



# The Behavior of Street Children within a Cultural Context: A Study on the Communication Life of Street Children within a Typical Indonesian Society

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## Abstract

In Indonesia, unfortunate children facing dire circumstances, including victims of war, forced labor, child abuse, and human trafficking, are prevalent. Among them, street kids endure rapid growth due to various factors, living in abusive environments and spending approximately eight hours daily wandering the streets. This study aimed to explore the uniqueness of street children near the tombs of Islamic saints (Wali), where they descend to interact with pilgrims during religious events, seeking alms. Employing a phenomenological approach. Data Collection was by interview, field observation together with ethnographic techniques on street children's motivations for begging and their communication behaviors in capturing pilgrims' attention. Findings revealed that economic reasons and peer influence were primary motives for the children's street presence. Additionally, sacred events like Muludan, Malam Pelal, Syawalan, Serenan, Sedekah Bumi/Nadran, and Kliwonan marked peak times for their begging activities, associated with poverty and ritualistic behaviors. Understanding street children's communication behaviors and dynamics in this cultural context offers valuable insights for social interventions and support.

**Keywords:** *children's motives; communication behavior; cultural context; phenomenology; ritual; street children*

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## Introduction

Research that explains children's behaviors typically controls for environmental factors. Children prefer to follow their desires or the instructions of outsiders when engaging in particular actions. When learning, playing, and developing social interests, they are highly affected by their parents and other people around them.

Social learning theory in behaviorism suggests that through habituation, an individual follows a simple learning pattern due to environmental stimuli (Timberlake & Lucas, 2019; Yusuf, 2005). Santrock and Yussen, as cited in Bajari (2011), suggested that "each of us develops in certain ways like all other individuals, like some other individuals, and like no other individuals." This statement is also applicable to street children. These children grow up under the direct or indirect influence of the environment. They inherit only street values and creatively develop new values because they are on the street for eight hours or more daily.

From the field evidence collected, the study found that adults, particularly parents, strongly determine the development of a street child (Edinyang et al., 2020; Vergara del Solar et al., 2022). The behaviors of the adults or parents around children determine the children's behavior (Bellamy, 2001; Juhana & Nurhayati, 2023; Latif et al., 2023; Nurhayati, 2021; Ratningsih et al., 2021; Suharyat et al., 2023; Sulaimawan & Nurhayati, 2023). Regarding time spent in a week, most street children work seven days per week. Nearly 70% of surveyed street children stated that they work every day. If it is to calculate the working time for a day, most street children work from four to twelve hours per day (Adriana, 2009; Kosmara et al., 2021).

Within street children's environment, not every street becomes where they spend time. Some street children might gather at a site and form a typical community in some contexts. In Indonesia, street children gather at religious tourism sites such as the tombs of forefathers. One of the sites is the tomb of an Islamic saint, Sunan Gunung Jati, in Cirebon, West Java. This tomb is a religious tourism destination for Muslims, creating a new area of economic growth, mainly from tourism (Agustina et al., 2022; Faedilla & Puspitasari, 2022; Munawar et al., 2021).

One of the negative impacts is the presence of beggars who ask for money (as alms/charity) from pilgrims. Street beggarism has in many instances been found to be inherent to religious tourism (Gowreesunkar, 2021; Andriotis, 2016). Beggars travel from nearby regions to pitifully or even forcefully beg for money. A unique relationship between pilgrims and beggars around the tomb is formed through interaction (Handriana et al., 2020). Saputra (2019) puts it that street beggars add a 'sacred aura' to a pilgrimage area. There is no hatred or conflict between visitors and beggars. Salimuddin (2020) notes that some tourists and pilgrims are not bothered by beggars; it is as if beggars are part of a religious ritual that they cannot ignore. They even think that giving some money to beggars is part of *ibadah* (worship) and that they cannot simply leave. Some beggars are neglected children whose parents allow them to beg at the tomb (Handriana, 2020). They arrive in groups and ask for small change, and some beggars even offer to show pilgrims sacred places in exchange for some cash.

The community of street children in Cirebon Regency living around the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati is unique. These street children grow up in a religious-mystical culture, influencing how they see themselves, their roles, their environment, and the relationships among these three perspectives. For example, street children around the tomb have empathetic intelligence in explaining the mystical value of the tomb, site, and remains and the rules pilgrims must follow. It is as though they are authorities who inherited knowledge about the site through direct communication (*gethok tular*).

Groups of street children around the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati and other pilgrimage tourism sites gather money by begging, waiting for *tawur/curak*, and showing the pilgrims the tourism destinations in exchange for some cash. Those activities are equal to begging in the name of religion, as evidenced by the reports of the children who served as informants. They stated that they did not merely beg for money. Based on the findings, their argument is accepted because most pilgrims voluntarily give them money. However, some beggars use coercive approaches at the gate of Syekh Djatul Kahfi's tomb, all the stair steps in it, and at the gate of the tomb of Gunung Djati and every surrounding alms corner. Based on the background outlined above, the following research questions guided this study: 1) What causes children go begging on the street during religious rituals?, 2) What economic factors and fundamental necessities primarily drive children to engage in begging during religious ritual gatherings? 3) What social communication behaviors do children use to earn money during ritual ceremonies?

This study aims to examine the following aspects: 1) To determine the factors behind the increased presence of child beggars on the streets during Islamic religious rituals. 2) To explore the economic motivations driving children to beg on the streets during religious social-ritualistic events. 3) To gain insight into the sociological communication patterns exhibited by children engaged in street begging during Islamic ceremonial occasions within society.

### **Definition and Characteristics of Street Children**

The International Convention defines street children as children who spend most of their time on the streets. They socialize and travel in groups; some earn their living on the street by begging, mooching, or busking, while others steal, extort, and sell drugs. According to Rubaida (2006), street children work on the streets. The study results indicated that street children between the ages of 7 and 15 work on the street, disrupting others' sense of calm and safety while endangering themselves. Rubaida stated that street children were always in risky situations for their physical, mental, and social development and even their life. The constant risky situations caused them to develop new values and attitudes that established violence as their means of survival. When they become adults, they tend to be agents of violence and exploit street children.

This aligns with Nurharjadmo (1999) that street children are children aged 7 - 18 years old, both male and female, working on the street or in public places daily. These children are likely separated from their family, have a home but spend their time on the street, or from a family that lives on the street. The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia classifies street children into three categories (based on its strategic alleviation efforts for Social Welfare Problems: street children living on the street, street children working on the street, and vulnerable children becoming street children (Yuliani et al., 2022).

### **The Development of Children's Communication Behaviors and the Environment (Jean Piaget's Cognitive Theory and Erik Erikson's Eight Developmental Stages)**

Street children represent individuals in the developmental phase of childhood, encompassing ages ranging from 0 to 18 years. The distinguishing factor that sets them apart from their age-matched peers is their environment, as they predominantly spend their time on the streets, earning them the label "street children" (Islam et al., 2021). Due to the intricate nature of their living conditions, these children's developmental trajectories are intricate and distinct. Santrock and Yussen's proposition that "each of us develops in certain ways like all other individuals, like some other individuals, and like no other individuals" underscores the uniqueness of each child's development. They also posit that a child's holistic developmental journey comprises biological, cognitive, and psychosocial growth. Building on foundational principles by Aristotle, Kretschmer, Elizabeth Hurlock, Comenius, and Rousseau, Yusuf (2005) suggests that childhood developmental stages can be understood through three frameworks: biological, learning, and psychological development.

The five stages of biological development, as delineated by Hurlock and cited by Yusuf (2005), encompass prenatal development spanning conception to birth, infancy from birth to around 10-14 days, babyhood extending from two weeks to two years, childhood spanning from two years to adolescence, and finally, adolescence or puberty ranging from 11-13 to 21 years old. Puberty entails three distinct phases: preadolescence (11-13 years for girls, later for boys), early adolescence (16-17 years), and late adolescence, extending into the college years (Mendle et al., 2019).

Growth and development of a child fundamentally involve their socialization within their environment (Nursa'adah et al., 2022; Rumsari & Nurhayati, 2020). The process of perceiving stimuli and internalizing values is dynamic, with reciprocal learning and influence (Grolnick et al., 2019). Individuals consistently remain learners, evolving their potential and capabilities through recognizing and comprehending their surroundings and making informed decisions (Fenwick & Tennant, 2020; Kaye & Bower, 1994). Soekanto (2004) asserts that a child's growth is significantly influenced by the psychological, social, and cultural environments, particularly the role of the nuclear family. In adolescence, peer groups take on a pivotal role in influencing development, especially when the family's impact diminishes due to internal conflicts.

Soekanto (2004) further identifies psychological, social, and cultural factors as crucial determinants of children's development, shaping the interplay between parents, schools, and the environment. He emphasizes the importance of discerning positive and negative influences within these contexts, neutralizing detrimental ones while reinforcing beneficial aspects. The overarching goal is to define factors that positively impact development while adhering to sound criteria for the growth of children and adolescents.

### **The Approach to the Construction of Meaning in Child Development**

The construction of meaning in different developmental stages of children is a concept often explored by cognitive theorists like Jean Piaget, a psychologist renowned for his focus on child development. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (Desmita, 2005) outlines how children interpret and adapt to objects and events, perceive their attributes and functions, categorize objects based on similarities and differences, comprehend causes of changes in objects, and formulate assumptions about events and objects.

Piaget's theory delineates distinct developmental stages that represent advancements from previous ones. Each individual undergoes a series of unchanging qualitative transformations driven by the need to adapt to the environment and the organization of thinking structures (Desmita, 2005). Yusuf (2005) noted that, mental capacity involves three dimensions: thinking, the ability to solve novel problems, and adaptability, indicative of intelligent behavior.

Within the context of constructing meaning during child development, cognitive psychology perceives children as "actors" actively shaping their understanding of reality. Rather than passively perceiving stimuli, children's prior experiences influence and modify their interpretation of the world over successive developmental phases. As noted in Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (Desmita, 2005) by Hetherington and Parke, children are active creators of knowledge about reality, continually modifying their thinking processes based on their experiences.

Piaget's theory acknowledges that development is a gradual process, categorizing children's cognitive development into distinct phases that evolve over time. As individuals age, they undergo unchanging qualitative changes, with significant cognitive growth occurring around ages five to six, particularly during the school years. Piaget identifies this stage as concrete operational thought, during which children can logically reason about relationships between concepts or schemas, primarily focusing on tangible, measurable objects and events (Desmita, 2005).

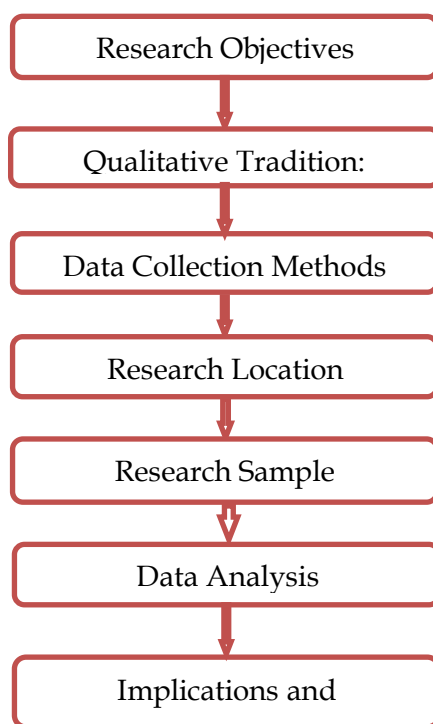
The existing literature highlights that street children engage in various activities, including begging and offering guiding services, to earn money during religious events (Gowreesunkar, 2021; Saputra, 2019; Salimuddin, 2020; Handriana et al., 2020). However, there is a lack of in-depth analysis concerning the motivations behind these actions and the communication strategies these street children employ to earn during ritual ceremonies. A comprehensive study in this domain could provide insights into the underlying factors driving their behaviors. This research aims to comprehend the distinct circumstances of street children near Islamic saints' tombs in Indonesia and explore their communication behaviors in this cultural context. These street children confront severe challenges, enduring circumstances like war, exploitation, abuse, and human trafficking. Among them, the population of street children is rapidly increasing, facing harsh living conditions and spending hours wandering the streets daily. The study's goal is to contribute to the existing knowledge base and offer practical implications for supporting this vulnerable group. By comprehending their unique circumstances, policymakers and stakeholders can devise effective strategies to address the challenges faced by these street children within their specific cultural setting.

## Methodology

This study utilized qualitative methods, specifically interviews and participatory observation, to explore the phenomenon in the field (Busetto et al., 2020). The main data used in describing the existing situations were quotes from these interviews, allowing for a deep understanding of individuals' experiences as subjects of a particular activity. The research was conducted at the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati in Cirebon, West Java Province, Indonesia, focusing on street children's subjective experiences and representing their perspectives on their life on the street. The research sample was selected using a convenience sampling technique (Julia, 2022; Stratton, 2021).

The qualitative tradition employed in this study was phenomenology, which seeks to explain individuals' lived experiences. Through interviews with street kids begging at the site and custodians of the tomb site together with participatory observation employing ethnographic techniques, the researchers gained valuable insights into street children's motives and communication behaviors during religious events (Frechette et al., 2020). The data collection involved various qualitative research methods, including interviews, observations, field notes, document analysis, and ethnographic methods.

Overall, using a phenomenological approach and qualitative methods, this research aimed to comprehensively understand street children's experiences near the tombs of Islamic saints during religious events. The findings offer valuable insights for social interventions and support aimed at addressing the challenges faced by this vulnerable population.



**Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart**

**Research Objectives:** This study seeks to explore the communication behavior and patterns exhibited by street children during religious events. The chosen qualitative approach is phenomenology, enabling an in-depth exploration of their experiences. **Data Collection techniques:** A multifaceted data collection approach, including in-depth interviews conducted with street children. These interviews will be supplemented by participatory observations carried out during events, allowing for a holistic understanding of their behavior. Additionally, general observations of street children's activities will contribute to the data pool. The research will rely on the compilation of field notes and document analysis,

supplemented by ethnographic techniques aimed at understanding the cultural backdrop. Research Location: The study will be conducted at the Tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati in Cirebon, West Java Province, Indonesia. This location holds significance due to its association with Islamic religious and cultural events and its presence as a context in which street children engage.

Sampling Strategy: The research will employ convenience sampling, targeting street children in proximity to the tomb during religious events. This approach ensures accessibility to participants while still offering relevant insights into their behavior during these occasions. Data Analysis: Collected data, including transcribed interviews, observational records, and field notes, will undergo rigorous analysis. This analysis aims to uncover the motives driving street children and their communication behaviors within the religious event setting.

Research findings: The study anticipates to reveal both the motivations that drive children to engage in begging during religious events and the distinct communication patterns they adopt during such occasions. By highlighting these aspects, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the street children's experiences in this context. Implications and Recommendations: The findings from this research hold potential implications for devising social interventions aimed at supporting street children. Insights into their motives and communication behaviors during religious events can form a reference for strategies that address their needs more effectively, offering a platform for positive change and empowerment within this vulnerable population.

## Result and Discussion

### Factors Underlying the Presence of Child Beggars at the Tomb of Sunan Gunung

To better understand the factors behind the increased presence of child beggars at Islamic religious sites and during religious rituals, the context of religious rituals, pilgrimage and tourism at the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati has to be examined.

### To determine the factors behind the increased presence of child beggars on the streets during Islamic religious rituals.

The tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati is the Biggest Pilgrimage and religious tourism attraction that it outperforms other forms of tourism in Cirebon City and its surroundings. The Cirebon City Tourism Office stated that 88% of visitors are on pilgrimage (Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kota Cirebon. (2022). The Tomb's historical significance, stemming from early Islamic missionary endeavors, historical trading, and the burial of notable figures since the 1420s, bestows it with not only Islamic religious importance but also historical and cultural value. Various ceremonies and events, such as the celebration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad (*Maulid*) and the "*Grebeg Syawal*" rites commemorating the royal families of Kraton Kanoman and Kasepuhan Cirebon, take place at the Tomb. These occasions involve communal prayers, the placement of flower wreaths on graves, and an array of ceremonial activities spanning multiple days, attracting both local and external participants and visitors.

The surge of tourists flocking to the Tomb consequently draws a diverse array of individuals, including commercial vendors and child beggars. Studies conducted by Saputra (2019) and Gowreesunkar (2021) underscore the correlation between commercial and religious activities at tourist sites and the presence of beggars. Gowreesunkar (2021) particularly underscores that the characteristic feature of beggary is evident in religious-oriented tourism as well.

A distinctive custom at the Tomb is the act of almsgiving, locally known as *curak*, which involves distributing coins to the waiting begging children site area. This expression extends not only around the tomb itself but also along the paths leading to people's homes. Abdul Ghofar one of the custodians of the site explains that those who give to beggars, view this practice as a means to purify their earnings. He elaborates,

"*Sidkah or zakat from ones earnings, signifys that a portion of their earnings is destined for the less fortunate*" (interview with Abdu Ghofar).

According to Salimuddin (2020), the tradition of *curak* after cultivates a social learning process for children that inclines them towards begging as its prevalence could be perceived by children as the tradition at the sacred tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati.

In another tradition, observed on a particular Friday with its roots in ancient times and led to the establishment of a new tradition known as *Seba Kliwonan*, people are implored to give to the poor on that particular Friday. From the perspective of beggars, both children and adults, the *Seba Kliwon* Friday has become a highly anticipated event due to the influx of pilgrims, which directly correlates with increase in their earnings. Rizal, a senior among the begging children, emphasizes this, stating,

"*On the Seba Kliwon Friday there's hardly any time for anything else besides waiting for alms from pilgrims, as numerous people visit the tomb. If you wish to find me and my friends, please avoid the eve of kliwon... kindly choose other days*" (Interview with Rizal, January 9th, 2008).

For these beggars, important days for generating income, through practices like *tawurji*, almsgiving, and begging, take precedence. However, their begging activities are not limited to days associated with religious traditions; they beg daily, even on non-religious days. The Tomb of Gunung Jati has become an integral part of their lives, a place where they strive to earn money for their daily sustenance from pilgrims consistently.

#### **Are economic motivations driving children into begging at tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati?**

When questioning the children frequenting the Gunung Jati tomb about their reasons for street begging and how they utilize their earnings, a recurring response emerges. They visit the pilgrimage area to sustain themselves through begging, often repeating the phrase "*wur... wur... wur... tawurji... tawur... tawur... selamat dawa umur*." Here, "*wur*" abbreviates "*tawur*," signifying that the pilgrims should scatter their alms if equal distribution proves challenging. "*Selamat dawa umur*" conveys appreciation and blessings for those who donate, with the belief it will bring them a prosperous life. From these findings it is clear that the allure of free easy pickings mandated by the belief system is a significant factor in motivating these children into street begging. This can be relatable to studies of Gowreesunkar (2021), Saputra (2019), Gunasekara (2016), and Salimuddin (2020) who have noted significant prevalence of street begging linked to beliefs and religiosity.

A local community member, Mr. Sya'ari remarked that "these street children constitute their family's financial support." This revelation reinforce the positions of Zarezadeh, (2013), Abari & Audu (2013) and Gowreesunkar et al (2021) that economic factors and poverty are the main factors that lead children into to street begging, they each however also present many other different factors that are social, political, security, health and geographical in nature. Local opinions about them vary, ranging from viewing them as impoverished youngsters left to fend for themselves, idlers, or troublemakers at the tomb. Mr. Satori, explained that;

"*the street children hail from the tomb's neighboring villages. Initially, the children's parents were prosperous; however, the habit of pilgrims dispensing alms in coin form led to an addiction to easy earnings. This paved the way for parents to allow their children to beg, causing lethargy towards work or farming.*"

Mr. Yusup, the custodian of the tomb of Syek Djatul Kahfi and aged 70, asserts that the children's existence doesn't disrupt the ambiance of pilgrimage. Despite occasional conflicts among them, their actions never lead to disturbances. Mr. Usup believes that one's destiny is

determined by a higher power, and there's no need for excessive concern. It's important to recognize their origins as offspring of the laboring underprivileged.

*"Urusan rejeki dewek-dewekan, kadang-kadang oli ana rejekine, kadang beli oli rejekine" (Interview with Mr. Yusup, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007).*

Mr. Yusup related that the street children's presence aligns with local myths and symbology that the begging symbolizes a deeper philosophy, akin to the relationship between humans and the divine. It's interpreted as an act of humility before the Creator. Mr. Yusup continued related another local myth that the children are in the place of missing monkeys at Gunung Djati. Whether children replace monkeys or transform from them, this myth highlights their significance, despite their occasional intrusiveness.

In conclusion, economic factors and poverty are the main factors that lead children into street begging at Gunung Jati, but beliefs and religiosity also play a significant role in motivating these children into street begging. The street children at the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati are viewed differently by the local community, ranging from impoverished youngsters left to fend for themselves to troublemakers at the tomb. However, the custodian of the tomb believes that their existence does not disrupt the ambiance of pilgrimage, and their begging is interpreted as an act of humility before the Creator. The begging by these children symbolizes a deeper philosophy, akin to the relationship between humans and the divine. It is important to recognize their origins as offspring of the laboring underprivileged.

### **Insights into Communication Behavior of Begging Children at the Tomb of Gunung Jati**

Communication is an inherent element of human existence, permeating every facet of social interactions (Ellis, 2019). Whether within organizations, conflicts, or program planning, communication is guided by contextual needs (Levi & Askay, 2020). This principle extends to street children's communication during daily activities, including those surrounding pilgrimage tourism sites (Amaro et al., 2021). Among these activities, the distinctive communication behaviors of street children play a crucial role in the social dynamics of the pilgrimage tourism community, as they convey messages about alms giving to pilgrims.

Pilgrims are inconvenienced by beggars obstructing their path, while keepers struggle to maintain the worship site's orderliness and cleanliness. This leads to a conflict of interests between those seeking to worship and those leveraging worship intentions for almsgiving.

Complications escalate during special occasions when pilgrim numbers surge, accompanied by an influx of street vendors and beggars, some from far beyond the regency, city, or province. During these events, beggars, including children, work extensively. Mob fight over alms intensify due to the larger beggar presence. However, some children attest to increased earnings during such occasions, sometimes doubling or tripling their daily income.

These circumstances intricately shape the communication behaviors of begging children. They invest more time engaging with people on the streets than their typical daily interactions. Their engagement with pilgrims multiplies significantly during these events, leading to heightened communication efforts.

While begging is often rooted in fulfilling basic needs, some children exhibit higher motives beyond sustenance. Notably, children from families not facing extreme financial hardships divert their earnings towards secondary and tertiary desires, such as cigarettes, gambling, and electronic gadgets. Cell phones are common among them, serving as tools for social interaction through texting, revealing motives that transcend survival.

### **Structuring Street Children's Communication with Pilgrims/Visitors**

Children's most intense communication occurs with pilgrims, specifically structured to solicit alms effectively. They strategically shape their communication to evoke a willingness

to give. This skillful communication involves a blend of verbal and non-verbal cues, crafted to prompt pilgrims to offer alms (Jackson, 2019).

Regarding verbal cues, children employ consistent vocabularies, sentence structures, and message content when addressing pilgrims. For instance, a common phrase like "Pa, sedekah, Pa!" (translated as "Sir, a donation for us, Sir!") is repeatedly used. This sentence exemplifies the formulaic approach children use to elicit positive responses and encourage almsgiving. This verbal tactic is often paired with non-verbal gestures to reinforce its impact. These non-verbal cues encompass gestures such as outstretching hands upward, tugging at pilgrims' clothing, and even accompanying visitors towards the worship site. These actions are predominantly undertaken by older begging children, whereas younger ones opt for more straightforward approaches. Wahyudin and Melisa are illustrative of this pattern, with Melisa employing these strategies, frequently using phrases such as:

*"Nyisun dikasih duit sewu, Pa, Bu"* (Please spare us one thousand rupiahs, Sir, Mam) (Interview with Melisa, *op cit*).

While Wahyudin typically says the following to visitors:

*"Cepet-cepetan, Pa sedekah Pa, amal Pa!"* (Hurry, Sir, spare us, Sir!) (Interview with Melisa, *op cit*).

These tactics underscore the children's dexterity in combining verbal and non-verbal communication to elicit empathy and financial support from pilgrims. This persuasive interaction is essential for their survival and has become an integral part of their daily lives. The interplay between linguistic and non-linguistic elements effectively shapes their communication behaviors, aligning with their objective of securing alms in the context of their presence around pilgrimage sites.

### **Avoiding Coercive Impressions**

Forceful solicitation is a communication approach actively avoided by children, as evident from findings by Bajari & Kuswarno (2020). Notably, the observations underscore that children maintain a non-aggressive stance while interacting with pilgrims. Instead, their behavior of accompanying pilgrims is perceived as a facilitation that enhances the pilgrim experience.

As such, it is pivotal that begging, providing assistance as guides, and requesting alms are executed with propriety. Children are against display of aggression or pressuring visitors for alms. The emphasis lies in ensuring that these interactions are respectful and non-coercive.

### **Addressing Pilgrims by a Nice Title**

Another way that children draw pilgrims' attention to give them alms is by calling the pilgrims nice titles. They typically call the pilgrims "Bu Haji" for women and "Pa Haji" for men (*Haji* = Hajj), even though the pilgrims have never completed Hajj to Mecca. In Islam, hajji is a title of honor and represents high status.

### **Try to "Sell" the Sacred Image of the Pilgrimage Site**

Children also engage in communication with visitors by persuading pilgrims about the sanctity of pilgrimage sites and objects. They endeavor to shape pilgrims' perceptions of the efficacy and mystical qualities of items or locations with religious significance, such as the stones and water at Watu Tameng and Seven Wells. Children acquire this sense of mysticism through oral traditions passed down by elders, who convey these myths to others and pilgrims, ensuring their acceptance. For children, their success is intricately tied to the extent of monetary contributions received from pilgrims.

For instance, Ahmad illustrates this approach by sharing that if a pilgrim takes a stone and offers alms, they will attain success in their endeavors and avoid misfortune. This narrative is shared with visitors who take stones from Tameng.

The act of throwing coins by visitors serves specific purposes, each aligned with their aspirations. Businesspeople, for instance, seek prosperous sales, while drivers yearn for safety and protection from ill fate. This practice of tossing coins, known as "sawer," is deeply rooted in these individuals' desires and beliefs.

*"Sawer is for getting a blessing: Businessman, driver, and school graduate. High school students want to graduate, and junior high school students want to graduate; if they graduate, they should be suwun. Suwun means to be grateful" (Interview with Ahmad, op cit.)*

Pilgrims never feel disturbed or annoyed by children's initiative in telling stories or myths. They do not mind or get upset. They believe these stories are for their safety, business, or preparation.

*"For example, Karim, when nameng, typically attempts to convince visitors of the efficacy of a stone of tameng by saying, 'Bu, batunya bu dibawa bu, biar sehat, rejekinya lancar. Kaluarganya panjang umur Pa Haji, Bu Haji' (Mam, here is the stone, mam, just take it. It is for your health, well earnings, for the long life of your family, Mrs. Haji, Mr. Haji)." (Interview with Mukarim, op cit.)*

### **Consideration of Visitors as People Who Are Willing to Give Alms**

Another important aspect in building children's courage in asking for alms is their perception of and positive attitudes toward pilgrims. When establishing effective and harmonic communication, it is important to have positive thoughts and attitudes. Participants in the communication are not burdened by fear or awkwardness in conveying something to their communication partner.

Children's attitudes toward all pilgrims evidence this; they think pilgrims will always give them alms sincerely and in good manners. That is one of their positive thoughts or attitudes. By having positive thoughts and attitudes, children never choose whom they request or do not request money from. Thus, if they have an unpleasant experience with some pilgrims, for example, they do not receive small change, they will not feel disappointed and immediately find other pilgrims.

One of the positive attitudes of children was reported by Sidik. Sidik always believes that pilgrims are charitable and always have some small change in their pockets to spare. For example, he stated that:

*"Approach them; they come here to do good deeds and surely bring some small change to spare. If they want, they can throw coins. Some even ask us to show them around." (Interview with Mukarim, op cit.)*

Iim stated that the good intention of pilgrims is seen as a habit. Pilgrims come to the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati to *tawur* (throw coins) so that they will have good earnings. Specifically, he said:

*"Nameng mintanya, Tawur Pa Tawur, biar rejekinya lancar. Mereka udah biasa, tau kita minta ditawur" (They are already familiar with it, they know we ask them for tawur)." (Interview with Muhammad Imron, op cit.)*

The foundation of Aceng's positive thoughts and attitudes is that he does not want to disturb the pilgrims. He would not force pilgrims to give him money. Therefore, Aceng feels

certain that because the children are not being forceful, pilgrims would never become tired of or upset with them even if they keep asking for alms.

We ask pilgrims by saying, "Sir, spare us, Sir, spare us, Sir, *tawur*, please, so your prayer will be granted happiness for some blessing. But we never force them, follow them. If they insist on not giving to us, never mind, we don't want to disturb them. They are not angry. Well, they are here to pray and, at the same time, to do good deeds so their prayer will be granted. Thus, they are just fine; we never insist too."

## Conclusion

The presence of child beggars at the Sunan Gunung Jati Tomb is related to economic factors, poverty, beliefs, and religiosity. These children beg at the religious site due to the attraction of easy income and religious motivation. They use effective communication strategies to gain empathy and financial support from pilgrims by using verbal and non-verbal cues. The practice of addressing pilgrims with a more respectful title and creating narratives around the sanctity of the pilgrimage site are strategies these children use to maximise alms. Meanwhile, this study has limitations in that it focuses only on the perspectives of child beggars and tomb guards, thus excluding the views of pilgrims, local traders, and tourism authorities. Future research needs to incorporate multiple perspectives and mixed methods to understand this phenomenon more holistically.

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