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## LITERATURE STUDY ON HIGHER EDUCATION AS HUMAN FITRAH: ISLAMIC WASATHIYAH VALUES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *This research aims to examine the meaning of higher education as the path of human nature from the wasathiyah perspective, focusing on its relevance in the context of socio-economic changes in coastal communities. The background of this research is based on the strong patriarchal views that limit the role of women in Higher education, a narrow understanding of destiny, and low participation in Higher education among coastal communities. This research uses a qualitative approach based on a literature study to analyze the concept of higher education as the path of fitrah from an Islamic perspective and its relevance to contemporary issues. The analysis was conducted on primary literature (the Qur'an and hadith) as well as secondary literature in the form of books, articles, research reports, and data from relevant institutions such as BPS, Kemendikbud, and UNESCO. The results show that Higher education is seen as a form of actualization of human nature, which is endowed with the potential of reason, heart, and instinct to develop. The concept of hair and destiny in Islam encourages maximum efforts in studying, including for women and marginalized communities. The findings confirm that Higher education is a strategic necessity in the face of socio-economic changes in coastal communities, which are now affected by the ecological crisis, limited natural resources, and the demands of globalization. This research contributes to enriching the understanding of the importance of Higher education as part of the mission of human creation in Islam. Research recommendations include the need to strengthen educational literacy programs in coastal communities, synergies between pesantren, universities, and local governments, and the development of an inclusive fitrah-based curriculum.*



**Keywords:** Educational Theory, Fitrah, Higher education, Pantura, Wasathiyah.

**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji makna berpendidikan tinggi sebagai jalan fitrah manusia dalam perspektif wasathiyah, dengan fokus pada relevansinya dalam konteks perubahan sosial-ekonomi masyarakat pesisir pantura. Latar belakang penelitian ini didasarkan pada masih kuatnya pandangan patriarkal yang membatasi peran perempuan dalam pendidikan tinggi, pemahaman takdir secara sempit, serta rendahnya partisipasi pendidikan tinggi di kalangan masyarakat pesisir. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka untuk menganalisis konsep pendidikan tinggi sebagai jalan fitrah dalam perspektif Islam dan relevansinya dengan isu-isu kontemporer. Analisis dilakukan terhadap literatur primer (Al-Qur'an dan hadis) serta literatur sekunder berupa buku, artikel, laporan penelitian, dan data lembaga terkait seperti BPS, Kemendikbud, dan UNESCO. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan tinggi dipandang sebagai bentuk aktualisasi fitrah manusia yang dianugerahi potensi akal, hati, dan naluri untuk berkembang. Konsep ikhtiar dan takdir dalam Islam mendorong upaya maksimal dalam menuntut ilmu, termasuk bagi perempuan dan masyarakat marginal. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan tinggi adalah kebutuhan strategis dalam menghadapi perubahan sosial-ekonomi masyarakat pesisir, yang kini terdampak oleh krisis ekologi, keterbatasan sumber daya alam, dan tuntutan globalisasi. Penelitian ini menambah kontribusi dalam memperkaya pemahaman tentang pentingnya pendidikan tinggi sebagai bagian dari misi penciptaan manusia dalam Islam. Rekomendasi penelitian meliputi perlunya penguatan program literasi pendidikan di masyarakat pesisir, sinergi antara pesantren, perguruan tinggi, dan pemerintah daerah, serta pengembangan kurikulum berbasis fitrah yang inklusif.

**Kata Kunci:** Fitrah, Pendidikan Tinggi, Pesisir Pantura, Teori Pendidikan, Wasathiyah.

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education includes an important phase in the development of quality knowledge, experience skills, and attitudes, covering intellectual, spiritual, and social aspects.<sup>1</sup> This strategic role is carried out through the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher education: teaching, research, and service to the community.<sup>2</sup> Through Higher education, people not only gain academic knowledge, but also critical thinking skills, innovation, and character values needed in society and the world of work.

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) shows that individuals with Higher educational attainment open doors to better job opportunities and improve one's

<sup>1</sup> Fikri Abdillah, *Peran Perguruan Tinggi dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Sumber Daya Manusia di Indonesia*, EDUCAZIONE: Jurnal Multidisiplin 1, no. 1 (2024): 13–24, <https://doi.org/10.37985/educazione.v1i1.4>.

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Palangkaraya, "Peran Penting Universitas dalam Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia di Indonesia," 2024, <https://universitaspalangkaraya.id/peran-penting-universitas-dalam-pengembangan-sumber-daya-manusia-di-indonesia/>.



standard of living compared to those without such qualifications.<sup>3</sup> However, challenges remain, such as the gap between graduates' skills and industry needs, which requires universities to continuously innovate curriculum and learning methods.<sup>4</sup> In the global context, Higher education also plays a role in promoting sustainable development through increasing the intellectual capacity of society and contributing to the development of technology and innovation.<sup>5</sup> UNESCO emphasizes the importance of Higher education in efforts to realize the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those related to poverty alleviation and improving the lives of citizens.

In this context, Islam as a comprehensive guide has given great focus to the importance of science.<sup>6</sup> There is still a conservative view that Higher education is not very important, especially for individuals who will be positioned in the domestic space, such as women who are perceived to only be wives and housewives. This view is reflected in various stereotypes and discriminatory practices that develop in society. Some articles point out that women are often faced with stigmas such as "why do women go to high school, they end up in the kitchen, bed and well anyway," which reflects the marginalization of women from the realm of formal education.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in some areas, women are prohibited from pursuing Higher education for cultural, economic, and even security reasons, while men are encouraged to prioritize careers.<sup>8</sup> Even in the academic space, discrimination against women still occurs, with the assumption that women only play a role as a male companion in the household, not as intellectually and economically independent individuals.<sup>9</sup> Such views are also affirmed in studies that highlight how patriarchal culture systematically inhibits women's access to Higher education, thereby reinforcing gender inequality in society.<sup>10</sup> This narrative is rooted in the notion that one's primary responsibility, particularly in traditional

<sup>3</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Maluku, *Statistik Pendidikan Provinsi Maluku 2022, 2023*, <https://maluku.bps.go.id/id/publication/2023/12/14/40771a13704a6c2ad94cb49d/statistik-pendidikan-provinsi-maluku-2022.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Universitas Palangkaraya, "Peran Penting Universitas."

<sup>5</sup> Kantor Staf Ahli UPI, *Peran Pendidikan Tinggi dalam Mengembangkan Tenaga Kerja yang Relevan dengan Pasar untuk Indonesia yang Kompetitif di Abad ke-21*, 2025, <https://ksa.upi.edu/peran-pendidikan-tinggi-dalam-mengembangkan-tenaga-kerja-yang-relevan-dengan-pasar-untuk-indonesia-yang-kompetitif-di-abad-ke-21/>

<sup>6</sup> Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. *The Concept of Education in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> The Columnist, "Menepis Stigma Pendidikan Tinggi bagi Perempuan," diakses 27 Mei 2025, <https://thecolumnist.id/artikel/menepis-stigma-pendidikan-tinggi-bagi-perempuan--320>.

<sup>8</sup> Pronesiata.id, "Perempuan dan Pendidikan Tinggi: Antara Stereotip dan Realita," diakses 27 Mei 2025, <https://pronesiata.id/homepage/detail/Esai/perempuan-dan-pendidikan-tinggi>.

<sup>9</sup> Siti Khadijah, "Problematika Pendidikan Perempuan di Indonesia," *Al-Tarbawi Al-Haditsah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 1 (2022): 45-58, <https://syekhnurjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/tarbawi/article/view/2860>.

<sup>10</sup> Yulia Rahayu, "Urgensi Penghapusan Diskriminasi Pendidikan pada Perempuan Indonesia: Perlawanan Atas Pelanggengan Budaya Patriarki," *Kompasiana*, diakses 27 Mei 2025, <https://www.kompasiana.com/yulia80700/5fd8e151d541df64fa280bd4/urgensi-penghapusan-diskriminasi-pendidikan-pada-perempuan-indonesia-perlawanan-atas-pelanggengan-budaya-patriarki>.



family structures, is at home, not in the public sphere which demands high academic qualifications.<sup>11</sup> In fact, today's life challenges are much more complex than those of the 1990s, demanding adaptive abilities, high literacy, and mastery of 21st century skills for both men and women..<sup>12</sup>

The changing times have brought about major transformations in the social and economic order of life. Globalization, digital revolution, and technological disruption require people to have critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and flexibility in facing various possibilities.<sup>13</sup> Higher education plays an important role in the personal and social development of individuals, facilitating maturity of thinking, development of value systems, as well as the ability to make effective decisions to face future life.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Higher education contributes to economic growth and social welfare, opening up options for people to obtain better jobs and contributing to economic growth.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the narrow perception of education is still inherent in many communities, including in coastal areas such as Pantura, where the marine sector has begun to experience setbacks due to damage to the marine ecosystem.<sup>16</sup> With the reduction of marine products and the weakening of livelihoods, Higher education should be a strategic alternative for social mobility and economic transformation. Higher education has an important role in opening up opportunities to improve people's welfare, as explained by Muhammad Husni Arifin that Higher education can be a tool for social mobility, although it is influenced by social and cultural inequality factors.<sup>17</sup> Quality education also plays a significant role in supporting economic growth through increased productivity and innovation.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, Higher education needs to adjust its curriculum to reduce unemployment in the era of globalization.<sup>19</sup> Local studies in Kampung Naga by Reza Renggana Hamdani and Gunartati show that education can open access to new skills that encourage social mobility in the community.<sup>20</sup> In line with that, Jumadi Tangko emphasized that Higher education

<sup>11</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 117.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Wagner, *The Global Achievement Gap* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 12 .

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, "Menyelenggarakan Program Pendidikan Tinggi," diakses 27 Mei 2025, [https://repository.upi.edu/74499/2/T\\_BP\\_999571\\_chapter1.pdf](https://repository.upi.edu/74499/2/T_BP_999571_chapter1.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> "Pentingnya Pendidikan Tinggi untuk Meningkatkan Kesejahteraan Sosial," *Suara Sosial*, diakses 27 Mei 2025, <https://suarasosial.com/2024/05/24/pentingnya-pendidikan-tinggi-untuk-meningkatkan-kesejahteraan-sosial/>

<sup>16</sup> Dwi Aryo Tjokronegoro, "Krisis Ekologi Laut di Pesisir Pantura," *Jurnal Sosial Maritim* 4, no. 1 (2020): 45–58.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Husni Arifin, *Memahami Peran Pendidikan Tinggi terhadap Mobilitas Sosial di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia, 2020), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Mutia Kardina dan Lince Magriasti, "Peran Pendidikan yang Berkualitas terhadap Pertumbuhan Ekonomi Suatu Negara," *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 5, no. 3 (2021): 1234–1245.

<sup>19</sup> Zainal Mardi, "Pendidikan Tinggi dan Masalah Pengangguran dalam Mengarungi Era Ekonomi Global," *Mimbar* 35, no. 2 (2019): 98–110.

<sup>20</sup> Reza Renggana Hamdani dan Gunartati, "Peran Pendidikan dalam Mobilitas Sosial di Kampung Naga Kabupaten Tasikmalaya," *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi Undiksha* 12, no. 1 (2021): 45–60.



must obtain competent human resources who are ready to compete at the global level, so that they can support inclusive and sustainable economic transformation.<sup>21</sup> Islam views education as an integral part of human life. In the Islamic view, humans are created with the potential of fitrah, which is a natural tendency towards truth and virtue. As written in the word of Allah:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلّدِينِ حَنِيفًا، فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

*"So set your faces straight to the religion (Islam); (remain on) the fitrah of Allah, who created man according to that fitrah."*<sup>22</sup>

The concept of fitrah is also emphasized in the hadith of the Prophet SAW:

كُلُّ مَوْلُودٍ يُولَدُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ، فَأَبْوَاهُ يُهَوِّدُهُ، أَوْ يُنَصِّرُهُ، أَوْ يُجَسِّسُهُ

*"Every child is born in a state of fitrah, so it is his parents who make him a Jew, Christian, or Magi."*<sup>23</sup>

The verse and hadith provide a foundation that human potential to develop is embedded from birth. Higher education is here as a way to realize this potential. It is not just a place to collect certificates, but a space for self-actualization, a place to grow in knowledge, spirituality, social responsibility, and the ability to solve life's problems. It is also important to emphasize that in Islam, between human endeavors and God's destiny are not two things that negate each other, but complement each other. Destiny should not be interpreted passively as a fate that cannot be changed, but rather as a divine provision that can be lived and responded to actively with effort and education.<sup>24</sup> In the context of Higher education, the endeavor to pursue knowledge becomes a form of charity that is worthy of worship. Thus, someone who takes Higher education is actually carrying out a divine mission to maximize their potential in the corridor of servanthood with the following arguments:

وَعَلَمَ آدَمَ الْأَنْسَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلِئَكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِيُونِي بِاسْمَكُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَدِيقِينَ

*And He taught Adam the names of all things, and then He showed them to the angels, saying: "Name them to Me if you are indeed of the truthful!"*<sup>25</sup>

This verse shows that Allah bestows knowledge to humans as a form of caliphate responsibility. Higher education is part of the effort to explore this knowledge, in order to optimize self-potential in order to serve God.

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ظَاهَرُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أَوْتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَتٍ

<sup>21</sup> Jumadi Tangko, "Pendidikan Tinggi dalam Pertumbuhan Ekonomi Era Global," *Jurnal Manajerial* 15, no. 1 (2019): 33-47.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Qur'an, Ar-Rūm: 30.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Hadis no. 1385; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Hadis no. 2658.

<sup>24</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001), 295.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Qur'an, QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 31.



*Allah will raise the degrees of the believers among you and those who are given knowledge by several degrees.<sup>26</sup>*

This verse emphasizes the virtue of the knowledgeable person. Pursuing Higher education is a form of knowledge jihad that brings one closer to Allah and increases one's degree of servitude.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

*And I did not create the jinn and mankind but that they should worship Me.<sup>27</sup>*

This verse provides the main basis that all human deeds, including in the field of education, must be aimed at devotion to Allah. Higher education is not only for the benefit of the world, but also as a means of actualizing the mission of servanthood.

In addition to some of the verses above, there are also several hadiths that have to do with learning which is not limited to the basic level but up to a higher level even to death:

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فِرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

*"Demanding knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim."<sup>28</sup>*

This Hadīth emphasizes the obligation to seek knowledge as part of the religious commandment. Pursuing Higher education is the real implementation of this commandment, and should be interpreted as worship within the framework of servanthood.

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَتَمَسَّ فِيهِ عِلْمًا، سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ

*"Whoever takes the path to seek knowledge, Allah will facilitate for him the path to paradise."<sup>29</sup>*

This Hadīth shows that the process of studying, including Higher education, is a form of devotion to Allah that brings one closer to Paradise. Higher education is not merely for a degree or career, but to achieve Allah's pleasure.

أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنَ الْمَهْدِ إِلَى الْمَحْدِ

*"Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave."*

This Hadīth emphasizes that the process of studying is not limited by a certain age or level. Pursuing Higher education is part of the implementation of the Prophet ﷺ's command to continue learning throughout life, even until death. This is in line with the human mission. As servants of Allah who must maximize their potential in the framework of devotion to Him. Education, in Islam, is not merely a cognitive process, but also a spiritual process that leads a person to a degree of glory in this world and the hereafter.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Qur'an, QS. Al-Mujādilah [58]: 11.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Qur'an, QS. Adz-Dzāriyāt [51]: 56.

<sup>28</sup> Abu Abdillah Muhammad bin Yazid bin Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, no. 224

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad bin Isa at-Tirmidzi, *Sunan at-Tirmidzi*, no. 2646.



Education in Islam is not just a process of transferring knowledge, but a heavy mandate. Teachers as educators have the responsibility to guide students in a positive and better direction in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects.<sup>30</sup>

Various theories in educational psychology such as nativism, empiricism and convergence contribute to understanding the importance of Higher education. Nativism theory believes that a person's development is influenced by innate factors, while empiricism emphasizes the importance of experience and environment.<sup>31</sup> The convergence combines the two, stating that the formation of a person's personality and knowledge is the result of the interaction between natural potential (talent) and life experience (environment).<sup>32</sup> Higher education is the intersection of these two elements, as it allows a person to hone their natural talents through a systematic and structured learning experience. In the reality of parenting, parents with Higher education backgrounds tend to be more reflective, adaptive, and progressive than those with lower education levels.<sup>33</sup>

The study of Higher education also needs to be placed within the wasathiyah framework, which is a moderate, inclusive, and fair view in understanding Islamic values and social dynamics. In this case, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches are used to understand the urgency of Higher education from various sides. The multidisciplinary approach looks at educational problems from the point of view of each science such as theology, philosophy, psychology, and sociology without interfering with each other. Interdisciplinary seeks to integrate these various sciences to build a more comprehensive understanding. Meanwhile, transdisciplinarity transcends disciplinary boundaries to see education as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon.

In the context of Pantura coastal communities, for example, economic shifts due to the destruction of marine ecosystems have forced the younger generation to look for alternatives outside the marine sector.<sup>34</sup> Higher education is a key asset for reskilling and upskilling, which enables vertical and horizontal mobility in society. This reskilling and upskilling process is crucial in creating a skilled and competitive workforce, as expressed by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in its report on the development of the electronics sector in Indonesia.<sup>35</sup> However, ironically, there are still many families who are reluctant to send their children to Higher education due to economic reasons or local traditions that consider education not very important. Economic factors, culture and local traditions are often the main obstacles to accessing Higher education. In fact, Higher education is a long-term investment that not only impacts individuals, but also contributes greatly to family

<sup>30</sup> Nasaruddin Umar, "Konsep Pendidikan dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an dan Hadis," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2022): 55-72.

<sup>31</sup> Hurlock, Elizabeth B., *Developmental Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 22-27.

<sup>32</sup> Djaali, *Psikologi Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2011), 54.

<sup>33</sup> Diana Baumrind, "Parenting Styles and Adolescent Development," in *The Encyclopedia of Adolescence*, ed. Richard M. Lerner (New York: Garland, 1991), 746-758.

<sup>34</sup> Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional (BRIN), *Kajian Ekosistem Laut Pantura*, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> International Labour Organization, "Reskilling and Upskilling Are Key to Create Indonesia's Skilled and Competitive Workers in Electronics Sector," *ILO News*, 2024.



welfare and nation building. Investment in education has a far-reaching impact in shaping qualified and competitive human resources, which in the future will be able to create innovations, increase productivity, and improve the overall quality of life of society.<sup>36</sup>

Studies show that people with higher levels of education are more adaptive to changing times and have better happiness and well-being indices.<sup>37</sup> Research also suggests that the involvement of both women and men in Higher education has a positive impact on decision-making at the family and community levels.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the urgency of Higher education must be understood not just as an individual right, but as a social mandate and contribution to sustainable development.

Previous research conducted by Nuraeni et al. revealed that Higher education plays a role in shaping reflective and progressive ways of thinking in childcare and household decision-making.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, Rahardjo's study states that people with Higher education backgrounds tend to be more adaptive to social change and have greater opportunities for vertical mobility.<sup>40</sup> However, there are not many studies that comprehensively examine Higher education from a wasathiyah perspective, which is a moderate Islamic approach that is inclusive and multidisciplinary towards changing social and economic realities.

Although college has a strategic role in producing intellectually, spiritually, and socially superior human resources, the reality is that there are still significant gaps in access to and perceptions of Higher education, especially for women's groups in coastal communities, such as in the Pantura region. This disparity is not only caused by economic factors, but also by social constructs that limit women's roles to the domestic sphere. This conservative view is still strongly entrenched, as recent studies show that women are often faced with stigma and structural barriers, including prohibitions on continuing their education for cultural, economic or even security reasons.<sup>41</sup> This reality becomes even more complex with the presence of global challenges such as technological disruption, digital transformation, and ecosystem crises in coastal areas, which actually demand the readiness of individuals, both men and women, in mastering digital literacy, critical thinking, and 21st century skills to face future uncertainties.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, Higher education has not been fully optimized as a way to deal with these challenges, both

<sup>36</sup> Faridah, "Pendidikan sebagai Investasi Sumber Daya Manusia," *Edunomia: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan* 10, no. 1 (2022): 45.

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO, *Education Transforms Lives*, 2021, <https://www.unesco.org/reports/education-transforms>.

<sup>38</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2020* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Nuraeni, Retno, dkk., "Dampak Pendidikan Tinggi terhadap Pola Pengasuhan Anak," *Jurnal Psikologi Islam* 8, no. 1 (2020): 35-48

<sup>40</sup> M. Dawam Rahardjo, *Pergulatan Dunia Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: LKiS, 2001), 143-147.

<sup>41</sup> Nisa, R. (2023). *Gender dan Pendidikan: Studi tentang Stigma Perempuan dalam Akses Pendidikan Tinggi di Wilayah Pesisir*. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 17(2), 145-159.

<sup>42</sup> Hamdani, R. R., & Gunartati. (2022). *Pendidikan dan Transformasi Sosial: Studi Kasus di Kampung Naga*. Bandung: CV Humaniora Press.



in its curriculum and teaching practices, so graduates are often poorly prepared for the increasingly complex world of work and social life. In the global context, UNESCO emphasizes the importance of Higher education to support sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially in addressing poverty and gender inequality.<sup>43</sup> However, the realization of this principle is still hampered by strong patriarchal narratives in society, which not only hinder women's access to Higher education but also undermine efforts for social transformation through education. Thus, there is a significant gap between the idealism of Higher education as a space for self-actualization and the reality of gender-based discrimination and the lack of adaptation of education to the demands of the times. Therefore, critical thinking and paradigm renewal are needed in viewing the role of Higher education as a way to actualize human nature, for men and women, and as a means to create social justice in society.<sup>44</sup>

Based on this background, this article aims to investigate the importance of Higher education from an Islamic perspective as a way to actualize fitrah, while analyzing it through a multidisciplinary approach by considering the social, economic, and cultural factors of coastal communities. This research highlights how Higher education can be a strategic solution in the context of the decline of the marine sector and strong patriarchal traditions. In addition, it contributes to enriching the discourse on wasathiyah Islamic education and offers normative and practical arguments regarding the importance of Higher education as a social mandate and part of worship.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach based on library research. This approach was chosen because the article aims to explore and analyze the concept of Higher education as the path of fitrah in an Islamic perspective, and relate it to contemporary issues such as gender inequality, global challenges, and socio-economic transformation. The method used is content analysis of various primary and secondary literature. Primary literature includes verses of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's hadith that are relevant to the theme of education, human nature, and the role of knowledge in life. Meanwhile, secondary literature includes scientific books, journal articles, research reports, and empirical data from relevant institutions such as the Central Statistics Agency (CSA), the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), and UNESCO that discuss issues of Higher education, gender equality, and social mobility.

Empirical data is used as a complement to the theoretical analysis to show the objective conditions of Higher education in Indonesia, such as the gross enrollment rate of Higher education, the gender development index, the level of

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO. (2022). *Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures: The Role of Higher Education in Achieving the SDGs*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

<sup>44</sup> Arifin, M. H. (2020). *Pendidikan Tinggi dan Mobilitas Sosial: Antara Idealisme dan Realitas Ketimpangan*. Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar.



educated unemployment, as well as data on the distribution of access to education in the coastal area.

The research process begins with an inventory of reference sources relevant to the topic, then proceeds with the categorization of themes to facilitate analysis. The main themes studied include human nature in an Islamic perspective, the importance of Higher education in self-development, the role of Higher education in facing social and global challenges, gender issues in access to education, and the relationship between Higher education and social mobility, especially in the context of Pantura coastal communities. Furthermore, an in-depth interpretation of the content of the various sources is carried out, using a multidisciplinary approach that includes the perspectives of Islamic theology, educational theory, and sociological analysis. The results of the analysis are then systematically arranged to support the main argument that Higher education is one of the important ways to actualize the potential of human nature within the framework of Islamic wasathiyah thinking, as well as an important instrument in realizing social justice and poverty alleviation through social mobility.

Through this method, it is hoped that this article can make theoretical and practical contributions in understanding the importance of Higher education as part of the actualization of human nature, as well as its role in building a more just, prosperous, and competitive society, both at the local and global levels.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In some parts of Indonesia, especially in rural and coastal areas, the view that Higher education is not important for women is still quite strong. This is reflected in data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CSA) which shows that the participation rate of women in Higher education is still lower than that of men, especially in areas with high poverty rates and a strong patriarchal culture. This view is often based on the assumption that women's main role is in the domestic sphere, not in the public or professional sectors, and therefore Higher education is considered irrelevant to their future. This perspective is often rooted in the understanding that women's roles are limited to the domestic sphere, such as being a housewife. However, over time, especially since the 2000s, gender roles in society have become more flexible and dynamic. The old view that Higher education is not essential has been abandoned as reality shows that both men and women have a collective responsibility in creating a quality family, society and nation.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the socio-economic realities of the modern era demand intellectual and spiritual preparedness that can only be obtained through education. This is where Higher education plays a strategic role in increasing the capacity of individuals to deal with the complexities of life. According to UNESCO (2017), Higher education not only produces professionals, but also agents of social change.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the narrative that women or anyone else does not need to go to

<sup>45</sup> Nugroho, Heru. *Pendidikan dan Ketimpangan Gender di Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO. *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*. Paris: UNESCO, 2017.



Higher education because “they will go back home” is no longer relevant to the demands of the times.

In the Islamic perspective, education is part of the actualization of human nature. Allah SWT has created humans with innate capital in the form of reason, heart, and instinct to develop. This is emphasized in QS. Ar-Rum: 30:

فَاقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلَّدِينِ حَتَّىٰ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

“So set your faces to the straight religion; (stay on) the fitrah of Allah, who created man according to that fitrah”.<sup>47</sup>

Fitrah includes the potential to think, grow, and do good. In the context of education, the Prophet also emphasized the importance of studying for everyone who becomes a Muslim:

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

“studying is an obligation for every Muslim”<sup>48</sup>

So, when someone gets a Higher education, he is actually carrying out the mission of his creation as a human being with the nature of a learner.

Understanding the concept of effort and destiny in Islam is not dichotomous. Islam encourages humans to try their best while still believing that the results are in the power of Allah SWT. This view is also an important spiritual basis in encouraging Muslims to pursue knowledge to the highest level. In this regard, QS. An-Najm: 39 emphasizes:

وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلنَّاسِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

“And that man only gets what he has worked for”.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, Higher education is a concrete form of endeavor, an effort that must be taken to improve the quality of life of individuals and society. Passing up Higher education opportunities on the pretext of destiny will only narrow the opportunities to change lives for the better.

Classical educational theories such as nativism, empiricism and convergence are still relevant to explain the importance of Higher education in developing human potential. According to Arthur Schopenhauer, a figure of nativism, innate factors or the basic potential of individuals already exist from birth and become the basis for the development of human abilities.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, John Locke in his theory of empiricism argues that humans are born like blank paper (tabula rasa), so experience, including Higher education, greatly determines the quality of individuals.<sup>51</sup> William Stern through the convergence theory combines the views of

<sup>47</sup> Al-Qur'an al-Karim. Surah Ar-Rûm: 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Mâjah. *Sunan Ibn Mâjah*, Hadith No. 224. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Qur'an al-Karim. Surah An-Najm: 39.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969).

<sup>51</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).



both, stating that individual development is the result of the interaction between innate potential and environmental influences, including education.<sup>52</sup> These three theories show that although humans have basic potential, Higher education remains an important factor influencing the actualization of this potential in facing the challenges of modern life.

Nativism emphasizes the importance of innate factors (nature), empiricism prioritizes experience and environment (nurture), while convergence combines both as the foundation of education.<sup>53</sup> Higher education serves as a bridge between the two: honing students' innate potential and enriching their empirical experience.

In this context, Higher education becomes a medium that bridges the two. Higher education not only enriches students' empirical experience, but also maximizes their innate potential (IQ, EQ, and SQ). For example, parents with Higher education backgrounds tend to have more progressive, communicative, and critical values-based parenting methods that are good for child development.<sup>54</sup>

Higher education-oriented societies tend to produce generations that are better equipped to compete at the global level. Conversely, low levels of education can exacerbate social inequality, economic backwardness and leadership crises. Studies show that educational inequality contributes significantly to social and economic inequality, especially in rural and coastal areas that often face limited access to Higher education. Research by Blanden, Doepeke, and Stuhler confirms that educational inequality has a long-term impact on social mobility and community welfare.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, it is urgent for residents in coastal and inland areas to make education a top priority in social and economic development, not just an optional choice.

In the north coast (Pantura) of Java, for example, traditional communities that once depended on the fisheries sector are now facing an ecological crisis due to the use of banned fishing gear such as cantrang and tiger trawls.<sup>56</sup> This shows that dependence on the primary sector (such as fisheries) cannot be the sole economic foundation of the community. Higher education can open access to alternative sectors such as technology, entrepreneurship or education. Thus, improving human resources through Higher education is a strategic necessity, not just a short-term solution. This shift should be read as a sign of the times that requires a paradigm leap. If previously the people of Pantura depended entirely on the sea for their livelihood, now Higher education can be a means to pave the way for new, more sustainable professions.

<sup>52</sup> William Stern, *The Psychological Methods of Testing Intelligence* (Baltimore: Warwick & York, 1911).

<sup>53</sup> Hergenhahn, B. R., and Matthew H. Olson. *An Introduction to Theories of Learning*. 9th ed. New York: Routledge, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Santrock, John W. *Life-Span Development*. 12th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Jo Blanden, Matthias Doepeke, dan Johannes Stuhler, "Educational Inequality," *arXiv preprint*, April 2022, diakses 28 Mei 2025, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2204.04701>.

<sup>56</sup> Sulisty, Bambang. "Krisis Ekologi Pesisir: Studi Kasus Penggunaan Cantrang di Pantura Jawa." *Jurnal Ekologi Sosial*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2021): 105-120.

According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), community participation in Higher education in the Pantura region is still relatively low. For example, in Lamongan Regency, the Pure Participation Rate (PPR) for senior high school (SMA)/equivalent level in 2023 only reached 66.21%. Although specific data on Higher education participation is not available in the report, the low APM at the senior secondary level could be an early indicator of low participation in Higher education.<sup>57</sup> Socio-economic factors, community perceptions of Higher education, and the dominance of economic pragmatism are the main causes of this limited participation. This is evidence that the scientific nature can be encouraged through the integration of education based on wasathiyah values.

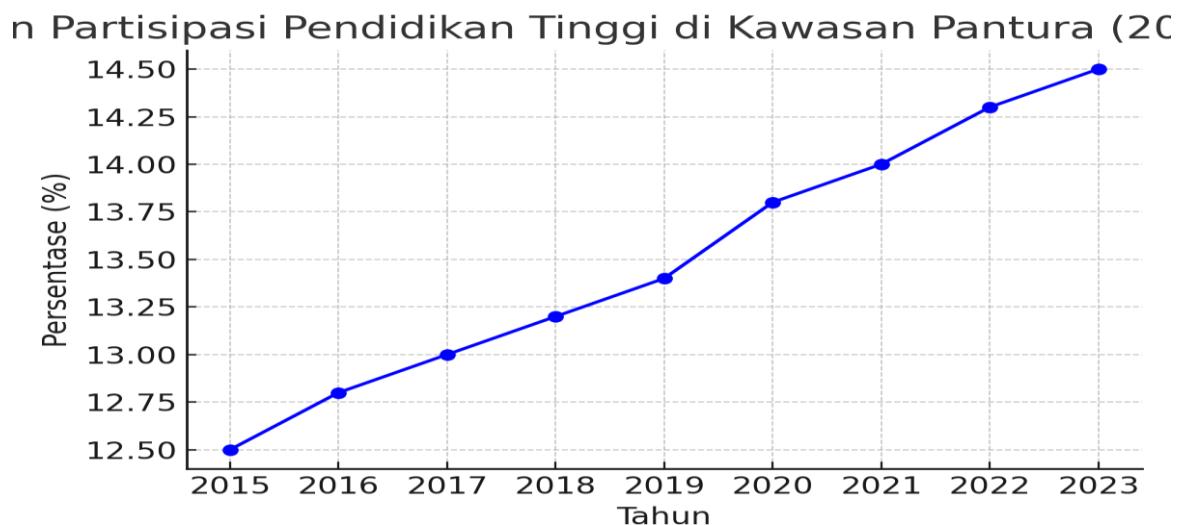


Figure 1: Trends in Higher education Participation in the Pantura Region (2015-2023).<sup>58</sup>

This finding reinforces the convergence theory in education, that fitrah (innate potential) and the environment (cultural and social) play a complementary role in encouraging Higher education participation. The concept of wasathiyah in Islam, which emphasizes balance, moderation and inclusiveness, plays an important role in aligning Higher education as the path of fitrah.<sup>59</sup> This result is in line with Al-Attas' view that Islamic education is not just a transmission of knowledge, but a process of self-recognition and self-actualization towards human nature.<sup>60</sup> However, the limitations of this study are that all coastal districts have not

<sup>57</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lamongan, *Statistik Kesejahteraan Rakyat Kabupaten Lamongan 2023*, hlm. 11, diakses 28 Mei 2025, <https://lamongankab.bps.go.id>.

<sup>58</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik, "Angka Partisipasi Kasar (APK) Perguruan Tinggi (PT) Menurut Jenis Kelamin, 2015-2023," diakses 28 Mei 2025, <https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MTQ0NiMy/angka-partisipasi-kasar-apk-perguruan-tinggi-pt-menurut-jenis-kelamin.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Al-Wasathiyah al-Islamiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993), 34.

<sup>60</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 22.



been reached proportionally, and limited access to micro data from local education institutions.

Higher education participation can be said to be part of advancing the quality of human resources, especially in the context of coastal communities such as the Pantura region. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the gross enrollment rate (APK) of Higher education in this region only increased by 2% in the 2015-2023 period, from 12.5% to 14.5%.<sup>61</sup> This figure is far behind the urban areas in central and southern Java Island, which have reached an average of over 20%.<sup>62</sup> This low participation has a direct impact on social inequality, low economic competitiveness, and a lack of knowledgeable local leadership.<sup>63</sup>

The main factors influencing this low participation include limited access to Higher education infrastructure, a local culture that tends to prioritize work over further study, and the community's perception that Higher education is not as important as short-term economic needs.<sup>64</sup> This view is exacerbated by the legacy of a strong patriarchal culture, especially towards women, so many families in Pantura still think that women do not need to pursue Higher education.<sup>65</sup>

In the context of educational theory, classical approaches such as nativism, empiricism, and convergence provide an important basis for understanding these dynamics. Schopenhauer's nativism theory emphasizes that human potential has been formed since birth, while John Locke's empiricism views experience as the main determinant of knowledge formation, and William Stern's convergence combines the two, emphasizing the importance of interaction between innate and environmental factors.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Higher education is crucial to optimizing individual potential, especially in facing the challenges of globalization and the industrial revolution.

Within the framework of Pantura coastal area development, an integrative strategy is needed between the government, the community, and educational institutions to encourage Higher education participation. This effort can be realized through the provision of affirmative scholarships, equitable development of educational infrastructure, and educational literacy programs for coastal communities that have been left behind.<sup>67</sup>

This research makes a significant contribution to the formulation of a more contextualized Islamic education policy, especially in marginalized and coastal areas. There is a need for a pesantren-based Higher education integration model as

<sup>61</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik, *Angka Partisipasi Kasar (APK) Perguruan Tinggi (PT) Menurut Jenis Kelamin, 2015-2023*, diakses 28 Mei 2025, <https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MTQ0NiMy/angka-partisipasi-kasar-apk-perguruan-tinggi-pt-menurut-jenis-kelamin.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik, *Indikator Pendidikan, 1994-2024*, diakses 28 Mei 2025, <https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/1/MTUyNSMx/indikator-pendidikan--1994-2024.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Soedjatmoko, *Dimensi Manusia dalam Pembangunan* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1983), 58.

<sup>64</sup> Made Pidarta, *Landasan Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1997), 88.

<sup>65</sup> Lies Marcoes, *Perempuan dan Transformasi Sosial* (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES, 2001), 102.

<sup>66</sup> Ahmad Tafsir, *Ilmu Pendidikan dalam Perspektif Islam* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2004), 43

<sup>67</sup> Anies Baswedan, *Pendidikan untuk Keadilan Sosial* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2007), 55.



a strategy to increase access and meaningfulness of Higher education. Further research can focus on exploring curriculum and learning strategies based on wasathiyah values in Islamic Higher education in disadvantaged areas.

## CONCLUSION

Higher education is a form of actualization of human nature in an Islamic perspective, where the potential of reason, spirituality, and sociality are developed integrally. In the wasathiyah context, Higher education is not just a technical instrument to obtain employment, but also a path of civilization that shapes the character, critical awareness, and social resilience of future generations. Traditional views that trivialize Higher education, especially for women, have proven incompatible with Islamic principles that place knowledge as a universal obligation and an instrument of community empowerment.

This study found that the participation of Pantura coastal communities in Higher education is still low, as reflected in CBS data which shows an increase in participation of only around 2% in the 2015-2023 timeframe. This shows the need for serious efforts in strengthening access to inclusive Higher education, especially for marginalized groups such as coastal communities.

With a multidisciplinary approach that combines classical educational theories (nativism, empiricism, convergence), Islamic values (fitrah, ikhtiar, destiny), and a reading of local socio-economic realities, this article answers the main question: how does Higher education act as the path of fitrah in the perspective of wasathiyah Islam? The answer is that Higher education is an important instrument to form a whole human being who is able to face the challenges of the times, as well as transforming the socio-economic conditions of society from dependence on the primary sector to science-based empowerment.

Therefore, it is recommended that Islamic education institutions, especially pesantren and madrasah in coastal areas, strengthen the integration of fitrah and wasathiyah values in their curriculum. Local governments also need to improve access and facilities for Higher education that are relevant to local needs, so that coastal communities are no longer marginalized in the national development map.

This research has limitations in its geographical focus (Pantura Java) and theoretical approaches that have not touched on quantitative aspects or in-depth field case studies. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop a transdisciplinary approach with mixed-methods and conduct empirical exploration in other coastal areas that have different socio-cultural characteristics, so that the results of this study can be more applicable and generalizable in various contexts.

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