

## The influence of school factors on students' English achievements

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**Abstract:** Under the dual influence of globalization's accelerated process and the deepening of the middle school examination and student tracking policy, language achievement has increasingly become a critical determinant of students' educational trajectories. In particular, English learning has emerged as a focal point in recent years, with academic achievement in this subject directly influencing students' opportunities for further education and their competitiveness in society. Consequently, research into the factors that affect students' academic achievement has garnered significant attention across multiple academic disciplines. This literature review seeks to systematically examine the impact of core school-related factors, with a particular emphasis on how peers, teachers, and the school's cultural environment influence students' English academic performance. Empirical studies suggest that these three elements collectively contribute to the formation of a supportive "learning ecology," thereby influencing the efficiency and depth of language acquisition. Considering the central role of school-based factors, future research should incorporate longitudinal methodologies and interdisciplinary frameworks to advance dynamic interaction models, offering robust theoretical foundations for targeted instructional interventions. Furthermore, it is essential to move beyond a singular focus on school environments and instead investigate integrated models that link family, social, and institutional education, thereby proposing comprehensive strategies for optimizing the English learning ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Peer, Teacher, School cultural atmosphere, English learning achievement

### I. Introduction

English, as a core subject in China's compulsory education system, plays a crucial role in students' academic and future development. According to the 2022 New Curriculum Standards, English accounts for 8% of total class hours, ranking third among all subjects. This substantial allocation of instructional time underscores the subject's strategic importance. Furthermore, English contributes 22.7% to the total score of 660 in the high school entrance examination (Zhongkao), a proportion significantly higher than that of many other subjects.

Under the dual influence of globalization's accelerated process and the deepening of the middle school examination and student tracking policy, language proficiency has increasingly become a critical determinant of students' educational trajectories. In particular, English learning has emerged as a focal point in recent years, with academic achievement in this subject directly influencing students' opportunities for further education and their competitiveness in society. Consequently, research into the factors that affect students' academic achievement has garnered significant attention across multiple academic disciplines. This literature review seeks to systematically examine the impact of core school-related factors, with a particular emphasis on how peers, teachers, and the school's cultural environment influence students' English academic achievement.

Peer not only provide emotional support but also act as a crucial driving force in shaping students' learning behaviors. Through mechanisms such as social comparison, cooperative learning, and the transmission of learning attitudes, peers significantly influence students' self-confidence, learning engagement, and perseverance. Both positive and negative peer influences manifest clearly in students' English learning outcomes.

Simultaneously, teachers play a central role in students' English learning. Their teaching styles, emotional support, and the quality of teacher-student relationships directly affect students' learning motivation, strategy application, and self-efficacy. As the primary source of structured language input and individualized feedback, teachers are essential to achieving effective language development.

The campus cultural atmosphere exerts either a reinforcing or weakening influence on language learning outcomes through the broader educational environment. Various factors—including classroom settings, campus English activities, material culture development, and institutional support—collectively create sustained material and psychological conditions that shape students' daily learning experiences. A positive campus culture can foster long-term interest, provide authentic language contexts, and support students' continuous engagement in English learning.

These three types of factors do not operate in isolation; rather, they dynamically interact to form an integrated learning ecosystem. The interplay among them can either enhance the effectiveness of learning interventions or undermine teaching outcomes. Consequently, a thorough understanding of their roles and underlying mechanisms in English learning achievements empowers individuals to take proactive control in constructing their own knowledge systems and improving both the quality and efficiency of their learning. This is of critical importance for the sustainable development and optimization of English education.

## **II. "Input-Environment-Output" model**

In 1985, Pascarella proposed the General Model of Student Change, building upon Astin's "Input-Environment-Output" model. This model clearly delineates the interrelationships among various influencing factors across both student-related and institutional dimensions. It comprises five core components: (1) the student's background and pre-enrollment characteristics; (2) the institutional structure and organizational features; (3) the campus environment; (4) interpersonal relationships within the school; and (5) the quality of the student's efforts. These five variables exert either direct or indirect effects on students' learning outcomes and overall development. Specifically, interpersonal relationships within the school are closely linked to students' academic engagement and have a direct influence on their learning outcomes. Meanwhile, institutional structure and organizational characteristics, as well as the campus environment, function as institutional resource provisions, which indirectly affect learning outcomes by shaping interpersonal interactions and the quality of students' efforts.

Pascarella's General Model of Student Change is recognized as a foundational framework for understanding institutional influence on student development. This model not only clarifies that institutional factors significantly affect students' learning outcomes, but also highlights that these factors exert their educational impact primarily by shaping students' academic engagement. Pascarella emphasizes that when evaluating educational quality, it is more informative to examine how institutions influence students' learning experiences and cognitive development than to merely analyze the characteristics of the institutional environment and organizational structure.

The "Input-Environment-Output" model posits that both input and environmental variables jointly determine educational achievement. In the educational context, input variables include students' personal background characteristics and internal traits, such as prior knowledge and motivation. Environmental variables encompass both interpersonal elements—such as teachers, peers, and administrators—and institutional aspects, including material resources, organizational structures, and cultural environments. Output variables refer to students' knowledge acquisition and skill development. While the model acknowledges the influence of students' personal

characteristics on learning achievement, it also highlights the significant role of the institutional environment. Pascarella further developed this framework by categorizing the factors influencing student achievement into two broad domains: student characteristics and school environmental factors. He elaborated on the operational mechanisms of environmental variables, ultimately proposing the General Model of Student Change.

According to theoretical definitions, institutional factors influencing student learning can be examined through three key dimensions: peers, teachers, and the school's cultural atmosphere.

### **III. Empirical Review**

#### **3.1 The Influence of Peers on English Achievement**

Peer relationships represent the most common form of interpersonal interaction among students in school and have a measurable influence on academic achievement. Within the context of English learning, the impact of peer factors on learning achievement has emerged as a prominent area of research. Notably, the correlations between peer relationships, peers' learning attitudes, and the academic achievement levels of peers and students' English achievement are particularly significant.

Peer relationships, as a fundamental aspect of interpersonal interaction, have a direct and positive influence on students' participation and academic achievement in English learning. Wentzel's research demonstrates that peer relationships significantly affect academic achievement by shaping students' motivation orientation, problem-solving abilities, self-regulation skills, and social interaction achievement. Students who are socially excluded or lack peer acceptance tend to achieve lower academic achievement compared to their accepted peers, and they also exhibit higher rates of absenteeism and dropout, with these effects becoming more pronounced as students advance through school grades. Zhang Ling (2023) further confirms that harmonious peer relationships are positively correlated with high academic achievement, whereas students who experience social isolation are more likely to encounter learning difficulties or even academic obstacles. Xu Luqin (2024) expands on this perspective by examining self-efficacy, revealing that positive peer relationships enhance students' confidence and self-efficacy in English learning, which in turn improves academic achievement. Xie Chunhui et al. (2024) also highlight the role of peer relationships as a key driver in fostering positive shifts in engagement patterns among college English learners.

At the same time, this relationship also carries a dual potential risk. Research by Wang Meifang and Yang Guangyan reveals that high-achieving students are more likely to gain peer acceptance, whereas those who experience persistent exclusion tend to develop negative self-perceptions, which in turn further impede their academic progress. Building on national longitudinal data, Zong Qingqing and Li Xuesong (2018) reached a more specific conclusion, demonstrating that the presence of "undesirable peers" in a classroom exerts a significant negative influence on students' English achievement. Gao Xiang (2020) further quantified this phenomenon, finding that the greater the number of high-achieving peers with aspirations for further education surrounding a student, the more significantly their English grades improve; conversely, a negative peer influence leads to a decline in academic achievement.

Peer interaction mode represents another critical factor influencing English achievement. Zhang Hanwen (2021) conducted a morning reading experiment in junior high school English, which demonstrated that the peer-assisted learning model of "pair-led reading – group mutual evaluation" significantly improves pronunciation accuracy and fluency. As a result, the experimental group outperformed the control group in both morning reading efficiency and final oral English scores. Zhao Xiaoli (2022) implemented a heterogeneous grouping experiment through the "little teacher system," in which struggling students deepened their understanding through peer explanations, while high achievers reinforced their knowledge through teaching. This approach led to a significant improvement in grammar test scores, demonstrating a complementary effect. Guo Ru (2023) investigated peer assistance in junior high school English teaching and found that scientifically based grouping is essential for

effective peer support. Appropriate grouping reduces interaction barriers caused by ability differences, enabling students to engage in productive collaboration during tasks such as vocabulary testing and grammar error correction. Chen Shujun (2023) further revealed that when students acquire interaction strategies such as "questioning – clarification – repair," their behavioral participation in class increases significantly, which indirectly contributes to improved academic achievement.

However, the potential negative effects of peer interaction should not be overlooked. Huang Shihuo's (2022) study on high school grammar instruction revealed that groups lacking clear structural guidelines often devolve into "chit-chat discussions," which significantly reduces the accuracy of grammar practice. This finding highlights that the beneficial effects of peer interaction are contingent upon effective and scientifically informed guidance. Guo Ru (2023) further found that when there is a notable disparity in self-regulation abilities within a group, lower-achieving students may withdraw from participation due to fear of criticism, leading to a "free-rider" phenomenon that undermines collaborative learning achievement.

The learning attitudes of peers influence an individual's English achievement through mechanisms such as "atmospheric infection" and "behavioral imitation," and similarly affect English achievement. Zhou Bi (2018) found in a review of peer assessment literature that students' receptiveness to peer feedback significantly influences their learning achievement. Liu Jing's (2024) quantitative study of 403 high school students revealed that when more than 60% of a class consistently engages in pre-class previewing, the previewing behavior of average-performing students also increases, ultimately leading to improvements in reading scores, particularly in reading comprehension and writing. This influence can manifest as either positive motivation or negative inhibition. Liang Chenyu (2024) found that the closeness of peer relationships affects the effectiveness of feedback, with students more likely to seek academic help from peers who are physically closer and more accessible. Zhang Huiyan (2024) further noted that learners' own attitudes can reciprocally influence the effectiveness of peer support. Therefore, the transmission of negative learning attitudes may suppress academic achievement, making the relationship between peer achievement levels and English grades both complex and dynamic.

The distribution of peers' academic achievement also influences an individual's academic achievement through mechanisms such as "social comparison" and "resource competition," with the magnitude and direction of this influence varying based on individual characteristics and contextual factors. A peer group characterized by high academic achievement exerts a significant positive effect on an individual's learning achievement. Feinstein and Symons (1999) similarly found that peer achievement has a substantial positive impact on individual academic achievement, and ability-based classroom grouping is especially advantageous for students with higher abilities. Yang Zhou and Huang Bin (2020) conducted a study using baseline data from the China Education Panel Survey, revealing that students surrounded by high-achieving peers demonstrated significantly better academic achievement compared to those in other groups, further confirming the positive influence of high-performing peers. However, Liu Jing (2024) found that when an individual's academic achievement falls below the class average, some students may experience anxiety, which can reduce their accuracy on grammar tasks. In contrast, students with strong self-regulation abilities may respond to this pressure by improving their academic achievement, highlighting the moderating role of individual traits in the influence of peer academic achievement.

### **3.2 The Influence of Teachers on English Achievement**

The influence of teachers on students' English achievement primarily operates through two key pathways: the teacher-student relationship and instructional style. Both of these factors can impact learning achievement through mechanisms such as emotional regulation, the quality of interaction, and the development of language skills.

From the perspective of the teacher-student relationship, its influence on English achievement can be explained through the "affective filter" mechanism. Krashen's "affective filter hypothesis" posits that a low-anxiety environment facilitates the acquisition of language input, and a positive teacher-student relationship can reduce

students' anxiety in learning English, thereby promoting language input absorption. This influence is bidirectional. Yunus et al. (2011) confirmed through qualitative interviews that a strong teacher-student relationship can enhance learning enthusiasm, significantly boost motivation, and improve academic achievement. Jung-Sook Lee (2012) similarly emphasized that the teacher-student relationship has a significant predictive effect on students' classroom participation and academic achievement. Tement (2013) demonstrated through experimental research that the higher the students' perception of teacher support, the more pronounced the improvement in achievement; conversely, low levels of perceived support can hinder academic progress. At the same time, teachers tend to show greater acceptance toward high-achieving students, which may lead to either a "positive cycle" or a "negative cycle" in the learning environment.

Specifically regarding the mechanism of action, Lihong Ma et al. (2017) argue that a positive teacher-student relationship can indirectly enhance academic achievement by fostering students' English self-efficacy and promoting the use of effective learning strategies. Qualitative research conducted by Zhou Wenye et al. and an experimental study by Ye Jianini (2019) both support this conclusion: the quality of the teacher-student relationship is positively correlated with academic achievement. As the relationship deteriorates, academic achievement declines significantly; conversely, stronger relationships are associated with higher achievement. Zheng Ruolan (2024) further highlights that academic support between teachers and students plays a critical role in enhancing positive emotions and mitigating negative ones, acting as a key facilitator for academic improvement. She proposes pedagogical recommendations aimed at strengthening teacher-student support in English learning to help students cultivate positive emotional responses, manage negative emotions, and ultimately improve their English achievement.

The quality of teacher-student interaction directly influences students' learning engagement, which subsequently has an indirect effect on their English achievement. He Jing (2021) found that when teachers provide encouraging feedback, students' participation frequency and writing quality improve significantly; however, if the interaction is marked by emotional distance, students are more likely to disengage from group discussions and other participatory activities. He Yulian (2024) further proposed that a strong teacher-student relationship enhances students' confidence in English learning, promotes greater learning engagement, and thereby positively affects English achievement. The magnitude of this influence varies across educational stages, with the teacher-student relationship exerting a weaker effect on academic achievement in college compared to high school, potentially due to the stronger self-regulated learning abilities of college students. Among special populations, Li Junzheng (2024) noted that a positive teacher-student relationship increases the willingness of students with special educational needs (SED) to engage in online English communication and strengthens their academic resilience. Yu Shiyan et al. (2024) also found that establishing a supportive and encouraging teacher-student relationship promotes the acquisition of professional knowledge through English learning. Zhang Meng's (2024) survey of junior high school students revealed a strong correlation between students' engagement vitality and multiple dimensions of the teacher-student relationship, with "closeness" and "conflict" demonstrating the strongest predictive power for English learning engagement. Similarly, Zhang Ying's (2024) study on primary school students emphasized that a democratic and equal teacher-student relationship not only enhances academic achievement but also supports the realization of educational equity in English learning.

The influence of teachers' teaching styles on students' English achievement is manifested through differentiated effects on classroom interaction patterns and skill development. Cold Yulin's (2019) correlational study revealed that the democratic teaching style, characterized by involving students in the selection of teaching content, enhances vocabulary retention efficiency and shows a strong positive correlation with academic achievement. Zhang Ping (2020) classified English teachers' teaching styles into authoritative, interactive, and permissive types, finding that the interactive style significantly improves students' classroom participation and listening comprehension scores. Chen Dan's (2024) research indicates that the emotional "pleasure" derived from

teacher support has a more pronounced effect on students' classroom engagement than peer support, acting as an implicit driver for academic improvement. Zeng Dan's (2024) controlled experiment further confirmed that when students perceive and are willing to align with teachers' teaching styles, classroom discipline improves, leading to better learning achievement. Therefore, teachers' teaching styles exert a structural influence on students' achievement by shaping interaction dynamics and enhancing the efficiency of knowledge transmission.

Different teaching styles demonstrate distinct strengths in skill development. Xu Peng (2019) differentiated teaching styles based on skill outcomes, finding that explanatory teachers excel in grammar instruction, whereas task-oriented teachers are more effective in improving oral fluency. Wei Xiaoli (2021) compared the teaching styles of Chinese and foreign English teachers, revealing that the immersive approach commonly used by foreign teachers enhances cross-cultural awareness, while Chinese teachers are more effective in guiding test-taking strategies. Cao Shuang (2022) found that evaluative and radical teaching styles have a more positive influence on students' classroom achievement. He Chengxi (2022) concluded that teaching styles preferred by students can enhance English academic self-efficacy and learning engagement, ultimately influencing academic achievement. Luo Qiuting (2024) pointed out that all four mainstream teaching styles positively affect learning engagement, with the humorous and active style showing the strongest effect. Li Xiao (2024) further found that the "caring and sharing" teaching style has the strongest correlation with behavioral participation, and teachers' instructional approaches can positively predict students' classroom involvement. The stronger the perceived presence of the caring and sharing and innovative exploration styles, the higher the level of students' behavioral participation in English classes. In terms of emotional engagement, the humorous and active and caring and sharing styles are most strongly associated with increased emotional involvement in classroom learning.

In conclusion, the influence of teachers on students' English achievement follows a progressive mechanism involving emotion, interaction, and skill development. A positive teacher-student relationship establishes an emotional foundation by reducing anxiety and enhancing students' sense of self-efficacy. An appropriate teaching style improves learning achievement through optimized interaction patterns and targeted skill cultivation. These two factors work synergistically to create a virtuous cycle, ultimately leading to improved academic achievement.

### **3.3 The Influence of School Cultural Atmosphere on English Achievement**

The school's cultural atmosphere, functioning as an implicit "second classroom," exerts a profound influence on English learning through multiple mechanisms, including cultural immersion, environmental optimization, and institutional support. This influence operates across four key dimensions: spiritual culture, material culture, classroom environment, and institutional frameworks.

From the perspective of spiritual and cultural dimensions, campus English cultural activities enhance students' learning engagement and comprehensive language abilities through consistent and subtle immersion. Yao Chunyan (2020) found that when activities incorporate vocational elements, students' professional English vocabulary expands significantly, with the effect being more sustained among senior students. Lu Yong (2021)'s study in vocational college settings further demonstrated that regularly organizing English corners and drama festivals significantly increases students' frequency of using English outside the classroom, thereby improving their English application skills across various contexts. Zhou Xingmei (2024) emphasized that diverse English cultural activities not only directly stimulate learning interest but also simultaneously enhance language application and cross-cultural communication abilities. Against the backdrop of the "Double Reduction" policy, Lu Yi (2024) proposed that integrating campus culture with English homework can effectively enhance students' English achievement.

Campus material culture construction, serving as a carrier of spiritual culture, also exerts a significant influence on English learning. Zhou Xingmei (2024) found in her high school-based study that after the establishment of an English cultural corridor, students' active reading behaviors increased significantly, and their

scores in understanding literary texts continued to improve. However, the presentation of material culture should avoid triggering a "saturation effect," as excessive exposure may lead to declining participation enthusiasm. Therefore, it is recommended to implement "thematic periodic activities" to sustain student engagement. Furthermore, digital material culture transcends the constraints of time and space. Xie Xintong (2024) proposed that by leveraging new media platforms and student clubs to create online cultural communities, and even encouraging the formation of "dormitory English corners," access to high-quality English resources can be expanded for students in remote areas, thereby serving as an important channel for fostering cross-cultural competence.

The classroom, functioning as a microcosm of the broader cultural atmosphere, exerts a more direct influence on the effectiveness of English learning through the optimization of both its physical and psychological environments. Liu Lihong (2025) confirmed through a structural equation model that the classroom environment indirectly affects academic achievement by shaping students' learning attitudes, with the most notable improvements in learning efficiency occurring in classrooms characterized by a clear task orientation. Yang Fan (2021) further found that in college English classrooms, "teacher support" is significantly and positively correlated with academic achievement, and a "cooperative learning" atmosphere enhances the quality of group task completion. Xia Qian (2024) highlighted the value of digital classroom environments, suggesting that the integration of new media tools in reading instruction can diversify input formats and improve learning concentration, thereby offering a promising pathway for enhancing academic achievement.

It is important to note that the positive effects of a cultural atmosphere must be supported by institutional frameworks; otherwise, the absence of institutional support may undermine the beneficial influence of other factors. Even in cases where the teacher-student relationship is strong and extracurricular activities are abundant, students' academic achievement may still decline if the allocated English class hours are reduced. This highlights that relying solely on cultural activities or environmental enhancements is insufficient to produce sustained improvements. A coordinated institutional system is therefore necessary. This can be achieved by clearly defining the proportion of English activity class hours through formal regulations, ensuring consistent teacher involvement in guidance, and establishing an evaluation mechanism to assess the effectiveness of such activities. If future research further investigates the dynamic interactions among these various dimensions, it could provide more targeted intervention strategies and robust theoretical support for improving English learning achievement with precision.

In conclusion, the influence of the school cultural atmosphere on English learning results from the synergistic interaction of multiple dimensions. Spiritual culture stimulates intrinsic motivation, material culture provides external carriers, the classroom environment enhances immediate learning effects, and institutional support ensures long-term sustainability. Only through the coordinated integration of these four aspects can their full potential be realized in promoting English learning.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study reviews and analyzes the factors influencing English achievement within the school context. Existing evidence demonstrates that peers, teachers, and school culture exert significant effects on English achievement, either through direct input and practical opportunities or via indirect mediating mechanisms. However, optimizing a single factor yields limited improvements; therefore, a systematic and integrated approach is required, which carries both practical significance and actionable implications for enhancing students' English achievement. It is recommended to establish a multi-dimensional linkage mechanism at the peer, teacher, and school levels. At the same time, attention should be given to the dynamic variations across educational stages and student characteristics. Given the current lack of research on the interaction mechanisms and long-term effects of these factors, future studies could adopt longitudinal designs and interdisciplinary methodologies to advance the development of dynamic interaction models, thereby providing theoretical support for targeted teaching interventions. Furthermore,

it is essential to move beyond a singular focus on the school environment and explore multi-dimensional linkage frameworks that integrate family support, social resources, and school education, offering a comprehensive strategy for optimizing the English education ecosystem.

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