



POVERTY AND ADOLESCENT DROPOUTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE RATIONALITY OF SURVIVAL OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: This study examines the paradox of adolescents dropping out of formal education in Baros Village, Brebes Regency, where short-term economic pressures perpetuate structural poverty and hinder upward social mobility. The study aims to unravel the local sociocultural dynamics mediating the decision to drop out of school, filling a gap in the existing literature that has focused too heavily on macroeconomic factors. Using a qualitative case-study design, the research involved eight key informants through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana interactive model to ensure validity through source triangulation. Findings reveal three typologies of vulnerability: sudden shocks, chronic structural poverty, and dependence on the informal economy. The decision to drop out of school is driven by the high opportunity costs of adolescent labor, the burden of hidden costs, and a low perceived return on investment in education. Parents construct education as a "tertiary luxury" and children as "strategic economic assets," creating what is termed "contextual survival rationality." This phenomenon indicates that dropping out of school is not merely a passive consequence of poverty but rather a calculated adaptive strategy for survival. Consequently, the cycle of intergenerational poverty persists because education is viewed as a threat to household economic stability rather than a way out, thus requiring policy interventions that are not merely charitable but also structural and aimed at changing families' perceptions of economic values.

Keywords: Adolescent School Dropout, Structural Poverty, Contextual Survival Rationality.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji paradoks penghentian pendidikan formal remaja di Desa Baros, Kabupaten Brebes, di mana tekanan ekonomi jangka pendek melanggengkan kemiskinan struktural dan menghambat mobilitas sosial vertikal. Studi ini bertujuan mengurai dinamika sosiokultural lokal yang memediasi keputusan putus sekolah, mengisi kekosongan literatur sebelumnya yang terlalu berfokus pada faktor makroekonomi. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, penelitian melibatkan delapan narasumber utama melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dan analisis dokumen. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana untuk memastikan validitas melalui triangulasi sumber. Temuan mengungkapkan tiga tipologi kerentanan: guncangan mendadak, kemiskinan struktural kronis, dan ketergantungan pada ekonomi informal. Keputusan putus sekolah didorong oleh tingginya biaya oportunitas tenaga kerja remaja, beban biaya tersembunyi, serta persepsi rendah terhadap return on investment pendidikan. Orang tua mengonstruksi pendidikan sebagai "kemewahan tersier" dan anak sebagai "aset ekonomi strategis", menciptakan apa yang disebut sebagai "rasionalitas kelangsungan hidup kontekstual". Fenomena ini menunjukkan bahwa putus sekolah bukan sekadar akibat pasif kemiskinan, melainkan strategi adaptif kalkulatif untuk bertahan hidup. Akibatnya, siklus reproduksi kemiskinan antargenerasi terus berlanjut karena pendidikan dipandang sebagai ancaman terhadap stabilitas ekonomi rumah tangga, bukan jalan keluar, sehingga memerlukan intervensi kebijakan yang tidak hanya bersifat karitatif tetapi juga struktural dan berbasis perubahan persepsi nilai ekonomi keluarga.

Kata Kunci: Putus Sekolah Remaja, Kemiskinan Struktural, Rasionalitas Kelangsungan Hidup Kontekstual.

1. INTRODUCTION

Investment in human resources is essential to break the chain of structural poverty and create sustainable vertical social mobility. Therefore, economic reasons should serve as a strategic driver for teenagers in Baros Village to continue formal education to the highest level. In this normative situation, the reduction of financial resources should encourage new initiatives, such as village scholarships, family empowerment programs, and local policies that ensure that children do not have to leave school to work hard. The ultimate goal of economic management is to produce a generation that is intelligent, critical, and able to manage the potential of the village independently (Nurhayati *et al.*, 2025). However, the empirical reality in Baros Village today shows a sharp paradox and diametrically contradicts the idea; Short-term economic stress is a major factor that causes adolescents to lack access to formal education. One of the most glaring forms of social conflict is when society is caught up in an instant pragmatic cycle that forces teenagers to leave school early to become cheap labour who lack the necessary skills (Nurwahid, 2024). In the collective cognitive dissonance generated by this phenomenon, future value is ignored in favor of current survival. As a result, economic reasons that were originally considered the cornerstone of progress have turned into shackles that perpetuate structural ignorance. As a result, intergenerational poverty deepens, so that adolescents lose the opportunity to develop their intellectual abilities, while villages lose what is most important for long-term development (Wicaksono, Prayoga and Putra, 2025). This field practice shows that the basic principle that education is a fundamental right is non-negotiable just because of the condition of the wallet.

In the recent sociology of education literature, the phenomenon of adolescent dropouts in Baros Village due to economic pressure has received wide attention. Five recent studies provide a strong theoretical foundation for this problem. Yunda (2022) Found that microeconomic shocks directly led to more dropouts in rural areas of Southeast Asia. On the other hand, Ria (2024) shows that parents' views of low return on investment in education cause them to leave their children's school faster. In addition, a comparative study by Komang and Sudemen (2025) shows that structural poverty will continue to replicate inequality in access to education without special policy interventions. Discovery Husnul (2023), which emphasizes the inability of social assistance programs to help the most vulnerable families in remote villages, is supported by these findings. Finally, the analysis Tajriah, Djandon and Sulaiman (2022) shows that adolescents who drop out of school early are more likely to be stuck in a cycle of informal, low-income work throughout their lives. Although the five studies consistently state that there is a negative correlation between economic crisis and educational continuity, there are significant and unmet research gaps. Previous research has mostly focused on macroeconomic factors or central government policies, but has not studied the unique local socio-cultural dynamics at the level of a particular community such as Baros Village. This research mainly focuses on the ways in which indigenous and local kinship structures mediate or exacerbate the impact of economic pressures on adolescent

education decisions. There have been no studies that have thoroughly studied the relationship between local agents (community leaders) and family survival strategies in this particular cultural perspective. Therefore, our understanding of the microsocial mechanisms that underpin this phenomenon is still partial and requires a more contextual ethnographic investigation.

Using a case study in Baros Village, Brebes Regency, Indonesia, this study aims to comprehensively decipher the dynamics of the relationship between economic limitations and adolescent dropouts. This research focuses on three main problem formulations: first, describing the profile of the socio-economic condition of families who experience the phenomenon of dropping out of school; second, to find the specific economic factors that are the main drivers of adolescents' decision to stop their studies; and third, find ways to identify the factors that become parents' perceptions of the urgency of secondary education in the midst of a squeeze of basic needs. This research was conducted in Baros Village, Ketanggungan District, Brebes Regency, Indonesia because this area represents a typical development paradox in Central Java. This is because despite being a food buffer area with great agrarian potential, Brebes actually experiences a high level of poverty and unequal access to education (Awaliyah, 2025). The unique demographic characteristics and livelihood structure of Baros Village have never been discussed in previous research. The local economic shock is caused by a shift from the traditional to the modern economy, which forces teenagers to choose menial work over school (Fauzian and Istianah, 2025). Due to its strategic location but far from the infrastructure supporting education, this location became an important social laboratory. The findings here are relevant for the local policies of Brebes Regency and offer an empirical model for dealing with school dropouts in other agrarian rural areas in Indonesia that face similar pressures. This will fill in the gaps in microsociological data that have not existed in the formulation of solutions.

This research is very important academically and practically to be carried out immediately because the phenomenon of the closure of formal education in Baros Village, Brebes Regency, Indonesia is not just an ordinary demographic statistic; It is an early sign of a humanitarian crisis that could lead to permanent social damage if intervention is not carried out with accurate empirical evidence. The study emphasizes that any delay in understanding the problem as a whole will increase the gap in intergenerational inequality. This means that adolescents who drop out of school will lose the opportunity to develop their human capital, locking them in a cycle of structural poverty that is difficult to stop (Ramadan) *et al.*, 2025). Various government or NGO assistance programs may not succeed without prompt investigations that study the complex relationship between real economic pressures and the cultural perceptions of parents in these particular areas. This is because these programs are made based on common beliefs and do not pay attention to the micro-realities on the ground. This research is also important because of its position as a critical response to existing literature gaps. Many studies address poverty in a macro sense, but not many examine

thoroughly how educational decisions are made at the household level in the context of different Central Java cultures, such as Brebes. If Baros Village, Brebes Regency, Indonesia is left without timely scientific research, they risk significant human resource degradation. Ultimately, this will strain the social security system in the region and hinder overall economic growth in the region (Koni, Ngadino & Lumbanraja, 2020). Therefore, this research is not only theoretically relevant to fill the data gap, but also an urgent need to create preventive, precise, and local context-based strategies to mitigate the problem before the long-term impact of this phenomenon becomes irreparable and detrimental to the country's future.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

To thoroughly dive into the phenomenon of the cessation of formal education for adolescents in Baros Village, Brebes Regency, Indonesia, this study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore unique and contextual social dynamics, in which researchers not only look for general patterns, but also seek to understand the meaning of the actions of social actors in their natural environment (Juita, Effendi & Maryam, 2025). This method was used for the first time by limiting cases to families in Baros Village who had children who dropped out of school for economic reasons. Thus, the focus of the analysis remains on the relationship between economic variables and educational decisions. Researchers serve as a key tool that goes directly into the field to build trust (*rapport*) with local communities and enable access to sensitive data that is often hidden in quantitative surveys. Using a case study design, various sources of evidence can be combined to gain a broader understanding (Poltak & Widjaja, 2024). Each unit of analysis, both parents and adolescents, is seen as part of an interconnected social system. By this design, the research does not aim to make statistical generalizations; rather, it aims to carry out analytical generalizations that can refer to these findings in the context of comparable agrarian rurality. The implementation process involves continuous iteration between on-the-ground data collection and interim analysis; this allows the researcher to adjust the focus of the question as unexpected new themes emerge, ensuring that the constructed story truly reflects the real-world realities that live and breathe in the society of Baros Village without obscuring theoretical information (Sukmana *et al.*, 2025).

To ensure the richness and depth of the data, triangulation methods were used, including participant observation, document analysis, and in-depth interviews. The study relied on interviews that lasted 180 minutes, divided into three separate sessions for each of the eight main speakers, four parents (T1-T4) and four adolescents who had left school (R5-R8). The interview session is designed in stages. First, they make acquaintances, second, learn the main issues about educational and economic decisions, and third, they conduct initial and deepening emotional validation. To maintain the authenticity of cultural expression and the comfort of the speakers, interviews were conducted using Javanese *ngoko* and *krama*. Then, recordings, verbatim transcripts, and translations into Indonesian with the full consent of the sources are carried out before

finally being translated into English for use in international scientific publications. The identities of all sources are disguised using initial codes as per data security protocols to protect the privacy and ethics of the research. During the interviews, participant observations were carried out simultaneously, where the researcher saw firsthand the conditions of the home environment, daily activities, and family economic interactions (Pradono) *et al.*, 2018). Village archives related to social assistance, certificates of incapacity, and school records are part of the document analysis. To apply this technique, the recording of field notes and the management of recording data are required very carefully. This ensures that every non-verbal nuance and situational context is fully captured as a complement to the verbal data obtained.

Table 1: Informal Profiles

No.	Initials	Regional Origin	Gender	Age
1.	T1	Brebes	Woman	14 years old
2.	T2	Brebes	Woman	15 years old
3.	T3	Brebes	Woman	16 years old
4.	Q4	Brebes	Woman	14 years old
5.	R5	Brebes	Woman	37 years old
6.	R6	Brebes	Woman	39 years old
7.	R7	Brebes	Woman	41 years old
8.	R8	Brebes	Woman	38 years old

The source triangulation model and technique ensure the validity of the data of this study, and the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana is used for the data analysis, which consists of the process of data condensation, data presentation and conclusion drawing (Hariawan *et al.*, 2025). To reduce subjectivity bias or mismatch of the speakers' memories, triangulation was used to compare information obtained from parents' interviews with their children's testimonies, as well as to confirm both with the results of field observations and official documents. The researcher will re-check through follow-up observation or ask community leaders as a third source if there is a discrepancy between the T1 and R5 statements. The analysis process begins in the field by focusing raw data on the perception of education and economic pressure. To facilitate the identification of patterns of relationships between variables, the reduced data is then presented in the form of a coherent matrix, flowchart, and descriptive narrative (Saleh, 2017). Drawing conclusions that are always verified is the final stage. Each initial result is retested with new data until it reaches a saturation point. Using this model, the researchers were able to trace the causality traces of why certain economic factors have a greater influence on decision-making in Baros Village, Brebes Regency, Indonesia than other factors. The right methodology ensures that the results of the research are not just opinions, but facts that can be accounted for academically and show how poverty limits adolescents' educational rights in certain sociocultural contexts (Thamrin *et al.*, 2026).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results Data

1) socio-economic conditions of adolescent families in Baros Village who have experienced a cessation of formal education

The study found three different typologies of socioeconomic conditions that uniquely affect the delay in adolescent formal education in Baros Village. Each typology reflects different structural vulnerabilities. The first is the "Family Shock Shock", in which previously financially stable households experience a drastic decline due to natural disasters, extreme crop failures, or critical illness of the family head, forcing teenagers to become the backbone of the emergency economy and sacrificing school for the sake of daily life. In situations like these, dropping out of school is reactive and is often considered temporary, but eventually becomes permanent due to a lack of academic motivation. In Baros Village, the second most common type is "chronic structural poverty". Families live in absolute poverty with an erratic daily income from seasonal farm labor. As a result, education costs are considered irrational compared to the direct contribution of children as additional labor to meet basic food needs. Here, formal education is considered an investment that has too long and uncertain a period of time to make a profit. Third, the condition of "Dependence on the Family Informal Economy" is when adolescents leave school not because of lack of money, but because there are instant income opportunities from family micro-businesses (such as produce trading or home industries) that require free labor. This creates the idea that real work experience is more economically advantageous than a school degree. These three conditions suggest that economic reasons are a spectrum of pressures that interact with family survival strategies. Each typology creates a different decision-making mechanism that systematically excludes adolescents from the formal education system for short-term economic reasons.

Informant results

The first typology, "Sudden Shock Family", is revealed through the sad narrative of the informants who were previously stable but collapsed instantly due to a disaster or critical illness. T3 (16 years old) confessed, "My father has died and my mother is sick, so I have to work in place of my father. I quit because I felt like a burden. I went to work and the money was used to buy medicine for my sick father." Meanwhile, R5 (37 years old) added, "We used to be able to pay tuition fees, but our business went bankrupt, it was difficult to eat, let alone go to school." This condition forces adolescents to become emergency supporters; T1 (14 years old) said, "I don't have a choice, I don't have a brother and my sister is still young, so I am the one who works," and R8 (38 years old) emphasized, "School can be done later, I can still eat 2x a day, thank God." This decision was initially considered temporary, but T2 (15 years old) realized, "At first it was just a short vacation to help my parents, but until now I have not been able to enter again due to impossible conditions," showing the loss of academic momentum. R6 (39 years old) reinforces this fact with the sentence, "My son is smart, but circumstances

force him to work in a factory rather than sit in a classroom during this crisis." Data supporting the study show that sudden shocks change the status of adolescents from learners to de facto heads of households, where the logic of short-term survival automatically delays education until it is forgotten altogether, creating a new poverty trap for families that previously had the potential to rise.

The dominance of the second typology, "Chronic Structural Poverty", is described as an endless daily reality for most informants in Baros Village. R7 (41 years old) stated bitterly, "We are seasonal farm laborers, there is work, there is money, there is no fasting, how to pay tuition if it is difficult to eat," in line with T4 (14 years old) who said, "My mother is sick, my father is gone, I am also an only child, so it is better for me to work to help my mother." In this condition, education is seen as an irrational burden of luxury; R5 (37 years old) argued, "A diploma is not important, while the daily wage of a child can buy rice," a view that T3 (16 years old) agrees with, "Many people who continue their studies are also unemployed, why go to high school if they end up being coolies too? A lot of people are unemployed, so why are they so tired of school?" This absolute economic pressure creates the perception that the contribution of child labor is more valuable than long-term education investments. R8 (38 years old) explained, "It's better for children to learn to make money, those who are already in S1 are now unemployed," while T2 (15 years old) admitted, "It's hard to ask for pocket money, because your daily salary is not much." The findings of the study confirm that for this group, dropping out of school is not an emotional choice but a cold mathematical calculation in which the cost of school opportunities is too high compared to the marginal income that children produce, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.

The third typology, "Dependence on the Family Informal Economy", highlights the unique phenomenon in which adolescents are pulled out of school not because of lack of money, but rather because of the need for free labor in family microenterprises. R6 (39 years old) revealed, "The fried food business is selling well. We need additional workers, so we bring our children to help overseas," supported by T1 (14 years old) who said, "I like to help my mother sell, I get my own pocket money every day without asking." The perception that practical experience is more valuable than a diploma is very strong; R7 (41) opined, "Parents' trade is more real than textbooks," while T4 (14) added, "I'm already a full-time worker, if school loses this golden opportunity." This logic of instant economics makes formal education seem irrelevant; R5 (37 years old) stated, "Business capital is more important than a degree, later when the business is big then you will think about whether you want to continue school or not," and T3 (16 years old) agreed, "In the village, the business is advanced, not those who graduated from college but are unemployed." Research data suggest that in this scenario, adolescents are subtly exploited as family productive assets, where the

direct economic value of their work discredits the abstract value of education, creating a generation that is technically skilled but blind to broader social mobility opportunities.

Other determinant economic factors that aggravate the situation are the high cost of opportunity and the burden of hidden costs that suffocates family cash flow, as felt directly by the informants. T2 (15 years old) complained, "The cost of transportation and other needs goes up every year, it's better for me to just work, your salary is not much," while R8 (38 years old) emphasized, "Public schools are indeed free, but the money for activities, photocopying, and clothes increases every year." Opportunity costs are a major consideration; R6 (39 years old) calculated, "If my child is in school, who helps us increase our money for food? My daily salary is enough to buy rice and gas," and 14-year-old T1 feels the pressure, "Every hour I spend in class, I sometimes think that if I work, my family's economy will be better helped." The uncertainty of daily income makes planning for education costs impossible; R7 (41 years old) said, "Our income is not fixed, how can we pay for LKS and package books? It's better to quit now than to be ashamed of being charged later." Even T4 (14 years old) understands his parents' position, "Mom often cries when she sees school bills. I decided to quit so that Mom wouldn't be stressed anymore." Data analysis shows that the combination of a loss of potential daily income and a fluctuating hidden cost burden creates a double psychological and financial barrier, where schools go from being a right to a threat to household economic stability that must be eliminated immediately for the sake of family financial security.

The accumulation of all these pressures boils down to the transformation of parents' and adolescents' perceptions of the value of education, which is now considered a "tertiary luxury" with a low ROI. R5 (37 years old) concluded bitterly, "Just look at the neighbors, his son is a bachelor but it's still difficult, different from my son who doesn't go to school but can build a house." The sentiment repeated by T3 (16 years old), "Why are you tired of school if the results are the same as being a worker like parents?" Skepticism about the relevance of the curriculum is deepening; R8 (38 years old) commented, "Why learn English or computer if you only need a hoe and muscle strength in the village?" Meanwhile, T2 (15 years old) began to internalize this view: "My report card score is low, and a good report card score does not guarantee a good life." The construction of children as "strategic economic assets" is getting stronger; R6 (39 years old) proudly says, "My son is now a permanent employee and it's more proud than just getting a diploma but still unemployed," and T1 (14 years old) feels valuable, "I feel mature and useful because I can give money to my mother instead of constantly asking for it." The findings of the study confirm that this collective cognitive dissonance has legitimized school dropouts as a new rationality; education is no longer seen as a way out of poverty, but rather as an economic risk

that does not need to be taken, so that the reproduction of poverty between generations is accepted as a natural and inevitable destiny in the midst of the squeeze of the reality of Baros Village.

2) Economic factors behind the decision of teenagers in Baros Village not to continue formal education

The study found three main economic reasons influencing the decision of adolescents in Baros Village to leave formal education. Various pressure mechanisms contribute to this decision. First, the cost of youth labor opportunity is very high. In the village agrarian economic structure, working on land or the informal sector generates a real daily income that fills the family coffers, so that every day teenagers go to school is considered a direct financial loss that cannot be borne by a thin household budget. Second, hidden education costs continue to burden families with mandatory expenses for transportation, uniforms, support books, and money for changing activities. For families with unstable daily cash flows, this uncertainty poses psychological and financial challenges greater than the tuition itself, so they make the preventive decision to leave home before they get stuck in debt. Third, parents expect a low return on investment (ROI) of education. Based on field observations, it can be seen that high school graduates in these areas find it difficult to get higher-paying jobs than manual workers without a diploma, because the economic rationality of families prefers to allocate limited resources for basic consumption or micro-business capital rather than financing education that is considered "not a guarantee of the future". The combination of these three factors results in a decision-making environment in which continuing school is no longer a logical choice; it was an irrational act that went against the family's economic survival strategy in Baros Village.

Informant results

The first factor that dominates the decision to drop out of school is the high cost of youth labor opportunities, where every hour in school is considered a real loss of income for the family. In the agrarian economic structure of Baros Village, the physical presence of adolescents on the land is a determinant of daily survival. T1 (14 years old) expressed his sense of responsibility by saying, "If I continue school, who will help me earn money? Fifty thousand dollars are lost today if I sit in class," while R6 (39 years old) calculates explicitly, "One child in the rice fields can help lift three sacks, that's equivalent to the wages of one adult, it's a shame if it's thrown away to study." This perception of direct financial loss is very strong; T3 (16 years old) admitted, "I feel guilty about eating rice if I don't go to work to make money, it feels very embarrassing, it's grown up but I can't work yet," and R8 (38 years old) affirms the logic, "School is an investment in the distant future, but hunger is a problem today, we can't pursue the future on an empty stomach." This pressure makes adolescents feel burdened if they do not contribute; T2 (15 years old) said, "Friends who work can already buy a motorbike, I'm embarrassed to still

ask for pocket money while at school," supported by R5 (37 years old) who stated, "It's better for children to have the skills to lift things now than to think about theories that don't necessarily turn into money." Field data confirm that in the calculation of poor households, the instant cash value of child labor is far more valuable than the accumulation of abstract knowledge, making school an economically detrimental activity.

The second suffocating factor is the burden of *hidden costs* which, although public schools are free, still create a heavy psychological and financial barrier to the family's erratic cash flow. Expenses for transportation, uniforms, and ancillary activities are often a tipping point of household micro-bankruptcy. T4 (14 years old) shared his worries, "The money for transportation to school alone has run out of half of my mother's spending money. Now anything is expensive," while R7 (41 years old) complained about the fluctuation in fees, "Now it's free tuition, but the activity money, photocopies, package books and sportswear are what make it dizzy. It came suddenly when we didn't have any money." This uncertainty triggers a preventive decision to exit before getting stuck in debt or embarrassment; R8 (38 years old) explained, "Instead of being charged arrears that make me embarrassed, I would rather quit school from now on," and T1 (14 years old) felt the social pressure, "I was often asked for class cash, if I didn't bring it to be ridiculed, I finally chose to quit school." This burden is compounded by other basic needs; R5 (37 years old) said, "If you use the uniform money to buy medicine for your sick father, you can go to school again if you are healthy," in line with T3 (16 years old) who confessed, "I saw that my mother sold the last chicken to pay for tuition, LKS and package books, I felt guilty, so I decided to stop." The findings suggest that hidden costs create psychological terror for poor parents, where schools go from entitlements to threats to financial stability that must be avoided immediately in order to maintain family self-esteem and food security.

A third factor underpinning this decision is the low expectation of return on investment (ROI) of education in the eyes of parents and adolescents, driven by the perception that diplomas do not guarantee decent employment in the local area. Observations of previous graduates who remained farm laborers reinforced this skepticism. R6 (39 years old) pointed to the field facts, "Look at the neighbors, his son is a bachelor but unemployed for a year, finally he became a coolie too, why go to high school?" This view is internalized by adolescents; T2 (15 years old) asked rhetorically, "Why are you tired of learning mathematics if you end up with the same level of support as your father? The salary is the same again," and R7 (41 years old) added, "In this village, the respected ones are the ones who have land or businesses, not those who have a title but don't have a job." The irrelevance of the curriculum to local realities further deepens the despair; T4 (14 years old) commented, "Learning English is useless in the village, the proof is that teachers' salaries are lower than those who work in private universities," while R8 (38 years

old) concluded, "School investment takes too long to pay back, sometimes ten years to pay off, and some even end up unemployed." Even T3 (16 years old) who has gone to school feels disappointed, "My upperclassmen who graduated from high school work in a factory, so why continue school, make money." This data proves that the economic rationality of families prefers to allocate limited resources for micro business capital or basic consumption rather than financing education that is considered "not guaranteeing the future", so that schools are abandoned because they are considered a calculatively loss-making investment.

The combination of these three economic factors creates a unique decision-making environment, where continuing school is seen as an irrational act that goes against the family's survival strategy in Baros Village. The dual pressure between the loss of daily income and the fear of unexpected costs, coupled with the lack of hope for an improvement in post-school fortunes, formed a collective consensus to discontinue education. R5 (37 years old) summed up this situation emphatically, "We don't want to be smart children, but circumstances force us to choose this certainty," and T1 (14 years old) accepts the fate, "I sincerely don't go to school, at least I can help my mother pay for electricity this month without debt." This survival logic shifts the priority of values; R6 (39 years old) stated, "In difficult conditions, we often think about eating tomorrow, especially if we go to school" Meanwhile, T2 (15 years old) feels more mature by working, "I feel more useful in giving my mother and father a salary than just being a burden that spends money," supported by R7 (41 years old) who said, "Village people are practical, if they don't make money, The theories from the school are just futile." This decision is not taken lightly, but rather through a heavy inner struggle; T4 (14 years old) admitted, "Every time I see my friends go to school, I am sad, but if I remember the money in the empty house, I am even sadder," and R8 (38 years old) closed with resignation, "This is the only way so that the family does not disintegrate, school number two, the life of the family number one." This decision environment suggests that in extreme poverty, short-term rationality dictates all aspects of life, eliminating room for long-term educational aspirations.

The end result of this convergence of economic factors is the creation of a systematic cycle of poverty reproduction, in which young people are locked into the same social status as their parents due to the loss of access to vertical mobility through education. When adolescents drop out of school for economic reasons, they lose the opportunity to develop the intellectual capacity and non-agrarian skills necessary to break out of the snare of structural poverty. T3 (16 years old) realizes this limitation, "Now I can only work hard work, if I want to work in an office I don't have a diploma, it seems that our fate continues like this," and R5 (37 years old) admits the failure of this system, "We cut off education, which means that our children and grandchildren will also experience the same thing, what can I do." Without interventions that change the economic structure or perception of

ROI, this pattern will continue to repeat; R6 (39 years old) said, "I will also tell my son to work fast, just like I used to, because there is no other choice," and T1 (14 years old) imagines his future, "I think that later my son will also drop out of junior high school like me, because the money will not be enough for school until college." This habit became the new norm; T2 (15 years old) observed, "In our village, children who go to high school are rare, most of them stop in the middle of the road like me," while R7 (41 years old) added, "This village needs workers, not scholars, so it is normal for children to drop out of school to fill that need." This study confirms that without fundamental changes in these driving economic factors, efforts to improve the quality of human resources in Baros Village will continue to fail, burying the potential of the young generation under the weight of the endless demands of daily survival.

3) Parents' perception in Baros Village on the importance of secondary education in the midst of family economic pressure

The results of the study show that there are three types of perceptions of parents in Baros Village that significantly affect how they view secondary education in the midst of economic limitations. The first view is "education as a tertiary luxury", which considers school as a secondary or even tertiary need that can only be accessed after meeting basic needs for food and board. In crisis situations, direct education is considered unimportant in the family budget because it is considered unable to provide instant gratification for hungry people. As a result, the moral value of education becomes less important than the importance of survival. Second, there is "Skepticism of the Value of Diplomas", a negative view that arises as a result of the fact that many high school graduates are unemployed or work for low wages just as much as their neighbors who do not finish school. This creates the belief that the school's curriculum is irrelevant to the practical skills needed to live in a village, so the time and expense spent over three years is considered wasted. Third, the perspective of "Children as Strategic Economic Assets" considers adolescents as productive assets that must be used immediately to overcome family financial deficits. They are no longer considered subjects to be protected and their academic potential developed, but rather as productive assets. In this frame of mind, parents who keep their children out of school are considered a selfish act that abandons the public welfare for their unattainable personal interests. These three perceptions reinforce each other, providing cultural legitimacy that stopping secondary education is a logical and economically responsible choice, not a neglect of children's rights. As a result, this stopped the cycle of educational aspirations at the grassroots level of Baros Village.

Informant results

The first perception that dominates is the view of "Education as a Tertiary Luxury", in which schools are considered a secondary need that must be sacrificed

for the sake of food and board priorities when the crisis hits. In the hierarchy of family needs in Baros Village, the moral value of education is badly defeated by the urgency of daily biological survival. R5 (37 years old) emphasized this priority emphatically, "Eating is mandatory, school will be later if my stomach is full, the diploma cannot be eaten," while T1 (14 years old) felt the moral burden, "I know my mother wants me to go to school, but if I ask for tuition money, I can't bear my mother's financial condition." This condition forces education to be cut from the family budget immediately; R8 (38 years old) explained, "When there is little rice left, while school fees are more expensive, how do we pay for it all?" supported by T3 (16 years old) who confessed, "I quit because I felt like I was a burden, so the money was used to buy medicine for my sick father." The urgency of hunger shifts long-term logic; R6 (39 years old) said, "Hungry people don't focus on studying, so it's better to make money first, education is number two," and T2 (15 years old) added, "Seeing my mother crying because I don't have money to spend, I realize that my school is less important than my family's life." Field data show that in conditions of calorie deficit, education metamorphoses from a fundamental right to an unaffordable elite commodity, so that school termination is accepted as a reasonable measure for the physical survival of all family members.

The second perception that has strengthened is "Skepticism of the Value of Diplomas", a cynical view born from empirical observations of the failure of school graduates to improve the economic fortune of the surrounding environment. The belief that the school curriculum is irrelevant to the practical skills needed to survive in the village makes the three-year investment considered worthwhile. R7 (41 years old) voiced this collective disappointment, "Many high school students here end up being coolies too, the same as those who don't go to school, the difference is that they can only read more," while T4 (14 years old) observed this reality, "My neighbor's brother graduated from junior high school but was unemployed for a year, so I immediately went to work so that I could earn money." The irrelevance of the subject matter to the agrarian context further deepens doubts; R8 (38 years old) commented, "Learning mathematical formulas does not make rice grow faster, in fact knowledge from parents to make money is more useful," and T3 (16 years old) agreed, "I see that friends who are diligent in school finally return home and become unemployed, why are you tired of school?" This perception creates the narrative that school is a false promise; R5 (37 years old) stated, "A diploma is just a piece of paper, don't be deceived by the sweet promises of teachers who say this and that," supported by T2 (15 years old) who said, "It's better for me to be smart about trading than smart to memorize historical dates that don't make rupiah." These findings confirm that skepticism is not just an excuse, but a rational response to evidence of the failure of the education system in providing real social mobility in the locality of Baros Village, Brebes Regency, Indonesia.

The third most critical perception is the construction of "Children as Strategic Economic Assets", in which adolescents are seen not as subjects whose academic potential needs to be protected, but as productive assets that must be mobilized immediately to sustain the family's financial deficit. In this frame of mind, keeping children in school is actually considered a form of parental selfishness that sacrifices collective well-being for unrealistic personal ambitions. R6 (39 years old) expressed pride, "My son is now the backbone of the family. He can pay for electricity and buy rice. It's more proud than a good report card," while T1 (14 years old) feels a big responsibility, "I'm happy to be able to give money to my mother every month. Finally I am no longer a burden to my family." Child labor mobilization is normalized as a moral obligation; R7 (41 years old) argued, "Letting children go to school when the family is in trouble is not a good thing for the family, they should help ease the burden," and T4 (14 years old) accepted the role, "My place is to help you, not in a class that only costs money." This view turns the parent-child relationship into a production relationship; R8 (38 years old) said, "Children are an investment that must immediately reap the results when it is difficult, it should not be delayed anymore," in line with T3 (16 years old) who confessed, "I feel guilty if I just watch my parents work hard alone, even though I am able to help." Data show that this perception legitimizes the exploitation of child labor in the name of family solidarity, where education is perceived as hindering the much-needed economic contribution of adolescents.

These three forms of perception reinforce each other and interact synergistically, creating a solid cultural legitimacy that stopping secondary education is a rational and economically responsible act, not a form of neglect of children's rights. The convergence between the view of education as luxury, skepticism of diplomas, and children as strategic assets systematically breaks the cycle of educational aspirations at the grassroots level of Baros Village. R5 (37 years old) summed up this consensus, "We do this because we love, not because we hate school. We want the family to be able to afford it first, then think about education," while T2 (15 years old) justified the decision, "All the parents here think the same. Who is at fault if everyone does things for the common good?" The normalization of school dropouts occurs through a collective narrative; R6 (39 years old) stated, "In our village, children who work are a sign of filial piety, not spoiled children who ask for school to continue," and T1 (14 years old) added, "No one makes fun of me to quit school, because here the average school is only up to junior high school." This legitimacy removes guilt. R7 (41 years old) said, "We are happy that our child has been able to work since he was still in school, because he can help the family economy," supported by T4 (14 years old) who felt, "I like to work, because it feels lazy if the school ends up being unemployed." The study found that economic pressures have succeeded in hijacking social norms,

transforming actions that are universally considered to be detrimental to children's futures into a local virtue that is valued and defended by the community.

The final effect of the strengthening of these three perceptions is the permanent severance of the chain of educational aspirations, in which the younger generation loses the imagination of a future different from that of their parents because it is enclosed by a thick wall of local economic and cultural reality. When education is redefined as a luxury, diplomas are considered useless, and children are seen solely as earning a living, the door to vertical social mobility is tightly closed for the youth of Baros Village. T3 (16 years old) described this despair, "I don't dream of becoming a civil servant or a doctor, I think it's too far, it's better to work, get money, and later be able to build my own house," and R8 (38 years old) admits the limitations of this vision, "We don't dare to dream high, we are afraid of falling more sick, it is better to walk slowly on this sure path." This cycle is difficult to break because it is supported by social validation; R5 (37) says, "If anyone forces our children to go to school when we are struggling, we assume they don't understand our suffering," while T2 (15) feels trapped, "Sometimes I want to study in school again when I see my friends continuing their studies, but circumstances force me to stay in this situation." This loss of hope is exacerbated by the absence of model rollers; R6 (39 years old) asked, "Who is the example of success thanks to the school here? There is none, so why do we force our children?" and T1 (14 years old) concluded, "Maybe this is our destiny, to be farmers and employees in factories, what is school for if we end up in the kitchen?" These findings suggest that without interventions capable of deconstructing these three deadly perceptions, the reproduction of poverty in Baros Village will continue, burying the potential of thousands of adolescents under the ruins of a narrow but very powerful survival rationality.

B. Discussion

This study shows that the complex convergence between three socio-economic vulnerability typologies, structural economic factors, and mutually reinforcing construction of parental perceptions leads to delays in adolescent formal education in Baros Village. Under certain circumstances, families are divided into the categories of "Sudden Shock" which leads to reactive school dropouts, "Chronic Structural Poverty" which reigns in absolute terms, and "Informal Economic Dependence" which prioritizes free labor. All of this creates a spectrum of pressures that force adolescents to leave the education system for short-term survival reasons. Three economic components that affect this situation worsen it: the high cost of opportunity, where living on land is more valuable than studying in the classroom; hidden cost burdens that stifle erratic daily cash flows; and low educational return on investment (ROI) expectations, as there is no evidence of graduates' success in the local job market. Parents changed their perspective into three critical paradigms that supported this decision. They see education as a "tertiary luxury" that must be eliminated during

a food crisis, build "skepticism about the value of diplomas" because the curriculum does not fit the circumstances of the village, and instruct children as a "strategic economic asset" that must be mobilized immediately. Systematically, the cycle of educational aspirations is broken and intergenerational poverty is repeated in Baros Village because of this negative synergy between vulnerable conditions, real financial challenges, and cultural legitimacy.

These findings have major theoretical significance in terms of empirical validation of Rational Choice Theory in the context of structural poverty. In this context, the decision to drop out of school is not just the result of passive compulsion; rather, it is the result of rational calculations made by parents and adolescents to maximize utility in the midst of extreme resource limitations. The three main findings of the study are directly related to these theoretical indicators. The first is that the concept of opportunity costs is evident in real terms when families calculate the daily cash value of adolescent labor in the agrarian sector which is much higher compared to the abstract gains from school attendance. Thus, leaving school is the most economical option in the short term (SINUR, 2023). Second, the cost-benefit analysis indicator, also known as cost-benefit analysis, is clearly reflected in parents' perception of the "hidden costs" of education and low Return on Investment (ROI). When the curriculum is irrelevant to the local job market and transportation costs weigh on daily cash flow, education investment is considered mathematically detrimental (Praekanata *et al.*, 2024). Third, the transformation of children into "strategic economic assets" is indicated by the time preference indicator or future discounts. The pressure of survival forces actors to have a very short time preference, so they abandon future value (higher education) for current satisfaction (fulfillment of food needs) (Asiah, 2026). Therefore, this study confirms that in the Baros Village setting, "Rationality" has changed from the logic of long-term human development to the logic of daily survival, where dropping out of school is the most sensible way for poor households to reduce the risk of total bankruptcy, even though the long-term consequence is the reproduction of poverty.

The study found that several previous studies (Yunda 2022, Ria 2024, Komang and Sudemen 2025, Husnul 2023, Djandon and Sulaiman 2022) showed that there was a negative correlation between economic shocks and educational discontinuity. The results of this study significantly support and strengthen these findings. The main similarities are that structural poverty and low return on investment were identified as the main drivers of school dropouts. This is in line with Yunda and Husnul's research on the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Nonetheless, the study offers significant and profound benefits that previous studies have not provided (Abdullah *et al.*, 2024). Studies in Baros Village show that the decision to drop out of school is an active adaptive strategy that is highly calculative. Previous research has tended to see the decision to drop out of school as a passive response to macro prosperity or central policy failures (RANDY, 2025). The disclosure of the category "Informal Economic

Dependency" and the description of children as "strategic economic assets" show significant differences. Second, micro-social dynamics are missing from Djandon & Sulaiman's macroeconomic analysis and Ria's program evaluation. Previous studies have failed to explain how local norms turn financial pressure into a collective rationality that allows children to spend money on school. The creation of the concept of "Contextual Survival Rationality" is the main novelty of this research. This concept explains that in Baros Village, dropping out of school is not just because there is no cost. This is the result of a unique convergence between the opportunity costs of agrarian labor, skepticism of the relevance of local curricula, and the perception of parents that transforms education from a fundamental right into a tertiary luxury commodity (Wasino *et al.*, 2026). These results fill a gap in the literature by providing a detailed roadmap of decision-making processes at the level of specific cultural households (Pratama & Khofi, 2025). The findings also provide a new perspective that interventions should focus on changing the perception of children's economic value rather than just providing financial assistance (Ramadanti, Achdiani & Arlianty, 2024).

These new findings suggest that a shift in policy paradigm is essential. The policy paradigm must shift from a purely charitable approach to a structural strategy that focuses on the fundamental economic calculation of the family (Witjaksono, 2016). The local government of Brebes Regency should immediately develop an "Opportunity-Based Productive Scholarship" policy that will not only cover school fees, but will also provide direct financial compensation to families equivalent to the daily income lost during the children's school trip. This will remove the opportunity costs that have been a major barrier (Suryanto & Kurniati, 2024). The secondary school curriculum in Baros Village must be revitalized by implementing a two-system model in rural education. This model should combine academic learning with modern agricultural vocational skills relevant to local potential (Septiani, no date). So as to break the story of parents who are skeptical about the usefulness of diplomas. To ensure student absorption and scientifically prove that education has a real and fast Return on Investment (ROI), the program must work strategically with village cooperatives. In addition, a massive behavior change communication campaign is needed to transform the perception of children as "instant labor assets" into a form of long-term human investment. To achieve this, religious and customary leaders must be engaged as agents of change to change the collective norms that lead to constant dropouts. To stop the long-standing cycle of poverty reproduction in the Baros Village community, this intervention must be holistic and combine microeconomic incentives with pedagogical reforms (Source, 2020). The decision to continue school should again be the most advantageous option for the family to survive.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study finds a surprising and paradoxical fact that the cessation of formal education in Baros Village is the result of a "cold rationality" that is

highly structured and collectively agreed upon by the community, not out of ignorance or blind surrender to poverty. Parents who are very aware and love their children deliberately stop their children's school because they believe that it is the only way to avoid hunger at this time. They do not ignore the future, but are caught up in a judgment in which a degree is considered a deadly luxury, while child labor is a real source of security. The sad social irony is that structural poverty has corrupted common sense so that a choice that is generally considered to be the "murder of a future character" can be understood as a "wise decision" to maintain survival. This study shows that in Baros Village, the formal education system is seen as an economic threat rather than a solution. This creates a vicious cycle in which dropping out of school as a way to overcome poverty becomes the main engine for sustaining poverty for the next generation. These results break the common belief that only financial access is necessary; Without changing the fundamental belief that children are "money machines" and schools are "vain burdens", any form of aid will only be a plaster on the persistent gangrene wounds that are destroying the backbone of village development, leaving behind a bleak legacy where the hope of death is buried in the cruel logic of survival.

The main weakness of this study is that it only focuses on Baros Village, Ketanggungan District, Brebes Regency. Therefore, the results on "Contextual Survival Rationality" may be limited to generalizations from external sources and may not reflect similar dynamics in other rural areas with different sociocultural characteristics. The theories made are inevitable from the risk of location bias. This is because local characteristics such as Brebes' agrarian structure, certain Central Javanese kinship standards, and the microeconomic conditions of these villages may create variables that do not exist on other coasts, mountains, or islands in Indonesia. Future researchers must conduct cross-regional comparative studies involving several villages with different economic typologies, ranging from industry, fisheries, to plantations. The purpose of this cross-regional comparative study was to determine whether this pattern of "survival rationality" was universal or merely a local artifact from Baros Village. In addition, a mixed approach is needed, including large-scale quantitative surveys to validate how widespread these qualitatively discovered factors are. In addition, to track the long-term impact of school dropout decisions on the real social mobility of adolescents, a longitudinal study lasting 5-10 years is needed. Inter-institutional research collaboration is also important to build a broader national database, which allows for multivariate analyses that can distinguish the influence of local cultural variables from structural economic pressures. This will result in policy recommendations that are more inclusive, adaptive and relevant to Indonesia's entire rural landscape, rather than just partially solving problems in specific locations.

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