

Students' Motivation In Participating In English Classroom Activities At Grade 11 Of SMKN 2 Kisaran

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Abstract

This study investigates students' motivation in participating in English classroom activities at Grade 11 of SMKN 2 Kisaran, analyzed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000). Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected from 31 students through open-ended interview questionnaires. The findings reveal that 81% of students (n=25) are predominantly extrinsically motivated, engaging in English activities due to grades, teacher expectations, and academic obligations, while only 19% (n=6) demonstrate clear intrinsic motivation. Analysis of psychological needs shows that competence (42%, n=13) and relatedness (45%, n=14) are the most dominant unmet needs, with autonomy representing only 13% (n=4). Pronunciation anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and a disengaged classroom atmosphere are identified as the primary barriers to active participation. The study concludes that the chronic underfulfillment of basic psychological needs inhibits motivational internalization, leaving students reliant on external pressures. Student-centered pedagogical strategies including pronunciation scaffolding, structured ice-breaking activities, and collaborative group tasks are recommended to foster more autonomous and sustained engagement in English language learning.

Keywords: students' motivation; Self-Determination Theory; intrinsic motivation; extrinsic motivation; EFL classroom

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji motivasi siswa dalam berpartisipasi pada kegiatan kelas Bahasa Inggris di kelas XI SMKN 2 Kisaran, dianalisis melalui lensa Self-Determination Theory (SDT) yang dikemukakan oleh Deci dan Ryan (1985, 2000). Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 31 siswa melalui kuesioner wawancara terbuka. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa 81% siswa (n=25) didominasi oleh motivasi ekstrinsik, yaitu berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan Bahasa Inggris karena nilai, harapan guru, dan kewajiban akademik, sementara hanya 19% (n=6) yang menunjukkan motivasi intrinsik yang jelas. Analisis kebutuhan psikologis menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi (42%, n=13) dan keterhubungan (45%, n=14) merupakan kebutuhan yang paling dominan namun belum terpenuhi, sementara otonomi hanya mencakup 13% (n=4). Kecemasan pengucapan, rasa takut berbuat kesalahan, dan suasana kelas yang tidak kondusif diidentifikasi sebagai hambatan utama partisipasi aktif. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kurangnya pemenuhan kebutuhan psikologis dasar menghambat internalisasi motivasi, sehingga siswa bergantung pada tekanan eksternal. Strategi pedagogis yang berpusat pada siswa termasuk pendampingan pengucapan, kegiatan ice-breaking terstruktur, dan tugas kelompok kolaboratif direkomendasikan untuk menumbuhkan keterlibatan yang lebih otonom dan berkelanjutan dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: motivasi siswa; Self-Determination Theory; motivasi intrinsik; motivasi ekstrinsik; kelas EFL

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation in language learning has long been recognized as one of the most important factors influencing student success, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Motivation drives students to work hard, persevere in the face of difficulties, and actively participate in

learning activities. Even the most gifted students may struggle to develop their language skills to their full potential if they lack motivation. This reality makes motivation an important topic of study in EFL research, particularly at the secondary school level, where students are in the formative stage of the language acquisition process.

According to Deci and Ryan (1985), motivation is not a single, uniform construct, but rather a multidimensional and dynamic force that varies in both type and quality. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, which arises from genuine interest and personal enjoyment, and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards, values, or social pressure. SDT further argues that the quality of motivation is shaped by the extent to which three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy (a sense of self-direction), competence (belief in one's ability to succeed), and relatedness (a sense of connection with others). When these needs are met in a learning environment, students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and engage more deeply in classroom activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

English plays an important role in the Indonesian education system as a required foreign language subject taught from junior high school through college. To enhance their future career readiness, vocational high school (SMK) students are expected to master communicative competencies in English. Eleventh-grade students at SMKN 2 Kisaran are expected to actively participate in various English language learning activities in class, including group projects, role-playing, presentations, and discussions.

However, based on initial observations conducted at SMKN 2 Kisaran, a large number of 11th-grade students showed low participation during English classes. Many students appeared passive, reluctant to speak, or hesitant to contribute to class discussions. Some students avoided answering questions even when they knew the answers, while others showed inactivity by remaining silent during group activities. This pattern suggests that motivation may be an underlying issue affecting students' willingness to participate.

Several factors may contribute to this motivational gap. First, the teaching methods used in the classroom may not always be engaging or student-centered enough, thereby reducing students' intrinsic interest in learning. Second, students' limited English proficiency can cause anxiety and undermine their sense of competence, thereby hindering active participation. Third, peer dynamics play an important role: some students feel more comfortable participating when supported by their peers, while others feel inhibited by a fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates. Fourth, external pressures such as grades and teachers' expectations can create extrinsic motivation that does not always translate into sustained engagement.

Given these circumstances, this study aims to identify: (1) the dominant type of motivation among 11th-grade students in participating in English class activities; and (2) the psychological needs that play the most significant role based on the Self-Determination Theory framework. Through an in-depth

understanding of student motivation, this study is expected to provide practical insights to help teachers design a more motivating and effective learning environment.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore and understand students' motivation to participate in English class activities in the 11th grade at SMKN 2 Kisaran. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because this study aims to investigate students' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors in a natural classroom setting, rather than to measure variables numerically. Through this design, the study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of how students' motivation is formed and how it influences their participation in English learning activities. The focus of the analysis is based on Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan, which emphasizes intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and the fulfillment of psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Research Location and Time

This study was conducted at SMKN 2 Kisaran, a public vocational high school located at Jl. Besar Sei Renggas No. 1, Sei Renggas Village, West Kisaran Subdistrict, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. Data collection took place during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically in May 2026, with dates adjusted to the school schedule and the availability of research participants. The entire research process from initial observation, instrument preparation, data collection, and data analysis to the writing of the final report is planned to take approximately three months, from March to May 2026.

Research Subject

The participants in this study were 31 11th-grade students at SMKN 2 Kisaran. The study selected several students as participants using purposive sampling. This technique allowed the study to select participants considered to have relevant experience related to the research topic. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, such as their level of participation in English class activities, their ability to express their opinions, and their willingness to participate in the study. By selecting participants with different characteristics, the study aimed to obtain diverse perspectives on student motivation.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

To obtain comprehensive, valid, and in-depth data on students' motivation to participate in English class activities, the researcher used several data collection techniques. These techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The use of these multiple techniques aims to ensure data triangulation, thereby making the research findings more accurate and reliable. The main research instruments included: (a) an observation checklist to systematically record students' participatory behaviors; (b) an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions based on SDT,

covering aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as the fulfillment of psychological needs; (c) field notes to record contextual information during observations and interviews; and (d) audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected in this study were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The analysis was conducted systematically and continuously throughout the research process, from data collection to final interpretation. In analyzing the data, the researcher referred to the Self-Determination Theory framework proposed by Deci and Ryan, focusing on intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and the fulfillment of psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The data analysis process included: (1) data reduction, which involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data; (2) presenting the data in the form of descriptive narratives; (3) examining data validity through triangulation, participant verification, ongoing engagement, and maintaining field notes; and (4) drawing conclusions and verifying them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Students' Motivation

Based on interview responses from 31 11th-grade students, student motivation was categorized into two groups following Deci and Ryan's (2000) SDT framework: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The distribution of student motivation is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Motivation Types

Motivation Types	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Intrinsic Motivation	6	19%
Extrinsic Motivation	25	81%
Total	31	100%

Source: Research Data, 2026

As shown in Table 1, the majority of students (81%, n=25) were primarily driven by extrinsic motivation in the form of grades, teachers' expectations, and social pressure. Only 19% (n=6) of students demonstrated intrinsic motivation, such as a genuine interest or personal enjoyment in learning English. These findings suggest that self-determined intrinsic motivation has not yet developed in this class, which aligns with the initial observations described in the introduction and is consistent with broader EFL research indicating that vocational school students often view English as a required subject rather than one with personal significance.

Students identified as having intrinsic motivation Fara Dilasyah Putri, Fattiya Nazwa S, Chintya Sinaga, Cici Dahlia Sirait, Naysilia Fazira Br. Rambe, and Laily Nurul Rahmadani expressed a genuine interest in English, articulated personal reasons for learning the language, and demonstrated a

willingness to voluntarily participate in classroom activities. For example, Fattiya Nazwa S stated that she finds English useful for her future and feels confident enough to speak in class. Chintya Sinaga described learning English as challenging and interesting, expressing great enthusiasm when mastering new material. In contrast, the 25 students with extrinsic motivation consistently cited grades, school requirements, and social pressure as the main drivers of their participation. The phrase “because of grades” appeared repeatedly in various student responses, reflecting the least autonomous form of external regulation according to Deci and Ryan (2000).

Psychological Needs Based on Self-Determination Theory

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), the quality and sustainability of motivation are fundamentally shaped by the extent to which three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The distribution of students’ dominant psychological needs is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students’ Dominant Psychological Needs Based on SDT

Dominant Psychological Needs	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Autonomy	4	13%
Competence	13	42%
Relatedness	14	45%
Total	31	100%

Source: Research Data, 2026

The findings in Table 2 show that relatedness (45%, n=14) and competence (42%, n=13) are the most dominant psychological needs among 11th-grade students, while autonomy was identified in only 13% of students (n=4). This distribution pattern has important implications for English language teaching practices at this school.

Students’ confidence in their ability to understand and successfully complete tasks in English was identified as a dominant need among 13 students (42%). This finding is highly significant: it means that for the largest group of students, the single strongest factor shaping their participation whether enabling or hindering it is their perception of their own English proficiency. Students such as Nur Alisa Sitorus, Icha Laila Khoyria, Siti Nur Jana, and Alliza Nawindi consistently cited difficulties with pronunciation, speaking in front of classmates, and understanding the material as major barriers. Even students who expressed a particular interest in English, such as Fara Dilasyah Putri and Cici Dahlia Sirait, acknowledged that their limited proficiency prevented them from participating more actively.

The need for students to feel truly connected to and supported by their teachers and classmates was identified as the dominant need among 14 students (45%), making it the largest group. These findings illustrate sharply polarized classroom social dynamics. On one hand, Naysilia Fazira Br. Rambe reported that peer support was a key factor enabling her confidence to speak up in class, while Armadina Sulha and Aftika Herliza described the classroom atmosphere and peer relationships as the main drivers

of their participation. However, the majority of students in this group experienced connectedness in a negative form: Akbar Alfaza Damanik, Kanca Imanuel Saragih, DTM. Fachry Ahmad, Ridho Syahputra, and Amira Zahra explicitly reported that their classmates' laziness or an unproductive classroom atmosphere reduced their own participation.

Autonomy the need to feel that one's learning is self-directed was identified as a dominant need in only 4 students (13%). The four students identified as having autonomy as their dominant need stood out precisely because their ability to articulate preferences, set personal goals, and critically reflect on their learning environment was uncommon in this class. Fattiya Nazwa S explicitly preferred speaking and reading over writing, while Chintya Sinaga critically compared the teaching approaches between her junior high school and vocational high school experiences. Laily Nurul Rahmadani demonstrated a history of independent learning dating back to junior high school and expressed a preference for presentations and hands-on practice.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a detailed picture of the motivational landscape among 11th-grade students at SMKN 2 Kisaran, analyzed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). The data reveal a complex interplay between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and unmet psychological needs, which collectively explain the low level of participation observed in English class activities.

First, the predominance of extrinsic motivation among 81% of students is a substantial finding consistent with previous EFL research. Noels et al. (2000) found that students in foreign language contexts who are primarily motivated by external rewards tend to demonstrate lower communicative competence and less active classroom participation over time. This finding reinforces these concerns: the majority of extrinsically motivated students in this study reported passive classroom behavior and a reluctance to speak unless formally required to do so by grades or the teacher's instructions. As Deci and Ryan (2000) warn, external regulation in which behavior is entirely controlled by external rewards is the least autonomous and least effective form of motivation for long-term learning.

Second, the finding that only 19% of students demonstrated intrinsic motivation is a serious concern from the perspective of language acquisition. As emphasized by Deci and Ryan (2000) and Brophy (2004), intrinsic motivation is the strongest and most enduring driver of learning: intrinsically motivated students engage more deeply with the material, take more communicative risks, and develop stronger language skills. The qualitative responses of intrinsically motivated students in this study such as Fattiya Nazwa S's desire for self-improvement, Chintya Sinaga's excitement about new material, Naysilia Fazira Br. Rambe's goal of learning public speaking in English, and Laily Nurul Rahmadani's consistent self-directed study reflect the kind of goal-oriented and active participation that leads to tangible language development.

Third, the analysis of psychological needs revealed that competence specifically, a perceived lack of competence is the single most critical barrier to participation in this class. The dominant pattern

among students who cited fear of mispronunciation, embarrassment in front of classmates, and a sense of limited ability as their main reasons for not speaking strongly supports the conclusion that competence needs are chronically unmet for the majority of students. This finding is consistent with Deci and Ryan's (2000) argument that when students feel incompetent, they are unlikely to develop intrinsic motivation and are more likely to disengage or rely entirely on external pressure.

Fourth, the findings on contagion highlight a problematic classroom culture in which the social environment functions more as a source of disengagement than as a motivational resource. The finding that some students explicitly lose motivation due to the laziness of their classmates illustrates what Brophy (2004) describes as the social contagion effect, in which the norms of unmotivated peers suppress individual engagement even among students who might otherwise be willing to participate. SDT does not entirely disregard extrinsic motivation; rather, it argues for a process of internalization in which externally imposed reasons for learning can gradually become personally valued. If teachers design learning environments to simultaneously support students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, even students driven by grades can gradually develop more self-determined forms of motivation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' motivation to participate in English class activities at SMKN 2 Kisaran is dominated by extrinsic motivation and is severely limited by unmet psychological needs, particularly competence and relatedness. Of the 31 students surveyed, 25 students (81%) demonstrated extrinsic motivation, participating in English class activities primarily due to external factors such as grades, teachers' expectations, and academic obligations. Only 6 students (19%) demonstrated clear intrinsic motivation, participating out of genuine interest, personal enjoyment, and self-directed goals.

Regarding the fulfillment of psychological needs, competence emerged as the most dominant unmet need (42%, $n=13$), manifesting primarily as anxiety about speaking, fear of making mistakes in front of classmates, and a feeling of overall limited English proficiency. Belonging was identified as the dominant psychological need for 14 students (45%), with the majority experiencing a negative form of belonging, in which an uncondusive classroom atmosphere and unmotivated peers hindered individual participation. Autonomy was the dominant psychological need for 4 students (13%), all of whom demonstrated the capacity to articulate learning preferences, set personal goals, and engage in self-directed learning.

The interaction of these motivational dimensions reveals a coherent pattern: a chronic lack of fulfillment of the needs for competence and relatedness has prevented the internalization of external motivation into a more self-determined form, causing the majority of students to rely on grades and external pressure as the primary drivers of their participation. To address this challenge, English teachers at SMKN 2 Kisaran are encouraged to implement student-centered teaching strategies, incorporating engaging and interactive activities (particularly icebreakers, singing, and collaborative

tasks), providing systematic pronunciation guidance, and working proactively to build a positive, inclusive, and emotionally safe classroom community.

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