

AN ANALYSIS OF EFL TEACHING STRATEGIES AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN ACEH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores teaching strategies that can increase students' motivation in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in junior high schools. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with English teachers from two junior high schools. The findings revealed that teachers implemented various strategies to improve students' motivation, including giving praise and rewards, creating a supportive and comfortable classroom atmosphere, utilizing digital media, applying cooperative learning methods, providing clear and specific feedback, organizing confidence-building activities, and adopting contextual learning that connects lessons to students' real-life experiences. These strategies effectively enhanced students' motivation, participation, confidence, and active engagement in learning English. The study emphasizes the importance of applying creative, interactive, and student-centered teaching approaches to foster enthusiasm, improve language acquisition, build self-confidence, and reduce students' learning anxiety in the EFL classroom. These findings provide valuable insights for English teachers to develop more engaging and effective learning strategies for young adolescent learners.

Keywords: cooperative learning; digital media; English learning; motivation; teaching strategies.

1. Introduction

English is an international language that plays a crucial role in the era of globalization, especially in the fields of education, technology, and communication. English proficiency has become one of the key indicators in mastering knowledge and increasing global competitiveness. In many countries, including Indonesia, English teaching has become part of the national curriculum and is compulsory from elementary to high school levels. The Indonesian government continuously strives to improve the quality of English teaching to enable students to develop proper language skills that meet the demands of the modern era.

However, in practice, the implementation of English teaching in various regions in Indonesia, including in Pidie District, still faces numerous challenges. Based on observations and the author's experience during the Field Practice Program (PPL), several issues were identified that affect the effectiveness of English teaching strategies, particularly at the junior high school level. These challenges include limited teacher competence in designing and applying innovative teaching strategies, a lack of supporting facilities such as projectors and internet access, and low student motivation in learning English.

Student motivation is a crucial factor in the success of the learning process. According to Deci and Ryan (1985) in the Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation plays an essential role in encouraging students to actively engage in learning. Students who are given autonomy and control over their learning tend to show higher participation. Additionally, Gardner (1985) emphasized that motivation in learning a foreign language is greatly influenced by students' attitudes toward the language and social factors in their environment. The low motivation among junior high school students to learn English has become a significant challenge that requires serious attention from educators.

Lamb and Farid (2020) found that students' motivation to learn English in Indonesia is influenced by religious and local cultural contexts. Meanwhile, Dörnyei (2020) highlighted the importance of innovation in language learning motivation studies in an increasingly complex modern era. These studies support the need for teaching strategies that are interesting, interactive, and contextual to increase students' motivation.

Conversely, using monotonous and one-way teaching methods tends to decrease students' interest in learning. Brown (2001) recommended the use of communicative and participative methods in language teaching, while Richards and Rodgers (2001) emphasized the importance of teaching strategies tailored to the local context. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights the importance of social learning suited to students' developmental stages.

The author's experience during PPL at one of the junior high schools in Pidie District indicated that many students were less enthusiastic about attending English classes. Students appeared passive, rarely asked questions, and were reluctant to speak in English. However, when the teacher applied more varied methods such as educational games, visual media, or group work, there was a noticeable increase in student participation and enthusiasm. These findings align with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, which suggests that direct, experience-based learning can enhance student motivation and understanding. Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory also supports the idea that combining visual and textual media can help students better understand learning materials.

Motivation in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has been the focus of numerous studies. Soraya (2019) emphasized the importance of motivational strategies designed to meet the affective needs of language learners. Ibrahim and Mohammad (2024) highlighted the role of self-regulated learning strategies, such as time management and self-monitoring, in enhancing learning effectiveness. Increasing student motivation is not only dependent on the learning material but also on how teachers create a positive classroom environment and provide appropriate recognition.

In junior high school English teaching, applying diverse teaching strategies is key to increasing student motivation. Alibakhshi (2019) highlighted the importance of flexible teaching methods tailored to students' learning styles, while Alshammari (2020) emphasized the

effectiveness of using digital media to enhance student engagement. However, challenges such as limited teacher training and pedagogical resistance must also be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of these strategies.

Abramczyk and Jurkowski (2020) found that cooperative learning can improve peer interaction and social skills, which are essential in foreign language learning contexts. Keller (2019), in the ARCS Model, also emphasized the importance of providing specific feedback and positive reinforcement to build students' intrinsic motivation. Additionally, Saito and Akiyama (2020) stressed the importance of self-regulation strategies in fostering student autonomy in learning.

The concept of contextual learning, which connects learning materials to students' daily lives, has also been proven effective in increasing learning motivation. Hidi and Anderson (2021) found that learning tasks designed to be meaningful and relevant to students' lives can sustain motivation and improve learning outcomes. Muller et al. (2020) also showed that providing well-structured rewards can support student motivation without diminishing intrinsic interest.

Through this literature review, it can be concluded that effective teaching strategies to increase English learning motivation at the junior high school level include giving praise and rewards, creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere, using digital media, applying cooperative learning, providing specific feedback, organizing confidence-building activities, and using contextual learning strategies.

This study aims to analyze the English teaching strategies applied by teachers in junior high schools in Pidie District and how these strategies affect students' motivation to learn English. This topic is significant because the findings can contribute substantially to improving English teaching practices at the junior high school level, particularly in increasing student motivation. The study is also expected to serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and future researchers in designing more effective and engaging teaching strategies for students.

This article is structured as follows. The first section is the introduction, which outlines the background, significance, and objectives of the study. The second section is the methodology, which explains the research design, participants, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods. The third section is the findings and discussion, which present the research results and relate them to existing theories and previous studies. The fourth section is the conclusion and suggestions, which summarize the study's findings and offer recommendations for practical implementation and future research.

Overall, this study contributes to the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching by emphasizing the importance of student-centered teaching strategies that address students' psychological needs. The study also opens opportunities for future research that can explore the influence of other factors, such as local culture, family roles, and institutional support, on student motivation in EFL.

2. Methodology

This section explains how the research was conducted. The main components in this section include the research design, population and sample, data collection techniques and instrument development, as well as data analysis techniques. Since this study is qualitative and does not use specific tools or materials, the focus will be on explaining the presence of the researcher, the research subjects, the informants who supported the research process, and how the data were gathered. In addition, the research location, duration, and the validation process for ensuring data credibility are explained in detail.

(1) **Research Design** This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, including behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions, in a holistic and descriptive manner. A case study design was chosen to explore in depth the teaching strategies used by English teachers to increase students' motivation in learning English at junior high schools in Pidie District. This design allowed the researcher to comprehensively investigate the context and details of English teaching practices in real classroom settings.

(2) **Research Setting and Duration** The research was conducted in two junior high schools in Pidie District, namely SMPN 1 Indrajaya and SMPN 2 Peukan Pidie. These schools were selected based on accessibility and the availability of English teachers who actively implemented various teaching strategies. The research process, including data collection and analysis, was carried out over a period of three months, from March to May 2025.

(3) **Research Participants** The participants in this study were English teachers from SMPN 1 Indrajaya and SMPN 2 Peukan Pidie. A total of four English teachers were involved, with two teachers representing each school. The selection of participants used a purposive sampling technique, where the selected teachers had more than ten years of teaching experience and had actively applied various teaching strategies in their classrooms. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument for data collection. The presence of the researcher in the field allowed for direct observation and interaction with the participants. The researcher also conducted interviews and distributed questionnaires to obtain in-depth data regarding the teaching strategies used to motivate students in English learning.

(4) **Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development** Data collection in this study used two main techniques, namely questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The combination of these techniques allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive and credible data. Questionnaires The researcher developed a set of questionnaires consisting of 20 items using a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was designed based on the Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2000), focusing on teaching strategies that influence student motivation. The questionnaire was distributed to English teachers using Google Forms.

The items in the questionnaire covered various aspects of teaching strategies, including the use of digital media, praise and rewards, cooperative learning, specific feedback, contextual

learning, and confidence-building activities. Interview Guides The researcher prepared an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions to explore the experiences and perspectives of English teachers in applying teaching strategies. The interviews aimed to gather detailed information regarding the implementation, effectiveness, and challenges of the teaching strategies used. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and were recorded in written form. This process allowed the researcher to capture authentic data and explore participants' insights more deeply. Researcher's Position In qualitative research, the researcher's role is critical. In this study, the researcher was directly involved in the entire research process, from planning to data collection and analysis. The researcher maintained objectivity by carefully documenting all findings and by consistently using triangulation to validate the data. The researcher also ensured that the data collection process was ethical, with participants giving informed consent before participating in the study.

(5) Data Analysis Techniques The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on frequency and percentage to summarize the responses. The researcher used these statistical measures to identify patterns in the teaching strategies applied by the teachers. Meanwhile, the data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The steps included transcribing the interview data, reading the transcripts thoroughly, coding significant statements, grouping the codes into relevant themes, and interpreting the findings based on the research objectives. The themes that emerged from the interview data provided insights into the teachers' strategies, challenges, and their perceptions of how these strategies influenced student motivation. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data strengthened the validity of the research through triangulation. By comparing data from the questionnaires and interviews, the researcher ensured that the findings were accurate and well-supported.

3. Finding and discussion

3.1 Finding

This section presents the results of the study and discusses the findings in relation to previous theories and studies. The results are organized to address the teaching strategies observed and analyzed throughout the research process. The findings, interpretation, and supporting evidence from the data are presented as an integrated narrative.

The study identified several teaching strategies frequently applied by English teachers to increase students' motivation. These strategies include giving praise and rewards, creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, using digital media, applying cooperative learning, providing specific feedback, organizing confidence-building activities, and using contextual learning strategies. The teaching strategies implemented by English teachers in junior high schools in Pidie had significant positive effects on students' learning motivation. The results indicated that students became more active, more confident, and more engaged in learning English.

Based on the questionnaire results, 75% of teachers reported always giving praise and rewards, while 25% stated they often did so. Teachers emphasized that rewards such as verbal appreciation and small gifts like candies were effective in encouraging student participation. Respondent B stated, "Sometimes I gave them candy or small gifts when they were brave enough to answer in English." This finding supports Peng (2021), who emphasized the role of praise in increasing student motivation and confidence. The impact of giving praise and rewards is evident in encouraging active student participation, building student confidence, and reducing learning anxiety.

All teachers (100%) consistently created a comfortable and supportive classroom atmosphere. This strategy involved using games, humor, and ice-breaking activities to reduce student anxiety. Respondent A explained, "I usually started the class with ice-breaking activities and games to make the students feel happy and relaxed." This finding aligns with Ajmal et al. (2021), who emphasized that a positive learning environment enhances student engagement. Creating a supportive classroom atmosphere positively affected students by increasing their comfort and willingness to participate, reducing fear of making mistakes, and building positive teacher-student relationships.

The questionnaire results also showed that 75% of teachers often used digital media, while 25% used it occasionally. Teachers incorporated videos, projectors, and storytelling to make learning more interactive. Respondent D stated, "I showed learning videos through the InFocus to make students more interested and not feel bored." These results are consistent with Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory, which highlights the importance of combining visuals and text in learning. The use of digital media had a significant impact in capturing student attention, making learning more interactive, and reducing student boredom.

Based on the questionnaire, 50% of teachers often used cooperative learning, 25% always used it, and 25% used it occasionally. Cooperative learning encouraged teamwork and peer interaction through group discussions, games, and role-play. This finding supports Abramczyk and Jurkowski (2020), who emphasized the effectiveness of cooperative learning in improving student motivation and social skills. The application of cooperative learning impacted students by encouraging teamwork and peer support, improving communication and social skills, and making learning more engaging through group activities.

The results also showed that 75% of teachers often provided specific feedback, while 25% provided it less frequently. Teachers adjusted their teaching methods based on students' responses and gave immediate feedback to support student improvement. Respondent C stated, "I always paid attention to students who were enthusiastic in asking questions and I immediately praised them to make them more motivated." This finding aligns with Keller's (2019) ARCS Model, which highlights the importance of specific feedback in building student motivation. Providing specific feedback helped students understand their progress, encouraged them to improve their performance, and built student independence and self-awareness.

All teachers (100%) reported consistently organizing confidence-building activities such as games, ice-breakers, and storytelling. These activities helped students overcome their fear of making mistakes and encouraged active participation. Respondent B stated, "We should not make the class too tense... we need to play while joking to keep them comfortable." This supports Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the need for a supportive environment to foster intrinsic motivation. Confidence-building activities helped students overcome fear and anxiety, increased student participation, and supported student enthusiasm in learning English.

Based on the questionnaire, 75% of teachers considered contextual learning highly effective, while 25% considered it effective. Teachers often related the learning material to students' daily lives to make it more meaningful. Respondent C explained, "Usually, students were very interested when we used objects that were familiar to them, like chairs, tables, clocks. Step by step, we asked them to make sentences." This finding aligns with Hidi and Anderson (2021), who emphasized the importance of meaningful and relevant learning tasks. Contextual learning made learning more meaningful, connected learning to students' real-life experiences, and increased student interest and motivation.

3.2 Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with previous research and educational theories that emphasize the importance of student-centered, interactive, and contextually relevant teaching strategies in language learning. Strategies such as praise, cooperative learning, digital media integration, and specific feedback align with the principles of positive reinforcement, experiential learning, and self-regulation.

The importance of student-centered learning has been consistently highlighted in modern language pedagogy. Brown (2001) emphasizes that effective language learning requires teachers to facilitate rather than dominate the learning process, ensuring that students actively construct their knowledge through interaction and participation. The strategies identified in this study support this pedagogical shift by placing students at the center of the learning experience, thereby increasing their motivation and sense of ownership over their progress. Praise and rewards serve as extrinsic motivators that can eventually foster intrinsic interest when used appropriately. Peng (2021) underlines that timely recognition of student efforts enhances self-efficacy and encourages sustained participation. However, educators must balance the use of rewards to avoid over-reliance on extrinsic reinforcement, which may hinder the development of long-term motivation.

Creating a supportive classroom atmosphere was found to significantly reduce student anxiety, particularly in speaking activities. This is consistent with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that low-anxiety environments facilitate language acquisition. Ice-breaking activities, games, and humor not only improve classroom dynamics but also lower students' emotional barriers to learning, allowing for more effective engagement.

Digital media integration has become increasingly relevant in the 21st-century classroom. Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory supports the finding that visual and auditory materials can enhance cognitive processing and retention. The teachers in this study effectively leveraged digital resources to make lessons more appealing, especially for students who may struggle with traditional text-based instruction. Digital media also cater to diverse learning preferences, further enhancing accessibility.

The benefits of cooperative learning are well-documented in the work of Slavin (1995), who argues that collaborative tasks promote higher-order thinking and social cohesion among students. The group-based activities observed in this study provided students with opportunities to practice language skills in authentic communicative contexts, thus reinforcing both their linguistic competence and interpersonal abilities.

Specific feedback emerged as a crucial factor in shaping student learning behaviors. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), effective feedback clarifies learning goals, identifies gaps, and provides actionable steps for improvement. The immediate and tailored feedback provided by the teachers in this study empowered students to self-correct and develop a clearer understanding of their progress, contributing to their confidence and motivation. Confidence-building activities such as storytelling and games were particularly effective in reducing the fear of making mistakes. This aligns with Deci and Ryan's (2000) assertion that supportive environments enhance intrinsic motivation by satisfying students' psychological needs for competence and relatedness. When students feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment, their willingness to participate and take risks increases substantially.

Contextual learning strategies further enhanced student engagement by linking lesson content to students' everyday experiences. This is supported by the Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when knowledge is presented within authentic contexts. The teachers' use of familiar objects and situations helped students perceive the relevance of English in their daily lives, thereby fostering deeper interest and retention. Despite these positive outcomes, the study also highlighted several challenges. Some teachers reported that maintaining student enthusiasm was difficult when faced with limited time and resources. Moreover, large class sizes occasionally restricted the implementation of more individualized strategies. These challenges underscore the need for institutional support in providing adequate materials, manageable class sizes, and ongoing professional development for teachers.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research advocating for diverse, interactive, and student-focused teaching strategies in English language instruction. Future research should explore the long-term effects of these strategies on students' academic achievement and language proficiency. Additionally, further investigation into the role of parental involvement and community support could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the

factors influencing student motivation in EFL contexts, particularly in rural and under-resourced schools.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that when teachers employ varied, meaningful, and student-centered strategies, they can significantly enhance students' motivation to learn English. The integration of praise, supportive learning environments, digital media, cooperative activities, specific feedback, confidence-building tasks, and contextual learning collectively creates a dynamic and engaging classroom atmosphere that nurtures both language development and student confidence.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

4.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the teaching strategies employed by English teachers at junior high schools in Pidie District to increase students' motivation in learning English. The findings revealed that the application of varied and student-centered teaching strategies significantly enhanced students' motivation, participation, and confidence in the English learning process.

The primary teaching strategies identified in this study include giving praise and rewards, creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, using digital media, applying cooperative learning, providing specific feedback, organizing confidence-building activities, and utilizing contextual learning strategies. Each of these strategies contributed to the creation of a positive and engaging learning environment, which in turn improved students' willingness to participate and their enthusiasm for learning English.

Giving praise and rewards helped students feel recognized and valued, which encouraged them to be more active in the classroom. The supportive classroom atmosphere reduced learning anxiety and created a safe space for students to express themselves. The use of digital media made the learning process more interesting and interactive, catering to various learning preferences.

Cooperative learning fostered teamwork and peer interaction, which are essential for language practice and social development. Specific feedback provided students with clear guidance on their progress, while confidence-building activities helped students overcome their fear of making mistakes. Contextual learning strategies made the lessons more meaningful by connecting them to students' daily lives. The combination of these strategies demonstrated the importance of creative, interactive, and student-focused teaching in enhancing student motivation in English language learning. The study also highlighted that teachers' flexibility in adjusting their teaching methods based on students' needs plays a critical role in sustaining student engagement.

Despite the positive outcomes, the study also noted challenges such as limited resources, large class sizes, and time constraints that may hinder the optimal implementation of these strategies. Addressing these challenges requires support from educational institutions to provide sufficient teaching materials, professional development opportunities for teachers, and manageable class sizes. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by reinforcing

the significance of student-centered teaching strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in rural areas like Pidie District. It also opens avenues for further research to explore the long-term impact of these strategies on students' academic performance and language proficiency.

4.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed:

1. **For Teachers:** Teachers should continue to implement varied and interactive teaching strategies that cater to students' interests and learning styles. Regularly provide specific feedback and create opportunities for students to practice English in supportive and low-anxiety environments. Incorporate digital media and real-life contexts to make learning more engaging and relevant.
2. **For Schools:** Schools should provide adequate facilities and resources to support the effective implementation of diverse teaching strategies, including access to digital media and teaching aids. Conduct regular professional development programs to enhance teachers' skills in using innovative and student-centered teaching methods.
3. **For Future Researchers:** Future studies can explore the long-term effects of the identified teaching strategies on students' English proficiency and academic performance. Further research may investigate the influence of other factors, such as parental involvement, cultural background, and institutional support, on student motivation in EFL learning.

The practical application of these findings can help improve English teaching practices in junior high schools, particularly in areas with similar educational contexts. The strategies identified in this study offer a framework for creating motivating and supportive learning environments that can be adapted and developed further in future research and classroom practice.

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