

Understanding Influencing Factors of Students' Motivation to Learn English: A Case Study at SMAN 1 Batukliang Utara

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Abstract: Motivation plays a central role in determining students' success in learning English, particularly in rural educational contexts where exposure to the language is limited. In many rural senior high schools in Indonesia, students demonstrate fluctuating levels of engagement due to limited facilities, minimal communicative practice, and restricted access to authentic English input. Despite the importance of motivation in second language acquisition, qualitative investigations focusing on rural senior high school contexts remain limited. Therefore, this study aimed to identify internal and external factors influencing students' motivation and to examine instrumental and integrative motivational orientations among students at SMAN 1 Batukliang Utara. This research employed a qualitative case study design grounded in Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model and Dörnyei's (1998) motivational framework. The participants consisted of ten eleventh-grade students and two English teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's framework, using both deductive and inductive coding procedures. The findings indicate that internal motivation exists but is strongly influenced by students' self-confidence and anxiety levels. External factors, particularly teacher encouragement, peer dynamics, and classroom atmosphere, significantly affect students' engagement. Instrumental motivation is dominant, as students primarily associate English learning with academic achievement and career opportunities. Meanwhile, integrative motivation is present but remains underdeveloped and requires systematic reinforcement. The study concludes that students' motivation is multidimensional and context-dependent, emphasizing the importance of balanced motivational development in rural EFL settings.

Keywords: Student Motivation, Internal and External Factors, Instrumental Motivation, Integrative Motivation, Rural EFL Context.

INTRODUCTION

English language learning in Indonesia continues to face persistent challenges, particularly in rural educational contexts where students' motivation remains a critical concern. In many rural schools, students demonstrate low levels of interest and engagement in learning English, often perceiving it as a difficult subject with limited relevance to their daily lives (Nasution et al., 2023; Andrianjary et al., 2023). This issue is further exacerbated by limited exposure to English, inadequate learning resources, and a lack of supportive learning environments. As a result, English is frequently treated as a compulsory subject rather than a meaningful communicative tool, reflecting deeper issues in students' affective engagement within the learning process.

Motivation plays a crucial role in determining students' success in acquiring a foreign language. In rural settings, motivational challenges are often intensified by socioeconomic constraints, limited access to technology, and insufficient availability of qualified English teachers (Sekar et al., 2022). These conditions contribute to passive learning behaviors, where students are less likely to participate actively in classroom activities or practice the language beyond academic requirements. Previous studies have shown that low motivation leads to reduced participation, avoidance of speaking opportunities, and minimal effort in completing learning tasks (Bon et al., 2022). Over time, such patterns may develop into anxiety and fear of failure, further hindering students' language development (Kim & Choi, 2023).

The disparity between rural and urban students also highlights the contextual nature of motivation. Urban students generally benefit from greater exposure to English through media, technology, and social interactions, while rural students often lack such opportunities (Safira et al., 2024). This imbalance contributes to differences in learning outcomes and reinforces negative attitudes toward English among rural learners. In many cases, English is perceived merely as a subject to pass rather than a skill to master, creating a cycle of low achievement and declining interest across generations.

Beyond academic performance, motivation to learn English has significant implications for students' future opportunities. English proficiency is widely recognized as a key factor in accessing global information, higher education, and employment opportunities (Akther, 2022). In an increasingly globalized economy, particularly in sectors such as tourism, trade, and technology, the demand for English proficiency continues to grow (Ayu et al., 2024). Consequently, low motivation to learn English may limit students' academic and professional prospects, particularly for those in rural areas, thereby widening existing social and economic disparities.

Despite these challenges, English remains a language of global communication and opportunity. When students recognize its relevance to real-life contexts, including cross-cultural interaction and access to international knowledge, their motivation can be enhanced (Atasheva, 2024; Ahmad & Yusof, 2023). With the increasing availability of digital platforms and online resources, even rural students now have greater potential access to authentic English exposure. However, without sufficient motivation, these opportunities may not be fully utilized.

Previous research on students' motivation in learning English has predominantly employed quantitative approaches, focusing on measuring levels of instrumental and integrative motivation. Findings generally indicate that Indonesian students tend to exhibit stronger instrumental motivation, such as learning English for academic achievement or career advancement (Rahadiano et al., 2022). However, such studies often fail to capture the complexity of motivational processes, particularly how students interpret their learning experiences and how contextual factors shape their motivation.

Furthermore, existing studies tend to focus more on urban contexts, leaving rural students underrepresented in the literature (Cleopatra & Rifai, 2023; Farmasari et al., 2025). Research conducted in other countries also highlights similar challenges in rural settings, including limited exposure to English, inadequate facilities, and low learning motivation (Shan & Abdul, 2022; Herizal et al., 2023; Murzina & Fayzulloyeva, 2022). These findings suggest that motivational dynamics are highly context-dependent and require deeper qualitative exploration.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore students' motivation to learn English in a rural school context, specifically at SMAN 1 Batukliang Utara. This study focuses on identifying internal and external motivational factors, as well as examining instrumental and integrative orientations among students. By exploring students' lived experiences and perspectives, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how motivation is shaped within rural educational environments. The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the existing body of knowledge on motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in underrepresented rural settings. Practically, it offers insights for teachers, policymakers, and educational institutions in designing strategies to enhance students' motivation and improve learning outcomes in resource-limited environments.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the factors influencing students' motivation to learn English in a rural educational context. A qualitative approach was selected to capture students' lived experiences, beliefs, and attitudes in depth, allowing for a richer understanding of motivational processes beyond numerical measurement (Maxwell, 2021). The case study design enabled an intensive examination of a bounded system within its real-life setting, facilitating the exploration of how contextual conditions interact with individual motivational factors.

The study was conducted at SMAN 1 Batukliang Utara, a public senior high school located in a rural area. This site was selected due

to its relevance in representing a resource-constrained educational environment, characterized by limited exposure to English, modest instructional resources, and sociocultural influences that shape students' learning experiences. Such a context provided a suitable setting for examining the interaction between internal and external motivational factors, as well as instrumental and integrative orientations.

Participants consisted of ten eleventh-grade students and two English teachers, selected through purposive sampling. This technique was employed to ensure variation in students' levels of motivation and English proficiency, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of motivational differences. Participants were recommended by English teachers based on their classroom engagement and learning behavior. The relatively small sample size allowed for in-depth data collection and detailed analysis, which is appropriate for qualitative inquiry.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants and their parents were informed about the study's objectives and procedures, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms. Participants were also assured that their involvement would not affect their academic evaluation or relationship with teachers.

Data were collected through three primary methods: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes toward learning English, allowing flexibility for probing and clarification (Adams, 2015). Classroom observations were carried out to capture students' actual learning behaviors, engagement, and interactions during instructional activities (Curd, 2019). In addition, relevant documents, including lesson plans, student work, and assessment records, were analyzed to contextualize and support the observational and interview data (Chand, 2025). The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2021). The process began with data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes. Initial codes were then generated to identify meaningful units of data,

followed by the development of broader themes representing recurring patterns. These themes were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure alignment with the research questions. Both deductive and inductive coding approaches were employed: deductive coding was guided by established theoretical frameworks, particularly Gardner's and Dörnyei's models, while inductive coding allowed new themes to emerge from the data.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were implemented. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was conducted by inviting participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations, reducing the risk of misrepresentation. Additionally, peer debriefing was undertaken to obtain external perspectives on the emerging analysis. These procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, and overall rigor of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that students' motivation to learn English at SMAN 1 Batukliang Utara is shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors, as well as instrumental and integrative orientations. Overall, motivation among students is generally low, unstable, and highly context-dependent, with stronger reliance on external and instrumental drivers rather than internal or integrative ones. These findings are consistent with prior studies highlighting that rural learners often demonstrate fluctuating motivation due to limited exposure and contextual constraints (Nasution et al., 2023; Safira et al., 2024).

Internal Factors

The analysis indicates that students' internal motivation is fragile, inconsistent, and largely underdeveloped. A dominant issue identified across interviews and observations is low self-confidence, which significantly affects students' willingness to engage in English learning activities. Many students expressed fear of making mistakes, particularly in speaking tasks, often worrying about negative evaluation from peers. This fear leads to avoidance behavior, where students prefer silence over participation. Such findings reflect the role of affective variables in language learning, where anxiety and

low self-confidence reduce learners' engagement and performance (Kim & Choi, 2023). From Gardner's (1985) perspective, motivation is closely tied to positive attitudes and desire, both of which appear weak in this context. Students' frequent descriptions of English as "difficult" and "confusing" indicate negative attitudes that hinder sustained effort.

In addition to confidence issues, students were found to have unclear or short-term learning goals. Many participants reported learning English simply to pass the subject rather than for meaningful communication or future use. This absence of clear personal goals reflects a lack of what Dörnyei (1998) conceptualizes as a future-oriented self-system, where learners envision themselves as successful language users. Without such a vision, motivation becomes externally regulated and unstable.

Another important internal factor is the influence of previous learning experiences. Many students reported negative past experiences, such as low grades or embarrassing moments during classroom activities, which shaped their perception of English as difficult. These experiences contribute to a cycle of low motivation, where students avoid participation, leading to limited progress and further negative perceptions. Although a small number of students demonstrated intrinsic motivation, such as learning through songs or online content, this group remains a minority. Most students showed controlled learning behavior, engaging only when required. This aligns with previous findings that intrinsic motivation in rural contexts is often limited and influenced by environmental constraints (Apriyanti et al., 2023; Astuti et al., 2022).

Overall, internal motivation in this study is characterized by low confidence, weak goal orientation, negative attitudes, and dependence on external triggers, making it difficult to sustain long-term engagement.

External Factors

External factors were found to play a significant yet insufficient role in shaping students' motivation. Among these, teacher influence emerged as an important supportive factor. Teachers' encouragement, feedback, and personal attention were observed to increase students' participation temporarily. However, such effects were not sustained over time, particularly among students with weak internal

motivation. This finding supports Dörnyei's (1998) argument that external factors can facilitate motivation but cannot replace internal drive. Teacher support creates a positive learning environment, but its effectiveness depends on students' readiness to engage.

Peer influence was identified as one of the most powerful external factors. The data revealed a dual effect: supportive peers encouraged participation, while negative peer reactions, such as ridicule, significantly reduced students' willingness to engage. Fear of being judged was a major barrier, particularly in speaking activities. This reflects the strong role of social context in shaping motivation, where group norms influence individual behavior.

Parental support was found to be relatively limited, largely due to socio-economic conditions. Many parents prioritize school attendance rather than academic achievement, providing minimal encouragement for English learning. This lack of support contributes to reduced motivation, as students receive limited reinforcement outside the classroom (Sekar et al., 2022). The assessment system also plays a crucial role as an external motivator. Students demonstrated increased effort during exams or graded tasks, indicating strong performance-oriented motivation. However, this motivation is typically short-term and often leads to surface-level learning strategies, such as memorization rather than understanding (Bon et al., 2022).

Additionally, technology presents both opportunities and challenges. While it provides access to English resources, students often use it for quick answers rather than deep learning. This reflects a shift toward efficiency-based learning, where task completion is prioritized over mastery. In summary, external factors significantly influence students' motivation, but their impact remains temporary and conditional, reinforcing the importance of internal motivation as a sustaining force.

Instrumental Motivation

Instrumental motivation was found to be dominant but limited in depth and sustainability. Most students are motivated by short-term goals, particularly passing exams and obtaining good grades. This aligns with previous research indicating that EFL learners often prioritize practical outcomes (Rahadiano et al., 2022). However, this motivation is largely reactive rather than proactive. Students increase their effort only

when faced with external demands, such as assessments, and reduce their engagement once these pressures are removed. This suggests that instrumental motivation is externally regulated and not fully internalized, consistent with Dörnyei's (1998) framework.

The perceived connection between English and future career opportunities was also limited. While some students recognized its importance, many did not view English as essential for employment, particularly in local contexts. This perception is influenced by socio-economic conditions, where immediate work opportunities are prioritized over long-term skill development (Akther, 2022).

Interestingly, instrumental motivation increased when learning was connected to real-life contexts, such as tourism or interaction with foreigners. This suggests that relevance plays a key role in strengthening motivation. However, such engagement was often temporary and did not translate into sustained learning behavior. Overall, instrumental motivation in this context is present but short-term, externally driven, and limited in future orientation, reducing its effectiveness in supporting long-term language acquisition.

Integrative Motivation

Integrative motivation was found to be the weakest motivational dimension among students. Most participants showed limited interest in English-speaking cultures and did not express a strong desire to integrate into the target language community. This finding aligns with Gardner's (1985) theory, which emphasizes that integrative motivation depends on positive attitudes toward the target culture. In this context, such attitudes are underdeveloped due to limited exposure and lack of meaningful interaction with English-speaking communities (Shan & Abdul, 2022). Although students are exposed to English through media, their engagement is largely entertainment-oriented. They enjoy songs or videos but rarely engage with the language at a deeper level. This indicates superficial rather than genuine integrative interest.

Students' willingness to communicate with foreigners is also constrained by low confidence and limited proficiency, further weakening integrative motivation. However, some students in tourism-related environments showed higher interest, suggesting that integrative motivation is context-dependent and situational. In general,

integrative motivation remains secondary and underdeveloped, reinforcing the dominance of instrumental and external factors in shaping students' learning behavior.

Discussion

The findings confirm that students' motivation is multidimensional, dynamic, and context-dependent, as proposed by Dörnyei (1998). Motivation is not a single factor but a complex interaction of internal, external, instrumental, and integrative components.

Internal factors, particularly self-confidence and anxiety, emerged as the most influential. Students with low confidence tend to avoid participation, supporting Gardner's (1985) view that affective variables significantly impact motivation. The absence of a clear future self further weakens motivation, aligning with Dörnyei's concept of the Ideal L2 Self. External factors, while influential, function primarily as supporting conditions. Teacher encouragement and peer interaction can enhance motivation, but their effects are limited without internal readiness. This highlights the interdependence between internal and external dimensions.

The dominance of instrumental motivation reflects the exam-oriented nature of the educational system. While it encourages effort, it often leads to short-term and surface-level learning, limiting long-term development. This finding is consistent with Gardner's distinction between instrumental and integrative orientations.

The weakness of integrative motivation can be explained by limited cultural exposure and lack of meaningful interaction with English-speaking communities. This supports previous studies indicating that integrative motivation is less developed in contexts with minimal intercultural contact (Murzina & Fayzulloyeva, 2022). Overall, the findings highlight key issues, including exam-oriented learning, low confidence, and limited cultural exposure, which collectively shape students' motivation in rural contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that students' motivation to learn English is shaped by a complex interaction of internal, external, instrumental, and integrative factors. Among these, internal motivation, particularly self-confidence and goal clarity, emerges as the most critical determinant of sustained engagement.

However, internal motivation remains fragile and inconsistent, heavily influenced by negative learning experiences and limited future orientation.

External factors such as teacher support, peer influence, and assessment systems play important roles, but their impact is largely temporary and situational. Instrumental motivation is dominant, yet it is primarily short-term and performance-oriented, focusing on exams rather than meaningful learning. In contrast, integrative motivation is relatively weak due to limited cultural exposure and lack of emotional connection to the target language.

These findings suggest that motivation in rural contexts is strongly shaped by socio-economic conditions, limited resources, and restricted exposure to English, reinforcing the importance of contextual factors in language learning.

From a pedagogical perspective, it is essential to create a supportive and engaging learning environment that fosters both internal and external motivation. Teachers should emphasize communicative and contextualized learning, helping students see the relevance of English in real-life situations. Building students' confidence through low-risk participation and positive reinforcement is also crucial.

Furthermore, integrating cultural elements and authentic exposure can help strengthen integrative motivation, while aligning learning with students' future aspirations can enhance instrumental motivation in a more sustainable way.

In conclusion, students' motivation is not fixed but dynamic and contextually constructed. Addressing motivational challenges in rural education requires a balanced approach that considers psychological, social, and environmental factors, ensuring that English learning becomes both meaningful and relevant for students' lives.

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