**Jurnal Ilmiah Ar-Risalah**: Media Keislaman, Pendidikan dan Hukum Islam
Volume 24 Nomor 02 Tahun
Print ISSN : 1693-0576
Online ISSN : 2540-7783

# EDUCATIONAL *KAFĀ'AH* IN MARRIAGE: CONSTRUCTING MUSLIM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS FROM ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENTIAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

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## Abstract

*The concept of kafa'ah in marriage has evolved alongside social changes within Muslim communities. Although formal education is not explicitly recognized as a primary element of kafa'ah in classical Islamic jurisprudence, it has increasingly been considered as a form of compatibility between spouses in contemporary contexts. This study aims to analyze Muslim university students' perceptions of educational kafa'ah in spouse selection, identify sociocultural factors shaping these perceptions, and examine the position of education within the concept of kafa'ah from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence. This study employed a mixed-method approach using an explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires involving 69 Muslim students from several universities in Jember Regency, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with eight informants. Data were analyzed descriptively and thematically through integration with Islamic jurisprudential and sociocultural perspectives. The findings indicate that 98.6% of respondents considered education important or very important in selecting a spouse. However, educational kafa'ah was not understood as identical academic attainment, but rather as compatibility in intellectual capacity, communication ability, family readiness, and shared values. This study reveals a reconstruction of educational kafa'ah from attribute-based compatibility toward capacity-based compatibility, while maintaining religion and moral character as the primary foundations of marriage.*

**Keywords:** *educational kafa'ah, Muslim university students, spouse selection, sociocultural factors, Islamic jurisprudence.*

## Abstrak

*Konsep kafa'ah dalam pernikahan mengalami perkembangan seiring perubahan sosial masyarakat Muslim. Pendidikan yang tidak disebutkan secara eksplisit sebagai unsur utama kafa'ah dalam fikih klasik mulai dipertimbangkan sebagai aspek kesepadanan pasangan dalam konteks modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis persepsi mahasiswa Muslim terhadap pentingnya kafa'ah pendidikan dalam memilih pasangan hidup, mengidentifikasi faktor sosial budaya yang membentuk persepsi*

*tersebut, serta mengkaji kedudukan pendidikan dalam konsep kafa'ah berdasarkan perspektif fikih Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan mixed method dengan desain explanatory sequential. Data kuantitatif diperoleh melalui kuesioner terhadap 69 mahasiswa Muslim dari beberapa perguruan tinggi di Kabupaten Jember, sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap delapan informan. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif dan tematik dengan memperkuat hasil melalui kajian fikih dan sosial budaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 98,6% responden menilai pendidikan penting atau sangat penting dalam memilih pasangan. Namun, kafa'ah pendidikan tidak dimaknai sebagai kesamaan jenjang akademik, melainkan sebagai kesepadanan kapasitas intelektual, kemampuan komunikasi, kesiapan membangun keluarga, dan kesesuaian nilai. Penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya rekonstruksi makna kafa'ah pendidikan dari kesepadanan berbasis atribut menuju kesepadanan berbasis kapasitas, dengan tetap menempatkan agama dan akhlak sebagai fondasi utama pernikahan.*

***Kata kunci:*** *kafa'ah pendidikan, mahasiswa Muslim, pemilihan pasangan, sosial budaya, fikih Islam.*

| Received: | Revised: | Accepted: | Published: |
|---|---|---|---|
| August, 10 2026 | August, 15 2026 | August, 26 2026 | October, 31 2026 |

## A. Introduction

The concept of *kafā'ah* or marital compatibility is one of the important discussions in *fiqh al-munākahāt* (Islamic jurisprudence of marriage). This concept relates to the suitability between prospective husbands and wives before entering into marriage. The consideration of *kafā'ah* is intended to maintain the welfare, harmony, and continuity of family life. Muslim scholars have different opinions regarding the position and elements of *kafā'ah*. Ibn Qudāmah explained the existence of different narrations within the Hanbali school regarding whether *kafā'ah* constitutes a legal requirement for marriage or a right that may be considered by women and their guardians. The criteria discussed include religion, *nasab* (lineage), freedom, occupation, and economic ability (Ibn Qudāmah, 1968). In the Shafiʿi school, al-Nawawī mentioned freedom, *nasab*, protection from immoral conduct, occupation, freedom from certain defects, and several other conditions as elements that may be considered in *kafā'ah*. Economic ability is not considered a determining element according to the stronger opinion within this school (Al-Nawawī, 2005).

These differences of opinion indicate that classical Islamic jurisprudence does not formulate a single uniform standard of *kafā'ah*. Each school of thought emphasizes different aspects based on its legal methodology and the social

conditions of its respective period. Al-Zuḥaylī mapped these differences by explaining that religion and moral integrity occupy an important position, while *nasab*, freedom, occupation, economic ability, and physical conditions remain subjects of disagreement among the *fuqahā'* (Islamic jurists) (Al-Zuḥaylī, 1989). Formal education is not explicitly mentioned as an element of *kafā'ah* in classical jurisprudential formulations. Therefore, education cannot be directly positioned as a legal requirement for marriage or an absolute standard in determining a spouse. Instead, education is more appropriately examined as a social consideration that may support the welfare of family life.

This position is consistent with Islamic family law in Indonesia. Article 61 of the Compilation of Islamic Law states that incompatibility between prospective spouses cannot be used as a reason to prevent marriage, except incompatibility due to differences in religion (Republik Indonesia, 1991). This provision indicates that differences in educational level, economic condition, *nasab*, occupation, and social status do not invalidate a marriage. Nevertheless, prospective spouses may still consider these aspects as part of their efforts to achieve compatibility in building family life.

Social changes and increased access to education have influenced how Muslim communities understand marital compatibility (Becker, 1993; Bourdieu, 1986). Education is no longer understood merely as an academic level or possession of a degree. Education is also associated with the development of ways of thinking, information-processing abilities, communication patterns, life orientation, and problem-solving skills. In the context of marriage, educational compatibility is often associated with ease of discussion, decision-making, child-rearing planning, and the formulation of family goals. However, formal educational attainment does not always reflect a person's religious quality, moral character, emotional maturity, and sense of responsibility. Therefore, education should be positioned proportionally as a supporting factor rather than the sole measure of a prospective spouse's quality.

The changing interpretation of *kafā'ah* has been discussed in several contemporary studies. Previous research indicates that the concept of *kafā'ah* has developed from an orientation based on social attributes toward an orientation based on individual capacities. Putra et al. (2025) and Asman and Aamer (2026) demonstrate that the interpretation of *kafā'ah* is influenced by the interaction between Islamic jurisprudential norms and the social realities of Muslim communities. Meanwhile, Akbar (2025), Makiyah (2025), and Kholis (2025) show that education has begun to be considered a modern aspect of *kafā'ah* because it is related to intellectual capacity, communication, family readiness, and shared life goals. However, these studies still have limitations because most of them focus on

conceptual discussions or specific groups, resulting in limited empirical descriptions of Muslim students' perceptions through a *mixed-method* approach.

Research by Makiyah (2025) and Kholis (2025) demonstrates that education as a consideration of *kafā'ah* among university students is not an entirely new topic. Therefore, the research gap cannot simply be formulated by stating that studies on students' perceptions of educational *kafā'ah* have never been conducted. The research gap lies in the limited empirical studies that simultaneously integrate Muslim students' perceptions of education as a form of marital compatibility with sociocultural factors and Islamic jurisprudential analysis. Previous studies have also focused more on postgraduate students within specific academic programs and environments. Studies involving Muslim students from various higher education institutions and different academic levels in Jember require further development.

Muslim students in Jember are relevant as research subjects because they are at a stage of identity formation, career planning, and preparation for family life (Giddens, 1991). They encounter modern social values that emphasize education, independence, communication, and shared visions. At the same time, they are also exposed to Islamic jurisprudential teachings that place religion, morality, welfare, and responsibility as primary considerations in marriage. Family and community environments may shape standards regarding what constitutes an ideal spouse. Furthermore, social norms concerning role division and family leadership may influence students' preferences regarding a prospective spouse's educational background (Bourdieu, 1986; Giddens, 1991). These conditions demonstrate that the interpretation of educational *kafā'ah* is not only related to academic level but also to ways of thinking, communication, gender relations, family dignity, and the distribution of responsibilities within the household.

This study differs from previous research because it examines Muslim university students' perceptions from several higher education institutions in Jember by combining online questionnaire data and follow-up interviews. The use of these two data collection techniques enables this study to identify response patterns while also obtaining deeper explanations regarding the reasons underlying students' perspectives. This research does not merely examine whether prospective spouses should have the same educational level. It also analyzes education as compatibility in ways of thinking, willingness to learn, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, child-rearing orientation, and family life visions. Furthermore, students' perceptions are analyzed from sociocultural and Islamic jurisprudential perspectives.

This research is important because education should not be understood as an absolute standard for determining the suitability of a prospective spouse.

Positioning academic degrees as an absolute standard may lead to exclusivity, feelings of inferiority, demeaning attitudes, and restrictions in choosing a spouse. Conversely, completely ignoring education is also inappropriate because educational experiences may influence how individuals communicate, establish goals, make decisions, and plan children's education. A balanced understanding is required to position education alongside religion, moral character, responsibility, emotional maturity, willingness to learn, and the ability to respect one's spouse.

Therefore, this study proposes that educational *kafā'ah* should be understood not as equality in academic level, but as compatibility in individual capacities that support family sustainability. Based on this explanation, this study aims to analyze Muslim students' perceptions in Jember regarding the importance of educational *kafā'ah* in spouse selection, identify sociocultural factors shaping these perceptions, and examine the position of education within the concept of *kafā'ah* from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence. This study provides empirical contributions by presenting questionnaire and interview data from Muslim students across several higher education institutions and academic levels in Jember. Theoretically, this research connects the concept of *kafā'ah* in Islamic family law with education, communication, gender norms, family influence, and changing social values. Practically, the findings may contribute to the development of premarital education programs that position education proportionally alongside religion, moral character, emotional maturity, shared visions, and readiness to fulfill family responsibilities.

## B. Research Method

This study employed a *mixed-method* approach with an *explanatory sequential design*, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods in a sequential process. The quantitative phase was conducted to obtain a general overview of Muslim university students' perceptions regarding educational *kafā'ah* in marriage, while the qualitative phase was used to gain a deeper understanding of students' reasons and considerations in interpreting education as one aspect of marital compatibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

This research was conducted among Muslim university students from several higher education institutions in Jember Regency in May 2026. The research subjects were selected using a *purposive sampling* technique with the criteria of active Muslim students currently pursuing higher education in Jember. Quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via *Google Forms* to 69 Muslim students, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with eight informants selected from questionnaire respondents who

were willing to participate in follow-up interviews. To maintain the confidentiality of informants' identities and comply with research ethical principles, all informants were not identified by their real names but were assigned codes ranging from I1, I2, I3, to I8. The use of these codes aimed to protect informants' privacy without reducing the analytical meaning of the interview data obtained.

The research instruments consisted of questionnaires and semi-structured interview guidelines. The questionnaire was used to identify students' perceptions regarding the importance of education in spouse selection, educational equality, the influence of educational differences on family life, the influence of social environments, and their understanding of the position of education within the concept of Islamic *kafā'ah*. The questionnaire employed a five-point *Likert scale*, ranging from a score of 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*very important*). The interviews were conducted online through *WhatsApp* to explore students' perspectives more deeply regarding sociocultural reasons and religious considerations in interpreting educational *kafā'ah*. The research data consisted of primary data and supporting data. Primary data were obtained from questionnaires and interviews with Muslim students, while supporting data were collected through literature studies involving classical Islamic jurisprudence books, Islamic family law references, scientific journals, and relevant previous studies.

Data analysis was conducted systematically. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns and tendencies in respondents' perceptions, while interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data validity was strengthened through technical triangulation by comparing questionnaire results, interview findings, and literature reviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). All findings were subsequently analyzed from sociocultural and Islamic jurisprudential perspectives to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the position of education within the concept of marital *kafā'ah*.

## C. Results and Discussion

### 1. Muslim University Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Educational Kafā'ah in Spouse Selection

Based on the questionnaire distributed to 69 Muslim university students from several higher education institutions in Jember Regency, education was found to be one of the aspects considered in selecting a spouse. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents expressed positive views regarding the importance of education in marriage. A total of 59 respondents (85.5%) considered education a very important aspect, 9 respondents (13%) considered it important, and 1

respondent (1.5%) considered it moderately important. No respondents considered education less important or unimportant.

**Table 1. Level of Educational Importance in Spouse Selection**

| Assessment | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very important (5) | 59 | 85,5% |
| Important (4) | 9 | 13% |
| Moderately important (3) | 1 | 1,5% |
| Less important (2) | 0 | 0% |
| Not important (1) | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 69 | 100% |

The high percentage of respondents who considered education important indicates that education has become one of the considerations in constructing the concept of an ideal spouse among Muslim university students. However, the interview results show that education is not understood merely as equality in academic level or possession of certain degrees. Students tend to view education as a process that shapes individual qualities in social and family life. This perspective is consistent with the concept of *human capital*, which explains that education is an investment contributing to the improvement of knowledge, cognitive abilities, and individual capacity in performing social functions (Becker, 1993).

Informant I1 explained that education is important in selecting a spouse because it is related to "ways of thinking, communication patterns, and problem-solving in household life." This perspective demonstrates that education is understood not merely as a formal achievement, but as an experience that shapes an individual's capacity to build life together with a spouse.

A similar perspective was expressed by informant I8, who emphasized that educational level is not the only primary measure; rather, the important aspect is how education shapes a person's mindset and approach to various problems. This finding indicates that Muslim university students tend to assign a substantive meaning to education, viewing it as part of the process of developing personal quality.

This interpretation can be explained through Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital*, which states that education does not only produce academic qualifications but also shapes ways of thinking, values, habits, and individuals' abilities to interact socially (Bourdieu, 1986). In the context of this study, students' consideration of a spouse's education is not solely related to academic status but also to intellectual and social qualities perceived as supporting family life.

These findings indicate a transformation in the understanding of marital compatibility within contemporary Muslim societies. *Kafā'ah*, which was previously associated with certain social attributes such as *nasab* (lineage), occupation, or economic status, has gradually expanded toward aspects of individual quality and capacity. Education has become a new form of compatibility because it is considered related to an individual's ability to perform social and family roles.

The findings of this study are consistent with Kholis (2025) who explains the shift in the concept of *kafā'ah* from status orientation toward competence orientation. In modern contexts, education is not only perceived as a symbol of social position but also as a factor that supports individual readiness to build family relationships. Makiyah (2025) also demonstrates that education has become one of the considerations among students in selecting a spouse because it is related to shared understanding and the development of family quality.

Nevertheless, this study shows that Muslim university students do not place education as an absolute standard in determining the suitability of a spouse. Education is still understood as a supporting factor that should be accompanied by other aspects, such as religion, moral character, responsibility, and personal maturity. Therefore, students' perceptions of educational *kafā'ah* do not indicate a demand for equality in academic level, but rather reflect expectations toward individual qualities developed through educational experiences.

**2. Educational *Kafā'ah* as Compatibility of Intellectual Capacity and Marital Relations**

The findings of this study indicate that Muslim university students interpret educational *kafā'ah* not merely as equality in formal educational levels between prospective spouses, but as compatibility of capacities that support marital relationships. Education is considered related to an individual's ability to understand their spouse, express ideas, make decisions, and deal with various family issues. These abilities can be understood through the concept of *human capital*, which explains that education contributes to the improvement of knowledge, cognitive abilities, and individual capacity in performing social roles (Becker, 1993). Therefore, the main concern is not merely the difference in educational levels, but rather how educational experiences shape an individual's ability to establish interpersonal relationships.

Based on the interview results, communication ability was one of the main reasons students considered education in selecting a spouse. Informant I1 explained that education influences "ways of thinking, communication patterns, and problem-solving in household life."

In addition to communication, education was also perceived as being related to the ability to resolve family issues. The quality of marital relationships is also influenced by the ability of couples to adapt, deal with life changes, and develop interaction patterns that support relationship continuity (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Informant I2 explained that educational compatibility can help couples develop problem-solving patterns that are easier to understand together because certain educational backgrounds may influence how individuals analyze problems and make decisions. However, the informant also emphasized that educational differences do not necessarily become obstacles as long as couples maintain mutual respect and openness toward differences.

These findings demonstrate that Muslim university students do not perceive educational differences as an immediate problem, but rather consider their potential impact on marital relationships. Incompatibility may occur when educational differences create gaps in communication patterns, ways of understanding problems, or attitudes of superiority toward one's spouse. Conversely, such differences can be managed when both parties possess awareness to learn from and respect each other.

This perspective illustrates that education is understood as a form of *cultural capital* that influences how individuals interact within social life. Bourdieu (1986) explains that education does not only produce formal qualifications but also shapes knowledge, ways of thinking, values, and individuals' abilities to adapt to social environments. In the context of this study, students consider their spouse's educational background because education is perceived as being related to the intellectual and social capacities required to build family relationships.

The relationship between education and the quality of marital relationships can also be understood through studies on marital success. Gottman and Silver (2015) explain that effective communication, the ability to understand one's spouse, and constructive conflict management are important factors in maintaining marital relationship quality. Studies on marital relationships also demonstrate that communication, conflict resolution, and emotional involvement play significant roles in maintaining relationship quality (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Similarly, Olson et al. (2014) state that family strength is influenced by couples' abilities to communicate, cooperate, adapt, and solve problems together. The findings of this study indicate that Muslim university students perceive education as a supporting factor that may develop these abilities, although it is not the sole determinant of successful family relationships.

Nevertheless, the findings show that Muslim university students still place limitations on the role of education. Informant I4 explained that educational

differences do not necessarily become a problem as long as both spouses are able to manage emotions and respect each other. Conversely, educational differences may become a source of conflict when they are used as a basis for belittling a spouse or establishing a superior position within the relationship.

Thus, educational *kafā'ah* from the perspective of Muslim university students is more appropriately understood as compatibility of capacities rather than administrative equality in terms of educational levels. Education becomes valuable because it can develop thinking abilities, communication skills, and cooperation that support family life. These findings demonstrate that the concept of marital compatibility in contemporary Muslim societies has gradually shifted from similarity in external attributes toward compatibility in individual qualities that enable spouses to grow together.

### 3. The Influence of Sociocultural Factors on the Formation of Muslim University Students' Perceptions of Educational *Kafā'ah*

The findings of this study indicate that Muslim university students' perceptions of educational *kafā'ah* are not formed individually but are influenced by the social and cultural environments surrounding their lives. In students' interpretations, education is not only related to personal achievement but also carries social values that shape their perceptions of an ideal spouse. Family factors, community environment, and academic experiences are elements that influence how students understand the importance of education in marriage.

Based on the interview results, family is one of the factors that contributes to shaping students' views regarding a spouse's education. Informant I1 explained that family and community environments influence how individuals perceive a suitable spouse. From childhood, individuals acquire an understanding of values considered important in family life, including the perception that education can serve as an indicator of a person's readiness to build the future.

These findings demonstrate that the family functions as an agent of value socialization that shapes standards regarding an ideal spouse. The family serves as one of the primary spaces for forming social values because, through family interactions, individuals acquire an understanding of norms, roles, responsibilities, and standards of ideal life (Coleman, 1988). Through family interactions, individuals develop perceptions regarding the expected qualities of a prospective spouse, including religion, character, responsibility, and education. In this study context, education becomes one of the inherited values because it is considered related to intellectual ability, independence, and readiness to perform family roles.

This perspective is also supported by informant I3, who explained that the family environment views education as a form of self-development and intellectual

growth. Education is not merely perceived as an academic achievement but also as part of the development of insight and personal maturity. Therefore, individuals with certain educational backgrounds are often perceived as having better abilities to understand issues related to family life.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital*. Bourdieu (1986) explains that education represents a form of cultural capital that not only produces formal knowledge but also shapes ways of thinking, habits, values, and individuals' abilities to interact socially. In the context of this study, education gains social meaning because it is considered to reflect certain qualities required in family life.

However, this study shows that the sociocultural influence on the interpretation of educational *kafā'ah* does not occur unilaterally. Muslim university students engage in a process of reinterpretation by considering their personal experiences and religious understanding. Although the social environment emphasizes the importance of education, students still place limitations by recognizing that education is not the only measure of a spouse's quality.

Informant I7 explained that education cannot be used as the primary measure because individuals with lower educational levels do not necessarily possess lower personal qualities. According to the informant, aspects such as religion, moral character, responsibility, and problem-solving ability remain important considerations in selecting a spouse. This perspective demonstrates a process of negotiation between modern social values that emphasize education and religious values that position character as the fundamental basis.

In addition to family and community, educational environments also contribute to shaping students' perceptions of educational *kafā'ah*. Social and educational environments also play a role in developing individual social capital through interactions, social networks, and shared experiences that influence how individuals understand social relationships (Putnam, 2000). As university students, respondents are situated within academic environments that expose them to diverse backgrounds, ideas, experiences, and perspectives. These interactions may strengthen their awareness that family life requires discussion skills, openness, and shared goals.

This transformation can be understood through Anthony Giddens' perspective on modernity and changes in social relationships. Giddens (1991) explains that modern societies experience changes in forming interpersonal relationships, shifting from relationships primarily determined by traditional structures toward relationships that increasingly emphasize self-reflection, communication, and shared life goals. In the context of marriage, this

transformation can be observed through the increasing attention among younger generations toward personal qualities of spouses, including education, knowledge, and the ability to build equal relationships.

The findings demonstrate that Muslim university students do not completely abandon traditional values in understanding an ideal spouse. Instead, they integrate religious values, cultural values, and the demands of modern life. Education has become an increasingly considered aspect because it is perceived as relevant to contemporary family needs, while still being positioned within a broader value framework.

These findings are consistent with Putra et al. (2025), who explain that the concept of *kafā'ah* in Indonesian society has changed due to interactions between Islamic legal norms and social realities. Criteria for selecting spouses, which were previously more associated with certain social attributes, have gradually developed toward considerations emphasizing shared values, communication, emotional maturity, and life goals.

Furthermore, Asman and Aamer (2026) demonstrate that the practice of *kafā'ah* in Muslim societies cannot be separated from evolving sociocultural contexts. *Kafā'ah* is not only understood as a normative concept in Islamic jurisprudence but also undergoes a process of reinterpretation in accordance with changes in social structures.

Therefore, the interpretation of educational *kafā'ah* among Muslim university students is the result of interactions between family, community culture, educational experiences, and social changes, while continuing to maintain religion and moral character as the fundamental foundations.

**4. The Position of Education in the Concept of *Kafā'ah* from the Perspectives of Islamic Jurisprudence and *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah***

The findings of this study indicate that Muslim university students have a relatively moderate understanding regarding the position of education within the concept of *kafā'ah*. Some informants considered education as part of marital compatibility because it is related to intellectual ability, communication, and readiness to establish family life. However, others understood that formal education is not included as a primary element of *kafā'ah* that is explicitly mentioned in Islamic jurisprudential literature. Therefore, education is understood as a supporting aspect that may strengthen the quality of family relationships, rather than an absolute standard in determining a person's suitability as a spouse.

This perspective is reflected in the interview with informant I6, who explained that education may be considered part of *kafā'ah* in the context of modern life because it is associated with an individual's readiness to manage household

responsibilities. Nevertheless, the informant emphasized that religion and moral character remain the most important aspects in selecting a spouse. Meanwhile, informant I2 explained that education is not an element of *kafā'ah* specifically mentioned in Islam, but it remains relevant because it may influence ways of thinking, communication, and parenting patterns within the family.

These findings demonstrate that Muslim university students do not perceive education as a replacement for the fundamental elements of *kafā'ah* in Islam. The purpose of marriage from an Islamic perspective is not only related to legal aspects but also to the formation of a family characterized by tranquility, responsibility, and moral values (Al-Ghazālī, 2005). Instead, education is positioned as an additional value that may support the achievement of marital objectives. This understanding reflects a balance between accepting the needs of modern society and maintaining the fundamental principles of Islamic law.

In classical Islamic jurisprudence, the concept of *kafā'ah* does not consider formal education as one of its primary elements. Ibn Qudāmah (1968) explains that *kafā'ah* relates to several aspects considered in marriage, including religion, *nasab* (lineage), occupation, and certain conditions associated with honor and compatibility between spouses. This discussion indicates that the purpose of *kafā'ah* is not to create absolute equality between prospective spouses, but rather to serve as a consideration for maintaining harmony and preventing potential problems in family life.

Within the Shafi'i school of thought, al-Nawawī (2005) also explains several elements considered in *kafā'ah*, including religion, protection from immoral conduct, *nasab*, occupation, and other social conditions. Formal education is not explicitly discussed as a standard of *kafā'ah* in these sources. This indicates that the inclusion of education as part of *kafā'ah* represents a development in interpretation that has emerged within the context of modern society.

Al-Zuḥaylī (1989) explains that there are differences of opinion among *fuqahā'* (Islamic jurists) regarding the elements of *kafā'ah*. These differences demonstrate that *kafā'ah* is closely related to the social conditions of a particular period. Certain aspects considered relevant may change according to social needs as long as they remain within the boundaries of Islamic principles. Therefore, the absence of education from classical discussions of *kafā'ah* does not mean that education has no value in contemporary marital life.

In modern society, education is associated with various family needs, including communication skills, decision-making, children's education, and problem-solving within the household. Sayyid Sabiq (2007) explains that the purpose of *kafā'ah* is to maintain harmony between spouses and reduce the

possibility of problems that may disrupt family continuity. Based on this objective, aspects related to family welfare may be considered as long as they do not contradict Islamic principles.

This understanding can be strengthened through the approach of *maqāṣid al-syarīʻah* (the objectives of Islamic law). Al-Syāṭibī (1997) explains that Islamic law fundamentally aims to achieve human welfare through the protection of essential aspects of life. In the context of marriage, all aspects that support the establishment of a good family and the continuity of household life may be considered as long as they remain within the framework of Islamic principles. Contemporary *maqāṣid* thought also emphasizes that legal understanding should consider the objectives and welfare intended to be achieved in human life. Ibn ʻĀsyūr (2006) explains that *maqāṣid al-syarīʻah* pays attention to the general objectives of Islamic law related to human welfare and continuously developing social needs.

The *maqāṣid* approach also provides space for understanding social developments that are not always discussed explicitly in classical literature. The *maqāṣid* approach enables Islamic law to respond to social changes by considering the primary objective of Islamic law, namely the realization of human welfare (Kamali, 2008). Auda (2008) explains that the systems approach in *maqāṣid* emphasizes understanding Islamic law based on the objectives and values it seeks to achieve, rather than merely through textual interpretations of legal rules. Based on this approach, education can be understood as an instrument that supports the achievement of marital objectives, such as the creation of a harmonious family, the ability to fulfill responsibilities, and the improvement of future generations' quality.

The findings of this study are consistent with Kholis (2025), who demonstrates that education in the modern concept of *kafā'ah* does not replace the position of religion and moral character but functions as a supporting aspect that contributes to intellectual compatibility and the ability of spouses to build a family. Makiyah (2025) also found that education may become a consideration in spouse selection because it is related to intellectual development, shared understanding, and family welfare.

Therefore, based on the perspectives of Islamic jurisprudence and *maqāṣid al-syarīʻah*, education may be positioned as a contemporary form of *kafā'ah* that functions as a supporting element (*tābiʻ*), rather than a primary element (*aṣl*) within the concept of *kafā'ah*. Education has value because it can assist spouses in performing family functions more effectively; however, its position remains secondary to religion, moral character, and moral responsibility.

## 5. Reconstruction of the Meaning of Educational *Kafā'ah* among Contemporary Muslim University Students

Based on the overall findings of this study, Muslim university students in Jember Regency have experienced a reconstruction in understanding educational *kafā'ah*. *Kafā'ah* is no longer understood as equality in external attributes, such as formal educational level or social status, but rather as compatibility of individual capacities, including intellectual abilities, communication skills, knowledge, and readiness to perform family roles. This shift demonstrates a change in orientation from attribute-based *kafā'ah* toward capacity-based *kafā'ah*, namely an assessment of spouses' abilities to understand, respect, and grow together.

This shift can be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital*. Education does not merely produce degrees or academic qualifications but also shapes ways of thinking, values, habits, and individuals' abilities to interact with their social environment (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, when university students consider education in selecting a spouse, such consideration is not only related to academic status but also to social and intellectual qualities perceived as supporting family life.

Based on the research findings, the reconstruction of the meaning of educational *kafā'ah* can be understood through three main dimensions. These three dimensions demonstrate that education functions as human capital and social capital that support individuals' abilities in performing family roles (Becker, 1993; Coleman, 1988). First, the intellectual dimension, which refers to compatibility in ways of thinking, knowledge, discussion abilities, and understanding life issues. Education is perceived as contributing to individuals' abilities to process information, make decisions, and develop shared perspectives within the family.

Second, the relational dimension, which refers to the ability of spouses to establish communication, cooperation, and problem-solving in household life. The findings indicate that students do not perceive educational differences as absolute problems but are more concerned with how such differences influence marital relationships. Educational compatibility becomes important when it supports healthy communication and the establishment of an equal relationship.

Third, the moral-religious dimension, which refers to placing education within the broader framework of Islamic values. The findings show that Muslim university students continue to place religion, moral character, responsibility, and personal maturity as the primary foundations in selecting a spouse. Education is viewed as a supporting factor that strengthens family quality rather than replacing moral and religious values.

This reconstruction indicates that contemporary Muslim university students engage in a negotiation process between modern values and fundamental Islamic principles. On the one hand, educational development and social changes encourage

increased attention toward intellectual abilities, communication skills, and shared visions between spouses. On the other hand, religious understanding continues to establish boundaries that a person's quality is not determined solely by formal educational attainment.

This phenomenon is consistent with Giddens' (1991) perspective that modern societies experience changes in establishing interpersonal relationships, increasingly emphasizing self-reflection, communication, and shared life goals. In the context of marriage, spouses are no longer selected solely based on similarities in social background but also based on the ability to build cooperative and sustainable relationships.

The findings of this study strengthen Kholis' (2025) research, which explains the transformation of *kafā'ah* orientation from status-based compatibility toward competence-based compatibility. Education within the modern concept of *kafā'ah* is understood as a functional aspect that supports spouses' abilities in managing family life. Akbar's (2025) study also demonstrates that social changes and increased access to education have contributed to the emergence of education as one aspect in the reconstruction of the concept of *kafā'ah*.

However, the reconstruction of educational *kafā'ah* found in this study does not indicate a change in the position of the fundamental elements of *kafā'ah* in Islam. Religion and moral character remain the primary foundations in determining the quality of a spouse. The change reflects an expansion of meaning regarding aspects that may support family welfare. From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), education can be understood as a means that contributes to achieving the objectives of marriage, such as establishing a harmonious family, fulfilling responsibilities, and developing quality future generations (Auda, 2008).

Therefore, this study demonstrates that educational *kafā'ah* among contemporary Muslim university students is not a concept of equality in formal educational levels, but rather a form of compatibility in personal qualities encompassing intellectual, social, and moral aspects. Education has become part of the development of the concept of *kafā'ah* because it contributes to individual readiness in building a family, as long as it remains positioned within an Islamic value framework that places religion and moral character as the primary foundations of marriage.

## D. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study regarding educational *kafā'ah* in marriage among Muslim university students in Jember Regency, it can be concluded that education is considered one of the important considerations in selecting a spouse.

However, Muslim university students do not interpret educational *kafā'ah* as equality in formal educational levels or academic degrees, but rather as compatibility in individual qualities, including knowledge, mindset, communication skills, maturity, and readiness to build family life. Therefore, the objective of this study, which was to understand the construction of Muslim university students' perceptions of educational *kafā'ah*, demonstrates that the concept has undergone an expansion of meaning from merely equal educational attributes toward compatibility in intellectual, social, and moral capacities within the context of marriage.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic family law studies, particularly in understanding the dynamics of the concept of *kafā'ah* within contemporary Muslim societies. The findings reveal that although formal education is not a primary element of *kafā'ah* explicitly formulated in classical Islamic jurisprudence, education can be understood as a contemporary form of *kafā'ah* that supports the achievement of family welfare. Education is relevant in building marital relationships through improving communication abilities, decision-making, conflict resolution, and the development of future generations' quality. This demonstrates a process of reconstructing the concept of *kafā'ah* from a status-based approach toward a capacity-based and benefit-oriented approach in household life.

This study has limitations regarding the scope of research subjects, as it only involved Muslim university students in Jember Regency. Therefore, the findings cannot comprehensively represent the perceptions of Muslim communities with different social, cultural, and regional backgrounds. Furthermore, this study primarily focuses on aspects of perception and interpretation, and does not deeply examine the relationship between educational *kafā'ah* and actual marital decision-making practices. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the research scope by involving more diverse groups, applying comparative approaches across regions, and examining the relationship between educational *kafā'ah* and other aspects of Muslim family life, such as family resilience, gender relations, and parenting patterns.

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