

Analysis of the Causes and Efforts to Address the High Number of Out-of-School Children (ATS) in Polewali Mandar Regency

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the factors causing high rates of out-of-school children (ATS) in Polewali Mandar Regency and efforts to address them. This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive picture of the ATS problem. The qualitative approach was used to explore the underlying factors, such as socioeconomic conditions, culture, and policies that influence children's decisions to drop out of school. Qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation in the field. The quantitative approach was used to measure the extent to which factors such as poverty, access to education, and parental involvement influence school dropout rates, using surveys and questionnaires distributed to children, parents, and teachers. Primary data was obtained directly from the source, while secondary data was taken from statistical reports, education agencies, and related research. The results of the study show that economic factors, low parental attention, and limited educational facilities are the main causes of ATS in Polewali Mandar Regency. Efforts to address this issue include strengthening educational assistance programs and improving educational facilities. This study contributes to the development of more effective and inclusive education policies that involve the government, community, and private sector.

Keywords: Cause and Effect, Government Policy, Out-of-School Children

A. Introduction

Education is one of the essential basic rights of every individual, because through education, a person can improve their quality of life, build character, and develop competitive human resources. At the global level, the issue of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) is a major challenge that affects the social and economic development of various countries. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report, it is estimated that there are around 258 million children who do not attend school worldwide (UNESCO, 2020). In Indonesia, even though education has been regulated as a constitutional right through Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution, equal access to education is still difficult to achieve, especially in remote areas.

Nationally, Indonesia faces the problem of high numbers of out-of-school children (ATS), with data showing that more than 6 million children in Indonesia do not attend school, whether they are dropouts (DO), graduates who do not continue their education (LTM), or have never attended school (BPB). According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), the number of children not attending school in Indonesia is divided into three main categories, with BPB recording 2,479,324 children. This problem is more pronounced in regions such as West Sulawesi, including Polewali Mandar Regency, which has a high number of ATS. In 2025, Polewali Mandar Regency recorded 1,796 children as Drop Outs and 1,839 children not continuing their education to the next level, illustrating a significant imbalance in the distribution of educational resources, in terms of facilities, teachers, and accessibility.

The high ATS rate in Indonesia, and particularly in Polewali Mandar Regency, illustrates the inequality in the provision of education, which is influenced by various factors, including social, economic, and geographical factors. Various studies, such as that conducted by Ngwakwe (2014), show that poverty, limited educational facilities, and family problems, including child labour and disability, are the dominant factors causing high dropout rates. In the context of Polewali Mandar, marginalised socio-economic conditions and limited access to education pose a major challenge to increasing children's participation in education. Nevertheless, government efforts through programmes such as the Indonesia Pintar (PIP) and Keluarga Harapan (PKH) programmes have been implemented, but the challenges in their implementation remain significant, especially in more isolated areas.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the factors causing high rates of out-of-school children (ATS) in Polewali Mandar and to assess the effectiveness of the efforts that have been made to address this issue. Although many studies have discussed the causes of ATS, such as economic and social factors, few have comprehensively examined how existing government policies are effectively implemented in areas with high poverty rates and different local characteristics. Therefore, this study will explore in greater depth the interaction between national education policies and social, economic, and cultural conditions in regions such as Polewali Mandar, in order to understand the more complex dynamics involved in addressing the issue of ATS.

The main questions in this study are: first, what are the factors causing high rates of out-of-school children (ATS) in Polewali Mandar Regency? Second, what efforts have been made to address the problem of ATS in Polewali Mandar Regency? This study adopts a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis, with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of the factors that influence ATS and the effectiveness of the policies implemented. Through this approach, it is hoped that this study can provide new insights into the influence of government policies on

reducing the number of ATS and make an important contribution to the development of education policies, both in Polewali Mandar and other regions facing similar challenges.

B. Method

The research approach used in this study is a mixed-methods approach, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. This approach was chosen because it provides a more comprehensive picture of the causes of and efforts to address the high number of out-of-school children (ATS) in Polewali Mandar Regency. The qualitative approach was used to explore more in-depth causal factors, such as socio-economic conditions, culture, and existing policies in the community that influence children's decisions to drop out of school. Qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation of the situation in the field. This approach provides a more holistic and in-depth understanding of aspects that cannot be measured with numerical data, thus providing a more complete picture of the social, cultural, and economic factors that play a role in children's decisions not to continue their education (Epstein, 2001).

Meanwhile, a quantitative approach was used to measure the extent to which certain factors, such as poverty, access to education, and parental involvement, influence the dropout rate in Polewali Mandar District. The data collection technique used was a survey with a questionnaire distributed to children, parents, and teachers. The numerical data obtained from this survey will provide information about the prevalence of ATS and the extent to which these factors influence children's decisions to drop out of school. The combination of numerical data from a quantitative approach and in-depth narratives from a qualitative approach allows for a more complete and complementary picture of the ATS problem in Polewali Mandar Regency (Ngwakwe, 2014).

This study uses primary and secondary data to obtain comprehensive information about the causes of and efforts to address the high number of out-of-school children (ATS) in Polewali Mandar Regency. Primary data will be obtained directly from sources such as children who are at risk of or have dropped out of school, parents, and educators (teachers). The qualitative approach will rely on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) as the main sources, while the quantitative approach will use surveys with questionnaires distributed to respondents to obtain numerical data on the prevalence of ATS and the factors that influence it (Epstein, 2001).

In addition, secondary data will also be used, obtained from statistical agencies, education offices, and previous research reports relevant to this topic. This secondary data will provide a broader context regarding the state of education in Polewali

Mandar Regency and assist researchers in understanding the larger social dynamics related to dropout rates (Selvia & Yewiwati, 2020).

The data obtained from qualitative and quantitative techniques will be analyzed separately according to the characteristics of each data type, then combined to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the ATS problem in Polewali Mandar Regency. This data integration will allow researchers to cross-check findings from qualitative and quantitative data. For example, quantitative data from surveys will provide a general picture of the extent to which factors such as poverty influence dropout rates, while qualitative data from interviews and FGDs will provide in-depth explanations of the reasons behind these figures, as well as the perspectives of parents, children, and teachers regarding factors that may not be revealed in statistical figures.

C. Results and Discussion

Overview of the State of Education in Polewali Mandar Regency

Polewali Mandar Regency is one of the regions in West Sulawesi that has great potential in the education sector, but still faces serious challenges in ensuring equal access to education for all children. Despite various efforts, the results are still not optimal in reducing the dropout rate or out-of-school children (ATS). One of the main factors affecting education is the uneven distribution of resources between urban and rural areas. While some schools in big cities have adequate facilities and qualified teaching staff, many schools in remote areas still face a shortage of facilities, trained teachers, and poor infrastructure.

The number of residents in the school-age category in Polewali Mandar Regency also shows that the majority of these children live in underdeveloped areas. School participation rates at the primary and secondary levels remain low, especially in remote areas, largely due to economic, social, and cultural factors. School enrollment rates in this region are also affected by poverty, which forces many children to work to help support their families rather than continuing their education to a higher level.

Factors Causing Children Not to Attend School in Polewali Mandar Regency

Economic Factors

Education plays an important role in improving the quality of life and providing better economic opportunities for individuals. However, in Polewali Mandar Regency, economic factors remain one of the main causes of high dropout rates. Although the government has launched a 13-year Free Education Program, the implementation of this program has not been fully successful in reducing dropout rates, especially in poor areas (Wahab, 2020). One of the main problems faced by

families in Polewali Mandar Regency is their inability to finance their children's educational needs, even though they are already registered in assistance programs such as the Indonesia Smart Program (PIP). Several studies also show that economic constraints remain a major obstacle despite the availability of such assistance (Selvia & Yeniwati, 2020).

The lack of attention to children's education is often related to families' ability to meet basic needs, such as buying school supplies, books, and bags, as well as providing transportation for their children to schools that are often far from home (Sanusi et al., 2019). This is exacerbated by the fact that most parents work in the fishing and agricultural sectors or in the informal sector, with unstable and low incomes, which makes them unable to meet their children's educational needs (Selvia & Yeniwati, 2020). Children from low-income families are often forced to work to help support their families, which directly prevents them from continuing their education. Research by Dahal et al. (2019) also shows that dependence on children's work to meet the needs of families in developing countries contributes to high dropout rates.

A concrete example in Polewali Mandar Regency illustrates how economic factors greatly influence children's decisions to drop out of school. A child who was forced to drop out of school on Battoa Island, Binuang District, revealed that his parents could not afford to buy school supplies and did not give him enough pocket money. On the other hand, in Tonyaman Village, Binuang Subdistrict, children must work to help their parents, whose income ranges from Rp 500,000 to Rp 1 million per month, which is only enough to meet their daily needs (Woldehanna et al., 2021). This is in line with the findings by Bayrakceken et al. (2025), which show that low family income is directly related to high dropout rates due to families' inability to meet their children's educational needs.

Parental Attention Factor

Education is one of the fundamental aspects of social and economic development, but many children in Polewali Mandar Regency are forced to drop out of school, and one of the main causes of this phenomenon is the lack of parental attention to their children's education. One factor that influences parental attention to their children's education is the family's economic condition. In limited economic conditions, parents often focus more on meeting daily needs than paying attention to their children's education (Sanusi et al., 2019). This is exacerbated by the low level of parental education, which often results in a lack of understanding of the importance of their involvement in supporting their children's academic development (Selvia & Yeniwati, 2020).

For example, children from low-income families in Polewali Mandar Regency often feel discouraged from continuing their education. In many cases, parents feel that they

have fulfilled their obligations by sending their children to school and paying for their education, but they are not directly involved in monitoring their children's learning progress at home (Wahab, 2020). A study by Paul et al. (2021) confirms that the lack of parental involvement in children's education can contribute to high dropout rates among adolescents. Limited parental involvement is directly related to low learning motivation in children, which ultimately causes these children to choose to drop out of school.

A more concrete example was found in interviews with school dropouts in Polewali Mandar Regency, where some of them revealed that their parents did not pay attention to whether they went to school or not, whether they did their schoolwork, or whether they studied seriously. These children felt unappreciated and did not receive the support they needed to continue their education (Selvia & Yeniwati, 2020).

Learning Facilities

Learning facilities are a crucial element in the success of education. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System mandates that education must serve to develop the potential of students to become competent, creative, independent, and responsible individuals. To achieve this goal, the quality and adequacy of learning facilities play an important role, including in efforts to prevent children from dropping out of school. In Polewali Mandar Regency, learning facilities, especially in remote areas, are still very limited. Several schools in this area still lack textbooks, teaching aids, and adequate infrastructure, such as insufficient classrooms or even temporary buildings that do not meet ideal school facility standards. This certainly affects students' comfort and motivation in learning (Setyadharma, 2018).

In addition, transportation facilities are a significant problem for students in remote areas. The long distance between students' homes and schools, coupled with poor road conditions and a lack of adequate transportation, are often reasons for children from poor families to drop out of school. As found in research by Yuliastanty (2019), inadequate facilities and transportation difficulties are often major obstacles for children in remote areas to continue their education. Difficult geographical conditions, such as hilly terrain or slippery roads, make children prefer not to continue their education because they cannot afford adequate transportation.

Limited physical facilities, such as cramped classrooms, a lack of textbooks, and inadequate teaching aids, greatly affect the learning process. Even in some schools, despite adequate infrastructure, other facility issues remain a major obstacle to learning. This is exacerbated by the poor quality of use of existing facilities, both by teachers and students. For example, library facilities are often not utilized properly, with incomplete books and laboratory facilities or teaching aids that are not used optimally to support the learning process (Sunı et al., 2019). Interviews with several

informants in Polewali Mandar Regency showed that even though some schools have fairly good buildings, other facility problems remain a major obstacle in improving the quality of education.

One concrete example was found in Tubbi Taramanu Subdistrict, where a student revealed that although the school building was good, other facilities such as textbooks in the library were very minimal. "We have to take turns using the available books, so sometimes studying at school feels boring," said Akbar, a student who was forced to drop out of school due to the lack of these facilities. This shows that the quality of facilities in schools is closely related to students' comfort in participating in the learning process and, ultimately, affects the dropout rate in Polewali Mandar Regency (Shanty et al., 2024).

Parental Education Factors

Parental education plays a key role in children's decisions to continue their education. Parents' knowledge of the importance of education greatly influences their attitudes toward their children's education. Parents with low levels of education often do not fully understand the importance of higher education, which in turn influences their children's decision to drop out of school. In Polewali Mandar Regency, many parents only have a primary or secondary education, such as elementary or junior high school, which makes them lack a deep understanding of the value of further education for their children (Sanusi et al., 2019).

A study by Selvia and Yeniwati (2020) shows that low parental education levels are often directly related to low motivation among children to continue their education. Many parents believe that a basic education is sufficient, and they assume that their children can live independently with the skills acquired from a basic or secondary education. This is reflected in many cases in Polewali Mandar Regency, where children from low-educated families often choose to work rather than continue their education.

For example, an interview with Mrs. Sukma, a parent of a child who dropped out of school, revealed that even though she and her husband did not have higher education, they still hoped their child could continue their education. However, their child chose to drop out of school in the 5th grade of elementary school and preferred to work, a decision that reflects the parents' limited view of the importance of education (Wahab, 2020). This is in line with the findings of Dahal et al. (2019), who stated that many parents with low levels of education feel that it is unnecessary to encourage their children to continue their education, because they believe that children can succeed with the practical skills acquired through work.

In addition, parents with low educational backgrounds often do not provide sufficient support to their children in terms of education, such as supervising schoolwork, providing emotional support, or providing adequate learning facilities. As stated by Muhlis, a child who dropped out of junior high school, his parents did not pay attention to or supervise his learning activities at home (Bayrakceken et al., 2025). This minimal role of parents, according to Paul et al. (2021), is directly related to children's decision to drop out of school. Children who do not receive sufficient support from their parents often feel unappreciated and lose motivation to continue their education. Low parental education exacerbates this problem because they tend to have limited views on the importance of higher education. They prioritize their children working, especially in agriculture or trade, over continuing their education (Woldehanna et al., 2021). This is often due to the economic constraints faced by many families in Polewali Mandar Regency, which force children to choose work over school. Research by De Vasconcelos et al. (2023) shows that children from families with low educational backgrounds often have difficulty accessing further education because their parents do not provide adequate support.

Location or Distance from School

The long distance between home and school is a dominant factor contributing to the high dropout rate in Polewali Mandar Regency. Although primary and secondary education is compulsory in Indonesia, the hilly and inaccessible geographical conditions prevent some children from continuing their education. The average distance between home and school in this area is between 5 and 15 km, which risks causing physical fatigue in children and reducing their interest in continuing their education. Fatigue from long journeys greatly disrupts children's concentration in learning and sometimes even makes them reluctant to go to school again (Dahal et al., 2019).

Several previous studies have shown that the greater the distance between home and school, the higher the likelihood of children dropping out of school. Research by Perdana (2020) also shows that long distances to school are negatively associated with children's participation in education, especially in rural areas with limited infrastructure and longer travel distances. In interviews with children who dropped out of school in Polewali Mandar Regency, it was found that they often walked every day to reach their schools. For example, Muhtar, a child who dropped out of junior high school, revealed that he had to travel a distance of about 5 km to and from school every day without transportation facilities, which made him feel tired and lose motivation to study.

Environmental Factors

The social environment plays a significant role in influencing children's decisions to continue or discontinue their education. Social interactions that occur in the surrounding environment, whether in the family, among peers, or in the wider community, greatly affect children's psychological and social development, which in turn is related to their decision to stay in school or not. In Polewali Mandar Regency, social environment factors are one of the main causes of high dropout rates, especially among adolescents at the primary and junior high school levels.

Children who are in an environment that supports education tend to be more motivated to continue school, while children who are exposed to an environment that does not support education, such as one that considers school unimportant or prioritizes economic or social activities that yield quicker results, tend to have lower motivation to continue their education (Zuilkowski et al., 2019). In Polewali Mandar Regency, many children are influenced by their peers who have already dropped out of school and chosen to work. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the perception in society, especially among poor families, that formal education does not always guarantee a better future.

For example, many children drop out of school because they are influenced by their surroundings, which favor working over continuing education. For example, Arham, a child who dropped out of school, revealed that he was influenced by his friends who had already left school and preferred to work on farms or in agriculture, while their parents supported this decision because it was considered more profitable in the short term. This view is in line with the findings of Shanty et al. (2024), who stated that a social environment that does not support education, especially among poor families, contributes to children's decisions to drop out of school.

Early Marriage

Early marriage, which often occurs in various regions in Indonesia, including in Polewali Mandar Regency, is one of the main factors causing high dropout rates among children. Although according to Article 7 of Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage, marriage is only permitted if the man has reached the age of 19 and the woman 16, marriages below these ages still often occur in society. This has a direct impact on children's education, especially girls, who after marriage tend to prioritize their domestic role as housewives, preventing them from continuing their education. In Polewali Mandar Regency, many children are forced to drop out of school because they are involved in early marriage. In the local culture, marriage is often seen as a way out of social and economic problems. The large number of children who marry at a young age results in the termination of their education, because after marriage, girls in particular tend to focus on household matters. For example, in an interview

with a school dropout from Anreapi Subdistrict, she revealed that she chose to marry because she felt ready to start a family, even though she was still young and had not completed her education (Chotim, 2019).

In addition to cultural factors, early marriage is often related to the economic conditions of the family. Many families, especially those below the poverty line, consider early marriage as a solution to reduce the burden on the family. Sometimes, parents encourage their children to marry at a young age to avoid negative behavior or other social problems, without considering the long-term impact on their children's education. Interviews with the Head of the Binuang Neighborhood in Polewali Mandar Regency revealed that many families see marriage as an economic solution, even though it has an impact on their children's education (Judiasih et al., 2020).

This phenomenon is exacerbated by the view in society that after marriage, girls no longer need formal education, as their role will focus on the household. This contributes to low levels of education among women who marry early. In addition, strong social and cultural factors regarding gender roles and the obligation for women to marry young exacerbate this situation. In some villages, social norms that require women to marry young often worsen the rate of early marriage, causing many children to drop out of school (Retnowulandari et al., 2024).

Efforts to Address the High Number of Out-of-School Children in Polewali Mandar District

The high number of school dropouts in Polewali Mandar Regency is a multidimensional problem that requires a cross-sectoral approach. Various factors such as family economics, low levels of parental education, limited educational facilities, distance to school, and the influence of the social and cultural environment contribute significantly to the increasing number of children who do not continue their education. Therefore, comprehensive efforts must be made to address this issue, involving the government, educational institutions, the community, and families.

Strengthening Educational Assistance Programs for Poor Families

One strategic effort to reduce the number of school dropouts in Polewali Mandar Regency is to strengthen the implementation of the Indonesia Pintar (PIP) Program and the Family Hope Program (PKH) as direct interventions for poor families. These programs are designed to ease the economic burden on families so that children can continue to exercise their right to education. However, the main obstacle lies in the inefficient distribution of assistance, which has resulted in a lack of impact on the continuity of children's education.

Based on data from the Polewali Mandar Regency Education Office (2024), there are more than 8,500 children who are beneficiaries of PIP, but around **12%** of them are still at risk of dropping out of school due to delays in fund disbursement, inaccurate targeting, and minimal assistance to beneficiary families. For example, field interviews conducted by the Polewali Mandar Regency Social Office in 2023 showed that some parents actually use PIP funds for consumptive needs such as home repairs, rather than for their children's education (Selvia & Yeniwati, 2020). Therefore, community-based assistance and financial literacy education for beneficiary families are very important. In addition, this program must also be integrated with economic skills training for parents in order to strengthen family economic resilience. For example, through the "Great Parents Care About Education" (OTHP2) program launched in 2023, the Education Office, together with local institutions such as the Sadar Mandar Child Welfare Institution, conducted entrepreneurship training for housewives in Mapilli and Campalagian subdistricts. This program succeeded in increasing household income by up to 20%, and their children were recorded as returning to school.

Improving Access and Quality of Educational Facilities

The equal distribution of educational facilities is an important step in reducing the number of school dropouts, especially in remote areas. Many schools in rural areas such as Polewali Mandar Regency still experience physical facility limitations and limited access, which are major obstacles for children to continue their education. One of the main solutions is the development of equitable educational infrastructure in all subdistricts, especially in remote areas. The "Sekolah Terpadu Mandiri" (Integrated Independent School) program, which began in 2022, aims to build new schools with more adequate facilities. By 2024, this program has succeeded in building six new schools in remote areas with easier access.

In addition, the provision of free school transportation in remote areas has also been very helpful. In Tinambung District, more than 500 students can now use school transportation provided by the Polewali Mandar District Education Office, reducing travel time that can take up to 2 hours every day (Setyorini, 2018).

In addition to physical development, the quality of learning facilities must also be considered. In 2023, more than 50 schools in Polewali Mandar Regency received educational technology assistance, including computers, projectors, and internet connections. This program successfully created digital classrooms, which increased children's motivation to learn and reduced the dropout rate by 10% in two sub-districts (Wahyuni et al., 2022).

Prevention of Early Marriage and Strengthening of Reproductive Education

Early marriage is one of the significant factors causing school dropouts, especially among adolescent girls in Polewali Mandar Regency. Although the Indonesian government has set the minimum age for marriage at 19 for men and 16 for women, the practice of early marriage is still common, especially in areas with low levels of education and economic constraints. Early marriage is closely related to the termination of education, as many adolescent girls who marry tend to prioritize their domestic role as housewives, thereby interrupting their education (Permatahati et al., 2023).

The most effective preventive measure to combat early marriage is to improve comprehensive reproductive education for adolescents, both in schools and in the community. Good reproductive education can help adolescents understand the social, economic, and health impacts of early marriage. Therefore, the Polewali Mandar Regency Government, through the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, has begun to organize reproductive education outreach programs in schools, especially in areas with high rates of early marriage, such as Palu, Tinambung, and Polewali subdistricts.

One example of these efforts is the "Mandar Health and Reproductive Education" program, which has been running since 2022. This program consists of counseling on reproductive rights, the impact of early marriage, and the importance of education for girls. These activities are carried out in collaboration with religious leaders, traditional leaders, and village governments, using a cultural approach that is in line with local wisdom. These educational sessions have reached more than 10,000 adolescent girls in junior high and high schools in areas prone to early marriage. In 2023, evaluation results showed a significant decrease in the rate of early marriage among adolescent girls in areas involved in this program, although there are still major challenges in changing traditional mindsets (Judiasih et al., 2020).

Child-Friendly School and Non-Formal Education Programs

For children who have already dropped out of school, non-formal education is an important option to ensure that they still have the opportunity to continue their education without feeling marginalized. Packages A, B, and C, managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), are forms of non-formal education designed for school-age children who cannot access formal education. In Polewali Mandar Regency, such programs need to be strengthened, especially to help children who have dropped out of formal education to continue their education, even if it is in a non-formal system.

The Package Program is intended for children who are unable to continue their education in formal education. Package A is equivalent to Elementary School (SD), Package B is equivalent to Junior High School (SMP), and Package C is equivalent to Senior High School (SMA). The aim of this program is to ensure that children who drop out of school can obtain a certificate equivalent to formal education.

In Polewali Mandar Regency, the Education Office has implemented the Package School Program in almost every sub-district to help children who have dropped out of school or who have been forced to stop attending school due to economic factors or other family problems. One notable program is the “Mandar Cerdas Package School,” which began in 2022. This program involves more than 600 school dropouts who have been given the opportunity to attend school through a community-based and online learning system.

In implementing this program, the teaching materials from Packages A and B are delivered through face-to-face and online classes using a platform managed by the Polewali Mandar District Education Office. The results of an evaluation conducted in 2023 show that 70% of children who participated in this program successfully continued their education to a higher level, while the other 25% chose to continue on to vocational training, such as computer skills and entrepreneurship training.

Strengthening Social and Cultural Awareness in Education

One of the biggest challenges in efforts to reduce the number of school dropouts in Polewali Mandar Regency is the social and cultural paradigm that still considers that boys should work and girls should marry young. This understanding not only hinders children’s access to education, but also exacerbates social and economic inequality in the long term. Therefore, strengthening social and cultural awareness of education is a crucial step in creating an environment that supports education for all children.

The first step that needs to be taken is to change the community’s paradigm regarding the role of education in improving family welfare and regional development. In many areas of Polewali Mandar Regency, there is a perception that formal education is not a top priority, especially for children from poor families. Many families, especially in rural areas, still believe that boys should work in the fields or help support the family financially, while girls are considered to have fulfilled their role if they marry young and take care of the household.

In Polewali Mandar Regency, the Mandar Cerdas Movement, launched in 2022, aims to educate the community about the benefits of education through public campaigns and community-based education. The program involves religious leaders, traditional leaders, and village governments to communicate the message about the importance of education in creating long-term economic prosperity and social success. The

campaign also includes success stories of children who have continued their education and ultimately lifted their families out of poverty. As a result, in the first year of the campaign's implementation, 33% of families who previously did not consider education a priority began to change their views, with many parents stating that they would strive to ensure their children continued their education to a higher level (Bayrakceken et al., 2025).

D. Conclusion

The high number of out-of-school children (ATS) in Polewali Mandar Regency is a complex problem influenced by various factors, including social, economic, and infrastructure factors. One of the main factors causing high dropout rates is family economic factors. Many children from poor families are forced to drop out of school to work and help support their families. In addition, low levels of parental education also affect children's motivation to continue their education. Parents with low levels of education tend not to understand the importance of continuing education and are more focused on short-term economic needs. Another factor is the limited availability of educational facilities, especially in rural areas, where many schools lack adequate facilities and infrastructure. The long distance between home and school is also a major obstacle, as children have to travel long distances, which reduces their motivation to attend school. To address this issue, comprehensive measures are needed. One proposed solution is to strengthen educational assistance programs such as the Indonesia Smart Program (PIP) and the Family Hope Program (PKH), which must be accompanied by social assistance and economic empowerment for families. The government must also improve access to and quality of educational facilities, especially in remote areas, by building adequate infrastructure and providing school transportation. In addition, parent education and family economic empowerment through skills training can increase parents' awareness of the importance of education and reduce economic pressures. Preventing early marriage and implementing child-friendly school programs are also crucial to ensuring that children continue their education. Collaboration between the government, community, and private sector is key to creating sustainable solutions to reduce the dropout rate in this region.

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