

Investigating the English Language Learning Motivation: An Interview Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the motivational factors influencing English language learning among 7th-grade students at SMP 1 Islam Jember, addressing the issue of low student motivation and its impact on engagement and learning outcomes. Focusing on a specific cultural context, the research fills a gap by examining intrinsic motivation (personal interest, satisfaction, mastery) and extrinsic motivation (grades, praise, career opportunities) among middle school students. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations involving 19 purposively selected students. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model, including data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that intrinsic motivation, driven by positive experiences like understanding lessons and teacher appreciation, is more dominant. However, students with low self-confidence or facing challenges often lose motivation. Extrinsic motivation was evident in aspirations for high grades and using English for academic and professional purposes. The study concludes that interactive, relevant teaching strategies, such as incorporating popular media or project-based simulations, can significantly enhance motivation. These insights offer practical contributions for developing effective teaching methods to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

Keywords: *English Language Learning; Language Learning Motivation; Junior High School Student; Interview Study*

A. Introduction

Motivation plays a crucial role in the success of language learning, particularly in English as a foreign language. It significantly influences students' engagement, persistence, and overall performance. Dörnyei (2001) asserts that motivated students tend to excel in language learning as they engage more actively with the subject matter. Motivation in English learning is generally categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation stems from personal interest and satisfaction, whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors such as grades, social approval, and career aspirations Lamb (2007); Zhou & Tian (2017); Eisenberger, R., Pierce, W. D., & Cameron, J. (1999).

Despite the importance of motivation, many middle school students, particularly in SMP 1 Islam Jember, exhibit low motivation in learning English. The lack of motivation among these students poses challenges for educators aiming to improve their engagement and proficiency. Research has indicated that various factors, including personal interest, teacher-student interactions, and future aspirations, influence motivation levels Csizér & Dörnyei (2005). However, there is a gap in research regarding the motivation of junior high school students within the specific cultural context of SMP 1 Islam Jember.

Several factors contribute to low motivation among students. First, some students find English difficult due to limited exposure and practice outside the classroom. Second, traditional teaching methods that focus on memorization rather than practical application fail to stimulate students' interest. Third, the absence of engaging and interactive learning materials reduces enthusiasm for learning English. Additionally, students' self-efficacy in English learning plays a vital role in shaping their motivation. According to Yashima (2002), students with high self-confidence in their English abilities are more likely to persist in learning and overcome challenges. Conversely, students who lack confidence tend to disengage from learning activities and avoid participation.

The relevance of learning material also significantly affects student motivation. Csizér & Dörnyei (2005) argue that students are more motivated when they perceive English as beneficial for their future goals. Practical and relevant learning materials, such as project-based learning and real-life applications, have been shown to enhance students' interest and engagement. Hidi & Renninger (2006) further emphasize that students are more likely to be motivated when lessons align with their interests, such as using English in music, movies, or social media.

Furthermore, the role of teachers and the learning environment cannot be overlooked. Reeve (2006) suggests that a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and encouraged fosters intrinsic motivation. Teachers who employ student-centered teaching approaches, such as collaborative learning and active discussions, can create a more engaging classroom atmosphere. Moreover, Locke et al. (1981) found that setting clear and realistic learning goals enhances students' motivation, providing them with a sense of purpose and direction in their studies.

Another crucial aspect of motivation is the use of technology in language learning. Ushioda (2011) highlights that digital tools, such as gamified learning platforms, interactive language applications, and multimedia resources, have positively influenced student motivation in language acquisition. Firat et al. (2018) found that students engaged in gamified language learning environments demonstrated higher motivation and retention rates compared to traditional methods. The integration of technology in English learning can cater to different learning styles and provide a more dynamic learning experience.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influencing 7th-grade students in learning English. By identifying these factors, educators can develop strategies to enhance student motivation and engagement. The study employs a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of effective teaching methodologies that foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among students. By understanding the motivational factors influencing English language learning, this study aims to provide insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to create a more engaging and effective learning environment for junior high school students.

Below is the table presenting the indicators and parameters used in this research. This table provides a structured overview of the key aspects measured during the study to analyze students' motivation in learning English.

Table 1 Indicator & Parameter of the Research

Intrinsic Motivation	Personal interest
	Satisfaction
Extrinsic Motivation	Desire to achieve good grades
	Receive praise
	Improve future career opportunities

The above theories are adapted and grounded in research by Deci and Ryan (1985), who developed the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework for understanding student motivation in English language learning. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic and

extrinsic motivation. In this context, the role of teachers and the learning environment is crucial for nurturing students' motivation, either by designing materials relevant to students' needs or by providing emotional and academic support.

Following the presentation of the table, the study proceeds with an in-depth discussion of how these indicators influence students' motivation. The findings from the qualitative data collected will offer further insights into the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in shaping students' attitudes toward English language learning. The conclusions drawn from this study will help inform effective strategies for enhancing students' engagement in English learning environments.

B. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on interviews and classroom observations to explore students' English learning motivation. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives, providing rich descriptive data. The research design follows an exploratory approach, aiming to identify key motivational factors that influence students' engagement with English as a foreign language.

The study was conducted at SMP 1 Islam Jember, involving nineteen 7th-grade students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of motivational levels were represented. Factors such as willingness to participate and prior engagement in English learning activities were considered when selecting students. Ethical considerations were maintained, and participants provided informed consent before data collection.

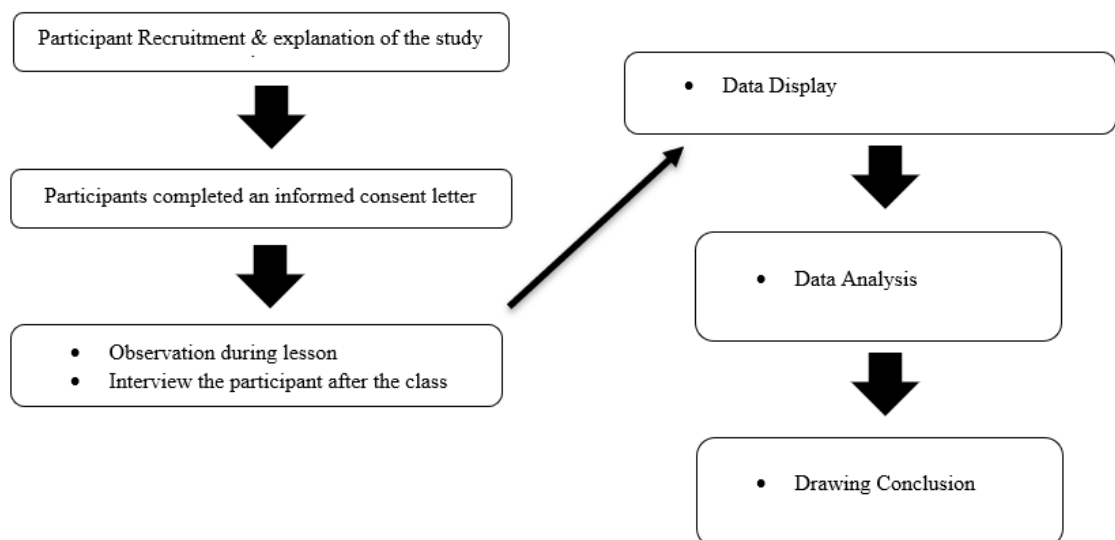
To gather data, two primary instruments were used: observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations were conducted in a non-participant manner, where the researcher documented students' engagement, interactions, and participation during English lessons. This method ensured that natural behaviors were captured without research interference. Semi-structured interviews were designed to explore students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, allowing flexibility for additional insights.

Data collection took place over a structured period within the school environment to maintain authenticity. Observations were conducted during regular English classes,

with the researcher taking notes on students' attentiveness, interaction, and willingness to participate in classroom activities. The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually, ensuring students could express their thoughts freely without peer influence.

The research followed a systematic data collection procedure to ensure methodological rigor. Initially, permission was obtained from the school administration and teachers to conduct the study. Following this, the research was introduced to the students, and their consent was secured to participate. Classroom observations were then carried out, during which behavioral patterns and interactions were meticulously noted to capture students' engagement and motivational dynamics. Subsequently, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the students using structured questions to delve deeper into their motivational factors and experiences. All responses were recorded and transcribed to facilitate accurate qualitative analysis. This structured approach ensured comprehensive data collection, enabling a thorough exploration of the factors influencing English language learning motivation among the students.

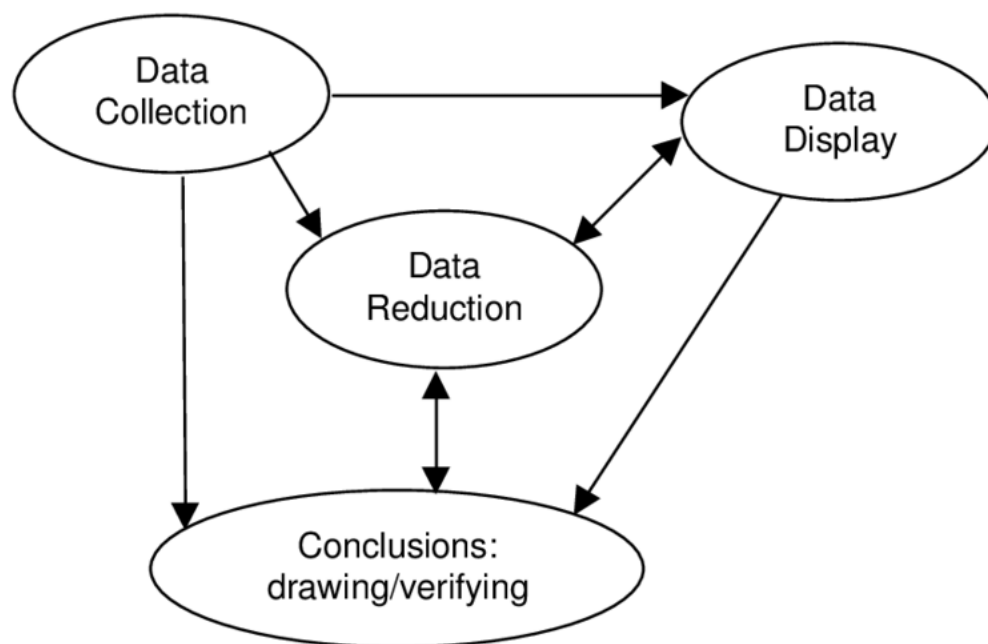
Figure 1: Data Collection & Procedure of the Research



The data analysis methodology in this study, adapted from Miles and Huberman (2014), comprises three main stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. In the first stage, data reduction, the collected data is organized, summarized, and focused on aligning with the research objectives, making it more manageable and relevant. The second stage, data display, involves processing the condensed data into a

transcript format and presenting it narratively for clear and structured findings. Finally, in the conclusion-drawing stage, the narrative data is analyzed and interpreted to derive insights, address research questions, and contribute to the study's overall findings.

Figure 2: Analyzing the Data



By employing this analysis method, the study effectively identifies key motivational influences, providing valuable recommendations for improving student engagement in English language learning.

C. Research Finding and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students' motivation in learning English is strongly influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with intrinsic motivation playing a more dominant role. Classroom observations revealed that the majority of students showed enthusiasm, attentiveness, and active participation, especially when the teacher applied interactive approaches such as games, group discussions, and collaborative tasks. These activities not only captured students' interest but also built a sense of enjoyment and confidence in using English. Interviews confirmed that many students found English fun and meaningful when it was connected to their personal interests, such as music, movies, or daily conversations. Furthermore, teacher appreciation and positive classroom experiences were reported as important sources of

satisfaction that encouraged students to continue learning. However, challenges were also evident: some students admitted experiencing low self-confidence and considered English to be too difficult, which reduced their motivation and sometimes led to disengagement from the learning process.

In terms of extrinsic motivation, the data suggests that external factors also contributed significantly to sustaining students' efforts. Many students expressed that they were motivated to achieve good grades, receive praise from teachers, and pursue long-term goals such as studying abroad or securing future career opportunities. Family support, though varied, was also highlighted as an important influence; some students reported consistent encouragement, while others mentioned limited or even no support from home. Additionally, digital resources such as dictionaries, Google Translate, and YouTube were commonly used by students to help them overcome learning difficulties and expand their vocabulary. Despite these extrinsic motivators, students tended to rely more on internal satisfaction and personal interest to maintain their engagement. Taken together, the findings suggest that a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic factors is essential, with intrinsic motivation serving as the core driver while extrinsic elements act as reinforcements that help sustain students' persistence in learning English.

The findings of this study confirm that students' motivation in learning English is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with intrinsic motivation emerging as the dominant driver. This result aligns with Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985), which emphasizes that personal interest, enjoyment, and the sense of mastery are powerful motivators for sustained learning engagement. The enthusiasm observed in classroom activities such as games, storytelling, and group discussions indicates that when students perceive learning as enjoyable and meaningful, they are more likely to participate actively. These results also resonate with previous studies which found that interactive and student-centered approaches increase learners' confidence and autonomy in foreign language learning contexts.

Despite the dominance of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic factors also played a significant role in sustaining students' effort. The desire to achieve good grades, gain teacher recognition, and prepare for future opportunities reflects the importance of external reinforcement, which is consistent with earlier research suggesting that extrinsic

rewards can complement intrinsic motivation in shaping positive learning behaviors. The role of family support and access to digital resources further highlights the socio-cultural dimension of learning motivation. In line with Gardner's socio-educational model (1985), external influences such as encouragement from parents or exposure to English through media contribute to learners' persistence, even though such support varied among students in this study.

However, the challenge of low self-confidence, as reported by some participants, suggests that motivational strategies must also address affective barriers. Students who perceive English as difficult or fear making mistakes often lose motivation, which corresponds with findings from Dörnyei (2001) on the impact of anxiety and self-efficacy in second language learning. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role in creating a supportive and encouraging classroom environment where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process. By integrating real-life applications and project-based learning, teachers can not only strengthen students' intrinsic motivation but also provide the extrinsic reinforcement needed to sustain their engagement.

Taken together, these findings indicate that effective English language teaching requires a balanced approach that nurtures both internal drives and external supports. While intrinsic motivation ensures long-term interest and personal growth, extrinsic factors act as valuable reinforcements that prevent disengagement. This study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasizing the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in second language acquisition, particularly in the context of Indonesian middle school students.

D. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students' motivation in learning English is strongly influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest, enjoyment, and the desire for self-fulfillment, plays a dominant role in encouraging students to engage actively in the learning process. Students who enjoy English-related activities—such as storytelling, games, and role-playing—tend to show higher participation and confidence. Furthermore, the relevance of English to students' daily lives and personal interests significantly enhances their motivation.

However, extrinsic motivation, including the pursuit of good grades, career goals, and teacher encouragement, also contributes to sustaining students' efforts in learning.

Despite these motivating factors, several challenges still hinder students' motivation. A lack of self-confidence, limited access to resources, and minimal parental support were identified as barriers that reduce students' enthusiasm toward English learning. In this context, the teacher's role becomes crucial. Teachers who employ interactive and student-centered approaches, integrate real-life applications, and provide emotional and academic support can foster a positive and motivating learning environment. Therefore, to enhance students' motivation effectively, it is important for educators to create engaging, supportive, and resource-rich classroom experiences that address both students' internal drives and external needs.

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