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Economic and Sociocultural Barriers to the Continuation of Studies of Indigenous Papuan Students at Musamus University

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Abstract. *This study aims to explore the external barriers faced by Papuan students at Musamus University in completing their studies. The phenomenon of low academic performance and high dropout rates forms the backdrop for this research. Using a mixed-method approach for a duration of three years, data were collected through observation, distribution of questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with students. The results indicate that students face multidimensional, interrelated external barriers. First, family financial instability forces students to work, live with relatives in overcrowded housing far from campus, commute on foot, and neglect safety and health to save on living expenses. Second, learning disruptions affect students' concentration and create imbalances in academic activities outside of efficient class hours. This imbalance is more severe for female students due to domestic responsibilities and childcare burdens. Third, low level of family educational literacy results in a lack of social control and financial, functional, and emotional support for students. This study recommends policy synergy through the provision of student dormitories, integrated transportation, and psychosocial support programs to create a more adaptive educational ecosystem for indigenous Papuan students.*

Keywords: *External Barriers; Indigenous Papuan Students; Study Sustainability; Economy and Sociocultural*

Abstrak. *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi hambatan eksternal yang dihadapi mahasiswa asli Papua di Universitas Musamus dalam menyelesaikan studi. Fenomena rendahnya performa akademik dan tingginya angka putus kuliah (drop out) yang melatarbelakangi penelitian ini. Menggunakan pendekatan campuran selama kurun waktu tiga tahun, data dikumpulkan melalui pengamatan, penyebaran angket, dan wawancara mendalam kepada mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menghadapi hambatan eksternal multidimensional yang saling berkaitan. Pertama, ketidakstabilan finansial keluarga memaksa mahasiswa bekerja, tinggal bersama kerabat dalam hunian yang padat dan jauh dari lingkungan kampus, menempuh perjalanan dengan berjalan kaki, hingga kebiasaan mengabaikan keselamatan dan kesehatan demi penghematan biaya hidup. Kedua, gangguan belajar yang memengaruhi rendahnya konsentrasi dan ketimpangan kegiatan akademik di luar jam kuliah yang efisien. Ketimpangan ini semakin berat bagi mahasiswa perempuan karena beban domestik dan pengasuhan anak. Ketiga, rendahnya literasi pendidikan keluarga yang menyebabkan minimnya kontrol sosial dan dukungan finansial, fungsional, dan emosional bagi mahasiswa. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan sinergi kebijakan melalui penyediaan asrama mahasiswa, transportasi terintegrasi, serta program pendampingan psikososial untuk menciptakan ekosistem pendidikan yang lebih adaptif bagi mahasiswa asli Papua.*

Kata kunci: *Hambatan Eksternal; Mahasiswa Asli Papua; Keberlanjutan Studi; Ekonomi dan Sosiokultural*

INTRODUCTION

Human resource development is the key factor in achieving equitable development across all regions of South Papua. One of the steps taken by the Government of South Papua is the establishment of the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) for 2025 – 2029 period, which outlines six main missions. The first of these missions emphasizes improving education, healthcare, and social welfare services for Indigenous Papuans (OAP), with “education” listed as the top priority. Although the government’s focus is on a boarding-based education system, Governor Apolo Safanpo emphasized that this plan represents a collective struggle of all people in South Papua (papuaselatan.go.id, 2025). This statement implies that both Indigenous Papuans and non-Papuan residents living in South Papua are expected to contribute to this grand plan, including education practitioners from primary to higher education levels.

If primary and secondary education are responsible for strengthening basic literacy, then higher education holds the responsibility of producing innovators, thinkers, and young professionals capable of translating regional visions into concrete actions. Thus, higher education plays a crucial role in developing high-quality young human resources as drivers of regional development, especially Indigenous Papuan talent. In this context, Musamus University stands as one of the main pillars in South Papua, entrusted with the mission of producing these agents of development _namely, Indigenous Papuan students.

Musamus University serves as the frontline of education in the border region for Indigenous Papuan students. As an institution, it bears a unique and complex sociological burden. Indigenous Papuan students come from both urban areas and remote regions, carrying the hopes of their families, prompting the university to provide the widest possible access to education. Once students are officially under its auspices, the university strives to ensure they receive proper education and are able to graduate on time. However, the effort to produce these development agents often clashes with the realities of capital constraints in the field.

Referring to Bourdieu’s (1986) perspective, success in higher education structures largely depends on the possession of economic, cultural, and social capital aligned with institutional demands. However, not all students come from family environments that possess such accumulated capital. These limitations and inequalities create a wide gap and generate multidimensional barriers for Indigenous Papuan students. As a result, during their study period at Musamus University, students face not only internal challenges, as identified in previous studies (Jua et al., 2025), but are also entangled in external factors that contribute to the risk of academic failure.

These external challenges are real phenomena experienced by Indigenous Papuan students. Students who are expected to become drivers of regional development must confront external disturbances or problems that are often beyond their control. At Musamus University, some of these external issues are visible, while others remain hidden unless students are willing to share their struggles with peers or lecturers. For instance, some students seek financial assistance (borrowing money) from lecturers to pay semester registration fees and complete academic tasks that require funding. This reality shows that external barriers are not merely minor disruptions but can pose serious threats to the continuity of Indigenous Papuan students’ studies.

The external problems experienced by students can have direct and visible impacts, such as a loss of motivation to complete their studies, low academic performance (GPA), and even withdrawal from university (dropout). Students are agents of change for Papua who are expected to help improve community welfare (Sanduan et al., 2025). If many students ultimately fail to complete their studies due to external challenges, the nation suffers a loss, particularly in terms of human resource development in Papua. South Papua also loses individuals who may have once possessed strong determination to fight for a better future for Papua, but whose efforts are hindered by external challenges that are difficult to overcome.

Broadly speaking, the external learning challenges faced by Indigenous Papuan students, as described above, can be examined through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s Social Reproduction Theory. Bourdieu argues that academic success is not determined solely by individual cognitive intelligence

but is also influenced by the accumulation of capital. This includes economic capital (financial stability), cultural capital (educational literacy and the internalization of family values), and social capital (support networks or external relationships). In this context, Indigenous Papuan students often experience symbolic violence, where the higher education system implicitly demands certain forms of capital that are not always aligned with their sociocultural backgrounds.

This symbolic violence forces Indigenous Papuan students to adapt quickly to environments that may feel unfamiliar. This phenomenon aligns with findings by Rohmah (2016) and Wahayuningtiyas et al. (2024), which indicate that Indigenous Papuan students studying outside Papua _especially first-year students_ often experience culture shock due to differences in culture, language, lifestyle, social environment, and academic rhythm compared to their previous experiences. Furthermore, physical differences among Papuan students often trigger discrimination and negative stereotypes (Fitrianti & Riyandani, 2023; Romadhoni et al., 2024). These experiences can lead to feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, causing students to withdraw from their surroundings and participate less in academic activities. These findings highlight that the risk of academic failure among Indigenous Papuan students is not merely a matter of low intellectual ability but rather a manifestation of systematic inequalities in capital structures.

Previous studies on the learning challenges of Indigenous Papuan students have been widely conducted. However, these studies generally focus on students studying outside Papua. In addition, the economic background of students is rarely discussed, with most analyses concentrating on external sociocultural issues such as culture shock, discrimination, and language barriers in unfamiliar environments. In contrast, this study focuses on the learning barriers experienced by Indigenous Papuan students in their own region, specifically at Musamus University. The novelty of this research lies in its examination of issues arising from limited economic capital, as well as its exploration of sociocultural aspects _particularly those rooted in family dynamics and students' social roles within households, which are often overlooked in academic literature.

Based on the background described above, this study seeks to answer the main research question: How do external barriers in the economic and sociocultural dimensions affect the academic sustainability of indigenous Papuan students at Musamus University? Specifically, this study explores how these resource constraints create physical and psychological barriers for indigenous Papuan students in completing their academic activities at Musamus University. The research findings and discussion in this study are expected to foster critical awareness among all readers, particularly stakeholders, to support and actively contribute to the academic success of Papuan students or young talents, according to their respective capacities. Additionally, these findings can serve as a foundation for developing more contextually appropriate intervention policies in the Southern Papua region.

METHODS

This study employs a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design to comprehensively analyze the economic and sociocultural barriers that hinder the continuity of studies among Indigenous Papuan students. This approach was chosen to combine the strengths of quantitative data in mapping the distribution of external learning barriers with the depth of qualitative data in exploring the lived realities of Indigenous Papuan students. The research was conducted at Musamus University in Merauke, one of the main higher education institutions in the South Papua border region. The researcher acted as the key instrument, conducting direct observations of students' academic and personal dynamics within the campus environment to understand the root causes of their challenges contextually.

The data collection process was carried out over approximately three years. The initial stage began with direct observation of student activities and learning outcomes from five departments taught by the researcher during the study period. Based on several identified learning issues during lectures, the study proceeded to the quantitative phase. The researcher distributed a problem-identification questionnaire to 160 Indigenous Papuan students from various departments at

Musamus University. In the questionnaire, students were asked to circle potential problems listed, while also being given open space to write additional issues they experienced that were not included in the questionnaire. The data obtained were analyzed descriptively to determine the percentage distribution of economic and sociocultural barriers. The qualitative phase was then conducted to explain these numerical findings through in-depth interviews using a persuasive approach with selected students identified as facing significant barriers.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher applied technique triangulation by comparing findings from field observations, questionnaires, and interview results. Additionally, peer discussions were conducted with fellow lecturers and several educators to validate field findings. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process ensured that each narrative presented in the research findings accurately represents the real barriers experienced by students, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of the life ecosystem of Indigenous Papuan students beyond the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The scope of this study covers the full range of learning-related challenges experienced by Indigenous Papuan students at Musamus University in Merauke, including both internal and external factors. However, this section specifically focuses on external barriers, particularly those related to economic and sociocultural dimensions. Based on the analysis of students' questionnaire responses and in-depth interviews, three main external issues were consistently identified among students. A summary of the findings regarding external problems from economic and sociocultural perspectives is briefly presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories and indicators of external issues in the economic and sociocultural dimensions among students

No	Categories and indicators of external issues	Percentage (%)
1.	Family economic background	
	a. Working while attending college	43
	b. Living with a large family or extended family	68
	c. The distance between home and campus is quite far	67
	d. Lacking transportation and walking to campus or using public transportation	65
	e. Rarely or never eating breakfast, lacking funds for lunch on campus, and attending classes while hungry	90
2.	Learning Disruptions	
	a. Unable to study at home or in a dorm	45
	b. Already having children during college	
3.	Academic Support from Parents and Relatives	
	a. Lack of financial support from parents or relatives	57
	b. Lack of practical support from parents and relatives	45
	c. Rarely receiving emotional support from parents	

Table 1 presents the main points and their aspects, along with the percentage distribution of external problems students experience. As can be seen from each point, the cumulative percentage does not reach the maximum (100%) because these results are based on the students' questionnaire responses. Students were allowed to select the appropriate answer if they felt they were experiencing the issue. Conversely, if students were not experiencing it, they were allowed to leave

the question unanswered on the questionnaire. The three points regarding students' external economic and sociocultural issues will be discussed further below.

Discussions

1. Family Economic Background

The inability of parents or families to provide adequate financial support creates a financial burden for students. Basic needs such as food and drinking are fundamental requirements to ensure that students' learning processes can run optimally. Students who are far from their parents and rarely _or in some cases never_ receive financial support are required to be independent in fulfilling their daily needs. This condition indicates limited economic capital, as explained in Bourdieu's theory of social capital, where family support plays an essential role in ensuring students' educational success.

This situation encourages students to seek solutions to meet their daily needs. One way is to study while working. Based on interview findings, students engage in various types of work such as shop attendants, domestic helpers, laundry workers, and construction laborers. This issue is a universal problem also identified by Wolfson et al. (2022), where students experiencing food insecurity tend to work to sustain themselves. They are forced to work longer hours to meet their needs, which adds additional pressure. Studying while working is extraordinary because students must perform dual roles and adjust between academic and work demands (Lusi, 2021). Students who continue their studies while working demonstrate a high level of maturity. They do not give up on their circumstances but instead seek solutions. This reflects their resilience and emotional intelligence, as they take concrete actions to solve problems (Felix et al., 2019; Timbang, 2015).

However, studying while working consumes significant time and also has negative impacts on students. Performing two major roles simultaneously with the expectation of excelling in both creates substantial pressure. Opportunities for studying outside lectures and work become limited. After working, students tend to experience fatigue and are unable to study optimally or complete academic assignments. This can be explained through Goode's (1960) role conflict theory, where individuals experience conflict between two simultaneous roles _as students and workers. This role conflict may lead to physical and mental exhaustion and reduce academic performance. This is supported by Creed et al. (2015), who state that students' attempts to balance dual roles can lead to chronic stress, mental health issues, and decreased learning motivation due to prioritizing work over academic tasks. However, this situation is often unavoidable, as working becomes a necessity for students with financial limitations rather than merely a way to gain experience. In some cases, students may delay graduation or even risk dropping out (Beerkens et al., 2011).

On the other hand, limited time and energy can also increase cognitive load, as explained in Sweller's (2011) Cognitive Load Theory, which states that human cognitive capacity is limited in processing information. As a result, students experience difficulties in concentration, managing academic tasks, and understanding learning materials. This is evident from various impacts such as uncompleted or unsubmitted assignments, frequent sleepiness during lectures, difficulties in arranging group work schedules, and loss of focus during learning. These issues negatively affect students' final grades, resulting in low GPA scores, which in turn limits their ability to take more credits (SKS) in the following semester.

Students enrolled at Musamus University come not only from Merauke but also from surrounding regencies such as Boven Digoel, Asmat, Mappi, and even mountainous regions. To attend classes, students need temporary housing. Field findings show that only 16% of students live in their own homes and 9% live in rented rooms (boarding houses). Meanwhile, 68% live with relatives or family members who happen to reside in Merauke. Another finding shows that students often live in overcrowded conditions, with 9 to 20 people in a small house. Similarly, students staying in boarding houses of approximately 4 x 4 meters may share space with 3 to 5 other students. Some even live in small dormitories with up to 40 students from the same region. These phenomena indicate the use of social networks to fulfill housing needs. From Bourdieu's perspective, this reflects

social capital in the form of support from family and relatives that helps students sustain their education.

Once again, financial constraints led students to ultimately decide to live with their families or relatives. Weak economic conditions meant that students were unable to rent a room to live on their own. According to nearly all (96%) students living with their families, the home environment does not support the learning process. Overcrowded living conditions and various activities of other household members _such as the habit of gathering and excessive alcohol consumption_ make it difficult for students to study and complete academic assignments. Additionally, students face limitations in home facilities, such as the lack of a dedicated study space. Some students also mentioned that they cannot study at night due to a lack of lighting or their inability to purchase electricity tokens. These various facts indicate that financial constraints limit students' ability to study. This can be explained using Gifford's housing density theory, which demonstrates that high spatial density can reduce comfort, privacy, and an individual's ability to concentrate.

In eastern Indonesia, such support is commonly understood as a form of mutual assistance. This condition is interpreted as social support, where students receive housing assistance from their social networks. However, overcrowded living conditions present additional challenges for students. Riva et al. (2014) found that household crowding can trigger stress and mental health issues, indicated by irritability and increased anxiety. This occurs because individuals have little control over their living environment. Moreover, overcrowded housing increases the risk of infectious diseases such as skin diseases and tuberculosis (TB) due to limited personal space and poor air circulation (Lumenta, 2017; Rahmita et al., 2019). This shows that although social support is important for students' survival, an uncondusive environment can become an obstacle and create new problems in their studies.

Furthermore, the social environment within overcrowded housing also influences student behavior. The presence of one or two dominant figures in the household can become behavioral role models for others. This is explained by Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which states that individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation of influential figures. If the dominant figure behaves positively, it can have a beneficial impact. Conversely, if the dominant figure engages in negative behavior, students with weaker personal resilience may adopt similar behaviors. This is important because students are still in the developmental stage of identity formation. According to Erikson (1968), individuals in this stage are highly vulnerable to social influence and group pressure.

In addition to students living with their families, there is the distance between students' homes or dormitories and the campus. The findings indicate that students' residences are quite far away, ranging from 5 to 20 km from Musamus University. Some students must travel approximately 50 minutes by motorcycle. In fact, some students must walk for at least 30 minutes to an hour to reach the campus. Living far from campus has both positive and negative impacts. The positive impact is that housing costs (for dorms) farther from campus are slightly cheaper. Alternatively, when students live with relatives, they can save money because they do not have to pay for housing. On the other hand, students also begin to learn time management regarding when to leave for or return home (Aryunsah, 2023). From the perspective of Zimmerman's (1986) time management theory, time management is an important aspect of students' academic independence. However, in reality, there are more negative impacts, such as low student attendance _especially in morning classes and classes with sudden schedule changes_ many students arriving late, the need for more time to reach campus, and physical fatigue. This finding is supported by Findri (2025), Sihaloho (2024), and Yohana et al. (2025), who note that physical fatigue can reduce students' motivation and productivity and affect their ability to concentrate in class. Additionally, students are prone to illness due to frequently encountering unpredictable weather during their commutes.

Physical fatigue not only affects the learning process but also impacts students who expend energy walking home or to their dorms. The time spent on the journey home and the physical fatigue experienced prevent some students from studying or completing assignments. This indicates that students' energy and time are severely limited after a long journey. The remaining time tends to be

used by students to rest and prepare physically for walking the next day. This situation indicates an imbalance in time management demands. As explained in Zimmerman's perspective on time management, the limitations of time and energy resources can affect students' ability to effectively plan their learning strategies.

Another issue that also requires attention is the safety of students traveling during daylight hours or after dark. In Merauke today, pedestrian safety and protection are relatively low. Criminal acts such as mugging and physical violence are committed by certain individuals, and the incidence of such incidents continues to rise. This phenomenon aligns with Pain's (2001) study on the geography of fear, in which unsafe environmental conditions can instill fear among individuals engaging in activities in public spaces. This situation makes students and pedestrians easy targets for perpetrators, due to a lack of supervision, especially in secluded, poorly lit areas. This puts students at high risk, as their pursuit of education clashes with safety threats during their commute. This situation can create a new problem, psychological stress that may affect students' comfort and focus while studying.

Another option chosen by some students is to use public transportation, commonly called a taxi in Merauke. This option is worth considering if students still have sufficient funds to cover transportation costs and wish to reduce their physical fatigue. However, the operational schedule of public transportation is unpredictable, as drivers must wait for and drop off other passengers. This uncertainty makes students prone to being late for classes due to the long travel times associated with public transportation. Consequently, the choice between walking and using public transportation presents its own challenges, ultimately affecting students' attendance, readiness to learn, and academic performance.

Another impact of financial limitations is students' inability to meet basic nutritional needs such as breakfast. Data shows that around 60% of students rarely or never eat breakfast before activities. Reasons include early morning classes requiring rushed departures due to long distances, lack of funds, or limited food supplies. Students living in dormitories also experience food shortages when supplies from parents run out quickly due to shared consumption. This results in food insecurity, defined as limited or uncertain access to sufficient and nutritious food, which can disrupt academic activities (Niroula et al., 2026; Riddle et al., 2020).

Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943), the fulfillment of physiological needs such as eating and drinking constitutes a basic need and is a primary requirement that must be met before individuals engage in higher-level activities, including learning activities that demand advanced cognitive abilities. Therefore, insufficient energy intake in the morning can directly impact students' physical condition and impair their ability to absorb course material. This aligns with the findings of Rima et al. (2020), which show that a lack of nutritional intake, particularly protein, not obtained from breakfast, affects students' concentration and cognitive abilities. This indicates that economic constraints not only affect financial matters but also affect students' health and readiness to learn.

In addition to breakfast issues, most students (around 57%) reported being unable to afford lunch on campus. This forces them to attend lectures while hungry. Students report that hunger leads to loss of focus, inability to understand lectures, and drowsiness. This indicates food insecurity that directly affects cognitive function. Failure to meet this need reduces concentration and participation in learning activities (Jua et al., 2025). This aligns with Payne-Sturges et al. (2018), who state that food insecurity is a serious health issue affecting academic performance, completion rates, and graduation outcomes.

Empirical observations in the Physics Education study program also show direct impacts, where some students suddenly experience physical weakness during lectures. Further investigation revealed contributing factors such as dense lecture schedules, lack of breakfast, long walking distances, absence of food supplies, and no lunch due to lack of funds. In other words, students engage in academic activities without any nutritional intake since morning. This not only reduces cognitive ability but also causes prolonged physical fatigue. According to Sweller's cognitive theory,

limited physical energy increases mental load during learning. This situation can be described as a “ticking time bomb” for students’ health, as prolonged conditions may lead to serious health issues and hinder academic success overall.

2. Learning Disruptions

Learning disturbances among students are not only caused by internal factors but are also influenced by external factors, particularly the condition of their living environment. Based on field findings, only 24% of students feel comfortable studying at home or in their boarding houses due to a quiet atmosphere. In contrast, 45% of students reported discomfort that hinders their learning process. Several identified causes include overcrowded housing, where students live with many family members in limited space, resulting in uncontrolled noise. This finding is consistent with previous findings regarding limited family economic conditions.

In addition to noisy or crowded home environments caused by multiple occupants, the problem is further exacerbated by disturbances from young relatives, which make it difficult for students to concentrate on their studies. Such home environments cause students to lose effective study time. According to Stokols’ environmental stress theory, physical environmental factors such as noise and crowding can become sources of psychological stress that affect individual functioning. In the learning context, such uncondusive environments can increase cognitive load, making it difficult for students to process information and maintain concentration (Sweller, 2011). As a result, students lose effective study time, which ultimately affects the quality of their learning outcomes.

In addition to overcrowded housing, another learning barrier is related to domestic workload that must be completed at home. This is significantly more experienced by female students, who bear greater responsibility for household tasks, although not all female students experience this equally. In certain social contexts, these domestic responsibilities are seen as a form of “compensation” or gratitude for being allowed to stay in the household. From a social and gender perspective, women are often expected to carry a larger share of domestic roles compared to men. This condition creates role conflict, as explained by Goode, where individuals must simultaneously fulfill multiple roles _as students and as family members with domestic responsibilities. This conflict leads to limited time and energy, resulting in the loss of productive study time. In addition, the dual burden, especially among female students, contributes to physical fatigue after completing household tasks. As explained in Sweller’s theory, under such conditions students’ cognitive capacity becomes suboptimal, making learning during the remaining available time less effective. Consequently, learning quality declines due to limitations in energy, time, and focus.

Learning barriers also arise from external environments around the residence, particularly disturbances to public order caused by certain individuals who frequently create noise. These disturbances are often worsened by alcohol consumption, which leads to disruptive behavior at any time. Forms of disturbance experienced by students include shouting, loud music played at high volume until late at night, fights, and continuous noise from vehicles with loud exhaust systems along the roads. Such disturbances outside the home not only disrupt students’ concentration and focus but also interfere with their nighttime rest. As a result, students lose stamina and mental readiness to participate in academic activities the following day.

Beyond the campus, a quiet and comfortable home environment is essential in supporting students’ independent learning, whether for reviewing materials, completing assignments, or preparing for lectures. Theoretically, the three environmental barriers discussed _overcrowded housing, domestic workload, and noise disturbances_ are interrelated sources of stress for students. This is supported by Evans (2006), who states that housing density creates cognitive burdens that hinder individuals’ ability to process complex learning information. In addition, unequal domestic workloads place students in a vulnerable academic position due to limited productive time remaining after household responsibilities (Puspitawati et al., 2012). This situation is further worsened by uncontrollable external noise, which according to Shield & Dockrell (2008) can reduce cognitive performance and disrupt sleep patterns, leading to decreased learning readiness.

Another learning disturbance that is particularly sensitive is the condition of students who already have children during their studies. The presence of a child is essentially a blessing, but for students who are still in the stage of identity formation and lack emotional and financial maturity, it becomes a serious challenge. Field findings indicate that some students have children outside of marriage as a result of adolescent social dynamics. When they have children, especially toddlers, students' focus is automatically divided between academic responsibilities and parental duties. In this context, students are required to adapt and perform dual roles as learners and parents. They must divide their time between attending classes, studying, working to earn income, and managing household responsibilities (Hurlock, 2002; Sari & Nurwidawati, 2013).

As explained in Goode's role conflict theory, individuals experience stress when required to fulfill multiple roles simultaneously. Furthermore, from Erikson's psychosocial development perspective, students in early adulthood are still in the stage of identity and relationship formation and are therefore not fully prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood. In such situations, a shift in priorities often occurs, where students choose to sacrifice their studies to meet the needs of their children and family (Sari & Nurwidawati, 2013). This external role pressure leads to decreased learning motivation, low attendance rates, reduced participation in academic activities, and declining academic performance.

3. Academic Support from Parents and Relatives

During data collection, it was found that external support is crucial to the academic success of both female and male students. No matter how resilient they are, students still need financial and emotional support from those closest to them. This aligns with Cohen & Wills' (1985) social support theory, which emphasizes that instrumental support _such as financial assistance_ and emotional support play a vital role in helping individuals cope with stress and maintain psychological well-being. In this context, one of the primary forms of support is financial assistance from parents, particularly for students living away from home, even if they are only from a different district. These funds are used not only for academic needs but also to support daily living expenses.

Furthermore, these findings can be explained by Tinto's (2012) student persistence model, which posits that student persistence is influenced by levels of academic and social integration. Financial support from families can strengthen students' commitment to completing their studies by reducing the economic pressures they face. From Bourdieu's perspective, such assistance constitutes economic capital that gives students an advantage, enabling them to focus more on their learning. However, in reality, not all students benefit from this financial support, as only about 43% of students regularly receive financial support from their parents. This disparity indicates unequal access to resources that may potentially affect students' academic success.

This condition is generally caused by family economic limitations, and in some cases, by the death of parents, leaving students without financial support from close relatives. In certain situations, even relatives are unable to provide assistance due to similar financial hardships. The lack of economic capital experienced by students ultimately limits their access to and continuity in higher education (Bourdieu, 1986). A common consequence of this lack of financial support is students deciding to drop out and return to their hometowns.

However, not all students have given in to these circumstances. Some students have instead demonstrated adaptive strategies to ensure the continuity of their studies. As researchers in the Department of Physics Education found, some students have taken the initiative to contact their professors and borrow funds to address urgent needs. Additionally, there were students who openly asked professors for help in finding any kind of work, including jobs like doing laundry, as long as the work provided a legitimate income to support their living and educational needs. This phenomenon can be explained by the concept of coping strategies in Cohen and Wills' social support theory, where individuals actively seek alternative sources of support when primary support is unavailable. On the other hand, faculty members' involvement as providers of assistance also reflects the importance of social support within the academic environment, which, according to Tinto (2012), can

strengthen students' attachment to the institution and increase their chances of persevering to complete their studies.

Other findings indicate that not all students receive practical support from their parents or relatives at home. According to research, approximately 45% of students feel their home environment does not provide sufficient opportunities to study or complete academic assignments. This occurs because of differing perspectives: parents tend to assume that all learning activities take place exclusively in the classroom. Consequently, when at home, parents or relatives expect students to be fully engaged in household chores. This view is supported by the findings of Puspitawati et al. (2012), who revealed that the root cause of the limited functional support lies in the family's perspective, which prioritizes domestic work and overlooks students' need for independent study time outside of formal class hours.

According to Cohen and Wills' social support theory, these conditions reflect a lack of technical and environmental support that should facilitate students' academic activities within the home environment. Furthermore, viewed through Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this situation is also linked to limited cultural capital, specifically regarding the family's understanding of the demands of higher education, which extend beyond the classroom and require independent study time. The scarcity of such support can hinder students' academic integration, a critical factor in Tinto's model of educational persistence.

Another important form of support for students is emotional involvement from parents. Some students admitted that when they intentionally do not attend lectures or do not study or complete assignments at night, their parents or relatives tend not to give any reprimand. It was also found that parents in their hometowns rarely call just to check on them. In fact, students feel calmer and more focused when they know their families are doing well. Although they are already adults, students still need emotional attention and validation from their parents. According to Cohen and Wills' theory, this condition reflects low emotional support, which is essential for maintaining students' psychological stability. The absence of parental attention creates feelings of neglect, making students feel as though they are struggling alone without moral support from their families.

The lack of emotional support may stem from the perception among parents and close relatives that the student has reached adulthood and is therefore deemed capable of managing personal responsibilities independently. On one hand, this attitude reflects parental trust in the student's autonomy. On the other hand, it indicates a lack of parental awareness regarding the actual academic dynamics students face. This is consistent with Arnett's (2000) perspective, which emphasizes that individuals in the emerging adulthood phase require emotional support even as they strive toward independence.

Furthermore, as explained by Ward et al. (2012), limited parental educational literacy often prevents parents from understanding the workload required outside formal lecture hours; consequently, they tend to overlook the need to monitor and attend to students' learning activities. This leads to a situation in which parents do not intervene when students skip classes, assuming there are no scheduled lectures or that all academic obligations have been fulfilled. When parents exhibit such indifference, students perceive a lack of social support, which subsequently leads to a decline in their academic discipline. This is further supported by the research of Fatmawati & Widanti (2022), which shows that low parental emotional support is associated with lower academic discipline among students. While parents may believe that their silence shows respect for independence, students, in reality, still require emotional involvement from them (Arnett, 2000). From Tinto's perspective, weak emotional support can undermine students' engagement with the academic process, thereby affecting their educational persistence.

These complex external issues cannot be resolved independently by students. Collaboration and the involvement of various stakeholders are required, ranging from parents providing functional and emotional support to the university implementing policies that embrace the diverse backgrounds of its students, and the government providing financial support and infrastructure. For instance, to address transportation barriers, the city government could facilitate a public

transportation mode _similar to the Trans Jakarta or Trans Jogja systems_ operating along Merauke's strategic routes, such as Jalan Mandala, Jalan Brawijaya, and the airport area. This policy would be more effective if accompanied by special student fares, which would alleviate their daily financial burden.

Regarding transportation solutions, Musamus University could optimize the use of its campus bus facilities by adopting systems used by several major universities in Indonesia. For instance, Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) operates campus buses as an internal transportation mode connecting all faculty areas, thereby improving student mobility for academic activities. A similar concept could be implemented at Musamus University, for example, by operating campus buses to pick up and drop off students during lecture hours, with routes starting at strategic points, such as the Mandala Muli traffic light intersection, and heading toward the campus. Implementing a minimal fare to cover operational costs could be a fair solution to alleviate students' economic burden without neglecting facility maintenance.

Another critical issue, such as housing limitations, requires policy intervention from the local government. Following up on the provincial government's medium-term plan for dormitory-based education, one viable solution is to construct student dormitories near the campus to accommodate students from their respective regencies. The management of these dormitories must be handled professionally to ensure compliance with standards for nutrition, sanitation, and student safety. Furthermore, local governments could adopt the 'One Thousand Scholars (Seribu Sarjana)' program from Mappi Regency as a model for well-planned and sustainable educational mentorship. This transformation requires collaboration and participation from all stakeholders who are genuinely committed to regional development through human empowerment, particularly from the generation currently striving to complete their studies and build their own homeland.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the external economic and sociocultural challenges faced by Indigenous Papuan students at Musamus University are highly multidimensional and interconnected. These factors include financial struggles, environmental disruptions in their living quarters, and significant gaps in parental educational literacy and support. Financial instability forces students to divide their focus between academic demands and labor to meet basic needs and secure digital access. These constraints compel students to live with relatives in overcrowded housing far from campus, often requiring them to commute on foot to save costs. Such conditions directly impair their safety, attendance, classroom engagement, and overall mobility efficiency. In extreme cases, students tend to neglect their health to minimize living expenses.

This situation is further exacerbated by overcrowded and noisy living environments, which hinder students' concentration and academic achievement. For female students, the burden is even heavier due to domestic chores and childcare responsibilities. Moreover, a perceptual gap exists between students and their families; low educational literacy leads parents to adopt an indifferent attitude, assuming that, as adults, students no longer require close social control or emotional support. Overall, the accumulation of these issues not only results in declining academic performance but also significantly increases the risk of dropping out. Therefore, a collaboration of student-centered policies is urgently needed, ranging from the provision of decent housing and integrated transportation modes to financial and emotional mentorship programs involving both local governments and higher education institutions.

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