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Determinants of regency/municipality poverty in Central Kalimantan: A panel data analysis, 2020 – 2024

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Abstract. This study examines the effects of economic growth, the Human Development Index (HDI), the open unemployment rate, the population growth rate, and regional expenditure on poverty levels across regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan Province during 2020–2024. Using panel data from 14 regencies/ municipalities (70 observations), the study applies a random-effect model with clustered robust standard errors. The results indicate that HDI has a negative and significant effect on poverty, whereas regional expenditure has a positive and significant effect. Economic growth, the open unemployment rate, and the population growth rate are not statistically significant. These findings suggest that poverty reduction is more strongly influenced by human development and the effectiveness of public expenditure than by aggregate economic growth alone.

Keywords: *poverty; economic growth; HDI; open unemployment; regional expenditure; panel data; Central Kalimantan*

I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains one of the most persistent development challenges faced by both developed and developing countries. Beyond being an economic issue, poverty reflects broader limitations in access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, housing, and other essential public services that influence human well-being. Contemporary development economics recognizes poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond insufficient income and encompasses deprivation of capabilities and opportunities necessary for individuals to lead productive and meaningful lives (Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2022). Consequently, poverty reduction has become a central objective of national and regional development policies, particularly in developing economies where socioeconomic disparities remain substantial.

In Indonesia, poverty alleviation continues to occupy a strategic position within development planning. Although the national poverty rate has generally declined over the past two decades, significant disparities persist across provinces and districts. These differences

suggest that poverty is influenced not only by macroeconomic conditions but also by local socioeconomic characteristics, demographic dynamics, labor market conditions, and government policy interventions (Todaro & Smith, 2015). Regional-level analyses are therefore essential to identify the determinants of poverty and to formulate evidence-based policies tailored to local conditions.

Central Kalimantan Province presents an interesting context for examining poverty determinants. The province possesses abundant natural resources, including forestry, mining, plantations, and agricultural commodities, which contribute substantially to regional economic activity. Nevertheless, the existence of considerable natural resource wealth does not automatically translate into equitable welfare improvements across all regencies and municipalities. Data published by the Central Kalimantan Provincial Statistics Office indicate that poverty levels remain unevenly distributed among districts, with several regencies consistently recording higher poverty rates than the provincial average during the period 2020–2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Kalimantan Tengah, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026). This condition suggests that economic resources and development outcomes may not be distributed evenly throughout the province.

Economic growth is traditionally regarded as one of the primary mechanisms for reducing poverty. According to neoclassical growth theory, economic expansion increases production capacity, generates employment opportunities, and raises income levels, thereby improving household welfare and reducing poverty incidence (Solow, 1956). However, the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction is often more complex than predicted by theory. Economic growth may fail to reduce poverty when its benefits are concentrated among higher-income groups or specific sectors of the economy. Kuznets (1955) argued that economic development may initially increase inequality before eventually generating broader welfare improvements. As a result, economic growth alone may not be sufficient to alleviate poverty unless accompanied by inclusive distribution mechanisms.

Recent empirical studies provide mixed evidence regarding the influence of economic growth on poverty. Darma et al. (2024) found that economic growth did not consistently contribute to poverty reduction in Indonesia, whereas improvements in human development indicators produced stronger effects. Similarly, Hakim and Wijaya (2023) reported that economic growth exhibited limited explanatory power in reducing poverty in Yogyakarta Province. These findings indicate that poverty reduction depends not only on the pace of economic expansion but also on the quality and inclusiveness of growth.

Among the factors frequently associated with poverty reduction, human development occupies a particularly important position. The Human Development Index (HDI) reflects achievements in education, health, and living standards, all of which contribute directly to household productivity and earning capacity (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). The capability approach developed by Sen (1999) emphasizes that development should be understood as the expansion of human freedoms and capabilities rather than merely increases in income. Higher levels of education improve labor productivity, better health enhances work capacity, and improved living standards increase opportunities for economic participation. Consequently, improvements in HDI are theoretically expected to reduce poverty levels.

Labor market conditions also play an important role in shaping poverty dynamics. The open unemployment rate reflects the inability of the economy to absorb available labor into productive employment. Classical and Keynesian perspectives both suggest that unemployment reduces household income and increases vulnerability to poverty (Keynes, 1936). Nevertheless, in regions characterized by large informal sectors, open unemployment may not fully capture economic vulnerability because many individuals remain employed in low-productivity and low-income activities (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). Therefore, the relationship between unemployment and poverty may vary depending on regional economic structures and labor market characteristics.

Demographic factors constitute another important dimension of poverty analysis.

Population growth influences the demand for employment, education, healthcare, housing, and public infrastructure. Rapid population growth may increase pressure on available resources and public services, thereby limiting improvements in living standards (Malthus, 1798). Conversely, favorable demographic conditions can contribute positively to economic development when accompanied by productive labor absorption and effective human capital development (Bloom & Williamson, 1998). Consequently, the impact of population growth on poverty remains an empirical question that may differ across regions.

In addition to economic and demographic factors, government intervention through fiscal policy is widely recognized as an important determinant of poverty reduction. Regional expenditure serves as a mechanism through which local governments finance infrastructure development, social protection programs, education, healthcare services, and poverty alleviation initiatives. According to Wagner's theory of public expenditure, government spending tends to increase as economic development progresses and societal demands for public services expand (Wagner, 1883). Effective expenditure allocation is expected to improve access to public services and reduce poverty. However, the effectiveness of regional expenditure depends heavily on expenditure composition, targeting accuracy, implementation quality, and governance capacity (Putri & Yefriza, 2025).

Although previous studies have examined the effects of economic growth, HDI, unemployment, population growth, and government expenditure on poverty, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Some studies identify economic growth as the dominant factor, whereas others emphasize the stronger role of human development or fiscal interventions (Darma et al., 2024; Hakim & Wijaya, 2023; Putri & Yefriza, 2025). Moreover, most existing studies focus on specific provinces or districts outside Central Kalimantan. Given differences in economic structures, demographic characteristics, fiscal capacity, and development priorities, findings from other regions cannot be directly generalized to Central Kalimantan.

This study addresses this empirical gap by examining the determinants of poverty across all regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan Province using panel data covering the period 2020–2024. Unlike previous studies that focus on a limited number of explanatory variables, this study simultaneously incorporates economic growth, the Human Development Index, the open unemployment rate, the population growth rate, and regional expenditure within a single analytical framework. The use of panel data allows the analysis to capture both cross-sectional and temporal variations, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of poverty dynamics at the regional level.

Based on the theoretical considerations, empirical evidence, and research gaps discussed above, this study aims to analyze the effects of economic growth, HDI, the open unemployment rate, the population growth rate, and regional expenditure on poverty levels across regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan Province during 2020–2024. The findings are expected to contribute to the regional development literature and provide policy recommendations for designing more effective poverty reduction strategies in Central Kalimantan.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Capability Approach Theory. The capability approach, developed by Sen (1999), views development as a process of expanding people's substantive freedoms and capabilities. Within this framework, poverty is not merely interpreted as a lack of income but also as the inability of individuals to achieve valuable functionings such as obtaining education, maintaining good health, participating in economic activities, and accessing public services. Development should therefore focus on enlarging human capabilities rather than solely increasing economic output.

This perspective has significantly influenced contemporary poverty studies because it recognizes that income alone cannot fully explain welfare conditions. Haq (1995) further

emphasized that human development should become the central objective of development policy, as economic growth is meaningful only when it improves people's quality of life. Consequently, variables such as education, health, employment, and access to public resources become important determinants of poverty dynamics. This theoretical perspective provides the foundation for examining the role of HDI, unemployment, and government intervention in explaining poverty levels.

2.2 Poverty. Poverty is generally defined as a condition in which individuals or households are unable to fulfill the minimum living standards required to maintain a decent quality of life. According to the World Bank (2022), poverty extends beyond insufficient income and includes limited access to healthcare, education, housing, sanitation, and economic opportunities. Similarly, Todaro and Smith (2015) argue that poverty should be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by economic, social, demographic, and institutional factors.

In Indonesia, poverty is commonly measured using the poverty line approach developed by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), which identifies individuals whose expenditures fall below the minimum threshold required to satisfy basic food and non-food needs. However, poverty levels often vary significantly across regions due to differences in economic structure, labor market conditions, demographic characteristics, and government policies. Therefore, understanding poverty requires a comprehensive analysis of multiple determinants rather than relying solely on income-based indicators.

2.3 Economic Growth and Poverty. Economic growth refers to the increase in the value of goods and services produced within an economy over a certain period. The neoclassical growth theory proposed by Solow (1956) emphasizes the role of capital accumulation, labor, and technological progress in expanding productive capacity and increasing output. Higher levels of economic growth are generally expected to generate employment opportunities, increase income levels, and improve overall welfare, thereby contributing to poverty reduction.

Despite this theoretical expectation, the relationship between economic growth and poverty is not always straightforward. Kuznets (1955) argued that economic growth may initially increase income inequality before eventually improving welfare distribution. Recent empirical studies also show mixed findings. Darma et al. (2024) reported that economic growth does not always significantly reduce poverty in Indonesia, while Hakim and Wijaya (2023) found that growth alone is insufficient to explain poverty dynamics without considering human development and income distribution factors. These findings suggest that the inclusiveness of growth is more important than growth itself in reducing poverty.

2.4 Human Development Index and Poverty. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite indicator developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to measure achievements in health, education, and living standards (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). HDI is widely used to evaluate development performance because it captures dimensions of welfare that extend beyond economic growth. Human development contributes to improving individual capabilities and productivity, thereby increasing opportunities to participate in economic activities.

According to Becker's (1964) Human Capital Theory, investments in education and health enhance labor productivity and income-generating capacity. Individuals with better education and health tend to have greater access to employment opportunities and higher earnings. Empirical evidence supports this argument. Shidiq Ramdan Dinata et al. (2020) found that HDI significantly reduced poverty levels in Riau Province, while Darma et al. (2024) reported that HDI had a stronger effect on poverty reduction than economic growth. Therefore, HDI is theoretically expected to have a negative relationship with poverty.

2.5 Open Unemployment Rate and Poverty. The open unemployment rate represents the

proportion of the labor force actively seeking employment but unable to obtain work. Unemployment is commonly associated with lower household income and reduced economic security. Keynes (1936) argued that unemployment results from insufficient aggregate demand, leading to reduced production and income generation. Consequently, prolonged unemployment can increase poverty by limiting access to stable sources of income.

However, the relationship between unemployment and poverty may vary depending on regional economic structures. In developing economies, many individuals work in informal sectors characterized by low productivity and unstable earnings. According to Doeringer and Piore (1971), labor market segmentation often causes economic vulnerability even among employed individuals. Therefore, open unemployment may not fully capture poverty risks, particularly in regions where informal employment dominates economic activities. This condition makes the relationship between unemployment and poverty an empirical issue requiring further investigation.

2.6 Population Growth and Poverty. Population growth reflects the increase in the number of people within a region over time. Classical population theory proposed by Malthus (1798) suggests that rapid population growth may outpace the growth of resources and employment opportunities, leading to increased poverty and lower living standards. Higher population growth can place pressure on public services, infrastructure, housing, and labor markets, potentially reducing welfare levels.

Nevertheless, contemporary development theories offer a more optimistic perspective. Bloom and Williamson (1998) argue that population growth can generate a demographic dividend when a larger working-age population is productively employed. In such circumstances, population growth may contribute positively to economic development and poverty reduction. Therefore, the impact of population growth on poverty depends largely on labor market absorption capacity, educational attainment, and the effectiveness of public policies.

2.7 Regional Expenditure and Poverty. Regional expenditure represents government spending allocated through regional budgets to finance public services, infrastructure development, education, healthcare, social assistance, and other development programs. According to Wagner (1883), government expenditure tends to increase as economies develop and public demand for services expands. Government spending is expected to improve welfare by increasing access to public services and supporting economic opportunities for disadvantaged populations.

From a public finance perspective, effective regional expenditure can reduce poverty through improvements in infrastructure, human capital development, and social protection programs. However, the impact of expenditure depends not only on the amount spent but also on allocation quality and implementation effectiveness. Putri and Yefriza (2025) found that regional expenditure significantly influenced poverty levels in Indonesian districts, although the direction and magnitude of the effect varied across regions. Consequently, regional expenditure is expected to play an important role in explaining poverty dynamics in Central Kalimantan.

III. METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory design. The unit of analysis consists of 14 regencies/municipalities in Central Kalimantan Province during 2020–2024, resulting in 70 panel observations. The dependent variable is the poverty rate, measured by the percentage of poor people. The independent variables include economic growth, the Human Development Index (HDI), the open unemployment rate (OUR), the population growth rate, and regional expenditure.

The data used are secondary data obtained from annual editions of Central Kalimantan

Province in Figures published by the Central Kalimantan Provincial Statistics Office, labor indicator tables, social statistics, and recapitulations of realized regional government revenues and expenditures. One value for Barito Utara's regional expenditure in 2024 was unavailable in the main source; it was therefore imputed using the 2023 value based on the dataset-construction decision and recorded explicitly in the data-verification sheet.

The analysis was conducted using panel data regression with three alternative models, namely pooled ordinary least squares, the fixed-effect model, and the random-effect model. Model selection was carried out using the Chow test to compare the pooled and fixed-effect models, and the Hausman test to compare the fixed-effect and random-effect models. To evaluate serial correlation in the panel data, the Wooldridge test was employed. Because the Wooldridge test indicated autocorrelation, coefficient significance in the final model was interpreted using clustered robust standard errors at the regency/municipality level. Thus, the coefficients were still derived from the random-effect estimation, while the standard errors, t-values, and probabilities were corrected to produce more reliable inference in the presence of panel autocorrelation.

$$TK_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PE_{it} + \beta_2 IPM_{it} + \beta_3 TPT_{it} + \beta_4 LPP_{it} + \beta 5 BD_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Where: TK denotes the poverty rate; PE denotes economic growth; HDI denotes the Human Development Index; OUR denotes the open unemployment rate; PGR denotes the population growth rate; RE denotes regional expenditure; i denotes the regency/municipality; and t denotes the year of observation. Partial effects were tested using the t-test, whereas simultaneous effects were tested using the F-test. Interpretation of the findings focuses on the selected model deemed statistically appropriate.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Model Selection Test. Before estimating the determinants of poverty, several model selection procedures were conducted to identify the most appropriate panel data specification. The Chow test produced a statistic of 149.573 with a probability value of 0.0000, indicating that the pooled ordinary least squares model should be rejected in favor of a model that accounts for cross-sectional heterogeneity across regencies and municipalities. Furthermore, the Hausman test suggested that the random-effect specification was more appropriate than the fixed-effect model.

The Wooldridge test subsequently indicated the presence of autocorrelation in the panel dataset. To address this issue and obtain more reliable statistical inference, the final estimation was conducted using a random-effect model with clustered robust standard errors at the regency/municipality level. This approach provides coefficient estimates that remain consistent while correcting standard errors for autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity within panels (Baltagi, 2021; Wooldridge, 2010).

4.2 Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to provide an overview of the characteristics of the variables included in the analysis. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Poverty Rate (%)	5.046	1.152	3.090	7.430
Economic Growth (%)	3.578	2.776	-3.180	7.410
Human Development Index	72.327	3.274	67.580	82.530
Open Unemployment Rate (%)	4.070	1.085	1.960	6.460
Population Growth Rate (%)	1.579	0.581	0.530	4.300
Regional Expenditure (Billion IDR)	1,343.310	453.085	571.765	2,723.682

Source: Processed data (2026)

Table 1 shows that the average poverty rate across regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan during 2020–2024 was 5.046 percent. The average HDI reached 72.327, indicating a moderate level of human development. Regional expenditure exhibited considerable variation among local governments, reflecting differences in fiscal capacity and development priorities. Such variation is expected to contribute to differences in poverty outcomes across regions.

4.3 Panel Data Regression Results. Following the model selection process, the random-effect model with clustered robust standard errors was employed as the final estimation model. The estimation results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Random Effect Estimation Results

Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic	Probability
Economic Growth	0.035	1.596	0.1105
Human Development Index	-0.105	-2.036	0.0418
Open Unemployment Rate	-0.115	-0.705	0.4808
Population Growth Rate	-0.156	-1.230	0.2187
Regional Expenditure	0.000694	2.240	0.0251
Constant	5.779	3.648	0.0003

Model Statistics	Value
R-squared	0.2258
Prob (F-statistic)	0.0050

Source: Processed data (2026)

Based on Table 2, the estimated regression equation can be expressed as follows:

$$TK_{it} = 5.779 + 0.035\ PE_{it} - 0.105\ HDI_{it} - 0.115\ OUR_{it} - 0.156\ PGR_{it} + 0.000694\ RE_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

The probability value of the F-statistic is 0.0050, which is lower than the 5 percent significance level. This result indicates that economic growth, HDI, open unemployment, population growth, and regional expenditure jointly affect poverty levels across regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan Province.

4.4 Coefficient of Determination. The coefficient of determination (R^2) obtained from the model is 0.2258. This value indicates that approximately 22.58 percent of the variation in poverty levels can be explained by economic growth, HDI, open unemployment, population growth, and regional expenditure. Meanwhile, the remaining 77.42 percent is influenced by other factors outside the model, such as income inequality, labor productivity, infrastructure quality, social protection programs, and institutional factors. Although the R^2 value appears relatively modest, such results are common in socioeconomic studies because poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by numerous interrelated determinants (Sen, 1999; United Nations Development Programme, 2024; Widarjono, 2018). Therefore, the explanatory power of the model remains acceptable for poverty analysis.

4.5 Economic Growth and Poverty. The estimation results indicate that economic growth has a positive coefficient of 0.035 but does not significantly affect poverty levels. This finding suggests that economic growth experienced by regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan during 2020–2024 has not directly translated into poverty reduction. One possible explanation is that economic growth in the province is still dominated by resource-based sectors such as mining, forestry, and plantations, which tend to generate output growth without necessarily creating broad employment opportunities for low-income households. Consequently, economic gains may be concentrated among specific groups while poorer households receive limited benefits. This finding is consistent with the arguments of Kuznets (1955), who suggested

that economic growth may initially increase inequality before generating widespread welfare improvements. Similar findings were reported by Darma et al. (2024) and Hakim and Wijaya (2023), who found that economic growth alone was insufficient to explain poverty reduction in Indonesia.

4.6 Human Development Index and Poverty. The Human Development Index has a negative and statistically significant coefficient of -0.105. This finding indicates that improvements in education, health, and living standards significantly contribute to poverty reduction in Central Kalimantan. The result strongly supports the Capability Approach proposed by Sen (1999), which emphasizes that poverty reduction depends on expanding people's capabilities rather than merely increasing income. Better educational attainment improves skills and labor productivity, while improved health conditions enhance individuals' ability to participate in economic activities. The findings are also consistent with Becker's (1964) Human Capital Theory and empirical studies by Shidiq Ramdan Dinata et al. (2020) and Darma et al. (2024), which identified HDI as one of the strongest determinants of poverty reduction.

4.7 Open Unemployment Rate and Poverty. The open unemployment rate exhibits a negative coefficient but does not significantly affect poverty levels. This result suggests that unemployment is not the primary determinant of poverty across regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan. The insignificant effect may be explained by the substantial role of the informal sector in the regional economy. Many individuals who are not formally employed continue to generate income through agricultural activities, small businesses, and informal services. As argued by Doeringer and Piore (1971), labor market segmentation often causes economic vulnerability that is not fully reflected in conventional unemployment indicators. Therefore, poverty is influenced not only by employment status but also by job quality and income adequacy.

4.8 Population Growth and Poverty. The population growth rate has a negative but statistically insignificant coefficient. This finding indicates that demographic growth has not significantly influenced poverty levels during the observation period. The result may be attributed to the unique demographic characteristics of Central Kalimantan, which has a relatively low population density and a large geographical area. Under such conditions, population growth does not necessarily create excessive pressure on employment opportunities or public services. This finding contrasts with Malthusian theory (Malthus, 1798) but supports the demographic dividend perspective proposed by Bloom and Williamson (1998), which argues that population growth can contribute positively to development when accompanied by adequate labor market opportunities.

4.9 Regional Expenditure and Poverty. Regional expenditure has a positive and statistically significant coefficient of 0.000694. This finding indicates that higher regional expenditure is associated with higher poverty levels across regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan. Although this result appears counterintuitive, several explanations are possible. First, local governments facing higher poverty levels may allocate larger budgets as part of poverty alleviation efforts, creating a positive statistical relationship. Second, increases in expenditure do not automatically reduce poverty if spending is concentrated on administrative functions rather than productive and pro-poor programs. According to Wagner (1883), rising public expenditure accompanies economic development; however, its effectiveness depends on allocation quality and implementation efficiency. Similar findings were reported by Putri and Yefriza (2025), who concluded that the effectiveness of expenditure allocation is more important than expenditure size alone. Therefore, improving expenditure quality may be more critical than simply increasing government spending in reducing poverty across Central Kalimantan.

V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that poverty levels across regencies and municipalities in Central Kalimantan Province during the period 2020–2024 are more strongly influenced by human development and regional expenditure than by economic growth, the open unemployment rate, or population growth. The panel data analysis using a random-effect model with clustered robust standard errors indicates that the Human Development Index (HDI) has a negative and statistically significant effect on poverty, confirming that improvements in education, health, and living standards contribute substantially to poverty reduction. In contrast, regional expenditure exhibits a positive and significant relationship with poverty, suggesting that increases in government spending have not yet been fully translated into effective poverty alleviation outcomes and may reflect higher fiscal responses in regions experiencing greater poverty levels. Meanwhile, economic growth, open unemployment, and population growth do not demonstrate significant partial effects, indicating that these variables are not the primary determinants of poverty during the study period. These findings imply that poverty reduction policies in Central Kalimantan should prioritize investments in human development and improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and targeting accuracy of regional expenditure. Nevertheless, this study is limited by the use of one imputed regional expenditure observation and the relatively limited set of explanatory variables. Future research is therefore encouraged to incorporate additional variables such as income inequality, sectoral economic structure, social assistance programs, and expenditure composition to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of regional poverty dynamics.

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