



Exploring Students' Academic Success in English at Schools of Rural Area: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Published Online: October 15, 2024

Understanding the factors that contribute to students' academic success in English is crucial, especially in rural schools where educational resources and opportunities may differ significantly from urban settings. This case study explores the unique challenges and successes experienced by students in rural areas, shedding light on the educational strategies that foster academic achievement in English. By analyzing these dynamics, this research aims to explore the learning experiences of high-achieving English students, identify the factors influencing their success, and examine the challenges they face while learning English in rural areas. This research employs a qualitative case study methodology, focusing on nine high-achieving students from SMPN 4 South Bungku. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires and analyzed using the Interactive Model of Data Analysis. The findings revealed that students experienced four types of learning: individual, group, direct, and indirect. Two primary factors influencing their academic achievement were the role of teachers and the lack of truancy. However, students faced external challenges such as inadequate teaching and learning facilities, significantly impacting their academic performance. The implications of the study suggest the importance of providing diverse learning experiences, supporting personalized learning strategies, fostering strong parental and teacher relationships, and addressing infrastructure issues in rural schools. Policymakers should consider these findings to create inclusive and resourceful learning environments that cater to diverse student needs and address specific rural challenges.

KEYWORDS:

academic achievement; challenges; learning experience; rural area

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural areas typically refer to villages and can be found in both developed and developing nations. These areas, often located beyond urban regions, are distinguished by their pristine natural environments, close-knit communities, and expansive open spaces. In developing countries, rural regions are marked by low levels of human development, neglect from policymakers, high rates of poverty, marginalization, and isolation, along with a dependence on natural resources and agriculture ((Dasgupta et al., 2014).

Studies on the condition of rural areas have been conducted, focusing particularly on education and English teaching. One such study examined the learning experiences of students in rural areas. Uleanya & Rugbeer (2020) conducted qualitative research on the first-year experiences of students at a South

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**Cite this Article: Nurlaili, Hamid R., Nappu S. (2024). Exploring Students' Academic Success in English at Schools of Rural Area:. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies, 4(10), 1116-1125*

African university. Their findings revealed that first-year students from rural areas faced unique challenges, including limited parental educational backgrounds, insufficient orientation to the new academic environment, and a lack of understanding of the higher education system. Similarly, Phuong (2018) used a case study approach to explore the language learning experiences of two Vietnamese adult learners, Tran and Nguyen, who had been studying English in Singapore for the past two months. The study aimed to analyze their language acquisition from social and cognitive second language acquisition perspectives. The key findings highlighted that the learners relied heavily on three crucial factors—motivation, their identities as learners, and interlinguistic influences—to learn the language. Meanwhile, Oyeromi et al. (2018) conducted a survey of all students and faculty members in public senior secondary schools across Oyo State, revealing a generally low level of academic performance. Those previous studies have mainly concentrated on university-level students. In contrast, this research targets junior high school students. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the types of learning experiences these

students have, the academic factors influencing their achievement, and the challenges they encounter in learning English, particularly those arising from the students themselves.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning Experience

According to the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2013), a learning experience encompasses a diverse range of situations and environments that reshape a learner's perceptions, aid in conceptual understanding, evoke emotional responses, and support the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Anthony, (2023) describes learning experience as the contextual or co-created conditions in which learners engage with their educational environment, including physical or virtual spaces, instructors, course design, and the emotional and cognitive culture of the institution. Floor (2023) defines learning experience as any situation from which students gain knowledge, whether it occurs in school, on the job, at a museum, at home, outdoors, or elsewhere. It can happen in real or virtual settings, or a combination of both. A learning experience is a comprehensive process intentionally designed and thoughtfully constructed to help learners achieve a specific, often predefined, educational outcome.

Floor (2023) divides learning experiences into five types, they are direct, indirect, individual, group, and blended learning experience. Gross & Rutland (2017) explained the direct learning experience as a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skills, and value from direct experiences. They call it experiential learning. Similarly, Kolb (2006) defines the direct learning experience as a particular form of learning from life experience; often contrasting it with lecture and classroom learning. Indirect learning experiences are abstracted through accounts, without experiencing them physically. Argote & Ingram (2000) define that the concept of indirect experience is similar to the concept of knowledge transfer. Gino et al. (2010) declared that both of these phrases describe the process by which people or social groups pick up skills by imbibing the knowledge of those experiencing them. Minshall (2009) declares that the phrase "knowledge transfer" (KT) refers to a wide range of initiatives that facilitate profitable partnerships between academic institutions, commercial enterprises, and government agencies. Individual Learning Experiences are critical to leverage, especially when a teacher has a smaller classroom of students who can spend time in an introspective environment. They also respond well to audiobooks, video journals, one-on-one time, and other similar strategies. Certainly, participants in individual learning experiences usually work alone with the course materials and don't communicate with other students directly. Vinikas (2022) found that independent learning is all about empowering students to take ownership of their learning. Similarly, Beale

(2019) added that independent learning is the process whereby someone manages their learning, rather than their learning being managed by a teacher.

Group-level learning is a common teaching tool used at all levels in most educational systems, from higher education to mandatory education. Chiriac (2014) called group learning as group work. Group work is when students work together in small groups to complete a task or achieve a common goal. Group work can take many forms; chats, joint projects, peer teaching, and problem-solving activities are just a few. Hybrid is one of the most effective types of learning experiences, as it focuses on blending various strategies to maximize potential impact. O'Byrne & Pitash (2015) conclude that blended learning, often known as hybrid learning, is a type of pedagogy that combines computer-mediated and in-person training.

Academic Achievement

Student's academic achievement is a key feature of education. Mekonnen (2014) found that academic performance has been described as the scholastic standing of a student at a given moment. This scholastic standing could be explained in terms of the grades obtained in a course or groups of courses. As stated in Cambridge University Reporter in (Ayedun et al., 2024) academic achievement refers to how students deal with their studies and how they cope with or accomplish different tasks given to them by teachers or lecturers. Teachers and education officials typically measure achievement using classroom performance. Brew et al. (2021) classifies several factors affecting academic achievement, they are truancy, teacher, library and textbooks, laboratory, parents' income, parents' level of education, and meal provision.

Challenges in Learning English in Rural Areas

Learning a foreign language presents some challenges. English as one of the foreign languages presents several challenges to learn. (Pramudito (2020) divides two main problems of learning English; they are internal and external problems. The internal problem means that students find it difficult to learn English because of themselves. Internal factors are physical condition, students' opinions, students' motivation, and learning opportunities. The external problem is from around students. The external factors include the material, teachers and methods, the place and facilities, and infrastructures.

III. RESULTS

Learning Experience

There are five types of learning experiences, they are individual, group, direct, indirect, and blended learning (Floor, 2023). To investigate the students' learning experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The results of the interview showed that the students of SMPN 4 South Bungku who achieved high academic achievement in English subject experienced four types of learning

experiences, they were: Individual Learning Experience, Group Learning Experience, Direct Learning Experience, Indirect Learning Experience. To be clear, it can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 . Types of Learning Experience

No	Name of Students	Types of Learning Experience				
		Indiv	Group	Direct	Indirect	Blended
1	Student 1	Ö	-	Ö	Ö	-
2	Student 2	Ö	-	-	Ö	-
3	Student 3	Ö	-	Ö	Ö	-
4	Student 4	Ö	Ö	-	Ö	-
5	Student 5	-	Ö	-	Ö	-
6	Student 6	Ö	-	-	Ö	-
7	Student 7	Ö	-	-	Ö	-
8	Student 8	Ö	-	Ö	Ö	-
9	Student 9	-	Ö	-	Ö	-

Type of learning experience in Table 1 signifies that the student engages in that specific form of learning. Starting with Student 1 experiences Individual, Direct, and Indirect learning. Student 2 participates in Individual, Indirect, and Blended learning. Student 3 is involved in Individual, Group, and Direct learning. Student 4 engages in Group and Direct learning. Student 5 takes part in Individual, Indirect, and Blended learning. Student 6 experiences Individual and Group learning. Student 7 participates in Individual, Direct, and Blended learning. Lastly, Student 8 engages in Indirect and Blended learning. This distribution of check marks provides an overview of the varied learning experiences among the students.

Direct Learning Experience

The result of the interview was as follows:

Question: Do you learn English by practicing the discussed topics?

Student 1: "I practiced with my friends. There were four of us in a team. We discussed procedure texts in class, specifically how to make Nasi Kuning. The teacher explained the ingredients and steps. Then, we had to practice it ourselves. We chose Es Buah as our topic. The next day, we brought the materials to school. My job was to peel and cut the fruits into cubes. From this, I learned English words like 'peel,' 'cut,' and 'put.' It was good, and I enjoyed it."

Student 3: "I also participated in the practice. I boiled sugar and cooked jellies. My friend gave instructions in English, and I followed them. For example, if she said 'stir the boiled sugar,' I did it. I learned words like 'pour,' 'mixture,' and 'boil.' I remember them because I saw and did the actions. I loved it."

The statements show that Students 1, 3, and 8 had direct learning experiences because they did practical activities after discussing the materials in class. These practices were part of the learning process, giving them hands-on experience with

what they learned in class. The students mentioned things like 'we discussed procedure text in the classroom,' 'we brought materials to make Es Buah to school,' 'I boiled sugar,' and 'my task was to peel and cut the fruits into cubes.' These activities reflect project-based learning. The students enjoyed these practical activities, as seen in their comments like 'It's good,' 'I like it,' and 'I love it.'

Indirect Learning Experience

The result of the interview is as follows:

Question: Do you learn English by reading books, watching videos, or listening to your teacher?

Student 2: I mostly learned English from my teacher, both inside and outside the classroom. During class, I listened to the lessons, and in our free time, especially when another teacher was absent, the English teacher would have us continue learning outside.

Student 7: I prefer learning English at home using YouTube and Google. Despite having an unstable internet connection, I made an effort to access it by going to the beach in the afternoons or evenings. I stayed there for about thirty or forty minutes to download videos and then watched them at home. The other six students shared similar experiences. They mentioned statements like "I learned English mostly from my English teacher," "I learned English words by reading dialogues in books," and "I prefer learning English at home through YouTube and Google." These responses indicate that the students did not learn English by directly engaging with the materials. Consequently, all participants had indirect learning experiences.

Individual Learning Experience

The interview results:

Question: Do you prefer worksheets, written activities, or storytelling for learning English?

Student 1: I hate group assignments because my friends don't contribute. I end up working alone while they talk about other things. In groups of three, I do all the work while the others just wait for me to finish.

Student 4: In English class, our teacher assigns group work with three or four students. But I don't like working with my friends because they don't help and distract me. I can't concentrate and end up doing all the work myself. Even if they help, they do it slowly.

Students 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 shared similar experiences, saying "I worked alone, and I did not enjoy working with my friends." This indicates that they were uncomfortable working in groups. Thus, seven students are categorized as having individual learning experiences.

Group Learning Experience

The interview results:

Question: Do you prefer discussions, team-based tasks, or games in classroom learning?

Student 4: I often discussed various topics with my friends at school, especially in English class. We worked together on assignments like translating English dialogues into

Indonesian. My two friends helped me find the right meanings of words. When we had to create a short dialogue in English, we discussed and chose a topic together, then arranged the dialogue. I didn't have any ideas, but my friends suggested topics, and we picked one.

Student 5: I enjoyed working in groups. For an assignment to memorize "The Legend of Sainoa," my friends and I discussed the story, how it happened, and the correct pronunciation of English words. We translated the story into Indonesian together and talked about the expressions. We couldn't finish at school, so we continued our discussion at home, which made our work easier.

Three of the nine students had different learning experiences. Statements like "My friends and I finish our assignments together" and "My friends and I sat together discussing what the story was about" indicate that these students did not enjoy learning individually. Thus, Students 4, 5, and 9 were classified as having group learning experiences.

Blended Learning Experience

The results of the interview were also described as follows:

Question: Does your teacher teach English online?

Student 3: The teacher has never taught English online. I don't know what Zoom is. Our internet connection is unstable; it might be good in the morning but bad in the afternoon. When that happens, I go to the beach behind the school to get a better signal from another island.

Student 8: If my teacher taught online, I couldn't join because I don't have a smartphone. My parents have a basic phone that's only good for calls, not for watching videos. Our electricity is limited; we only get it four hours a day from 6 to 10 in the evening since the National Electricity Company doesn't serve our island and we rely on a small local generator.

Other students had similar issues. Their statements like "The teacher never taught English online" and "I don't have a smartphone" show they learned English offline. Reasons included lack of phones, unstable internet, and limited electricity. Thus, none of the students experienced blended learning.

Based on the interviews with the nine students, it can be concluded that they had four types of learning experiences: indirect, direct, individual, and group. They did not have blended learning due to the island's conditions.

Factors Affecting High Academic Achievement

Several factors affect the students' academic achievement truancy, teacher, library and textbooks, and parents' level of education (Brew et al., 2021). The factors can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The Factors that Affect the High Academic Achievement of Students

No.	Factor	Yes	No
1.	Truancy	√	
2.	Library and textbooks		√
3.	Teacher	√	
4.	Parents' Level of Education		√

Table 2 shows that two factors affected the students' high academic achievement, they were truancy and teacher. A detailed explanation of the table above can be seen in the description below:

Truancy

The result of the interview can be described in the following statements:

Question:: How often are you absent without permission from your teacher?

Student 3: I was never absent without permission. If I was sick, I informed my teacher by sending a letter. If I couldn't write a letter, my parents told the teacher directly about my condition.

Student 5: I hate missing English class. Even if I wake up late, I still go to school. The teacher keeps track of student absences regularly.

Statements like "I was never absent from school" and "I hate being absent from English class" indicate that Students 3 and 5 were never truant. The other seven students shared similar experiences, only missing school when they were sick and always informing the teacher. Students with high academic achievement were never truant, showing that regular attendance contributed to their success.

Library and Textbooks

The interview with the students resulted:

Question: Do you always go to the library?

Student 3: In my free time, I went to the library to read books like short stories, legends, and fables. I didn't take the books home; I brought them to my classroom to read. I read both English and Indonesian books, but the library has only a few books.

Student 6: When the teacher didn't come to class, I went to the library to borrow books, mostly Indonesian short stories. There are few English books. I prefer reading in the classroom because there's no place to sit in the library. The library also serves as a teachers' room, staff room, guest room, and pantry, so most teacher activities happen there.

Student 3's statement, "I went to the library to read a book," indicates that the school has a library, but it has very few books. Student 6 described the library as a multipurpose room, suggesting it's not a proper library. The school did have a small collection of books in the teachers' room, but this limited library did not impact students' academic achievement, as they still performed well without extensive library resources.

Teacher

The students had positive and varied descriptions of their English teacher.

Student 1: I like my English teacher because she explains things clearly, even difficult materials. If I don't understand, she repeats the explanation. She uses teaching aids like clocks and calendars when discussing time, dates, and months.

Student 3: My favorite teacher is my English teacher. She makes learning fun with games to improve our vocabulary. For example, we played a game where one student showed a picture, another gave clues, and a third guessed. The winner got a prize, and it was really fun.

Both students expressed their fondness for their English teacher. Student 1 said, "I like my English teacher," and Student 3 stated, "My favorite teacher is my English teacher," indicating that the students love their teacher. This positive relationship contributed to their high academic achievement.

Parents' Level of Education

The students shared information about their parents in the interview.

Question: What is your father/mother's education?

Student 2: My father and mother both went to Junior High School. My father is a fisherman, and my mother is a housewife. They support my education and never asked me to sell fish during school hours.

Student 6: My parents didn't go to Senior High School, but they support me a lot. They buy everything I need for school and let me finish my homework without interrupting me. Once, I woke up late and went to school late, and they were angry with me.

All participants live with their parents, who have a low level of education. Statements like "She never asked me to go sell fish during school hours" and "They were angry with me for being late" show that parents fully support their children's education. Despite their low education levels, parents still support their children's schooling, indicating that parental education does not affect students' high academic achievement.

The interviews with nine high-achieving students revealed two key factors for their success: supportive teachers and regular attendance. The teachers motivated students to learn English, and the students were never truant. In contrast, the lack of a proper library and parents' low education levels did not hinder their academic success.

Challenges in Learning English in Rural Area

The main challenges students face in learning English are internal problems like motivation and attitude, and external problems like teacher quality and facilities (Pramudito, 2020). To understand the specific challenges students in rural areas encounter, an open-ended questionnaire was conducted. The results are shown in the following Table 3:

Table 3. Challenges in Learning English in Rural Areas

No	Challenges	Category	Yes	No
1	Motivation	Internal		√
2	Attitude	Internal		√
3	Teacher	External	√	
4	Facility	External	√	

Table 3 shows that the students of SMPN 4 South Bungku who achieved high academic achievement in English faced external challenges, they were teacher and facility.

Motivation

The students were asked about their motivation for learning English. They had various motivations. The following figure shows the students' motivation.

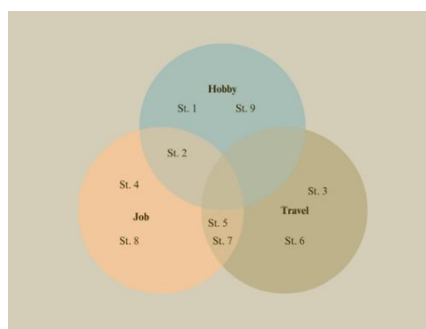


Figure 1. Students' Motivation in Learning English

Figure 1 shows that students' motivations for learning English include hobbies and personal interests, better job prospects and status, and the desire to travel abroad. Students 1 and 9 learned English due to hobbies and personal interests. Student 2 was motivated by her hobby, personal interest, and the aim for a better job and status. Students 3 and 6 wanted to learn English to travel abroad in the future. Students 4 and 8 were focused on better job opportunities and status. Students 5 and 7 were motivated by their hobbies, personal interests, and the hope of traveling abroad someday.

The questionnaire results indicate that students learned English for three main reasons: better job prospects and status, hobbies and personal interests, and traveling abroad. Some students had one motivation, while others had multiple motivations. Overall, students had positive motivations for learning English.

Attitude

Students' attitudes toward English, including their feelings, thoughts, and actions, significantly affect their goals, learning process, and outcomes (Hasbi, 2013). They were asked three questions about their attitudes: their intention to learn English, their feelings about the subject, and their opinions on English. The students' responses varied, as shown in the Venn diagram below:

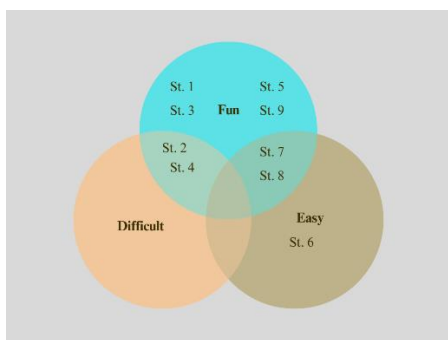


Figure 2. The Students' Opinion of the English Subject

Based on Figure 2, students had different opinions about English: some found it fun, some found it easy and fun, and others found it difficult but fun. Specifically, Students 1, 3, 5, and 9 thought English was fun. Student 6 thought it was easy to learn. Students 2 and 4 found it both easy and fun, while Students 7 and 8 thought it was difficult but fun.

When asked about their intentions for learning English, students had various reasons. Some wanted to master the language, others aimed to get a high score in the subject, and some had both goals. The students' responses are illustrated in the following figure:

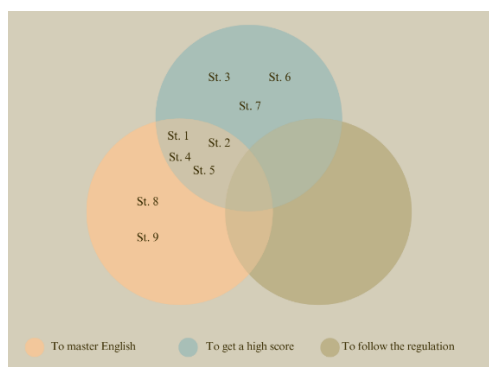


Figure 3. Students Intention to Learn English

Figure 3 shows the students' intentions for learning English. Generally, they wanted to master the language and get high scores in the subject. Specifically, Students 3, 6, and 7 aimed to master English. Students 8 and 9 focused on achieving high scores. Students 1, 2, 4, and 5 aimed to both master English and get high scores.

When asked about their feelings toward English, all the students felt excited.

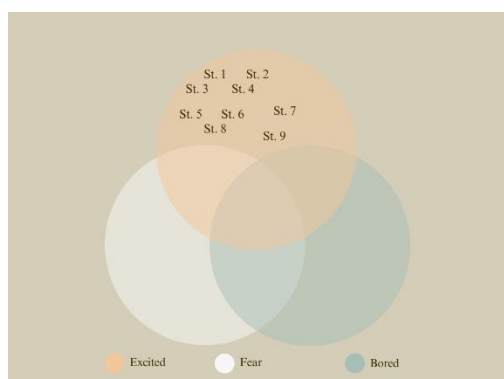


Figure 4. Students Feeling Toward English

Figure 4 shows that all students, 1 through 9, felt excited about learning English. None of them felt fear or boredom. Overall, the figures indicate that the students had positive opinions about English and strong intentions to learn it. They also felt positively about the subject. Therefore, it can be concluded that the high-achieving students at SMPN 4 South Bungku had positive attitudes toward English.

Teacher

The students were questioned about the teacher's response to the students' questions, they stated their opinion in the figure below.

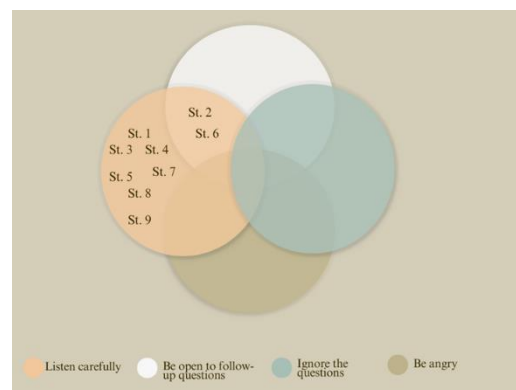


Figure 5. Teacher Response to Students' Questions

Figure 5 shows that the teacher always listened carefully to students and was open to follow-up questions when they had difficulties learning English. Students 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 would ask questions when they struggled, and the teacher would listen carefully and explain the material again. Students 2 and 6 mentioned that the teacher not only listened and re-explained but was also open to follow-up questions. When asked about the teacher's presence, all students said the teacher always arrived on time but often left the island. The students' responses are illustrated in the following figure.

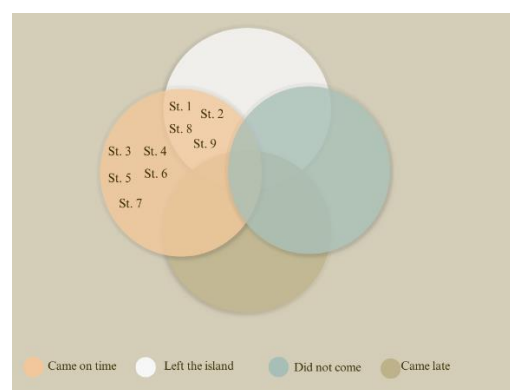


Figure 6. Teacher's Presence

Figure 6 shows that while the English teacher always arrived at school on time, she often left the island. Students 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 noted that the teacher was punctual. Students 1, 2, 8, and 9 added that she frequently left the island.

These figures indicate that the teacher responded well to students' questions and had good teaching methods. However, she often traveled to the city for her duties as a treasurer,

staying there for a week each month, which affected her ability to teach the students consistently.

Facility

The students were asked about the facilities available at the school, and they listed them as shown in the following figure.

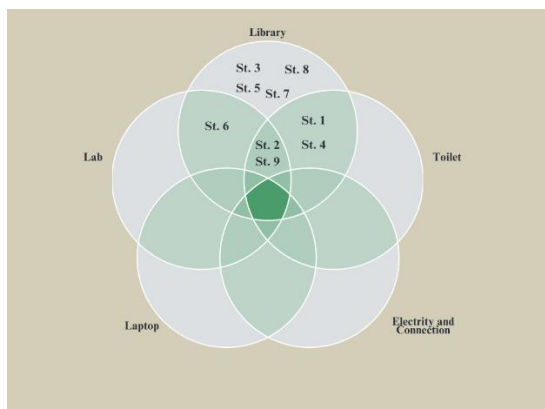


Figure 7. School Facility

The students identified three facilities at their school: a library, a laboratory, and a toilet. The library had limited books, and the laboratory and toilet buildings were unused. Even though the toilet was functional, there was no water supply, making it difficult to use. Both students and teachers had to go home to use the restroom due to the water scarcity on the rural island.

The questionnaire results showed that students had three main motivations for learning English: better job prospects and status, traveling abroad, and personal interest or hobbies. This indicates that students had high motivation and no issues with their motivation to learn English. They also had positive attitudes towards English, viewing it as fun and feeling excited about learning it. Their intentions included mastering the language, achieving high scores, and traveling abroad, indicating no attitude-related challenges.

The English teacher was punctual and responsive to students' questions. However, she had an additional role as a treasurer, requiring her to spend a week in the city each month. This absence was problematic because no one replaced her during that time. Additionally, the school facilities were inadequate. The unused laboratory and toilet, and the need to go home to use the restroom, disrupted the teaching and learning process. Therefore, teacher availability and school facilities were significant challenges for learning English in this rural area.

IV. DISCUSSION

Learning Experience

Based on the interview and questionnaire results, high-achieving students had a mix of direct, indirect, individual, and group learning experiences. Their academic success was influenced by their teacher, attendance, and their parents' level of education. Additionally, students in rural areas of Morowali faced external challenges in learning English. Detailed explanations of each point are provided below.

Direct Learning Experience

The findings presented above show that three of nine students enjoyed conducting a practical activity which was still a part of the learning process. The students practiced the materials that had been discussed inside the classroom. The steps the students had been through were the syntax of Project-based learning. The objective of the activity was to make students experience directly the real situation of the material they learned inside the classroom. The students' activity was relevant to the statement of Keeton & Tate in (Sankaran & Sheldon, 2022) who state that direct learning is learning in which the learner comes in direct contact with the realities being studied as part of the learning process. Thus, the three students were categorized as having direct learning experiences.

The findings show that three of the nine students enjoyed practical activities as part of their learning process. They practiced the materials discussed in class, following the steps of Project-Based Learning. The goal was for students to directly experience the real-life applications of what they learned. This aligns with Keeton & Tate's statement in Sankaran & Sheldon (2022) that direct learning involves direct contact with the realities being studied. Therefore, these three students were categorized as having direct learning experiences.

Indirect Learning Experience

All students primarily learned English from their teacher at school. At home, they learned from family or friends, read books, and watched videos, indicating indirect learning since they did not directly engage with the material. This aligns with (Gallemart, 2023), who defines indirect learning as acquiring knowledge through others within an institution.

Individual Learning Experience

Seven students preferred completing worksheets alone, without peer interaction. They managed their work independently, fitting Vinikas (2022)'s definition of independent learning, where students take charge of their learning. These students found peers distracting and couldn't manage their time well during group discussions, showing that their learning preference was influenced by their environment, similar to Closs et al. (2022) 's findings.

Group Learning Experience

Three students frequently worked in groups, sharing tasks and ideas, which made their work easier and more inspiring. This fits Chiriac (2014) 's definition of group work, where students collaborate to complete a task or achieve a goal.

Overall, students at SMPN 4 South Bungku with high academic achievement experienced four types of learning: direct, indirect, individual, and group. This matches Floor (2023)'s classification of learning experiences into direct, indirect, group, individual, and blended learning.

Additionally, one student learned English from the teacher, who was the main resource, and also read books and watched videos to expand her knowledge. This student had three types

of learning experiences: individual, direct, and indirect. Another student liked learning English individually both at home and school, but also enjoyed group discussions and learning from the teacher. This student experienced individual, group, and indirect learning. These students had multiple learning experiences, aligning with Sood (2021), who found that students benefit from various learning experiences, enhancing knowledge transfer and skill application. Having diverse learning experiences allowed these students to tailor their learning.

The Victoria State Government (2022) noted that high-achieving students excel in all aspects of learning. Similarly, Mubarok et al. (2016) found that high achievers develop effective and efficient learning strategies. Despite limited facilities and the teacher's availability, with strong parental support, effective teaching methods, and positive motivation and attitudes, these students achieved high academic performance in English.

Factors Affecting Students' High Academic Achievement

Truancy

The interview revealed that students always informed the teacher if they were sick, either by sending a letter or having their parents inform the teacher directly. Even if they woke up late, they still went to school. This shows that the students were never truant, which contributed to their high academic achievement. This aligns with Mwansa (2021), who concluded that truancy negatively impacts academic success and skill development. Hence, the absence of truancy positively affected the students' academic performance.

Teacher

The interviews also highlighted that the teacher explained the material well, used teaching aids, incorporated fun games, and motivated the students to attend school and learn English. The students enjoyed the teaching methods, leading to their high academic achievement. This is consistent with Fadlun & Fatmawati (2023) who stated that a teacher's performance impacts student achievement. Thus, the teacher played a significant role in the students' academic success.

Library

The interviews indicated that the school building, referred to as a library, was a multipurpose room used as an office, teachers' room, pantry, guest room, and library. It contained only a few books on a shelf, not meeting the criteria of a proper library. Despite this, students of SMPN 4 South Bungku achieved high academic performance without a functional library. Steven et al. in Brew et al. (2021) suggested that lacking a defined school library could severely impact students, but in this case, the teacher provided materials by downloading and printing them, mitigating the lack of a library.

Parents' Level of Education

The students' parents had low levels of education and mostly worked as fishermen or fish sellers. However, they never

asked their children to help during school hours and fully supported their education. This contradicts Khan et al. (2015), who found that highly educated parents have a greater influence on their children's academic success. Despite their low education levels, the parents' support contributed to the students' high academic achievement.

Brew et al. (2021) identified factors such as truancy, parents' education level, teacher, and library as influencing academic achievement. However, these findings differ, as parents' education level and the library did not affect the students' high performance. Instead, the students' success was primarily influenced by their teacher and the lack of truancy.

Challenges in Learning English in Rural Areas

The students' academic achievement can be affected by various factors. Brew et al. (2021) classify several factors affecting the students' academic achievement including truancy, teacher, library, and parents' level of education.

Motivation

The questionnaire results showed that students were highly motivated to learn English due to their hobbies, personal interests, job aspirations, and the desire to travel. This strong motivation contributed to their high academic achievement. McDonough in Al-Tamimi et al. (2009) stated that students' motivation significantly affects their English learning success. Thus, motivation was not a challenge for these students.

Attitude

Students had various intentions for learning English, such as mastering the language, speaking fluently, and achieving high scores. They found English fun, even if some thought it was difficult. All students were enthusiastic about learning, showing a positive attitude towards English. Ali et al. (2013) noted that a positive attitude leads students to improve and use English despite challenges. Therefore, attitude was not an issue for these students.

Teacher

The English teacher was punctual and responsive but had to leave the school for a week each month due to additional duties as a treasurer. Peng (2023) highlighted that teachers play versatile roles in motivating students. However, frequent absences negatively impacted students' academic performance, as found by in Layson (2009) Thus, the teacher's absence was a significant challenge.

Facility

The school had a library, a laboratory, and a toilet. However, the toilet was broken, the laboratory lacked tools, and there was no water supply, forcing students and teachers to go home to use the restroom. This disrupted the learning process. Ogbodo in Kingsley (2019) stated that inadequate facilities impact students' academic achievement. Therefore, facilities were a major challenge.

The students had strong motivations and positive attitudes towards learning English, indicating no internal challenges.

However, they faced external challenges such as teacher availability and inadequate facilities, which were beyond their control and could affect their academic success. These findings contrast with Shan & Aziz (2022) who found that rural students often had negative attitudes towards learning English. At SMPN 4 South Bungku, the high-achieving students primarily faced external challenges.

V. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to find the factors contributing to the students high academic achievement, and the challenges faced by high-achieving students in learning English in a rural setting. The findings revealed that students experienced four types of learning: individual, group, direct, and indirect. Students who preferred completing tasks alone exhibited individual learning, while those who enjoyed working in groups had group learning experiences. Direct learning involved engaging directly with the material, and indirect learning included gaining knowledge through books, videos, teachers, or family members. This variety of learning experiences helped students develop personalized strategies to suit their needs. Despite challenges such as limited facilities and restricted teacher time, strong parental support, effective teaching methods, and a positive attitude enabled these students to excel in English.

Two key factors influencing their academic success were the teacher and truancy. Regular attendance and a strong appreciation for their English teacher contributed to their enthusiasm for learning and high performance.

However, students faced external challenges in rural areas, such as insufficient teacher presence and a lack of basic facilities, which could negatively impact their academic achievement.

The study's findings have several important implications. Firstly, offering a variety of learning experiences—individual, group, direct, and indirect—can better engage students and address their diverse needs. Secondly, supporting personalized learning strategies helps high-achieving students tailor their approaches to what works best for them. Thirdly, strong parental support and positive teacher-student relationships are crucial for academic success, suggesting that schools should enhance communication with parents and provide teachers with the tools to motivate students. Fourthly, addressing challenges in rural areas, such as insufficient teacher presence and poor facilities, is essential. This could involve improving infrastructure, teacher training, and resource allocation. Lastly, policymakers should use these insights to create inclusive and supportive educational programs, reduce truancy, and ensure adequate teacher presence to boost academic achievement.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the government for the grant and the permission to complete the study.

VII. DISCLOSURE

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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