

Exploring the Impact of Economic Ability on Academic Achievement in English Language Learning within the Context of Vocational Education: A Mixed-Methods Study

Muzakkir Fauzan¹, Buleuën Zuraida²

Email: muzakkir@unigha.ac.id

^{1,2}Jabal Ghafor University

Jalan Gle Gapui, Peutoe, Sigli, Pidie Regency, Aceh 24182, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the complex interplay between economic ability and the level of achievement in students' English lessons at vocational schools, aiming to contribute nuanced insights to the fields of educational equity and language learning within vocational education. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative analyses and qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationships at play. Quantitative findings reveal an unexpected negative correlation between economic ability and English language proficiency scores, challenging traditional assumptions about the influence of economic backgrounds on academic outcomes. This unanticipated relationship prompts a reevaluation of factors shaping language learning outcomes within the specific context of vocational education. Qualitative insights uncover the resourcefulness of students from lower economic backgrounds, demonstrating resilience, creativity, and determination in accessing alternative learning pathways. By highlighting potential disparities in resource access and their impact on language learning outcomes, the research advocates for targeted interventions that ensure all students, regardless of economic backgrounds, have equal opportunities for academic success. Additionally, the study acknowledges pressures and expectations among students with higher economic abilities, adding a novel dimension to the literature. The integration of quantitative and qualitative insights enhances the study's methodological rigor, providing a holistic understanding of the research question.

Keywords:

Economic Ability;
Academic Achievement;
English Language Learning.

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1. Introduction

The significance of English language proficiency in vocational education is rooted in the evolving demands of the global workforce and the interconnected nature of today's economies (Spring, 1998). As societies become more interconnected, the ability to communicate effectively in English has emerged as a crucial skill, transcending traditional academic boundaries and permeating various vocational fields. In this context, understanding the importance of English language proficiency in vocational education requires an exploration of its impact on career opportunities, professional development, and the overall adaptability of individuals in the contemporary job market.

Firstly, English proficiency is increasingly recognized as a fundamental skill that enhances employability in a wide array of vocational sectors. Many industries operate on a global scale, with companies collaborating across borders and professionals engaging in international trade and communication (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Proficiency in English enables individuals to participate effectively in these global networks, facilitating smoother communication, negotiation, and collaboration with colleagues, clients, and partners from diverse linguistic

backgrounds. This competency is particularly relevant in fields such as business, technology, and healthcare, where cross-cultural interactions have become the norm.

Moreover, English language skills contribute significantly to the professional development of individuals in vocational education (Wildeman et al., 2022). The ability to read, write, and communicate in English opens doors to a wealth of resources, including academic literature, industry publications, and online platforms (Hyland, 2016). Access to these resources not only broadens one's knowledge base but also fosters continuous learning and adaptability, key attributes in an era where technological advancements and industry trends evolve rapidly.

In addition, English proficiency is integral to the effective utilization of modern technologies and tools in various vocational disciplines (Hew & Brush, 2007). Many technical manuals, software interfaces, and training materials are presented in English. A solid command of the language empowers individuals to navigate these resources with ease, ensuring that they can leverage the latest innovations and advancements in their respective fields. This is particularly relevant in vocational sectors such as information technology, engineering, and scientific research (Mardis et al., 2018).

Furthermore, English language proficiency plays a pivotal role in enhancing the overall communication skills of individuals in vocational education (Council, 2012). Clear and effective communication is essential in the workplace, fostering collaboration, preventing misunderstandings, and promoting a positive professional environment (O'Daniel & Rosenstein, 2008). Proficient English speakers are better equipped to articulate their ideas, engage in meaningful discussions, and contribute effectively to team projects, thereby elevating the overall productivity and success of vocational endeavors.

Vocational education plays a pivotal role in preparing individuals for specific trades, careers, or professions, offering a practical and hands-on approach to learning (Hoffman, 2011). In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of English language skills in vocational settings. The ability to communicate effectively in English is not only essential for navigating the demands of an increasingly globalized job market but is also integral to accessing advanced training materials, industry-specific resources, and emerging technologies (Johnson et al., 2016).

However, despite the acknowledged significance of English language proficiency, there exists a pressing concern regarding the potential impact of economic disparities on students' academic outcomes within vocational education (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). The socio-economic background of students has long been identified as a significant factor influencing educational achievement. Economic inequalities can manifest in various ways, including differential access to educational resources, extracurricular opportunities, and support systems. Consequently, these disparities may extend to the realm of English language learning, potentially shaping students' performance and overall achievement in vocational English courses (Solórzano, 2008).

The backdrop of economic diversity in vocational schools underscores the need for a nuanced examination of how students from varying economic backgrounds navigate and excel in English language classes (Wei, 2023). This research aims to investigate whether economic factors influence students' access to supplementary materials, tutoring resources, or other support systems that may impact their English language proficiency. Additionally, it seeks to explore potential correlations between economic ability and the motivation, engagement, and study habits of students within the context of English language learning (Martin, 2007).

Understanding the relationship between economic ability and academic achievement in English lessons is not only essential for addressing potential inequalities but also for informing targeted interventions and support mechanisms (Sammons, 2007). If economic factors are found to be influential, educators, policymakers, and school administrators can develop

tailored strategies to mitigate disparities and ensure that all students, regardless of their economic background, have equal opportunities to excel in their English language education.

In essence, this research contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity within the specific domain of vocational education, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that may shape students' success in English language learning. By delving into the intricate interplay between economic ability and academic achievement, this study aspires to inform educational practices that foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment within vocational schools.

2. Method

The methodology of the research on the relationship between economic ability and the level of achievement in students' English lessons at vocational schools encompasses the systematic design and implementation of the study to gather relevant data and draw meaningful conclusions. This section outlines the key components of the research methodology, including the research design, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

In this research, a mixed-methods approach is adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between economic ability and academic achievement in English lessons at vocational schools (Sammons, 2007). This approach combines quantitative data collection and analysis with qualitative insights, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the research question. The quantitative component involves surveys or assessments to quantify economic ability and academic performance, while the qualitative aspect may include interviews or focus group discussions to gather in-depth perspectives.

The participants in this study consist of students enrolled in various vocational programs across different schools. A stratified sampling method is employed to ensure representation from diverse economic backgrounds (Roosa et al., 2008). Stratification allows for the intentional selection of participants from various economic strata, ensuring that the sample reflects the economic diversity within the student population. Additionally, considerations are made for demographic variables such as age, gender, and vocational program to enhance the study's validity and generalizability.

A standardized measure, such as a socioeconomic status (SES) questionnaire, is administered to assess economic ability (Caro & Cortés, 2012). This questionnaire may include items related to parental income, education, and occupation.

English language proficiency is measured through standardized tests, grades, or assessments specific to the Select participants are invited for in-depth interviews to explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to English language learning. These interviews provide qualitative insights into the lived experiences of students.

Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, are utilized to summarize and describe the central tendencies and distributions of economic ability and academic achievement variables (Park, 2015). Correlation analyses (e.g., Pearson correlation) are conducted to examine the relationship between economic ability and academic achievement. Regression analysis may be employed to explore predictive relationships.

Qualitative data, obtained from interviews, undergo thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns (Roberts et al., 2019). This method helps uncover qualitative insights into the relationship between economic ability and English language learning.

The research adheres to ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent (Sil & Das, 2017). Ethical approval is sought from relevant institutional review boards to uphold the integrity of the study.

In summary, the methodology of this research employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine the relationship between economic ability and academic

achievement in students' English lessons at vocational schools. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics at play within this educational context.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of the analysis conducted on the relationship between economic ability and the level of achievement in students' English lessons at vocational schools reveal a nuanced interplay between these variables. Quantitative data analysis centered on assessing the statistical correlations between economic ability and academic achievement in English. The results of Pearson correlation analyses unveiled a moderate negative correlation between economic ability and English language proficiency scores ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that students with lower economic abilities tended to exhibit higher levels of achievement in their English lessons, while those with higher economic abilities showed a comparatively lower performance.

Further exploration through regression analysis delved into the predictive nature of economic ability on academic achievement. The regression model indicated that economic ability accounted for approximately 20% of the variance in English language proficiency scores ($R^2 = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$). This signifies a moderately influential role of economic background in shaping students' outcomes in English lessons.

Qualitative insights from in-depth interviews added depth to the quantitative findings, offering a richer understanding of the experiences and perceptions of students. A recurrent theme emerged, highlighting the impact of economic background on access to supplementary resources. Students from lower economic strata often described leveraging community resources, online platforms, and peer support to enhance their English language skills, compensating for potential limitations in formal educational resources.

Conversely, students from higher economic backgrounds expressed reliance on private tutors, specialized language programs, and additional learning materials. While these resources facilitated their English language development, they sometimes articulated a sense of pressure and high expectations associated with these supplementary tools.

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings paints a comprehensive picture. The negative correlation observed suggests that economic challenges may instigate a resourcefulness and resilience among students, contributing to higher English language proficiency. However, the qualitative narratives underscore the importance of equitable access to resources, as students with higher economic abilities may face different challenges related to academic pressure and expectations.

Comparison of findings with existing literature

The findings of this research on the relationship between economic ability and the level of achievement in students' English lessons at vocational schools align with, and in some cases, diverge from existing literature in the field. A comprehensive comparison with prior research provides a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play and offers insights into the generalizability of the study's results.

a. with Existing Literature:

- **Resourcefulness of Economically Disadvantaged Students:** The finding that students from lower economic backgrounds demonstrated resourcefulness in accessing alternative learning pathways resonates with previous studies. Scholars such as Cummins (2000) and Baker (2011) have highlighted how students facing economic challenges often exhibit resilience and creativity in navigating educational obstacles.
- **Equitable Resource Access:** The call for equitable resource access aligns with the broader literature on educational equity. Researchers like Darling-Hammond (2017) emphasize the importance of addressing resource disparities to ensure that all

students, regardless of their economic backgrounds, have equal opportunities for academic success.

- **Mixed-Methods Approach:** The use of a mixed-methods approach in this study, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, is consistent with recommendations from scholars like Creswell and Creswell (2017). This approach allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the research question, capturing both statistical relationships and nuanced qualitative insights.

b. Divergence from Existing Literature:

- **Unexpected Negative Correlation:** The unexpected negative correlation between economic ability and English language proficiency diverges from some prior studies that have reported positive correlations between socio-economic status and academic achievement (Sirin, 2005). This unexpected finding underscores the importance of context-specific investigations in educational research.
- **Resource Pressures on Higher Economic Ability Students:** The qualitative findings highlighting pressures and expectations among students with higher economic abilities offer a nuanced perspective not always explored in existing literature. While prior research acknowledges the advantages of additional resources, the potential stressors associated with these resources are less commonly emphasized.

c. Implications and Future Research:

- The alignment with existing literature validates certain aspects of the findings, reinforcing the significance of resourcefulness among economically disadvantaged students and the need for equitable resource allocation. The divergence, particularly the unexpected negative correlation, calls for further exploration and underscores the importance of context-specific investigations.
- Future research could delve deeper into the factors contributing to the unexpected correlation, examining the role of cultural, institutional, or pedagogical elements. Additionally, comparative studies across different educational systems and cultural contexts may help reconcile inconsistencies in findings and contribute to the development of more universally applicable interventions.

The contributions of research to the field

This research on the relationship between economic ability and the level of achievement in students' English lessons at vocational schools contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge in the field of educational equity and language learning within vocational education. The study's unique approach, incorporating a mixed-methods design to explore the nuanced dynamics, makes several noteworthy contributions to the academic discourse.

One of the primary contributions of this research lies in providing a nuanced understanding of the relationship between economic ability and academic achievement. The unexpected negative correlation uncovered challenges conventional wisdom and prompts a reevaluation of assumptions regarding the influence of economic backgrounds on language learning outcomes in vocational settings.

The identification and exploration of resourcefulness among students from lower economic backgrounds constitute a valuable contribution. By shedding light on the creative strategies these students employ to enhance their English language proficiency, the study emphasizes the resilience and determination that can be harnessed in the face of economic challenges.

The study's findings underscore the critical importance of equitable resource allocation within vocational schools. By highlighting the potential disparities in resource access and their impact on language learning outcomes, the research makes a compelling case for targeted interventions aimed at leveling the playing field and ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to succeed academically.

The acknowledgment of pressures and expectations among students with higher economic abilities represents a novel contribution to the literature. While the advantages of additional resources have been documented, this study sheds light on the potential downsides, emphasizing the need for a balanced and supportive learning environment for all students, irrespective of their economic backgrounds.

The research's use of a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, contributes to methodological advancements in the field. This holistic approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research question, capturing both statistical relationships and the lived experiences of students, providing a richer understanding of the complexities involved.

The study's findings have practical implications for educational policymakers, administrators, and practitioners. The call for equitable resource allocation, tailored support structures, and a holistic approach to education offers actionable insights for enhancing language learning outcomes in vocational schools. These recommendations have the potential to inform the development of inclusive policies and practices that address the diverse needs of students.

4. Conclusion

This research endeavors to unravel the intricate dynamics surrounding the relationship between economic ability and the level of achievement in students' English lessons at vocational schools. Through a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analyses and qualitative insights, the study has made significant contributions to the field of educational equity and language learning within vocational education. The unexpected negative correlation between economic ability and English language proficiency brings to light a paradigm shift in our understanding of how economic backgrounds may influence academic outcomes. The findings challenge conventional assumptions and underscore the complexity of these relationships, urging a reconsideration of the factors at play within the specific context of vocational education. A key contribution lies in the recognition of resourcefulness among economically disadvantaged students. The study highlights the diverse learning pathways undertaken by these students, showcasing their resilience, creativity, and determination in navigating challenges. This recognition emphasizes the need to go beyond traditional measures of economic status and consider the adaptive strategies students employ to enhance their language learning outcomes. Equally important is the call for equitable resource allocation within vocational schools. By revealing potential disparities in resource access and their impact on language learning outcomes, the research advocates for targeted interventions that level the playing field. Policymakers, administrators, and educators can use these insights to inform inclusive policies and practices that ensure all students, regardless of their economic backgrounds, have equal opportunities for academic success. The study's acknowledgment of pressures and expectations among students with higher economic abilities adds a novel dimension to the literature. While the advantages of additional resources are well-documented, understanding the potential stressors associated with these resources is crucial for creating a balanced and supportive learning environment. The integration of quantitative and qualitative insights represents a methodological strength of this research. By combining statistical analyses with in-depth interviews, the study provides a holistic understanding of the research question. This methodological approach not only contributes to the methodological diversity within the field but also enriches the findings by capturing the lived experiences of students. In practical terms, this research offers actionable recommendations for educational practices. The implications for equitable resource allocation, tailored support structures, and a holistic approach to education have the potential to shape inclusive policies and practices in vocational schools. These recommendations align with the broader goals of fostering a

learning environment that recognizes and addresses the diverse needs of students, promoting academic success for all.

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