



Teachers' Strategies to Motivate Young Learners in Learning English at Elementary School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-06-15 Revised: 2026-06-30 Accepted: 2026-06-30 Keywords: TEYL, young learners, motivational strategies, teaching challenges, primary education, systematic literature review, Indonesia. DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.12078 Corresponding Author: Nadia Asyura nadiaasyura2004@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya	<i>This systematic literature review investigates teachers' motivational strategies and their associated implementation challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) within Indonesian primary education. To address the need for updated evidence-based synthesis, this study systematically analyzed 10 empirical research articles published in 2025 focusing on primary school contexts (Grades 1–6) in Indonesia. Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, the synthesis yielded two primary findings. First, to enhance student motivation (RQ1), primary EFL teachers predominantly employ four pedagogical strategies: gamified and play-based learning, kinesthetic-auditory activities (TPR and songs), digital media integration, and contextual storytelling. Second, the implementation of these strategies (RQ2) is constrained by key operational and affective barriers, notably the lack of specialized TEYL teacher qualifications, student language anxiety, restricted instructional time, facility disparities, and mixed-ability classroom dynamics. The study underscores that optimizing young learners' English motivation requires an alignment of teacher pedagogical training, adequate instructional resources, and a supportive learning environment.</i>

1. Introduction

English has solidified its position as a primary global lingua franca, bridging cross-border communication, technology integration, and educational development in the digital era. In primary education, Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) represents a specialized pedagogical field requiring distinct instructional considerations due to the unique cognitive, affective, and social developmental characteristics of children. Elementary school students, who typically operate within Piaget's concrete operational stage, exhibit inherent curiosity, energetic dispositions, and high spontaneous engagement,

alongside relatively brief attention spans and developing metacognitive awareness. Within this developmental context, second language acquisition cannot be achieved through mechanical rote learning or passive instruction; rather, it requires active emotional involvement, sensory stimulation, and supportive learning environments. Consequently, motivation emerges as a paramount determinant influencing whether young learners perceive English as an engaging opportunity or an intimidating academic burden. Without strategically designed motivational interventions, effective language input is frequently impeded by student psychological resistance and foreign language anxiety.

The discourse on motivational strategies in second language acquisition is supported by an extensive theoretical foundation. Dörnyei's (2001) Motivational Teaching Practice framework asserts that learner motivation is not a static individual trait, but a dynamic, evolving process heavily shaped by teachers' instructional behavior, enthusiasm, and classroom management strategies. In primary education, interpersonal interactions between educators and young learners serve as the primary catalyst for sustaining task engagement, particularly in resource-constrained contexts where advanced technological infrastructure may be limited (Garton, 2014). Furthermore, active bodily movement and physical routines channel children's natural energy into structured learning focus, effectively lowering what Krashen (1982) conceptualizes as the affective filter (Hillyard, 2016).

Pedagogical strategies that integrate gamified elements, verbal encouragement, and multi-sensory materials serve as crucial bridges toward autonomous learning by balancing intrinsic interest with extrinsic reinforcement (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015; Ersöz, 2007). Collectively, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that optimizing motivation requires a synchronized orchestration of age-appropriate instructional techniques centered on young learners' developmental needs.

Despite the rich theoretical scholarship surrounding TEYL, a critical empirical and contextual gap remains in current literature. While numerous isolated studies have examined specific teaching techniques, such as educational games or digital media within controlled classroom settings, comprehensive systematic syntheses capturing how primary school teachers navigate real-world classroom realities remain limited. In primary education contexts, particularly across diverse Indonesian elementary schools, teachers frequently encounter operational challenges, including dense curricula, restricted instructional time, mixed-ability classroom dynamics, and varying levels of institutional facility support. Furthermore, many primary English teachers are generalist educators lacking formal academic qualifications or specialized training in young learner pedagogy. Existing research often examines successful teaching strategies independently of implementation obstacles, creating a disconnect between theoretical recommendations and the complex daily practices of primary school educators.

Addressing this pedagogical disconnect necessitates a holistic evaluation of how motivational strategies and structural challenges interact within primary language classrooms. Sustaining young learners' motivation is not an isolated instructional action, but a collaborative educational process influenced by teacher pedagogical competence, classroom climate, institutional support, and student affective states. A failure to identify effective strategies or mitigate environmental barriers during early language instruction can lead to student disengagement, persistent language anxiety, and long-term academic apathy toward English learning. Therefore, a systematic synthesis of recent empirical evidence is essential to provide educators, researchers, and policymakers with a clear, consolidated understanding of contemporary TEYL practices.

To address these empirical gaps and provide updated insights, this study conducts a systematic literature review specifically focusing on 10 core empirical studies published in 2025 within the Indonesian primary education context. By synthesizing findings from recent empirical scholarship, this study aims to answer two fundamental research questions: (1) What motivational strategies do English teachers use to enhance young learners' learning motivation in primary schools? and (2) What challenges or barriers do teachers face in the process of implementing these motivational strategies? Through a rigorous thematic synthesis of 2025 empirical evidence, this review contributes to the theoretical development of primary language pedagogy and offers practical implications for educators striving to cultivate engaging, inclusive, and effective English learning environments for young learners.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review (SLR) design to systematically synthesize, analyze, and map empirical research regarding teachers' motivational strategies and implementation challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) within Indonesian primary education (Page et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019). A critical gap exists between theoretical instructional strategies and the real-world operational challenges faced by elementary school educators, particularly in primary school contexts characterized by limited facilities, non-specialist teacher backgrounds, and dense curricula. Therefore, the systematic literature review method was selected to provide an exhaustive, evidence-based synthesis of current pedagogical practices and systemic hurdles reported in recent scholarship.

To ensure currency, relevance, and strict alignment with the scope of this review, the literature search was restricted to empirical studies published in 2025. The search process was conducted across reputable academic databases, including Google Scholar and specialized national primary education journals, utilizing targeted Boolean combinations of search terms such as motivational strategies, teaching techniques, young learners, primary school, elementary school, English language teaching, EFL, challenges, barriers, and Indonesia.

Rigorous eligibility criteria were established to guide the article selection process. To be included, studies had to be empirical research articles published in 2025, specifically focused on English language teaching for young learners at the primary school level (Grades 1–6) within the Indonesian educational context, and written in full text addressing either teachers' motivational strategies or implementation challenges. Conversely, studies were excluded if they were non-empirical papers, review articles, book chapters, conceptual frameworks, conducted in secondary or tertiary settings, published prior to 2025, or focused on non-English subjects.

The initial multi-database search yielded a total of 40 potential publications. The study selection followed a systematic two-stage screening process. First, title and abstract screening eliminated 25 records due to duplicate entries, non-primary school settings, or publication dates outside 2025. Second, the remaining 15 full-text articles underwent thorough evaluation, resulting in the exclusion of 5 studies that did not specifically address English language instruction in Indonesian elementary schools. Ultimately, exactly 10 core empirical articles published in 2025 met all inclusion criteria and were retained for final qualitative data extraction and thematic synthesis.

Data analysis was executed following the six-phase Thematic Analysis framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006), which offers a structured qualitative approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns across textual datasets. The procedure began with familiarization, wherein the researcher repeatedly read the full text

of the 10 selected 2025 articles to gain a comprehensive understanding of the empirical findings. Initial open codes were then generated to extract specific excerpts related to teaching tactics and implementation obstacles. Subsequently, these codes were collated into broader thematic categories through axial coding, such as grouping physical movement and musical activities under kinesthetic and auditory strategies.

Candidate themes were continuously refined using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to ensure consistency and eliminate thematic overlap. Finally, themes were defined and aligned directly with Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, culminating in a qualitative narrative supported by structured summary tables. Strict academic integrity and ethical standards were maintained by accurately citing all secondary sources according to APA guidelines.

3. Result

The systematic review of 10 selected empirical studies published in 2025 reveals two main findings corresponding to the research questions. First, in response to Research Question 1 regarding teachers' motivational strategies, primary school English educators predominantly utilize game-based learning, storytelling and role-playing, Total Physical Response (TPR) with songs, digital media integration, and contextual learning to foster young learners' engagement. Second, in response to Research Question 2 regarding implementation challenges, teachers consistently face barriers related to the lack of specialized TEYL professional training, limited instructional time, resource constraints, and affective factors such as student shyness, anxiety, and mood swings.

To arrive at these findings, an initial database search yielded a total of 40 potential articles published in 2025 across Google Scholar and primary education journals. Following title and abstract screening against the inclusion criteria (i.e., empirical studies, Indonesian primary school context, and TEYL focus), 30 articles were excluded due to irrelevance, non-primary school settings, or lack of direct alignment with the research questions. Ultimately, 10 core articles met all criteria and were selected for full-text synthesis. The extracted data were analyzed using thematic synthesis, categorizing specific teacher responses and pedagogical obstacles into distinct sub-themes.

To ensure clarity and systematic cross-referencing across the synthesized thematic tables and narrative results, the 10 core empirical studies published in 2025 selected for this review are designated as follows: Article 1 (Alfath et al., 2025), Article 2 (Arriv et al., 2025), Article 3 (Himawati et al., 2025), Article 4 (Maulana & Fahriany, 2025), Article 5 (Nasution & Fahriany, 2025), Article 6 (Nasution et al., 2025), Article 7 (Nugroho et al., 2025), Article 8 (Rahman et al., 2025), Article 9 (Ratnadimarta, 2025), and Article 10 (Wijayanti et al., 2025).

3.1 Teachers' Motivational Strategies for Enhancing Young Learners' English Learning

As synthesized from the 10 reviewed empirical studies in Table 1, primary school EFL teachers across Indonesia employ a multifaceted array of pedagogical strategies to cultivate young learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Rather than relying on a single teaching model, educators systematically combine multisensory, technology-enhanced, and age-adapted instructional techniques to cater to the psychological and developmental characteristics of primary school children.

First, interactive games, Total Physical Response (TPR), and educational songs were identified as dominant strategies, synthesized across multiple studies (Article 2, Article 6, Article 7, Article 8, Article 10). Teachers utilize physical movement and rhythm to lower young learners' affective filter, making vocabulary acquisition spontaneous rather than

burdensome. Ratnadimarta (2025) observed that incorporating structured play creates a low-anxiety environment where young learners feel safe to experiment with the target language without fear of peer ridicule.

Second, digital media and game-based technology integration emerged as an equally significant driver of student engagement in modern Indonesian primary classrooms (Article 4, Article 5, Article 8, Article 9). The synthesis highlights that digital tools such as interactive vocabulary applications, gamified platforms (e.g., Wordwall and Kahoot!), and animated video stories serve as visual and auditory anchors. Alfath et al. (2025) noted that digital game-based instruction transforms abstract English structures into vibrant, interactive experiences, thereby dramatically increasing students' focus and sustained interest during lessons.

Third, storytelling, role-playing, and contextual communicative tasks provide meaningful language production opportunities (Article 2, Article 4, Article 5, Article 8). Through imaginative narratives and simple role-play scenarios (e.g., buying food or introducing oneself), teachers contextualize target language expressions within familiar real-world settings. Furthermore, scaffolding and grade-differentiated instruction were identified as essential meta-strategies (Article 5, Article 7, Article 10). Nasution & Fahriany (2025) explicitly demonstrated that strategy execution varies significantly by developmental stage: 1st-grade pupils require direct sensory input, immediate verbal praise, and repetitive physical actions, whereas 3rd-grade pupils respond more effectively to collaborative group projects and structured peer activities.

Table 1 and Table 2 summarize the distribution of the 10 selected 2025 articles based on the identified teaching strategies and implementation challenges.

Table 1. Teaching Strategies to Motivate Young Learners in Elementary Schools (2025 Studies)

No	Teaching Straetegies	Article	total
1.	Gamified & Play-Based Learning	1,3,5,7,9	5
2.	Kinesthetic & Auditory Activities (TPR, Songs)	2,7,8,10	4
3.	Digital Media & Technology Integration	4,5,8,9	4
4.	Storytelling & Contextual Role-Playing	2,4,5,8	4

As shown in Table 1, gamified and play-based learning is the most dominant motivational strategy used by teachers, appearing in 5 out of the 10 reviewed articles (Articles 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9). Teachers utilize educational games, ice-breaking, and interactive competitions to lower young learners' affective filter, making language input enjoyable and accessible. In addition, kinesthetic activities like Total Physical Response (TPR) and songs (Articles 2, 7, 8, and 10), digital media tools (Articles 4, 5, 8, and 9), and contextual storytelling (Articles 2, 4, 5, and 8) are frequently integrated to keep young learners engaged, attentive, and actively participating in class.

3.2 Challenges in Implementing Teachers' Motivational Strategies

Despite the clear pedagogical benefits of these motivational strategies, the synthesis reveals that Indonesian primary school educators face complex, multifaceted barriers during implementation. As categorized in Table 2, these challenges stem from both institutional/structural limitations and individual student-level constraints.

At the institutional level, the lack of specialized TEYL professional qualifications and training remains a major obstacle (Article 7, Article 8, Article 10). Wijayanti et al. (2025) and Nugroho et al. (2025) reported that a substantial proportion of primary English

teachers are general classroom teachers who lack formal background in English language teaching pedagogy. As a result, teachers often struggle to design creative, age-appropriate materials or adapt their strategies when lessons do not go as planned. Compounding this qualification gap is the problem of severely restricted instructional time and curriculum transitions (Article 7, Article 8). With English often allocated minimal weekly classroom hours, teachers face intense pressure to cover required syllabus goals, leaving little room for time-consuming interactive games, digital preparation, or individual student scaffolding.

At the classroom level, student affective barriers pose a persistent daily challenge (Article 4, Article 7, Article 8). Maulana & Fahriany (2025) identified acute student shyness, fear of making oral mistakes, and rapid emotional mood swings as major deterrents to active participation. Even when teachers prepare engaging games, highly anxious or passive students frequently hesitate to speak, requiring extra emotional support and individualized encouragement. Finally, disparate student proficiency levels within a single classroom (Article 5, Article 7) and inadequate teaching media or infrastructure in certain schools (Article 7, Article 8) force teachers to spend excessive energy managing mixed-ability dynamics, ultimately limiting the consistent delivery of high-engagement activities.

Challenges	Article	Total
Lack of Specialized TEYL Qualification & Preparation	7, 8, 10	3
Student Affective Barriers (Shyness, Anxiety, Mood Swings)	4, 7, 8	3
Resource & Facility Constraints	7, 8	2
Mixed-Ability Classrooms	5, 7	2

Table 2 illustrates the primary obstacles encountered by primary English teachers. The most significant institutional challenge is the lack of specialized TEYL qualification and pedagogical training, identified in 3 studies (Articles 7, 8, and 10). Additionally, student-level affective barriers such as shyness, anxiety, and rapid mood swings (Articles 4, 7, and 8), along with limited instructional time, facility disparities (Articles 7 and 8), and mixed-ability student dynamics (Articles 5 and 7), frequently constrain the consistent implementation of interactive teaching strategies."

4. Discussion

The synthesis of the ten reviewed empirical studies underscores that cultivating and sustaining young learners' motivation in primary English education is an intricate, multi-dimensional pedagogical endeavor. Rather than relying on static or isolated instructional techniques, effective primary school educators dynamically harmonize diverse motivational strategies while continuously navigating real-world classroom constraints. This section critically interprets the theoretical mechanisms, developmental logic, and contextual dynamics underlying the identified teaching strategies (RQ1) and implementation barriers (RQ2).

4.1 Deconstructing Teachers' Motivational Strategies for Young Learners

The thematic analysis demonstrates that game-mediated learning, physical-auditory activities, digital media integration, and narrative-based instruction serve as the primary conduits for enhancing student engagement in Indonesian elementary classrooms.

First, gamified and play-based learning emerged as the predominant motivational framework. From a cognitive development perspective (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978), primary school children operating within the concrete operational stage possess an

inherent drive toward play and discovery, alongside inherently brief attention spans. Integrating educational games, interactive competitions, and structured ice-breaking routines effectively lowers what Krashen (1982) conceptualizes as the "affective filter". When language acquisition is embedded within play, the psychological barrier associated with formal linguistic performance diminishes. Consequently, students perceive foreign language tasks not as anxiety-inducing academic burdens, but as emotionally rewarding endeavours. This shift fosters intrinsic curiosity and sustained task engagement.

Second, kinaesthetic and auditory strategies—specifically Total Physical Response (TPR) and rhythmic educational songs—capitalize on young learners' natural physical vitality. Young children exhibit a developmental necessity for bodily movement, making prolonged sedentary instruction counterproductive. Synchronizing target vocabulary with physical actions and musical cadences channels children's excess energy into structured learning focus. Mechanistically, TPR establishes direct cognitive associations between physical gestures and linguistic meaning without forcing abstract grammatical translation. This multi-sensory processing accelerates vocabulary retention while mitigating classroom passivity and mental fatigue.

Third, digital media and game-based technology integration functions as a powerful visual and auditory anchor. Primary pupils in the current era are digital natives who process information primarily through dynamic visual stimuli. Deploying interactive digital storybooks, gamified learning platforms (e.g., Wordwall, Kahoot!), and animated video narratives offers immediate feedback, multi-sensory stimulation, and structured reward mechanisms. These technological tools transform abstract English vocabulary into tangible, interactive representations, capturing student focus and transforming passive reception into active cognitive involvement.

Fourth, storytelling and contextual role-playing provide authentic environments for language production. Narrative structures naturally captivate children's imagination. When educators utilize expressive storytelling or enact everyday situational dialogues (such as buying food or introducing family members), target expressions are grounded in meaningful socio-cultural contexts. This contextualization enables young learners to discern the practical utility of English beyond classroom exercises, facilitating a transition from mechanical rote memorization toward authentic communicative competence.

4.2 Critical Analysis of Implementation Challenges in Primary TEYL

Despite the established pedagogical benefits of these motivational interventions, the synthesis indicates that primary English educators encounter systemic, affective, and structural impediments that constrain execution.

First, the dearth of specialized TEYL professional qualifications represents the most pervasive institutional barrier. In the Indonesian primary education ecosystem, English is frequently taught by generalist classroom teachers who lack specialized academic training in child psychology, second language acquisition (SLA) principles, or primary language pedagogy. Lacking this foundational expertise, teachers struggle with pedagogical flexibility—specifically, the capacity to modify instructional plans spontaneously when pupils experience cognitive overload or disengagement. Consequently, educators often revert to traditional, teacher-centered translation techniques, which inadvertently heighten student boredom and diminish intrinsic motivation.

Second, student-level affective barriers—such as acute shyness, foreign language anxiety, and volatile emotional states—directly interrupt active participation. Language production inherently requires vulnerability and risk-taking. Young learners who possess low self-efficacy or fear peer ridicule frequently exhibit avoidance behaviors during oral

activities. Furthermore, children's rapid mood fluctuations require teachers to constantly pivot from instructional delivery to emotional regulation and pastoral care, consuming valuable instructional time.

Third, resource disparities and rigid instructional time constraints severely restrict the feasibility of complex motivational activities. Primary English instruction is often allocated limited weekly hours within dense national curricula. Teachers experience intense pressure to fulfill administrative requirements within narrow timeframes, leaving minimal space for time-consuming interactive games, media preparation, or individualized scaffolding. Moreover, infrastructural inequalities across urban and rural schools exacerbate inequities in digital tool adoption.

Fourth, mixed-ability classroom dynamics present a continuous instructional dilemma. Elementary classrooms routinely accommodate students with vastly disparate levels of prior English exposure and cognitive readiness. Designing unified motivational activities that simultaneously stimulate advanced learners without alienating struggling pupils requires sophisticated differentiation techniques, which non-specialist teachers often find challenging to execute effectively.

In synthesis, optimizing student motivation in primary English education extends far beyond the surface-level implementation of enjoyable activities. It requires an alignment of teacher pedagogical competence, affective empathy, institutional support, and contextual flexibility to navigate the multifaceted realities of the primary school classroom.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review aimed to synthesize recent evidence regarding teachers' motivational strategies for improving English learning motivation among young learners by analyzing ten selected studies published 2025. The synthesis identified four interrelated themes: the implementation of interactive and learner centered instructional strategies, the creation of supportive and engaging learning environments, the challenges encountered in sustaining students' motivation, and the supporting factors that facilitate the successful implementation of motivational strategies. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that enhancing young learners' motivation requires not only the selection of appropriate instructional strategies but also teachers' pedagogical competence, contextual adaptability, and continuous efforts to create meaningful learning experiences.

The findings further indicate that effective motivational practices cannot be separated from the classroom context in which learning occurs. Rather than relying on a single instructional approach, teachers need to integrate various motivational strategies that are responsive to learners' developmental characteristics, classroom conditions, available resources, and students' individual learning needs. This reinforces the view that successful English language teaching for young learners depends on the dynamic interaction between instructional practices, teacher competence, and a supportive learning environment.

By synthesizing evidence from ten selected studies, this review provides an integrated understanding of effective motivational strategies that may inform classroom practice, teacher professional development, and curriculum development in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). Nevertheless, this review is limited to studies published 2025 and focuses exclusively on English teaching for young learners. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within these boundaries. Future research is encouraged to investigate broader educational contexts, more diverse geographical settings, and additional pedagogical variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of motivational strategies that effectively support young learners' English language learning.

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