

# Economic and Psychological Determinants of Educational Outcomes among Children of Migrant Worker Families



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## Abstract

Parental migration as a form of international labor mobility has become a common household economic strategy, significantly influencing the educational experiences of left-behind children. This study aims to analyze the role of economic and psychological factors in shaping students' educational experiences and engagement within migrant worker families. A qualitative approach was employed using primary data collected through in-depth interviews with eight students of MTsN 5 Bulukumba whose parents work abroad. Data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques, with triangulation applied to ensure data credibility. The findings reveal that remittances play an important role in fulfilling students' educational needs, but do not directly determine their learning engagement. Instead, psychological conditions resulting from parental separation—such as feelings of longing and emotional loss—have a more dominant influence on students' motivation. A key finding of this study is that most students prioritize parental presence over economic support, along with the identification of student typologies categorized as economically oriented, psychologically oriented, and balanced. This study highlights that students' educational experiences are shaped by a multidimensional interaction of economic, psychological, and social factors.

Keywords:

*Economic Factors; Psychological Factors; Educational Outcomes; Migrant Worker Families*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

International labor migration has become a common economic strategy among families in developing countries, including Indonesia. This phenomenon is primarily driven by limited domestic employment opportunities and the expectation of improving household welfare through remittances. In this context, remittances serve not only as a source of income but also as a means to enhance children's access to education. However, the relationship between improved economic conditions and educational outcomes is not always linear (Khoiruddin & Pratomo, 2024).

At the same time, parental migration generates complex social and psychological consequences for left-behind children. Prolonged parental absence may affect children's emotional well-being, parenting patterns, and learning motivation. Children of migrant worker families often face a dilemma between the economic benefits they receive and the absence of parental care. This raises critical questions about how economic and psychological factors interact in shaping their educational experiences.

Furthermore, existing literature suggests that educational success is influenced not only by economic resources but also by psychological conditions such as emotional support, attachment, and a sense of security. Therefore, it is essential to understand the educational experiences of children

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from migrant worker families holistically, by examining the interplay between economic and psychological dimensions.

In the local context, students at MTsN 5 Bulukumba from migrant worker families exhibit unique dynamics. Some students benefit from remittances, which support their educational needs and learning facilities. However, others experience emotional challenges due to parental separation, which affects their concentration and engagement in school activities (Bergner et al., 2025; Jauzi & Ceasar, 2025).

These conditions indicate diverse student experiences in interpreting remittances and coping with psychological challenges. While some students develop strong learning motivation as a form of responsibility toward their parents' sacrifices, others experience decreased academic engagement due to the lack of direct parental guidance. This highlights the multidimensional nature of parental migration's impact on children's education.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to comprehensively understand how economic and psychological factors simultaneously shape students' educational experiences. Previous studies have predominantly focused on economic aspects, such as the role of remittances in improving educational access, while often neglecting the accompanying psychological dimensions.

Additionally, this study is important for informing more socially responsive educational policies. By understanding the lived experiences of students from migrant worker families, schools and policymakers can design interventions that address not only economic support but also psychological well-being.

Previous studies have shown that remittances positively influence children's educational access and school continuity. Other research indicates that children from migrant families tend to achieve better educational outcomes compared to non-migrant families. However, some studies also reveal that parental absence may lead to psychological issues such as loneliness and anxiety. The importance of emotional support in maintaining learning motivation and psychological well-being as a mediating factor between economic conditions and educational outcomes (Jannah et al., 2025; Natalia & Purnomo, 2024; Sosial et al., 2023).

Despite these findings, a significant research gap remains. Most studies tend to separate economic and psychological factors and predominantly use quantitative approaches. Research that explores students' subjective experiences in interpreting remittances and psychological conditions, particularly in specific local contexts such as Islamic schools in Indonesia, is still limited.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, combining economic and psychological factors within a single analytical framework, and emphasizing students' subjective perspectives in understanding their educational experiences. Moreover, this study contributes by focusing on the unique context of Islamic secondary education.

The objective of this study is to analyze how students from migrant worker families interpret family economic conditions through remittances and how psychological conditions resulting from parental separation influence their educational experiences and engagement.

This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the fields of education and migration studies, and practically to assist schools and policymakers in designing more comprehensive programs that address both economic and psychological dimensions of students' well-being.

This study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks that explain the relationship between economic, psychological, and educational factors in the context of migrant worker families. First, Human Capital Theory suggests that investment in education is strongly influenced by household economic resources. In this context, remittances from parents working abroad serve as a

primary source of educational financing, thereby improving students' access to learning resources (Alaoui, 2024).

However, an economic perspective alone is insufficient to comprehensively explain students' educational experiences. Therefore, this study also draws on Attachment Theory, which emphasizes the importance of emotional bonds between children and parents in psychological development. Prolonged parental absence may disrupt emotional attachment, which in turn can affect students' motivation and engagement in the learning process (Khoiruddin & Pratomo, 2024).

In addition, this study employs Social Support Theory to explain the role of extended family members in students' lives. The presence of grandparents or other relatives provides emotional and social support that helps mitigate the negative effects of parental absence. Such support functions as a buffer that contributes to maintaining students' psychological stability (Wang et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Self-Determination Theory is used to understand students' learning motivation. This theory posits that motivation is shaped by the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, including relatedness, competence, and autonomy. In the case of students from migrant worker families, limited interaction with parents may hinder the fulfillment of these needs, thereby influencing their motivation to learn (Barik, 2024).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study adopts a multidimensional approach, arguing that students' educational outcomes are shaped not only by economic factors but also by the dynamic interaction of psychological conditions and social support systems.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of students from migrant worker families in interpreting their economic and psychological conditions in relation to education. The data used in this study are primary data obtained directly from selected informants. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews to comprehensively explore participants' perceptions, lived experiences, and educational dynamics. A total of eight informants were selected using purposive sampling, with specific criteria: students of MTsN 5 Bulukumba whose parents are employed as migrant workers abroad. The selection of informants was based on the relevance of their experiences to the research objectives.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative data, this study applies triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and data triangulation, to validate the consistency of the findings from multiple perspectives. Data analysis in this study was conducted interactively through three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction stage, the researcher not only filtered and focused on relevant information but also applied a systematic coding process, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, interview transcripts were examined and broken down into meaningful units; for example, a participant's statement such as "I need my parents more than money" was coded as "emotional need." In the axial coding stage, similar codes were grouped into broader categories, such as "psychological condition" and "meaning of remittances." Finally, in the selective coding stage, these categories were integrated to develop overarching themes, such as "the dominance of psychological factors in shaping students' educational experiences."

Following the coding process, the data were presented in a systematic narrative supported by thematic tables to highlight emerging patterns. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn iteratively and continuously verified throughout the research process using triangulation techniques, including cross-source and temporal triangulation, to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how economic and psychological factors shape the educational experiences of students from migrant worker families.

### 3. RESULT

To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study applied triangulation techniques through both source triangulation and time triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing responses across informants with similar backgrounds—namely, students whose parents work as migrant workers—to identify consistent patterns in the data. For instance, the perception that parental presence is more important than remittances was not expressed by a single informant but was consistently confirmed by several participants, thereby strengthening the validity of this finding. In addition, time triangulation was implemented by reconfirming informants' responses at different points during the interview process, particularly on issues related to psychological conditions and learning motivation. This approach aimed to ensure that the responses were consistent rather than situational or temporary. The triangulation results indicate that most findings exhibit recurring and consistent patterns, suggesting a high level of credibility.

Furthermore, triangulation was also achieved by examining the relationships across themes, such as the linkage between the meaning of remittances and students' psychological conditions. The consistency of these interrelated themes indicates that the data are not isolated but mutually reinforcing in shaping the study's conclusions. Therefore, triangulation in this study was not only applied conceptually but also implemented practically to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

The findings of this study were derived from in-depth interviews with eight student informants at MTsN 5 Bulukumba whose parents work as migrant workers abroad. Data were analyzed using qualitative techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing through a thematic approach. The results reveal that students' educational experiences are not solely shaped by economic factors such as remittances, but also significantly influenced by psychological conditions resulting from parental separation. These two dimensions interact dynamically, forming complex patterns in students' learning experiences.

#### 3.1. Economic Meaning of Remittances

Remittances are perceived by students as a crucial factor in supporting their educational needs, particularly in fulfilling school-related necessities such as books, stationery, and other learning resources. Most informants (Informants 1, 3, 7, and 8) consider remittances highly important as they serve as the primary source of educational funding. However, variations in perception exist, where some informants (Informants 2 and 4) perceive remittances as less significant, while Informant 5 indicates that remittances are still insufficient to fully meet educational needs.

**Table 1. The Meaning of Remittances from a Student's Perspective**

Informant	Perception of Remittances	Category
1	Very important	High
2	Less important	Low
3	Very important	High
4	Not important	Low
5	Insufficient	Medium
6	Sufficient	Medium
7	Very important	High
8	Very important	High

*Source; interview results*

The categories of *high*, *medium*, and *low* in this table were determined based on the extent to which informants emphasized the importance of remittances in supporting their education. The *high* category refers to informants who explicitly identified remittances as a primary or highly important factor in fulfilling educational needs, often expressed through strong and repeated statements. The *medium* category includes informants who acknowledged remittances as a supporting factor but not as a primary determinant, typically reflected in moderate or ambivalent statements. The *low* category

refers to informants who perceived remittances as less important or having minimal influence on their education. These categories were derived through thematic analysis, considering both the intensity and meaning of informants' responses.

The table indicates that most students perceive remittances as essential for supporting their education. However, the diversity of responses highlights that economic factors alone do not fully determine educational experiences. Remittances also carry subjective meanings shaped by students' social and psychological contexts.

### 3.2. Psychological Dynamics of Left-Behind Children

Students' psychological conditions vary significantly, ranging from feelings of longing and sadness to emotional adaptation. Some informants (Informants 3, 4, and 8) experience deep emotional distress due to prolonged parental absence. Meanwhile, others demonstrate adaptive coping mechanisms, particularly when communication with parents remains frequent.

**Table 2. Dynamics of Students' Psychological Conditions**

Informant	Psychological Condition	Intensity
1	Stable, mild longing	Low
2	Stable	Low
3	Deep sadness	High
4	Sad and anxious	High
5	Fluctuating	Medium
6	Adaptive	Medium
7	Initial longing	Medium
8	Sad and feeling loss	High

*Source; interview results*

The categories of *high*, *medium*, and *low* in this table were determined based on the intensity of psychological conditions experienced by the informants due to parental separation. The *high* category refers to informants who exhibited strong emotional distress, such as deep sadness, feelings of loss, or frequent anxiety, expressed explicitly during the interviews. The *medium* category includes informants who experienced fluctuating emotional conditions, such as occasional feelings of longing that remained manageable. The *low* category refers to informants who demonstrated relatively stable psychological conditions with minimal emotional distress. These classifications were established through thematic analysis, considering the depth, frequency, and expression of emotions conveyed by the informants.

The findings suggest that psychological conditions are strongly influenced by the duration of separation and the intensity of communication with parents. Students with frequent communication tend to exhibit more stable emotional conditions, while limited communication is associated with higher psychological vulnerability.

### 3.3. Extended Family as Social Buffer

All informants live with extended family members such as grandparents or siblings. These family members play a significant role in providing emotional support, supervising learning activities, and assisting with daily needs. In many cases, they partially substitute parental roles, although not entirely.

**Table 3. The Role of Surrogate Family**

Informant	Living Arrangement	Role
1	Grandparents & relatives	Full support

Informant	Living Arrangement	Role
2	Mother	Supervision
3	Grandmother	Emotional support
4	Grandparents & relatives	Support
5	Family members	Mixed
6	Grandmother	Support
7	Grandparents	Strong
8	Grandparents & sibling	Strong

Source; interview results

The role categories in this table were determined based on the types of support provided by extended family members in students' daily lives. The *full support* category refers to comprehensive support encompassing emotional care, supervision, and daily needs. The *supervision* category highlights a primary focus on monitoring and regulating students' learning activities. The *emotional* category reflects support centered on emotional closeness and care, with limited involvement in academic aspects. The *support* category indicates general assistance that is present but not comprehensive. The *mixed* category refers to varied roles without a clearly dominant function. Meanwhile, the *strong* category represents consistent and intensive involvement across multiple aspects of students' lives, although not necessarily covering all dimensions completely. These categories were derived through thematic analysis of interaction patterns and support experiences. Extended family serves as a social buffer that mitigates the negative impacts of parental absence. However, their role remains complementary and cannot fully replace the emotional presence of parents.

### 3.4. Educational Engagement and Motivation

Students' learning motivation shows diverse patterns. Some students demonstrate increased motivation as a response to their parents' sacrifices, while others experience decreased motivation due to emotional challenges and lack of direct supervision.

**Table 4. The Role of Surrogate Family**

Informant	Motivation Level	Direction
1	High	Positive
2	Stable	Neutral
3	High	Positive
4	Decreasing	Negative
5	Fluctuating	Mixed
6	High	Positive
7	High	Positive
8	High	Positive

Source; interview results

The directional categories in this table were determined based on students' learning motivation tendencies in response to their family conditions. The *positive* category refers to students who demonstrate increased motivation, such as strong enthusiasm, academic aspirations, and a desire to reciprocate their parents' sacrifices. The *negative* category includes students who exhibit decreased motivation, reflected in reduced engagement or lack of enthusiasm for learning. The *neutral* category indicates relatively stable motivation without significant change. The *mixed* category refers to fluctuating motivation, where students experience both increases and decreases over time. These categories were established through thematic analysis of students' learning experiences. Students' motivation is shaped by the interaction between economic and psychological

factors. Those who positively interpret parental sacrifices tend to exhibit stronger intrinsic motivation.

### 3.5. Interplay Between Economic and Psychological Factors

Most students perceive parental presence as more important than economic support alone. However, both factors are interdependent and jointly shape educational experiences.

**Tabel 5. Economic and Psychological Relations**

Informant	Dominant Factor
1	Psychological
2	Economic
3	Psychological
4	Psychological
5	Psychological
6	Psychological
7	Combined
8	Psychological

*Source; interview results*

The dominant categories in this table were determined based on the factor that most strongly influences students' educational experiences. The *psychological* category refers to informants who emphasize the importance of parental emotional presence, including the need for care, affection, and closeness. In contrast, the *economic* category includes informants who perceive financial support, particularly remittances, as the primary factor supporting their education. These categories were derived through thematic analysis of the emphasis expressed by informants when comparing the two factors. The findings indicate that psychological factors are generally more dominant than economic factors. However, the relationship between the two is complementary rather than mutually exclusive

### 3.6. Typology of Students

Before categorizing students into distinct types, it is important to recognize that their responses to parental migration are not uniform but reflect diverse interpretations shaped by their economic conditions, psychological experiences, and social environments. The findings reveal that students construct different meanings regarding the role of remittances and parental presence, which in turn influence their motivation and engagement in education. This variation indicates the need for a typological classification to better understand the patterns underlying students' experiences. By developing this typology, the study aims to identify dominant orientations among students and to provide a more nuanced analytical framework for explaining how economic and psychological factors interact in shaping educational outcomes.

**Tabel 6. Student Typology Based on Responses**

Type	Characteristics	Informants
Economic-Oriented	Focus on financial support	2
Emotionally-Oriented	Emphasize parental presence	3, 4, 6, 8
Balanced	Combine both factors	1, 7

*Source; interview results*

The characteristic categories in this table were determined based on students' response patterns toward parental migration. The *remittance-focused* category refers to students who primarily view economic factors as the main support for their education. The *parental presence-focused* category includes students who emphasize the importance of emotional support and direct parental presence. Meanwhile, the *balanced* category refers to students who integrate both factors and perceive them as equally important. These categories were established through thematic analysis of how students interpret their overall experiences.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The finding that most students perceive remittances as an important factor in education can be explained through Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes that investment in education is highly dependent on household economic resources. Remittances enable students to fulfill basic educational needs, such as school supplies, uniforms, and other expenses, thereby improving access to learning. However, the variation in students' perceptions indicates that remittances are not interpreted purely as economic resources, but are also shaped by social constructions and subjective experiences. This is consistent with the New Economics of Labor Migration, which suggests that migration is not solely an economic decision but also a household strategy to improve overall welfare. Thus, remittances function not only as financial support but also as a symbolic representation of parental sacrifice, influencing how students interpret their educational experiences (Bergner et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025).

The variation in students' psychological conditions can be understood through Attachment Theory, which posits that emotional bonding with parents is a fundamental need in individual development. Prolonged parental absence may disrupt this attachment, leading to feelings of longing, loss, and anxiety. However, not all students experience these effects in the same way due to the presence of psychological adaptation mechanisms. Students who maintain frequent communication with their parents tend to preserve emotional closeness despite physical separation. This suggests that emotional relationships are not entirely dependent on physical presence but can be sustained through ongoing interaction. Therefore, students' psychological conditions result from the interaction between physical separation and the quality of maintained emotional relationships (Bergner et al., 2025; Gu, 2024; Jauzi & Ceasar, 2025).

The role of extended family in this study can be explained through Social Support Theory, which highlights the importance of social support in maintaining individual well-being. The presence of grandparents or other relatives provides emotional, instrumental, and informational support that helps students adapt to the absence of their parents. This support functions as a buffer that mitigates the negative effects of stress caused by separation. However, extended family members cannot fully replace the emotional role of biological parents, as the nature of emotional attachment differs. This explains why, despite receiving social support, some students still experience feelings of loss and longing. Thus, extended family acts as a complementary rather than a complete substitute in the caregiving structure (Expectations & Involvement, 2024; Khoiruddin & Pratomo, 2024; Li, n.d.).

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The variation in students' learning motivation can be explained through Self-Determination Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students who interpret their parents' migration as a form of sacrifice tend to develop intrinsic motivation, driven by a sense of responsibility and the desire to reciprocate their parents' efforts. In contrast, students who experience emotional distress or lack direct parental support tend to show decreased motivation, as their basic psychological need for relatedness is not fully satisfied. Additionally, external factors such as peers and teachers also play a role in shaping students' motivation. Therefore, students' learning motivation is the result of an interaction between internal psychological factors and external social and economic environments (A New Decade for Social Changes, n.d.; Abbasi et al., n.d.; Alaoui, 2024). The dominance of psychological factors over economic factors in this study can be explained through the well-being approach in education, which emphasizes that emotional well-being is a fundamental prerequisite for effective learning. While economic resources provide necessary support, without

adequate emotional support, students may struggle to utilize these resources optimally. This indicates that economic and psychological factors are not substitutive but complementary. In this context, psychological conditions act as a mediating mechanism that determines how students respond to economic support. Therefore, educational outcomes depend not only on the availability of economic resources but also on the quality of students' psychological well-being (Children, 2024; Expectations & Involvement, 2024; Gu, 2024).

The emergence of student typologies in this study reflects the heterogeneous nature of responses to parental migration, shaped by a combination of economic, psychological, and social factors. This can be explained through the perspective of social constructivism, which suggests that individuals construct meaning based on their experiences and social interactions. Students with an economic orientation tend to view education primarily in terms of financial support, while those with a psychological orientation emphasize the importance of parental presence. Meanwhile, students in the balanced category demonstrate the ability to integrate both factors simultaneously. This typology highlights that students' educational experiences are not uniform but are constructed through their interpretation of social realities. Therefore, this classification provides an important analytical contribution to understanding the diversity of student responses in a more nuanced manner (A Systematic Review in the Impacts of Skilled Parent Migration on Left- Behind Children : Gaps in the Existing Knowledge, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2025).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the educational experiences of students from migrant worker families are not solely determined by economic factors such as remittances, but are also significantly shaped by psychological conditions resulting from parental separation. While remittances play an essential role in fulfilling students' educational needs, they do not automatically enhance learning engagement or outcomes. Instead, psychological factors—such as feelings of longing, emotional loss, and the need for parental support—appear to have a more dominant influence on students' motivation and educational experiences.

A key finding of this study is that most students prioritize parental presence over economic support. Furthermore, the study identifies distinct student typologies based on their responses to parental migration: economic-oriented, psychologically-oriented, and balanced types. This typology highlights the heterogeneous nature of students' experiences, shaped by the interaction of economic, psychological, and social factors. The role of extended family and the intensity of communication with parents are also found to be critical in maintaining students' emotional stability.

The findings suggest the need for more comprehensive and socially responsive educational policies for students from migrant worker families. Schools should not only focus on academic performance but also provide psychological support services, such as counseling and emotional support programs for students experiencing parental separation. Teachers should also be empowered to act as supportive figures who can provide guidance and motivation.

At the policy level, governments should consider developing targeted programs for migrant worker families, including parental education on long-distance parenting and facilitating communication between parents and children. Such initiatives are essential to maintaining emotional bonds despite geographical separation. Additionally, greater attention should be given to supporting extended family members, given their significant role in students' daily lives.

This study has limitations, particularly in terms of the relatively small number of informants and the specific research setting. Future research is recommended to expand the scope by including a larger and more diverse sample to enhance generalizability.

Moreover, future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach to quantitatively examine the relationship between economic and psychological factors. Researchers may also explore additional variables, such as the role of communication technology, the quality of caregiving by extended families, and cultural influences in shaping students' educational experiences. Such efforts would contribute to a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

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