

## English Teacher Strategies in Motivating Low-Achiever Students

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore how English teachers can effectively motivate low-achieving students through various strategies identified during classroom observations. The research highlights that teachers establish foundational motivational conditions by starting lessons enthusiastically and fostering personal connections with students, which encourages them to try harder and believe in their abilities. Additionally, by emphasizing the importance of learning English and offering bonus scores, teachers generate initial motivation that can improve low-achieving students' grades. To maintain this motivation, teachers provide opportunities for students to present their learning outcomes, enhancing their engagement and confidence. Furthermore, helping low-achieving students improve their pronunciation encourages positive self-evaluation, making them feel valued and motivated to continue learning. The findings suggest that it is essential for teachers to implement effective motivational strategies in order to facilitate better understanding and learning among their students. Therefore, an English teacher must possess both effective strategies and enthusiasm to motivate students and ensure their comprehension of the lesson.*

### INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is a compulsory subject for students. However, some students consider it an important subject, and some do not, because a compulsory subject does not include daily use, and their study environment may not provide them with the opportunity to learn or practice the language (Sulistiyo, 2016). Therefore, students become less motivated when they learn English. This may be a problem for teachers because when students are not motivated, they tend to have low achievement (Kotob & Ibrahim, 2019).

Motivation is viewed as one of the fundamental factors in learning English (Nguyen, 2019). Bernaus and Gardner (2008), Fan and Feng (2012), and Kitjaroonchai (2012) claimed that students who have high motivation have been found to have higher achievement in learning English as a second language than students who have lower motivation.

Students' achievement is fundamental to almost every aspect of education and has been the most important outcome of schooling at any level (Hattie & Anderman, 2013). Students with low

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achievement and low motivation will struggle to endure the lengthy process of becoming proficient in the target language (Alizadeh, 2016). Low achievement does not necessarily indicate that the student is stupid or has a low IQ (Hasanah, 2015).

Many factors influence the students' low achievement in English, both internal and external. To improve the academic achievement of low-achieving students, the role of teachers is very important in motivating students to have high achievements (Guilloteux & Dornyei, 2008; Moskovsky et al., 2013; Loima & Vibulphol, 2014; Urhahne, 2015; Vibulphol, 2016; Rahardjo & Pertiwi, 2020). In order to motivate low-achieving students, English teachers must devise effective strategies.

A limited amount of research has been conducted to determine the effect of implementing motivational teaching strategies on student achievement. The first investigation was carried out by Guilloteaux and Dornyei (2008). They investigated the link between the teachers' motivational teaching practice and their students' language learning motivation. Although most students are relatively motivated and have an internal interest in learning English, the level of learning is not very high (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Moskovsky et al., 2013; Vibulphol, 2016). Previous research shows that language teachers' motivational strategies are associated with increased levels of students' motivational learning behavior as well as English language achievement.

The purpose of this study is to identify how the English teachers' use of strategies to motivate low-achieving students. This research is, to some extent, similar to research conducted by Bernaus and Gardner (2008), Guilloteaux and Dornyei (2008), Moskovsky et al. (2013), and Vibulphol (2016). The difference lies in the context of the research location, level, method, and various strategies that the teacher used. In addition, there was no research on the topic in the senior high school in Jember. By interviewing the English teacher in the school, there is no research conducted on the topic in the school.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Teacher Motivational Strategies**

Teacher motivation strategies are defined as methods and techniques to generate and maintain student motivation (Sugita & Takeuchi, 2010). Dornyei (2001) defines motivational strategies as a technique that offers human behavior and is related to certain goals. Teachers can play a role in increasing the level of motivation of their students so that they can improve their learning achievement. Bearing this in mind, the question of what teachers can do to increase student motivation has great significance. This brings us to the most central issue in this research: teacher motivation strategies for low-achieving students.

In the world of education, there is a component of motivational teaching practice in second language classes. This component is also known as motivational teaching practice (MTP). These components include creating basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation, and encouraging retrospective self-evaluations.

### **Low-Achiever Students**

Low-achieving students are defined as those who score below the baseline level of proficiency (Wen & Johnson, 1997). They may face difficulties in various areas of learning, including learning English. These students often struggle to meet grade-level expectations and may experience challenges understanding and applying key concepts.

Learners can be low or high achievers for a variety of reasons, including physical and

psychological issues that may have several dimensions (Chakrabarty & Saha, 2014). Low achiever traits were highlighted by Normazidah et al. (2012). They claim that low achievers think English is a challenging subject. Because of their reliance on the teacher as their source of authority, their lack of support for using English outside of the classroom, their lack of exposure to the target language, their limited vocabulary, and their lack of motivation to learn English, they have a negative attitude toward learning the language. The perspective of Normazidah et al. (2012) on low achievers appears to focus mostly on personal attitudes and motivations toward language acquisition. In other words, learners may seek strategies to expose themselves to language, ways to expand their vocabulary, and ways to adopt a proactive approach to learning with the right spark of motivation.

### **Previous Research on English Teacher Motivational Strategies**

Research related to the topic of English teacher strategies in motivating low-achieving students has been carried out by several researchers in 2008, 2013, and 2016. The first study investigated the effectiveness of motivational strategies. Guilloteaux and Dornyei (2008) found a strong positive correlation between teachers' teaching practice motivation and students' learning motivation in real classes. This research, involving 27 FL teachers and more than 1,300 EFL learners in South Korea, has attempted to empirically assess the impact of motivational strategies on learner motivation in language classes using a series of instruments, as follows: (a) a 20-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure students' situation-specific motivational dispositions; (b) a classroom observation instrument used to assess the quality of teachers' teaching practices and the level of students' motivated behavior; and (c) a post-lesson teacher evaluation scale developed to provide a post-hoc evaluation of teachers' motivational.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

In this research, I used a case study design. A case study is described as an intensive and systematic investigation of an individual, group, community, or other unit in which the researcher examines in-depth data relating to several variables (Heale & Twycross, 2018). Case studies were used to understand individuals intensively, which is useful for achieving better adjustment, and also to understand all matters related to what was studied in this research. In this study, I collected detailed information from observation and interviews with teacher. Through this approach, I was able to gain a better understanding of teacher strategies for motivating low-achieving students.

The following are the steps I took to answer the research questions:

- a. I have observed how teacher and students perform during teaching and learning activities. From the beginning of the learning session, the core activities, to the closing. The observation used a field note. Before the observation began, I took the attendance of the students one by one to find out which students were low achievers in the class.
- b. Next, the collected data were analyzed using content analysis.
- c. A Lastly, I composed the report based on the analyzed data.

### **Research Context**

This research was conducted at a senior high school in Jember, East Java, Indonesia. I chose this school as a research location for several reasons that helped me conduct this research.

First, I got access to this research from an English teacher. Therefore, I got easy access from the principal with the help of the English teacher. Second, the English teacher at the school teaches students in different classes, so they have experience teaching students with different characteristics. Third, English teacher showed great interest in being involved in this research and sharing their experiences in motivating low-achieving students. In addition, the English teacher expressed her willingness to help me collect the necessary data.

### **Research Participant**

This research was conducted to find out teacher's strategies for motivating low-achieving students. The purposive method was applied to select and determine the research participants in this study. In this research, participant was selected based on my assessment, where I and the participant already know each other, so that I was more comfortable conducting observation to obtain as much information and in-depth data as possible (Rai & Thapa, 2015). In addition, I worked closely with the research participant by involving the teacher throughout the research so that she felt comfortable sharing the teacher experiences of the strategies used to motivate low-achieving students. Therefore, one female English teacher was selected in this study as a participant. The participant has been teaching English for more than 5 years, so the participant is also considered to have good teaching professionalism.

### **Data Collection Method**

This research used the classroom observation method to collect data. Non-participant observations were used in this study. In non-participant observation, I was detached from or did not participate in any activities during the research process (Caldwell & Atwal, 2005).

I observed teacher and low-achieving students during teaching and learning activities, from the beginning of the learning opening, to the core activities, and to the closing. I observed how teacher deliver material to students and how teacher apply strategies to motivate low-achieving students so I could obtain data regarding the strategies implemented by teacher. I made observations four times over two weeks in different classes to obtain perfect data, namely during the learning process, which was observed from the beginning to the end of the lesson. I also used field notes to record the learning process and what strategies teacher use to motivate low-achieving students. I also recorded the observation process using a smartphone in video form to avoid missing or incomplete data. The scheduled classroom observation is below:

**Table 1.** Schedule of data collection

<b>No.</b>	<b>Component</b>	<b>Date</b>
1.	First observation	Monday, 20 May, 2024
2.	Second observation	Monday, 20 May, 2024
3.	Third observation	Tuesday, 28 May, 2024
4.	Fourth observation	Tuesday, 28 May, 2024

### **Data Analysis Method**

Data analysis is a process of systematically searching and organizing data in the form of observation notes, interviews, and others in order to improve the researcher's understanding of the case being studied and provide the findings to others (Rijali, 2018). This study collected data through observation, and the data was analyzed inductively using content analysis (Cohen et al., 2017). The organizing stage includes familiarizing, open coding, creating categories, and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), before coding or

categorizing data, it is very important to thoroughly explore the entire dataset in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of its contents.

The researcher analyzed the depth of how the English teacher uses strategies in motivating low-achiever students. In transcribing videos, the English teacher revealed several key codes and strategies in motivating low-achiever students. The analysis focused on recurring patterns and teacher strategies. The next step was to classify the coded texts that belonged to the same category, and the coding process was based on the evolving data. Then, the last step was developing an explanation that best represented the code generated and discussed in order to draw a conclusion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

To reveal the English teachers' strategies in motivating low-achiever students, I have conducted field notes observations at a high school in Jember, precisely in classes 11-4, 11-5, 11-7, and 11-8. The name of the teacher who was the resource person has been disguised, and for ease of writing, I mentioned the first classroom observation as 01, the second classroom observation as 02, the third classroom observation as 03, and the fourth classroom observation as 04. As in the data collection schedule, I have included in table 3.4 that I made four observations, namely the first observation on May 20, 2024, at 09.00–09.40 WIB with a duration of 30 minutes, the second observation on May 20, 2024, at 10.20–11.40 WIB with a duration of 1 hour and 8 minutes, the third observation on May 28, 2024, at 07.00–08.20 WIB with a duration of 1 hour, and the fourth observation on May 28, 2024, at 08.20–09.40 WIB with a duration of 30 minutes. The findings were analyzed using content analysis and produced four codes with six sub-codes.

From the table appendix A, appendix B, appendix C, and appendix D, several strategies were found that the teacher applied to motivating low-achiever students obtained from classroom observations. For a comprehensive explanation, refer to the section below:

#### 1. Creating the Basic Motivational Conditions

Creating the basic motivational conditions means creating an environment and situation that supports and stimulates students' internal motivation to learn and achieve. This involves efforts to meet students' basic psychological and emotional needs so that they feel motivated to engage in the learning process.

This condition can be created by the teacher starting the lesson enthusiastically. When the teacher starts the class with enthusiasm, it creates a positive and energetic atmosphere. The teacher's positive attitude and enthusiasm can be contagious to students, including those who are low achievers. This positive atmosphere helps reduce the discomfort felt by low achievers, making them more open to engaging in the lesson. As shown in the data below:

(T: "Good morning! How are you today?")

(S: "Good morning, ma'am! Okay, thank you")

(T: "Who is excited?")

(S: "Me")

(T: "That is great to hear!")

(T: "Today we will start class with something very exciting")

(T: "We will learn about analytical exposition text, and you will also present an assignment about this text that I gave last week.")

(T: "Are you ready?")

(S: "Ready")

(The 2<sup>nd</sup> Observation)

T: "Where is the enthusiasm? Come on, it is still early, do not be sleepy"

(The 3<sup>rd</sup> Observation)

The statement above states that the teacher uses the strategy of starting the lesson enthusiastically in learning activities. This strategy is applied by the teacher, not without reason. By seeing problems such as students being sleepy and lacking enthusiasm since the beginning of learning, this is the right strategy to solve it. Furthermore, teacher can help students be more energetic and enthusiastic.

Apart from that, to create the basic motivational conditions, the teacher makes a personal connection with low-achieving students. When the teacher gets close to students, they can build a more personal relationship and show concern for students' individual needs and strengths. The closeness of teacher to students allows for more open communication and more constructive feedback. Students feel more comfortable asking questions and receiving advice from teacher. Relevant and communicative feedback helps students understand their areas of improvement and feel more motivated to make improvements. As shown in the data below:

(T: "I noticed during the presentation that you seemed to be having difficulty with this task")

(T: "Can I help you?")

(LAS: "Yes")

(T: "Let's see together. First, what do you find difficult about this text?")

(LAS: "I am still confused about the internal conjunction part of the language features of this analytical exposition text")

(T: "Well, no problem. In internal conjunctions there are although, because, while, if, and when")

(The 2<sup>nd</sup> Observation)

(LAS: "I cannot close the presentation in English")

(T: "It is okay, I will help you, repeat after me")

(T: "That is all from me")

(LAS: "That is all from me")

(T: "Thank you for your attention")

(LAS: "Thank you for your attention, Wassalamualaikum")

(The 4<sup>th</sup> Observation)

From the data above, it can be seen that the teacher approached himself by discussing the material with low-achieving students. The teacher invited students to discuss together about the tasks on the screen to support the students' understanding of the text. This method can have a good impact on students' understanding because the teacher and students can discuss the text being studied.

## 2. Generating Initial Motivation

Generating initial motivation is one way to create an initial drive for students to be actively involved in learning and achieve their academic goals. In learning low-achieving students, a careful and attentive approach is needed to create an effective initial drive.

Creating an initial push to motivate low-achieving students to learn English, the teacher emphasized the importance of learning English in a relevant and interesting way. Explained in depth is that English can open up opportunities in the future and is useful for everyday life. As shown in the data below:

*(T: “Do not be lazy learning English will not hurt because English is an international language that is widely used throughout the world. It allows us to communicate with people from different countries and cultures”)* (The 1<sup>st</sup> Observation)

*(T: “Many large companies are looking for employees who can speak English because it allows them to work with international clients and partners. By mastering English, you can open up more job opportunities.”)*

*(T: “English is often used in technology, media, and science. Much of the latest information and research is written in English. With good English skills, you can access this information more easily.”)*

(The 2<sup>nd</sup> Observation)

The data above shows that the teacher emphasizes the importance of learning English. With fluent English, it can certainly help low-achieving students develop and have broader insights. Apart from that, to encourage low-achieving students to try harder in learning, the teacher gives bonus scores. With incentives, low-achieving students are more confident and motivated to try harder and be more actively involved in the learning process because they see that there is a reward for their efforts. The additional marks obtained by low-achieving students are also useful for improving their previous marks. As shown in the data below:

*(T: “I will give a bonus score to those who answer the questions correctly”)*

(The 1<sup>st</sup> Observation)

*(T: “Do not worry, every student who dares to answer will definitely get points”)*

(The 2<sup>nd</sup> Observation)

*(T: “If I give you a question, do not hesitate to answer, I will give you points as much as possible”)*

(The 3<sup>rd</sup> Observation)

The data above shows that the teacher gives a bonus score to low-achieving students by creating questions during the teaching and learning process. These questions contain elements to find out how well students understand the material or text given. The questions above can also help students better understand the material or text being studied.

### 3. Maintaining and Protecting Motivation

Maintaining and protecting motivation means involving ongoing strategies and support to ensure that low-performing students remain motivated and have opportunities to thrive. Students who lose motivation often experience a continued decline in achievement, which can lead to academic failure.

Improving the achievement of low-achieving students certainly requires strengthening their understanding of the material. In this case, the teacher was giving opportunities for low-achieving students to present their learning outcomes. Knowing that they will present their work can motivate them to be more serious and try hard to understand the material. As shown in the data below:

*(T: “So after I explained today's material, those who have not presented it yet can do it today to add to the end-of-year assessment”)*

*(T: “Have you presented the assignment I gave you?”)*

*(LAS: “No”)*

*(T: “Okay today you can come forward and present it”)*

*(LAS: “Okay ma'am”)*

(The 1<sup>st</sup> Observation)

(T: "Okay, everyone, I have finished explaining today's material, and now it is time to present your work results")

(T: "I will give an opportunity to students who feel that their exam scores are not sufficient")

(T: "Because next week is the final semester assessment")

(LAS: "Me ma'am")

(T: "Could you please come forward and start the presentation?")

(LAS: "Yes")

(The 2<sup>nd</sup> Observation)

(T: "That is all the explanation from me. So now one by one they must present the results of their work. Who is the first?")

(LAS: "Me ma'am")

(T: "Please come forward!")

(The 3<sup>rd</sup> Observation)

From the data above, it can be seen that the teacher gives an opportunity to present learning results. The teacher invites low-achieving students to discuss together by presenting to the front of the class. This strategy is carried out so that students try to understand the material and are more confident.

#### 4. Encouraging Positive Retrospective Self-Evaluation

Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation includes encouraging motivational attributions, providing feedback, and increasing student satisfaction in motivation. In providing feedback to students, the teacher is encouraged to see every things or contribution of students in learning and in student achievement. In accordance with the results of this study, teacher provides feedback to low-achieving students by providing input or feedback. In addition, teacher also invites them to be active in learning by asking questions related to the meeting material. As shown in the data below:

(T: "How many generic structures of analytical exposition?")

(T: "How many?")

(LAS: "Three")

(T: "What are they?")

(LAS: "Thesis, argument, and reiteration")

(T: "Not 'argumen', but the correct one is 'argument'; repeat after me")

(LAS: "Argument")

(T: "Good")

(The 1<sup>st</sup> Observation)

T: "Not 'bekaus', but 'because'"

LAS: "Because"

T: "Good, do you understand?"

LAS: "Yes, thank you"

(The 2<sup>nd</sup> Observation)

(T: "The correct one is 'closely'")

(LAS: "Closely")

(T: "Ideas")

(LAS: "Ideas")

(T: "Logical")

(LAS: "Logical")



(The 3<sup>rd</sup> Observation)

(T: *"It is good, but there is a pronunciation that is not quite right. The pronunciation should be 'conjunction'. Let's repeat it one more time"*)

(Low-Achiever Student: *"Conjunction"*)

(Teacher: *"Exactly"*)

(The 4<sup>th</sup> Observation)

The above data shows that the teacher was helping low-achiever students improve their pronunciation. Helping every student's wrong pronunciation and correcting it. In addition, the teacher also does not judge students who are wrong; the teacher informs them well.

## Discussions

In answering the research question, in this discussion section, I discuss the results of English teachers' strategies for motivating low-achieving students. In this discussion section, I discuss important aspects of my findings.

Based on the research, the researcher analyzed the English teacher's strategy in motivating low-achiever students. Therefore, in this study, the teacher's strategies have a significant influence on the low-achiever student motivation. Teacher motivates low-achiever students using strategies that support the learning process. In motivating low-achiever students, teacher must combine several different strategies to create an environment that supports the teaching and learning process.

The first strategy that the teacher used in motivating low-achiever students is starting the lesson enthusiastically. Raharjanti (2019) stated that when a teacher shows evidence of greater enthusiasm, students tend to be more interested, enthusiastic, curious, and passionate about learning. Teacher enthusiasm in teaching is very important for students, especially for those who are low achievers. When teachers show passion and dedication, it can motivate students to try harder and believe in their own abilities.

The second strategy that the teacher used in motivating low-achiever students is to make a personal connection. Amerstorfer and Freiin (2021) describe that one of the prerequisites for producing effective motivation is good teacher behavior and good relationships with students. Making a personal connection with low-achieving students has several benefits, such as helping them feel heard and supported, increasing their motivation to learn, strengthening the relationship between teachers and students, and providing an opportunity to better understand the challenges they face. Han and Yin (2016) assert that a close relationship between teacher and students is crucial for effective motivation.

The third strategy that the teacher used in motivating low-achiever students is emphasized the importance of learning English. Dornyei (2001) argues that in generating student motivation, there needs to be an understanding of the objectives of learning, and this will foster hope for success because that is how we will learn as well as possible. Having English proficiency for low-achieving students not only opens the door to access to global information but also increases academic and career opportunities in the future. In addition, proficiency in English can increase students' self-confidence, communication abilities, and interpersonal skills, all of which are crucial in an increasingly globally connected society.

The fourth strategy that the teacher used in motivating low-achiever students is to give a bonus score. Kasyulita (2019) suggests that giving gifts or awards is a positive way to appreciate student performance. Bonus scores can be a positive encouragement for low-achieving students to try harder and improve their learning results. Students who receive bonus scores may feel

recognized for the extra effort they put in, increasing their satisfaction with learning. Bonus scores can also be a positive signal that, even though academic achievement is initially low, there is still an opportunity to improve and achieve academic success.

The fifth strategy that the teacher used in motivating low-achiever students is giving an opportunity to present results of learning. Cochran and Reinsvold (2017) emphasize that teachers can increase the motivation and learning of students by allowing students to actively participate in the learning process. One of the goals of teaching foreign languages in Indonesia is to improve students' speaking skills accurately and fluently (Maysaroh et al., 2022). Therefore, giving an opportunity to present results of learning is a strategy to increase their engagement and confidence. Students can get the opportunity to speak in front of the class, which can help students feel more confident in their abilities. Students also learn public speaking skills and practice structuring and communicating ideas clearly.

Finally, the strategy that the teacher used in motivating low-achiever students is helping low-achiever students improve their pronunciation. Pronunciation can play an important role in supporting the learners' overall communicative power (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Students who receive positive feedback and support in pronunciation feel more valued and motivated to continue learning and trying. Good pronunciation is often associated with better reading and writing skills, as they better understand the relationship between letters and sounds.

In conclusion, the use of strategies in motivating low-achieving students has been proven to help teacher and students in teaching and learning activities, such as the strategies obtained from the data above, namely starting the lesson enthusiastically, making a personal connection, emphasizing the importance of learning English, giving a bonus score, giving an opportunity to present results of learning, and helping low-achieving students improve their pronunciation. Santihastuti and Wahjuningsih (2019) speculate that language learning strategies are one of the important factors that determine whether students can become effective learners and help them achieve maximum success in language learning. In the teaching process, teacher needs to make students interested in learning English and enjoy being in the middle of the teaching and learning process. Teacher can help motivate low-achieving students by applying the right strategies.

The limitation of this research is that the researcher did not measure the effectiveness of the strategies used by the teacher. Apart from that, another limitation is that the number of subjects in this research is minimal, so further research is recommended to expand the scope of research subjects.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to answer the research question of how strategies for English teacher motivate low-achieving students. This research also found several strategies implemented by teacher in learning through data collection using classroom observations. First, the teacher creates the basic motivational conditions by starting the lesson enthusiastically and making a personal connection. Second, the teacher generates initial motivation by emphasizing the importance of learning English and giving a bonus score. Third, the teacher maintains and protects motivation by giving an opportunity to present results of learning. Fourth, the teacher encourages positive retrospective self-evaluation by helping low-achiever students improve their pronunciation.

Starting the lesson enthusiastically can motivate students to try harder and believe in their own abilities. Making a personal connection with students can help teacher understand their students' difficulties. Telling students about the importance of learning English can help them

understand why they should do so. Giving bonus scores to students can help low-achieving students get better grades. Giving an opportunity to present results of learning can increase their engagement and confidence. Helping low-achiever students improve their pronunciation makes them feel more valued and motivated to continue learning and trying.

Teachers need to motivate their students when teaching in class because students can have better understanding when they are motivated to learn. Teachers need to have strategies to motivate their students so that students can understand the lesson. Therefore, to motivate their students and ensure their understanding of the lesson, an English teacher must possess effective strategies and enthusiasm for teaching.

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