

The Hidden Costs of Statelessness: Educational Challenges for Indonesian Children in the Philippines Migrant Settlements

Wolter Weol, Christar Rumbay, Imee Sendiang
Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Manado, Indonesia
Email: wolter.weol@iakanmanado.ac.id, christar.indotec@gmail.com,
imee.sendiang@iakan.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Citizenship documentation, Indonesian migrants, statelessness, socio-legal barriers, access to higher education	This research qualitatively explores the challenges Indonesian migrant children in the Philippines face in accessing higher education due to incomplete citizenship records, financial difficulties, and institutional restrictions. Interviews with children, parents, educators, and government officials reveal that statelessness remains a pressing issue alongside economic and bureaucratic barriers. Programs like Sekolah Indonesia Davao (SID) and the Indonesian Consulate of Davao (KJRI) provide support, but many students still cannot pursue college due to legal and financial obstacles. The study's findings highlight critical implications for educational policy reform and bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and the Philippines. It documents multidimensional barriers—including legal documentation gaps, financial constraints, and institutional inadequacies—that systemically exclude stateless children, violating international human rights standards. The research offers evidence-based insights to guide targeted interventions. Policymakers can use these findings to streamline documentation and expand scholarships; educational institutions can adopt inclusive enrollment policies; bilateral agencies can improve cooperation to resolve citizenship issues; and community groups can boost awareness and support services. This study also contributes to regional discussions on migrant education rights, providing a framework applicable to other stateless populations in Southeast Asia. Key recommendations include simplifying legal procedures, enhancing bilateral agreements, increasing financial aid, and strengthening institutional partnerships. These steps represent concrete ways to improve educational access and outcomes for this marginalized group. The report advocates for legislative reform, stronger bilateral cooperation, and community-driven efforts to ensure equitable education access for stateless Indonesian children in the Philippines.

Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0)



INTRODUCTION

Indonesian expatriate children in the Philippines still have trouble accessing higher education because of systemic problems. Strict laws, financial difficulties, and unclear citizenship status are the main barriers (Kamogawa & Nakaya, 2025). Many families, especially those working in farming and fishing, lack legal residence permits. This means their children cannot attend college and have limited access to government support (Razali et al., 2015; Razali, 2023).

People have been migrating from Indonesia to the Philippines for a long time, especially from the Sangir Islands. Those who migrated to Mindanao in the 1970s established settlements in Davao Occidental, Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato, and North Cotabato. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR) reported in 2015 that 8,756 registered Indonesians in Mindanao were at risk of becoming stateless. A joint verification project in 2016 confirmed the citizenship of 664 people, giving them the choice of either Philippine or Indonesian nationality. However, many still lack any form of documentation.

The Philippine government issues Alien Certificates of Registration (ACR) to foreign nationals as a means to stay legally in the country (Crenshaw, 2015; Johnson & Johnson, 2024). However, the ACR does not confer citizenship rights and must be renewed annually at the Bureau of Immigration, usually for a fee (Fragomen, 2024). Indonesian nationality laws exacerbate the problem because citizens risk losing their nationality if they live abroad for more than five consecutive years without government service or fail to formally declare every five years their intention to retain Indonesian nationality (Aiello et al., 2025; Kingston & Stam, 2017; Koehler et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2023; Selçuk, 2025). Consequently, many long-term residents face citizenship difficulties that hinder their access to college.

According to Philippine law, citizenship is based on *jus sanguinis*, meaning it is inherited from parents rather than determined by place of birth. Generally, children of two Indonesian parents are considered Indonesian citizens unless they undergo formal legal processes to change their status. When a child has parents from two different countries, they may hold dual citizenship temporarily but must choose one nationality upon turning 18 because Indonesia does not allow dual citizenship for adults (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024).

The Indonesian government established *Sekolah Indonesia Davao* (SID) in 1968 as part of the *Sekolah Indonesia Luar Negeri* (SILN) initiative to address basic educational needs. SID offers free tuition, dormitory accommodation, and daily meals from primary school until Grade 12. This allows students to receive a basic and secondary education despite legal or financial issues. However, graduates in the Philippines often face difficulties transitioning to higher education due to residency restrictions and paperwork requirements. SID collaborates with Indonesian institutions such as Universitas Lambung Mangkurat (UNLAM) Banjarmasin, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, and Politeknik Piksi Ganesha Bandung to tackle these challenges. Although these collaborations provide more college opportunities, many students still struggle academically because of limited financial resources, lack of scholarship awareness, or family responsibilities.

Despite substantial literature on statelessness and migration globally, there is a significant gap in research specifically examining the educational access challenges faced by stateless children in Southeast Asian migrant contexts (Berger & Garg, 2024; Bhat & Shahid, 2024; Pantić et al., 2025). While existing studies address statelessness among Indonesian migrants in the Philippines and broader migration patterns in the region, systematic empirical research investigating the intersection of legal documentation status, citizenship policies, socio-economic constraints, and educational access for Indonesian migrant children in the Philippines remains notably absent (Gentry et al., 2024; Mikiewicz, 2021; Perna & Titus, 2015).

Previous scholarship has mainly focused on the legal aspects of citizenship and statelessness (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; UNESCO, 2019) or on the sociological aspects of migrant integration and community formation, without comprehensively examining how these factors jointly influence educational trajectories and opportunities. Furthermore, while humanitarian organizations have documented the scale of statelessness in Mindanao, academic research has not sufficiently explored the educational implications of this legal limbo status. The role of institutional support mechanisms, such as *Sekolah Indonesia Davao* (SID) and the Indonesian Consulate (KJRI), as well as their partnerships with Indonesian universities, in facilitating or limiting higher education access for this population has not been systematically evaluated. Additionally, the complex dynamics involving parental decision-making, family economic constraints, scholarship availability and awareness, and community support systems

in shaping educational outcomes remain underexplored (Bortolin, 2020; Meili et al., 2025; Scheurich & Mason, 2024).

This research gap is especially important given the increasing recognition of education as a fundamental human right under international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), to which both Indonesia and the Philippines are signatories. The lack of comprehensive research on how statelessness and documentation barriers specifically restrict higher education access represents a critical knowledge deficit that hampers evidence-based policy formulation and intervention design. Moreover, within the broader field of migrant education studies, Southeast Asian contexts—especially those involving transnational populations navigating dual legal systems—remain underrepresented compared to European, North American, or Middle Eastern migration studies.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated examination of legal, economic, institutional, and social factors affecting educational access for stateless Indonesian children in the Philippines. This study is the first to systematically document and analyze the specific barriers to higher education faced by this population through a comprehensive qualitative investigation involving multiple stakeholder perspectives. By employing a case study methodology grounded in human rights frameworks, legal pluralism theory, and intersectionality theory, this research offers a theoretically informed yet empirically grounded understanding of how structural inequalities lead to educational exclusion. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how qualitative approaches can capture lived experiences and institutional dynamics that quantitative methods often miss, providing rich contextual insights to inform policy and practice.

This study contributes three key advances to migrant education scholarship. First, it offers the first comprehensive empirical documentation of educational access challenges faced by stateless Indonesian children in Philippine migrant settlements, filling a critical gap in Southeast Asian migration and education literature. Second, it develops a conceptual framework that integrates legal, economic, and social dimensions of educational exclusion, showing how multiple marginalizations intersect to create compounded barriers. Third, it delivers actionable, evidence-based policy recommendations grounded in stakeholder perspectives and international human rights standards, providing practical guidance for bilateral cooperation, institutional reform, and community-based interventions. By addressing this gap, the study advances both theoretical understanding and practical solutions for one of the most vulnerable populations within the Southeast Asian migration landscape.

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative research design, using a case study methodology to examine challenges faced by Indonesian children in the Philippines accessing higher education. The case study approach enabled in-depth contextual analysis of complex social issues involving multiple stakeholders and intersecting legal, economic, and institutional factors. This design allowed for a comprehensive examination of how structural barriers manifested in individual and collective experiences, providing rich qualitative data to inform theoretical understanding and practical interventions.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience or relevant expertise related to the research topic. The sample included four groups:

1. Grade 12 students and alumni from *Sekolah Indonesia Davao* (SID), who shared firsthand educational experiences and challenges.
2. Parents of SID students, who provided insights on family decision-making, economic constraints, and legal documentation issues.

3. Teachers and administrators at SID, offering institutional perspectives on student needs and systemic barriers.
4. Indonesian government officials from the Konsulat Jenderal Republik Indonesia (KJRI), who discussed policy frameworks and consular support.

The total sample consisted of 25 participants: 8 students/alumni, 9 parents, 4 educators, and 4 KJRI officials. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, ensuring depth and diversity of perspectives. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) with Grade 12 students, and document analysis of relevant legal and policy materials were employed.

All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Institutional review board approval and informed consent from participants were obtained, with confidentiality maintained through anonymization and secure data storage.

While the sample focused on participants connected to SID and KJRI in Davao and may not represent all Indonesian migrant settlements, it provided sufficient depth for understanding intersecting barriers to higher education access in this context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter outlines the study's results, examined thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process: (1) Getting to know the data, (2) Making the first code, (3) Finding patterns that happen consistently, (4) Making topics that are relevant, (5) Reviewing and defining topics, and (6) Making final report. Data were collected via interviews with personnel at the Indonesian Consulate (KJRI), Indonesian migrant parents, Grade 12 students, alumni, and relevant legal and policy papers. The research identifies four key themes: (1) Legal and Citizenship Obstacles, (2) Financial Distress, (3) Reliance on Scholarships and Insufficient Awareness, and (4) Parental and Community Intervention

Theme 1: Legal and Citizenship Barriers Findings

Interviews with KJRI staff or personnel and parents found that the lack of legal documents was the primary cause encountered by the students or their children. Many people were in a "grey area" of citizenship since they did not have the right documents, such birth certificates, Alien Certificates of Registration (ACR), or Certificates of Indonesian Citizenship (SKRI). Philippine immigration authorities said that colleges and universities would not let them in without their important documents. Most Schools need either an ACR or a student visa, and without one, students are unable to enroll.

Parents and students were also confused and worried about Indonesia's rule on dual citizenship. When they reach 18 years of old, children must choose one nationality by law. This restriction frequently makes things unclear throughout their education, making it harder for them to get both educational opportunities and grants. Families must deal with complicated legal systems that make things worse for their children in real life.

These problems are made considerably worse by the legal obligations of both countries. The Civil Registry Law (Act No. 3753) and the Immigration Act (CA 613) in the Philippines says that it requires official documents to be recognized and get services. In Indonesia, Law No.12/2006 Citizenship only allows dual nationality in highly restricted cases. Families are stuck between two legal systems that don't operate together, which makes it hard for them to access in education.

Discussion

These findings align closely with existing literature on statelessness and educational exclusion. Dryden-Peterson (2010) identified inadequate documentation as one of the most

significant structural impediments to higher education access for refugees and displaced populations globally, noting that bureaucratic barriers often prove insurmountable even when individuals possess educational qualifications. The experiences of Indonesian migrant children in the Philippines exemplify this pattern, demonstrating how documentation gaps create cascading exclusions across multiple life domains. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2019) similarly documented how migration and displacement contexts produce "legal invisibility" that denies children access to fundamental rights, including education, despite international commitments to inclusive education systems.

From the perspective of legal pluralism by (Griffiths, 1986), these results to highlight the direct conflict between Philippine immigration regulations and Indonesian nationality laws. Instead of making things clearer, the merging of these two legal systems makes things even more difficult, putting children in a very dangerous situation.

This exclusion is clearly against a Human Rights-Based Approach to Education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) explains that both Indonesia and the Philippines must make sure that everyone has equal access to education, no matter what their citizenship status is. The fact that national laws and international obligations can't be reconciled shows a big gap between what the law says and what children are going through.

These results are also in line with Dryden-Peterson's (2010) worldwide study, which shows that being undocumented is still one of the biggest structural impediments to pursuing higher education. The data given implies that this problem is not limited to this situation but is part of a larger trend throughout the world in which strict paperwork requirements knowingly deny children their basic right to study.

Theme 2: Economic Hardship Findings

Parents kept saying that their children couldn't go to college because they were poor. Families who relied on farming, fishing, or informal jobs had trouble paying for the school since they had to pay for transportation and to fill out legal documentation. Students in the focus group said that without scholarships, a lot of them would have to work instead of study, and some of them were already helping to pay for things around the home. Alumni testimonials backed this up, illustrating how limited financial resources made the problems of insufficient paperwork much worse, which meant that many families couldn't get their children the education they required.

Discussion

The economic challenges facing Indonesian migrant families reflect broader patterns documented in research on poverty and educational inequality. Fiske and Ladd (2004) demonstrated in their study of post-apartheid South Africa that marginalized populations face compounded barriers to educational access, where poverty intersects with other forms of disadvantage to create multiplicative rather than merely additive effects. Bray's (2002) work on education financing in Asia similarly showed that hidden costs—transportation, materials, documentation fees, and opportunity costs of foregone labor—often exceed direct tuition expenses and prove prohibitive for low-income families.

Economic difficulties in these families reflect the findings of Fiske and Ladd (2004) and Bray (2002), who contend that marginalized populations have unequal obstacles in obtaining higher education. The results confirm the fact that financial instability not only restrict options but also worsens the consequences of inadequate documentation. This dynamic is easier to understand when we use Intersectionality Theory. Poverty, being undocumented, and having an ethnic identity all make these children more vulnerable in complex ways, which means they have to deal with a lot of problems that are all interrelated.

This case shows that there is a bigger problem with the structural arrangement of educational systems. The Philippine Constitution (Art. XIV) formally protects education as a right, but in practice, migrant children cannot access higher education since it costs too much to meet legal and administrative requirements. The costs of tuition, transportation, and documentation transform a constitutional promise into a privilege that only those who can afford it may enjoy.

Furthermore, the finding that some students must balance work and study to support household expenses connects to broader literature on child labor and educational attainment. Post and Pong (2000) found that economic necessity forcing children into labor substantially reduces educational achievement and progression, creating intergenerational cycles of poverty and limited opportunity. For Indonesian migrant families in the Philippines, this pattern is exacerbated by their legal marginalization, which limits employment opportunities and earning potential, thereby intensifying economic pressures on households.

Theme 3: Scholarship Dependency and Limited Awareness Findings

All the respondents who participated said that scholarships were the only way to go to college. Parents and students both saw scholarships as a requirement, not a secondary benefit for getting into college. But not everyone knew about the possibilities that were offered. Some families didn't know about or couldn't apply for Indonesian university scholarships because of trip costs, missing documentation, and other logistical issues. Sekolah Indonesia Davao (SID) and the KJRI also provided information about these scholarships. Alumni testimonials also showed that students' chances of getting scholarships were generally lower when they had to wait or had problems with their paperwork. This suggests that the weight of navigating rules and regulations and being financially dependent makes it even harder for families to make decisions about pursuing to higher education.

Discussion

Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000) illustrates how connections and networks influence individuals' opportunities, and the data confirms the fact. For a lot of families, Sekolah Indonesia Davao (SID) and the KJRI are more than just public institutions; they are lifelines where they can get information and get to learn about scholarships programs and meet other people who can assist them to the school. But as Perna and Titus (2005) states that, just having access doesn't mean everyone has the same chance. Families also need to know these chances and opportunities are out there, be willing to put themselves forward and have the financial resources to follow through.

The problems are that a lot of families don't do well in these areas. High travel fees, lack of documentation, and limited information to get in contact with people mean that scholarship information does not always get to the people who need it most. Because of this, scholarships frequently seem like patch instead of a solution. It may help some individuals in the short term, but they don't solve the fundamental problems that keep people from getting an education.

Theme 4: Parental and Community Mediation Findings

Interviews revealed that parents were determined, even if they didn't have much money. Many were ready to sacrifice, and others even told their children to balance employment and school so they could keep learning. When parents from various countries differed on where their children should go to school, however, conflicts in the home sometimes made things worse. These situations, community supports were very important to extent. Teachers at Sekolah Indonesia Davao (SID), as well as NGOs and religious or missionary organizations, gave families support and encouragement that helped them at least to some extent.

Discussion

Findings are in line with Intersectionality Theory, which states that social factors, legal issues, and economic problems all affect a person's chances of getting to an education. The dedication and sacrifices of parents demonstrate their strength and willingness to address the challenges face them. The significance of community organizations highlights the importance of local, grassroots initiatives. But these efforts are just short term in general inequalities, not long-term solutions, unless they have strong solid foundation from structure and the state.

Cross-Theme Synthesis

The themes shows that there are many issues that make it hard to get

1. Several students can't get into higher education because of legal restrictions.
2. Economic problems that children could not attend college because they must pay for tuition, transportation, and legal documentation.
3. Relying on scholarships shows how fragile current chances are, as they aren't available to everyone and generally only work as a short-term remedy instead of long-term solutions.
4. Parental and community support helps to some extent; these efforts are still not enough to deal with structural problems.

These results align with the conceptual framework provided in Chapter 2, which highlights the importance of human rights, legal barriers, economic difficulties, and social barriers within comprehensive human rights framework. Legal pluralism, social capital, and intersectionality collectively influence access to the higher education. Institution such as SID and KJRI are significant as they offer information and assistance; nevertheless, their impact remains limited. If there isn't a permanent, bilateral, and right-based system in place, children will still be at risk of dropping out to school or having force to work instead of going to college.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian migrant children in the Philippines face significant barriers to higher education stemming from incomplete citizenship and legal documentation, limited institutional support, and financial and social challenges. Although organizations like *Sekolah Indonesia Davao* (SID), the Indonesian Consulate, and scholarship programs offer essential assistance, these measures fall short without comprehensive, long-term reforms. The study suggests simplifying legal document procedures, enhancing bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and the Philippines, expanding scholarship opportunities, strengthening university partnerships, and raising community awareness to better support affected families. It emphasizes that educational access should be recognized as a fundamental human right, independent of citizenship or administrative obstacles, guaranteeing dignity and equal opportunity for all children. Future research should explore the experiences of Indonesian migrant children outside of established institutional networks and assess the impact of proposed policy reforms on educational outcomes across diverse migrant communities.

REFERENCE

- Aiello, E., Chiappelli, T., di Grigoli, A., Mancaniello, M. R., Mara, L.-C., & Sordé Martí, T. (2025). School success for migrant and refugee children: A systematic literature review. *SAGE Open*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251330126>
- Berger, T., & Garg, U. V. (2024). Entangled contestations: Transnational dynamics of contesting liberal citizenship in South Asia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(19), 4809–4832. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2376406>

- Bhat, M. M. A., & Shahid, R. (2024). Introduction: Mutual attrition of citizenship, democracy and the rule of law in South and Southeast Asia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(19), 4787–4808. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2376403>
- Bortolin, S. (2020). Intersectionality: A pathway towards inclusive education? *PROSPECTS*, 49(3–4), 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09461-6>
- Crenshaw, K. (2015). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Gentry, A. N., Martin, J. P., & Douglas, K. A. (2024). Social capital assessments in higher education: A systematic literature review. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, Article 1498422. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1498422>
- Johnson, N. N., & Johnson, T. L. (2024). The race-gender-equity-leadership matrix: Intersectionality and its application in higher education literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 94(4), 503–545. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347241259454>
- Kamogawa, A., & Nakaya, A. (2025). Out-of-school children in Southeast Asia: A case study of Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, and Malaysia. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), Article 2481004. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2481004>
- Kingston, L. N., & Stam, K. R. (2017). Recovering from statelessness: Resettled Bhutanese-Nepali and Karen refugees reflect on the lack of citizenship. *Journal of Human Rights*, 16(4), 436–455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2015.1103160>
- Koehler, C., Palaiologou, N., & Brussino, O. (2022). Holistic refugee and newcomer education in Europe: Mapping, upscaling and institutionalising promising practices from Germany and Greece (OECD Education Working Papers No. 273). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9ea4c08a-en>
- Lim, M., Metzler, J., & Cherian, A. (2023). Barriers and facilitators to education access for marginalised non-citizen children in Malaysia: A qualitative study. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), Article 1076. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15112-3>
- Meili, L., Schmid, T., & Sommer, S. (2025). Intersectional inequality in education in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 71(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.70008>
- Mikiewicz, P. (2021). Social capital and education—An attempt to synthesize conceptualization arising from various theoretical origins. *Cogent Education*, 8(1), Article 1907956. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1907956>
- Pantić, N., Gialdini, C., Packwood, H., & Viry, G. (2025). A matrix of educational policies to support migrant students across Europe. *European Educational Research Journal*, 24(2), 214–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041251337233>
- Perna, L. W., & Titus, M. A. (2015). The relationship between parental involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group differences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(5), 485–518. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2005.0036>
- Peungcharoenkun, T., & Waluyo, B. (2024). Understanding migrant school-aged children's education in public schools Thailand: Teachers' perspectives and classroom narratives. *SAGE Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241245379>

- Razali, R. M. (Ed.). (2023). *Safeguarding against statelessness at birth: International law and domestic legal frameworks of ASEAN member states*. Springer Nature Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5371-2>
- Razali, R. M., Nordin, R., & Duraisingam, T. J. (2015). Migration and statelessness: Turning the spotlight on Malaysia. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 23(S), 19–36.
- Scheurich, J. J., & Mason, M. (2024). An intersectionality-based research framework and methodology that emphasizes systemic inequities in public schooling, including racism, sexism, and classism. *Urban Education*, 59(6), 1532–1560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086241254815>
- Selçuk, K. (2025). A scoping review of barriers to education faced by migrant minors in Türkiye. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 34(2), Article e70010. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.70010>