

Understanding College Intention in Rural Education Context

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the extent to which learning motivation and perceived parental financial support influence students' intention to pursue higher education, focusing on 11th-grade students in a rural Indonesian high school. It addresses a research gap concerning educational aspirations among underserved youth in developing regions.

Methodology: A quantitative explanatory design was employed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. Data were collected from 127 purposively selected students at SMAN 1 X Koto Singkarak. Constructs for learning motivation, perceived parental financial support, and college intention were measured using validated items on a 5-point Likert scale. The analysis assessed the measurement model (validity and reliability) and structural model (path coefficients).

Findings: Both learning motivation ($\beta = 0.344$; $p < 0.001$) and perceived parental financial support ($\beta = 0.219$; $p < 0.01$) positively and significantly influence college intention. The model explains 20.2% of the variance in students' educational aspiration ($R^2 = 0.202$). Learning motivation was the stronger predictor, highlighting the critical role of internal psychological drivers despite economic limitations.

Originality: This research offers new insights into how psychological and economic factors jointly shape college aspirations in rural settings. By integrating Self-Determination Theory within a socio-economic framework using PLS-SEM, the study contributes both theoretically and methodologically.

Research limitations: Findings are limited to a single rural school, reducing generalizability. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and self-reported data may involve bias. Future studies should use broader samples, longitudinal designs, and explore mediating variables such as peer or institutional influence.

Practical implications: The results suggest schools and policymakers should foster student motivation through mentoring and goal-setting, while also enhancing financial access via scholarships and outreach to promote higher education participation in rural areas.

Keyword: Learning motivation, perceived parental financial support, college intention, rural students, PLS-SEM

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Introduction

The pursuit of higher education plays a pivotal role in shaping individual futures and national development agendas, particularly in emerging economies such as Indonesia. However, despite significant policy efforts to expand access to tertiary education through initiatives like the KIP-Kartu Indonesia Pintar program and other merit-based scholarship schemes, a substantial portion of students—especially those in rural and economically constrained areas—remain hesitant or unable to pursue college-level studies. This phenomenon highlights the complex interplay of individual and structural factors that influence educational decision-making. Two prominent determinants frequently cited in the literature are learning motivation and perceived parental financial support, which jointly impact a student's academic aspirations and perceived feasibility of continuing to university (Saputri, Ahmad, & Lestari, 2019; Alinsa, Bado, & Inanna, 2024).

Learning motivation represents an internal psychological drive that directs an individual's energy and persistence toward educational goals. It is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential predictors of academic engagement and long-term academic planning (Slameto, 2015; Sardiman, 2016). Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Deci and Ryan (2000) emphasize the significance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in shaping human behavior, particularly in goal-oriented contexts such as education. Students with high levels of intrinsic motivation are more likely to demonstrate self-regulated learning behaviors and a proactive approach toward academic progression, including aspirations to enter higher education (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this view, motivation is not only a predictor of academic success but also a precursor to educational intention, acting as a bridge between current effort and future orientation (Fernando, Andriani, & Syam, 2024).

At the same time, perceived parental financial support plays a substantial role in influencing students' access to educational resources, decision-making capacity, and ultimately their academic ambitions. Families with higher income levels can generally provide more comprehensive support in terms of tuition assistance, private tutoring, access to digital learning tools, and emotional encouragement (Durrotunnafisa & Rosy, 2024; Eryanto & Rika, 2013). Conversely, students from lower-income households often face greater uncertainty regarding the affordability of college, leading to decreased intention to enroll in higher education despite possessing academic potential. Research by Adnin and Efendi (2021) and Budisantoso (2017) confirms the importance of socio-economic status in mediating students' interest in pursuing further education, particularly when compounded by geographic isolation or lack of institutional outreach.

While many studies have separately examined the effects of motivation or perceived parental financial support on educational outcomes, few have comprehensively analyzed the simultaneous influence of both variables on students' intention to attend college, especially among high school students in rural Indonesia. While previous studies have often examined the effects of learning motivation and perceived parental financial support on students' educational aspirations in isolation (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Budisantoso, 2017; Saputri et al., 2019), there remains a gap in understanding how these internal and external factors operate in tandem. In real-life educational decision-making, students' psychological drive and socioeconomic background interact dynamically. Therefore, examining both variables simultaneously offers a more holistic view of what drives college intention, especially in underrepresented rural contexts. This integrated approach aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the interplay between intrinsic motivation and environmental support (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Most existing research has centered on urban or higher education populations, leaving a significant research gap in the context of secondary education in rural or semi-peripheral regions (Sahade & Nuraisyah, 2022; Subarkah & Nurkhin, 2018). This study responds to that gap by focusing on Grade XI students at SMAN 1 X Koto Singkarak, a public high school located in a rural area of West Sumatra, Indonesia. It investigates how learning motivation and parents' income jointly

influences students' intention to pursue higher education, using a robust quantitative approach based on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Accordingly, this research poses two key questions: First, to what extent does learning motivation affect students' intention to pursue higher education? Second, how significant is the effect of perceived parental financial support on students' college intentions? To address these questions, the study aims to empirically test the direct effects of both variables while offering contextualized insights relevant to educational policymakers, school administrators, and scholarship providers. Theoretically, this research enriches the application of Self-Determination Theory by linking it to socio-economic determinants within the decision-making framework of high school students. Practically, it offers actionable recommendations to enhance motivation and reduce financial barriers, particularly among students in rural regions who remain underrepresented in tertiary education enrollment.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Educational intention, particularly the intention to pursue higher education, is shaped by a complex constellation of psychological and socio-economic factors. Among these, learning motivation and perceived parental financial support are widely recognized in both theory and empirical research as significant predictors of students' academic planning and long-term educational outcomes. This section outlines the theoretical foundation and previous studies that inform this research, as well as the conceptual definitions of key variables and the development of testable hypotheses.

Motivation is a central concept in educational psychology, often regarded as the engine that drives students to learn, persist, and succeed. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), motivation exists along a continuum ranging from amotivation (lack of intent) to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction and personal interest, while extrinsic motivation is influenced by external rewards or pressures. Both forms are relevant in the academic context, where students' motivation may be shaped by a desire for knowledge or external goals such as grades or future career opportunities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Prior research has shown that students with high motivation—particularly intrinsic—are more likely to set educational goals, sustain effort, and demonstrate strong aspirations for higher education (Sadirman, 2018; Fernando, Andriani, & Syam, 2024).

Several empirical studies reinforce the positive relationship between learning motivation and students' intention to pursue tertiary education. Budisantoso (2017) found that motivation significantly influenced high school students' interest in enrolling in college in Klaten, Central Java. Similarly, Hidayah, Zulaihati, and Sumianti (2023) demonstrated that learning motivation was a significant predictor of achievement and academic planning among vocational students. In the context of this study, motivation is defined as the internal psychological drive that influences students to engage in academic tasks and envision a college-bound future. Based on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Learning motivation positively affects students' intention to pursue higher education.

In addition to internal psychological factors, external socio-economic conditions—particularly family income—play a pivotal role in shaping students' access to and expectations about higher education. Perceived parental financial support often reflects the family's ability to afford educational expenses, including tuition, learning materials, private tutoring, and transportation. Students from higher-income families tend to have broader access to educational opportunities and a stronger sense of financial security, which positively influences their academic aspirations (Durrrotunnafisa & Rosy, 2024; Fauzi, Satrianto, & Effiyanti, 2019). Conversely, those from lower-income backgrounds may perceive college as financially

unattainable, thus lowering their intention to pursue further studies, regardless of academic ability (Andriyani, Caska, & Haryana, 2016; Eryanto & Rika, 2013).

In studies focusing on high school students, family income has consistently been found to exert a statistically significant influence on college aspirations. For instance, Sahade and Nuraisyah (2022) reported that perceived parental financial support significantly predicted students' desire to enroll in university programs. Similarly, research by Oryza and Listiadi (2021) concluded that socioeconomic status, along with motivation and achievement, was a key determinant of students' educational trajectories. In this research, perceived parental financial support is defined as the monthly earnings of students' parents or guardians that contribute to the household's economic well-being and influence educational planning. From this perspective, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Parents' income positively affects students' intention to pursue higher education.

Together, these two hypotheses provide a conceptual framework that integrates both psychological and economic factors in the analysis of educational intention. The inclusion of both internal and external variables offers a more holistic understanding of the challenges and motivators facing rural high school students in their decision-making process regarding higher education.

Research Methods

This research adopts a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design aimed at examining the causal relationship between the independent variables—learning motivation and perceived parental financial support—and the dependent variable, which is students' intention to pursue higher education. The explanatory design is considered suitable for testing predefined hypotheses derived from existing theory and prior empirical research.

The population of the study consists of all Grade XI students at SMAN 1 X Koto Singkarak, Solok Regency, West Sumatra, in the 2024/2025 academic year. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with the main criteria being active Grade XI students who are in the early stage of higher education decision-making and are willing to complete the research questionnaire. A total of 127 valid responses were collected and deemed sufficient for analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). According to Hair et al. (2022), a minimum sample size of 100–150 is acceptable for a relatively simple model tested through PLS-SEM.

The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Each research variable was measured using established constructs adapted from relevant literature. The learning motivation variable was measured using indicators adapted from the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000), particularly focusing on intrinsic drive, goal orientation, and persistence in academic contexts. Example item: *"I am eager to study because it helps me achieve my future academic goals."*

The perceived parental financial support variable was operationalized based on students' perception of their family's financial capacity to support education, following the approach of Durrotunnafisa and Rosy (2024) and Andriyani, Caska, and Haryana (2016). In this study, perceived parental financial support is conceptualized not as the precise numeric monthly income, but rather as students' *perception* of their family's economic ability to support their higher education. This reflects the subjective experience of economic support rather than objective income levels, consistent with prior research using perceived economic status as a predictor of academic outcomes (e.g., Alinsa et al., 2024; Eryanto & Rika, 2013). For instance, items included statements such as: "My parents are financially able to support my future education." This operationalization allows the model to capture the student's own interpretation of financial

security, which is often more psychologically salient in shaping college intentions than income alone. Indicators included the estimated monthly income, the ability to cover school-related expenses, and access to additional learning support. Example item: *"My parents can afford to finance my college education without external assistance."*

The college intention variable was measured by students' expressed desire, plans, and perceived likelihood of enrolling in higher education. This construct was adapted from Sahade and Nuraisyah (2022) and Oryza and Listiadi (2021). Example item: *"I plan to enroll in a university after completing high school."*

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS version 4, which allows for simultaneous assessment of complex relationships among latent constructs. This method is particularly appropriate for exploratory studies with small to medium sample sizes and does not require strict normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2022; Ghozali, 2023). The analysis followed a two-step procedure involving the assessment of the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model).

The measurement model was assessed for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.50, and factor loadings greater than 0.70. The results showed that all indicators met these criteria, with AVE values ranging from 0.583 to 0.694. For construct reliability, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Ghozali, 2023). Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.756 to 0.841, while CR values ranged from 0.836 to 0.888, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE for each construct was higher than its correlation with other constructs. This confirmed that each construct measured a distinct concept. Thus, the measurement instruments were deemed valid and reliable for further structural analysis.

This rigorous methodology ensures that the findings drawn from this study are statistically robust and theoretically grounded, allowing for meaningful interpretation of the influences of learning motivation and perceived parental financial support on students' intention to pursue higher education.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents and Variables

The respondents in this study consisted of 127 Grade XI students from SMAN 1 X Koto Singkarak. In terms of gender, the sample was predominantly female (62.2%) compared to male students (37.8%). Most respondents were aged 16–17 years, and the majority indicated an aspiration to continue to higher education. With respect to their parents' income, approximately 64% of students reported their family's monthly income to be below IDR 3 million, reflecting the rural socio-economic context of the research setting.

Regarding the main study variables, the mean score for learning motivation was 4.13, indicating a high level of academic drive among students. The college intention variable had a mean of 4.08, suggesting strong aspirations to pursue higher education. Meanwhile, the perceived parental financial support perception variable averaged 3.61, revealing moderate confidence in financial support for college.

Outer Model Analysis

To evaluate the measurement model, an assessment of indicator reliability, convergent validity, construct reliability, and discriminant validity was conducted. The standardized outer loadings for all items were above the recommended threshold of 0.70, with values ranging from 0.721 to 0.835. These results confirmed that each item reliably represented its respective latent construct.

Convergent validity was further established by examining the Average Variance Extracted

(AVE) for each construct. The AVE values for learning motivation, perceived parental financial support, and college intention were 0.583, 0.629, and 0.694, respectively, all exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.50, indicating that most of the variance in the indicators was explained by their corresponding latent variables.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted

Variable	<i>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</i>
Learning motivation (X1)	0,516
Perceived parental financial support (X2)	0,638
College intention (Y)	0,666

Construct reliability was demonstrated through Cronbach’s alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) scores. For learning motivation, the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.756 and the CR was 0.836. Perceived parental financial support had a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.794 and a CR of 0.855, while college intention yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.841 and CR of 0.888. All values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability across all constructs.

Table 2. Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability

	Composite reliability	Cronbach’s Alpha
Learning motivation	0,864	0,813
Perceived parental financial support	0,897	0,857
College intention	0,923	0,899

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which requires that the square root of the AVE for each construct be greater than its correlations with other constructs. The results confirmed that each construct shared more variance with its own indicators than with any other construct in the model, thereby affirming good discriminant validity and supporting the adequacy of the measurement model.

Table 3. Fornel-Larcker Criterion

	Learning motivation (X1)	Perceived parental financial support (X2)	College intention (Y)
Learning motivation (X1)	0,718		
Perceived parental financial support (X2)	0,239	0,799	
College intention (Y)	0,396	0,301	0,816

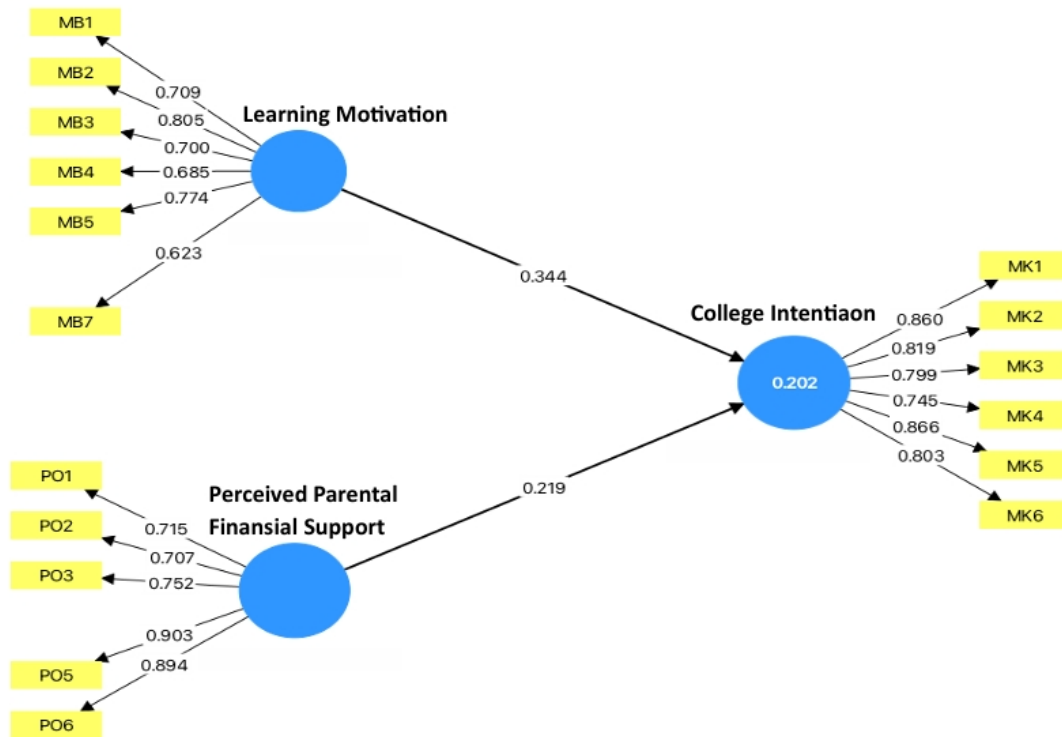


Figure 1. Factor Loading

Inner Model Analysis

Following confirmation of the measurement model's adequacy, the inner model was evaluated to examine the structural relationships between the latent variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for college intention was found to be 0.202, indicating that learning motivation and perceived parental financial support jointly explained 20.2% of the variance in students' intention to pursue higher education. This level of explanatory power falls within the weak range, according to the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2022).

The path coefficient from learning motivation to college intention was 0.487, while the coefficient from perceived parental financial support to college intention was 0.329. These coefficients suggest that both variables have a positive and meaningful influence on students' educational intentions. Further assessment of effect sizes (f^2) revealed that learning motivation had a large effect on college intention, with an f^2 value of 0.140, whereas perceived parental financial support had a moderate effect, indicated by an f^2 of 0.056. These findings highlight the relatively stronger role of internal motivational factors over external economic conditions in influencing students' academic aspirations.

Hypotheses Testing Results

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to test the statistical significance of the hypotheses at a 95% confidence level.

Table 4. Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	t-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H1	Learning Motivation → College Intention	0.344	4.463	0.000	Supported
H2	Perceived parental financial support → College Intention	0.219	2.668	0.000	Supported

Both hypotheses were supported, confirming that learning motivation and perceived parental financial support significantly and positively influence students' intention to pursue higher education. The stronger effect of motivation underscores the psychological readiness of students as a key determinant, even in financially constrained environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence of the significant influence that both learning motivation and perceived parental financial support have on students' intention to pursue higher education. The structural model revealed that learning motivation had the stronger effect between the two predictors, underscoring the central role of internal psychological factors in shaping students' academic ambitions, particularly in under-resourced environments.

The positive and significant relationship between learning motivation and college intention aligns well with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000), which asserts that motivation—especially intrinsic motivation—drives purposeful behavior, including educational engagement and long-term planning. Students who are self-motivated and have internalized academic goals are more likely to visualize a future that includes higher education. These findings are consistent with prior research (Fernando, Andriani, & Syam, 2024; Budisantoso, 2017; Hidayah, Zulaihati, & Sumianti, 2023), which consistently reports a strong link between students' motivation levels and their educational aspirations. In the case of rural students in this study, high motivation appears to compensate for certain environmental and economic limitations, serving as a protective factor against dropping out of academic pathways after high school.

Meanwhile, the role of perceived parental financial support in shaping college intentions, though slightly less prominent, remains statistically significant and meaningful. This finding supports the perspective that economic capital enables families to provide educational resources, reduce financial anxiety, and increase the perceived attainability of college enrollment (Durrotunnafisa & Rosy, 2024; Oryza & Listiadi, 2021). Students from higher-income households may feel more confident about navigating tuition costs, application fees, and living expenses, and are more likely to receive logistical and emotional support from their parents. In line with Bourdieu's concept of economic and cultural capital, this suggests that material resources can ease students' transition from aspiration to intention.

Interestingly, while both factors influence college intentions, the stronger predictive power of motivation suggests that internal factors may exert more control over students' educational decisions than external socio-economic status—at least within this sample. This may be due to the characteristics of the student population: as rural students in a public-school setting, many respondents may be accustomed to economic constraints and have developed resilience and goal orientation in spite of financial barriers. This is in line with the argument made by Sya'diyah and Fachrurrozie (2020) that motivation can act as a mediator between environmental factors and educational outcomes. It also highlights the relevance of school-based interventions to boost motivation as a relatively low-cost yet high-impact strategy to increase post-secondary enrollment in rural regions.

From a contextual standpoint, the findings also underscore the need for greater policy attention to rural educational development. Students in areas such as X Koto Singkarak face dual burdens: financial limitations and a lack of exposure to higher education pathways. Although their motivation may be high, structural obstacles like transportation, lack of information, and fewer mentorship opportunities can diminish the realization of their aspirations. Programs like scholarships, outreach by universities, and community-based educational campaigns are crucial to convert intention into actual enrollment. Additionally, these results suggest that policies should not only address affordability but also nurture motivation through school climate, goal-setting workshops, and counseling services.

Overall, the findings contribute to both theoretical and practical discourses. Theoretically,

they reinforce the value of integrating motivational constructs with socio-economic variables in explaining college aspirations. Practically, they highlight intervention points for educators and policymakers to improve rural students' transition to tertiary education. Future research may consider a longitudinal design to examine whether intention leads to actual enrollment and how these relationships evolve over time.

Implications

The results of this study offer several important implications for educational practitioners, school administrators, and policymakers, particularly those working to improve higher education participation among rural high school students. By demonstrating the significant roles of both learning motivation and perceived parental financial support, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of college intention and the need for interventions that address both psychological and structural barriers.

Educational and Managerial Implications

From an educational management perspective, the strong influence of learning motivation suggests that schools should actively cultivate a motivational climate. Teachers and school counselors should be trained to implement motivational strategies in the classroom, including goal-setting activities, personalized academic feedback, and recognition of students' academic progress. Schools could also organize structured career guidance programs that expose students to higher education options, career pathways, and success stories from alumni—especially those who come from similar socio-economic backgrounds. These programs can help students internalize long-term academic goals and see higher education as both attainable and valuable.

At the managerial level, school principals and education leaders should prioritize the integration of motivation-building components into the broader curriculum. Workshops on time management, self-efficacy, and future planning could be embedded into student development programs. Moreover, mentorship initiatives pairing high-performing senior students with junior peers may further enhance motivation through social modeling. These low-cost but impactful strategies can significantly raise educational aspirations, particularly in resource-limited settings.

Policy Relevance

From a policy standpoint, the significant role of perceived parental financial support highlights persistent inequalities in educational access. While intrinsic motivation can help students aspire toward college, actual enrollment often hinges on whether families can afford tuition fees and associated costs. Therefore, scholarship programs targeted at economically disadvantaged students are critical. Policymakers at both the regional and national levels should expand need-based financial aid, simplify the application process for rural students, and ensure that information about these programs is disseminated widely.

In addition, outreach policies that bring universities closer to rural communities—such as mobile university fairs, partnerships between schools and local higher education institutions, and digital information platforms—can reduce informational barriers and help translate intention into enrollment. Such efforts must be sustained and tailored to the local context to be truly effective. More broadly, the findings call for integrated policies that combine financial support with motivational development. For example, scholarship programs could be coupled with academic coaching or preparatory workshops to reinforce students' confidence and readiness for higher education. This dual approach acknowledges that both economic capability and internal motivation are essential drivers of educational progression.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the influence of learning motivation and perceived parental financial

support on students' intention to pursue higher education among Grade XI students at SMAN 1 X Koto Singkarak. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory and socio-economic literature, the research employed a quantitative explanatory design with data analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that both learning motivation and perceived parental financial support significantly and positively influence students' college intention, with learning motivation demonstrating a stronger effect. These results confirm that psychological readiness, as shaped by motivation, plays a more dominant role than financial capacity in shaping students' educational aspirations in this context.

The research questions posed at the beginning of this study can now be definitively answered. First, *does learning motivation influence students' intention to pursue higher education?*—yes, it does, and to a substantial extent. Second, *does perceived parental financial support affect students' college intentions?*—yes, although its influence is more moderate compared to motivation. These findings offer valuable insights into how internal and external factors operate simultaneously to shape students' future educational plans.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single public high school in a rural area of West Sumatra, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or urban settings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias due to students' subjective perceptions, particularly regarding household income and educational motivation. Finally, the study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing intention at a single point in time without tracking whether these intentions ultimately translate into actual college enrollment.

Future research may consider expanding the scope to include multiple schools across different socio-economic and geographical contexts to enhance the external validity of the findings. Longitudinal studies could also provide a deeper understanding of how motivation and financial factors evolve over time and influence actual enrollment behaviors. Moreover, incorporating additional variables such as peer influence, academic achievement, or parental educational background could offer a more comprehensive model of college decision-making among high school students.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the critical role of both motivation and financial support in shaping students' aspirations for higher education. It calls for integrated educational strategies and policies that nurture both internal drive and external opportunity, particularly in underserved rural communities.

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