



Exploring English Teachers' Challenges in Applying Motivational Strategies at Senior High School

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing motivational strategies during English teaching at senior high school level. The research was conducted at SMAN 3 Luwu Timur using a descriptive qualitative method. Two English teachers teaching grade X were selected as participants through purposive sampling. Data were collected using classroom observation and interviews. The findings show that teacher encountered various challenges, including the diversity of students' backgrounds, large class size, persistent use of native language, and lack of infrastructure. These challenges significantly hindered the effectiveness of motivational strategies in the learning process. Addressing the obstacle is crucial for improving students' motivation in English Learning

Keywords: *teacher challenges, motivational strategies, English learning*

Introduction

English plays a significant role in the global context as a medium of communication, education, and international cooperation (Burns & Richards, 2009; Crystal, 2003). Its growing importance in global affairs has led many countries, including Indonesia, to emphasize the teaching of English at all educational levels. English is now a compulsory subject in Indonesian secondary schools, as it equips students with skills necessary for academic advancement and global competitiveness. However, the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia presents notable challenges, especially related to student engagement and motivation in the classroom.

Many students in Indonesia struggle to stay motivated when learning English, perceiving it as a complex and intimidating subject. This observation supports Lengkanawati's (2005) view that EFL instruction in Indonesia is often hindered by students' low confidence and motivation. These negative perceptions can lead to disinterest and avoidance, further complicating the teaching process.

Therefore, fostering student motivation becomes a fundamental concern in language education, as it directly impacts students' willingness to learn and persist. Motivation is widely recognized as one of the most important psychological elements in successful language learning. Dörnyei (2001) highlights that motivation acts as the engine of learning, influencing learners' initiation, persistence, and effort. Brown (2000) echoes this by asserting that motivation stems from both internal and external conditions, including self-perception, social interactions, and learning environments. Gardner (1985) categorizes motivation into integrative and instrumental orientations, emphasizing that students may be driven by cultural interest or pragmatic goals.

In addition, Ryan and Deci (2000) differentiate between intrinsic motivation—driven by internal enjoyment—and extrinsic motivation—based on rewards or external expectations. These theories emphasize that motivation is dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by learners' experiences and educational context. In this regard, the teacher plays a central role in shaping classroom motivation. Teachers are not only knowledge providers but also mentors and motivators who facilitate a positive learning environment. Fen and Kiat (2015) identify the teacher's role as encompassing that of facilitator, motivator, and role model. Similarly, Lawrence and Hanitha (2017) emphasize that a teacher's personal interaction, classroom management, and supportive attitude significantly contribute to students' engagement and success. A motivated teacher can transform the classroom atmosphere and sustain student interest through strategic encouragement, meaningful feedback, and culturally relevant materials.

However, in real teaching settings—particularly in public senior high schools—teachers often face considerable challenges in applying motivational strategies effectively. Singh (2021) argues that teachers encounter multiple barriers, such as large class sizes, diverse student abilities, minimal institutional support, and the dominance of the native language. These contextual issues hinder the implementation of motivational approaches, making it difficult to maintain consistent engagement among students. Teachers must constantly adapt their strategies to meet varying student needs while managing resource limitations and time constraints.

Furthermore, Sucuoglu (2017) adds that motivation is not a static condition but one that requires continuous reinforcement from educators. Even with effective strategies, students may lose interest if the classroom environment is not supportive or engaging. This highlights the importance of teachers' reflective practices and adaptive techniques in motivating learners. Teachers must continuously evaluate

and adjust their strategies according to student responses, classroom dynamics, and the broader educational environment.

In light of these perspectives, this study aims to explore the challenges experienced by English teachers in applying motivational strategies in senior high school settings. Conducted at SMAN 3 Luwu Timur, this research investigates how teachers navigate issues such as student diversity, infrastructural limitations, and classroom behavior in their efforts to maintain student motivation. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences and teaching practices, this study seeks to provide deeper insight into the practical implementation.

Method

In this research, the researchers used descriptive qualitative research. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing motivational strategies in real classroom settings. Descriptive qualitative research aims to understand phenomena based on the experiences, behaviors, and perceptions of the participants in their natural context. As stated by Creswell (2023), descriptive qualitative is an analytical approach where the researcher closely adheres to the data, applies minimal framework or interpretations to explain the findings and organized the information into thematic categories.

The main sources of data in this research were the results of classroom observations and interviews with two English teachers at SMAN 3 Luwu Timur. These teachers were selected as participants based on their active role in teaching tenth-grade students and their experience in applying motivational strategies in English language instruction. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling, which is appropriate in qualitative research to select informants who are considered to have sufficient knowledge and experience regarding the research focus (Sugiyono, 2023). The observational data provided insight into how motivational strategies were used in practice, while the interviews revealed the challenges teachers encountered during the implementation process.

The researcher used thematic analysis as the technique for analyzing the data. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. The steps followed in this research were as follows:

1. Identifying research focus related to teacher challenges in applying motivational strategies
2. Conducting classroom observations in Grade X English classes
3. Taking field notes on teaching practices and student engagement
4. Conducting semi-structured interviews with both English teachers
5. Transcribing interview recordings
6. Coding and categorizing data related to observed and reported challenges
7. Interpreting data to develop themes and draw conclusions

The data collected in this study were non-numerical and descriptive in nature. The use of interviews and observations allowed the researchers to understand the specific factors that limited the effective application of motivational strategies, such as student diversity, class size, native language use, and lack of teaching facilities. The researcher also ensured the credibility of data through triangulation by comparing results from observation and interviews to provide a comprehensive and accurate depiction of the real challenges experienced by teachers in the classroom.

Results

Based on the research conducted at SMAN 3 Luwu Timur, the researchers found that English teachers face four dominant challenges in implementing motivational strategies in classroom instruction. These include student diversity, large class sizes, use of native language, and lack of infrastructure. The data, obtained through classroom observation and interviews, revealed that both teachers had to constantly adapt their strategies to respond to different levels of student ability and motivation.

Table 1 Challenges faced by Teachers in Implementing Motivational Strategies

No	Supporting Factors	Explanation	Extract
1.	Diverse Students background	The students' varying learning experiences, goals, and level of English proficiency made it difficult for teachers to apply a single motivational strategy effectively.	<p><i>My students are very diverse. Some are already accustomed to taking English lessons outside of school, but others still have difficulty constructing simple sentences. I have to find a way to keep them all engaged, without making them feel left behind or that it is too easy</i> (Mr.K,)</p> <p><i>I often see students who are very enthusiastic about learning English because they have goals that require English skills, but there are also those who say it's not important. So, I have to use different approaches to motivate all the students.</i> (Miss.E)</p>
2.	Use of Native Language	Students frequently used their native language (local language) during lessons, which	<i>I usually use English completely in the classroom, but many students sometimes don't understand. So sometimes I alternate between English and Indonesian.</i>

	reduced the opportunity to practice English in class	(Mr.K) <i>I often hear students say, 'I'm afraid of making mistakes, Miss,' which is why they feel more comfortable using Indonesian. But I always tell them, 'It's okay to make mistakes; what's important is that we try first.' I encourage them to be brave and speak in English, even if it's just one or two sentences. It's very important as a first step</i> (Miss. E)
3.	Large size of Class The high number of students in one class limited teachers' ability to monitor and give attention to each individual student.	<i>Ideally, if we want to learn English, there should only be 15 students in a class. This is because the more students there are, with their different characters and personalities, the less effective the learning process will be. Perhaps 15 students per class would be better</i> (Mr.K) <i>I noticed that when the class is too big, only certain students are active. The others become passive, perhaps feeling insecure or afraid of making mistakes. But I want all the children to be involved</i> (Miss.E)
4.	Lack of Infrastructure The absence of essential teaching facilities like projectors or internet access made it difficult for teachers to support learning with engaging media.	<i>I once designed an activity using a tutorial video to make students more interested, but in the end, it fell through because the LCD was broken and the speakers were not working. So, sometimes good ideas have to be adjusted according to the available facilities</i> (Mr.K) <i>Actually, I want to invite the kids to create vlogs or digital presentations, but not everyone has a suitable phone. So, I first look to see if the kids can do that from</i>

*home.
(Miss.E)*

However, despite these limitations, both teachers demonstrated strong reflective practices. They consistently evaluated their teaching methods before, during, and after instruction, adapting motivational strategies according to the students' reactions and classroom dynamics. The findings of this study suggest that motivational strategies cannot be separated from the context in which they are applied. Teachers' ability to identify challenges and modify their approaches plays a significant role in maintaining student motivation. This is particularly important in EFL classrooms, where engagement and exposure are key factors in language acquisition.

Discussion

From the research on the challenges faced by English teachers in applying motivational strategies at SMAN 3 Luwu Timur, several key findings emerged. The challenges identified in this study include student diversity, large class sizes, use of native language, and lack of infrastructure. These challenges often made it difficult for teachers to apply motivational strategies effectively, even though they understood the importance of motivation in language learning.

This research confirms that contextual factors play a significant role in determining the success of motivational efforts. The diversity of students' abilities and backgrounds required teachers to continuously adapt their strategies. Large class sizes limited opportunities for personalized feedback and attention. The frequent use of the native language reduced students' confidence to use English. In addition, the lack of supporting facilities made lessons less interactive and engaging.

Despite these constraints, the teachers remained committed to motivating their students. They regularly evaluated their teaching practices and adjusted their strategies when needed. This shows that motivational strategies are not only based on theoretical principles but also depend on how teachers respond to real classroom conditions. As stated by Dörnyei (2001), motivation is dynamic and must be supported by a positive and responsive learning environment. This study highlights the importance of teacher adaptability and institutional support in ensuring the successful implementation of motivational strategies in EFL classrooms.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the challenges faced by English teachers in applying motivational strategies, this study found that there are several significant obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of motivation in the classroom. These include student diversity, large class sizes, frequent use of the mother tongue, and limited supporting facilities. Each of these challenges impacts how motivational strategies are planned, applied, and adjusted in real teaching situations. This research is closely

related to the field of education, particularly in the context of English language teaching in Indonesian high schools. It highlights how theoretical strategies may not always work effectively without considering classroom realities. The findings suggest that motivational strategies should be implemented flexibly and contextually, depending on the classroom environment and students' needs.

In conclusion, the information presented in this study shows that while motivational strategies are essential in supporting student learning, their success depends largely on the conditions in which they are applied. Teachers play a central role not only in delivering these strategies but also in adapting them to overcome challenges. Therefore, schools and education stakeholders need to support teachers by providing adequate resources and professional development to help improve student motivation and learning outcomes.

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