

English Students' Learning Motivation in Rural Senior High School

Safira Septiana¹, Siti Ayu Surayya², Muhammad Husnu³, Yulia Agustina⁴

Universitas Hamzanwadi, Indonesia

¹ safiraseptian16@gmail.com, ² ssurayya@hamzanwadi.ac.id, ³ oesnoedotuu@gmail.com,

⁴ rahestin@gmail.com

Abstract

This research investigates the underlying reasons why grade XI students at MA NWDI Lepak, a senior high school in rural East Lombok Regency, are motivated to learn English. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis using a qualitative approach with case studies. The theme analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze this study. The results show that students' learning motivation is influenced by two main factors: (1) students' sociocultural and identity factors, such as support from teachers, peers, and perceptions of English in the community; and (2) strong future goals, such as career aspirations and educational expectations, which are the main drivers of their motivation. These results support socio-cultural identity theory and potential-based achievement goal theory, which emphasize that students' motivation is influenced by their thoughts about their future potential in their social and cultural contexts. It is hoped that this research will help teachers, schools and policy makers create effective and contextualized English learning strategies for students in rural areas.

Keywords: Learning Motivation; Rural Students; English Language Learning; Sociocultural Identity

INTRODUCTION

Education is essential for a country as the foundation and determinant of its progress and rural areas are no exception. High schools in rural areas often face different problems than urban schools. Limited access to resources, facilities, and high-quality teachers is often an issue (Tang, 2023). This situation becomes more complex when learning English. Compared to urban schools, the materials available, learning tools available, and even opportunities to speak with people who speak English can be very limited (Singh, 2024). Geographic remoteness can also limit students' access to the environment in which they learn in English. Therefore, it is important to explore students' motivation to learn. Learning motivation is defined as an internal or external drive that drives and directs individual behavior to achieve learning goals (Filgona et al., 2020). In the context of language learning, motivation plays a central role as it directly affects the extent to which students participate, invest and persist in the learning process (Alanazi & Mugaddam, 2025). Lack of motivation can hinder students' progress, even if they have tremendous potential. Students who do not have strong motivation may face difficulties in learning a foreign language, such as difficult pronunciation or complicated grammar. Therefore, it is also important to pay attention to effective ways or methods to be applied in order to produce ideal English language learning.

An ideal approach to learning English involves strengthening cognitive aspects like vocabulary and grammar, alongside fostering communication skills, confidence, and the willingness to speak. Kemaloglu-Er & Sahin (2022) emphasized that the learning environment should be interactive, significant and relevant to students' lives. For students studying in rural schools, this may mean connecting English learning to their local environment, such as through

community-based projects or the use of authentic materials that reflect local culture . In addition, teachers must also be engaging facilitators, able to foster curiosity and remove the fear of being wrong. It is crucial to develop new approaches to teaching, use new technologies, and create customized teaching materials due to limited resources in rural areas. By understanding the level and type of motivation students have, educators can be more precise in choosing and applying the right strategies to make English learning more interesting and effective despite the limitations.

Research on students' motivation to learn English in rural environments is an important and growing field due to the unique nature of these environments. Several relevant studies have investigated different elements of motivation in secondary school students living in rural areas. For example, research by Anggela et al., (2024) who investigated the challenges faced by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers in rural areas, indirectly highlighting the impact of these challenges on student motivation. Their findings revealed that limited resources and minimal language exposure, which can affect students' motivation levels. A related study by Umpung et al., (2023) conducted at a vocational high school in Indramayu found that most students were more influenced by intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation in learning English. The study also revealed that motivational teaching strategies received positive responses from students, with the teacher identified as a key factor in successfully boosting their motivation to learn.

A study comparing rural and urban students in Bulukumba found that both groups were motivated in learning English, but the levels and types of motivation differed (Rahmat & Akbar, 2019). Rural students were mainly influenced by both integrative and instrumental motivation, while urban students were more strongly driven by instrumental motivation. The study also revealed similarities in motivational factors such as teachers, learning activities, and expectancy, but differences emerged in aspects like goal setting, relevance, and school environment. In addition, Setiawan and Nadia, (2023) discussed the rural teachers' challenges of teaching English in rural areas in East Lombok. The result show that one of the hindrances of the rural instructors was low motivation of the students who showed little participation, or were distracted by external factors such as sleepiness and cellphones. These studies collectively provide an overview of factors that may be relevant to student motivation in rural schools, although the specific case study at MA NWDI Lepak would provide a more in-depth and contextualized understanding.

The author selected the title “English Students’ Learning Motivation in Rural Senior High School” based on firsthand observation that learning motivation in rural schools, particularly at MA NWDI Lepak, remains a significant challenge. Many students feel that English is a difficult subject and irrelevant to their lives, so they are less eager to learn. However, the researcher also found that there are some students who remain enthusiastic and show high motivation, despite their limitations. This appealed to the researchers to investigate further to find out what really motivates them, and how factors in their school and personal environment affect their enthusiasm for learning. By understanding students’ learning motivation, the researchers hope that this study can make a real contribution to teachers and schools in creating more effective, enjoyable and appropriate English learning for students in rural environments.

METHOD

This research was conducted using qualitative method and case study. This method was chosen because the researcher attempt to understand and explore thoroughly the social and cultural reasons that encourage students to learn English in rural schools (Ugwu et al, 2023). This case study was used to study the phenomenon of learning motivation in a specific environment, namely eleventh grade students of MA NWDI Lepak. This was done by considering the social,

cultural and ideological backgrounds that shape students' experiences. Therefore, the aim of this study is to gain a more in-depth and contextualized understanding rather than generalizing. The population of this study was eleventh grade students in the 2024/2025 school year. The researcher used purposive sampling technique to select participants based on certain criteria, namely actively participated in English language learning, have diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and willing to provide information and take part in interviews. A limited number of participants were selected (around 5 students) to allow in-depth exploration according to the qualitative approach.

Data collection in this qualitative case study are in-depth semi-structured interviews and document analysis. These instruments are designed to gather rich, contextualized data to address the research questions regarding English students' learning motivation, guided by the Theories of Motivation and Sociocultural Identity and Potential-Based Achievement Goal Theory. This approach allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to explore emergent themes and follow up on participants' responses in real-time, ensuring a deep understanding of their perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data were analyzed using Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis technique, which included the following steps:

1. Reading and reviewing the data thoroughly (familiarization)
2. Initially coding relevant pieces of data
3. Identifying and developing themes from the code set
4. Reviewing themes for consistency of meaning
5. Giving names and definitions to themes
6. Write a narrative report based on the results of the analysis

The whole process of analysis is directed at understanding the meaning of learning motivation from the students' own point of view, according to their social and cultural context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

To find out the motivation to learn English of eleventh grade students at MA NWDI Lepak, the researcher collected data by conducting in-depth interviews on July 19, 2025 with 5 participants from eleventh grade students at MA NWDI Lepak and supported by document analysis, then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach. The researcher used purposive sampling technique to select participants with criteria; actively participated in English language learning, have diverse socio-economic backgrounds, willing to provide information and take part in interviews. This was done to find out more about how students' sociocultural and identity factors affect their motivation to learn English, and what the students' goals or strengths are in motivating them to learn English. Therefore, through the interview, the researcher can find out the students' perspectives and what influences them. In this interview, there were 5 questions given to the participants and during this interview, the data was recorded using a voice recorder and documented in the form of photos using a phone. Based on the interviews with five eleventh grade students of MA NWDI Lepak, several main themes emerged that influence their motivation in learning English, including the following:

Table 1. Interview Result

Participant	Main Theme	Sub-theme / Focus	Direct Quote
1	Students' Goals and Their Power	Aspiration to work on a cruise ship	<i>"I want to be able to speak English so I can work on a cruise ship. Therefore, I must learn English."</i>

2	Sociocultural Factors and Students' Identities	Support from encouraging teachers	<i>"I used to dislike English lessons because they felt very boring, but when the teacher explained enthusiastically and casually, I also became enthusiastic and did not get bored in class."</i>
3	Sociocultural Factors and Students' Identities	Support from study group friends	<i>"My friends like to help me when I am confused, and we also often study in groups so that we can understand more easily"</i>
4	Students' Goals and Their Power	Desire to study outside the region	<i>"if my grades are bad, I am afraid of being scolded by my parents. my father is strict, so I have to study so that my grades are good"</i>
5	Sociocultural Factors and Students' Identities	Personal value of English	<i>"Even though I live in a village, English can help with many things, such as chatting with tourists or understanding English songs and videos"</i>

As shown in Table 1, students' motivation comes not only from internal factors (such as future aspirations and personal values towards learning), but also from external factors such as teacher support and family pressure. For example, participant 1 and participant 5 showed strong intrinsic motivation with long-term goals and independent learning spirit. Meanwhile, participant 4 reflected pressure from the family environment as a learning drive. Social support such as friends and teachers also play a significant role in shaping students' motivation.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that student motivation does not originate only from internal sources; external factors, such as the social environment of students and their personal desires, also influence it. This finding is consistent with the idea that motivation is an ever-changing construct influenced by complex interactions between individual characteristics and the broader social context in which students live. According to Divoll & Lastrapes (2024), creating a positive and culturally relevant learning environment is crucial for increasing student participation. Furthermore, they argue that contextual approaches, particularly those tailored to students' lives, are particularly beneficial in situations where learning resources are limited. Based on the results of the interviews and the documentations, the researcher describes them as follows:

1. Sociocultural Factors and Students' Identities on English Learning Motivation

Students' motivation is not only influenced by their personal interests; teachers' attitudes, peer support, and social interactions in the classroom also greatly influence their motivation to learn. Students in rural areas often have difficulty accessing learning resources such as books, internet connections, and exposure to English outside of school. Therefore, the classroom serves as the primary place where their identity and motivation to learn are formed. This theme emphasizes how students' social and cultural backgrounds, along with their understanding of the role and importance of English, influence their desire to participate in learning activities. For example, students often view English not only as an academic subject but also as a symbolic tool that connects them to broader cultural and social opportunities. Despite infrastructure limitations, the presence of strong social support from peers, along with a sense of self-identity developed as part of a learning community, serves as an important motivational factor.

The participants' statements show this. P2 said, *“I used to dislike English lessons because they felt very boring, but when the teacher explained enthusiastically and casually, I also became enthusiastic and did not get bored in class.”* This testimony emphasizes that teachers' enthusiasm, personal involvement, and teaching styles play an important role in shaping students' emotional responses to English learning. As indicated by the phrase *“enthusiastic and enjoyable teachers,”* student motivation stems from internal factors as well as the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. English becomes more accessible, enjoyable, and meaningful to students when teachers demonstrate interest and clarity in their teaching. The study by Febriana et al., (2018) also confirmed that teachers in rural schools play a key role in maintaining students' interest despite infrastructure limitations.

P3 stated, *“My friends like to help me when I am confused, and we also often study in groups so that we can understand more easily,”* as mentioned earlier. This statement shows how collaboration and peer support can increase collective motivation while reducing individual anxiety. Group learning activities and informal discussions with classmates create a supportive learning environment. Social identity as part of a community that is becoming more open to foreign languages also strengthens their desire to master English (Luong & Tran, 2021). Studying together with the help of peers allows students to create shared meaning, which improves their understanding and confidence. Peers not only provide academic assistance but also offer emotional support that validates and encourages one another, as demonstrated by the act of *“helping and learning in groups.”* In a rural context, this peer dynamic is particularly important because formal educational resources may be limited, and learning communities serve as a substitute for external exposure. This experience shows that the social interactions students experience in class determine their identity as English learners. Teachers who actively make classes enjoyable are able to encourage student interest. Supportive peers can also be additional motivators. With these two factors, students in rural areas still have a strong desire to learn even though they do not have many educational resources.

In addition, student motivation is related to how they learn in class, but also how they see the benefits of English in everyday life. Statement P5, *“Even though I live in a village, English can help with many things, such as chatting with tourists or understanding English songs and videos,”* illustrates this point. According to this statement, students see English as a skill that offers new opportunities to access information and entertainment from global media and interact with others. Because they view English as a useful skill in real life rather than just a school subject, this perspective increases their desire to learn. Thus, the motivation to learn English in a rural environment can be understood as the result of a combination of several important factors: the role of enthusiastic teachers, peer support, and students' views on the practical benefits of English in their lives. These three factors are interconnected and together shape students' identities as learners motivated to continue developing despite limited conditions.

The sociocultural support aspect was also evident from the documents. Some students (especially P2 and P3) have records of study groups or group English assignments that show cooperation and mutual support. In addition, English teachers at MA NWDI Lepak often motivate students with success stories of local people who have made it thanks to their English language skills. Teachers should focus on creating a safe and supportive classroom environment, where mistakes are considered an integral part of the learning process, to foster self-confidence and reduce communication anxiety (Atifnigar, 2024). Research by Saffari et al., (2024) also highlights the important role of teacher support in mitigating

language learning anxiety and fostering an inclusive environment. This reinforces positive perceptions of English at the level of their small community. However, on the other hand, R4 also admitted that *“if my grades are bad, I am afraid of being scolded by my parents. my father is strict, so I have to study so that my grades are good”*. This shows that pressure from the immediate environment can be a barrier.

2. Students’ Goals and their Power on Motivating to Learn English

Almost all research participants stated that they wanted to learn English for specific purposes, such as becoming a tour guide, working on a cruise ship, or studying abroad. This is in line with the Potential-Based Achievement Goal theory, which states that future aspirations can encourage continuous motivation to learn (Kurniawan et al., 2022). This indicates that their desire to learn is not only driven by school requirements but also tied to their values and future aspirations. Students feel they have a clear direction in their learning process when they have specific goals. This makes their efforts more consistent and focused. Motivation to learn English is long-term and sustainable if we believe that the language can help us achieve a better future. *“I want to be able to speak English so I can work on a cruise ship. Therefore, I must learn English,”* said participant P1. This statement shows a strong instrumental motivation to learn English as an important requirement for professional success. Bandhu et al., (2024) explained that motivation in this framework is rooted in an intrinsic desire to achieve a higher level of self in the future. Additionally, this perspective indicates that learning English is no longer merely an academic obligation but a real necessity for obtaining employment. This also shows that mastering English has significant practical value and is directly related to social mobility and a better quality of life for students.

The fact that the student's learning activities also show support for this motivation. For example, P1’s notes include a list of English vocabulary related to tourism and travel, as well as several terms used in the shipping industry. These notes show how seriously and actively P1 is studying vocabulary related to his career aspirations. Sekar et al., (2022) also showed that students in rural areas would be more motivated if learning was linked to real career prospects. He is not only learning what is taught in class, but also striving to expand his own knowledge according to his needs. This demonstrates a future-oriented and goal-directed approach to learning. Participants' experiences show that rural students will be more motivated to learn English if it is linked to future job or educational opportunities. When students see a direct connection between what they learn in class and their careers or dreams, they will be more enthusiastic and consistent in their learning process. Therefore, the specific goals students have played an important role in creating sustainable learning motivation.

These findings are highly relevant to the results of this study, as the students in this study also emphasized how contextual and relevant teaching methods helped them maintain their interest in learning despite facing limitations. In addition to the learning environment, family expectations emerge as an additional motivator. Some students said that their parents put pressure on them to achieve good academic performance, but many also acknowledged that this pressure encouraged them to remain focused on their education. This dual effect shows that if students receive academic and emotional support, social pressure, although sometimes burdensome, can be transformed into a positive motivator. This aligns with the research by Cuong (2021) who found that family needs and expectations serve as strong external motivators for learning English in rural areas. Their research shows that rural students are more likely to develop sustained motivation when their long-term goals, such as improving career

opportunities and contributing to family well being, are supported by a strong social support system and adaptive teaching practices.

Overall, these findings emphasize that motivation is the result of interactions between personal desires, family expectations, and the broader cultural-educational environment rather than an individual trait. Specifically, the results of the study show that schools and teachers can increase student motivation in rural areas or areas with limited resources by applying approaches that connect academic content with their socio-cultural realities. Additionally, they acknowledge the importance of family dynamics. In this context, educational interventions not only aim to enhance students' intrinsic motivation but also leverage external incentives, such as social expectations and family long-term goals. These two forces work together to support students' education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the motivation to learn English of eleventh grade students at MA NWDI Lepak is strongly influenced by two main factors: 1). Sociocultural and Identity Factors: Support from teachers and peers, as well as the community's perception of the importance of English, shape students' intrinsic motivation. 2). Future Aspirations: Goals such as career, higher education and social mobility become strong and purposeful sources of motivation. The results confirm that learning motivation has many dimensions and consists of a combination of internal and external factors that work together. When students have strong social support and clear future goals, limited facilities are not the main obstacle in a rural context. Therefore, to improve the quality of English language learning in rural areas, there are three main components that must be considered: strengthening the role of teachers, developing collaborative learning among students, and designing a curriculum that aligns with students' career needs and aspirations. Overall, this study enhances our understanding of how rural motivation to learn English is formed and sustained. It also emphasizes that the success of English language learning depends not only on individual ability but also on social interactions and environmental support that foster sustained motivation.

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