

Education as a Catalyst: School-Based Strategies to Prevent Child Marriage in Lombok, Indonesia

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Abstract

Child marriage as a pressing issue in Indonesia significantly affects education, economic and societal dynamics. This study focuses on the Lombok region, a place with a high prevalence of child marriages; investigating its factors, impacts, and strategies. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, data were collected from deep interviews with teachers across five schools in Lombok. Findings reveal that cultural traditions, alongside economic challenges and lack of family support, contribute to this practice. Child marriage affects education, fosters psychological problems, and perpetuates poverty. Education interventions play a significant role in addressing this practice. Strategies such as school-community collaboration, parental involvement, and additional activities are highlighted, though their effectiveness is hindered by deep-rooted cultural norms. Despite the challenges, schools are crucial in promoting awareness, fostering education, and supporting systems for at-risk youth. This study emphasizes the need for comprehensive policies integrating education and socio-economic support to prevent child marriage in Lombok. It contributes to understanding localized contexts of Lombok.

Keywords: *child marriage, socio-economic, cultural norms, education, school-based prevention strategies*



Introduction

Every year, a large number of girls around the world are married before their eighteenth birthday (Vogelstein, 2020; Robin & Duncan, 2023), and this kind of issue is recognized as a 'harmful practice' under International Human Rights law. Adversely, this may affect children, their spouses, and broader societal and developmental outcomes. The elimination of such practices is a targeted goal under Sustainable Development Goal 5 (United Nations, 2023). Child marriage is a legitimate or informal partnership involving a young person below the age of eighteen and a grown-up or another young person (United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Girls who leave formal education are at a higher risk of marrying before the age of eighteen, as they assume greater domestic responsibilities, becoming adolescent parents. These girls may also encounter stigma, forced school exclusion, and restrictive gender norms that confine them to the household (Girls Not Brides, 2023).

Child marriage presents numerous detrimental impacts that extend beyond the immediate circumstances of individuals involved. One of the most important consequences is the disruption of education, including school dropouts and the loss of opportunity to attain better occupations caused by a lack of education (Robin & Duncan, 2023). Furthermore, the psychological ramifications are profound; many young married children experience mental health disorders, including anxiety and trauma leading from domestic violence, which can hinder their well-being (John et al., 2019). Socially, child marriage restricts individuals in fully engaging with their peers of their age, as they are often burdened with household responsibilities at an early age (Winangsih & Wibowo, 2023). The early prediction of adult responsibilities can adversely affect the psychological development of both partners, leading to immature and unstable mindsets that may contribute to domestic violence and increased likelihood of divorce (Octaviani et al., 2020).

This issue may hinder a country's economic progress by limiting girls' access to education and employment (Vogelstein, 2020). This limits their

ability to contribute to the economy and lowers the quality of human capital. Moreover, children born to young mothers face increased health risks, which affect the quality of the following generation (Wodon et al., 2017). Child marriage also reduces women's labor force participation, economic independence, and decision-making authority, altering society's social and economic structures (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014). Furthermore, as it perpetuates poverty and limits economic resources, more women depend on their spouse, which unintentionally promotes gender inequality, which disadvantages women (Guimaraes, 2020). As a result, addressing child marriage is critical to promoting economic growth and development. The long-term threats such as inequality of access, loss of talent through emigration, and the negative impact of child marriage are serious issues hampering economic growth at the peak of the demographic dividend in the future (Risandini & Silvi, 2022).

Child marriage in Indonesia is introduced by a variety of variables, some of which are structural in nature and stem from community, family and individual capacity. Examples include socio-economic status, lack of education, the welfare level, health, employment, and social protection (Badan Pusat Statistik et al., 2020). Girls from impoverished households, those with limited education, and children in rural regions are particularly at risk of marrying at a young age (United Nations Children's Fund, 2016). This tendency is especially pronounced in rural settings, where early marriage is often viewed as a response to economic hardship. Consequently, women who marry early at a young age often face limited employment opportunities, predominantly finding work in the informal sector. Female workers under the age of eighteen are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and instability.

In West Nusa Tenggara, particularly Lombok, child marriage is often perceived as an investment and economic solution. According to Febriyanti and Dewi (2017 as cited in Rohana and Sainun, 2024) parents frequently believe early marriage will allow children to support each other financially and contribute to the family's welfare. In addition, as reported

by Radio Republik Indonesia (2025), child marriage in the Lombok region is also influenced by the low educational level and a range of social factors. Data from the Ministry of Religion (2025) found that approximately 33,000 cases of child marriage occur annually in West Nusa Tenggara.

The consequences of early marriage are far-reaching. Children who marry at a young age are more likely to drop out of school, experience limited economic opportunities, and face higher risks of violence and mental health problems compared to those who marry later (Welle, 2019). This phenomenon can be understood through Independent Economic Theory, which suggests that women with higher education, social status and urban residency correlate with delayed marriage. In contrast, children living in rural areas are more likely to marry at a young age, often due to cultural norms and limited access to educational resources (Natanael et al., 2013).

The urgency of this issue is highlighted by concerning statistics. According to the data in 2018, Indonesia reported 1.2 million women aged 20–24 who had married before turning eighteen, ranking the nation among the top ten countries with the highest total percentage of child marriages worldwide (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2020). The highest level of child marriage in Indonesia is in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) province. In central Lombok alone, the rate reached 19.32 percent, highlighting the strong influence of local customs and economic pressures (Statistics Agency of NTB province, 2020). In North Lombok, socio-economic status is inversely correlated with early marriage households, with higher economic standing exhibiting lower rates of early marriage (Wulandari & Laksono, 2020).

Legally, Indonesia has established frameworks to address child marriage. According to the Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974, individuals under the age of 21 years old are required to obtain written formal consent from their parents (Republic of Indonesia, 1974). Moreover, the National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS) has incorporated child

marriage prevention into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024, collaborating with UNFPA, UNICEF, and other organizations. This plan is to develop the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage (STRANAS PPA) to implement comprehensive strategies across Indonesia (National Development Planning Agency, 2020).

Besides government and organization efforts, education is a key driver in preventing child marriage and various programs are carried out. Advocacy campaigns involving community and religious leaders have proven effective in reshaping societal attitudes (Afifah, 2018). Several digital platforms have been utilized to conduct training sessions for students and teachers, enhancing their understanding of child protection laws and highlighting the impacts of early marriage (Eleanora et al., 2022). Beyond these efforts, encouraging strong attachments and approaches between students and schools plays a pivotal role. Research by Varela et al. (2021) highlights a positive correlation between school attachment and academic achievement while reducing risky behaviors.

Several studies have investigated education interventions in regard to the issue of child marriage, Masrurroh et al. (2021) highlight the role of schools in preventing early marriage. This has been realized through efforts to enhance knowledge, teacher supervision, and cross-sector cooperation. Additionally, various extracurricular activities at schools also contribute significantly to these efforts. Girls Not Brides (2020) evidences and emphasizes education as a protective factor against child marriage. Research indicates that the longer a girl remains in school, the less likely she is to marry before the age of eighteen. This recommends child marriage interventions that focus on removing gender-based barriers to education and ensuring that girls complete twelve years of quality education. In contexts where marriage and education are mutually exclusive, merely attending school can serve as a deterrent to child marriage. Schools not only provide girls with knowledge and skills but also encourage confidence, social connections, and aspirations beyond early

marriage. Furthermore, a critical mass of girls attending school has the potential to shift social norms within families and communities (Shah, 2016), thereby broadening opportunities for girls and promoting a cultural transformation.

UNICEF (2022) notes the importance of promoting the quality of education to guard against child marriage. Access to quality education and decent work are also critical to disrupting the cycle of poverty and the intergenerational transmission of child marriage, since girls from more educated and prosperous households are less likely to marry in childhood. Furthermore, a study by Junaedi et al. (2022) highlights the role schools play is significant in preventing child marriage. An ideal school intervention would involve incorporating early marriage education and reproductive health into the curriculum, ensuring regular health services and promoting a strong motivation for students to continue their education.

Therefore, considering the research urgency related to this issue, this study aims to delve into the factors and impacts that influence child marriage in Lombok and the role of schools as intervention agents. It seeks to identify ways educational institutions, social organizations and communities can collaborate to raise awareness, and educate and empower students to prevent early marriage. Focusing on the Lombok region, recognized for its high rate of child marriage cases, this study will offer new insights and contribute to understanding how localized educational interventions can effectively address this issue. Moreover, the research intends to provide policy recommendations based on its findings.

In formulating the research questions, it is crucial to base them on the key issues that need to be addressed and investigated. Additionally, from various studies reviewed, many researchers have recommended this area as potential for further studies. The research questions are:

1. What are the factors that influence child marriage in Lombok?
2. How does child marriage hinder individual development in Lombok?
3. What specific school-based interventions have been implemented to address the issue of child marriage in Lombok?

Method

A qualitative approach is applied to answer these research questions. Qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups attribute to social or human issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, to deeply understand the phenomenon, this study employs case study as research design. Case study research involves an in-depth examination of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007), which allows for a comprehensive analysis of the context and intricacies surrounding the issue of child marriage.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The participants in this study consist of seven teachers from five different schools across various villages in the Lombok district, including elementary school and both junior and senior high schools. These schools have selected approximately one to two student marriages per year over the past five years. Among the participants, two are principals, and five are teachers from different subject expertise. The group includes five males and two females, all of whom possess varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from seven years to 33 years.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected by utilizing open-ended interview questions. The seven participants from five different schools are recognized as a triangulation, providing multiple perspectives that strengthen the validity and depth of the findings. In the interview sessions, the researchers conducted direct interviews, both physical and virtual, with each respondent in a one-on-one session. This method served for in-depth interviews of participants' expressions and perceptions while providing the flexibility to interview with follow-up questions. The interviews were followed by a set of pre-arranged questions, while maintaining the flexibility of participants in providing necessary information.

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was employed. According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is carried out using topic analysis, focusing on the discovery, definition, reasoning, justification and linking of themes (Clarke and Braun, 2006). After transcribing all interview recordings verbatim, the researchers began by reading the transcripts to become familiar with the content. Then they coded the data manually, assigning short phrases to represent meaningful units related to the research questions. These codes were then grouped into broader themes. Once the initial themes were generated, the researchers reviewed and refined them by comparing each theme against the coded extracts and the dataset. Finally, the researchers defined and named the themes, and used representative quotations to illustrate the findings and discussions.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and describes the findings of in-depth interviews conducted with participants from five schools in Lombok. This analysis investigates the views of teachers and leaders regarding the factors that influence child marriage, the challenges that hinder individual development, and the forms of school intervention that are considered

effective in preventing it. Each theme will be discussed in detail, including quotes from participants, and will be linked to the findings of previous studies.

The Determinant Factors of Child Marriage in Lombok

Four teachers highlighted that child marriage in Lombok is deeply rooted in cultural practices, particularly the tradition of *merarik* (marrying without parental consent). This custom, practiced by the Sasak people of Lombok, involves elopement and allows marriage to proceed without parental agreement, relying solely on the decision of the children engaged. It literally involves a religious belief, that when a couple of children get together in one place or have a relationship, they are forced to get married immediately.

Teacher 3 explained:

In Lombok's culture, if there are a boy and a girl without a marriage relationship hanging out for 24 hours, the society will automatically encourage the parents to marry them off, to avoid embarrassment and not violate the merarik custom.

This statement is a reflection that *merarik* is a way to uphold familial respect and moral integrity. It points out how local customs and strict theological conceptions intersect, which leads to early marriage being normalized as an accepted cultural response.

Within this context, societal norms and religion dictate that no girls are allowed to spend time together with boys, or even a single night in the company of a boy, unless they are married regardless of their age. Such norms reinforce the conservative mindset to preserve religious beliefs, reflecting a broader societal acceptance of these practices. This cultural

perspective demonstrates a lack of social awareness regarding the detrimental impacts of child marriage. The prevailing acceptance of child marriage underscores the entrenched social and cultural norms that continue to influence perceptions and practices in Lombok.

However, some teachers hold a contrasting perception regarding the *merarik* custom. They argue that this cultural practice was never meant to support child marriage. As teacher 5 noted, the original custom was governed by specific laws, because in the past *merarik* might not be carried out by the minors and it required both families' consent. Meanwhile, nowadays, there are many misconceptions spread among society. This tradition merely perceives it as an act of elopement between the youth due to mutual affection, and who choose marry immediately.

This demonstrates how current customs have diverged from previous cultural principles, when *merarik* was controlled by a code of conduct stressing community mediation, family permission, and maturation. The misuse of this norm to excuse child marriage is the result of the modern-day distortion, which is fueled by social pressures and a decreasing of traditional authority.

Furthermore, five teachers stated that child marriage happens because of an unsafe environment triggered by social media and a lack of control and affection from their parents. One of the teachers noted:

... children from broken home families often face lack of emotional support, which can impact their sense of self-worth and emotional stability. In such conditions, marriage is sometimes perceived as an alternative solution to fill the void left by unmet emotional needs. For some, entering into a marital relationship becomes a means of seeking love, care, and security they did not experience in their family relationship.

Additionally, another teacher highlighted the family problem in influencing the child marriage issue:

... children from broken homes are at a higher risk of early marriages, often due to economic struggles and financial instability. This financial challenge makes them more likely to accept marriage proposals, especially when accompanied by monetary offers.

Factors such as parents' being divorced or working abroad, especially during the children's puberty phase, exacerbate the issue, weakening family relationships. This lack of closeness hinders parents' ability to educate their children effectively and provide them with the necessary supervision and guidance to make informed decisions. Consequently, children may be more vulnerable to external pressures and the risks associated with early marriage. Furthermore, three teachers stated that child marriage happens because of the lack of parental presence, divorced parents, and poverty (parents separated to earn a living) related to household dynamics and the economic environment. Aligning with Retnowulandari et al.'s, (2024) discussion, the Sasak Lombok community is significantly influenced by social and environmental factors, such as limited access to education. Furthermore, low levels of education and awareness among parents, children and the broader community shape mindsets, which lead to a limited understanding of the true purpose of marriage.

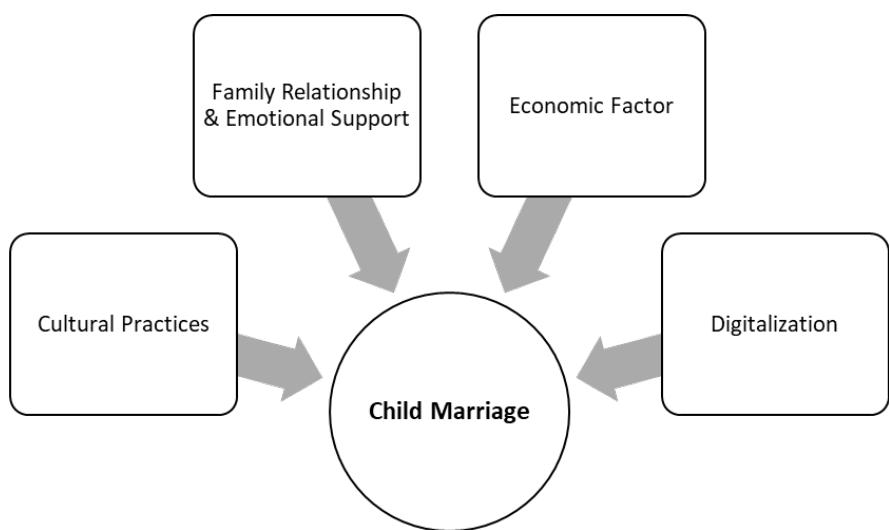


Figure 1. *The Contributing Factors of Child Marriage in Lombok*

The issue of child marriage in Lombok does not solely rely on one factor, it is influenced by an interplay of cultural practices, family support and economic factors. Cultural norms and traditions often normalize early marriage, particularly in communities where this practice is deeply rooted. These practices are frequently perpetuated by beliefs that early marriage protects family honor or ensures the financial stability of the family. Additionally, family relationships and economic factors play a critical role. Families who are struggling with poverty often view marriage as a solution to reduce their financial burdens. The lack of emotional support and guidance from parents further exacerbates the issue, leading the children to be vulnerable to be married at an early age to escape from the home environment (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

Moreover, understanding the contributing factors of child marriage through Bronfrenbrenner’s ecological systems lens, highlights the systems which are interconnected and influence individual development and decisions.

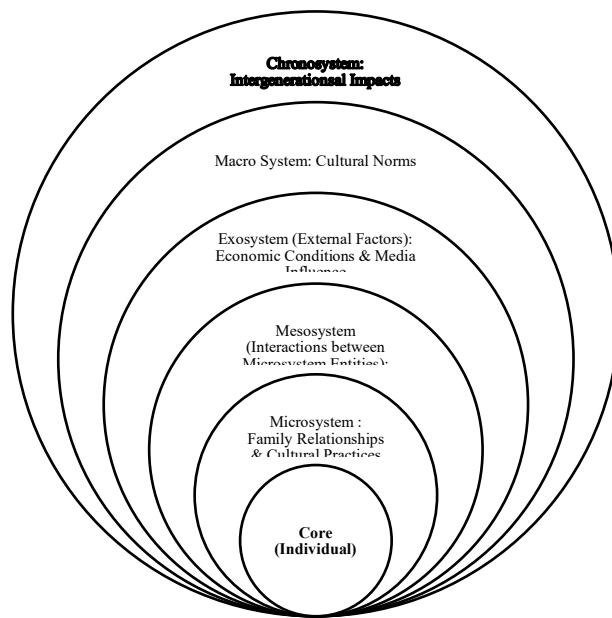


Figure 2: *The Contributing Factors of Child Marriage Based on Ecology Theory*

Cultural Practices

The tradition of *merarik* in Lombok has its origins in deeply rooted cultural practices. Historically, as documented in Lombok history, *merarik* was an effort to protect women from the ‘wickedness king’ of Bali 1891 (Fitrianita, Kholifah, & Adawiyah, 2025). Over time, the continuation of this culture has contributed to the persistence of child marriage within this community. Furthermore, this practice is also caused by constructed norms and social stigma; for instance, girls who remain unmarried upon reaching puberty, seem to be old maids or ‘uninterested’ girls (Hariati et al., 2023).

This cultural context significantly shapes faith values that serve as guiding in daily life (Parsons et al., 2015). If a young woman spends time with or stays out late in the company of a man, societal norms grounded in

religious principles often necessitate that the two of them marry (Yulyani et al., 2019). This practice is protecting women to prevent free sexual behavior and protecting family honor (Nabila et al., 2022). According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the *merarik* practice is at the macrosystem stage, because it stems from cultural beliefs, social norms and religious values that shape society's perception of marriage and the role of women.

Family Relationship and Emotional Support

The role of parents significantly shapes the children's thoughts and behavior, including in making decisions related to marriage. Effective communication is important in guiding these decisions to positive outcomes. Parents are entrusted with responsibilities that they must fulfill to ensure the emotional support of their children (Larasati et al., 2021). Parents' education also plays a critical role in influencing child rearing. A lack of adequate education among parents can result in less effective nurturing practices (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Additionally, the family environment may affect the child marriage issue, as the children are struggling to find affection and wish to avoid the uncomfortable family environment.

Furthermore, this statement belongs to the microsystem layer, where the environment closest to the individual and interactions directly occurs, especially in the context of family relationships. In this layer, parents play an important role as the main socialization agents who shape children's thinking, emotions and behavior. The way parents communicate, provide emotional support, and carry out maternal responsibilities has influence on how children make decisions, including in matters of marriage.

Economic Factors

Initially, economics serves as the prominent factor in contributing to child marriage (Parsons et al., 2015). Families with low socio-economic status may view child marriage as a viable solution to meet financial needs. This occurs when a proposal is made for their child to marry. In many cases, families facing economic challenges may see child marriage as an approach to alleviate financial strain, perhaps by reducing the number of dependents. Furthermore, it has been noted that 2.5 million girls around the world were married during the pandemic. This phenomenon happened to secure and maintain their economic condition (Szabo & Edwards, 2020; Altamimi, 2023).

The economic factor is closely related to the exosystem layer, which is a system that does not involve individuals directly but still has a big impact on their lives. In this context, the family's socio-economic conditions, such as low income, limited employment opportunities and financial pressure, influence parents' decisions to marry off children at a young age. Although children are not directly involved in the family economic process, the decisions taken by parents in facing life's hardships have a direct impact on the child's future.

Digitalization

The issue of child marriage often springs from the rise of digitalization. The wide use of technology has introduced new avenues for communication and social interaction, some of which may influence the perpetuation of child marriage. Through digital technology, individuals from different geographical locations may propose marriages. Additionally, digital networks may foster perceptions among adolescents that child marriage is a favorable practice, as they often perceive the platforms as role models or sources of influence.

Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, this digitalization phenomenon can be linked to the exosystem layer, which is a system that influences individuals indirectly through the social environment, technology and media. In this context, technological advances and the use of digital platforms have opened up new spaces for communication and social interaction which have an impact on teenagers' views and behavior towards marriage. Although individuals, especially children and adolescents, do not fully control these technological systems, they remain exposed to the influence of media content and social networks that shape their perceptions of marriage norms.

The Negative Impacts of Child Marriage in Lombok

Child marriage has significant negative impacts on individuals and their surrounding environment. From the microsystem level, child marriage causes emotional immaturity leading to internal conflict and divorce. According to interview results:

From my observations at this school, most children who marry at an early age tend to divorce quickly, 1 in 5 of them. After the divorce, the most disadvantaged part is usually the woman. They have to become independent and migrate for work, leaving their children in the care of their grandparents. Education is no longer a priority in their life as financial constraints become a major obstacle.

... since at their age, they are not yet ready to work or start to build a family. Their behaviors remain as other children who enjoy playing games, hanging out with friends, and their emotional maturity is not yet prepared for managing a household, leading to unwell-being.

Understanding the results, at the personal and family level, early marriage often leads to instability, including frequent divorces of the new early marriage spouses. This outcome is primarily due to the emotional, physical, economic and psychological immaturity of the individuals involved. Young couples are often unprepared to navigate the complexities of married life, leading to conflict and breakdowns in family relationships. At the microsystem level, this situation reflects emotional pressure and poor well-being. As claimed by the World Health Organization (2017), girls who are victims of child marriage suffer from loneliness, depression and anxiety as a result of their limited autonomy and lack of choice in taking decisions. At the mesosystem level, child marriage harms familial connections and diminishes support within society. It weakens the attachment between the home and the educational environment. Girls often lose agency in decision making, including the opportunity to pursue further education (Hariyanti et al., 2023).

In the broader social context, child marriage negatively affects educational aspirations. Married students tend to lose motivation to continue higher education, prioritizing family responsibilities and household tasks over academic goals. Andriyan et al. (2021) revealed in their study, child marriage leads to the deprivation of children's rights such as education, play, protection and security. In addition, the exosystem level found that child marriage causes financial instability. This finding is supported by the results of interviews with parents whose children are victims of early marriage

My daughter is married, yet she still relies on parents to support her financially. (Parent 4)

This is a condition in line with the experience of the victims of child marriage:

I married because I want to improve my family's economic condition, but after I married, everything got worse, my husband was jobless and I decided to end the relationship. (Married child victim 1)

The persistence of child marriage forms an intergenerational cycle, where economic hardship both motivates and results from child marriage. One participant noted that her decision to marry early was driven by financial problems, yet the marriage itself deepened her economic challenges. This aligns with Wodon et al., (2017) who stated that child marriage frequently limits future employment opportunities and income possibilities for girls.

Schools' Strategies in Lombok

To prevent child marriage in the context of schools in Lombok, the schools make some interventions, and this research found that macrosystem, microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem levels have shown minimal efficacy in avoiding child marriage. The macrosystem intervention had little influence on modifying deeply ingrained cultural practices and social conventions, while the microsystems involved requiring parents and students to sign agreements and imposing fines. The mesosystem emphasized that interrelation between stakeholders is needed, such as teacher-parent collaboration, school-village leaders' coordination, and health organizations. The exosystem addressed the problem from an economic perspective.

However, these sorts of interventions need to be evaluated to tackle underlying cultural norms, insufficient parental affection, and financial struggles to have a more substantial effect on the main early marriage rationale. Utami et al. (2023) found that providing counseling on sex education to young people, equality in education, and parental and

community understanding of the dangers of child marriage are effective in preventing child marriage. Additionally, Lase (2022) concluded from his research that co-ordination among various parties is essential to preventing child marriage, which has many negative effects.

Education is identified as a prominent dimension influencing both the contributing factors to and the impact of child marriage (Asna-ashary et al., 2021). Whether these factors stem from cultural norms, family relationships, or economic conditions, education serves as the fundamental element underpinning individual development and shaping outcomes. Ensuring the children remain in education has proven to be an effective strategy to prevent child marriage (Harrison, 2023).

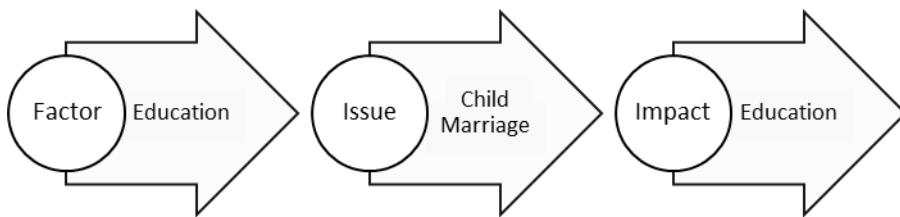


Figure 3. *The Conceptual Model Linking of Child Marriage*

The school's strategies had little influence on modifying deeply ingrained cultural practices and social conventions, such as the tradition of merarik (marrying without parental consent). To influence community attitudes, a thorough community education program and cultural conversation are required, since the school interventions in this study focused solely on dialogue with parents. By requiring parents and students to sign agreements and imposing fines, these interventions may indeed increase parental involvement and responsibility and may reduce direct pressure to marry off children. However, these measures do not directly address the issues of lack of parental affection and presence, or the influence of social media. Providing family counseling programs in

education on the impact of child marriage can complement these interventions. Parents pay fines to schools for their married children. Based on the findings, this is not effective in preventing early marriage, as it has not had much impact in reducing child marriage. While this may be effective for some families, the fines can also add to the financial burden on poor families. Interventions should include economic support programs, such as scholarships, financial aid, and community development initiatives, to reduce the burden on poor families.

School-Stakeholder Collaboration

Strong parent-teacher collaboration is a crucial aspect of the educational process, as a bridge between family and school environments. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the mesosystem refers to the interactions between different microsystems, including the relationship between parents and teachers. These interactions will shape the child's educational experience and development. When parents and teachers maintain open communication, they can better understand the child's needs, support each other's efforts, and encourage a more comprehensive learning environment. As stated by one teacher:

We conduct a meeting between all parents with home room teachers at the beginning of each semester to discuss school regulations.

Research by Masrurah et al. (2021) highlights that schools can provide essential support for students facing challenges. This support often extends beyond the classroom and involves direct engagement with the parents. This emphasizes the critical role of teacher-parent collaborations in ensuring a holistic approach to student development and

addressing any issues that may arise in the student's home life. Gartu (2017) asserted the advantages of this type of collaboration included increased comprehension between instructors and parents concerning children's needs and hardships during school. In line with this, Pusztai (2024) agreed that family and school are two important environments for students' development and upbringing. Therefore, active involvement of parents in cooperation with the school has a positive impact on the success of the students' learning process which also enables adults to develop.

Additionally, based on teachers' interviews, the school also establishes contracts and agreements between the school and parents to ensure mutual understanding of the school regulations. The school imposes monetary fines on students who marry during school age. For junior high school students, the fine ranges from two to three million IDR, while for senior high school students, from three to four million IDR. Furthermore, the school collaborates with local authorities to facilitate the retrieval of children involved in early marriages. Each school, however, has its own rationale for implementing such fines or sanctions. While this approach may seem to address the issue after it arises, rather than focusing on root causes, yet it considers an agreement between the school and parents that both parties have consented to. On the other hand, the weakness of this agreement as a local regulation is that most parents can fulfill the sanction by paying some money, which may lead to biased alternatives and child marriage cases still occur in many areas.

A teacher uttered:

... since the sanction for parents is money, which parents consider as material, most of them are able to fulfill it.

Meaning, this approach may be positioned as a viable solution in addressing the issue rather than seeking to understand and identify the causes. Therefore, this sanction also needs strong support from the central government to manage strict regulation. Becchis (2003) revealed that local regulations frequently focus on the closest area they oversee, which may result in conflicts of interest and bias in making decisions.

Besides that, the school also collaborates with nearby health organizations such as primary health care (*puskesmas*) to conduct socialization activities related to sex education and reproductive health. This aligns with (Masruroh et al., 2021) study, stating that this collaboration extends to other organizations, including the Religious Affairs Office and the police. Moreover, *puskesmas* play a crucial role in this cross-sector collaboration, as some of its programs target young people, specifically within school settings. Herliana et al. (2018) suggest that an ongoing collaboration between health organizations and village authorities, to establish youth education programs at the school and village level, needs to be improved further to provide advance access to information related to child marriage.

Teachers' Consultation

Apart from the school instruction, teachers initiate small consultations with children. As argued by teachers:

...children tend to comprehend more when teachers hold consultation sessions, such as when they approach students and listen to their concerns.

Qureshi et al. (2024) also highlight the importance of mentorship in building children's self-esteem and providing them with guidance,

particularly in addressing sensitive issues. Similarly, in the context of Lombok, teachers often serve as informal mentors and counselors, providing students advice and emotional support. Not only do mentors and consultations help children deal with everyday challenges and to navigate difficult conversations with their parents around child marriage, in many conditions, they have also played an important role in preventing child marriage through teachers' advocacy and recommendation. Masruroh et al. (2021), with the same result, noted that teachers significantly influence students' decisions. Teachers often provide help and consultation with their children when they have some problem. Students will pay more attention when it comes to exclusive consultation.

Consistent with the discussion above, another study found that teachers play crucial roles in preventing child marriage by educating and guiding adolescents about the consequences of child marriage, which is formed in a program called 'legal counseling' (Eleanora et al., 2022). Teachers in Lombok tend to integrate such discussions within school-based activities, community meetings, or regular classes, making the intervention more culturally acceptable. However, the implementation of counseling and mentorship are challenges; a reality mirrored in Lombok where limited training, lack of facilities, and inadequate government support often constrain teachers' ability to provide consistent guidance. Therefore, support from the government is crucial to strengthening policies, empowering teachers, and providing facilities for them to educate the community about the risk of child marriage and promote gender equity (Karyati, 2024).

Extra Curricula Activities

As mentioned by one teacher:

The school offers extracurricular activities such as culinary arts and crafting with rattan. These activities emphasize the school's commitment to providing opportunities for creative expression that align with students' age, fostering their development and love for learning.

Following the interview results, it is clear that the school places significant importance on additional agendas as part of its holistic approach to student learning development. As mentioned by the teacher, the school provides several activities, in addition to classroom learning, which are designed to not only nurture students' creativity but also support their personal growth and practical skills. These activities are aligned with the students' age and developmental stages, which ensure that the opportunities offered are both relevant and engaging. In a study done by Masrurah et al. (2021), the school offers both compulsory and optional extracurricular courses, allowing students to choose activities based on their interests and talents. The engagement in these extracurricular activities helps students develop their skills and talents while facilitating a constructive way to spend their free time. This method not only promotes positive engagement but also serves as a preventive measure against negative influences, particularly relationships with the opposite sex. By fostering students to focus on their interests and skills through structured activities, the school ensures that they remain involved and supported in their personal and social development.

This finding, supported by a study conducted in Bengkulu, found that the program of Youth Information and Counseling Center Groups (PIKR), as an extracurricular program at the junior high school level, focuses on

providing a deeper understanding of sex education, including social, mental, physical and reproductive health, succeeds in raising students' awareness about the severe risk of child marriage which results in a decrease of child marriage cases (Destariyani, 2023). Moreover, a study in Bondowoso indicated that empowering women through the Sekolah Perempuan Peningkatan Kualitas Hidup (SEKOPER PKH) can reduce the prevalence of child marriage attributed to socio-economic factors (Ernada, 2022). The curriculum provided in this program includes discussions on avoidance of child marriage, family nutrition, managing finances and familial roles.

In addition, engaging youth in outside-of-school activities as sources of inspiration and agents of change through programs such as in the Philippines' Maguindanao Alliance of Youth Advocates (MAYA) and Linding Ko Kalombayan (LKK) may lower the rate of child marriage (Tagorda, 2024). The studies above indicated the importance of engaging youth through community programs or organizations that have been successful in reducing child marriage. However, there are some difficulties faced by the youth, such as a lack of family support, and adults taking more dominant roles over youth, leading them to be voiceless in decision making, and limited access to funding, training and alliances that can strengthen their advocacy (Tagorda, 2024). According to Dlamini et al. (2019), to address these difficulties, adults need to support youth in their positive involvement and activities by establishing platforms that encourage inclusivity and a sense of belonging, and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to society.

Conclusion

Child marriage in Lombok remains a complex social issue deeply shaped by cultural traditions, family conditions and economic pressures. The findings of this study reveal that the persistence of *merarik*, deeply rooted in Sasak tradition as a cultural practice combined with financial

strain and inadequate parental guidance, reinforces the continuation of child marriage and its impacts on education and social well-being. These factors collectively create a cycle where child marriage both results from and contributes to educational disruption and poverty.

Education interventions have shown effectiveness in addressing the root causes of child marriage. Strategies such as parental agreements, sanctions, and collaboration with local authorities serve as temporary solutions and have demonstrated potential in raising awareness and empowering youth. However, such initiatives often fall short in challenging entrenched cultural norms, as they primarily address behavior outcomes rather than transforming the values and belief system that sustain the practice.

To create sustainable change, an integrated ecological approach is needed, linking education, family empowerment, and socio-economic development. Ultimately, addressing child marriage in Lombok requires not only educational reform but also systemic cultural engagement, highlighting that transformation occurs across all levels of community. Further study should investigate multi-stakeholder perspectives and implement longitudinal and comparative analyses to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of school-based strategies in diverse contexts.

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