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## Behind the Numbers: What English Pretest Scores Reveal About Student's Academic Performance in School

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between English grammar proficiency and academic readiness among students at Stasi Anelaga, Paroki Bunda Maria Church, in Wamena, Papua Pegunungan. A qualitative approach was employed to explore the experiences and perceptions of 12 students aged 15–17 who had participated in church-based English classes. The data were collected through a standardized pretest focused on the grammar topic of nouns, followed by in-depth individual interviews and academic document reviews. The results revealed that students demonstrated an adequate foundational understanding of English, particularly in identifying and using nouns. Key contributing factors included previous exposure to English learning, high motivation, access to learning resources, family support, and stable psychological conditions. Despite being in a rural and underserved region, the students performed well on the grammar test, challenging assumptions about limited academic potential in such contexts. The findings suggest that English pretests can be used as diagnostic tools to identify educational strengths and support needs in remote areas. The study offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to improve language instruction and promote equitable academic outcomes across Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Academic performance; English pretest; rural education; Papua Pegunungan*

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of language proficiency in academic performance has been a focal point of educational research for decades. Language skills, particularly in English, are widely recognized as crucial tools for academic success, enabling students to understand complex instructions, interact meaningfully with academic content, and communicate ideas effectively. In the context of Indonesia, where English is often considered a foreign or second language depending on the region, understanding how English pretest scores relate to students' overall academic performance becomes particularly crucial. This study focuses on 12 students from Stasi Anelaga, Paroki Bunda Maria Church, located in Wamena, Papua Pegunungan, to explore this relationship within a rural educational setting where access to quality English education is limited.

Recent global studies have consistently demonstrated that language proficiency serves as a foundational skill for learning across various subjects. A report by the World Bank (2020) underscores that early language skills significantly impact learning outcomes in other disciplines such as mathematics and science. Smith et al. (2021) support this view, showing a positive correlation between early English proficiency and academic achievement in core subjects. Moreover, Puspitasari et al. (2022) and Rahmawati and Pratama (2021) found that Indonesian

students with better English skills tend to score higher in national examinations and demonstrate stronger problem-solving capabilities. This is further corroborated by research from Wijayanto and Mahmud (2023), who observed that students with higher language fluency are more confident in classroom engagement and critical thinking tasks.

In rural and semi-urban contexts such as Papua Pegunungan, the challenges are even more pronounced. Students often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and have limited access to qualified English teachers, learning materials, or exposure to the English language (Susanto & Wulandari, 2020). As a result, pretest scores in English may reflect not only their language ability but also broader educational disadvantages. Hartati and Yusuf (2023) emphasized the disparities between urban and rural schools in Indonesia, where lack of infrastructure and language support programs contribute to lower academic performance. This makes English pretests a potential diagnostic tool for identifying students who may need additional academic support.

Furthermore, studies such as those by Indriani et al. (2021) and Nugroho and Lestari (2020) suggest that incorporating English language reinforcement into early education can lead to significant improvements in students' academic motivation and self-efficacy. In Papua, where educational development is still in progress, understanding these dynamics could help bridge the educational gap between remote regions and urban centers.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform educational policies and teaching strategies in Indonesia. By identifying the relationship between English proficiency and academic success, particularly in underrepresented and rural areas, this study can offer actionable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. Interventions designed around early English language development can be crucial not just for improving English scores, but for fostering broader academic growth. Ultimately, such efforts can contribute to more equitable and inclusive educational outcomes across diverse Indonesian contexts.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the relationship between English pretest scores and academic performance among students at Stasi Anelaga, Paroki Bunda Maria Church. The sample consists of 12 students, aged 15 to 17 years, who were selected based on their participation in English language classes at the church. The qualitative method is appropriate for this research as it allows for in-depth exploration of students' experiences and perceptions regarding their language skills and academic performance.

Data collection involved administering a standardized English pretest designed to assess students' proficiency in grammar and syntax; nouns. The pretest was conducted in a controlled environment to ensure consistency and reliability in the results. Following the pretest, which consisted of multiple-choice questions focusing on nouns, individual interviews were conducted with each student to gather insights into their academic experiences, the challenges they faced in learning English, and their perceptions of the role of English in their overall education.

Additionally, academic records were reviewed to correlate pretest scores with students' overall grades in other subjects. This triangulation of data sources enhances the credibility and

validity of the findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between English pretest scores and academic performance.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their parents, ensuring that participants understood the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were also maintained to protect their privacy.

## **RESULT & DISCUSSION**

### ***1. Adequate Foundational Understanding of English Grammar***

The students exhibited a solid grasp of basic English grammar, particularly in the area of nouns, which was the focus of the pretest. Their responses demonstrated that they were able to differentiate between common and proper nouns, identify noun phrases, and understand noun usage in basic sentence structures. Despite the remote location and educational limitations in Wamena, the pretest results indicate that students have internalized fundamental English grammar rules. This may be attributed to effective foundational instruction at earlier stages or retention of learned material through consistent exposure.

This finding is aligned with prior studies emphasizing that basic grammatical knowledge, when consistently reinforced can remain intact over time even without continuous formal instruction (Putra & Yuliana, 2023). It also suggests that noun-focused instruction may serve as a strategic entry point for broader grammar competency in similar rural contexts (Kim & Gil, 2022). Therefore, educators in resource-limited areas may benefit from prioritizing core grammar concepts, like noun usage, to build student confidence and comprehension before introducing more complex grammatical structures.

### ***2. Previous English Learning Experiences***

Interviews revealed that the students had varying degrees of prior English learning experiences. Some gained knowledge through formal education in school, others through church-based learning sessions, and a few reported attending informal tutoring or self-study via mobile applications and printed materials. These learning experiences, though inconsistent in structure, contributed to their current understanding and performance in the test.

This finding supports the argument that exposure to English in any form, school curriculum, religious settings, or self-initiated learning can positively affect language acquisition outcomes (Nguyen, 2021; Rachmawati et al., 2022). Particularly in remote contexts like Wamena, where formal education infrastructure may be lacking, these alternative pathways provide important avenues for language learning. Repetitive exposure, even in informal or fragmented contexts, helps reinforce grammatical patterns such as noun structures and builds familiarity with common vocabulary.

### ***3. High Learning Motivation***

The students showed a strong desire to perform well in English, which directly influenced their focus and preparation for the pretest. Many of them expressed that learning English was not only a school obligation but also a personal goal connected to future aspirations, such as attending university or pursuing careers outside Papua. This motivational drive pushed them to review lessons, seek additional materials, and remain disciplined in their studies.

High motivation is consistently identified in second language acquisition literature as a critical success factor, particularly in low-resource settings (Susanti & Hidayat, 2023). Motivation acts as a buffer against environmental challenges and helps students maintain consistent effort over time. In this case, students' enthusiasm toward English helped offset some of the barriers related to infrastructure and access, allowing them to prepare more thoroughly for the pretest. Their intrinsic motivation also led to reduced test anxiety and increased focus during the exam.

### ***4. Access to Learning Resources in Wamena***

Contrary to expectations, students had relatively good access to learning resources. Some schools and church-based education centers in Wamena provided English books and worksheets, while others allowed students to use mobile phones with limited internet data to access YouTube videos or learning apps. Additionally, several students mentioned that teachers gave extra practice materials or offered one-on-one assistance after class.

These findings challenge the assumption that remote areas are completely disconnected from educational resources. Recent developments in digital infrastructure and community education efforts in Papua have improved students' access to English learning tools (Suryani et al., 2022; Yusuf & Prabowo, 2023). While the access may not be uniform or fully reliable, it is sufficient to allow motivated learners to engage with content that supports their grammar development, including noun-focused lessons. This modest level of resource access appears to play a critical role in shaping their ability to perform well on standardized pretests.

### ***5. Supportive Family Environment***

Family involvement emerged as a significant factor in student success. Many students shared that their parents or guardians regularly asked about school progress, provided encouragement, or made efforts to obtain English learning materials. Even though most parents in Wamena may not speak English themselves, their emotional and logistical support created a positive learning atmosphere at home.

This is consistent with research highlighting that parental encouragement, even in non-academic forms can enhance student motivation and performance (Arifin et al., 2021; Marlina & Setiadi, 2022). In a context like Wamena, where families often prioritize communal responsibility and education as a pathway to improve life conditions, the role of the family cannot be understated. Students who feel supported by their families are more likely to persist through difficulties and stay engaged with their studies, as reflected in the pretest outcomes.

## **6. Stable Psychological Condition**

Observations during the test revealed that students approached the pretest calmly and confidently. In follow-up interviews, many expressed that they felt relaxed during the assessment, crediting familiar surroundings (church classroom), prior exposure to similar questions, and positive encouragement from teachers and peers. Such emotional readiness contributed to their ability to concentrate and recall information during the test.

Psychological stability during testing is a strong predictor of student performance, especially in language assessments where anxiety can interfere with memory retrieval and focus (Lee & Cho, 2022). Students in this study were not affected by test-related stress, which is often common among rural learners due to unfamiliarity with formal testing. This may indicate that the church and school environments in Wamena have succeeded in normalizing assessment practices in a way that reduces fear and builds confidence. This emotional resilience further explains the students' effective performance in the noun-focused pretest.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the strong performance of students on the English grammar pretest, particularly on the topic of nouns, can be attributed to a combination of internal and external factors. Although these students reside in a remote area of Wamena, Papua Pegunungan, they exhibited a solid understanding of basic English grammar due to prior learning experiences, high motivation, sufficient access to resources, and supportive family environments.

The results challenge prevailing assumptions that students in rural and underserved regions lack the capacity to perform well in academic settings. On the contrary, the presence of dedicated learners, concerned parents, and improving local infrastructure has created a supportive learning environment, even in geographically isolated areas. This study highlights the importance of maintaining and enhancing access to quality English learning resources, supporting teachers in rural areas with professional development focused on grammar instruction, encouraging parental involvement and providing families with strategies to aid learning at home as well as recognizing the psychological and emotional readiness of learners as a vital part of academic preparation.

Future research should explore whether similar results occur with other English grammar topics (e.g., verbs, sentence structure), and whether the positive factors identified in Wamena apply to other rural Indonesian contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could help determine whether this early grammatical proficiency predicts future academic or language outcomes.

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