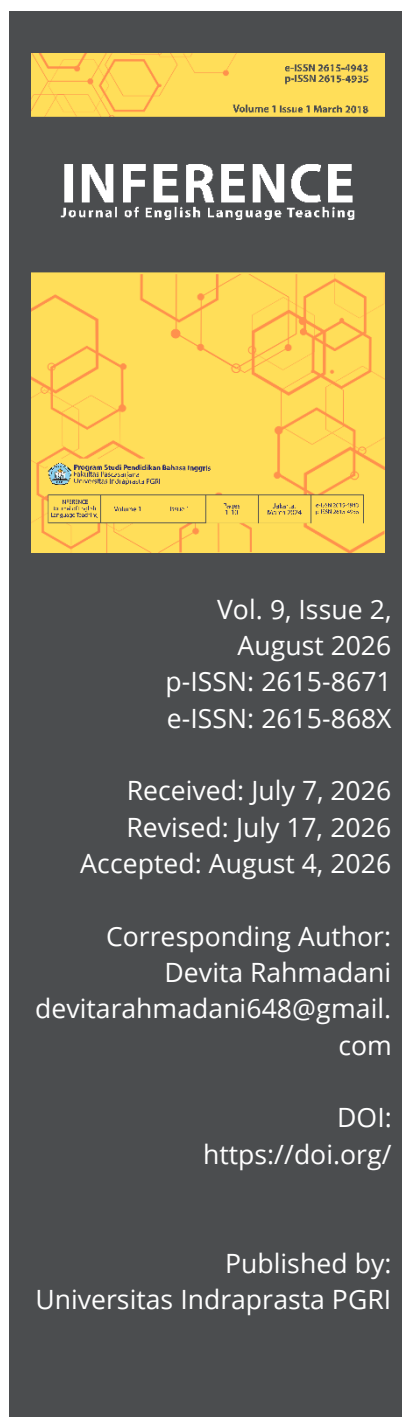




RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION GAP AND LEARNING READINESS IN SPEAKING SKILLS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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Abstract: This research explored the motivation gap and multidimensional learning readiness in speaking tasks among tenth-grade students at MA Nurul Iman and identified the instructional and environmental factors underlying these phenomena. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through triangulation, including non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with fifteen students and the English teacher, and document analysis. The findings revealed a profound motivation gap, as students' abstract future goals (Ideal L2 Self) remained disconnected from classroom engagement. Students also demonstrated behavioral avoidance and cognitive text dependency, preventing spontaneous language production. This communicative paralysis was reinforced by three interconnected factors: a high affective filter (speaking anxiety and fear of mistakes), pedagogical mismatch (the omission of motivational opening routines and warm-up activities), and structural planning failures (the absence of written lesson plans and continuous grade archives). The study concludes that abstract motivation requires systematic pedagogical scaffolding through structured lesson plans and routine warm-up activities.

Keywords: Motivation Gap; Learning Readiness; Speaking Skills; Affective Filter; Case Study.

EKSPLORASI KESENJANGAN MOTIVASI DAN KESIAPAN BELAJAR SISWA DALAM KETERAMPILAN BERBICARA: SUATU STUDI KASUS KUALITATIF



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Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi kesenjangan motivasi dan kesiapan belajar multidimensional dalam tugas berbicara pada siswa kelas X di MA Nurul Iman serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor instruksional dan lingkungan yang mendasari fenomena tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui triangulasi, meliputi observasi kelas nonpartisipan, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan lima belas siswa dan guru bahasa Inggris, serta analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan motivasi yang mendalam, di mana tujuan masa depan siswa yang bersifat abstrak (Ideal L2 Self) tidak selaras dengan keterlibatan mereka dalam pembelajaran di kelas. Siswa juga menunjukkan kecenderungan menghindari partisipasi dan ketergantungan kognitif terhadap teks sehingga tidak mampu menghasilkan ujaran secara spontan. Kondisi tersebut diperkuat oleh tiga faktor yang saling berkaitan, yaitu tingginya affective filter (kecemasan berbicara dan ketakutan melakukan kesalahan), ketidaksesuaian pedagogis (tidak diterapkannya kegiatan pembuka yang memotivasi dan aktivitas pemanasan), serta kelemahan perencanaan pembelajaran (tidak adanya modul ajar tertulis dan arsip nilai yang berkelanjutan). Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa motivasi abstrak memerlukan dukungan pedagogis yang sistematis melalui modul ajar yang terstruktur dan aktivitas pemanasan yang rutin.

Kata kunci: Kesenjangan Motivasi, Kesiapan Belajar; Keterampilan Berbicara; Affective Filter; Studi Kasus..

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are widely recognized as a key indicator of success in mastering English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Mastery of this skill ideally requires integration across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The cognitive domain provides a linguistic framework through mastery of vocabulary and grammar; the affective domain builds the necessary self-confidence and motivation; while the psychomotor domain translates these elements into clear and articulate oral communication.

However, the reality in the classroom often reveals a sharp dissonance. A common phenomenon is the "motivation gap," in which students understand the long-term importance of English for their future careers or higher education, yet remain passive, anxious, and hesitant when asked to engage in spontaneous oral tasks. Preliminary observations and informal interviews with the English teacher at MA Nurul Iman revealed a prominent "motivation gap," where students understand the long-term importance of English for their future careers or higher education, yet remain passive, anxious, and hesitant when asked to engage in spontaneous oral tasks. During the interview, the English teacher stated:

"Anak-anak sebenarnya tahu bahasa Inggris itu penting buat masa depan mereka, tapi pas saya suruh ngomong langsung atau presentasi pendek, mereka cuma nunduk, diam, dan bilang belum siap."

(Students actually know that English is important for their future, but when I ask them to speak up or do a short presentation, they just look down, stay quiet, and say they are not ready).

This gap is closely related to students' low multidimensional learning readiness, which encompasses cognitive readiness (such as baseline language proficiency), affective readiness (including self-confidence and high anxiety), and environmental readiness (such as classroom support and exposure to speaking English). This lack of readiness was explicitly expressed by one of the students during the initial interview:



"Aku tahu bahasa Inggris penting, Kak, tapi pas disuruh ngomong langsung bingung mau ngomong apa, takut salah grammar, dan grogi ditertawakan teman." (I know English is important, but when asked to speak spontaneously, I get confused about what to say, fear making grammatical errors, and feel nervous about being laughed at by my peers).

Rather than viewing English as a functional tool for communication, most students perceive it as a daunting academic burden. Several recent studies have explored these variables separately. For instance, Nurhaliza and Jufri (2022) investigated the persistent challenges of foreign language speaking anxiety among EFL students, while Setiawan and Wedhayati (2023) examined the critical correlation between students' learning readiness and active classroom participation. Additionally, Siregar et al. (2024) highlighted how motivational dynamics directly influence oral communication competencies. Nevertheless, qualitative investigations that synthesize motivational gaps, multidimensional readiness, and institutional structural barriers within a single madrasah classroom ecosystem in rural areas remain extremely rare.

This study is important because it provides a holistic perspective on how students' psychological issues interact directly with teacher administrative management policies in the classroom. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the manifestations of learning readiness and motivational gaps, as well as to identify the underlying instructional and environmental factors among tenth-grade students at MA Nurul Iman.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore a single, limited context in depth. The case study approach was chosen because the researcher sought to capture natural phenomena in their entirety without manipulating the research subjects. This study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Nurul Iman in Sukabumi. Due to the relatively small population size, total sampling was used, involving all fifteen actively enrolled tenth-grade students and one English teacher.

Data collection was carried out sequentially using a triangulation approach to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. First, non-participant classroom observations were conducted to record direct behavioral dynamics, levels of engagement, and interaction patterns during oral performance tasks. The researcher sat in the back row of the classroom, using an observation checklist to record all forms of students' physical gestures.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in Indonesian so that students could express their psychological challenges without language barriers. These interviews were conducted with fifteen students (S1–S15) and one English teacher (T1). Third, an analysis of institutional documents was conducted by evaluating the curriculum syllabus, lesson plans (RPP), attendance logs, and grade records to establish structural verification anchors. The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively by adapting the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which comprises three main stages: data reduction (summarizing and sorting core data), data presentation (organizing a narrative of findings), and drawing or verifying conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manifestations of the Motivation Gap

Data collected through in-depth interviews revealed a psychological contradiction within the students. On the one hand, all students (100%) exhibited a very high level of future-oriented awareness (Ideal L2 Self). They believed that English is essential for finding a job or pursuing higher education. However, this motivation crumbles when they are faced with speaking tasks in class.

This condition manifests as a severe reliance on written text (text dependency). Students refuse to speak unless they have written out the entire sentence in their notebooks. This is reinforced by the following excerpt from an interview with one of the students:

“Sebenarnya saya tahu bahasa Inggris itu penting banget buat cari kerja nanti atau kalau mau kuliah. Tapi kalau disuruh ngomong langsung di depan kelas, saya enggak bias pikiran saya langsung kosong. Jadi saya harus tulis semuanya dulu di buku catatan kata per kata, baru saya baca keras-keras di kelas. Kalau enggak ada teksnya, saya mending diam aja.” (Interview with S4, May 12, 2026).

The quote above indicates that students' long-term motivation is not strong enough to give them the courage to speak spontaneously without the aid of a text.

Manifestations of Learning Readiness

Classroom observations show that students' affective readiness is at a very low level. When the teacher asked students to come to the front to practice oral descriptive texts, the majority of students exhibited behavioral avoidance. Physical gestures observed included bowing their heads deeply, avoiding eye contact with the teacher, pretending to write, and passing the turn back and forth to their seatmates. Students candidly acknowledged this lack of psychological readiness during interview sessions:

“Jantung saya langsung berdebar kencang begitu guru mulai memanggil orang untuk maju ke depan dan ngomong. Saya takut salah ngucapin kata-kata, dan saya takut teman-teman sekelas bakal ngetawain saya kalau saya terbata-bata. Makanya saya sengaja nunduk ke bawah biar enggak dipanggil.” (Interview with S11, May 13, 2026).

This high level of affective anxiety inhibits students' cognitive abilities, causing their motor skills for pronouncing English words to become completely paralyzed.

Instructional and Environmental Factors

Through document analysis and an interview with the English teacher (T1), it was found that the problem of students' low learning readiness stems from the fragility of pedagogical management at the school. The researcher identified three structural shortcomings:

1. Absence of a Written Lesson Plan: When the researcher requested the lesson plan document for the descriptive text material, the teacher admitted to not having prepared a written one. The teaching process proceeded impromptu (on the spot), simply following the textbook pages in a linear fashion.
2. Neglect of Opening Routines: An examination of the class attendance log revealed that the daily attendance column was left blank with no entries. Based on observations, the teacher also proceeded directly to the core material without conducting classroom management, initial motivation, or ice-breaking activities.
3. Absence of Ongoing Grade Records: The school does not have a specific record book that tracks students' speaking grade progress over time.

This oversight was directly confirmed by the teacher (T1) in an interview:

“Memang benar untuk pelajaran teks deskriptif kemarin itu, saya tidak sempat membuat rencana pelaksanaan pembelajaran tertulis karena jadwal mengajar yang sangat padat. Saya langsung pakai buku paket saja di kelas. Aktivitas pembuka seperti pemanasan atau absensi juga sering terlewat karena kami mengejar materi yang sangat banyak di buku paket.” (Interview with T1, May 15, 2026).

The juxtaposition between high L2 Ideal Self scores and low levels of active participation in class empirically confirms the existence of a motivation gap among tenth-grade students at MA Nurul Iman. This finding expands upon Dörnyei's (2011) theory regarding the L2 Motivational Self System. Dörnyei states that future motivation will remain nothing more than an abstract aspiration unless it is supported by positive direct learning experiences in the classroom (L2 Learning Experience). At MA Nurul Iman, students' vision of the future is disrupted because they do not find a safe emotional bridge within the classroom to begin attempting to speak.

Low learning readiness, characterized by looking down and reliance on written texts, is clear evidence of the Affective Filter operating at a very high level. In accordance with Stephen Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, negative emotions such as anxiety, shame, and fear of negative evaluation act as a psychological barrier. This barrier prevents the linguistic knowledge stored in students' brains from being processed into spontaneous oral articulation skills. As a result, students experience communicative paralysis.

Furthermore, the analysis of this case study demonstrates that students' high levels of the Affective Filter do not occur naturally but are the result of inappropriate instructional stimulation from the teacher. Based on Robert Gagné's (1985) theory of Instructional Events, the earliest and most crucial stages of learning are Gaining Attention and Stimulating Recall. When the teacher (T1) skipped the opening routine, ignored attendance, and failed to conduct an icebreaker, the teacher directly created a surge in cognitive load for the students. Students were forced to produce a foreign language without any mental warm-up or prior activation of basic vocabulary. This finding strongly supports previous studies by Nurhaliza and Jufri (2022) as well as Aydin (2013), which argued that the absence of structured pedagogical scaffolding and initial emotional conditioning inside the classroom directly triggers severe levels of foreign language anxiety and communication avoidance among learners.

The absence of a written lesson plan exacerbates this situation because the teaching process loses its scaffolding function. According to David Merrill (2002) effective learning must proceed in stages from demonstration, to application, to integration. Without a lesson plan, the teacher lacks a well-developed learning scenario to reduce students' anxiety. Thus, students' reluctance to speak in class is a direct result of the accumulation of negligence in teachers' instructional planning. This conclusion aligns with and supports the empirical findings of Setiawan and Wedhayati (2023), who demonstrated that institutional structural shortcomings and the lack of a structured teaching scenario directly amplify learning unreadiness, leading to persistent classroom passivity.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study concludes that the motivation gap among tenth-grade students at MA Nurul Iman arises because their ideal future goals are not matched by adaptive pedagogical strategies in the classroom. The main barriers to students' readiness to learn stem from high levels of affective anxiety (affective filter) and low cognitive readiness resulting from an acute reliance on written texts. This psychological paralysis among students is exacerbated by the teachers' negligence in instructional management, which includes the absence of written lesson plans, the neglect of classroom opening routines, and the lack of a continuous record of students' speaking performance scores.

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