

Teacher Strategies to Enhance Student Motivation in EFL Classroom at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin

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Abstract

This study investigated the strategies employed by English teachers to enhance student motivation in the EFL classroom at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin, Indonesia. Motivation plays a crucial role in language learning; however, its practical implementation often differs from theoretical expectations. Adopting a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from three English teachers through questionnaires based on Dörnyei's (2001) framework and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that teachers enhanced students' motivation by creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, establishing positive teacher-student relationships, and employing interactive and enjoyable learning activities. They also connected lesson content to students' real-life experiences and future goals, making English learning more relevant and meaningful. Nevertheless, some challenges persisted, particularly in maintaining group cohesion, fostering instrumental motivation, and implementing structured goal-setting. Variations in feedback practices, such as verbal praise and the use of rewards, were also identified. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of continuous reflection and adaptive teaching practices to sustain student motivation in EFL learning contexts.

Keywords: EFL classroom, student motivation, teacher strategies

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a pivotal role in enhancing students' motivation to learn. According to Harmer (2001), three key factors influence students' motivation: setting clear learning goals, creating a stimulating classroom environment, and designing engaging lessons. Establishing clear objectives helps students understand their learning targets, while a positive classroom atmosphere and varied activities sustain interest and participation.

Motivation encompasses both internal and external factors that direct and sustain students' efforts toward achieving academic goals (Gardner, 2010; Dörnyei, 2011). Intrinsic motivation arises from personal satisfaction and enjoyment in learning, whereas extrinsic motivation stems from external rewards such as grades, recognition, or career opportunities (Borah, 2021). When students are adequately motivated, they tend to be more persistent and goal-oriented in achieving

their learning objectives (Saputra, Regina, & Riyanti, 2023).

Despite its importance, maintaining motivation in English learning remains challenging. Many Indonesian students struggle to stay engaged and confident in English classes (Susanto & Malik, 2020). Teachers also face dual challenges—teaching language skills while managing fluctuating student motivation (Oktavia et al., 2022). Kassing (2011) notes that some teachers are unaware of how their strategies affect student enthusiasm, leading to passive participation. Moreover, since English is a foreign language in Indonesia, limited exposure outside the classroom makes fluency and retention more difficult (Liando, Moni, & Baldauf, 2005).

In response, Dörnyei (2001) highlights the importance of motivational strategies that foster engagement, confidence, and meaningful learning. This is particularly relevant in Islamic schools, where both academic and moral development are emphasized. Islamic schools today increasingly prioritize English proficiency to prepare students for global communication and future opportunities (Habiburrahim et al., 2022; Hidayati, 2016). Parents also view these schools as strong partners in holistic education (Vitasari, 2017). Previous studies (Abbasi et al., 2021; Oktavia et al., 2022; Girsang & Chadijah, 2022; Maesa, 2022; Saputra, Regina, & Riyanti, 2023) have shown that teacher strategies such as praise, rewards, interactive tasks, and personalized support significantly enhance students' motivation. However, few studies have focused on Islamic school contexts. Therefore, this study aims to explore **teacher strategies to enhance student motivation in English learning at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin**, identifying effective practices that foster engagement and improve learning outcomes.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to identify teacher strategies used to enhance student motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research seeks to understand participants' experiences and perspectives in their natural contexts. Data in this study were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The participants consisted of three English teachers at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin, selected because of their direct involvement in teaching and applying motivational strategies in the classroom.

The questionnaire was adapted from Dörnyei's (2001) framework of motivational teaching practices, which includes four dimensions: creating basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation, and encouraging positive self-evaluation. It used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" (1) to "Always" (5) to determine how frequently teachers applied these strategies. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to complement the questionnaire results and gain deeper insights into the teachers' experiences. As stated by Creswell (2014), semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for follow-up questions while allowing focused exploration of the research topic.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the first stage, the questionnaire and interview data were transcribed, categorized, and organized based on Dörnyei's

four motivational dimensions. The next stage involved presenting the structured data clearly to identify emerging themes and patterns. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions to answer the main research question: *What strategies do teachers at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin use to enhance student motivation in EFL classrooms?*

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the motivational strategies employed by English teachers at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin to enhance students' engagement and persistence in learning English. Motivation plays a crucial role in language learning success, particularly in EFL contexts where exposure to English is limited (Gardner, 1985; Alizadeh, 2016). Using Dörnyei's (2001) framework, the findings were categorized into four main dimensions: creating basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation, and encouraging positive self-evaluation. In the first dimension, *Creating Basic Motivational Conditions*, all teachers (100%) consistently demonstrated positive behavior, built personal relationships, and created supportive learning environments. They emphasized kindness, praise, and flexibility in classroom management to make students comfortable and confident. However, only 33.3% reported "Always" fostering group cohesion, suggesting a need for more structured cooperative learning. This aligns with Slavin (2015) and Oktavia et al. (2022), who highlight that collaboration and games strengthen student engagement.

In the second dimension, *Generating Initial Motivation*, teachers effectively promoted positive attitudes toward English and connected lessons to students' daily lives (100% "Always"). They used real-life examples and discussed future opportunities to make English relevant. Yet, only 33.3% "Always" emphasized the instrumental value of English use beyond the classroom. As Alshenqeeti (2018) noted, integrating practical applications is essential for sustaining motivation over time. For *Maintaining and Protecting Motivation*, all teachers (100%) encouraged persistence and autonomy through creative learning activities such as songs, projects, and games. However, goal-setting strategies were applied less consistently (33.3% "Always"), reflecting a need for clearer learning targets. Locke and Latham's (2002) Goal-Setting Theory supports that specific and challenging goals improve performance, indicating that more structured planning could enhance results. Similar findings were reported by Girsang & Chadijah (2022), emphasizing the role of enjoyable and personalized methods in maintaining motivation.

In the final dimension, *Encouraging Positive Self-Evaluation*, teachers showed a strong commitment to praising student effort (100% "Always"). Yet, only 66.7% consistently used feedback and rewards, reflecting some variation in practice. Teachers emphasized verbal praise, encouragement, and constructive comments rather than grades alone, aligning with Hattie and Timperley's (2007) view that effective feedback should guide students to recognize their progress. Interview results reinforced the questionnaire data, showing that teachers employed diverse but complementary strategies—acting as role models, using cooperative activities, and connecting learning to real-life contexts. While these strategies successfully built engagement, challenges

remained in maintaining long-term motivation through structured goal-setting and practical English use. These findings echo Dörnyei's (2009) view that motivation is dynamic and context-dependent, requiring teachers to continuously adapt. Overall, the findings show that English teachers at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin have successfully created positive and engaging learning environments. However, strengthening group cohesion, structured goal-setting, and practical application of English outside the classroom are recommended to sustain student motivation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English teachers at SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin have effectively implemented diverse motivational strategies to enhance students' engagement and persistence in learning English as a foreign language. Guided by Dörnyei's (2001) framework, the strategies were reflected across four key dimensions. Teachers successfully created supportive classroom environments, fostered personal connections, and maintained positive teacher-student relationships. They also generated initial motivation by linking English lessons to students' real-life experiences, future opportunities, and global relevance.

Furthermore, teachers maintained and protected motivation through varied, enjoyable learning activities and opportunities for learner autonomy. They also encouraged positive self-evaluation by providing praise, rewards, and constructive feedback that focused on both effort and achievement. Despite these strengths, some aspects—such as promoting group cohesion, setting clearer learning goals, and extending English use beyond the classroom—require further improvement. Strengthening these areas can help sustain students' long-term motivation and contribute to more effective English language learning outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to the English teachers and students of SMP Islam Nurul Yaqin for their valuable participation, time, and cooperation throughout this study. Their openness in sharing experiences and insights greatly contributed to the depth and quality of the findings. The researcher also extends heartfelt appreciation to the school principal and staff for their kind support and permission to conduct the research within the school environment.

Special thanks are due to the research advisor for continuous guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement from the early stages of proposal development to the completion of this study. The researcher is also grateful to academic colleagues and friends for their helpful discussions, motivation, and thoughtful suggestions that enriched the research process. Lastly, sincere appreciation goes to the researcher's family for their endless support, prayers, and understanding during the completion of this project. Without their encouragement and patience, this work would not have been possible.

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