



P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

Vocational High School Students' Identity and Investment in Learning English in a Rural Area

Nur Annisa
Soni Mirizon*
Sary Silvhiany

Master's Program of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Sriwijaya, Palembang 30139, INDONESIA

Abstract

This study explored vocational high school (VHS) students' identity and investment during their English learning in the class at a private VHS in a rural area. The aim of this study was to understand how student identity impacted their investment in learning English. This study also attempted to seek factors that influenced students' investment in learning English. To answer the research questions of this study, the narrative method was applied. This study involved six students from a VHS. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions which was used to explore learning English at the VHS. The results revealed that the students had different ideas about their English learning. They are learning English outside the classroom, English necessity for future career, reluctant in learning English, perspective on future self. This study also revealed that the participants' investment in learning English was hindered by five factors such as teaching method, inconvenient classroom environment, lack of knowledge, family, peer support, and having a part time job. VHS students need support to encourage them to commit investing their time and effort in improving their English language skills. The implication of this study is the importance of teachers encouraging learners' investment in order to achieve desirable learning outcomes.

Keywords: EFL students, identity, investment, vocational high school.

* Corresponding author, email: smirizon@unsri.ac.id

Citation in APA style: Annisa, N., Mirizon, S., & Silvhiany, S. (2023). Vocational high school students' identity and investment in learning English in a rural area. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 10(2), 926-942.

Received July 26, 2022; Revised December 1, 2022; Accepted April 7, 2023; Published Online May 31, 2023

<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v10i2.27167>

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, vocational high school (VHS) is established to equip students with certain skills. VHS offers vocational programs, such as tourism, arts, business and management, engineering, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). VHS Students are equipped with specific skills following the demand of the business and industry world (Admadja & Marpanaji, 2016; Indriaturrahmi & Sudiyanto, 2016; Sularti et al., 2019). In addition to having hands-on skills to compete with other workers, mastering a foreign language such as English might help students tap into the job market easier because English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. However, not all students graduate with good English proficiency.

Many researchers consider the classroom situation a struggling place for students to construct and negotiate their identity (Teng, 2019; Wirza, 2018). Those interactions that occur in the classroom are needed because, at that time, there is a process of identity negotiation. Identity is theorized as multiple sites of struggle and is changing across time and space (Peirce, 1995). In the process of learning English, a learner constantly reconstructs their identity as they go through different learning experiences. They might have multiple identities. Their identities could be situated in a way that made them marginalized and less involved in the target language society. This identity continuously changes due to multiple factors and circumstances over time. A certain experience may be received or replace another aspect of a learner's perceived identity; for instance, it changes due to the influence of language learning pressure (Teng, 2019).

Identity is associated with the concept of investment (Norton, 2010). The notion of investment was introduced to explain the complicated relationship between learner involvement in language learning and social surroundings (Peirce, 1995). Investment can be used to understand learners' classroom resistance when the value of their linguistic and cultural capital increases. The concept of investment in this study supports the research focus in broadening the view of what encourages students to actively participate in language learning and why they resist. Understanding the investments students make from the beginning of learning is crucial. If the teacher can understand the occurrence of student resistance during learning, it will minimize unsatisfactory learning outcomes (Muslim et al., 2020). What the learner has experienced both inside and outside the language classroom and how the learner chooses to act in responding to the societal and institutional power structures that limit participation in the classroom should be considered (Wirza, 2018).

English in VHS is categorized as English for Specific Purposes (Richards, 2001; Sumarni, et al., 2018). However, Mahbub (2018) said that English materials for VHS students are general English. The materials provided for VHS students are the same as for general high school students. Moreover, the Indonesian curriculum (*Kurikulum 13* or K13) for VHS only allocates three hours of English classes once a week. As a result, students' English learning progress is slow. Time limitation slows their English learning progress, where students in VHS lack English proficiency. While many researchers conducted research on identity and investment in EFL settings with adult learners (Ahn & Lee, 2017; Norton & Gao, 2008; Skilton-Sylvester 2002; Teng, 2019; Vasilopoulos, 2015), it seems that there is still limited research on identity and investment in language learning in Indonesian context especially research related to VHS students. To fill this gap, this study focused on six students from a rural VHS and

investigated how student identity impacted their investment in learning English. This study also attempted to seek factors that influenced students' investment in learning English. In relation to the issues mentioned above, the problems of this study are formulated into the following research questions:

1. How do VHS students' identities interact with their EFL learning investment?
2. What factors influence students' investment in learning English?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Student Identity in Learning English

Identity views as dynamically constructed within multiple combinations of experience and relationships. According to [Darvin and Norton \(2015, p. 36\)](#) identity is seen as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future”. The world, in this term, relates to the learner's surroundings and with whom he or she gets in touch. Further, identity is an unfixed and static construct; it is always changing and evolving ([Teng, 2019](#)).

Negotiating identity is challenging and problematic ([Vasilopoulos, 2015](#)). In the context of this study, VHS students depend entirely on English lessons in the classroom. They put teachers as the main resource to engage with the target language. Every experience in which students try to use the target language is an identity-constructed and negotiated act. [Wirza's \(2018\)](#) study revealed that identity construction was influenced by the teacher's role. Their identity in the classroom could be positive or negative ([Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Teng, 2019](#)).

[Duff and Talmy \(2011\)](#) added that language learners might conform, resist, or negotiate the learner practices to mark their identity. [Kim \(2014\)](#) suggested that such learning difficulties or failure are related to the learner's identity and other sociocultural aspects that impact the learning process. If teachers cannot provide students with adequate opportunities to participate in classroom situations that are agreeable to them, their development in the target language will be less than what teachers may desire ([Potowski, 2004](#)).

2.2 Notion of Investment

Investment is an ever-changing phenomenon that depends on the learner's relationship with target language speakers/learners, and it is related to learners' identity construction and negotiation during the language acquisition process of what identities the learner wants to perform in a specific situation. According to [Darvin and Norton \(2018, p. 2\)](#), investment in language learning involves “commitment to the goals, practice, and identities that constitute the learning process and that are continually negotiated in different social relationships and structures of power”. Investment means to giving time, effort, and money. Students are willing to invest, believing that they will obtain symbolic resources (e.g., higher education, better job and friendship) and material resources (e.g., money, property) ([Norton, 2013](#)). Therefore, investment is diverse because it relies on a student's personal capacity and ability and what is his or her goal to achieve.

Norton and Toohey (2011) explained, “the construct of investment seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner’s desire and commitment to learning a language and the language practices of the classroom or community” (p. 415). Investment can be used to recognize learners’ classroom resistance when the value of their linguistic and cultural capital increases. This concept helps this study to see why students have resistance in the learning process, which makes their learning outcomes not optimal. In fact, for VHS students mastering a foreign language is an added value in finding a job.

There are multiple explanations for why students want to invest in learning English and numerous factors that hinder or help them in the learning process. Ahn and Lee (2017) found that there are four factors that might affect students’ investment in the classroom. First, students disagreed with the ideology that English is needed today. Second, the curriculum and teacher were not helpful. Third, they did not know how to study. Last, they were tired of irrelevant activities in their study, like playing a game. Moreover, Al Mubarakah (2021) found that parents’ awareness of their children’s future careers is not essential in promoting students’ investment.

2.3 Learning English in VHS

Levels of education in Indonesia are divided into elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and university. Each level has its own characteristic, considering the growth or age of a person. The senior high school consists of two types; the general high school and VHS. There are similarities and differences between these schools. The similarity is mostly concerned with the students’ age group. Students of general high school and VHS are on the average age of 14-17 years old. The difference is apparent; VHS offers vocational programs, such as tourism, arts, business and management, engineering, and ICT, and these are not offered in general high schools.

In 2020, there were 5.249.149 VHS students in Indonesia (Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia, 2020). In addition, the subjects that are taught in general high school are general and theoretical. They are taught as the basic knowledge that will be further taught at higher levels or universities. In VHS, the subjects are more specific and practical. They are related to the future job. The portion of the lesson is much more on practice than theory. VHS equips its students with certain skills and prepares them to work according to the demand of the business and industrial world related to their competency (Admadja & Marpanaji, 2016; Indriaturrahmi & Sudiyanto, 2016; Sularti et al., 2019). Students are trained with many practical lessons both in class and in industry. English is taught to make students able to communicate orally and in writing. It is related to their specific future job.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

A narrative inquiry design was applied to appropriately answer this study’s research questions. This design best explains the participants’ investment in learning English influenced by the learners’ social capital and their changing identity across time and space. As Norton and De Costa (2018) suggested, narrative design is one of

the methodologies that can be used to investigate identity and investment. Narrative inquiry is an approach that focuses on the use of stories as data. [Clandinin and Connelly \(2000\)](#) defined narrative inquiry as “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu” (p. 20). Therefore, the focus of this method is not only to capture the detailed stories of participants but also to construct meaning from their realities and experiences.

3.2 Participant

The participants of this study were six students from one private VHS in a rural area in Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatera, Indonesia. They were five male and one female students. The criteria for choosing these students were as follows: their English grades were lowest, middle, and highest in the classroom. This was based on the mid-test and final test results during their learning process. Second, they did not pay considerable attention to their English learning in the classroom.

3.3 Instrument

In order to capture the participants’ identities and investment in learning English, two kinds of interviews were used for data collection: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. In order to capture the participants’ identities and investment in learning English, two kinds of interviews were used for data collection: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews can help gain insights into how the participants react (i.e., based on their subjective experiences, opinions, and motivations) to a certain phenomenon ([Busetto et al., 2020](#); [Kvale, 1996](#)). In addition to the benefits for participants, a semi-structured interview allows an interviewer to enhance the opportunity to elicit essential information for research by means of guiding questions ([Nunan, 1992](#); [Roulston, 2010](#)). The focus group discussion holds as a supplement to the interviews because some participants may not have expressed their feelings accurately due to uncertain factors such as timing and shyness. The focus group discussion holds as a supplement to the interviews because some participants may not have expressed their feelings accurately due to uncertain factors such as timing and shyness.

3.4 Data Collection

Interviews and the focus group discussions were conducted face-to-face and took place at school. It depended on the availability and convenience of the participants. This study used Palembang local language, Bahasa Palembang, during the interview to make participants feel more comfortable. Moreover, this study used pseudonyms to ensure participants’ confidentiality (i.e., P1 for participant 1, P2 for participant 2, P3 for participant 3, and so on).

3.5 Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis to analyze the data obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions. There are some steps in analyzing qualitative

data using thematic analysis. They are as follows: First, transcribing the data from interview. Before translating the data, the data were read and listened to several times to familiarize and identify the first initial extracts most related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Before translating the data, the data were read and listened to several times to familiarize and identify the first initial extracts most related to the research questions. Not all the data were translated into English. Then the ideas, concepts, and themes were coded using open coding (Creswell, 2012) to fit the categories according to the most frequent themes in their narratives.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Students' Identity and Investment in English Learning

The first research question of this study was about how VHS students' identity affects their EFL learning. The direct quotes from the participants were translated from Bahasa Palembang. The result of this study is further discussed through explanations based on the themes discovered from data. They are learning English outside the classroom, English necessity for future career, reluctant in learning English, perspective on future self.

4.1.1 Perceived benefits

For instance, P1 thought English was a strange language the first time he learned English. He could not mention any single word in English but was curious about it. Every night, he started to open a picture dictionary and memorized new words. He also spent his free time practicing. He described himself as a "memorizer" because he tried to memorize new English vocabulary every night. P1 specially mentioned he loved his picture dictionary:

- (1) I like to memorize new words every day, I open my picture dictionary and start to memorize the words.

P1 perceived that memorizing new vocabulary made his English learning easier as it helped him in improving his performance and helped him follow the lessons in the classroom.

4.1.2 English necessity for future career

Another student, P2 had a different view on learning English. He thought that learning English could make his mother proud, thus aiming to reach the top ten or top five in class. At the age of 10-year-old, his father passed away, and since then, he has lived with his grandfather because his mother decided to become an Indonesian female migrant worker. He expressed:

- (2) I want to make my mom happy and proud of me. Because she is not here, if I can get top 10 or top 5, it will make her proud. I think if I learn a subject that my colleagues did not understand I can get a higher score. That is why I learn math and English which I think are the top two hardest subjects, they are even hard for my friends. (P2)

From his words, it can be inferred that he did not want his mother to worry about his study. Also, it was found from the interview that his mother wanted him to become an Indonesian migrant worker just like her. That is why learning a foreign language like English is a must for him. His effort in learning English was reflected in his hobbies, such as watching English channels on YouTube and movies and listening to English songs to improve his English skill. This investment is symbolic and material sources in a broader space which is possible to increase the value of their cultural capital.

4.1.3 *Feared selves*

P6 was the only female participant in this study. She was also the only female student in her class. She described learning English in the classroom as cumbersome. She considered the material difficult, and the teachers gave unequal treatment. She expressed that the teachers' goal was to make students get higher scores rather than students' personal development.

- (3) We did so many assignments and memorized textbook but lacked speaking practice. (P6)

Similarly, P3 considered learning English in the classroom a waste of time. He stated:

- (4) Learning English in class is a waste of time because all we do is taking notes and answering the questions. It doesn't matter if we have to keep taking notes, but the teacher should explain the materials until we understand. (P3)

The difficulties he faced during the learning process made him unwilling to learn English in class. Another participant, P4, considered himself a loser. He wanted to be a pilot, but then he realized he had to be fluent in English to achieve it.

- (5) When I was a kid, my dream was to be a pilot. But then I realized I need to learn English because English is used to communicate with the flight crews, and all the navigation buttons on the plane use English. I live in a rural area. We don't have good internet access and a qualified teacher of English. Learning English by myself made me frustrated. So, I gave up on my dream. (P4)

Instead of trying to learn English, he thinks that English was an obstacle to achieving his dream. Eventually, he gave up his dream. In his first year at VHS, another student, P5 believed that his peers were far ahead of him, thus rendering him unconfident in learning English. It started when he did not pass a speaking test. At that time, he had to memorize a long conversation and practice it in front of the class. He expressed:

- (6) It was really hard to memorize such a long conversation, and I did not know how to pronounce (the words) correctly. I was embarrassed. My teacher scolded me. She said 'it is easy, why can't you do it? All your friends can do it', and of course my friends laughed at me. (P5)

Since that day he could not forget his teacher's words and felt dejected. In the end, P5 chose to resist the learning process.

- (7) Every time I heard about English, I would directly remember what happened that time. I immediately thought, 'ah it must be difficult and I definitely cannot do it as usual'. I know I should be motivated. I tried to download a mobile application to help me learn English pronunciation, but then I stopped after I thought it did not help much. (P5)

4.1.4 Perspective on future self

However, P5's experience as explained in 4.1.3 helped him to change his perception of a language learner. One day, he attended a seminar, and the key speaker had good English. He started to imagine himself as the key speaker. He said,

- (8) I want to be like him. I do not want to work as a motorcycle mechanic my entire life. I want to work in an office with a neat uniform and good income. English is much needed. (P5)

Nevertheless, P5 mentioned that he would start investing his time in learning English after graduating from VHS. Here, P5 felt motivated, but at the same time, he felt excluded from classroom practices because he was labeled as a 'poor' or 'unmotivated' learner.

4.2 Factors Influencing Students' Investment in English Learning

The second research question of this study focused on what factors influenced VHS students' investment in learning English. The interview revealed that the participants did invest in learning English outside the classroom, such as listening to music, watching YouTube, using mobile applications, and memorizing new vocabulary. However, the data on six VHS students indicated that they had less investment in their English learning in the classroom. It was caused by the teachers' teaching method(s), inconvenient classroom environment, lack of knowledge, family, and peers' support, and having a part-time job.

4.2.1 Teaching methods

One of the reasons that caused students to have low investment in learning English was teachers' teaching methods. Four of the participants mentioned that the classroom learning experience was not that interesting. Mostly, the teachers used the traditional teaching method (i.e., teacher-centered). The teachers focused on explaining the material in front of the class, and students wrote it down in their notebooks or asked students to read the textbook by themselves and answer the questions without explanation. As a result, students were principally expected only to listen, and they seldom had opportunities to make their own voices heard. Based on the interview data, the participants complained about their teachers not being effectively supportive of them. For example, P2 felt that his teacher did not have the intention to teach. When asked what made him think that way, he said:

- (9) They just give the task without explaining. That is why my desire to learn is hindered. At first, I really wanted to learn but ended up reluctantly. They also do not pay attention to students. I think they should explain more on how to read, how to do the exercises, but it is not there at all. (P2)

In line with P2, P3 also outlined a similar perception that the teacher's method did not help them understand English. He mentioned that he needed to ask if there

were difficulties. When he did not understand the instruction, he wanted the teacher to explain it more, as he said:

- (10) Learning English is boring. The teacher always asks us to write a note and suddenly asks to do the exercises. I think the teacher is bad (in teaching). I mean, when we do not understand the material, he will not repeat or explain it. It is okay if the teacher asks us to write a note but he has to give an explanation clearly. If we understand the material, we can do the exercises. (P3)

P3 felt that the teachers moved too quickly through the material, did not give clear instructions and explanations, and did not give enough support to struggling students. From this, it can be inferred that this teaching method reduced the investment in English learning. The participants considered that this teaching method derived them to a negative attitude. Especially when the teachers gave them physical punishments such as squat walk and push-ups, as mentioned by P4 and P6:

- (11) The teacher often gives us test, such as speaking test, if we can't do it, we are forced to do it. It is a must, if we cannot pass the test we will be punished. In my opinion, punishment makes us afraid to learn. (P4)

In addition, P6 shared a similar perception regarding the punishment that the teachers gave to the students:

- (12) I became lazier than before because of the punishment. What I want is when we don't understand the material the teacher should give their guidance to us, not punishment, I am dejected. For example, if the punishment is squat walk, I will be dizzy and cannot concentrate on learning anymore because I am already tired. (P6)

P3 also outlined a similar perception that punishment changed the way he learned, he said:

- (13) It was embarrassing and I was disappointed. The teacher should give clear explanation. They should make us really understand the material and also the instruction in doing the task. (P3)

From the voices above, it is apparent that teachers' effective teaching method was demanded since these participants needed the teachers' guidance and encouragement as much as they wanted to know how to study English well.

4.2.2 Inconvenient classroom environment

The unsupportive class environment was another problem mentioned by P1 and P6. They may be motivated and eager to learn, but if the language practices in their classroom insulted them, they may not be invested in learning. P1 spoke out about how the inconvenient classroom disturbed his learning, saying:

- (14) The classroom was very noisy. I lost my focus to listen to the teacher's explanation and the teacher ignored it. (P1)

The students must overcome these certain barriers or obstacles. If the learning environment is ideal and friendly for learning, then the learning process could go more smoothly.

Inadequate treatment was another problem that was found in this study. P6 mentioned:

- (15) The teacher is picky. She was grading unfairly. For example, if she likes student A, she will give her a high score. Conversely, if she doesn't like the students, she will give them low score. She often scolds, give punishment and ignore those students that she didn't like. She doesn't care whether her students understand or not with the materials.

The participants agreed that the teachers gave special treatment to those who she liked. They wanted equality among the students. It led to the feeling that their teachers did not value them. They did not enjoy in participating in the class activities.

4.2.3 Lacking of knowledge

All participants were positioned as non-English speakers; they did not consider themselves capable of using the language further than saying a few words. They also recognized that their use of the language was limited to the English classroom, and they emphasized the difficulties they faced when interacting in English due to their lack of knowledge. The FGD data below revealed that all the participants could not use the dictionary.

- (16) P4 : We do not understand how to use an English dictionary. Instead of helping, the teacher just makes us even more confused.
Interviewer : Have you ever been taught on how to use the dictionary?
All participants : Never.
P3 : That is why it is even more confusing when I open a dictionary.
Interviewer : How about Google Translate?
P5 : We were not allowed to use our mobile at class so, it did not help us.
P2 : But to do our homework it is very helpful.

The impressive finding was that some participants struggled with knowledge, whereas others possessed capability during classroom interaction. This result may be explained by the fact that learners who did not have enough knowledge might find themselves incapable of interacting, while learners with fair knowledge could stand or insist on their sentiments during classroom interaction.

4.2.4 Family and peers

In the practice of learning English, the support from family and peers impacted in increasing the participants investment in their study. The support is needed to encourage the participants to practice and use English in their study and to help them when they face some obstacles in its practice. The data from the findings showed that five of the six participants were not supported by their families in learning English. P4 was the only participant whose parents wanted him to take an English course. He mentioned that his parents would support whatever he needed for his education. They would pay the tuition if he wanted to take an English course. In contrast, five other participants could not get an English course, and their families never asked about their English learning in school, as mentioned by P6:

- (17) I never take English courses outside of school. I want to learn English outside the school but the conditions did not allow it. The English course is far from my house. I also do not have money. (P6)

Another point addressed by the participants is that they realized that their peers thought English was not useful. They could not offer any help for their work. This implied that there were no foreign companies and foreigners in their village or surroundings, so they seldom had opportunities to use English in workplaces, as P3 mentioned:

- (18) We live in this region where we use the local language in our daily life. Learning English does not give any advantage. It is useless. Learning English in the classroom is just for formality to pass the examination. That is what my peers think. (P3)

Additionally, another participant also marked the reason why his peers did not support them in learning English, as stated by P4:

- (19) We live in a small village. Our community is narrow-minded. They just work and earn money for a simple life. That's it. (P4)

When confronted by reality, the participants could not do anything about it. Their peers did not get the point of the benefits of using English today. Five out of six participants agreed that English was not important.

4.2.5 *Part-time jobs*

Another reason that influenced the students' investment was doing part-time jobs while studying. Financial matters were an obstacle for P1 and P5. Of the six participants, P1 and P5 had busy schedules, which obstructed their learning investment by being unable to keep up with learning activities or studying outside and inside the classroom. To fulfill their daily needs, they had to do part-time jobs. It caused them not to be active in class for the reason of being too tired during school hours. Sometimes they forgot to do their homework because of exhaustion. For example, P1 struggled with family responsibilities:

- (20) P1 : My activity after school is cutting grass to feed my goats. We raise goats and I take care of them. The goats are our saving when we do not have money, we can sell them.
 Interviewer : How many goats do you herd?
 P1 : We have four. But I do not own them all. So, it is a profit-sharing system. For example, if a goat gives birth to two baby goats, I will get one and the owner gets one too. Sometimes I have to go far to find grass. That is why after looking for grass, I am already tired and lazy to study.

P1 said that the goats were not entirely his own but belonged to someone else. It was a profit-sharing system. He was given the responsibility to take care of the goats by the owner. Raising goats took much of his time. He felt tired of looking for the grass, feeding the goats, and taking care of them. He sacrificed his own desire to learn English for the sake of helping his family. Nonetheless, he admitted that his English ability has diminished.

- (21) I feel like my English ability is decreasing little by little. I used to learn and practice English in my free time but now even during school holidays I have to help my father, so what I have learned is gone because I never practice it. (P1)

As shown in (21), P1 felt that there was a loss in his English ability. The responsibilities he had impacted his educational development. P1 had no choice. He had to deal with the responsibilities given to him. Evidently, his economic status limited P1 to develop his English ability. Similarly, P5 faced difficulty with his work schedule. He was a motorcycle mechanic and worked after school. He stated that learning English was not his current goal. He needed to earn money for his own education. He wanted to relieve the burden on his parents. His exhaustion from work kept him from studying.

5. DISCUSSION

Drawing upon six VHS students' experiences in learning English in a rural area in Indonesia, this study explored their identity and factors that influenced their investment in learning English using narratives. The findings indicate that the participants had identities of being unknowledgeable, frustrated, hated (by teachers and peers), and unconfident; these drove them from participating in classroom activities. The participants were struggling to reconstruct their identities (Peirce, 1995). The findings supported what Darwin and Norton (2015) claimed regarding how their identities impacted students' investment in English learning. These participants might construct positive or negative identities (Teng, 2019). Students who have a negative identity in their class will experience a decline in their behavior, such as sleeping in class and not paying attention to the teachers' instructions. On the contrary, those with a positive identity will perform well. This is in line with Norton's (2013) claim that "an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity" (p. 103). If students cannot overcome the change in their identity, they might be reluctant to learn English. When students have a negative identity, it will affect their investment. For instance, P5 formed a negative identity after failing in a speaking test. P5, labeled as a poor English learner, made him feel marginalized. He believed himself to be the 'worst' student in class. At first, he invested in learning to catch up with the coursework, especially in speaking skills, but he failed. This resulted in his performance to diminish in the English class. This awareness caused a loss of perseverance in improving his English proficiency. In contrast, P2 constructed a positive identity. A major reason for such identity transformation was his desire to make his parents proud of him and seek better job opportunities. It related to his future plans, such as being an employee and an Indonesian migrant worker. P2 recognized the importance of learning English, and decided to invest in the learning process because he conceived English as a useful and valuable resource that may lead him to obtain his desire. It refers to the desire to access higher symbolic resources explained by Peirce (1995) as intangible stocks of the subject.

Another significant finding was the ups and downs of student investment in their learning process. The investment could be defined as students' commitment and desire to learn a language. The students' investment appears when they understand it might gain the value of their cultural capital. The learners' investment seems to be understood as symbolic and material resources in a broader range, which may increase the value

of their cultural capital (Norton, 2008). The investment can be seen when the students give their time, effort, and money to achieve successful language learning. They might be active in classroom activities. The participants' investment in language learning is an interactive process. Based on the data, some participants can be assumed to invest in their English learning in and outside the classroom to a certain extent. Their investments outside the classroom were such as listening to music, watching movies, and watching YouTube videos. However, their investment in the classroom was poor. The participants did not do their assignments and homework, slept in class, or chatted with their peers. It was important to investigate the factors that influenced their investment to overcome this phenomenon. Five factors discovered through the findings include teachers' teaching method(s), inconvenient classroom environment, lack of knowledge, support from family and peers, and having a part-time job.

The first reaction of the participants was the teaching method the teacher used in the classroom. Teachers still used the teacher-centered method, as all participants mentioned it. The teaching method is essential because it determines whether the teaching-learning process's goals can be achieved. As all participants claimed, the teachers gave unclear explanations that might decrease students' understanding. It caused apprehension in students. These findings correspond to Ahn and Lee's (2017) study, where the participants felt the teachers did not help them to understand English. Moreover, they believed that teachers should use different teaching methods interactively as it has been proven to impact learning positively. As Muslim et al. (2020) suggested, teachers need more professional development on how to make their learning process or situation more fun for the students to increase students' investment in learning.

The following factor which raised the issue was the inconvenient classroom environment. The participants felt uncomfortable learning English because the class was noisy and the teachers were indifferent to students who did not pay attention. They also mentioned that their teachers treated them unfairly. Those who felt marginalized by the teachers believed that the teachers did not value them as an individual, and this withdrew them from the learning process. Darvin and Norton (2015) argued that students might be highly motivated to learn in the classroom, but if the language practices or their instructors are "racist, sexist, or homophobic" (p. 37), they may not be invested in the learning process. To avoid this, a teacher should create an equitable classroom environment.

Another factor that this study found was that the participants had difficulties in learning English due to different pronunciations between Bahasa Indonesia and English. In English, the same letter has different pronunciations (James & Smith, 2007). It made the participants confused. These obstacles lead them to not achieve optimal learning outcomes. The significant finding was they did not know how to use a dictionary. As mentioned by P3 in (16), '...it is even more confusing when I open a dictionary'. Although a dictionary is essential in learning a language, the teachers did not explain how to use it to the students. As a result, with such limited access to the resources, these participants found it challenging to learn English and improve their proficiency. However, their lack of prior knowledge caused some of them to work harder to catch up on the English materials at the VHS level.

The interview data also uncovered a clash collision between the participants' desire to learn and their social world. Being inactive students was a phenomenon that occurred inside the classroom as a consequence of the power relationships between the

students and the social world surrounding them. Even though they perceived that English could be considered as an additional skill useful for looking for a job, however, their family and friends did not find a connection between the desire to learn the language and the benefits it may embody them. It is because English is not their primary language needed in their social life. They positioned themselves as non-English speakers and emphasized their limitations when interacting in English.

Finally, the result of the study also showed students' tiredness with their activities outside the classroom posed their divestment (Ahn & Lee, 2017). Due to their socioeconomic status, two of the six participants preferred to earn money rather than study. Although they have the desire to learn, they had to work to ease the burden of their parents. For P1, helping his parents was exhausting and he could no longer afford the strength and time to study. He believed that work made him unfocused in studying.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the main aims of this study were to investigate the relationship between VHS students' identity and investment and the factors that influenced their investment in learning English in a rural area in Indonesia. The findings revealed that students had different ideas about their identity and investment in learning English, they are learning English outside the classroom, English necessity for future career, reluctant in learning English, perspective on future self. This study also revealed that the participants' investment in learning English was hindered by five factors. They are the teachers' teaching method(s), inconvenient classroom environment, lack of knowledge, family and peer support, and having a part time job. This study is expected to be beneficial for the students in negotiating their identities and reflecting on their investments in learning English. Students can improve their English learning by understanding their identities and investments. On the other hand, teachers can also reflect on their ways of teaching while considering what students need while learning the target language.

Since this study took students' perspectives, it might be interesting to conduct this kind of study from the teachers' point of view. Further studies may be conducted to see how teachers deal with students' identities and investments and develop suitable materials for classroom practices. In addition, a similar study can also be conducted in the future with more participants from different majors. Besides, since this study only had one female participant, it would be interesting to find out further relations between identities, language learning, and gender by inviting more female and male students to participate in related studies.

REFERENCES

- Admadja, I. P., & Marpanaji, E. (2016). Pengembangan multimedia pembelajaran praktik individu instrumen pokok dasar siswa SMK di bidang keahlian *karawitan* [Development of individual practice in learning multimedia instruments for vocational school students in the field of *karawitan* traditional

- musical expertise]. *Jurnal Pendidikan Vokasi*, 6(2), 173–183. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpv.v6i2.8107>
- Ahn, S. G., & Lee, M. W. (2017). “Sleeping Beauties” in English classrooms: The English divestment of Korean high school students. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics English Philology*, 17(3), 547–579. <https://doi.org/10.15738/kjell.17.3.201709.547>
- Al Mubarakah, L. (2021). Learning investment as a means of shaping learner identity in higher education. *Korea TESOL Journal*, 16(2), 101–124.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Busetto, L., Wick, W. & Gumbinger, C. How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 36–56. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191>
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2018). Identity, investment, and TESOL. In J. I. Liontas & M. DelliCarpini (Eds.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1–7). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0802>
- Duff, P., & Talmy, S. (2011). Language socialization approaches to second language acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition* (pp. 95–116). Routledge.
- Indriaturrahmi & Sudiyanto. (2016). Peran dunia usaha dan dunia industri dalam penyelenggaraan SMK berbasis kearifan lokal di Kota Mataram [The role of the business and the industry in organizing local wisdom-based vocational schools in Mataram]. *Jurnal Pendidikan Vokasi*, 6(2), 162–172. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpv.v6i2.6277>
- James, L., & Smith, O. (2007). *Get rid of your accent* (3rd ed.). Business and Technical Communication Services Limited.
- Kim, H. Y. (2014). Learner investment, identity, and resistance to second language pragmatic norms. *System*, 45, 92–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.05.002>
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Sage.
- Mahbub, M. A. (2018). English teaching in vocational high school: A need analysis. *JEELS*, 5(2), 229–258. <https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v5i2.835>
- Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia. (2020). *Statistik persekolahan SMK 2019/2020* [Vocational school statistics 2019/2020]. Pusat Data dan Teknologi Informasi.
- Muslim, A. B., Hamied, F. A., & Sukyadi, D. (2020). Integrative and instrumental but low investment: The English learning motivation of Indonesian senior high school students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9(3), 493–507. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v9i3.23199>

- Norton, B. (2008). Identity, investment, and Chinese learners of English. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 18(1), 109–120. <https://doi.org/10.1075/japc.18.1.07nor>
- Norton, B. (2010). Language and identity. In N. Hornberger & S. McKay (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language education* (pp. 349–369). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847692849-015>
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783090563>
- Norton, B., & De Costa, P. (2018). Research tasks on identity in language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching*, 51(1), 90–112. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000325>
- Norton, B., & Gao, Y. (2008). Identity, investment, and Chinese learners of English. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 18(1), 109–120. <https://doi.org/10.1075/japc.18.1.07nor>
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 412–446. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000309>
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Peirce, B. N. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9–31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587803>
- Potowski, K. (2004). Student Spanish use and investment in a dual immersion classroom: Implications for second language acquisition and heritage language maintenance. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88(1), 75–101. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3588719>
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roulston, K. (2010). Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, 10, 199–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356739>
- Skilton–Sylvester, E. (2002). Should I stay or should I go? Investigating Cambodian women's participation and investment in adult ESL programs. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171302237201>
- Sularti, Drajiati, N. A., & Supriyadi, S. (2019). Listening materials for vocational high school students in Indonesia: Teachers' perception. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 4(2), 229–246. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v4i2.172>
- Sumarni, Fauzan, M. M., Mofreh, S. A. M., & Patak, A. A. (2018). Investigating students' reflection toward self-assessment on creative writing achievement in ESP course. *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)*, 1(1), 8–16. <https://doi.org/10.33750/ijhi.v1i1.3>
- Teng, M. F. (2019). Learner identity and learners' investment in EFL learning: A multiple case study. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 7(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.30466/ijltr.2019.120632>
- Vasilopoulos, G. (2015). Language learner investment and identity negotiation in the Korean EFL context. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 14(2), 61–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2015.1019783>
- Wirza, Y. (2018). A narrative case study of Indonesian EFL learners' identities. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 473–481. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v8i2.13313>