

The Correlation Between Students' Motivation and Their Achievement in Studying English at a Junior High School in Samarinda

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Abstract

English plays a pivotal role as a global language and is taught as a compulsory subject in Indonesia. However, students' low enthusiasm toward learning English remains a critical concern, particularly at the junior high school level. Motivation is widely recognized as a major determinant of success in second or foreign language learning. This study aims to investigate the correlation between students' motivation and their English language achievement at a Junior High School in Samarinda. Employing a quantitative correlational method, the study involved 170 ninth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a motivation questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and English achievement scores provided by the school. Validity and reliability tests were conducted prior to data collection, with 11 out of 20 questionnaire items declared valid ($r > 0.300$) and Cronbach's Alpha indicating reliable consistency ($\alpha = 0.701$). Descriptive statistics revealed that the majority of students showed moderate motivation (37.1%) and high average English scores ($M = 91.94$). However, the results of the Spearman rank correlation showed a weak and negative correlation ($r = -0.025$, $p = 0.747$) between students' motivation and English achievement. These findings suggest that although motivation exists, it is not a strong predictor of performance in this context. Other influencing factors such as teaching quality, parental involvement, and prior exposure to English may play a more significant role. This study highlights the need for a multifaceted approach in language teaching, addressing both motivational and environmental aspects to improve learning outcomes.

Keywords: Motivation, English Language Learning, Academic Achievement, Junior High School, Correlational Study

1. Introduction

English is one of the most widely used international languages and holds a crucial role in global communication, education, science, technology, and international collaboration. In Indonesia, English is treated as a foreign language and has been included as a compulsory subject in formal education starting from the elementary level up to higher education. Despite its acknowledged importance, many students show limited enthusiasm in learning English, which raises concerns regarding their motivation and long-term academic achievement. Motivation is a fundamental aspect that significantly affects the success of English language acquisition. According to Schunk et al. (2021), motivation is the internal process that initiates and sustains goal-directed behavior. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), students who are motivated tend to be more engaged, persistent, and receptive to learning. On the contrary, students with low motivation often perceive English as difficult, irrelevant, or burdensome. This condition worsens when teaching strategies are not designed to foster student interest or when external support from teachers and families is insufficient.

D'Souza and Padmanabha (2024) explain that learning a second or foreign language typically involves implicit learning mechanisms, such as the subconscious acquisition of vocabulary and grammar through repeated exposure and usage. However, this process can feel tedious and demotivating if learners lack internal drive or are not supported by engaging instructional methods. Teachers play a critical role in this regard by providing stimulation, encouragement, and learning environments that promote curiosity and autonomy. Moreover, the internalization of motivation is influenced by social relationships. Learners with “amotivation” or a lack of purpose often depend on support from people close to them, particularly family members. Yildirim et al. (2021) found that students who receive emotional and academic support from their parents tend to develop stronger intrinsic motivation and self-perception. Conversely, a lack of support correlates with reduced learning confidence and academic disengagement.

Preliminary observations conducted at a Junior High School in Samarinda indicate a concerning trend: many students are not motivated to learn English for intrinsic reasons. Through interviews with several ninth-grade students, it was discovered that most of them study English only to meet academic requirements or satisfy external expectations, rather than because of genuine interest in the language. Additionally, some teachers were observed to have limited involvement in actively motivating students, which further affects learners' internal drive.

This phenomenon highlights a broader pedagogical issue: the failure to foster autonomous, self-driven motivation among EFL learners. Educational psychology emphasizes that intrinsic motivation—rooted in interest, curiosity, and personal goals—is essential for deep and sustainable learning. Motivation that relies solely on external rewards or pressures is often unstable and insufficient for long-term achievement. Based on these conditions, it is crucial to examine the extent to which students' motivation correlates with their English learning achievement. While motivation is commonly cited as a key predictor of success in second language learning, further empirical evidence is needed, especially within the junior high school context. Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the

correlation between students' motivation and their achievement in studying English at a Junior High School in Samarinda.

2. Literature Review

a) Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation plays a central role in the process of learning, particularly in the context of learning a foreign language such as English. According to Ryan and Deci (2022), motivation is defined as the process that initiates, guides, and sustains goal-directed behavior, driven by internal desires and needs. Motivation is not directly observable but can be interpreted through individuals' actions, including their enthusiasm, effort, and persistence. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory further explains that motivation operates in a hierarchical structure from basic physiological needs to self-actualization (Kenrick et al., 2019). This framework provides a useful perspective in understanding how students move from satisfying fundamental needs toward achieving academic success and personal growth.

Moreover, academic motivation is not only a dispositional trait but also shaped by situational and contextual factors. Pekrun & Marsh (2022) argue that time pressure, classroom climate, and students' perception of learning tasks interact dynamically with personal factors such as interests and attitudes to shape learning behavior. In this regard, learning motivation is a psychological process that stimulates students to achieve academic goals, especially in acquiring English proficiency. Schunk et al. (2022) emphasize that motivated students show increased engagement and are more likely to persist in the face of challenges. Therefore, motivation is considered one of the most crucial predictors of academic achievement.

b) Types of Motivation

There are two primary types of motivation relevant in educational psychology: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

- 1) Intrinsic Motivation is characterized by an internal desire to learn for the sake of learning itself. Learners engage in educational activities because they find them enjoyable or fulfilling. Students who are intrinsically motivated in learning English often demonstrate creativity, persistence, and deep understanding of content (Schunk et al., 2022).
- 2) Extrinsic Motivation, on the other hand, involves engaging in a task due to external influences such as rewards, grades, recognition, or punishment avoidance. Although it can be effective in the short term, excessive reliance on extrinsic motivation may hinder students' internal drive and long-term learning engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Motivation also operates along a continuum from external to internal regulation. For instance, a student may begin learning English due to parental encouragement (external regulation) but eventually internalize the value of mastering the language, leading to identified regulation—a form of more autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In Herzberg's theory (Suwatno & Priansa, 2011), motivation is classified into intrinsic (motivators such as achievement and recognition) and extrinsic (hygiene

factors such as supervision, salary, or school facilities). In school contexts, both types need to be optimized for effective learning outcomes.

c) Factors Influencing Motivation

Repeated reading is a reading instruction way that require reading a text seven times to Motivation is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors that interact in complex ways.

1. Internal Factors include:

- Physiological conditions, such as students' health and stamina.
- Age, where younger learners are more responsive to playful or musical language input (Murphey, 2022).
- Goals, both short-term (e.g., passing a test) and long-term (e.g., studying abroad), which serve as strong motivational drivers (Locke & Latham, 2002).
- Needs, including the desire for achievement and self-fulfillment (Huang, 2024).

2. External Factors include:

- Family Support, particularly parental involvement, which correlates positively with students' learning motivation (Liang et al., 2023).
- Teachers, who play a vital role in shaping classroom engagement through creativity and motivational teaching.
- Peers, whose social influence can foster a sense of belonging and competition (Fawcett & Garton, 2022).
- School and Society, where community expectations and educational resources impact learners' attitudes.
- Facilities, such as access to books, language labs, and digital media, which support motivation and participation.

According to Skehan in Jacob (2020), the four most significant motivators in learning are instructional activities, perceived success, internal interest, and external rewards. Therefore, motivation must be approached holistically, combining individual readiness with supportive external stimuli.

d) English Language Achievement

Achievement in English learning refers to the measurable outcomes of students' language performance. According to Brown (2021), achievement can be assessed through formative and summative tools, including quizzes, projects, presentations, and standardized tests. These assessments reflect not only the knowledge acquired but also the ability to apply language skills in real-life situations. Szumilas & Kolsuta (2023) highlight that task-based and communicative approaches lead to higher learner engagement, which significantly enhances English achievement. Effective instructional strategies that combine feedback, interaction, and motivation contribute to better student performance.

Brown (2021) also outlines the five principles of assessment: practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. A well-designed English assessment

should reflect communicative competencies rather than isolated grammar or vocabulary knowledge. According to McClelland's achievement motivation theory (Nawawi, 2019), the need for achievement is a powerful motivational force that drives students to strive for academic excellence. Students with high achievement needs tend to be more goal-oriented and persistent, even when facing difficulties.

e) English Language Achievement

Learning achievement is influenced by psychological and environmental factors. Usán et al. (2022) found that optimism, self-efficacy, and motivation are major predictors of academic success. Students with confidence and a growth mindset are more likely to engage deeply in learning tasks. Interest, as defined by Hidi and Renninger (2023), serves as a foundation for intrinsic motivation. When students find personal meaning in their learning, they are more likely to invest effort and achieve better results.

Parental education also plays a critical role in shaping academic performance. Higher educational backgrounds correlate with better support at home and higher aspirations for children's academic success (Harmer, 2022). In conclusion, motivation and achievement are interrelated components of successful English language learning. Students who are motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically tend to perform better and show greater persistence. Understanding the types and factors of motivation provides valuable insights for educators in fostering effective learning environments that promote academic excellence.

3. Methods

This study used a quantitative correlational research method and it was implemented in the ninth grade of a Junior High School in Samarinda with a sample of 170 students. This study was conducted during the academic year 2024/2025. The independent variable in this study was students' motivation in learning English, while the dependent variable was their achievement in studying English. The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire, which was adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and consisted of 20 Likert-scale items, including both favorable and unfavorable statements.

Before being distributed to the participants, the instrument was reviewed by an English teacher to ensure clarity and relevance. Then, a validity and reliability test was conducted using a sample of students with similar characteristics to the research participants. The validity was tested using Pearson Product-Moment correlation, and 11 out of 20 items were declared valid with r -values greater than 0.300. The reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha and resulted in a value of 0.701, indicating that the questionnaire was reliable. After collecting the data from the questionnaire, students' scores were processed for analysis. The data analysis technique used was the Pearson Product-Moment correlation to determine the relationship between the two variables. Before the correlation test, a normality test was conducted to fulfill the statistical assumptions. The hypothesis tested in this study was H_0 : "there is no significant correlation between students' motivation and their achievement in studying English," and H_a : "there is a significant correlation between students' motivation and their achievement in studying English." The analysis was carried out on all data using the SPSS Statistics 25.0 program.

4. Result

The research instruments used were a motivation questionnaire and students' English scores obtained from their final semester records. The purpose was to determine the level of students' motivation in learning English and its correlation with their English achievement.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Subjects by Class

Aspect	Class	Frequency	Percent
Class	IX-A	32	18.8%
	IX-B	24	14.1%
	IX-C	27	15.9%
	IX-D	21	12.4%
	IX-E	20	11.8%
	IX-F	23	13.5%
	IX-G	23	13.5%
Total		170	100

Based on table 1 above, it can be concluded that the largest number of research subjects came from class IX-A with a percentage of 18.8% and the lowest number came from class IX-G with a percentage of 11.8%.

Descriptive test is used to describe the data of students of a Junior High School in Samarinda. The empirical mean and hypothetical mean are obtained from the responses of the research sample, namely the motivation scale. The empirical mean and empirical standard deviation are obtained from the results of calculating through the SPSS program.

Table 2. Empirical Mean and Hypothetical Mean

Variable	Empirical Mean	Empirical Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	Hypothetical Standard Deviation	Status
Motivation	37.29	7.273	33	7.3	High

Based on the measurement results through the motivation scale, the empirical mean was 37.29, which was greater than the hypothetical mean of 33 with high status.

Table 3. Categorization of Motivation Scale Scores

Scale	Classification	Frequency	Percent
≥ 48	Very High	24	14.1%
41 – 48	High	23	13.5%
34 – 40	Moderate	63	37.1%
27 – 33	Low	60	35.3%
≤ 27	Very Low	0	0%

Based on the categorization in table 3 above, the results of the student motivation scores can be seen. It is known that the research subjects who have very high motivation are 14.1%, high 13.5%, medium 37.1% and low 35.3%.

Following the data collection, the researcher aimed to identify key statistical measures such as the mean, median, mode, and maximum score. These calculations were carried out using the SPSS software. The descriptions of the finding were described below:

Table 4. English Scores

Valid	170
Missing	0
Mean	91.94
Median	91.50
Mode	88
Std. Deviation	3.860
Variance	14.896
Minimum	84
Maximum	99

The mean score for English is 91.94, while the median is recorded at 91.50. The most frequently occurring score, or mode, is 88. The highest English score achieved by students is 99, and the lowest is 84. The data shows a standard deviation of 3.860 and a variance of 14.896.

Table 5. Test of Normality

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	P	Status
Motivation	0.151	0.000	Abnormal
English Scorers	0.141	0.000	Abnormal

The results of the normality assumption test of data distribution on motivation variable data produced a Z value of 0.151 and a p value of 0.000. The test results based on the rules showed that the distribution of motivation scale items was declared abnormal. The results of the normality assumption test on the English language score data produced a Z value of 0.141 and a p value of 0.000. The test results based on the rules showed that the English language score was declared abnormal.

Because the results of the normality test state that the data is not normal, it will be continued with a nonparametric test, namely the Spearman test. The results of the Spearman test can be seen in the following table:

Table 6. Spearman Test Correlations

			Moti vation	English Scores
Spearman's rho	Motivation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.025
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.747
		N	170	170
English Scores	English Scores	Correlation Coefficient	-.025	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.747	.
		N	170	170

The correlation coefficient is -0.025, with a p-value of 0.747, indicating a very weak and non-significant correlation between students' motivation and their English achievement.

The hypothesis testing shows:

- H_0 : There is no significant correlation between students' motivation and their achievement in studying English.
- H_a (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant correlation between students' motivation and their achievement in studying English.

As a result, there is a weak association between students' learning motivation and their English achievement at a Junior High School in Samarinda. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0), which posits no significant relationship between the two variables, is rejected. Instead, the alternative hypothesis (H_a), indicating a significant correlation between students' motivation and their performance in English, is accepted.

Table 7. The Interpretation Correlation Values

Interval	Intepretation
0.00 – 0.200	Correlation is very weak
0.201 – 0.400	Weak correlation
0.401 – 0.600	The correlation is quite strong
0.601 – 0.800	Strong correlation
0.801 – 1.000	The correlation is very strong

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the correlation index ($r = -0.025$) is in the interval 0.00 - 0.200 which means that the correlation is included in a very weak correlation. In other words, there is a very weak correlation between variable X and variable Y.

5. Discussion

According to the aforementioned data analysis, the correlation between students' motivation and their English achievement at a Junior High School in Samarinda is discussed

based on the research problems posed in this study. The discussion addresses whether students at a Junior High School in Samarinda have high motivation in learning English, and whether there is a significant relationship between students' motivation and their achievement in studying English.

In the first problem, the researcher investigated the level of students' motivation in learning English. The results of the motivation categorization test revealed that the majority of students fell into the moderate category, with a percentage of 37.1%, while a significant number also showed low motivation. This finding indicates that, although students demonstrate some willingness to learn English, their motivation is not yet optimal, and therefore, requires attention and improvement. Motivation is one of the essential factors influencing language learning success (Ryan & Deci, 2022), and moderate levels suggest there is potential for further development through targeted pedagogical support.

In the second research question, the researcher aimed to determine whether there is a significant correlation between students' motivation and their achievement in learning English. Based on the results of the Spearman correlation test, the correlation coefficient was -0.25, indicating a weak and negative correlation. This means that, statistically, motivation is not strongly related to students' English achievement. Despite some students achieving high scores in English, their motivational levels were not necessarily high, suggesting that other variables may contribute more significantly to their academic outcomes. This finding can be explained by considering factors such as external support (e.g., private tutoring, parental involvement), teacher effectiveness, and students' prior exposure to English, all of which may significantly influence achievement regardless of internal motivation. The result also aligns with Pekrun & Marsh (2022), who argued that academic motivation is situational and multifaceted, shaped by both internal dispositions and external environments.

Based on the explanation of the research questions above, it can be concluded that while students' motivation is present at a moderate level, its direct impact on their English achievement is limited in this study. This result is consistent with other research showing that academic performance is a multifactorial outcome, influenced by both psychological factors (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy) and contextual ones (e.g., learning environment, instructional strategies) (Harmer, 2022; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2022). This study has implications for English teachers and educational institutions. It emphasizes the importance of not relying solely on boosting student motivation, but also improving the quality of instruction, ensuring adequate learning facilities, and strengthening home-school collaboration to enhance academic outcomes. It also highlights the need for teachers to identify students with low motivation early and provide appropriate interventions to maintain engagement.

However, this study also has limitations, including the sample scope restricted to a single grade level, time constraints, and reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires, which may not fully capture the complexity of students' motivational states. Therefore, further research is needed using mixed methods approaches, involving larger and more diverse samples, and possibly including experimental or longitudinal designs to better understand how motivation interacts with other factors in shaping language achievement. In summary, although a correlation exists between motivation and English achievement, the relationship is not strong, highlighting the complexity of academic success and the need for comprehensive strategies that integrate both motivational and instructional components in English language education.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. This conclusion is supported by the correlation coefficient result, $r_{xy} = -0.025$. Therefore, a relationship exists between students' motivation and their English learning achievement at a Junior High School in Samarinda, although the strength of this correlation is minimal.

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