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Gender Differences in Academic Motivation among Rural Indonesian Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT. The present study investigated the academic motivation of junior high school students in a rural area in Indonesia to determine whether there was a gender difference in their academic motivation. To this end, a mixed-method study was conducted with a focus on the quantitative methods of conducting a survey. 71 students participated in the survey and an informal group interview in the form of a sharing session. This study found that not all the participants reported they would continue their studies to the high school level upon graduating. It was further seen from the survey that most participants generally reported high academic motivation. Furthermore, female students reported a significantly lower level of motivation than their male counterparts. From the sharing session, the study found that, generally, the participants lacked clear academic goals. Some shared their general aspirations, but they seemed to lack practical plans to achieve them. Female participants were reticent in sharing their aspirations. Implications include raising the awareness of students from both genders on the importance of continuing study to widen future job opportunities and cut the cycle of poverty. Future studies could involve more secondary schools in different rural areas to increase the likelihood of generalisability. Using diverse methods can better capture the complexity of academic motivation from multiple perspectives.

Keywords: academic motivation, gender difference, Junior High School, Indonesian, Rural Area.

Diferenças de gênero na motivação acadêmica entre alunos do ensino médio rural da Indonésia

RESUMO. O presente estudo investigou a motivação acadêmica de alunos do ensino fundamental em uma área rural da Indonésia para determinar se havia diferença de gênero em sua motivação acadêmica. Para tanto, foi conduzido um estudo de métodos mistos com foco nos métodos quantitativos de realização de uma pesquisa. 71 alunos participaram da pesquisa e de uma entrevista informal em grupo, realizada em uma sessão de compartilhamento. O estudo constatou que nem todos os participantes relataram que continuariam seus estudos até o ensino médio após a formatura. A pesquisa também demonstrou que a maioria dos participantes, em geral, relatou alta motivação acadêmica. Além disso, as alunas relataram um nível significativamente menor de motivação do que seus colegas do sexo masculino. A partir da sessão de compartilhamento, o estudo constatou que, em geral, os participantes não tinham objetivos acadêmicos claros. Alguns compartilhavam suas aspirações gerais, mas pareciam não ter planos práticos para alcançá-las. As participantes do sexo feminino se mostraram reticentes em compartilhar suas aspirações. As implicações incluem a conscientização de alunos de ambos os sexos sobre a importância de continuar os estudos para ampliar futuras oportunidades de emprego e interromper o ciclo da pobreza. Estudos futuros podem envolver mais escolas de ensino médio em diferentes áreas rurais para aumentar a probabilidade de generalização. O uso de métodos diversos pode capturar melhor a complexidade da motivação acadêmica sob múltiplas perspectivas.

Palavras-chave: motivação acadêmica, diferença de gênero, ensino fundamental, Indonésia, área rural.

Diferencias de género en la motivación académica entre los estudiantes del medio rural de Indonesia

RESUMEN. El presente estudio investigó la motivación académica de estudiantes de secundaria en una zona rural de Indonesia para determinar si existían diferencias de género en dicha motivación. Para ello, se realizó un estudio de métodos mixtos centrado en los métodos cuantitativos de encuesta. Setenta y un estudiantes participaron en la encuesta y en una entrevista grupal informal en formato de sesión de intercambio. Este estudio reveló que no todos los participantes afirmaron continuar sus estudios hasta el nivel de bachillerato tras graduarse. La encuesta también reveló que la mayoría de los participantes, en general, reportaron una alta motivación académica. Además, las estudiantes mujeres reportaron un nivel de motivación significativamente menor que sus compañeros hombres. A partir de la sesión de intercambio, el estudio reveló que, en general, los participantes carecían de metas académicas claras. Algunas compartían sus aspiraciones generales, pero parecían carecer de planes prácticos para alcanzarlas. Las participantes mujeres se mostraron reticentes a compartir sus aspiraciones. Las implicaciones incluyen sensibilizar a los estudiantes de ambos sexos sobre la importancia de continuar sus estudios para ampliar sus futuras oportunidades laborales y romper el ciclo de la pobreza. Estudios futuros podrían involucrar a más escuelas secundarias en diferentes zonas rurales para aumentar la probabilidad de generalización. El uso de diversos métodos permite comprender mejor la complejidad de la motivación académica desde múltiples perspectivas.

Palabras clave: motivación académica, diferencia de género, educación secundaria, indonesia, zona rural.

Introduction

Motivation comes from the Latin word "*movere*", meaning "to move" (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). Thus, generally, motivation is understood as a driving force moving a person to make decisions, engage in action, show effort, and persist. In other words, motivation is responsible for why people do an action, how long they are willing to do it, and how hard they will pursue it. It is an individual differences factor that has been extensively investigated in psychology, education, and learning fields. In the education field, the motivation construct is generally known as academic motivation. It is defined as students' general interest, engagement, and enjoyment in learning and school (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2013).

One prominent theory to understand academic motivation is Self Determination Theory (SDT), introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985) where they divided motivation into two types: intrinsic motivation, which is fuelled by inherent enjoyment, challenge, and satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external factors such as rewards. The authors further explained three fundamental needs influencing motivation. These are 1) autonomy, the feeling of control of one's choice and action; 2) competence, the feeling of being able to do; and 3) relatedness, feeling connected and belonging to others. In an environment fulfilling these needs, one will likely have increased motivation, enhanced well-being, and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When applied to education, SDT is concerned with improving students' interest in learning, valuing education, and confidence in their capabilities.

In the case of education in rural areas, several factors may impede the creation of conditions conducive to increased motivation and personal growth. Gaps between urban and rural education are still happening. Many rural schools suffer from limited access to sufficient infrastructure and often lack enough qualified teachers (Kawuryan et al., 2021). Rural students' families' generally disadvantaged socio-economic condition may also negatively impact rural students' academic motivation. For example, the decision of rural poor students to continue their studies may be the result of a combination of factors such as the students' intelligence and academic performance, the extent to which their families support and encourage their children despite the economic limitations, and their teachers' encouragement (Cuicui, 2022).

Even though motivation research in the education field has been very extensive, studies have been predominantly investigating phenomena in urban settings, with education in rural

settings seemingly being underrepresented. In the US, rural education studies seem to be pioneered by Patricia L. Hardre and associates (Hardre, 2012; Hardre & Hennessey, 2013; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). An early study by Hardre and Reeve (2003) found that autonomy-supportive teachers increased students' motivation, whilst controlling teachers decreased it. Furthermore, involving 625 students in 19 rural public high schools, Hardre and Sullivan (2008) reported that students' perceived ability and valuing strongly predicted learning and future goals. The future goals, in turn, strongly predicted motivation. Synthesising her 15-year work of rural research on secondary school students' academic motivation, Hardre (2012) reported that interpersonal relationships, classroom instructional practice, and motivation-conducive school climate are among the multi-level strategies for motivating rural students. She further commented that teachers and administrators can bridge the gap between students' achievement and their actual potential. However, in a subsequent study involving 13 rural teachers, Hardre and Hennessey (2013) reported that teacher participants' self-perceptions reflected a relatively weak level of self-efficacy to successfully intervene for unmotivated students.

Despite not very extensive, motivation studies involving rural contexts have also been available in Africa, for example, in Nigeria (Adepoju, 2008) and Ghana (Dramanu & Mohammed, 2016), in Latin America, such as in Ecuador (Andrade-Molina et al., 2021), Involving 1,000 senior high school students in Nigeria, Adepoju (2008) found that academic performance could be positively predicted by motivational variables such as the provision of learning materials and conducive school environments. In Ghana, Dramanu and Mohammed (2016) involved some 1400s students from both rural and urban high schools. The study reported a positive relationship between the students' academic motivation and performance. There was no gender difference between male and female students in rural and urban groups. However, the study reported that rural students had a statistically significantly lower level of academic motivation than their urban counterparts. Andrade-Molina et al. (2021) compared rural and urban students' English learning motivation in Ecuador. The study reported no marked difference in motivation levels between students from both groups.

In Asia, studies are available, for example, in India (Mallick et al., 2017; Sarangi, 2015), China (Cuicui, 2022), Vietnam (Pham, 2016), and in Indonesia (Nugraha et al., 2023). A study by Sarangi (2015) involved 200 students. It found, among others, that motivation did not significantly differ across genders and that rural students' academic motivation positively

and significantly correlated with their academic achievement. Next, Mallick et al. (2017) involved 700 junior high school students from urban and rural areas. The study found that the urban group reported a significantly higher motivation than the rural counterpart. It also reported that girls in urban and rural areas reported significantly higher motivation than boys. Pham (2016) specifically investigated rural students' motivation to learn English in Vietnam. The study found that motivation was attributable to the extent of parental encouragement, the influence of peers, and the perceived value of learning for their personal and interpersonal commitment. A relatively recent study by Cuicui (2022) investigated the academic motivation of poor rural students in China. It found four major factors influencing the students' motivation to enter secondary vocational schools. These were school, family, peers, and individual motives. The study also advocates for vocational education to be an avenue for these participants' upward mobility. In the Indonesian context, Nugraha et al. (2023) specifically investigated reading motivation among rural elementary school students. The study found no gender difference in reading motivation and that students' self-concept seemed to be more instrumental in influencing their reading motivation than external factors.

When discussing education in rural contexts, it becomes relevant also to see whether there is gender disparity. Research highlights biological differences between females and males, which could be a source of gender gap in certain domains. Nonetheless, the influence of biological factors on differences in attitudes, behaviours, and preferences between males and females may not be as deterministic as the context and socialisation process (Borgonovi & Han, 2021). Different treatments by teachers, parents, and peers may lead male and female students to adopt different attitudes and behaviours, and such different treatments could lead to stereotypes. In the case of rural education, where students typically come from low-income families, gender disparity may occur. Harahap et al. (2020) noted that in low-income families, males tend to attend school more than females, leading male children to have a higher education than female ones.

In the case of Indonesian rural contexts, gender differences could play a part in influencing students' academic motivation. Indonesia is a vast archipelagic country, the fourth most populous worldwide, with disparities between urban areas and rural areas across sectors, including education (Harahap et al., 2020). Hastuti and Sudrajat (2023) noted that despite the continuous effort to promote gender equality, Indonesia generally still has a patriarchal society. Particularly in Javanese culture, the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, making up

roughly 40% of the country's population, many ancient literary works mentioned the ideal roles of women of being able to do 3*Ms*: *Masak-Macak-Manak* (cooking, dressing up, and giving birth) (Pirus & Nurahmawati, 2020). Though such old beliefs have been significantly diminished in society, their remains may still be present in some circles of society. Recently, the country ranked 106 of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report in 2023 in terms of educational attainment subindex. Hence, it is essential to conduct a study investigating whether Indonesian rural students' academic motivation differs by gender. To the best of my knowledge, only few empirical studies delve into motivation-related constructs in Indonesian rural education contexts. For example, a study by Nugraha et al. (2023) investigated reading motivation among rural elementary school students, whilst a study by Nurcahyoko et al. (2024) examined factors influencing elementary school students' literacy skills, including motivation. That being said, empirical studies specifically examining the academic motivation of Indonesian rural students and whether this motivation differed across genders are still very limited; thus, the need to conduct more empirical studies. Indonesian students in rural areas often face socio-economic constraints, not to mention that rural schools often suffer from limitations in quality resources (Kawuryan et al., 2021). These intertwined factors could hamper optimal learning, and these students may be at risk for low motivation and lack of academic success.

The Present Study

The present study aimed to answer two research questions. First, what is rural Indonesian junior high school students' level of academic motivation? And second, is there a significant difference in academic motivation between male and female students? With these two research questions in mind, the present study sought to investigate rural Indonesian junior high school students' academic motivation and to see whether this motivation differed across genders.

This study may serve the following merits. First, it could provide an eagle-eyed view of Indonesian rural students' academic motivation, and the findings may pave the way for further studies specifically investigating education for Indonesian rural students, who, at present, are relatively unresearched despite the large number of students falling into this category in Indonesia. Second, this study potentially contributes to understanding whether gender disparity is present within the rural education context and what the possible factors are.

Methods

Research Design

The present study employed a mixed-method design emphasising the quantitative method. It used a survey and informal group interviews in the form of a sharing session exploring junior high school student participants' academic motivation. The choice of the methods was based on at least two considerations. First, the quantitative method matched the study's objectives on investigating participants' academic motivation and whether this motivation differed based on gender. Second, the qualitative method of doing informal group interviews in the form of a 50-minute sharing session, where participants shared their academic aspirations, could provide more in-depth data on the academic motivation data obtained from the survey. Initially, the participants were divided into three small groups, each facilitated by a research assistant, to discuss their future academic aspirations. This was followed by a plenary session where participants shared their aspirations with the larger group. Given the participants' young age, the group interviews were deliberately conducted at a slower, more relaxed pace to minimise cognitive load.

Participants

In total, 71 junior high school students participated in the present study by filling out the paper-based questionnaires and joining the sharing session. Their ages ranged from 12 to 16 *(M = 12.75, SD = .73).* Of these participants, 32 (45.1%) were females, whilst 39 (54.9%) were males. These participants studied at a junior high school in a rural, coastal area in Java, Indonesia. Before the present study, a preliminary focus group was conducted with four teachers at the school to obtain some background information about the target student participants. In the focus group discussion, the teachers generally reported that these students came from financially disadvantaged families, lacked learning motivation, were rarely engaged in the lesson, and were sometimes absent from classes to earn money as freelancers. Many of these students received the Indonesian government's full scholarship for underprivileged students. Some teachers also reported that, thus far, some of the school graduates have not continued their studies to a high school level due to socio-economic factors. They hoped that the students, the target participants of this study, would show a change.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, ethical principles were strictly adhered to. Participation in this study was voluntary, without any coercion. The voluntary participation was maintained through the use of consent form detailing the researcher's identity, the purposes of the study, and the students' rights and responsibilities if they decided to participate (Gray, 2022). Considering that the participants were still in their early adolescence and may not be able to focus on typical interviews or focus group discussion cognitively, a sharing session was conducted where the student participants shared their dreams in a relaxing class atmosphere with researcher assistants as the facilitators of the discussion. This practice could be seen as the implementation of beneficence and non-maleficence principles where the benefits should be optimised and potential harm should be avoided (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were paper-based questionnaires and a discussion checklist guiding the sharing session. One set of questionnaires consisted of a consent form, a demographic information questionnaire, a question on whether the target participants planned to continue their study to a high school level, and a Likert-scale academic motivation questionnaire. The questionnaires were presented in Indonesian. Four possible responses were available on whether the target participants would continue their study. These were "Definitely Continue", "Possibly Continue", "Unlikely Continue," and "Very Unlikely Continue." The academic motivation questionnaire consisted of ten items. An example of the statements is "I feel pleasure and satisfaction when learning new things at school." Four possible responses were available for each of the statements: "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." Furthermore, the discussion checklist included questions such as "Who is your favourite figure?" and "What do you want to be in the future?"

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed on 22 June 2024. It was followed by a 50-minute sharing session on the same day, where all the student participants shared their academic aspirations.

The questionnaire data were recorded in SPSS 25. The responses on the ten Likert scale items on academic motivation were recorded as follows: "Strongly Agree" as four points, "Agree" as three points, "Disagree" as two points, and "Strongly Disagree" as one point. Of the ten items, items 4 and 8 were negative items. In these items, "Strongly Agree" responses indicated low motivation. Hence, the responses on these two items were reverse-scored. After being recorded, the questionnaire data were tested for reliability and validity. The validity of the ten items on academic motivation was tested using Pearson's correlations, and each was correlated with the overall construct of academic motivation. All the items significantly correlated with the overall construct, with Pearson's correlation coefficients ranging from .50 to .76. These numbers were above the critical value of Pearson's correlation coefficient *(N = 71, df = 69)* at ±0.235. These data suggested that all ten items on academic motivation were valid measures of the overall construct of academic motivation. Furthermore, these ten items produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .77 and a MacDonald's omega coefficient of .76. These numbers indicated that, generally, these items were quite reliable.

To answer the first research question on the student participants' level of academic motivation, descriptive statistics were performed on SPSS, and the data were presented in percentages, means, and standard deviations. An independent sample t-test was conducted to answer the second research question on whether there was a gender difference in academic motivation. The results are presented in mean scores, a t-test score, and a significance level. Next, the data from the sharing session with the participants were analysed qualitatively to obtain additional data and add nuances to the quantitative results on the participants' motivation. These qualitative data include the participants' spoken accounts during the sharing session.

Findings

Rural Indonesian junior high school students' level of academic motivation

Of the 71 participants, 56 (78.9%) participants reported that they would "definitely continue" their study to a high school level, fourteen participants (19.7%) reported they "possibly continued", whilst a participant (1.4%) reported to "unlikely continue". From this result, it can be seen that not all the participants had a definite plan to continue their study to a high school level.

Furthermore, descriptive statistics were performed on the ten questionnaire items on academic motivation to determine the level of the participants' academic motivation. The ten questionnaire items produced a collective mean score of 32.31 *(SD = 2.99)*, indicating an average mean score of 3.23 from the possible range of 1 to 4. It indicated that, generally, the participants reported high academic motivation. Table 1 shows the detailed responses to each of the questionnaire items.

Table 1 - The Participants' Academic Motivation

No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*M*	*SD*
1.	I feel pleasure and satisfaction when learning new things at school.	16 (22.5%)	54 (76.1%)	1 (1.4%)	-	3.21	.45
2.	I feel that the lessons at school are useful for the career I want.	25 (35.2%)	46 (64.8%)	-	-	3.35	.48
3.	I really enjoy the subjects/materials offered.	16 (22.5%)	53 (74.6%)	2 (2.8%)	-	3.20	.47
4.	I don't know, I feel that lessons at school are just a waste of time.	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)	42 (59.2%)	27 (38%)	3.34	.58
5.	I enjoy the effort to understand things I didn't previously understand.	16 (22.5%)	53 (74.6%)	2 (2.8%)	-	3.20	.47
6.	I am happy to discover things I never knew before.	26 (36.60%)	44 (62%)	1 (1.4%)	-	3.35	.51
7.	For me, school lessons are enjoyable.	15 (21.10%)	56 (78.90%	-	-	3.21	.41
8.	I don't know, I don't understand why I need to attend class.	1 (1.4%)	23 (32.4%)	30 (42.30%)	17 (23.9%)	2.89	.79
9.	Learning at school gives me personal satisfaction from the process of deeply mastering the material.	14 (19.7%)	56 (78.9%)	1 (1.4%)		3.18	.43
10.	I want to show myself that I can succeed in my study.	28 (39.4%)	42 (59.2%)	1 (1.4%)	-	3.38	.52

Source: Author's own survey data of 71 Indonesian junior high school students

The results presented in Table 1 can be outlined. In item 1, 70 participants (98.59%) reported pleasure and satisfaction when learning new things at school. In item 2, all the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that lessons at school were useful for the career they wanted. As seen in item 3, 69 participants (97.18%) reported enjoying the materials or subjects at school. Next, as seen in item 4, a negative statement, as many as 69 participants (97.18%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed that lessons at school were just a waste of time. As seen in items 5 and 6, as many as 69 participants (97.18%) and 70 participants

(98.59%), respectively, reported enjoying the effort to understand things they did not understand before and were happy to discover new things. As seen in item 7, all participants (100%) reported that school lessons were enjoyable. Furthermore, statements in items 9 and 10 obtained agreements from an equal number of participants, 70 (98.59%). They agreed that learning at school gave them personal satisfaction from the process of mastering the materials, and they wanted to prove to themselves that they could succeed in their study. Nonetheless, as seen in item 8, a negative statement, as many as 24 participants (33.80%) reported that they did not understand why they needed to attend class. Overall, whilst most participants reported high levels of academic motivation across most indicators in the questionnaire, some participants appeared to show a degree of ambivalence in their academic motivation.

Next, a 50-minute sharing session in the Indonesian language was conducted to dig deeper into their academic motivation. The participants were divided into three groups, where they shared their future academic aspirations. Most participants were very timid and were not very willing to share their academic aspirations. When asked what they wanted to be in the future, a male student said, "I want to be a doctor." Other male students said, "I want to be an engineer", and "I want to be an entrepreneur." However, they could not elaborate on their aspirations more specifically, such as the reasons and how to realise them. Another student said he wanted to be like his father. When asked for the reason, he spontaneously replied, "My father is a responsible person," a response that was met with applause from many of the students. Interestingly, no female student volunteered to share their dreams. For example, when asked where they would continue their study after graduating, they seemed hesitant even to name a school. In brief, the findings in the sharing session indicated that the participants may have ideal aspirations for what they wanted to become. Nonetheless, they lacked pragmatic and practical views on how to achieve them. Female participants also seemed to have less confidence in sharing their academic aspirations.

Gender differences in academic motivation

To find whether male and female participants differed in their academic motivation, an independent sample t-test was performed. The results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 - Independent Sample T-Test Results of Male and Female Participants' Academic Motivation

	Male (N=39)		Female (N=32)		T-test	Sig.
	M	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***t***	***p***
Students' Academic Motivation	32.53	3.46	32.03	2.34	-.71	.007

Source: Author's own survey data of 71 Indonesian junior high school students

As seen in Table 2, this study found that female student participants reported lower academic motivation than their male counterparts (Mfemale = 32.03, Mmale = 32.53, SD = 3.46, SD = 2.34). The difference was statistically significant, t (69) = -.71, p = .007.

Discussion

The quantitative results suggesting a high motivation level are contrary to the results of the preliminary study involving these students' teachers, who reported low motivation among their students. The mismatch can be approached from at least two different angles. First, these students might not be as unmotivated as their teachers perceived them to be. It also differed from the results of several rural education studies in other learning contexts, suggesting that rural students had low academic motivation (Irvin et al., 2011; Pham, 2016; Sarangi, 2015). Another angle to see the phenomenon is based on the ambivalent responses found in item 8, where 24 participants (33.80%) reported that they did not understand why they needed to attend class. This could indicate that the participants may not value schooling in the first place. Research suggested that valuing education predicted academic motivation (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008) and one of the implementations of SDT by Deci and Ryan (1985) in an educational context is students' valuing education (Hardre & Reeve, 2003). In the present study, 15 participants reported that they did not have a definite plan to continue their study to a high school level. This result could further indicate that students did not value pursuing education much, indicating low academic motivation.

The results of the sharing session also seemed to support the possibility of low motivation among the students. This was evidenced by their lack of clear views on realising their academic aspirations and lack of confidence, even in naming a high school they would apply to upon graduating. These findings may indicate that the participants were not self-efficacious in their ability to continue their studies to the high school level or may not see the pragmatic benefits of continuing their studies after graduating, suggesting the absence of perceived ability and valuing of education essential for motivation (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008).

A study in rural China by Cuicui (2022) reported that the poor socio-economic condition of students' families greatly affected students' academic motivation. A combination of factors, such as students' academic performance, families' encouragement, and families' financial support, may determine whether students can continue their studies. In the case of the present study, whilst some students may want to continue their studies, an array of socio-economic factors outside their wish may likely determine the final decision. Another possibility was that this array of factors shaped students' way of thinking and the degree of effort they were willing to expend in their studies, given their respective situations.

Teachers and the Indonesian government could take several possible actions to remedy the situation. Teachers' strategies should promote confidence, collaboration, and the value of education. For example, instead of focusing on whole-class activities, teachers could promote more small-group projects and encourage students to take initiative in small groups, which may be less anxiety-provoking than the whole class. These activities may stimulate their confidence in their capabilities, which in turn probably makes them more interested in learning. Furthermore, whilst the Indonesian government may have provided a full scholarship for many of these underprivileged students, students' awareness of the importance of pursuing higher studies may not automatically be positively affected and thus should be nurtured and improved. The process of nurturing and enhancing this awareness can be done through teachers' daily instruction and junior high school curriculum, which is the government's jurisdiction. These solutions may also apply in rural learning contexts in other countries with similar characteristics.

Furthermore, in this study, it was found that female students reported a statistically significant lower motivation level than their male counterparts. This study's finding differed from the findings of at least two rural education studies in Ghana and India (Dramanu & Mohammed, 2016; Sarangi, 2015). Both studies reported no gender difference in academic motivation. Due to the relative scarcity of rural education studies focusing on gender differences, explaining these differences can be challenging. Nevertheless, several possible causes can be identified, though they may be unique to the Indonesian rural context. As seen in the results of the sharing session presented previously, no female students volunteered to share their academic aspirations. They also seemed to have difficulty naming a high school to apply to after graduating, probably suggesting not only low confidence and perceived ability but also a perceived low prospect of being able to continue their study. In this case, the

students' immediate families and environments may play a part. For example, in a low-income family with male and female children, the family often prioritises male children to continue their education (Harahap et al., 2020). Some female participants in the present study may have known this prospect, thus their reluctance to volunteer answers regarding their academic aspirations. Coupled with the patriarchal culture, some of these young female students may have grown up believing that education is not as important for females as it is for males. Moreover, considering the geographical location where they live, in a rural area where some old beliefs on limited roles of females in society may still prevail, these students may not see the urgency to pursue a higher level of education. That being said, this study calls for the importance of raising awareness among students of both genders on the importance of continuing their education. The merits can be at least twofold: to widen their future job opportunities and to possibly cut the circle of poverty associated with low income due to a low level of education.

The present study has several limitations. The first limitation was the researcher's inability to optimise the sharing session with the early adolescent student participants. The participants' timidity and their possible lack of experience in encountering new people may not have been sufficiently taken into account beforehand. As a result, the study was unable to obtain adequately deep qualitative data regarding their academic motivation. Additionally, this study involved a limited number of student participants and was conducted only at a school in a rural area in Indonesia. Therefore, it may lack generalisability to broader rural contexts in a vast country like Indonesia.

Conclusion

The present study intended to investigate the level of academic motivation of Indonesian rural junior high school students and whether there was a gender difference affecting this motivation. The survey found that, generally, the participants reported a high level of academic motivation. However, this reported motivation did not seem consistent across items, nor did it align with the results of the sharing session, where they seemed unable to specifically explain detailed aspects of their motivation. This may suggest the reported motivation may not translate into motivated behaviours. Next, female students also reported significantly lower motivation than their male counterparts. From the qualitative sharing

session, female students were visibly more reticent in sharing their future aspirations, suggesting low self-confidence in capabilities and low motivation.

This study contributes to understanding the academic motivation and gender difference in the motivation of Indonesian rural junior high school students, who were thus far under-represented in the plethora of rural education literature. Furthermore, motivation literature has also been overwhelmingly dominated by academic motivation studies focusing on urban or general populations. Thus, the focus on a rural junior high school in Indonesia may fill a contextual and geographical gap. This study also contributes to the discussion on gendered educational experiences, especially in rural education contexts. As an implication, teachers need to provide more opportunities for female students to build their confidence in class, encouraging them to speak up and, in the process, develop their academic self-efficacy and, eventually, motivation. They could provide a psychologically safer environment for them to make mistakes in the process, such as through small group tasks or group projects, not necessitating them to show their learning progress in front of the whole class.

Future studies can be suggested as follows. Considering Indonesia is very vast and has vast differences across regions, it is strategic to conduct motivation studies involving secondary schools in various rural areas in Indonesia. Such studies would probably better capture the phenomenon and produce generalisable data that could be used to inform education practitioners and policymakers. Future studies should also use diverse methods to obtain in-depth data from multiple perspectives. Involving teachers or people with whom the target participants are familiar may increase the likelihood of obtaining in-depth information from target participants who share characteristics similar to those of the present study's participants. Furthermore, involving not only students and teachers but also students' parents in studies on academic motivation in rural areas is worthwhile. Such a study may uncover the possible intertwined relationships between these adolescent students' motivation and various surrounding factors.

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