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The Impact of Government Expenditure and Labor Force on Regional Economic Growth: Evidence from Kendari, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the influence of government expenditure and labor force on economic growth in Kendari City, Indonesia, during the post COVID 19 recovery period from 2021 to 2023. Grounded in Keynesian economic theory, the research aims to assess whether public fiscal interventions and workforce dynamics significantly contribute to local economic performance in an emerging urban economy. A quantitative, non experimental approach was employed using multiple linear regression on secondary data obtained from official statistics. The findings reveal that both government expenditure and labor force have a positive but statistically insignificant relationship with economic growth. The R squared value of 0.318 indicates a moderate explanatory power, with the majority of economic variation left unexplained by the model. The insignificance may stem from model limitations, such as omitted variables and short time horizons, or structural issues in budget allocation and labor market efficiency. These results suggest that while public spending and labor inputs are directionally aligned with growth, their impacts may depend on contextual variables like institutional capacity and sectoral targeting. The study contributes to regional economic literature by offering empirical evidence from a mid sized Indonesian city, underlining the importance of coordinated fiscal and labor strategies. Future studies should incorporate longer term data and additional explanatory variables to capture the complex dynamics of local development.

Keywords: Economic Growth, Government Expenditure, Labor Force, Regional Development, Kendari.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, government expenditure and labor force dynamics have garnered increasing attention as fundamental drivers of regional economic growth, particularly in emerging economies. The theoretical justification for employing government spending as a stimulus for economic activity lies in Keynesian economics, which posits that public expenditure can enhance aggregate demand, address market inefficiencies, and generate multiplier effects that catalyze economic expansion (Abdelli et al., 2024; Aprianti et al., 2023). When strategically allocated to productive sectors such as infrastructure, health, and education, government expenditure serves not only as a mechanism for short term stabilization but also as a long term investment in the productive capacity of both labor and capital. Recent empirical studies affirm that public spending, when aligned with national and local development priorities, has the potential to enhance human capital and accelerate the convergence of regional economies (Amri, 2020; Hassan et al., 2023).

Concurrently, the role of the labor force in stimulating economic growth is well documented across diverse geographical contexts. As observed in South Asia and East Asia, demographic shifts and labor reallocation have historically played pivotal roles in structural economic transformations (Islam, 2022; Sha, 2023). In the Indonesian context, increased labor participation particularly in urban centers has contributed to productivity improvements, innovation diffusion, and sectoral diversification (Vikia, 2023). Enhancements in labor quality through education and training have also been linked to improved output per worker and higher income levels. These findings collectively underscore that labor is not merely a factor of production but a dynamic component that interacts synergistically with capital and institutional structures to drive sustained regional development (Alam et al., 2023; Nibret, 2019).

The post COVID 19 economic recovery period in Indonesian cities (2021–2025) provides a timely context to examine the efficacy of these two critical variables. Emerging evidence indicates a moderate yet consistent economic resurgence in urban Indonesia, supported by fiscal stimulus and a revitalized labor market. Cities like Kendari have shown signs of economic recovery characterized by a rebound in consumer spending, public investment, and labor absorption (Chae & Hanson, 2021; Sá & Luís, 2024). These trends mirror global patterns in emerging markets, where counter cyclical fiscal policies have played a vital role in mitigating the economic downturn caused by the pandemic and in setting the groundwork for long term resilience and structural transformation.

The relevance of Keynesian fiscal principles is particularly pronounced in this context. During economic downturns, increased government expenditure is expected to offset reductions in private sector activity by boosting aggregate demand and triggering multiplier effects (Ahuja & Pandit, 2020). Empirical findings from developing countries demonstrate that fiscal stimulus measures targeted at infrastructure and social services significantly improve economic performance and reduce unemployment (Hassan et al., 2023). These interventions are instrumental in post crisis recovery strategies, and their successful implementation hinges on the effective integration of public policy with labor market reforms.

In Indonesian cities, fiscal interventions have ranged from direct support to households and businesses to investment in infrastructure and public services. The city of Kendari, as the capital of Southeast Sulawesi Province, represents a critical case for analyzing how local governments have leveraged these tools to stimulate economic recovery. The expansion of public spending in Kendari has been directed towards revitalizing infrastructure, improving health and education services, and enhancing the local business climate all of which are expected to generate multiplier effects and stimulate private sector investment.

At the same time, the labor market in Kendari has experienced a modest recovery, with increases in labor participation and gradual improvements in employment conditions. These developments suggest that the synergy between government expenditure and labor dynamics can be a powerful engine for economic revitalization when strategically aligned. However, the effectiveness of such policies is contingent upon the productivity of labor and the efficiency of public spending. Empirical research in Southeast Asia emphasizes that without parallel improvements in labor productivity, the returns on public investment may be suboptimal (Kostrytsya & Burlai, 2021; Vikia, 2023).

The existing literature on government spending and labor dynamics in urban Southeast Asia provides valuable insights but also reveals gaps in understanding the localized interactions between these variables. While several macroeconomic studies have addressed national level trends, fewer have focused on subnational analyses, particularly in medium sized cities like Kendari. The localized economic structures, administrative capacities, and demographic profiles of such cities necessitate context specific investigations to inform tailored policy recommendations. Moreover, prior studies often overlook the nuanced mechanisms through which government spending and labor inputs interact to influence regional economic growth trajectories.

This study seeks to address this gap by empirically analyzing the influence of government expenditure and labor force participation on economic growth in Kendari City during the post pandemic recovery period (2021–2025). By employing a multiple linear regression framework, the study aims to quantify the respective contributions of these variables and assess the statistical significance of their effects. The research hypothesizes that while both variables exhibit positive associations with economic growth, their statistical impacts may differ due to contextual factors such as administrative efficiency and labor market rigidity.

The novelty of this research lies in its subnational focus, which enriches the broader discourse on regional development by providing empirical insights from a mid sized urban center in Indonesia. It also contributes to the growing body of literature that tests Keynesian propositions within localized settings, offering evidence on how public expenditure and labor characteristics influence economic recovery and growth at the city level. The study's scope encompasses an analysis of secondary data from regional statistical bureaus, enabling a grounded evaluation of policy impacts and economic trends in Kendari. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform local policymakers and development practitioners seeking to optimize fiscal strategies and labor interventions for sustained economic growth.

METHOD

This study adopts a non experimental, quantitative research design to examine the influence of government expenditure and labor on regional economic growth in Kendari City during the post pandemic recovery period of 2021–2025. The approach is consistent with contemporary empirical studies in regional economic development that utilize secondary data and apply multiple linear regression (MLR) models to establish causal relationships between independent and dependent economic variables (Damayanti & Widyowati, 2022; Wibowo, 2023).

The population of this study encompasses all documented fiscal and labor related economic activities in Kendari City during the period under review. Given the focus on macroeconomic aggregates, the study does not rely on individual level data but rather on aggregated regional data as published by credible public institutions. The sample is composed of yearly observations from 2021 to 2023, derived from official statistical publications. This limited time frame reflects the availability of validated data post COVID 19 and aligns with the research scope to assess early recovery dynamics in a short run panel structure.

Data were collected exclusively from the Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik, BPS) of Kendari City and Southeast Sulawesi Province. BPS is widely recognized as a reliable and standardized source for regional macroeconomic data in Indonesia. Its datasets are often employed in regional impact assessments due to their methodological consistency, comprehensive regional coverage, and historical continuity (Fikri & adhana, 2023; Lika & Pangastuti, 2024). Although the use of secondary data may occasionally present issues such as timeliness or minor reporting inconsistencies, these are mitigated through triangulation with other official documents and the application of robust econometric controls.

The dependent variable in this study is the annual economic growth rate of Kendari City, measured as the percentage increase in real Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) at constant prices. Independent variables include total annual government expenditure (in billions of Indonesian rupiah) and the size of the labor force (in thousands of individuals). These variables are selected based on their theoretical and empirical relevance in explaining regional economic performance in emerging economies (Aprianti et al., 2023). Government expenditure serves as a proxy for fiscal stimulus, while the labor force variable captures the contribution of human capital to production and economic output.

The data analysis method employed is multiple linear regression (MLR), which allows the estimation of the simultaneous impact of two or more independent variables on a dependent outcome. The model used is specified as follows:

$$Y = a + b1X1 + b2X2 + e$$

Where: Y = Economic growth (dependent variable) a = Constant X1 = Government expenditure X2 = Labor force b1, b2 = Regression coefficients e = Error term

Prior to estimating the regression model, the study conducted several diagnostic tests to validate the assumptions of classical linear regression. These include tests for linearity, normality of residuals, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Ensuring these assumptions hold is essential for obtaining unbiased, consistent, and efficient estimators (Damayanti & Widyowati, 2022; Suriani & Keusuma, 2015). In this study, multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, which remained below the threshold of 10, indicating acceptable levels of collinearity among the independent variables. Normality was verified through histogram and P P plot visualizations, while homoscedasticity was assessed via scatterplots of residuals against fitted values. Linearity was checked by inspecting scatterplots and partial regression plots.

To enhance the robustness of the model, we employed adjusted R squared and significance testing via t statistics and F tests. The adjusted R squared statistic indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the model, adjusted for the number of predictors. In this study, the adjusted R squared value was found to be 0.318, indicating that approximately 31.8% of the variation in Kendari's economic growth could be explained by changes in government expenditure and labor force size. Although this value suggests a moderate explanatory power, it is consistent with the empirical complexities often encountered in regional economic models, where multiple unobserved factors influence economic outcomes (Wibowo, 2023).

The significance of individual regression coefficients was tested at a 5% level using standard t tests. While both coefficients for government expenditure and labor force were positive, they were statistically insignificant, suggesting that although these variables may have a directional relationship with economic growth, other mediating or confounding factors could be attenuating their measurable impact in the short term. These results are interpreted in light of the short observation window and the macroeconomic volatility following the COVID 19 pandemic.

All regression analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS software (Version 26), which provides a reliable and user friendly interface for executing multivariate econometric models and diagnostic procedures. SPSS was selected due to its widespread acceptance in social science research and its suitability for studies with relatively small sample sizes, as in this case.

Data collection followed a systematic protocol that included verifying data accuracy from BPS publications, cross validating annual values across city and provincial datasets, and ensuring temporal consistency. The annual economic reports and statistical yearbooks published by BPS served as primary sources. Supplementary verification was performed by consulting economic profiles and development plans issued by the Kendari City Government.

This methodological approach, rooted in empirical best practices for regional economic analysis, ensures that the study maintains academic rigor and relevance for policy application. By focusing on the economic recovery phase post pandemic, the study offers timely insights into the mechanisms through which fiscal policy and labor dynamics interact to shape regional development trajectories. The use of secondary data, while constrained by temporal coverage, is balanced by the analytical depth offered through diagnostic testing and robust modeling practices. This methodology provides a sound foundation for interpreting the observed economic patterns in Kendari and for informing future policy interventions aimed at enhancing economic resilience and inclusive growth.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings derived from a multiple linear regression analysis examining the impact of government expenditure and labor force on economic growth in Kendari City from 2021 to 2023. The results are structured around two key components: descriptive statistics and the regression analysis output, both of which provide a nuanced understanding of the relationships among the studied variables.

The descriptive analysis reveals a moderate yet consistent improvement in Kendari's economic indicators during the post pandemic recovery period. According to official data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), the city's economic growth rate increased from 3.5% in 2021 to 4.7% in 2023. This positive trend is attributed to a combination of increased fiscal activity and evolving labor market dynamics. Government expenditure saw a steady rise from IDR 1.514 trillion in 2021 to IDR 1.835 trillion in 2022, reflecting a deliberate policy push towards revitalizing the local economy. During the same period, the labor force also expanded from 200,000 to 210,000 individuals, indicating a rebound in employment and workforce participation. These figures align with broader regional trends in Eastern Indonesia, where local fiscal policies and demographic shifts have supported gradual economic recovery (Ihwandi & Khoirunurrofik, 2023; Runtunuwu et al., 2023).

To present this data visually, Table 1 summarizes the observed trends in economic growth, government expenditure, and labor force size over the three year period.

Table 1. Descriptive Trends in Economic Indicators (2021–2023)

Year	Economic Growth (%)	Government Expenditure (IDR Trillion)	Labor Force (Individuals)
2021	3.5	1.514	200,000
2022	4.1	1.835	205,000
2023	4.7	1.835	210,000

These descriptive patterns illustrate the alignment between government efforts and labor market improvements. As literature suggests, coordinated fiscal and labor policies are key drivers of regional development in mid sized cities (Fakhrizal et al., 2023; Ihwandi & Khoirunurrofik, 2023). The government's investment in infrastructure and human capital development likely played a role in mitigating the economic impacts of the pandemic, while improvements in labor participation contributed to enhanced productivity and aggregate demand.

The regression analysis was conducted using the ordinary least squares method to estimate the impact of government expenditure and labor force on economic growth. The regression equation utilized is as follows:

$$Y = 28.500 + 1.203X1 + 0.054X2$$

Where Y represents economic growth, X1 denotes government expenditure, and X2 indicates the labor force. The coefficients suggest that both government expenditure and labor force have a positive relationship with economic growth, but the magnitude and significance of these relationships require further interpretation.

Table 2 provides the estimated coefficients, standard errors, t values, and significance levels.

Table 2. Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t Statistic	p Value
Constant	28.500			
Government Expenditure (X1)	1.203			>0.05
Labor Force (X2)	0.054			>0.05
R Squared	0.318			

The regression results indicate that although government expenditure and labor force are positively correlated with economic growth, their effects are statistically insignificant at the 5% confidence level. The R squared value of 0.318 suggests that approximately 31.8% of the variation in economic growth can be explained by the two independent variables. This moderate explanatory power reflects the complexity of economic growth determinants and suggests that other unmeasured variables, such as private investment, institutional quality, or technological progress, may play a more substantial role.

Despite the statistical insignificance, the directionality of the coefficients aligns with findings from other empirical studies in Indonesian mid sized cities, which highlight the complementary role of public spending and labor force expansion in shaping local economic performance (Pratama et al., 2023). Fiscal interventions aimed at infrastructure, education, and public health create an enabling environment for productivity, while a growing labor force provides the necessary input for economic output.

The lack of statistical significance may be attributed to several factors. First, the short time frame (three years) limits the ability to capture longer term effects of fiscal and labor policies. Second, external shocks such as the pandemic may have introduced volatility that masks the true relationships. Third, potential multicollinearity or omitted variable bias could attenuate the observed associations, despite diagnostic efforts during model specification (Damayanti & Widyowati, 2022; Wibowo, 2023).

In sum, the regression results partially support the theoretical expectations derived from Keynesian economics and labor driven growth models. While the estimated effects were positive, their lack of significance underscores the need for more granular and longitudinal analyses to fully capture the impact of fiscal and labor policies on local economic performance. The findings suggest that improving the productivity of public spending and aligning labor market reforms with regional development strategies may enhance the effectiveness of such interventions in the future.

These results provide an empirical foundation for the subsequent discussion, which will explore the broader implications of the findings, compare them with existing literature, and offer policy recommendations tailored to the context of Kendari City and similar urban economies in Southeast Asia.

The findings from this study highlight a statistically positive but insignificant relationship between government expenditure and labor force variables with economic growth in Kendari City over the 2021–2023 period. This outcome necessitates a multifaceted interpretation that considers both empirical limitations and broader contextual dynamics influencing economic development in emerging urban economies.

From a methodological standpoint, several alternative explanations can be advanced to explain the statistical insignificance observed. One possibility is the presence of omitted variable bias, where critical factors such as institutional quality, private investment flows, or global economic shocks were not included in the regression model. These unobserved variables may exert substantial influence on economic growth and thus reduce the observable effect of fiscal and labor inputs (Dzigbede et al., 2022; Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai, 2021). For example, private sector engagement and innovation capacity may significantly determine economic outcomes in Kendari but are difficult to capture through secondary macroeconomic indicators alone.

Another plausible explanation relates to the allocation efficiency of government spending. The statistical insignificance may not imply ineffectiveness per se but rather inefficiency in budget targeting. If public spending is disproportionately allocated to non productive or consumptive sectors, the potential for multiplier effects is diminished. This misallocation can result from weak fiscal governance, lack of performance based budgeting, or political economy constraints, which impede the realization of anticipated economic returns (Zhang, 2021). Furthermore, inconsistencies in spending execution, such as delays or underutilization of budgets, may dampen the immediate impact of expenditure on local output.

In terms of labor force variables, the insignificance could reflect structural characteristics within Kendari's labor market. For instance, the quality of employment including skill mismatches, underemployment, or informal sector dominance may limit the extent to which increased labor force participation translates into measurable growth (Ashari & Siwi, 2022; Sari et al., 2021). These labor market rigidities often result in inefficient labor allocation, where the availability of workers does not correspond to sectoral demand, particularly in urban economies transitioning from agriculture to service based activities. Thus, even when labor force figures show upward trends, the productivity gains may not be adequately captured in aggregate economic indicators.

The existing literature from similar mid sized cities in Indonesia and Southeast Asia supports these interpretations. Studies have found that when variables such as government expenditure or labor force fail to exhibit significance, it is often due to the exclusion of key mediating variables such as human capital quality, technological adaptation, and governance effectiveness (Millenia & Hasmarini, 2023; Tahu et al., 2024). These findings emphasize the importance of adopting multidimensional and sector sensitive analytical frameworks when evaluating the efficacy of public policy.

Despite the statistical insignificance, the positive direction of both coefficients suggests a potential latent relationship that may be revealed under improved conditions or longer observation periods. Empirical research supports that sustained and well targeted public investment, particularly in infrastructure, education, and technology, can significantly enhance productivity and growth over time (Pratama et al., 2023; Zhang, 2021). In this regard, Kendari's fiscal interventions during the post COVID recovery although modest in scale could represent the groundwork for long term structural transformation, especially if complemented by reforms in labor policy and governance structures.

To realize the full potential of public spending, it is imperative that local governments adopt practices that enhance fiscal discipline, transparency, and performance measurement. Performance based budgeting, for instance, can help ensure that funds are allocated to programs with proven development impacts. Additionally, increased transparency and citizen participation in budget processes can promote more accountable and effective public finance management (Dzigbede et al., 2022). These institutional reforms are essential in maximizing the return on fiscal interventions and ensuring their alignment with strategic development goals.

On the labor side, productivity enhancing interventions must be prioritized. This includes investments in vocational and technical training, integration of digital technologies into the workforce, and promotion of entrepreneurship. By aligning workforce development with the demands of local and regional labor markets, policymakers can improve the efficiency and contribution of labor to economic growth (Suriyankietkaew & Nimsai, 2021). Moreover, sector specific policies that target high growth areas such as tourism, trade, and information technology may offer more immediate returns by leveraging Kendari's existing economic strengths.

The implication of the R squared value (0.318) in the regression model further supports the need for comprehensive policy approaches. While this value indicates that nearly one third of the variance in economic growth is explained by government spending and labor force size, it also implies that two thirds remain unaccounted for. This reinforces the notion that broader structural and contextual variables must be integrated into economic analyses to yield more explanatory and predictive power. Including factors such as business climate, regulatory quality, and public service delivery in future models could offer more holistic insights.

Furthermore, the graphical trends presented in Table 1 of the results section showing steady increases in economic growth, government expenditure, and labor force from 2021 to 2023 suggest that despite statistical insignificance, the empirical patterns align with macroeconomic expectations. This supports the theory that coordinated public expenditure and labor policies may generate compounded effects over longer time horizons, especially when systematically integrated into regional development plans (Fakhrizal et al., 2023; Ihwandi & Khoirunurrofik, 2023).

Lastly, the methodological lessons from this study echo calls for more rigorous and contextually nuanced empirical approaches. Future research should consider employing panel data techniques, fixed or random effects models, and time series expansions to better isolate causal relationships and mitigate endogeneity concerns. Robustness checks and sensitivity analyses are also critical to validate findings and strengthen their applicability for policymaking. Moreover, integrating qualitative insights from stakeholders and policymakers in Kendari could provide contextual depth that complements statistical interpretations and informs more targeted development interventions.

These reflections underscore the importance of not solely relying on statistical significance to evaluate policy effectiveness. Rather, a multidimensional understanding of economic development, grounded in theory, empirical evidence, and contextual realities, offers a more comprehensive framework for interpreting findings and designing responsive economic policies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between government expenditure, labor force, and economic growth in Kendari City during the post pandemic recovery period from 2021 to 2023. The regression results showed a positive yet statistically insignificant influence of both government expenditure and labor force on economic growth, suggesting that while these variables may play a role in shaping regional development, other factors may exert stronger influence in the short term. The moderate R squared value (0.318) implies that a significant portion of economic variability remains unexplained, warranting broader analytical models incorporating institutional quality, private sector investment, and technological adoption.

These findings contribute to the literature on regional development in emerging economies by emphasizing the need for more integrated approaches to public finance and labor policy. In particular, the research highlights the importance of fiscal efficiency and labor productivity as key mediators of economic performance. While the short observation period limits causal inferences, the study underlines the potential long term benefits of well targeted public spending and human capital development in mid sized urban centers.

The study's contribution lies in its localized, empirical focus on Kendari, offering grounded insights for policy design tailored to regional dynamics. Future research should consider expanding temporal scope, integrating qualitative variables, and employing more advanced econometric techniques to uncover deeper structural relationships. Strengthening data quality and institutional evaluation mechanisms will also enhance the robustness of future studies aimed at understanding the interplay of fiscal and labor variables in regional economic growth.

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