

## **Family Communication in the Mentawai Indigenous Community: Fostering Children's Educational Motivation and Social Practices**

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### **Abstract**

Over the past two decades, Mentawai indigenous communities have demonstrated an increasing paradigm shift toward prioritizing formal education as a response to evolving socio-economic challenges. This qualitative descriptive study investigates how family communication dynamics foster academic motivation, focusing on the Sikerei (Aman Lepon) family. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, the research identifies this household as a “Concensual Family” type, characterized by dialogical interaction, transparency, and the transmission of values emphasizing intergenerational advancement. The findings reveal that strategic social practices – such as structured academic supervision, the alignment of agricultural labor with school schedules, and consistent emotional reinforcement – are instrumental in sustaining educational drive. Ultimately, the study concludes that internal family communication serves as a vital strategic asset. It empowers indigenous families to navigate geographical isolation and economic constraints, ensuring that educational attainment remains a primary vehicle for social and cultural resilience.

**Keywords:** family communication, educational motivation, Mentawai, cultural values, social practices.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indigenous communities are frequently imagined as living on the margins of modern life, socially isolated, resistant to change, and disengaged from formal education. This assumption began to unravel when my team and I sat with the Mentawai indigenous community in West Sumatra, particularly the Aman Lepon family. In the middle of everyday conversation, shared meals, stories about children, and discussions about the future, it became clear that modernization was not something they rejected. Instead, it was something they negotiated carefully through family dialogue, values, and collective decision-making.

From the perspective of family communication theory, the family represents the first and most influential communicative environment in which children learn how to interpret the world. Within Mentawai households, communication is not limited to instruction or discipline; it is deeply relational, intergenerational, and value-oriented. Parents and elders transmit meanings about responsibility, perseverance, and hope through daily interactions, stories, and shared experiences. These communication practices form the foundation upon which children’s educational motivation is constructed.

Over the past two decades, many Mentawai indigenous families have increasingly recognized formal education as an important pathway for their children's social participation and future security. This awareness has not emerged abruptly, nor has it been imposed from outside. Rather, it has grown through ongoing family conversations between parents, children, and extended kin about changing social realities and aspirations beyond the village. In this sense, educational motivation is not merely an individual desire but a collectively communicated family value.

These aspirations persist despite structural limitations. Geographic isolation, restricted access to schools, and limited educational facilities continue to shape the educational landscape of Mentawai communities. Yet families such as Aman Lepon demonstrate how communication within the family functions as a source of resilience. Through supportive messages, encouragement, and shared commitment, parents motivate their children to pursue education even when the path is uncertain and physically distant.

Drawing on family communication theory, this study examines how communication patterns within Mentawai indigenous families shape children's educational motivation and everyday social practices. By centering lived family interactions rather than abstract assumptions, this research highlights how indigenous families actively construct meaning around education, blending cultural continuity with adaptive engagement in a changing world.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Family Communication**

Family is the smallest socio-economic unit in society and forms the basis of all social and state institutions (Puspitawati, 2013). In another definition, family is any group of people united by marriage, blood, or adoption, or sexually expressive relationships, in which adults cooperate financially for their mutual support, people are committed to each other in intimate interpersonal relationships, and members see their individual identities as closely tied to the group's identity (DeGenova & Rice, 2002 in Sergin & Flora, 2005). This definition is comprehensive enough to cover structural, task-oriented, and transactional components.

Within the family, the communication process that occurs is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is face-to-face communication between people, which allows each participant to directly capture the reactions of others, both verbally and nonverbally (Mulyana, 2015). Several family communication experts argue that communication shapes families and is very important in defining family reality (Sergin & Flora, 2005).

Family communication is a process of exchanging messages conveyed verbally and nonverbally to create mutual understanding in order to foster warmth, affection, trust, honesty, openness, and harmony among family members (Cangara, 2023). In family communication, there are at least five characteristics that distinguish it from other types of communication, namely privacy, face-to-face communication or communication through media, the use of verbal and nonverbal language, communication that occurs in small groups, and intimacy (Cangara, 2023).

### **Family Communication Patterns Theory**

Koerner and Fitzpatrick argue that family communication patterns describe families' tendencies to develop fairly stable and thus predictable ways of communicating with one another (Vangelisti, 2004). In his book, Cangara (2023) argues that family communication patterns reflect how communication takes place within a family. McLeod and Chaffee in Comstock (1985) developed two main dimensions of family communication patterns, the first being socially oriented and the second conceptually oriented (Cangara, 2023). Koerner & Fitzpatrick (2006) further developed McLeod and Chafee's ideas by focusing on conversation-oriented and conformity-oriented family communication, which is called the Family Communication Pattern Theory (FCPT). From the two orientations in the Family Communication Pattern Theory, four family types are obtained, namely consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire. None of these four family types is considered better than the others, but the two orientations are closely related and influence each other within the family. The theory is applied to structurally and functionally intact families where parents have a more powerful position within the family.

Koerner & Fitzpatrick explain that a high conversation orientation, such as families who adhere to this view, value the exchange of ideas, and parents who hold this belief see frequent communication with their children as the primary means of educating and socializing them. Conversely, families with a low conversation orientation believe that the open and frequent exchange of ideas, opinions, and values is not necessary for the general functioning of the family. In addition, this family specifically does not believe conversations will be beneficial for the education and socialization of children.

In relation to conformity, Koerner & Fitzpatrick convey that high conformity is a belief in what is called the traditional family structure. In this view, families are cohesive and hierarchical. This means that family members prefer family relationships over relationships outside the family, and they expect resources such as space and money to be shared among family members. Families with a high conformity orientation believe that individual schedules should be coordinated among family members to maximize family time, and they expect family members to prioritize family interests over

personal interests. Parents are expected to make decisions for the family, and children are expected to act accordingly. In more detail, the following is a complete explanation of the types of families:

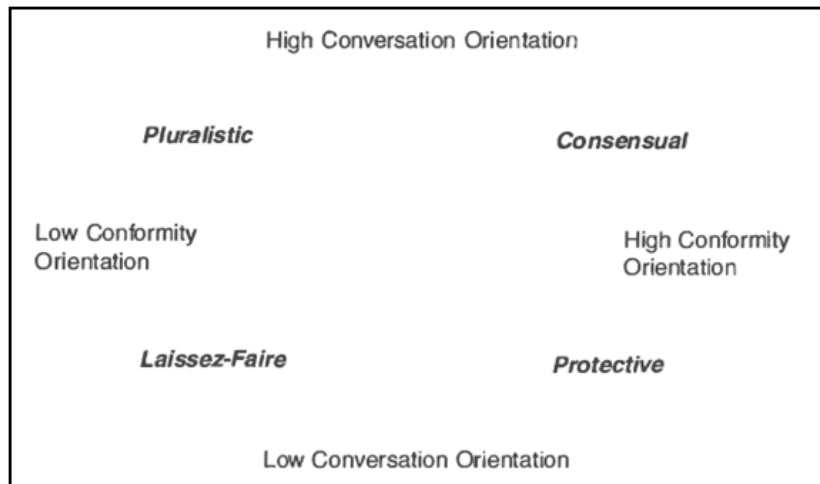
1. *Consensual Families* have a high conversation orientation and a high conformity orientation. These families encourage open and free discussion (high conversation), but at the same time emphasize that all members must agree and obey the existing hierarchy (high conformity). Parents listen to their children and explain their decisions in the hope that their children will understand and adopt their values. Conflict is considered negative, but conflict resolution is valued.

2. *Pluralistic Families* have a high conversation orientation and a low uniformity orientation. These families value open, free, and unforced discussions, where opinions are evaluated based on the merits of the argument, not who said it (high conversation, low uniformity). Parents do not feel the need to control their children. Children learn to value family conversation and become independent and competent in communication. They openly resolve conflicts.

3. *Protective Families* have low Conversation Orientation & high Uniformity Orientation. These families emphasize obedience to parental authority and pay little attention to open communication or the exchange of ideas (low conversation, high uniformity). Parents make decisions and see little value in explaining their reasons to their children. Conflict is viewed negatively and avoided. Children learn that family conversation is of little value.

4. *Laissez-Faire Families* have low Conversation Orientation and low Uniformity Orientation. These families interact infrequently and without emotion, with few topics discussed openly. Parents believe that each family member should make their own decisions, but they are not particularly interested in their children's decisions. Family members tend to be emotionally detached and avoid conflict.

Picture 1. Family types based on conversation orientation and conformity orientation



Source: Koerner and Fitzpatrick, (2006)

### **Educational Motivation Theory**

The theory of educational motivation is grounded in the assumption that learning behavior is not driven solely by external rewards or institutional demands, but by internal psychological processes that shape how individuals interpret, value, and commit to educational experiences. Early motivation theories in education were dominated by behaviorist perspectives that emphasized reinforcement and punishment. However, later scholars argued that such approaches could not fully explain sustained engagement in learning, particularly in contexts where education intersects with identity, culture, and long-term aspiration. This shift paved the way for more human-centered theories that view learners as active agents who seek meaning, growth, and connection through education.

One of the most influential contributions and foundations of contemporary educational motivation theory around the 2000s came from Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, widely known as Self-Determination Theory. Their research challenged the assumption that motivation increases simply through external incentives, proposing instead that individuals are naturally inclined to learn when their basic psychological needs are supported (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Although originally developed in psychology, their framework has been extensively applied in educational research to explain persistence, engagement, and well-being among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the context of indigenous families such as the Sikerei in Mentawai, this perspective is particularly relevant because educational

choices are deeply embedded in social roles, collective values, and cultural continuity.

The first foundational need within this framework is competence, which refers to the learner's perception of being capable and effective in dealing with educational challenges. For a Sikerei family entering formal schooling systems, feelings of competence may initially be fragile due to unfamiliar curricula, language barriers, or differences between indigenous knowledge systems and institutional standards. Educational motivation strengthens when schools acknowledge existing forms of expertise, such as ecological knowledge, healing traditions, or communal problem solving, and build upon them rather than dismiss them. When learners experience progress and receive meaningful feedback, they are more likely to view education as attainable and worthwhile.

The second core need, autonomy, centers on the experience of choice, volition, and personal endorsement of one's actions. For Sikerei families, the decision to pursue formal education is often negotiated within the tension between maintaining cultural responsibilities and engaging with state-based institutions. Motivation is more likely to emerge when education is perceived as a pathway chosen by the family, rather than a directive imposed from outside. Educational environments that allow flexibility, respect cultural rhythms, and involve families in decision-making help reinforce a sense of ownership. In such conditions, learning becomes an expression of self-determined goals rather than compliance with external authority.

The third psychological need, relatedness, highlights the importance of social connection, mutual respect, and belonging in sustaining motivation. In Mentawai society, kinship ties and communal relationships are central to daily life, including the role of the Sikerei as cultural and spiritual figures. Educational motivation is supported when formal schooling does not isolate learners from their community but instead fosters respectful relationships between schools, families, and local leaders. When Sikerei children and adults feel seen, valued, and understood within educational spaces, their commitment to learning is reinforced through emotional security and social affirmation.

Taken together, these three needs, competence, autonomy, and relatedness, form an integrated framework for understanding educational motivation as a relational and culturally situated process. For a Sikerei family in Mentawai, motivation to pursue formal education develops not merely from economic aspirations or policy interventions, but from learning environments that respect cultural identity, nurture confidence, and maintain social bonds. This theoretical perspective underscores that effective educational engagement among indigenous communities depends on aligning institutional

practices with psychological needs that are universally human yet locally expressed.

### **Social Practices**

The social practices referred to in this study refer to Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. In the book "An Analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's: Outline of a Theory of Practice," Maggio (2017) explains that the main assumption of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice is habitus, which is a system of dispositions that internalizes past experiences and connects social structures with a person's actions, allowing for improvisation within certain limits. These practices occur in a social field or space where actors compete using various forms of capital. Capital here is not only economic, but also cultural and social. Capital is used to achieve symbolic power.

At the core of this framework is the concept of habitus, which refers to deeply embedded dispositions formed through long-term socialization. Habitus shapes how individuals perceive possibilities, evaluate choices, and act in familiar situations, often without conscious reflection. In a Sikerei Mentawai family, habitus is influenced by indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual responsibilities, communal living patterns, and close relationships with nature. These dispositions guide how family members interpret the meaning of education, whether it is seen as compatible with cultural values or as something distant from everyday life. Educational aspirations, therefore, are filtered through culturally grounded ways of thinking and being.

The second element, capital, encompasses the resources that individuals and families can mobilize to pursue certain practices. Bourdieu identified multiple forms of capital, including economic capital (material resources), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, and educational credentials), social capital (networks and relationships), and symbolic capital (recognition and legitimacy). For a Sikerei Mentawai family, cultural and symbolic capital may be deeply rooted in spiritual knowledge, healing practices, and community respect, while formal educational capital may be limited. Access to schooling depends not only on financial means but also on whether existing cultural capital is acknowledged or undervalued within educational institutions.

The concept of field refers to the structured social space in which practices take place, governed by specific rules, power relations, and forms of legitimacy. Education constitutes a distinct field with its own expectations, hierarchies, and standards of success. When a Sikerei Mentawai family engages with formal schooling, they enter a field shaped by national curricula, bureaucratic procedures, and dominant cultural norms that may differ significantly from local traditions. The family's position within this field

influences how comfortably they can navigate educational institutions and how their knowledge and identity are recognized.

Educational practices within a Sikerei Mentawai family emerge from the interaction between habitus, capital, and field. Decisions about schooling are not merely individual choices but negotiated responses to cultural dispositions, available resources, and institutional structures. When the educational field accommodates indigenous knowledge and values, families are more likely to perceive schooling as meaningful and attainable. Conversely, when schooling disregards local habitus or devalues existing forms of capital, participation may feel alienating or incompatible with community life.

Viewed through Social Practice Theory, the pursuit of education by a Sikerei Mentawai family is best understood as a situated social practice shaped by historical experience, cultural identity, and power relations. This perspective highlights that educational engagement requires more than motivation or access; it depends on the alignment between cultural dispositions, available capital, and the structure of the educational field. By recognizing these interdependencies, Social Practice Theory offers a nuanced framework for understanding how indigenous families negotiate education while maintaining cultural continuity and social dignity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The method used in this study was descriptive qualitative. In qualitative research is an approach to design where the researcher stays close to the data, uses limited frameworks and interpretations for explaining the data, and catalogues the information into themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of communication within Mentawai indigenous communities in building children's motivation to attend school and social practices. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to explore the meanings, subjective experiences, and rich social contexts of the informants, namely Sikerei families who had successfully sent their children to school. The research location was in Ugai Hamlet, Madobag, South Siberut, Mentawai Islands Regency, which was specifically selected (purposive) as a contextual location where traditional practices and modern education interact. Primary data from the Aman Lepon family (father and mother, namely Aman Lepon and Bai Lepon) was collected on November 24-25, 2025. Meanwhile, primary data from the children (Anton and Lepon) was collected on December 9, 2025, in Padang City.

The main data collection technique used was in-depth interviews with four key informants, namely the father (Aman Lepon), mother (Bai Lepon), and children (Lepon and Anton) of one Sikerei family. The interviews aimed to

obtain comprehensive verbal data on the family's communication patterns, motivations, and social practices. In addition, participatory observation was conducted to understand the social context, daily interactions, and traditional practices relevant to family communication dynamics. Supporting data in the form of documents, such as personal photos and notebooks, were also collected to strengthen the validity of the research findings through data triangulation. Triangulate different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build coherent evidence for themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, this process adds to the study's validity. Data analysis techniques in this study were conducted using thematic analysis. Categorical thematic analysis is appropriate for interview transcripts and documents, and artifacts produced by informants (Saldana, 2021). The collected data will be analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to produce an in-depth description and interpretation tied to the theory of family communication patterns.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The *Sikerei* Family and Children's Education**

In Aman Lepon's family, formal education is not seen as a threat to indigenous identity, but rather as a strategy for defending Mentawai culture. Aman Lepon's main motivation for sending his children to school stems from his deep reflection on his own limitations, feeling "stupid" and having difficulty communicating with outsiders because he did not receive a formal education. He realized that the ability to read, write, and communicate with the outside world was a valuable asset so that his children would not experience the same difficulties. In addition, education could also serve as a bridge between the indigenous Mentawai community and modern society. However, based on the information obtained, not all *Sikerei* families in the Mentawai Islands shared Aman Lepon's views on education. There are other *Sikerei* who do not allow their children to attend formal school.

The history of the establishment of the first school began when a pastor came to the village of Putuy, Ugai Village. The non-formal school was named "Patas," which roughly means "*Sikerei* children's school." Several years later, an elementary school was built. At that time, Lepon, as Aman Lepon's eldest child, should have been in the third grade of elementary school. However, because his competence was considered insufficient, he was demoted one grade to the second grade when he entered formal elementary school. Although Aman Lepon's children attended formal school, they were introduced to the main subjects of nature and the forest from an early age. Aman Lepon's children were taken to the forest when they were three years

old. At that age, the children were introduced to nature. For example, they were taught which leaves were useful and which plants were edible and which were not. In traditional education, conversation or oral tradition is key to providing education. This was evident when Aman Lepon learned to become a Sikerei; he relied on oral tradition and memory to learn without reading or writing.

All four of Aman Lepon's children attend school. The eldest, Lepon, has graduated with a degree in Public Health and works as an employee at a community health center. The second child, Anton, is pursuing a higher education in Information Technology. The third and fourth children, both girls, are attending high school. Aman Lepon and his wife place a high priority on education. This is reflected in their children's educational journey, which they fully support, a far cry from their traditional life in the forest, but based on a desire to advance their own indigenous community.

For young people like Lepon and his younger siblings, education is not a way to abandon their culture, but rather a means of protecting it. Lepon emphasizes that school is a way to learn how to reconcile outside cultures with the Mentawai culture. He even uses his education to advocate for causes, such as protesting palm oil plantations at the governor's office. Thus, concerns about the loss of culture due to education are dispelled by the belief that being educated actually strengthens their capacity to protect and preserve Arat Sabulungan amid the onslaught of modernization.

Aman Lepon views his children's education as a big investment. When asked if his children would become Sikerei, he replied that it would be "irresponsible" and "a waste" if his children immediately became Sikerei after spending a large amount of money on college. Even though they did not become Sikerei, Aman Lepon's children still contributed to preserving Mentawai culture. Becoming a Sikerei was not the only way to preserve the culture that had been passed down from generation to generation.

The Aman Lepon family's commitment as Sikerei to education was manifested through extraordinary economic sacrifice and moral support. Aman Lepon and his wife struggle to finance their children's college and school tuition by selling agricultural products and livestock such as pigs, chickens, sago, and durian, even willing to borrow money to pay for school fees so that their children can continue their education and not fall behind. This support is not authoritarian. On the contrary, Aman Lepon applied a democratic parenting style that gave his children the freedom to choose their educational path according to their interests, whether it was vocational school or high school. The strongest symbol of the harmony between education and tradition was seen when Aman Lepon attended his first child's graduation ceremony wearing traditional Mentawai clothing in a modern academic environment, a clear statement that his child's academic success did not diminish his father's

Sikerei identity. The education of Sikerei children has produced a generation capable of harmonizing modern life with Mentawai customs. Lepon, for example, has not abandoned his roots but instead uses his knowledge of public health to teach Clean and Healthy Living (PHBS) to villagers, while still respecting his father's role in traditional spiritual healing as a Sikerei.

Picture 2. Lepons's graduation photo



Source: *Author Documentation* (2025)

The findings regarding the Aman Lepon family's strategy in their children's education are in line with recent academic findings on indigenous communities, where formal education is no longer seen as destructive but rather as a tool for cultural preservation. The phenomenon of blended identity demonstrated by Lepon and Anton validates Wahyuni's (2025) findings, which note that transformative dynamics are occurring among the younger generation of Mentawai, who have successfully integrated traditional ancestral values with teachings from world religions and modern perspectives. Thus, the model of collaboration between medical and magical knowledge proposed by Aman Lepon is a way to uphold the preservation of indigenous-based culture.

In relation to traditional education methods for introducing nature to young children, this is considered the main foundation for introducing their beliefs. The oral tradition of introducing children to culture, as obtained from the interviews, is in line with the research written by Tulus (2012) in his dissertation. Tulus states that the Mentawai people use oral tradition as a source of information that can explain several issues that arise in their daily lives.

### **Communication Patterns in the Sikerei Family**

Based on Koerner and Fitzpatrick's (2006) Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT), the Aman Lepon family exhibits characteristics that combine high conversation orientation with high conformity orientation, placing them in the "Consensual" family typology. High conversation

orientation is clearly evident from the democratic climate that Aman Lepon has built within the Uma (the traditional house where the family lives). From the results of participant observation and interviews, it can be assessed that in the Aman Lepon family, interactions between father and children are very open and fluid. Aman Lepon does not impose his will on his children's life choices. When Anton chose to attend high school instead of vocational school, or Lepon chose to major in public health, Aman Lepon gave them full autonomy with the supportive words, "whatever you like," and actively discussed financial support despite economic limitations. This openness creates a safe environment for children to express their choices and opinions without fear of judgment. The Aman Lepon family's communication pattern is in line with research by Sutedjo & Kristanto (2024), which shows that a combination of open communication and family rules (consensual/pluralistic pattern) is positively correlated with academic motivation.

However, behind the flexibility of these conversations, there is also a very high dimension of conformity orientation, which is specifically directed at compliance with the traditional values of Arat Sabulungan. Conformity here does not mean authoritarian restraint without basis, but rather a non-negotiable agreement on values in order to maintain harmony with the ancestors. Aman Lepon and his wife instilled strict rules regarding sacred boundaries that must not be violated, such as the prohibition of using technology during cultural rituals and the moral obligation not to forget their identity as children of Sikerei. Lepon himself internalized this conformity as an inevitable "birth agreement," stating that even though he attended college, he could not escape his cultural destiny. Lepon's obedience is not forced, but born of his own choice and beliefs held firmly since childhood.

The synergy between high levels of conversation and high levels of conformity creates an effective and resilient mechanism for cultural transmission. In FCPT, consensual families allow parents to listen to their children's views on the outside world (school, technology), but at the same time use these discussions to explain why compliance with traditional values remains a top priority. This can be seen in the way Aman Lepon motivates his children's education, namely by allowing modernity to enter through open dialogue, but framing it within a narrative of cultural conformity.

Furthermore, the Aman Lepon family's nonverbal communication in showing affection to their children is translated into economic sacrifice (instrumental support). Parents sell valuable assets (pigs, chickens, sago) and barter to finance education, even borrowing money so their children can attend school. This demonstrates democratic parenting with high expectations balanced with high support for children. Aman Lepon also openly shows his pride by attending his child's graduation and wearing complete Sikerei traditional clothing when taking photos. He affirms his identity to Lepon, "Your father is Sikerei. Sikerei is good." The high level of open communication in the

Aman Lepon family creates a sense of psychological security, allowing children to explore the modern world without fear of losing family support or their original identity.

Furthermore, the Aman Lepon family's nonverbal communication in providing affection to their children is translated into economic sacrifice (instrumental support). Parents sell valuable assets (pigs, chickens, sago) and barter to finance education, even borrowing money so that their children can attend school. This demonstrates democratic parenting with high expectations balanced with strong support for children. Aman Lepon also openly displays pride by attending his son's graduation and wearing the full Sikerei traditional costume for photos. He confirms his identity to Lepon, "*Bapakmu Sikerei. Sikerei itu bagus.*" "Your father is a Sikerei. Sikerei is awesome." High and open communication in the Aman Lepon family creates a sense of psychological security, allowing children to explore the modern world without fear of losing family support or their true identity.

As mentioned earlier, Aman Lepon's family believes that school is a tool to improve dignity and preserve the Mentawai culture itself. Thus, the Sikerei family's communication pattern has succeeded in producing a critical and educated younger generation that remains loyal and obedient to its traditional roots.

### **Family Communication as a Factor in Children's Educational Motivation**

In the review of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), Aman Lepon's family communication serves as a major factor in fostering his children's intrinsic motivation from an early age. Aman Lepon does not use coercive approaches to encourage his children to go to school. Instead, he builds their internal awareness that education is necessary for their own future. This can be seen in the practice of "forest school," where children are introduced to nature from the age of three, building a natural curiosity before entering formal education. Aman Lepon emphasizes the principle of moral autonomy with the phrase, "When it comes to learning, we are responsible for ourselves," which effectively shifts the locus of causality from external to internal. As a result, Lepon and Anton's educational choices were born out of their own conscious will, not absolute obedience to their parents.

The family communication pattern applied by Aman Lepon and his wife consistently fulfills three basic psychological needs of children: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The need for autonomy is facilitated through a democratic communication style, as when Anton decided to attend high school rather than vocational school like his older brother. Aman Lepon responded with full support, saying, "It's up to you where you want to go." The need for competence is nurtured through encouragement for children to master skills that their parents do not have, so that Lepon feels capable of taking on a role

in public health and Anton in information technology. By allowing children to choose fields they are capable of mastering, this family builds a strong sense of self-efficacy in their children as preparation for facing the challenges of the modern world.

Regarding the aspect of the need for relatedness, this is fulfilled through uninterrupted loving communication and identity validation. Even though their children have left home to pursue their studies, they never feel alienated from the culture that their family holds dear. Aman Lepon's presence at Lepon's graduation ceremony, dressed in full traditional attire, sends a strong signal of unconditional acceptance and support, affirming that they are still part of the Sikerei family, the indigenous Mentawai community. This feeling of connection and being loved becomes a solid emotional foundation, making the children's motivation to study no longer just to find a job, but has been internalized into a noble desire to uplift the dignity of their family and preserve their culture. With these three psychological needs being fulfilled through supportive family communication, the educational motivation of Aman Lepon's children continues to grow and be sustained.

The results of the study prove that Aman Lepon's family communication is closely related to fulfilling the psychological needs of children empirically in line with the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In relation to motivation, this is also in line with the research by Sutedjo and Kristanto (2024), which proves that a family communication pattern that supports autonomy has a significant positive correlation with high academic motivation among students in Indonesia.

### **Social Practices in Mentawai Indigenous Families**

In Bourdieu's view, the social practices of the Sikerei family are the result of the formation of a very strong habitus through early socialization in the "field" of nature and the Mentawai forests. From the age of three, children in the Aman Lepon family are taken to the forest to learn about nature firsthand. Daily practices such as hunting, processing sago, and selecting the right wood for building traditional houses are not merely skills that are cultivated from an early age, but rather the internalization of Arat Sabulungan values that are integrated into everyday activities. This learning is carried out through direct practice and memorization without involving reading and writing, so that the culture is understood as a way of life and daily activities that are ingrained, not just theory.

This transformation of social practices then extended to the realm of formal education as a form of adaptation to the demands of the times. In this context, social practices such as accompanying children in their studies, managing field work time so as not to interfere with school, and providing emotional support became important factors in building motivation for

education. This strategy reflects what Bourdieu refers to as capital investment. The Aman Lepon family consciously reorganized their traditional work schedule (fields/forest) to make room for their children to acquire new “cultural capital.” The emotional support provided serves as psychological reinforcement, ensuring that the transition from the forest habitat to the academic realm of school takes place harmoniously, so that education is not seen as a burden, but as a means of improving the family's dignity without having to abandon Mentawai culture.

The social practices of the Sikerei family reflect a negotiation between traditional and modern capital through a pattern of selective adaptation. The Aman Lepon family accepts elements of modernity contextually, while maintaining sacred boundaries during cultural rituals, as expressed in the saying, “*HP boleh, TV boleh. Tapi kalau lagi acara adat, tidak boleh (menggunakan) itu. Ada waktunya itu.*” (Cell phones are okay, TV is okay. But during traditional ceremonies, they are not allowed. There is a time and place for everything.” The use of technology is not rejected, but when indigenous peoples are conducting activities, it must be set aside. However, outsiders who wish to cover activities during traditional ceremonies using technology are not rejected. Aman Lepon believes that this is one way to introduce the Mentawai indigenous community to a wider audience.

The synergy between practical time management in the fields and consistent learning support shows that the Sikerei family has successfully combined their roles. This hybrid practice is clearly seen in the collaboration between Sikerei traditional medicine and the public health knowledge that Lepon learned in college. Thus, their social practices are not a rejection of change, but rather a way for them to adapt in order to remain empowered in the modern realm without losing their symbolic capital as guardians of Mentawai customs.

The social practices applied by the Aman Lepon family are related to several previous studies. The strengthening of cultural capital through formal education carried out by Aman Lepon is in line with Nur's (2025) findings that the traditional educational values of Arat Sabulungan remain an ethical foundation (unwritten book) for the younger generation of Mentawai in controlling their identity in the public sphere. The strategy of aligning Mentawai culture with modernity while adhering to Mentawai customary rules, as practiced by the Aman Lepon family, is a mechanism for identity preservation in line with the research of Irwandi & Taufik (2023).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Aman Lepon family, which is a Sikerei family of the Mentawai indigenous community, has family communication that is dominated by dialogical interaction, openness, and personal advice. There is an emphasis on values such as hard work, responsibility, and “children must be more advanced than their parents.” The Aman Lepon family applies a consensual pattern by combining a highly democratic conversation orientation and high conformity to the noble values of Arat Sabulungan. This communication pattern has proven effective in fostering intrinsic and autonomous educational motivation. Formal education is no longer seen as a threat to culture, but rather as a cultural defense strategy to complement parents' limitations in facing the outside world. By fulfilling children's basic psychological needs for autonomy and connectedness, Sikerei family (especially Aman Lepon family) have succeeded in producing a generation of successors who are enthusiastic about pursuing higher education without experiencing confusion in their spiritual and cultural identities.

The social practices that emerge from this dynamic communication are forms of selective adaptation and strategic capital conversion. Families consciously organize their daily routines, such as the timing of farming and the allocation of economic resources, to support the acquisition of new cultural capital in the form of formal education. This has produced a generation with a hybrid identity that is capable of synergizing modern scientific rationality with local wisdom, as seen in the collaboration between medical and traditional practices. Thus, this study confirms that Mentawai indigenous families have flexible and proactive resilience mechanisms, making education the main instrument for strengthening the existence and dignity of the Mentawai indigenous community amid the tide of modernization.

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