

Children's Educational Access by Gender in the Cultural Perspective of the Bahorok Malay-Islamic Community

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ABSTRACT

Educational access for girls and boys in the Malay Bahorok community has changed alongside developments in social, economic, and educational conditions. Earlier generations experienced more limited educational opportunities due to inadequate educational facilities, geographical distance, household economic constraints, and gendered expectations concerning children's roles. This study aims to examine educational access for girls and boys from the perspective of Malay Bahorok culture, identify the factors influencing such access, and understand changing community perceptions of education across generations. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving 11 informants, comprising 2 key informants, 7 primary informants, and 2 supporting informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that educational access has become increasingly equal for girls and boys, including growing support for girls' pursuit of higher education. However, gender-based divisions of domestic responsibilities remain evident within family life. These findings indicate that changes in educational access have progressed more rapidly than changes in some gender norms within households. The study contributes to understanding educational transformation and gender relations within culturally grounded communities.

Akses pendidikan anak perempuan dan laki-laki dalam masyarakat Melayu Bahorok mengalami perubahan seiring perkembangan kondisi sosial, ekonomi, dan pendidikan. Pada generasi terdahulu, keterbatasan fasilitas pendidikan, jarak, kondisi ekonomi keluarga, dan konstruksi peran gender memengaruhi kesempatan anak untuk melanjutkan pendidikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis akses pendidikan anak perempuan dan laki-laki dalam perspektif budaya Melayu Bahorok, mengidentifikasi faktor yang memengaruhinya, serta memahami perubahan pandangan masyarakat terhadap pendidikan berdasarkan pengalaman antargenerasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan melibatkan 11 informan yang terdiri atas 2 informan kunci, 7 informan utama, dan 2 informan tambahan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perubahan akses pendidikan yang semakin setara antara anak perempuan dan laki-laki, termasuk meningkatnya dukungan terhadap pendidikan tinggi perempuan. Namun, pembagian tanggung jawab domestik berdasarkan gender masih ditemukan dalam kehidupan keluarga. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa perubahan akses pendidikan berlangsung lebih cepat daripada perubahan sebagian norma gender dalam rumah tangga. Penelitian berkontribusi pada pemahaman mengenai transformasi pendidikan dan relasi gender dalam masyarakat berbasis budaya.

Keywords: bahorok malay, children's educational, cultural, gender

Introduction

Educational culture is one of the fundamental dimensions of community life because education functions not only as a means of acquiring knowledge but also as a process through which individuals develop character (Mincu, 2022), morality, skills, and the capacities required to participate in social life. The quality of education is closely associated with the quality of human resources because education provides individuals with opportunities to develop their

intellectual, emotional, social, and practical capabilities. From this perspective, education cannot be separated from the social and cultural environment in which individuals grow and develop. Social values, norms, customary practices, and collective perceptions can influence how families understand the importance of education, establish educational priorities, and provide learning opportunities for their children (Aziz, 2026; Rahmania, 2024; Saleh & Maulida, 2025). Educational access, therefore, involves more than the physical availability of educational institutions; it is also shaped by social, economic, and cultural conditions as well as family relationships that determine the extent to which children can develop their potential. In communities characterized by strong social structures and cultural values, decisions concerning children's education may reflect prevailing understandings of the social roles of men and women. Education consequently has an important social and cultural dimension that warrants examination, particularly where differences in educational opportunities are associated with gender constructions (Dora et al., 2021; Nafisah & Hafizi, 2025).

This issue is particularly relevant in the context of the Malay Bahorok community, which forms part of the broader Malay population of North Sumatra and whose social structure is rooted in customary values, religious principles, and kinship relations. Within Malay Bahorok society, social norms and roles are transmitted across generations and contribute to the formation of collective understandings regarding the status, responsibilities, and expected conduct of men and women. Traditionally, the prevailing value system has tended to position men as heads of households and primary authorities in family decision-making, while women have been more strongly associated with the domestic sphere. The patrilineal kinship structure also places particular significance on paternal lineage and male descendants, resulting in the perception that sons carry greater responsibilities for family leadership and the continuity of lineage. Such constructions may influence how families perceive children's education, particularly when households must establish priorities under conditions of limited resources. Nevertheless, these gender-role constructions should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that the Malay Bahorok community rejects education for girls. Rather, the community appears to attach considerable value to education, while the implementation of educational aspirations within family life may be influenced by differing social expectations concerning sons and daughters. Educational access should therefore be examined not merely in terms of whether children have the opportunity to attend school, but also in terms of how cultural values and gendered divisions of roles shape family decisions concerning that opportunity.

The meaning attributed to education within the Malay Bahorok community is also closely connected to the relationship between cultural values and Islamic teachings. Malay communities are generally characterized by a strong appreciation of customary traditions, social etiquette, knowledge, and religious values in everyday life. Education is understood not only as the acquisition of formal knowledge through schooling but also as a process of cultivating moral character, ethics, personal conduct, and social responsibility. Within the Malay cultural context, education simultaneously functions as a means of preserving and transmitting values inherited from previous generations. The integration of customary principles with Islamic teachings is reflected in the philosophical formulation *adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah*, which places customary norms in close relationship with Islamic principles. From an Islamic perspective, men and women both possess spiritual responsibilities as servants of God and social responsibilities as *khalifah*, while the pursuit of knowledge is regarded as an important dimension of religious and social life. These principles provide a normative foundation for recognizing the importance of education for both boys and girls. However, normative

recognition of the importance of education does not necessarily produce equal educational practices, because decisions concerning children's schooling are also influenced by household economic conditions, the availability of educational facilities, the surrounding social environment, and gender-role constructions. It is therefore necessary to examine how cultural and religious values are translated into actual educational practices within Malay Bahorok families (Fariati et al., 2025; Mardiah et al., 2022).

Within educational scholarship, this issue is closely related to the concepts of gender and equality of opportunity. Gender refers not merely to biological differences between men and women but also to social roles constructed through cultural values, norms, expectations, and everyday practices. Gender constructions may influence children's educational experiences through differences in family support, the distribution of domestic responsibilities, learning opportunities, and decisions concerning educational continuation. Equitable education fundamentally positions girls and boys as individuals who should have opportunities to obtain quality education without being constrained by social constructions unrelated to their actual abilities. In practice, however, social norms and gender-based divisions of roles may produce differences in educational opportunities, particularly when household resources are limited. Within this framework, liberal feminist theory becomes relevant because it conceptualizes women's inequality as a condition that can emerge through social prejudice, discriminatory norms, and unequal opportunities that distinguish between men and women. This perspective enables the present study to examine how gender-role constructions may influence children's educational opportunities while also considering how changing social perceptions can create broader spaces for women's education. From this perspective, differences in educational access are not treated merely as individual or household-level problems but as manifestations of an opportunity structure shaped through the interaction of families, culture, and society (Putro et al., 2024; Rif'ah et al., 2022).

Previous studies have demonstrated that gender, culture, household conditions, and the broader social environment are interconnected with educational opportunities. Research on gender in education indicates that differential treatment based on gender constructions can affect children's opportunities, motivation, and learning experiences, while education itself plays an important role in developing gender awareness and reducing bias within educational environments. Studies examining gender inequality in educational access have further shown that perspectives positioning women primarily within the domestic sphere may contribute to the perception that education represents a more important investment for boys than for girls (Putro et al., 2024). At the same time, research on education grounded in local wisdom demonstrates that cultural values contribute to shaping children's character and educational orientations (Dora et al., 2021). Research concerning women's education has also documented changing understandings of women's position in relation to educational participation and involvement in broader social life (Mardiah et al., 2022). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that educational access is a multidimensional issue shaped by the interaction of gender, culture, family conditions, and the social environment. Nevertheless, each community possesses distinctive social and cultural experiences, meaning that the relationships among these factors need to be examined within their specific local contexts.

Within the Malay Bahorok context, educational access becomes more complex because changes in educational opportunities are associated not only with gender constructions but also with household economic conditions and the availability of educational infrastructure. Educational conditions in the past indicate that the limited number of schools, considerable

travel distances, inadequate transportation, and the community's economic dependence on agricultural and plantation activities could constrain families' ability to provide education for their children. Under conditions of limited resources, families were required to establish priorities, and boys tended to receive greater educational opportunities because they were perceived as future breadwinners and individuals who would assume greater economic responsibility for the household. At the same time, girls were more frequently associated with domestic responsibilities and preparation for family life. However, these circumstances cannot be understood simply as evidence of community resistance to girls' education. Rather, the observed disparities reflect an interaction among gender constructions, household economic limitations, educational infrastructure, and family considerations in establishing educational priorities. As the number of schools increased, transportation became more accessible, economic conditions improved, and parents' awareness of the importance of education grew, these differences in educational opportunities gradually declined. Educational change should therefore be understood as a broader social process involving transformations in cultural values, material conditions, and family perceptions of the future roles and prospects of sons and daughters.

Against this background, there remains a need to examine more deeply how culture and gender constructions interact with broader social change in shaping children's educational access. Previous research has extensively addressed gender equality in education, women's education, culturally based education, and family-related factors associated with educational outcomes. However, the relationship among Malay-Islamic cultural values, gender constructions, socioeconomic conditions, and changing patterns of educational access within the Malay Bahorok community has not been a primary focus of the studies reviewed in this article. This gap is particularly significant because educational disparities in the past cannot be adequately explained solely through the existence of norms that restricted women. Within Malay Bahorok society, cultural values and Islamic teachings continue to recognize the importance of education, while actual educational opportunities are also shaped by household economic circumstances, educational infrastructure, gendered social roles, and changing parental awareness. The contribution of this study therefore lies in examining how children's educational access according to gender is constructed, maintained, and subsequently transformed within the Malay-Islamic cultural context of Bahorok. Such an approach makes it possible not only to identify differences in educational access but also to explain the factors underlying those differences and the ways in which social transformation contributes to increasingly equitable educational opportunities.

Based on these issues and the identified research gap, this study aims to analyze children's educational access according to gender from the perspective of Malay-Islamic culture in Bahorok, with particular attention to differences in educational opportunities between girls and boys. The study specifically examines the factors that shape educational access, including cultural and traditional values, gender-role constructions within families, household economic conditions, parental awareness, the social and educational environment, and changing community perceptions concerning the importance of girls' education. In addition, the study seeks to understand how the Malay Bahorok community interprets education for boys and girls and how these interpretations have changed alongside broader social developments. By pursuing these objectives, the study is expected to contribute to the sociology of education and cultural studies by providing a contextual understanding of the relationship among culture, gender, and educational access within a local community. At the same time, the study seeks to

illustrate how communities can respond to changing educational circumstances while maintaining customary values and religious principles that remain important components of their social identity.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to develop an in-depth understanding of educational access among girls and boys in the Malay Bahorok community and the social and cultural factors influencing such access (Sugiyono, 2023; Suhirman et al., 2026). This approach was selected because the phenomenon under investigation involves educational experiences, family perspectives, cultural values, social practices, and changing understandings of education within the community. The qualitative approach enabled the study not only to describe observable educational conditions but also to examine informants' experiences and perspectives regarding how educational decisions are shaped within families and the broader community. The study focused on comparing educational experiences between girls and boys, identifying cultural factors influencing educational access, and examining changes in community perceptions of education for both groups over time. The descriptive design was employed to present the phenomenon contextually on the basis of information obtained directly from the field (Moleong, 2018).

The study was conducted over approximately six months, from the proposal preparation stage through the completion of the research report. The data sources consisted of 11 informants, categorized into three groups according to their roles and relevance to the research focus. The informants comprised 2 key informants, 7 primary informants, and 2 supporting informants. The key informants consisted of a community member and a customary leader who possessed knowledge of the social conditions, cultural values, and community perspectives concerning education in the Malay Bahorok community. The seven primary informants were members of the Malay community born between 1969 and 2014. This generational range was intended to capture educational experiences from different generations and thereby examine changes in educational access and community perceptions across generations. The two supporting informants consisted of one teacher and one religious leader, who provided complementary perspectives from the educational and religious contexts of the community. All informants were selected based on the relevance of their experiences and knowledge to the research focus. The personal identities of the informants are not disclosed in the manuscript in order to maintain participant confidentiality.

Table 1. Composition of Research Informants

Informant Category	Number	Characteristics	Contribution to the Study
Key informants	2	Community member and customary leader	Provided information concerning social conditions, cultural values, customary practices, and community perspectives on education
Primary informants	7	Malay community members born between 1969 and 2014	Provided educational experiences and perspectives concerning girls' and boys' educational access across generations
Supporting informants	2	Teacher and religious leader	Provided complementary perspectives from educational and religious contexts

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation (Creswell, 2018). In-depth interviews served as the primary source of data and were used to explore informants' experiences and perspectives concerning educational conditions during their respective periods, educational opportunities for girls and boys, parental considerations in educational decision-making, the influence of cultural and customary values, gender-based family responsibilities, and changing perceptions of girls' education. The interview guide was developed in accordance with the research questions and directed toward key, primary, and supporting informants according to their respective areas of knowledge. The research guidelines indicate that the interview questions addressed gender-based educational access, Malay Bahorok cultural perspectives, family roles, customary values, and educational conditions within the community. Questions directed to the customary leader also examined customary perspectives concerning girls' and boys' education and the extent to which customary responsibilities might influence girls' educational opportunities.

Observation was conducted to obtain contextual information concerning social conditions and educational practices within families, the community, and schools. Observation served as supporting evidence for examining the social context in which education takes place and the participation of girls and boys in educational activities (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The teacher's perspective was used to complement information concerning the participation of female and male students, attendance, engagement in learning activities, and parental support for children's education. Documentation was used to supplement information obtained through interviews and observations, including photographs of research activities, relevant documents, reference materials, and supporting data related to the research focus. The use of these three techniques enabled the researchers to obtain information concerning educational experiences, social conditions, and educational practices from multiple sources, thereby providing a more comprehensive account of the phenomenon under investigation.

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed thematically by organizing the information according to the research focus and patterns emerging from the field data. Interview findings were compared with observations and documentary evidence to identify consistencies and differences across data sources. The data were subsequently grouped into themes concerning educational access, household social and economic conditions, gender-based role divisions, and changing community perceptions of girls' and boys' education. The analysis proceeded through several stages, including reviewing the collected data, identifying information relevant to the research questions, organizing the data into thematic categories, and developing interpretations based on the patterns identified. Through this procedure, the analysis was directed toward answering the research questions concerning educational access among girls and boys and the cultural factors influencing such access within the Malay Bahorok community.

Result

This study focuses on access to education among girls and boys in the Malay Bahorok community and the factors shaping such access within the local social and cultural context. Data were obtained through interviews with key informants, primary informants, and additional informants, complemented by field observations. The analysis generated three major themes: (1) changes in educational access among girls and boys across generations, (2) social, economic, and family conditions shaping educational access, and (3) changing perceptions of girls'

education and its position within family and community life. These themes indicate that educational experiences have not remained the same across generations. The availability of schools, family economic circumstances, parental support, the distribution of responsibilities within the household, and changing perceptions of girls' education emerged as important aspects of the experiences described by the informants.

Changes in Educational Access among Girls and Boys across Generations

Educational experiences among earlier generations in the Malay Bahorok community developed under conditions that were considerably more constrained than those experienced today. The most prominent limitations concerned the availability of schools and supporting educational facilities, which had not yet expanded sufficiently to meet the educational needs of the wider population. These constraints became particularly significant when children sought to continue their education beyond the level available within their immediate surroundings. In the absence of accessible secondary schools, pursuing further education could require children to leave their home area, thereby creating additional financial, logistical, and social demands for their families. One informant who experienced this educational environment recalled that schooling opportunities in Bahorok were still limited and that children who wished to continue their education were required to leave the area. Such experiences demonstrate that educational participation during the earlier period was shaped by more than individual willingness or academic motivation. The realization of educational aspirations depended heavily on whether the surrounding environment could provide accessible institutions and whether families possessed sufficient resources to overcome the barriers associated with educational mobility. Education was therefore not yet an equally accessible opportunity but remained closely connected to the geographical, institutional, and socioeconomic circumstances in which families lived.

These structural limitations intersected with household economic capacity and prevailing understandings of the different roles of girls and boys. When families lacked sufficient resources to provide the same level of education for all children, educational decisions involved a process of prioritization. One informant described this situation by stating, "In the past, when a family could not afford to send all of their children to school, boys were usually given priority. Girls were considered to need only basic abilities such as reading, writing, and managing the household." This account suggests that gender inequality in education during the earlier period did not necessarily operate through explicit restrictions preventing girls from attending school. Girls could still receive formal education, but when household resources were insufficient, boys were more likely to be regarded as the priority for continued educational investment. Such decisions reflected broader expectations concerning the future roles of children. Boys were more commonly associated with economic and social responsibilities outside the household, whereas girls were more strongly connected to domestic life and family responsibilities. Consequently, the educational limitations experienced by girls should be understood as the outcome of an interaction between economic constraints, restricted educational infrastructure, and gendered expectations concerning adulthood. Over subsequent generations, however, this pattern gradually weakened. Informants from younger age groups described an educational environment in which girls and boys increasingly received comparable opportunities, while family decisions became more attentive to children's abilities, willingness to learn, and future aspirations rather than relying primarily on gender.

The intergenerational transformation becomes particularly evident in the contemporary educational environment, where opportunities for girls and boys to participate in schooling are now perceived as substantially more equal. A teacher stated, "There is no longer any significant difference. Girls and boys are given the same opportunity to attend school, even up to university." This account is consistent with observations of the school environment, where girls and boys were actively involved in classroom learning, academic programs, extracurricular activities, and other school-based initiatives. No apparent restrictions based on gender were identified, and participation by female and male students appeared relatively balanced across the observed activities. This condition represents a marked departure from the experiences reported by earlier generations, for whom educational continuation was strongly influenced by the availability of local schools, geographical distance, household financial capacity, and gendered educational priorities. The transformation therefore reflects more than an expansion of educational infrastructure; it also indicates a broader change in the social meaning assigned to education. Education is increasingly understood as an important developmental opportunity for every child rather than as an investment that should be differentiated according to gender. Within the Malay Bahorok community, the weakening of gender-based educational preferences consequently appears to have developed alongside greater institutional accessibility and changing family expectations concerning children's futures. Nevertheless, the increasing equality of educational access should be interpreted carefully, since equal opportunities to attend school do not necessarily demonstrate that all gender-based differences in household responsibilities, social expectations, and everyday experiences have disappeared.



Figure 1. Documentation of the researcher's interviews with informants in the Malay Bahorok community

Social, Economic, and Family Conditions Shaping Educational Access

Household economic circumstances emerged as one of the most influential factors shaping informants' experiences of educational access and continuity. Among earlier generations, financial constraints extended beyond the ability to meet routine school expenses and became more consequential when children were required to pursue further education outside their residential area. Transportation, accommodation, daily living expenses, and the need for continued family support made educational continuation a substantially greater financial commitment. When household income had to be allocated across multiple basic needs, educational expenditure became part of a broader process of household prioritization. This condition demonstrates that educational access cannot be separated from a family's capacity to sustain children's schooling over time. The greater the additional costs generated by geographical distance and the limited availability of local educational institutions, the greater the burden placed on households. Economic constraints in the past therefore did not

necessarily mean that children were completely excluded from schooling; rather, they could restrict the ability of families to support educational continuation at higher levels. The contemporary educational environment has gradually reduced some of these pressures by providing wider access to educational institutions and decreasing the need for children to leave their communities to continue their studies. The changing relationship between household resources and educational accessibility consequently represents an important dimension of the intergenerational transformation identified in the Malay Bahorok community.

Alongside economic capacity, parental support emerged as a significant factor influencing children's educational trajectories. Parents contributed not only by meeting educational expenses and material needs but also by providing encouragement, attention, and motivation for children to remain engaged with schooling and complete their education. Interview data indicate a noticeable shift in family orientations among younger generations, particularly in the increasingly similar educational aspirations expressed for daughters and sons. One informant explained that parents hoped that *"all children can attain a high level of education and have a good future."* This statement reflects a family orientation in which education is increasingly understood as a common developmental need rather than an opportunity that should be differentiated according to gender. Such a shift is significant because it represents a movement away from an understanding of education primarily as preparation for boys' future economic responsibilities toward a broader recognition of education as a means through which girls can develop their abilities, expand their life choices, and construct their own futures. Parental support therefore operates not merely as a practical condition for educational continuity but also as a social space in which changing educational aspirations and gender expectations are negotiated. As parents increasingly express comparable educational expectations for daughters and sons, educational decision-making becomes less dependent on gender and more closely associated with children's individual potential, aspirations, and future prospects.

Despite the expansion of educational opportunities, gendered patterns in the distribution of household responsibilities remain evident in everyday family life. Interview data indicate that girls are more frequently associated with domestic tasks, whereas boys are more commonly involved in work or activities outside the home. One informant explained, *"Yes, usually girls help more with household chores, while boys help with work outside the home."* This account demonstrates that changes in educational access have not necessarily eliminated established patterns of gendered responsibility within the household. At the same time, the findings indicate that domestic responsibilities do not automatically prevent girls from participating in education. An informant from the younger generation explained that certain family practices and values continue to be transmitted by parents but *"do not prevent children from receiving an education."* This suggests that household responsibilities and formal education can coexist within children's everyday lives. Field observations further demonstrated parental support for children's educational activities and relatively equal opportunities for girls and boys to participate in both academic and non-academic school programs. The resulting pattern is therefore one of gradual rather than complete transformation: equality in educational access has advanced more rapidly, while changes in the gendered organization of household responsibilities have proceeded at a slower pace. The continued involvement of girls in domestic work should consequently not be interpreted automatically as evidence of educational restriction but rather understood as the persistence of family norms operating alongside an increasingly egalitarian orientation toward girls' and boys' education.

Changing Perceptions of Girls' Education and Its Position within Family and Community Life

Changes in perceptions of girls' education constitute one of the clearest findings emerging from comparisons across generations. In earlier periods, girls were more frequently prepared for roles as wives and mothers. Education was still recognized and provided, but higher education was not generally regarded as a primary need. When families experienced economic limitations, boys were more often considered to require higher education because they were expected to become breadwinners and heads of households. One informant described this condition by explaining that when a family could not afford to educate all of its children, boys were usually prioritized, whereas girls were considered sufficiently prepared if they could read, write, and manage household responsibilities.

This perspective does not indicate that the community as a whole rejected girls' education. The findings instead reveal a distinction between access to basic education and encouragement to pursue higher levels of education. Girls could attend school, but continuing to higher education was not always regarded as necessary. Within this context, social expectations for girls remained strongly associated with domestic and family responsibilities, while boys' education was more closely associated with preparation for economic roles. These patterns were particularly evident in the experiences of earlier generations and became more apparent when families had to establish educational priorities under conditions of limited resources. Perceptions of girls' education subsequently changed as the community increasingly recognized its broader benefits. One informant stated, "Higher education for women is viewed as something positive." The informant further explained that women who pursue higher education are increasingly viewed as capable of improving themselves, contributing to family economic conditions, and becoming examples within the community. This account reflects a broader understanding of the value of girls' education. Education is no longer considered solely in relation to women's domestic roles but increasingly in terms of the capacities they can develop and the contributions they can make within family and community life.

This changing acceptance is also evident in attitudes toward women who pursue university education. One informant stated, "At present, customary practices do not prohibit it. In fact, the community feels proud when a woman succeeds in attaining higher education. However, in the past, parents considered higher education less important for women." The statement illustrates a substantial change in social attitudes. Higher education for women, which was previously not considered a major priority, is increasingly accepted and may even become a source of pride for families and communities. Women who continue their education are also increasingly given space to pursue educational choices according to their aspirations and abilities. These changes are further reflected in the experiences of younger generations and in the school environment. One informant stated, "Girls and boys have the same opportunity to attend school and continue their education according to their aspirations." Another informant explained that people in the local community support women who pursue higher education because education is considered important for achieving a better future. Field observations similarly showed that girls and boys participated in learning activities and school programs without restrictions based on gender. Although the distribution of responsibilities within families remains visible, education continues to occupy an important position in children's lives.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that access to education among girls and boys in the Malay Bahorok community has undergone substantial intergenerational transformation. This change is reflected not only in the increasing availability of formal educational opportunities but also in the changing ways families perceive education as an important component of their children's future. Earlier generations experienced educational continuation under conditions in which educational institutions were relatively limited within the local area. When higher levels of education were not adequately available within the community, children wishing to continue their schooling often had to leave their place of origin, thereby creating additional transportation, accommodation, living, and social support costs for their families. Under such circumstances, educational decisions were strongly shaped by the opportunity structure available within the local environment. This pattern is consistent with Ahsan, Emran, and Shilpi (2020), who demonstrated that regional differences in school quality, educational investment, and access to educational opportunities are associated with intergenerational educational mobility in Indonesia. In Bahorok, geographical and institutional constraints therefore directly narrowed the educational choices available to families. Younger generations, by contrast, have grown up within a more accessible educational environment in which schools are increasingly available and opportunities to pursue higher education have expanded for both girls and boys. Educational change in Bahorok should therefore not be understood merely as the consequence of an increase in educational facilities, but as a transformation of the opportunity structure through which families can envision broader educational futures for their children.

The transformation of educational opportunities has occurred alongside changes in household socioeconomic conditions and increasing parental aspirations. Lim and Lee (2022) found that household socioeconomic circumstances and parental aspirations are associated with children's educational attainment in Indonesia. The Bahorok findings reveal a similar relationship in explaining differences in educational experiences across generations. When household resources were limited and further education required children to study outside their communities, the financial burden of education increased substantially, requiring families to prioritize educational investments. Under these circumstances, education was not simply a matter of whether children could attend school but also whether households could sustain their education through higher levels. As educational access improved and families became increasingly capable of utilizing available opportunities, parental aspirations also changed. Higher education gradually became perceived as a relevant goal for all children rather than as an option reserved for particular groups. This shift is significant because educational decisions are shaped not only by material resources but also by what families perceive as an appropriate and desirable future for their children. In Bahorok, the growing aspiration for both girls and boys to obtain higher education suggests that educational expansion has occurred together with a broader transformation in how families define children's success and future prospects.

This transformation is particularly evident in the increasing openness of educational opportunities for girls. **Buchmann et al.**, (2022) demonstrated that the expansion of higher education can increase university participation among both women and men, indicating that institutional expansion can serve as an important mechanism for broadening educational opportunities across gender groups. Although Si's study was conducted in China, its findings provide a useful comparative perspective for understanding developments in Bahorok, particularly because younger generations increasingly receive support to pursue education

without the strong gender-based restrictions experienced by earlier generations. Nevertheless, the present findings also demonstrate that greater equality in educational access has not necessarily produced equality across all dimensions of family life. Girls continue to be more strongly associated with household work and domestic responsibilities, whereas boys are more frequently associated with activities outside the home or family economic activities. This indicates that changes in educational access and transformations in gender norms are interconnected but do not necessarily occur at the same pace. Educational opportunities can change relatively quickly because they are influenced by school expansion, educational policies, socioeconomic conditions, and family aspirations, whereas domestic divisions of labor are embedded in everyday routines, socialization processes, and intergenerationally transmitted cultural expectations. Consequently, increasing female participation in education should be regarded as an important indicator of progress toward gender equality, but it should not be interpreted as evidence that all forms of gender differentiation within family life have disappeared.

The relationship between education and domestic labor becomes particularly evident when the Bahorok findings are considered alongside previous research on children's gendered time allocation. Zhou, Zhang, and Jordan (2026) found that girls in Indonesia and the Philippines spend more time on household work while also engaging in study outside school, whereas boys tend to spend more time participating in family economic activities. This pattern corresponds with the situation identified in Bahorok, where educational opportunities for girls have expanded while domestic responsibilities have not yet been distributed equally. Escobar Carías et al. (2025) similarly found that girls in Indonesian informal settlements may devote time to education while simultaneously performing unpaid work. These findings demonstrate that formal equality in educational access does not necessarily constitute substantive equality in educational experience. A girl may possess the same formal opportunity to attend school as a boy while simultaneously carrying a different time burden because of household responsibilities. This perspective is further supported by Gibby (2022), who found that girls in southern India undertake significantly more household work and that parental gender ideologies are associated with the amount of domestic labor performed by girls. The convergence of these findings suggests that educational expansion can reduce institutional barriers to girls' education while gendered expectations concerning household labor may persist for a longer period. Educational transformation in Bahorok has therefore contributed significantly to reducing disparities in formal access, but it continues to face the challenge of ensuring that girls receive sufficient time and family support to benefit substantively from educational opportunities.

Nevertheless, the Bahorok experience does not fully reproduce the patterns identified in several previous studies concerning gender preferences in educational investment. Dessy, Tiberti, and Zoundi (2023) demonstrated that economic shocks can interact with cultural norms and lead households to reduce educational investment in girls while protecting investment in boys, particularly in contexts characterized by strong patrilocal structures. A related pattern was identified by Maluleke (2017), who showed that gender parity in school participation may coexist with a bias toward boys in household educational expenditure. Begum, Grossman, and Islam (Begum et al., 2022) similarly demonstrated that parental gender preferences can generate greater educational investment in boys. In contrast, the Bahorok findings indicate a weakening of the tendency to prioritize boys' education among younger generations. Informants described increasingly similar aspirations for higher education among girls and boys.

This difference is important because it demonstrates that the relationship between economic conditions, gender norms, and educational investment is not universal. Economic pressure may constrain a household's capacity to finance education, but the extent to which such pressure produces gendered educational decisions depends on family norms, parental aspirations, educational environments, and community perceptions of the value of girls' education. In Bahorok, changing aspirations and expanding educational opportunities appear to have reduced the influence of earlier norms that positioned boys' education as the primary educational priority.

Several interconnected mechanisms help explain this transformation. The first is the expansion of the educational opportunity structure, through which increasing availability of schools and higher educational institutions has gradually reduced geographical and financial barriers to educational continuation. When children no longer need to leave their communities to pursue further education, the economic and social burdens placed on households are reduced, allowing educational decisions to be made on the basis of broader considerations. The second mechanism concerns changes in household capacity and resource allocation. Improved economic capacity enables families to distribute educational investments more equally, whereas resource constraints in earlier periods required households to prioritize educational spending according to their perceptions of long-term benefits. The third mechanism involves changes in parental aspirations. As education becomes increasingly understood as a pathway toward greater capacity, employment opportunities, and improved future prospects, gender becomes less decisive in educational decision-making. The fourth mechanism concerns changing perceptions of the benefits of girls' education. Girls' education is no longer understood primarily in relation to literacy, marriage, caregiving, or domestic life, but increasingly as a means of developing personal capacities, accessing employment, strengthening economic independence, and expanding social participation. These changes help explain why younger generations in Bahorok express more similar educational aspirations for girls and boys. Nevertheless, these developments continue to occur within a cultural environment in which some traditional gender expectations remain influential, meaning that changes in educational access do not automatically eliminate gender norms.

Another important mechanism is the intergenerational negotiation of gender norms. Values and practices inherited from previous generations do not necessarily disappear when educational opportunities expand; instead, they may be modified and adapted to changing social circumstances. Families may continue to expect daughters to participate in household work while simultaneously supporting their pursuit of higher education. Such circumstances demonstrate that social transformation does not always involve the complete replacement of older values by new ones. Instead, it may occur through processes of accommodation, adaptation, and negotiation. Khurshid (Khurshid, 2016) demonstrated that women's education can expand opportunities for women to assume broader roles in the public sphere without automatically eliminating domestic responsibilities. This perspective is particularly relevant to Bahorok, where girls' and women's educational opportunities have expanded while some domestic expectations remain. More broadly, Murphy-Graham (2024) argues that gender-transformative education must move beyond providing access to schooling and address stereotypes, norms, social practices, power relations, educational environments, and family and community engagement. The Bahorok findings support this argument because educational equality has progressed more rapidly than changes in household divisions of responsibility. Therefore, the success of girls' education should be assessed not only through the number of

girls who enter school or attain higher education but also through whether they receive sufficient time, resources, family support, and social conditions to translate educational opportunities into broader forms of empowerment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that educational transformation in the Malay Bahorok community represents a gradual, complex, and uneven intergenerational process. Educational opportunities for girls and boys have expanded, parental aspirations have become more inclusive, and higher education for women has gained stronger social acceptance. Women's educational achievement is increasingly associated with positive symbolic value and may become a source of pride for families and the wider community. However, these developments have not completely eliminated gendered divisions of domestic responsibility. This situation indicates that equality in educational access can advance more rapidly than the transformation of gender norms within households. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of maintaining economic and geographical support for education, particularly for households with limited resources; strengthening parental aspirations that regard higher education as equally relevant to daughters and sons; and promoting a more balanced distribution of domestic responsibilities so that girls do not face time burdens that diminish the benefits of educational participation. The involvement of schools, families, community leaders, and local institutions is also essential to ensure that educational transformation extends beyond access toward broader social change. The principal contribution of the Bahorok findings therefore lies in demonstrating that educational equality develops through interconnected changes in the opportunity structure, household economic conditions, family aspirations, perceptions of the value of girls' education, and intergenerational negotiation of gender norms. The case demonstrates that communities can move toward greater educational equality without necessarily abandoning inherited cultural values, but sustaining this transformation requires educational expansion to be accompanied by changes in household responsibilities, time allocation, and gender expectations within families and communities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that access to education among girls and boys in the Malay Bahorok community has undergone substantial intergenerational change. Among earlier generations, educational opportunities were strongly influenced by limited educational facilities, geographical distance to higher levels of schooling, household economic circumstances, and prevailing perceptions of different gender roles. Among younger generations, educational opportunities have become increasingly accessible, while parental aspirations for girls' and boys' education have become more comparable, including aspirations to pursue higher education. Nevertheless, these changes have not completely eliminated gender-based divisions of responsibility within family life, particularly girls' involvement in domestic work. The findings therefore address the focus of the study by demonstrating that changes in educational access have occurred alongside changing family aspirations and greater social acceptance of girls' education, while certain gender norms within domestic life continue to persist.

This study contributes to the understanding of educational access in culturally grounded communities by demonstrating that educational equality is a gradual process that does not necessarily develop at the same pace across all dimensions of gender relations. In practical terms, strengthening educational equality should involve not only expanding access to schooling but also supporting household economic capacity, strengthening parental educational

aspirations, and promoting a more balanced distribution of domestic responsibilities. Schools, families, community leaders, and relevant local stakeholders can work collectively to sustain equal educational opportunities for girls and boys. Future research could broaden this inquiry by involving a wider range of generational groups and incorporating the perspectives of families, children, and community members to examine more deeply how changing gender norms are negotiated within educational and family contexts.

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