonesia, even when they are experiencing economic strain, rely on their own internal coping capacities, extended

family support, and community-based aid to ensure the well-being and education of their children.

The unique aspect of this investigation is its focus on the dynamic interplay between cultural transformation and economic constraints. This study specifically emphasizes the fact that families with limited economic resources continue to prioritize their daughters' education, which is indicative of a change in cultural values that redefines education as a strategic investment in the future to ensure independence and security. By illustrating that patriarchal systems are not monolithic but are subject to ongoing negotiation and reconfiguration, this perspective contributes to a more nuanced comprehension of gender and education.

As a result, the objective of this investigation is to examine the factors that encourage Batak Toba females in Desa Petuaran Hulu to pursue higher education. The study will concentrate on the influence of cultural transformation, gendered expectations, and socio-economic conditions on educational participation

2. Method

To understand how patriarchal cultural norms affect females' decision to attend college, this study uses a descriptive qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for comprehending social phenomena, meanings, and lived experiences from the perspective of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Moleong, 2021). The complexity of socio-cultural dynamics and decision-making processes within families can be captured by the researcher using this approach.

The investigation was carried out in the North Sumatra region of Desa Petuaran Hulu, which is located in the Kecamatan Pegajahan, Kabupaten Serdang Bedagai. This particular area was chosen on purpose because of the significant Batak Toba cultural background that it possesses as well as the noticeable rise in the number of girls graduating from higher education institutions. The purpose of this study is to get an overview of the ways in which socio-economic factors, cultural values, and gender norms influence decisions regarding pursuing higher education.

The informants were chosen through purposive sampling, a qualitative research methodology that is frequently employed to identify individuals who possess pertinent knowledge and experience regarding the research topic (Sugiyono, 2022). There were three primary categories of individuals who participated in the study: (1) female students who are currently enrolled in higher education; (2) female graduates; and (3) parents who have provided financial support for their daughters' educational pursuits. It was believed that these groups might provide light on decision-making processes and motivations in more depth than any other.

Data were acquired through three primary methodologies: documentation, in-depth interviews, and observation. In order to have a better understanding of the social backgrounds and the daily routines that are common within the community, observation was carried out. Researchers mostly relied on in-depth interviews to gain insight deeply into the viewpoints, reasons, and experiences of the participants (Bungin, 2017). For the

purpose of providing support and validation for the findings gained from interviews and observations, documentation was utilized.

Data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing are all parts of an interactive model that was used for data analysis (Miles et al., 2018). The process of data reduction includes choosing out and reducing the most relevant information, while data presentation helps to arrange those details into logical patterns. The final stage includes a formulation of conclusions that are founded on the recurring themes and relationships that were identified during the analysis process. This analytical method allows the researcher to methodically analyze the data and validate the results' credibility

3. Results and Discussion

This trend reflects a larger change in perspective on education, which is now seen as more than just a social status role but as a tool for individual growth and social mobility. Recent research has shown that internal characteristics such as aspirations, self-esteem, and individual agency have a significant influence in establishing educational participation, especially among young women in nations that are still in the process of developing (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). Within this context, girls do not simply internalize structural conditions; in fact, they play an active role in shaping their own identities within established sociocultural frameworks.

Theoretically, these results are consistent with Kabeer's idea of empowerment, which highlights the significance of agency in allowing individuals to establish and work toward their objectives (Kabeer, 2020). As a result, the decision to pursue higher education is not only a reflection of the availability of change resources but also of the capacity of girls to exercise choice and to foresee alternative futures that go beyond the conventional gender roles. In light of these arguments, this section looks at how internal factors, such as goals and opportunities for personal growth, influence the decision of girls to attend college.

Internal Drivers of Educational Participation in Aspirations, Agency, and Self-Development

According to the results of this study, internal factors significantly influence the extent to which girls in Desa Petuaran Hulu participate in higher education. Collectively, these elements shape educational decision-making and manifest mostly as individual goals, intrinsic motivation, and the pursuit of personal growth. Girls actively shape their own educational paths based on their goals, rather than simply following the demands of their families or cultures. their objectives and ambitions for the future.

Empirical data from the field indicates that females consider higher education as a strategic approach to achieving personal independence, stable employment, and improved socio-economic status. Several interviewees stressed the need to "avoid dependence on family or marriage outcomes," "gain better employment opportunities," and "improve life conditions," thereby supporting this inference. This transition in perception shows that education is seen more and more as a way to build one's own competence rather than only to meet social expectations.

The study's overview of important internal factors is shown in Table 1, which demonstrates these internal motives.

Table 1. Main Motivations of Batak Toba Girl at Petuaran Village for Higher Education

Informant's Name	Age (years)	Education Status	Main Motivation
S Pasaribu	23	College Student	Easier to achieve future aspirations, and can bring pride to parents.
T Lumban Siantar	23	College Student	Having a better future and standard of living, a foundation for economic independence, and self-esteem
R Sinaga	28	Bachelor	It is easier to get a decent job, easier to improve personal finances, and to boost self-confidence.
N Marbun	23	Bachelor	Improving social and economic status, having easier access to better self-development. Being able to change one's fate for the better, and having better dignity in the eyes of the family

Source : Field Data (2025)

This section points out the importance of students demonstrating norms, but the data presented in Table 1 shows that their aspirations serve as a significant motivator for engagement. the importance. There is a strong correlation between these hopes and plans for the future, especially regarding career opportunities and social advancement. Research from around the world has shown that girls' hopes for financial autonomy and better opportunities in life have a significant impact on their educational perseverance (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

Additionally, the study import demonstrates agency, underscoring the significance of agency. Rather than being passive recipients of information, girls actively negotiate the decisions that affect them. From this perspective, they are not passive recipients of structural conditions; rather, they are active agents who negotiate their positions within the existing socio-cultural frameworks (Baiduri, Ekomila, et al., 2023, 2024; Baiduri, Loviarara, et al., 2023). This is in line with Kabeer (2020) definition of empowerment, which underscores that agency is the capacity to set and pursue individual goals. Within this patriarchal setting, girls' decisions for achieving higher education symbolize their empowerment since they establish agency over their life paths.

Another important factor that motivates people is the opportunity for personal growth. Education is viewed as not only a means to advance financially but also as a way to enhance personal growth through learning new things and forming new friendships. This confirms what previous studies have shown: that young women (girls) consider education as crucial to their development as individuals and to achieving their full potential (Evans et al., 2021).

It is important to note that these findings counter conventional perceptions, which describe girls living in patriarchal countries as being structurally limited and lacking in autonomy. Instead, the findings of this study indicate that internal elements, particularly ambitions and agency, serve as significant motors that enable girls to negotiate and, to a certain greater degree, break through the socio-cultural limits that are existing in their lives. This claims that educational involvement should not be understood just by looking via societal factors such as economic position or cultural norms, but rather through the lens of individual agency and motivating dynamics for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

External Drivers of Educational Participation through Family Support, Socio-Economic Adaptation, and Cultural Influence

The results of this research indicate that, in addition to the internal motivations that girls in Desa Petuaran Hulu have, there are also external factors that play a significant role when considering whether or not they choose to pursue higher education. The primary representations of these external factors can be found in three interconnected dimensions: the support of family, the adaptation to socioeconomic conditions, and the influence of culture. Collectively, these elements form a supportive environment that encourages and sustains girls' educational pathways.

Family support, particularly that from parents, has been highlighted as one of the most significant external variables. The findings indicate that parents actively support and facilitate their daughters' access to higher education, even in somewhat constrained socioeconomic situations. Due to the fact that parents continually emphasize the important role of education in helping to improve future life outcomes, their support is not only financial but also emotional and psychological. In many cases, mothers play a significant part in pushing for their daughters' education, which reflects a transformation in the dynamics of decision-making within the household, as they often advocate for educational opportunities and challenge traditional gender roles that may limit girls' access to schooling.

This finding is in line with earlier studies that found that parental support plays a key role in deciding whether or not girls in traditional societies participate in education (UNESCO, 2021). Through the transmission of values, expectations, and long-term goals, families play an essential role in fostering the development of educational aspirations. This study found that parents' engagement was significantly associated with their children's perception of education as a means to economic and social advancement.

It becomes clear that socioeconomic adaptability is an important component, alongside family support. Despite the fact that they are located in low- to middle-income circumstances, families utilize a variety of adaptation strategies in order to guarantee that their girls continue their education. Some of these indicators include being ready to make adjustments financially, diversify financial sources of income, and making college costs a top priority. These kinds of strategies demonstrate that financial constraints are not impossible obstacles but rather are actively controlled within the framework of the residence.

Table 2 displays the important dimensions found in the study, which help to summarize these external elements.

Table 2. Parental Support Patterns in Girls' Educational Participation

Informant Name	Age (year)	Role	Type of Support Provided
S. br Pardosi	55	Mother of the main informant (S. Pasaribu)	Financial support for tuition despite limited economic resources
S. br Sirait	60	Mother of the main informant (T. Lumban Siantar)	Dual-income effort through farming and small-scale trading to support education
R. br Pandiangan	60	Mother of the main informant (R. Sinaga)	Full financial and emotional support for higher education
M. Manurung	59	Mother of the main informant (M. Manurung)	Providing permission and financial support for educational continuation

Source : Field Data 2025

Table 2 shows that socio-economic adaptation represents a decision-making process based on logic within the home. This finding corroborates the assertion that families are not merely constrained by economic conditions; instead, they actively devise strategies to maximize available resources for enduring advantages (OECD, 2022). Cultural factors can influence individuals' decisions regarding their school engagement in two distinct ways. This finding corroborates the assertion that families are not merely constrained by economic conditions; instead, they actively devise strategies to maximize available resources for enduring advantages (OECD, 2022). This finding confirms the statement that families are not simply restricted by economic conditions, but rather actively strategize to optimize available resources for long-term benefits (OECD, 2022). This transforms the perspective from viewing education as a cost to an investment, especially in societies that place priority on formal employment.

Families increasingly see their daughters' education as a valuable asset that benefits both the individual and the family. Cultural factors can have a double impact on how people choose to engage in school. Batak Toba culture is traditionally defined by patriarchal values that emphasize the male bloodline and inheritance. In contrast, the findings indicate that certain cultural norms have undergone significant adjustments, particularly in terms of connection to education. The following is notably the case. Families increasingly see their daughters' education as a valuable asset that benefits both the individual and the family.

This dichotomy can be understood through the approach of cultural adaptation, which has been defined by the selective preservation of established norms while continuously incorporating new values. *Dalihan Na Tolu* and other Batak cultural systems show adaptability to social and economic changes, according to (Christie, 1966; Harvina et al., 2017) . As this study shows, there is an increasing acceptance of girls' participation in higher education, which demonstrates flexibility.

Most importantly, the interplay between financial adaptability, cultural transformations, and family support illustrates that these external elements are not acting

in a void but rather are complexly interconnected. The role of families in bridging the gap between individual ambitions and systemic barriers allows girls to seek higher education despite these obstacles, as families provide emotional support, financial resources, and encouragement that empower girls to pursue their educational goals. This discovery highlights the significance of understanding educational involvement as an outcome of evolving social processes, rather than being dictated by static structural factors.

Socio-Economic Factors

Generally, people consider an individual's socio-economic circumstances to be the key factor that determines their accessibility to higher education. But this study's results show that, at least in the case of Desa Petuaran Hulu, females' educational involvement is not totally hindered by socioeconomic barriers. As a matter of fact, these factors determine the priorities and allocation of family resources when it comes to funding education.

According to Table 3, which shows the parents' jobs and economic position, almost all of families range into the low- to middle-income brackets, with most of them working in agriculture or the informal sector. These economic circumstances are a reflection of restricted and frequently insecure sources of income, which, according to traditional perspectives, would be expected to restrict access to higher education.

Table 3. Parents' Occupational Structure and Economic Status

Parent Informant Name	Age (Years)	Primary Occupation	Economic Status
S. br Pardosi	55	Agricultural laborer	Low
S. br Sirait	60	Farmer and small-scale trader	Low-middle
M. br Lubis	59	Housewife and farm helper	Low
R. br Pandiangan	60	Civil servant (teacher)	Middle
H. br Sitinjak	59	Civil servant	Middle

Table 3 indicates that most households function under restricted economic circumstances. But these restrictions do not necessarily lead to less involvement in school. Instead, families show resilience by adjusting to changing socioeconomic conditions and finding creative ways to ensure their daughters can continue to attend college.

These strategies involve emphasizing the importance of higher education costs over other household needs, the utilization of different kinds of work, and diversification of earnings. Several parents shared stories of how they had to take on extra jobs or make tough financial decisions in order to cover their children's college expenses. This shows that households' economic decisions aren't spontaneous but rather require thoughtful consideration and contemplating the future.

This study goes against deterministic perspectives, which hold that economic capital is the most important determinant for establishing access to educational opportunities. Recent studies (Evans et al., 2021; World Bank, 2022) illustrate that the relationship

between socio-economic position and education is not directly causal but rather is mediated by family strategies and decision-making processes. This is in contrast to the traditional perception that the relationship is directly causal. In this study, adaptive strategies are used to actively operate, rather than eliminate, economic restrictions.

From a theoretical point of view, these dynamics can be explained by utilizing Bourdieu's concept of capital, namely the relationship that exists between economic capital and other types of capital (Portes, 1998). Despite having lower financial wealth overall, some families are able to make an investment in their children's education because they are skilled at managing and prioritizing their resources. Socioeconomic factors should not be interpreted as deciding results in this study, but rather as influencing the circumstances and opportunities for educational engagement. Despite the fact that financial restrictions set the boundaries within which family structures function, they do not entirely explain why some educational decisions are made, such as giving priority to daughters.

In order to completely comprehend the patterns that have been seen, it is necessary to examine socio-economic situations together with other dimensions, such as gender dynamics and cultural values. These aspects form the structural framework of educational involvement. To keep educational involvement from being reduced to simply economic reasons, this differentiation is critical.

Gendered Patterns in Educational Participation

This study's findings indicate a clearly steadier gendered trend in educational engagement in Desa Petuaran Hulu, with girls more inclined to seek higher education, whereas boys are more prone to join the workforce or migrate at an earlier age. This trend contradicts the traditional beliefs of Batak Toba society regarding the value of men's education and the significance of passing it on from generation to generation.

According to the findings of empirical research, a growing number of young women view higher education as a strategy for gaining future stability, steady job, and personal independence. Typically, boys are expected to contribute to the household income or manage family finances, which may lead them to prefer immediate economic engagement. Gendered expectations ingrained in societal and familial institutions contribute to this discrepancy, rather than individual choices alone.

Table 4 delineates the predominant educational selections and their corresponding rationales across gender demographics.

Table 4. Gender-Based Educational Choices

Gender	Dominant Choice	Underlying Reasons
Female	Pursuing higher education	Future aspirations, employment opportunities, social mobility
Male	Working or migrating	Cultural expectations, inheritance roles, low interest in higher education

Source : Field Data (2025)

Table 4 shows that boys are particularly affected by immediate financial concerns while making their educational decisions, while girls are more likely to think about the

future and plan appropriately. This study is in line with recent global trends, which indicate that girls are more advanced than males in terms of educational engagement. This is taking place as a result of girls' greater academic tenacity and higher goals for socio-economic mobility (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

This phenomenon can be analyzed from a theoretical standpoint through the lens of gendered division of roles, which is a concept in which life pathways for men and women are different due to the influence of social expectations. In many developing environments, it is common for boys to be expected to assume productive economic tasks at an earlier time, which decreases the possibility that they will continue their formal schooling (World Bank, 2022). On the other hand, girls are being urged more and more to pursue education as a means of ensuring their future stability and boosting their possibilities in life.

This pattern also illustrates a form of strategic adaptation that occurs within patriarchal systems. Although there is still a lot of weight behind traditional ideas about male dominance and inheritance, things seem to be changing in the realm of education. This is in line with patriarchal bargaining, as proposed by (Kandiyoti, 1988), in which families and individuals work to maximize benefits within preexisting systems by negotiating gender norms. According to the findings of this study, families appear to reallocate educational possibilities toward daughters, particularly in situations when sons are expected to assume direct economic obligations.

Importantly, the gendered trend that has been observed should not be regarded as a complete reversal of patriarchy; rather, it should be interpreted as a restructuring of gender roles within the context of a changing socio-economic environment. These transformations are still buried within larger cultural frameworks that continue to define gender relations, although increasing numbers of females are enrolling in higher education, which reflects both structural changes and altering expectations.

Therefore, the best way to understand gendered educational involvement in this setting is as a dynamic outcome of other factors that interact with one another. These factors encompass economic conditions, familial strategies, and evolving gender norms. This pattern serves as a critical foundation for examining the deeper processes of cultural development, which the following section addresses.

Cultural Transformation and Adaptation

Cultural transformations like the one mentioned above show how educational value changes are deeply rooted in community members' everyday thoughts and social meanings as well as structural. These modifications are reflected in how education is viewed, justified, and supported at both the home and community levels. This phenomenon is because families are reinterpreting established norms and renegotiating gender roles as a group. These kinds of activities demonstrate that cultural values are not fixed but rather are continuously replicated and altered through the social behaviors and interactions that occur on a daily basis (Baiduri, Damanik, et al., 2024).

Understanding cultural adaptation in this setting necessitates conducting further investigations into the context in which these dynamic values are transmitted through the viewpoints of parents and society in general. One of the most important factors in

maintaining and confirming these transformations is the context in which education for females is regarded, whether as a necessity, an investment, or a social expectation. As a result, the following section explores the perspectives of parents and members of the community with regard to the participation of females in higher education. This section offers a more in-depth understanding of the societal acceptance and continuity of this cultural transition.

Using the previous discussion on gendered educational patterns as a foundation, it becomes clear that the observed shifts in involvement are not simply decisions made at the level of individuals or households; rather, they are interwoven within larger processes of cultural transition. This evidence indicates a reconfiguration of cultural norms within Batak Toba society, notably in connection to gender roles, family expectations, and the meaning of education itself. The increased tendency of girls to pursue higher education is a representation of this reconfiguration.

Although Batak Toba society has traditionally been defined by a patriarchal structure that places a higher importance on male bloodlines and ancestral inheritance, the findings of this study indicate that there has been a substantial transformation in the way that education is valued and distributed within households. This transition is indicative of a larger trend when women are showing they can be catalysts for transformation rather than viewers in social and community spheres (Baiduri, Damanik, et al., 2024). In this framework, daughters are no longer restricted to the task of only performing domestic duties; rather, they are increasingly considered individuals who are capable of making contributions to the growth of their families and society through the pursuit of education. Tabular representation of this transformation may be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Transformation of Educational Values in Batak Toba Families

Aspect	Previous Condition	Current Condition
Educational priority	Sons prioritized	Daughters increasingly prioritized
Educational purpose	Lineage continuation	Personal independence and future security
Role of mothers	Supportive role	Active decision-makers

Source : Field Data (2025)

Table 5 highlights an individual transformation in the significance and priorities of education. The traditional practice of investing in the education of sons was considered a way to ensure the continuation of the family line (*marga*), while daughters were expected to stay at home and provide support. This change is accompanied by a redefining of educational goals, which range from the maintenance of bloodline systems to the achievement of personal freedom and long-term socio-economic security. However, current patterns indicate that daughters are increasingly being prioritized in terms of obtaining higher education.

From a theoretical point of view, this transition can be recognized by considering culture to be a system that is both dynamic and adaptable, rather than a static structure.

The results indicate that cultural standards constantly renegotiate themselves to accommodate shifting socioeconomic situations. In this context, education serves as a pivotal arena where the conflicts between tradition and modernity are expressed and resolved.

This is in line with (Kabeer, 1999, 2020) theory of empowerment, which highlights that transformation takes place not only via access to resources (like education) but also through changes in social norms, agency, and decision-making power. This argument is relevant because it demonstrates that transformation can take place. The gradual redistribution of agency within the family structure is indicated by the increase in the role of women as active decision-makers in educational investment. This movement in power relations within the household is a reflection of this shift in power relations.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with the argument made by (Harvina et al., 2017), who contend that Batak cultural systems, such as *Dalihan Na Tolu*, are not fundamentally fixed but rather exhibit a degree of flexibility in their response to the processes of modernization and globalization. These cultural frameworks are not abandoned; instead, they are selectively modified, allowing new values, such as gender equality in education, to coexist with established traditional norms.

In light of these findings, the alteration that was observed in this study ought not to be construed as the dismantling of patriarchy but rather as the reconfiguration of itself. As a result of a process of adaptation and negotiation, cultural change takes place. This process involves families reinterpreting ancient values to bring them into alignment with current ambitions, particularly with regard to securing better futures for their daughters.

4. Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, the participation of girls in higher education in Desa Petuaran Hulu is not only dictated by institutional constraints; rather, it is molded by a dynamic interaction of internal and external factors instead. Higher education is a pathway that many girls take because of internal drivers like ambition, agency, and self-development and external factors like family support, socio-economic adaptation, and changing gender expectations. An indication that economic constraints do not work as absolute obstacles is the fact that the majority of families, although operating with limited economic resources, actively prioritize educational investment through adaptive strategies. In addition, the formation of gendered participation patterns, in which girls are more likely than boys to pursue their education beyond the high school level, provides evidence of a reorganization of responsibilities within the home. This pattern is further encouraged by progressive cultural adaptation, in which education is increasingly considered a strategic investment for the development of daughters' future independence and security. The findings, taken as a whole, shed light on the fact that educational involvement in this environment is best understood as a product of negotiated processes that involve individual agency, household strategy, and growing socio-cultural frameworks.

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