

## **Teacher Strategies for Enhancing Senior High School Students' Motivation in English Learning: A Case Study at SMAN 1 Barru**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the strategies employed by teachers to enhance the motivation of senior high school students in learning English at SMAN 1 Barru, Indonesia. Student motivation is a crucial factor influencing learning outcomes; yet, many learners struggle with low engagement, limited confidence, and anxiety when using English. Addressing this issue is essential for enhancing language proficiency and supporting national education objectives. A qualitative descriptive design was adopted, with data collected through semi-structured interviews involving six tenth-grade students. The interviews were analysed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) framework to identify recurring themes and patterns. The results revealed that two primary strategies — Active Learning and Reward Systems — significantly boosted student motivation. Active learning, through techniques such as group discussions, gamified quizzes, and brainstorming, created opportunities for collaboration, participation, and self-expression. Reward Systems, including praise, certificates, and bonus points, provided reinforcement that encouraged effort and perseverance. Together, these strategies not only increased enthusiasm but also reduced learning anxiety, making English learning more enjoyable and meaningful. The novelty of this study lies in highlighting how the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic approaches can sustain motivation in Indonesian EFL classrooms. This context has often been overlooked in prior research. The findings offer practical insights for teachers seeking to balance innovative methods with culturally relevant motivational practices. Future research involving larger and more diverse samples, along with teacher perspectives, is recommended to strengthen the applicability of these strategies across different educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Motivation; EFL; Active Learning; Reward Systems

## INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised society, English has become a crucial skill for communication, academic advancement, and career development. Proficiency in English not only opens access to international opportunities but also supports participation in the knowledge economy and intercultural communication. In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject from junior to senior high school and is often reinforced through extracurricular and informal learning activities. However, many students continue to find English difficult, uninteresting, or irrelevant to their daily lives, which usually results in low achievement and disengagement (Astuti, 2021; Handayani & Widodo, 2021). This makes cultivating motivation one of the most urgent tasks for teachers and policymakers in English language education. Without adequate motivation, even well-designed curricula and resources risk failing to deliver meaningful outcomes.

Motivation is widely regarded as one of the most significant factors influencing success in second language learning (Dörnyei, 2020; Lamb, 2017). It is the driving force that determines the level of effort learners are willing to invest, their persistence in the face of challenges, and the strategies they adopt in acquiring a new language. Motivation encompasses both intrinsic dimensions, such as interest, curiosity, and enjoyment, as well as extrinsic dimensions, including rewards, social recognition, and career goals (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Studies have repeatedly shown that motivated learners are more engaged, more resilient, and more successful in acquiring language skills compared to those with low motivation (Bai & Wang, 2023; Puspitasari et al., 2022). Thus, student motivation is not a peripheral factor but a core determinant of English learning success in Indonesian senior high schools.

Teachers play a central role in shaping this motivation. They are not only transmitters of linguistic knowledge but also facilitators, mentors, and motivators who influence learners' attitudes and confidence. The teacher's ability to create an engaging, supportive, and learner-centred classroom environment has been consistently linked to improved student motivation (Maulana & Hamied, 2021; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2020). Teachers who incorporate active learning strategies, foster collaboration, and provide constructive feedback help students feel a sense of ownership over their learning, while also reducing anxiety and boredom. In addition, extrinsic motivators, such as praise, certificates, or recognition, can be powerful tools for sustaining engagement when combined with intrinsic supports (Brophy, 2016; Lestari & Kurniawan, 2021). These strategies are particularly important in contexts such as Indonesia, where large class sizes, limited resources, and exam-oriented practices often make it challenging to maintain high levels of motivation.

Previous research has highlighted several effective approaches to fostering motivation. Active learning, for example, engages students in problem-solving, discussions, and creative tasks that promote deeper involvement in the learning

process (Gedera et al., 2015; Bai & Wang, 2023). Collaborative tasks, such as group projects or peer teaching, encourage interaction and build social support networks that sustain motivation (Putra, 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2022). Meaningful reward systems, ranging from verbal praise to formal recognition, can also reinforce student effort and persistence (Lestari & Kurniawan, 2021). However, despite these insights, much of the existing literature focuses on university contexts or general EFL learning environments. Relatively little research has been conducted to explore how motivational strategies are specifically implemented in Indonesian senior high schools, where students are at a critical stage in preparing for both national examinations and future academic or career pathways.

The urgency of investigating motivation at this level has increased in recent years due to rapid changes in education. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered teaching and learning practices, often shifting them online or to hybrid formats, where students reported declining engagement and increased learning fatigue (Churiyah et al., 2020). These disruptions highlighted the fragility of motivation when teaching practices fail to adapt to changing conditions. Post-pandemic classrooms now face the dual challenge of addressing learning loss and re-engaging students who have developed negative attitudes toward English learning. Teachers at senior high schools, therefore, need concrete strategies to restore enthusiasm and sustain persistence, making this research both timely and necessary.

The novelty of this study lies in its context and focus. While global research has long emphasised the importance of motivation in language learning, and Indonesian studies have examined general motivational factors (Lamb, 2017; Widodo, 2016), few have explored in depth the actual strategies used by teachers to enhance motivation in senior high schools, such as SMAN 1 Barru. This research aims not only to identify which strategies are used but also to analyse how students perceive them and how they impact engagement in real classroom contexts. By grounding its analysis in qualitative data drawn from students' perspectives, the study contributes a dimension often overlooked in prior quantitative surveys. It captures lived experiences that reveal both the successes and limitations of motivational strategies as implemented on the ground.

The visibility and feasibility of the study are clear. SMAN 1 Barru represents a typical Indonesian senior high school environment, making its findings relevant to similar contexts across the country. The focus on tenth-grade students provides valuable insights at a transitional stage of learning, when students are adjusting to more demanding academic expectations. The use of semi-structured interviews ensures that participants' perspectives are explored in depth, while content analysis offers a systematic framework for identifying patterns and themes. Although the scope is limited to a single institution, the findings have broader implications for teacher training and curriculum design in Indonesia, offering practical guidance that can be adapted and applied in other settings.

This study is important because it addresses one of the most influential factors in English language learning is student motivation. Its urgency arises from the challenges faced by Indonesian high school learners, especially in the aftermath of pandemic-related disruptions. Its novelty stems from its focus on teacher strategies and student perceptions within a specific high school context, a dimension that is underrepresented in the literature. Its visibility is secured through a practical, qualitative design that provides insights transferable to similar educational contexts. By investigating the strategies English teachers use to foster motivation, the study seeks to enrich the literature on ELT motivation while also offering practical recommendations for enhancing learning outcomes in Indonesian senior high schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms involve deliberate and informed decisions regarding lesson planning, instructional methods, and curriculum development. These strategies are shaped by contextual factors, including students' characteristics, expected learning outcomes, and teachers' instructional preferences. As EFL education continues to evolve, teachers must remain flexible and responsive to the diverse needs of learners (Hayati, Afriani, & Akbarjono, 2021). A carefully chosen strategy can make learning more effective and engaging, thereby enhancing student motivation and achievement.

According to Pungki and Suwartono (2019), teachers play a vital role as instructional leaders in the classroom. To perform this role effectively, they must take into account students' diverse social and intellectual backgrounds, manage classroom conditions, and demonstrate strong pedagogical, methodological, and strategic competence. Their decisions directly influence how motivated students feel to engage in learning. Within this context, the literature highlights two major strategies that consistently enhance motivation in EFL classrooms: (1) active learning and (2) reward systems.

Active learning emphasises instructional methods that actively involve students in the process rather than positioning them as passive recipients of information. Activities such as discussions, problem-solving, and collaboration foster a deeper understanding and promote long-term retention (Freeman et al., 2014). In language education, where interaction and practice are essential, active learning provides particularly strong benefits (Silberman, 2019). Common practices include (a) group discussion, which encourages critical thinking, collaboration, and communication confidence; (b) the Jigsaw technique, which develops autonomy and cooperation by making students responsible for peer teaching; (c) gamified quizzes, which integrate competition, rewards, and feedback to increase enjoyment and effort; (d) gallery walks, which allow students to present and respond to peer work in dynamic and informal ways; (e) concept maps, which help learners visualise and organise grammar or vocabulary knowledge while fostering critical thinking; (f) brainstorming activities, which build creativity, problem-solving, and collaborative

skills; (g) mastery learning, which ensures that students progress at their own pace while gaining confidence through individualised feedback; and (h) hot seat activities, which strengthen fluency, spontaneity, and speaking confidence. Collectively, these methods demonstrate that active learning is not a single strategy but a broad framework encompassing various practices that engage students cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

The second major approach is the use of reward systems. Rooted in motivational theories such as Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2008), rewards can reinforce desirable behaviours and promote effort when aligned with students' intrinsic goals. Two main categories of rewards are widely discussed in EFL literature. (a) Material rewards include stickers, certificates, or bonus points, which can effectively boost short-term motivation and encourage participation, though overreliance may risk undermining intrinsic interest (Putri et al., 2021; Ma, 2023). (b) Social rewards, on the other hand, include verbal praise, public recognition, and nonverbal gestures such as smiles, all of which help build a supportive classroom climate and strengthen teacher–student relationships (Prawiro & Anggrarini, 2019). By combining these forms of reinforcement with engaging instruction, teachers can maintain a balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Underlying these strategies is the broader concept of motivation in foreign language learning, which remains one of the most influential variables determining student success. Recent scholarship emphasises two central types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, where learners engage for personal interest or satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, where engagement is driven by external factors such as grades or recognition (Kember, 2016; Nguyen, 2019). Intrinsic motivation fosters autonomy, creativity, and a long-term commitment to learning, while extrinsic motivation is effective for immediate participation but may not sustain persistence over time. Effective teachers recognise the need to blend both, ensuring that students benefit from extrinsic incentives without losing intrinsic curiosity and enjoyment.

The literature indicates that strategies such as active learning and reward systems are effective tools for enhancing motivation in EFL classrooms. They help address both cognitive and affective aspects of learning, ensuring that students not only acquire knowledge but also feel encouraged to persist in their learning journey. However, their success depends on thoughtful implementation, where teachers strike a balance between external reinforcement and opportunities for autonomy and creativity.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the strategies used by English teachers at SMAN 1 Barru to enhance students' motivation in learning English. Qualitative description was selected because it allows researchers

to capture participants' experiences and perspectives in their own words, providing nuanced insight into classroom realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study involved six tenth-grade students as participants. While the sample may appear small, qualitative research prioritises depth over breadth, and even small samples can generate rich and meaningful data if they are carefully chosen (Marshall et al., 2013). The six students were selected purposively to represent a range of motivational levels and learning experiences across different classes, ensuring a diverse set of perspectives. For instance, some students reported confidence in speaking through group work, while others valued the use of technology or opportunities for creative expression. This range of voices allowed the study to capture a broad spectrum of student perceptions while maintaining the depth of individual narratives.

### **Instrument and Procedures**

The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview, which struck a balance between flexibility and consistency in addressing key themes related to teacher strategies. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences, allowing the researcher to probe for clarification and provide examples (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide was developed based on prior studies on motivation in EFL classrooms (e.g., Freeman et al., 2014; Pungki & Suwartono, 2019) and aligned with concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation drawn from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). To enhance validity, the interview questions were reviewed by two English education lecturers for clarity and relevance, then piloted with two non-participant students before being finalised. Each participant took part in a one-on-one interview lasting approximately 30–40 minutes, conducted in Indonesian to ensure comfort and authenticity of responses. The interviews explored student perspectives on specific strategies such as active learning, collaboration, and rewards, and how these influenced their motivation in English learning. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed the framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the condensation stage, interview transcripts were read repeatedly, and significant statements were coded into initial categories such as "teacher encouragement," "peer collaboration," "rewarding effort," and "technology use." Codes were then grouped into broader themes that reflected both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of motivation. In the data display stage, the categorised information was organised into thematic matrices and descriptive narratives to identify patterns across participants. For example, comparisons were made between students who responded positively to group discussions and those who highlighted technology as a motivating factor. In the conclusion-drawing stage, the researcher synthesised

findings to identify recurring patterns and relationships, checking for consistency across participants to ensure trustworthiness. Triangulation was achieved by comparing codes with existing motivational theory and prior studies. Member checking with two participants was conducted to confirm that the interpretations accurately reflected their views. This rigorous process ensured that the analysis was credible, dependable, and reflective of the participants' lived experiences.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, based on interviews with six students at SMAN 01 Barru and classroom observations, revealed that teachers enhance students' motivation in English learning through two main approaches: Active Learning Strategies and Reward Strategies. Students consistently described these strategies as fostering confidence, engagement, and persistence in language learning.

### Active Learning Strategies

#### *Group Discussion*

Students emphasised that active learning created a supportive and stimulating environment that reduced anxiety and encouraged participation. Group discussions were highlighted as particularly effective in helping students practice speaking English with less fear. One student explained:

*"I like learning in group discussions because I can exchange opinions with friends in English. It makes me more confident to speak without fear of making mistakes"*  
(AN, Q.1).

Another added:

*"Our teacher divided us into small groups with mixed abilities. This helps me learn from my friends and makes me feel more comfortable participating"*  
(MS, Q.1).

These responses indicate that group work not only provides a safer environment for communication but also enables peer scaffolding, where stronger students support those who are weaker. By lowering anxiety and creating opportunities for shared responsibility, group discussions empowered learners to take risks in using English.

#### *Gamified Quizzes*

Gamified quizzes were another strategy students described as motivating and enjoyable. A participant reflected:

*"I like when the teacher plays a quiz with the Quizizz app. It makes grammar and vocabulary lessons more fun and easier to remember"*  
(MS, Q.2).

*Another reinforced this:*

*“When we have a quiz in class, I feel more motivated to study because I want to win”*  
(UP, Q.2).

These statements show that gamification introduces both intrinsic fun and extrinsic competition into language learning. The sense of challenge and instant feedback helped transform grammar practice, often considered tedious, into an engaging classroom activity. This aligns with broader research showing that gamified tasks stimulate persistence and effort, particularly among learners who may otherwise disengage from routine drills.

### *Brainstorming Activities*

Students also consistently pointed to brainstorming activities as crucial in sparking ideas and facilitating their transition into more complex tasks. One explained:

*“Before starting a lesson, my teacher asks thought-provoking questions, like ‘What would you do if you met a lost tourist?’ It makes me think and want to answer”*  
(AN, Q.3).

Another elaborated:

*“The teacher always starts the lesson with thought-provoking questions. Sometimes, they also use surprise videos. Brainstorming helps me generate ideas before writing or speaking in English”*  
(GN, Q.3).

These accounts suggest that brainstorming acts as a cognitive warm-up, stimulating curiosity and making students more prepared to tackle demanding tasks. By activating prior knowledge and encouraging creativity, teachers helped students overcome hesitation, making English use feel more natural and less intimidating.

These active learning strategies demonstrate that students felt motivated when they were given opportunities to collaborate, compete healthily, and prepare through idea generation. The strategies reduced learning anxiety, fostered peer support, and encouraged active participation, ultimately making English more engaging and accessible.

### **Reward Strategies**

In addition to active learning, students reported that teachers’ use of rewards strongly influenced their motivation. Both social rewards (such as praise and recognition) and material rewards (such as stickers or certificates) were mentioned as significant motivators.

Social recognition was highlighted as particularly impactful. One student shared:

*“My teacher always praises me when I try to speak English, even if I sometimes make mistakes. That makes me more confident to speak more”*  
(GN, Q.4)



Another emphasised:

*“When I answer correctly, my teacher acknowledges my effort in front of the class, which makes me happy and motivated”*  
(FJR, Q.4)

These responses illustrate that praise does more than acknowledge achievement; it reinforces effort and builds resilience. Even when students struggled, knowing that their attempts would be valued encouraged them to keep trying. In this way, social rewards acted as an emotional support system that bolstered confidence and perseverance in language learning.

Material rewards, while more tangible, were also valued by students as symbols of recognition and achievement. As one participant explained:

*“I feel happy when my teacher appreciates my work, such as giving me a star or praising me in front of the class. It makes me even more motivated to learn”*  
(UP, Q.5)

Another echoed this:

*“I like it when we get small rewards like stickers or certificates for doing well in assignments. It makes me want to try harder”*  
(MS, Q.5)

These comments suggest that even simple incentives can have a powerful psychological effect by validating students' effort and creating excitement in the classroom. Although extrinsic motivators are sometimes criticised for being short-lived, in this context, they functioned as effective tools for reinforcing positive learning behaviours and sustaining effort. The accounts of students highlight how reward strategies complemented active learning methods. Social rewards fostered confidence and emotional security, while material rewards provided additional extrinsic incentives. This balance between intrinsic and extrinsic support helped sustain both immediate engagement and longer-term motivation in English learning.

The results demonstrate that English teachers at SMAN 01 Barru motivated students through a deliberate blend of active learning and reward-based strategies. Active learning methods such as group discussions, gamified quizzes, and brainstorming promoted collaboration, reduced anxiety, and encouraged participation. Reward strategies, both social and material, reinforced effort, built confidence, and sustained enthusiasm. By integrating these complementary approaches, teachers created a dynamic and supportive classroom environment where students felt both challenged and encouraged to succeed in English.

This study provides fresh insights into how English teachers at SMAN 01 Barru enhance student motivation by combining active learning strategies with reward systems. Earlier studies often examined these strategies in isolation; however, this research highlights their integration, demonstrating how teachers blend group discussions, brainstorming, and gamified quizzes with both social and material

rewards to create a more holistic motivational environment. This integrated approach contributes to the literature by illustrating that motivation is most effectively sustained when strategies address cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions simultaneously.

The findings extend the ARCS Model of Motivational Design (Keller, 2010) by showing how different strategies align with its four components. Gamified quizzes capture attention and provide satisfaction through instant feedback and competition, while brainstorming and group discussions foster confidence and relevance by creating supportive, collaborative environments. Unlike earlier studies that emphasised academic achievement as the primary outcome of active learning (Freeman et al., 2014), this study highlights its affective impact, reducing anxiety, boosting self-confidence, and promoting peer collaboration. This aligns with recent work by Setiawan and Kuswando (2022), who argue that active learning enhances not just knowledge acquisition but also emotional readiness in EFL classrooms.

Technology integration, particularly through gamification, emerged as a significant motivator. While previous studies confirm the benefits of gamification in improving student engagement (Thongsri, 2019; Putri et al., 2021), this study underscores that its effectiveness depends heavily on how teachers mediate its use. Rather than technology being the sole driver of motivation, the findings show that teacher guidance, scaffolding, and encouragement make digital tools more impactful. This resonates with Arifani et al. (2020), who emphasise that digital learning environments only become meaningful when accompanied by strong teacher-student interaction.

The findings also offer new insights into the role of reward systems. While some studies caution that material rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation if overused (Ma, 2023), this study demonstrates that small, symbolic tokens such as certificates or stickers can complement intrinsic motivators when combined with social recognition. Students described teacher praise as equally, if not more, motivating than material rewards, supporting Han and Yin's (2022) assertion that extrinsic and intrinsic motivators can coexist productively when balanced. This nuanced understanding contributes to a broader discussion on motivation by showing that teachers' sensitivity to student needs determines whether rewards enhance or hinder learning.

A final contribution lies in inclusivity. While much research treats motivational strategies as universally applicable (Nguyen et al., 2021), this study demonstrates that different students benefit from different strategies. Those with higher confidence thrived in group-based tasks, while less confident learners relied more on extrinsic incentives. This echoes recent findings by Dewi and Astuti (2021), who argue that motivation in Indonesian EFL classrooms is highly context-dependent, necessitating teachers to adapt their strategies to accommodate student diversity.

Thus, the present study adds weight to calls for more differentiated approaches to sustaining student motivation in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

The findings suggest several practical implications for teachers and policymakers. First, teacher training programs should emphasise the integration of motivational strategies rather than presenting them as isolated methods. Combining active learning with reward systems allows teachers to address multiple dimensions of motivation simultaneously. Second, schools should encourage the use of gamified platforms, but ensure that teachers are trained to effectively scaffold their use, preventing technology from becoming a distraction rather than a motivator. Third, teachers should prioritise social rewards, such as verbal encouragement and recognition, as they are powerful, low-cost tools for sustaining engagement and building student confidence. Ultimately, the differentiated application of motivational strategies is essential: teachers must tailor their approaches to students with varying levels of confidence, participation, and learning preferences.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample consisted of only six students, which, while providing qualitative depth, limits the generalizability of the findings. Further research with a larger and more diverse population would strengthen the applicability of the results. Additionally, the study relied primarily on interview data, which may more accurately reflect students' perceptions than actual classroom practices. Triangulation with longer-term classroom observations or teacher interviews would provide a more comprehensive view. Finally, the study was context-specific to SMAN 01 Barru, and motivational strategies may differ in other regions or school environments. Future studies could explore comparative contexts to examine how cultural, institutional, and technological factors shape motivational practices.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teacher strategies are central to sustaining student motivation in English learning, not only by shaping classroom interaction but also by addressing the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning. The integration of active learning methods with reward systems at SMAN 01 Barru illustrates how combining intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can foster confidence, reduce anxiety, and increase willingness to participate. A key contribution of this study lies in showing that motivational strategies are most effective when applied in a balanced and context-sensitive manner. Whereas earlier research often treated active learning and reward systems separately, this study highlights their complementarity, demonstrating that interactive techniques, such as group discussions or gamified quizzes, become more effective when reinforced by social and material recognition. This combined approach advances the literature by emphasising integration over isolation and underscores the teacher's role as both facilitator of engagement and mediator of motivational balance. The findings also extend theoretical frameworks such as Keller's ARCS Model and Self-Determination Theory by illustrating how

motivation can be sustained through strategies that simultaneously target attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. Importantly, this study adds nuance by showing that rewards when used judiciously do not necessarily undermine intrinsic interest, but can coexist with learner autonomy to promote persistence and growth. Taken together, the results suggest that effective motivational practices in EFL classrooms require more than adopting isolated strategies; they demand thoughtful integration, teacher sensitivity to learner diversity, and adaptability to local contexts. Beyond reinforcing established theories, this study contributes a practical model of how strategy integration can create inclusive and engaging learning environments. Future research with larger and more diverse samples will be essential to test the broader applicability of these findings. However, the evidence presented here strongly supports the need for teacher-led, context-aware approaches to motivating students in English language learning.

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