

From Mountains to Classrooms: How Faith Shapes the Dayak Meratus Educational Journey

Ahmad Juhaidi*, Analisa Fitria, Noor Hidayati

Associate Professor Educational Management, Antasari State Islamic University Banjarmasin, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: Ahmad Juhaidi, Associate Professor Educational Management, Antasari State Islamic University Banjarmasin, Indonesia

Received: 📅 October 21, 2024

Published: 📅 October 28, 2024

Introduction

The Dayak Meratus is an indigenous tribe of Indonesia. The Dayak Meratus refers to the tribe's geographical location [1]. They inhabit the Meratus Mountains in South Kalimantan Province, the third largest island globally. The data on Indonesia's population is not precise enough to pinpoint an exact number. The bulk of Meratus Dayaks reside in isolated communities. The Dayak Meratus subscribe to the Kaharingan belief system, grounded in their comprehension and experiences of nature and the cosmos [2]. Their primary revenue is derived from agriculture, specifically cinnamon, rubber, and candlenuts.

Religious based non-profit organizations significantly contribute to the education of the Dayak Meratus tribe. NGO movement also influenced religious conversion from traditional beliefs to Christianity or Islam. As a result, religion laid the foundation for the establishment of the Dayak Meratus community. Christians and Muslims primarily inhabit a section of the hamlet.

Christian communities generally exhibit a higher level of education compared to Muslim groups. The Meratus Dayak community in Tatayan Hamlet and Kipas Beach predominantly follows Christian doctrines. The community is renowned for its excellent level of education.

What is causing that occurrence? We shall delineate some potential causes in the subsequent section.

Faith and Education

Cristian School

Tataian and Pantai Kipas Hamlet in Loksado Village, South Kalimantan, Indonesia, represent the relatively successful Meratus Dayak community in their generation's education. Most children in the hamlet have completed their education up to the college

level. Parents strongly encourage their children to pursue further education. The community's attachment to education is inseparable from the religious non-profit institution that established Cristian Primary School in the late 1970s [3]. The school established itself as the first in the Loksado region. As a result, the community exhibits a stronger commitment to education than other Meratus Dayak communities do.

This phenomenon was also observed in the Pantai Kipas community. The original primary school was located near the church. In the 1980s, the government took ownership of the school and moved it. At that time, residents had to walk for approximately six hours before they could use motorcycles or cars. Therefore, the existence of a school close to their community is very important. The majority of communities without schools did not pursue primary education until the early 1990s.

We conclude that school is one of the determining factors for community engagement with education. Religious movements that emphasize education will have a long-term impact on the community. The NGO founded the school, establishing the groundwork for educational capital within the Meratus Dayak community.

Role Model in Community

The first generation of primary school graduates is now the driving force behind their children. Their children have become the first scholars in the family. Even in those communities, college has become a symbol of success and pride in their community. They strive to support their children's education. Furthermore, this generation serves as an educational role model for the current generation. They have now grown into significant figures in society, such as teachers and midwives, who serve as references for the education of community members [4].

Scholars from the Muslim Dayak Meratus community tend to separate themselves from the Dayak community. Nevertheless, some individuals return to reside with their parents, who prefer staying committed to the Kaharingan faith. They often move to cities or Muslim communities outside their hometowns. In contrast, scholars from the Christian Dayak Meratus community are more likely to remain within their community, although some do migrate to cities for work. However, the tendency to stay within the community is generally stronger among the Christian Dayak Meratus. This explains why the Christian Dayak Meratus community tends to have higher educational attainment compared to the Muslim Dayak Meratus community.

Muslim Dayak Meratus scholars often come from mixed backgrounds, such as having a Banjaresse father and a Dayak Meratus mother, or vice versa. Teachers, Islamic religious leaders, and members of the Muslim community have confirmed this phenomenon. It appears that education is not a primary priority for the Muslim Dayak Meratus community.

Religious leaders in these communities do not emphasize educational motivation, focusing instead on fostering awareness of faith and religious practices. As a result, education among the Muslim Dayak Meratus is often oriented toward religious fields, with fewer members pursuing careers such as midwifery, nursing, or teaching.

Conclusion

Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape for the children of the Dayak Meratus indigenous tribe. By placing education at the core of religious movements, communities can lay a strong foundation for long-term improvements in their quality of life. When education becomes a shared value, it not only fosters personal growth but also serves as a springboard for career success, which in turn inspires the next generation to aim higher academically. As role models emerge, they motivate others to strive for better educational opportunities, creating a positive cycle of growth and aspiration within the community.

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DOI: [10.32474/JAAS.2024.10.000331](https://doi.org/10.32474/JAAS.2024.10.000331)



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