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Socioeconomic and Educational Disparities in English Language Achievement: A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban High School Students

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Available Online: August 2024
Revised: June 2024
Accepted: June 2024
Received: July 2024

Volume II Issue 3 (2024)
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13764215
E-ISSN: 2984-7184
P-ISSN: 2984-7176
https://getinternational.org/research/

Abstract

Proficiency in the English language is a fundamental skill that students are expected to acquire in school. However, it has been suggested that learning gaps among students may be linked to factors such as their socioeconomic status, peer influence, and limited access to resources. In response to a growing trend of failing students, this study was conducted to investigate and identify the factors influencing students' performance in English. Data for the study was collected from two types of communities: rural and urban. A descriptive research method was employed to achieve the study's objectives.The results revealed that urban students have greater access to learning resources compared to those in rural areas. Additionally, the data indicated that both teachers and peers play a significant role in shaping students' performance in English, regardless of location. Furthermore, the findings showed that female students in both rural and urban settings tend to outperform their male counterparts, with the highest academic achievers being concentrated in urban areas. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that male students generally perform worse in English, teachers should maintain fairness toward all students, and rural schools should be provided with more English-related resources.

Keywords: Rural and Urban, Accessibility, peer factor, teacher factor, academic standard, academic performance

Recommended citations:

Smith, R. J. E. (2024). Socioeconomic and Educational Disparities in English Language Achievement: A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban High School Students. GUILD OF EDUCATORS IN TESOL INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL, 2(3), 125–132. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13764215

INTRODUCTION

Communication involves the transfer of information from one location, person, or group to another. At its core, every communication involves at least a sender, a message, and a recipient. While this may appear simple, communication is actually quite complex. Numerous factors can affect how a message is conveyed between the sender

and recipient, such as emotions, cultural context, the method of communication, and even geographical location. Achieving clear, effective, and precise communication can be challenging, which is why these skills are highly valued by companies around the globe.

The ability to communicate effectively with another English speaker is essential for several reasons, but it requires strong communication skills to achieve this. There are various English communication strategies that can help individuals stand out in conversations, whether they are native speakers or language learners, making a lasting first impression. Understanding the concept of Communicative English is key to learning the Communicative Approach and improving English communication skills.

As Daniel (2021) points out, becoming fluent in English can be difficult, especially for those whose native language is very different from English. Beginners learning English as a second language often face numerous challenges. Even native speakers sometimes make mistakes due to the language's complexities and subtleties. So, the struggles faced by English learners are not unique to them.

According to a study by El-Omari (2016), several factors influence student performance in many educational systems. These include grade repetition, socioeconomic background, speaking the language of instruction at home, and age. Students tend to perform better academically and exhibit positive behaviors in school when their parents are educated, supportive, and involved. Parental involvement is widely recognized as a factor that can enhance student success, especially in urban schools.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research approach to identify factors affecting English achievement among students in both barangay and national high schools.

Sources of Data

Data were collected from enrollment records of students attending tutorial sessions at the Reading Clinique Center on Tenejero Road, Pulilan, Bulacan. A sample was drawn from this population.

Instrumentation

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire. The first section collected demographic information (e.g., gender, barangay, country of origin, grade level), while the second section addressed challenges such as access to resources, travel time to the learning center, peer pressure, and teacher influence during English classes. The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended questions and was validated by students from Sta. Peregrina High School and Balatong B. Elementary School.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the Reading Clinique Center owner to conduct the study. After approval was secured, questionnaires were distributed to participants. The data collected were then organized, analyzed, and interpreted.

Statistical Treatment

The data were analyzed statistically to compare challenges affecting academic performance between students in barangay and national high schools. Analysis included using a percentage formula to determine respondents' profiles and preferences for accents.

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100 P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100$$

Where: **P**-percentage

f –frequency

N- number of respondents

In this study, correlation analysis was used to determine if there were significant differences between four variables: students in rural and urban secondary schools, the challenges they face, gender, and grade level.

This is the equation:

$$X^2 = \frac{\Sigma(O-E)^2}{E} \frac{\Sigma(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Where: X^2- Chi-square

E- Expected Frequency

O- Observe Frequency

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Findings

Profile of the Respondents on the Location of School at Different Year Level

The distribution of respondents' profiles based on the school's location across different year levels is presented on the chart. The fourth year has the largest percentage of students in rural areas at 9.96%, while the second year has the smallest at 8.84%. In urban areas, first-year students have the highest rate at 5.87%, and the lowest rate is 4.41%. Despite the similarities between rural and urban schools in terms of resources and learning environments, various factors, some specifically tied to the classification of schools as rural or urban, affect students' academic performance.

Percentage of Accessibility on References

The data shows that among rural students, fourth-year students make up the largest percentage at 9.96%, while second-year students are the smallest group at 8.84%. In urban schools, first-year students are the most numerous at 5.87%, and second-year students are the least at 4.41%. Despite similarities in resources and learning environments between rural and urban schools, various factors influenced by the school's classification affect students' academic performance.The graph indicates that rural students lack access to electronic libraries and rely solely on physical books, particularly English ones. In contrast, urban students have access to both physical and electronic libraries. According to Foradian (2013), these disparities contribute to the lag in rural education compared to urban standards. The quality of education in rural areas is generally lower, highlighting the need for improvements. To address this, it is crucial to enhance basic facilities, including clean restrooms, safe drinking water, adequate classroom infrastructure, and consistent teacher motivation. With appropriate reforms, rural education in India can be significantly improved, providing better opportunities for students to pursue higher education and careers.

Percentage on the Distance of School from Home

The diagram highlights transportation preferences for commuting to school, revealing that walking is the most popular choice among both rural (56.25%) and urban (78.57%) respondents. Conversely, the least favored mode in rural areas is the jeep (4.78%), while in urban areas, it's the bicycle (3.67%). Overall, walking is the predominant

choice (70.60%), and bicycle use is the least common (4.99%). Baliyan & Khama (2020) suggest that ensuring students live near their schools can reduce transportation time, providing more opportunities for after-school study and improving academic performance.

Percentage of the Perception of the Respondents on Teacher Factor to Attend English Class

This figure emphasizes key qualities valued in English teachers by both rural and urban students. A majority from both groups agree that teachers treat students fairly and assign grades consistently, with 100% of rural and 95.92% of urban respondents concurring. Rural students particularly appreciate teachers who create a comfortable learning environment and motivate them to continue studying, both at 98.52%. In contrast, urban students place more importance on being inspired by their teachers (93.26%) than feeling comfortable with them (92.24%). Additionally, 57.35% of rural and 64.90% of urban students find their teachers punctual.

Rakesh Ranjan (2013) highlights that practice teaching is a crucial stage in teacher education. It provides aspiring teachers with real-world classroom experience, allowing them to develop necessary skills before entering the profession. This period serves as a bridge from student to teacher, with student-teachers recognizing its importance in their professional preparation.

Percentage of the Perception of the Respondents on Peer Factor to Attend English Class

This section discusses the influence of peer interactions on school attendance decisions. In rural areas, 83.03% of respondents and in urban areas, 87.14% appreciated peer support in attending school. Peer compassion was also valued by 83.09% of rural and 83.67% of urban respondents. Peer pressure was minimal in rural areas, affecting only 15.44%, though 50% received peer help with assignments. In contrast, urban students faced more peer pressure related to schoolwork (65.10%) but received slightly less support with assignments (61.43%).

Yee (2013) highlights past practices of ability grouping in elementary schools, where students were clustered based on achievement levels. By the late 1980s and 1990s, critics argued that such grouping and tracking reinforced inequality, especially for disadvantaged and minority students. While some research indicated negative impacts on self-esteem for lower-level students, other studies suggested that grouping benefitted advanced learners and improved overall test scores.

Mean Academic Standard in English of Students in Urban

Plate 7 shows the average academic performance in English for urban students. Females consistently achieve higher scores than males at each school level. First-year male students have an average score of 81.69%, while females score 82.11%. Sophomore females scored 82.80%, compared to 80.80% for their male counterparts. In the junior year, males have an average score of 79.45%, whereas females score 83.13%. Senior males scored 81.55%, and senior females scored 85.10%. Overall, female students in urban areas have an average grade of 83.26%, compared to 80.87% for male students.

Mean Academic Standard in English of Students in Rural

The data shows that, on average, students in rural areas perform differently based on gender at various school levels. Female students consistently achieve higher scores than their male counterparts. For first-year students, males have an average score of 78.68%, while females score 80.96%. In the sophomore year, females average 80.95%, compared to 79.40% for males. Among juniors, males score 76.98% and females 81.23%. Senior males have an average score of 79.59%, whereas senior females score 81.12%. In urban areas, female students average 81.07%, while male students average 78.66%.

This finding is consistent with Parajuli & Thapa (2017), which suggests that gender can influence academic performance. It appears that female students outperform their male peers. Additionally, males often engage in a broader range of extracurricular activities than females, allowing female students more time to focus on homework, studying, and test preparation.

Correlation of Mean Academic Performance of Respondents at Different School Location

The linear regression analysis of academic performance in rural and urban schools yielded a correlation coefficient of \(r = 0.79 \), showing a strong positive relationship between the variables. A comparison of academic means resulted in a t-value of 1.822, which is lower than the critical values at both the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, suggesting no significant difference in academic performance between male and female students.

A study by Rashid and Javanmardi (2012) involving 182 Iranian EFL students found that mastery goals were the most prevalent, followed by performance-approach, work avoidance, and performance-avoidance goals. The study concluded that gender did not significantly affect students' goal orientations in English. Additionally, Musa, Dauda, and

Umar (2016) found that while performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals did not significantly influence the effect of gender on academic performance in English, students' learning goals had an impact.

Correlation of Mean Academic Performance of Respondents and Gender

The table at the top shows the correlation between respondents' average academic performance and gender. With a correlation score of 0.21, it suggests a slight positive relationship between male and female academic achievement. This indicates that academic performance is largely independent of gender, and evaluations are consistent across both genders.

Urban schools, particularly in developing economies, are generally larger, serve a more affluent student population, have greater control over their budgets, experience fewer staffing issues, have a higher proportion of credentialed teachers, and maintain higher student-teacher ratios compared to their rural and small-town counterparts ("What Makes Urban Schools Different," 2013).

Conclusions:

The analysis reveals that female respondents outnumbered males, and national high schools had more participants compared to rural schools. Most respondents were in their first year, with the fewest in their fourth year. Urban schools had access to more resources, while barangay schools lacked electronic libraries and only had English textbooks. Walking was the preferred mode of transport for both barangay and national high school students. Attendance in English classes was largely driven by teachers' reputations for fair grading. While students valued peer support, they were less likely to help each other with assignments. English test scores were higher in national schools than in rural schools, but there was no significant difference in overall academic performance between students from

barangay and national schools, or between male and female students. Recommendations include establishing electronic libraries in both types of schools, encouraging male students to improve their English skills, and ensuring teachers maintain fair and punctual grading practices.

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