

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

English as a foreign language (EFL) education has become increasingly important in many countries around the world. In rural areas, however, students often face additional challenges in learning EFL compared to their urban counterparts. Understanding what motivates rural students to learn EFL and their attitudes towards studying the language can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to improve EFL education outcomes in rural schools (Fayzulloyeva & Murzina, 2022).

Globally, English is considered the dominant language of international communication, business, academia, technology, and popular culture. Proficiency in English is seen as crucial for access to higher education, employment opportunities, and participation in the global economy. In many non-English speaking countries, English is taught as a compulsory subject from primary school onwards (Rao, 2019)

In Indonesia specifically, English has been designated as the first foreign language and a compulsory school subject since independence. Indonesian students start learning English in 4th grade of primary school. However, English teaching quality remains uneven, particularly in rural regions (Mistar, 2014). Weaknesses in the national curriculum, lack of student exposure to authentic English, inadequately trained teachers, and limited resources all constrain rural students from developing strong English skills. This puts them at a disadvantage for passing high-stakes national exams and competing for admissions to top high schools and universities,

the gateways to social mobility in Indonesia. Motivation and attitude are crucial elements that influence the success of language learning. Motivation drives students' engagement and persistence, while attitude shapes their perception and emotional response towards the language. Understanding EFL motivation and attitudes among rural Indonesian students can help identify strategies to strengthen the quality and equity of English language education across the country (Supriadi, et al., 2021).

Motivation has long been identified as a key factor influencing success in foreign language learning. Gardner's (2019) socio-educational model emphasizes the role of integrative motivation, referring to a desire to learn the language to interact with and identify with members of the target language community. Integrative motivation has been linked to positive attitudes and persistence in language study. However, as English has become a global language, researchers have acknowledged instrumental motivation - wanting to learn English for pragmatic goals like academic achievement or career advancement - may also shape students' experiences learning EFL (Gardner, 2019).

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is another key perspective for understanding student motivation. It posits motivation exists along a spectrum from extrinsic motivation driven by external rewards and consequences, to intrinsic motivation stemming from inherent interest and satisfaction in the task itself. Research suggests intrinsic motivation is more consistently associated with engagement and achievement in education settings (Ryan, & Deci, 2017).

A number of studies conducted in rural regions of both English and non-English speaking countries provide insight into EFL motivation among rural youth.

In Malaysia, studies found rural students tend to have high instrumental motivation for learning English. English is seen as vital for academic and career advancement, due to its status as the language of higher education and language of wider communication in the country (Tseng, 2021). Integrative motivation has been weaker, which Khorsheed, (2021) attribute to limited contact with English speakers in rural communities. In Indonesia, Sabiq (2023) found rural junior high school students expressed relatively strong instrumental motivations for learning English, especially ambitions related to further education and white collar employment. However, their rural circumstances were perceived as a disadvantage for achieving English proficiency compared to urban youth. In Poland, a study of high school students in rural areas found moderate levels of both integrative and instrumental orientations for learning English, with a stronger orientation towards instrumental goals (Ellis, 2017).

Peer influences and intrinsic interest in English language and culture were also important motivational factors. Among rural students in China, Ma, Xiao, & Liu, (2021) identified a range of motivations including pragmatic goals of test-taking, aspirations for future education and career advancement, intrinsic interest in English, influence of peers, parents, teachers, and the expanding role of English in Chinese society. They note motivations are diverse rather than dichotomous, and "externally driven aspirations and internally generated interests" both shape engagement in EFL learning (p. 549). In the Korean context, Kim (2018) found rural high school students expressed mixed motivations but placed greater emphasis on pragmatic goals related to college entrance exams which represent high-stakes assessments and gateways to future opportunity. In summary, across diverse rural

settings, instrumental motivations related to academic achievement, career prospects, and social mobility tend to be pronounced among rural youth learning EFL. Integrative orientations are somewhat weaker but still relevant depending on the local context. Rural students also exhibit a range of individual interests and contextual influences that drive EFL learning.

Attitudes represent the evaluative beliefs students hold about learning English and play an important role in shaping motivation. The socio-educational model views attitudes as an antecedent to motivation, while other researchers argue the two constructs are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing (Jabbari, & Golkar, 2014). In either case, positive attitudes marked by enjoyment of language learning and favourable views towards the target language community are believed to facilitate motivation.

Attitudes toward English as a foreign language (EFL) are also crucial determinants of students' engagement, motivation, and ultimately, their success in language learning. Defined as the learned tendency to evaluate English language and its culture in either a favorable or unfavorable manner, attitudes play a significant role in shaping students' learning experiences. Commonly, attitudes are viewed as comprising cognitive beliefs, affective feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards the language and its speakers. According to theorists like Eagly & Chaiken (1993) and Jabbari (2014), attitudes involve making evaluative judgments or appraisals towards EFL. Moreover, Gardner's socio-educational model (2014) emphasizes the importance of attitudes in second language acquisition, highlighting the distinction between positive attitudes, which facilitate language learning, and negative attitudes, which hinder it. In various educational contexts, including rural areas, attitudes

towards EFL are influenced by a multitude of factors such as peer influences, intrinsic interest in the language and culture, as well as pragmatic goals related to academic achievement and future prospects. Thus, understanding and addressing students' attitudes towards EFL is essential for creating supportive learning environments and promoting successful language acquisition outcomes.

Research also provides insight into rural students' attitudes towards learning English. While variation exists across contexts, some common themes have emerged. In Poland, Iwaniec, J (2014) found rural high schoolers held moderately positive attitudes towards English, though they recommended improving attitudes further through teaching methods that increase enjoyment and relevance of English lessons. In Cameroon, Mbakop, N., & Willy, A (2023) surveyed rural high school students and found moderate levels of positive attitudes towards English, though significant numbers remained uncertain in their appraisals. Students recognizing English as a gateway to opportunity beyond their villages held the most favourable attitudes. In Korea, Han, Y (2023) found rural students held positive attitudes towards the importance of English but lower confidence, anxiety and discomfort towards using English compared to non-rural peers. Their comparatively lower English proficiency was perceived as an obstacle to college and career goals. In summary, while acknowledging the value of English as a language of access and opportunity, rural students across contexts often grapple with lower confidence and more uncertain, anxious attitudes towards learning and using English. Limited exposure and proficiency appear to shape these ambivalent orientations

Rural area theory examines the unique social, economic, and cultural factors that shape educational experiences and outcomes in non-urban contexts. Drawing

from disciplines like rural sociology, geography, and education studies, this theoretical perspective highlights how geographic isolation, lower population density, economic dependence on agriculture or resource extraction, strong local cultural identities, and limited access to resources and infrastructure can create distinct challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning in rural communities. Rural area theory encourages researchers to consider the specific assets, needs, and constraints of rural settings rather than universalizing models derived from urban or suburban contexts. It also calls attention to issues of equity and social justice, as rural youth often face disadvantages in accessing high-quality education due to the effects of geographic marginalization and social stratification along urban/rural lines (Howley, & Howley, 2014)

Initial data collecting was carried out to acquire preliminary insights into students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English at SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang. Three students from the eighth-grade class were chosen randomly to participate in motivation and attitude tests, with consideration given to gender and academic performance. The motivation assessment used a short questionnaire to measure interest, enthusiasm, and dedication towards learning English, while the attitude assessment included semi-structured interviews to explore perceptions, beliefs, and emotional disposition towards the subject. The initial phase is intended to drive the development of research tools and sample methods for the main study. It also helps in finding early patterns or trends to shape the research questions and hypotheses in later chapters.

The initial data collection conducted through motivation and attitude tests towards English language learning with three randomly selected eighth-grade

students at SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang provided preliminary insights into patterns and trends that can shape the research questions and hypotheses for the main study. These data, which included a short questionnaire on interest, enthusiasm, and dedication as well as semi-structured interviews on perceptions, beliefs, and emotional dispositions, served as a basis for developing more comprehensive research tools such as motivation questionnaires and structured interview protocols. Initial research indicates a positive attitude and motivation towards acquiring English as foreign language in rural regions. The early findings regarding factors influencing motivation, sources of positive or negative attitudes, and potential relationships between motivation, attitudes, and language learning outcomes can inform the design of a larger main study to investigate in-depth the role of motivation and attitudes in English language learning among a broader sample of students at SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang or similar contexts.

While a body of literature examines EFL learning motivation among rural students, there remain significant gaps. Few studies employ longitudinal designs to explore how motivations may change over time as student progress through secondary school and consider future plans. More research is needed comparing rural students both cross-nationally and also to non-rural peers within the same national contexts using consistent measures. Finally, little research has evaluated impacts of interventions aimed at enhancing rural students' EFL motivation, engagement and achievement. Studies addressing these gaps would provide greater clarity on nature of motivational challenges facing rural EFL learners and effective means of support.

In an increasingly globalized world, English proficiency is becoming ever more important for educational and career advancement, including among rural

youth. Rural EFL students exhibit primarily instrumental motivations oriented towards pragmatic goals, yet lower confidence, exposure and resources may generate more anxious, uncertain attitudes towards learning English. Contextual disadvantages rooted in infrastructure deficiencies, uneven teaching quality, poverty and social inequality appear to further shape motivational patterns and learning outcomes (Buendía, & Ortega-Martín., 2018). A fuller understanding of these challenges along with future research evaluating interventions to foster motivation can help strengthen EFL education and expand opportunities for rural students.

With this background on English as a foreign language education globally and in Indonesia, theories of language learning motivation, existing research on rural students' EFL motivation and attitudes, and gaps needing further study, the proposed research aims to expand understanding of these issues in the specific context of rural Indonesian students. Given the importance of English for educational and career advancement in Indonesia, examining motivation and attitudes can provide insight into strengthening English language instruction and equity for rural youth. The early findings regarding factors influencing motivation, sources of positive or negative attitudes, and potential relationships between motivation, attitudes, and language learning outcomes can inform the design of a larger main study to investigate in-depth the role of motivation and attitudes in English language learning among a broader sample of students at SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang or similar contexts. Therefore, drawing on the background reviewed above, the proposed study's title is "Students' Motivation and Attitude in Studying English for Foreign Language in Rural Area." This focused research conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Sawit Seberang, in Kecamatan Sawit Seberang, Kabupaten Langkat, Indonesia. Investigating rural

Indonesian students' perspectives on learning English at this specific school helped address gaps in understanding their motivations and attitudes, with the goal of improving English language education.

### **1.2 Problems of the Study**

And based on the background of the study above, the problems are formulated as follows:

1. What are the factors effected students' motivation and attitude in learning English at SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang?
2. How does the students' motivation and attitude describe in learning English at SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang?
3. Why do the student motivation and attitude realize in learning English SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang?

### **1.3 The Objectives of the Study**

In the line with the problems of the study, the objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the students' motivation and attitude in rural region in learning English at SMP Negeri 1 Sawit Seberang.
2. To explain the students' motivation and attitude in learning English at SMP Negeri 1 Sawit Seberang.
3. To explain the reasons why students' motivation and attitude towards learning English at SMPN 1 Sawit Seberang is important

### **1.4 The Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on analyzing the motivation and attitudes of students towards learning English as a foreign language at SMP Negeri 1 Sawit Seberang specifically. The results provided a description of motivations and attitudes within this rural Indonesian school context.

### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

This study eventually has purposes. The writer intended to do this research in order to give contributions to applied linguistic field. The significance of study were both theoretically and practically as explained before.

#### **a. Theoretically**

This study contributed to the body of knowledge on EFL motivation and attitudes among rural students in Indonesia, helping address gaps identified in the research literature.

#### **b. Practically**

This study can have important practical impacts for English language education among rural Indonesian youth. The results can provide insights to help teachers, school leaders, and policymakers strengthen English language instruction and improve student motivation in rural schools. Understanding the motivations and attitudes of students at SMP Negeri 1 Sawit Seberang can inform more engaging, culturally relevant teaching methods and curriculum tailored specifically to this rural context. By elucidating student perspectives, the research may point towards ways of making English feel more relevant and achievable for rural Indonesian youth. If the study supports improvements to English language education in rural schools, it could increase future opportunities for further education and employment among the rural students impacted. Given the importance of English proficiency for social mobility in Indonesia today, this research has potential to practically benefit rural Indonesian youth and development.