
Exploring Teachers' Expectation in Students' English Learning Motivation

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Abstract	This study investigates the influence of teachers' expectations lead to improved performance on students' motivation in learning English. Focusing on English major students at Universitas Klabat, the research employs a qualitative design utilizing thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with four participants. The main question addressed in this study is: What are the students' perspectives of teachers' expectations on students' motivation in learning English in terms of (a) Nature of Teacher Expectations, (b) Communication of Expectations, (c) Impact on Motivation, (d) Support Needed, and (e) Effect of Low Expectations? The study uses a qualitative approach, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with four students. Results show that when teachers set clear and realistic expectations, students tend to be more motivated, putting in extra effort and participating more actively in class. On the other hand, unclear or overly high expectations can lead to stress or a drop in motivation. Interestingly, one student remained driven by personal goals, regardless of teacher expectations, highlighting that not all students respond the same way. Overall, the study suggests that teacher expectations can be a powerful motivator when used effectively and supported with proper feedback and encouragement.		
Keywords	Teacher Expectations, Student Motivation, Pygmalion Effect		



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INTRODUCTION

Motivation is one kind of stimulus from an internal or external factor that moves an individual to take actions towards achieving a goal. Rahardjo and Pertiwi (2020) stated that motivation comes from the root of word, "motives", which are impulses that arise from a person that causes someone to act or do something.¹ Dörnyei (1998) points out that motivation is responsible for determining human behavior by energizing it and giving it

¹ Rahardjo, A., and Pertiwi, S. (2020). Learning Motivation and Students' Achievement in Learning English. *JELITA*, 1(2), 56-64.

directions.² Pujals (1986, as cited in Rahardjo and Pertiwi, 2020) also stated that motivation is a shift of energy of someone which is marked by the emergence of feelings and reactions to achieve their targets. From these statements, motivation can be summarized as a very critical factor in influencing engagement, effort, persistence, and especially in learning. The more motivated a person is to learn, the better their academic performance and overall learning outcomes will be.³ This explains why motivation is key for academic success. In language learning, staying active in class and not giving up are very important for progress.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) stated that teacher expectation is a psychological phenomenon which leads to an increase in performance.⁴ It rises someone's belief which means that when a person is expected by someone to do well or behave in a certain way, he or she often will end up doing or acting that way because of the expectations. According to Panda et al. (2014), teachers' expectation are ideas that if someone is encouraged to believe that they can do something better, they will. In the realm of education, this phenomenon suggests that students may perform better in grades and standardized testing when they have teachers who set positive expectations.⁵ Teacher expectation happens because people tend to take in and live up to the labels other people have given to them, whether they are good or bad. This study aims to investigate the teachers' expectation in the Pygmalion effect in students' motivation in learning English by understanding how the teachers' expectations effect and student motivation interact in the context of learning English.

Teachers' expectation suggests that their students can have a big influence on how motivated those students are and how well they perform. But in the context of learning English, especially at the university level. We still do not fully understand how these

² Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 31, 117-135

³ Wardani, A. D., Gunawan, I., Kusumaningrum, D. E., Benty, D. D. N., Sumarsono, R. B., Nurabadi, A., and Handayani, L. (2020). Student Learning Motivation: A Conceptual Paper. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ECPE 2020)*, 487, 275–278.

⁴ Rosenthal, R., and Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

⁵ Good, T. L. and Brophy, J. E. (1973). *Looking in classrooms* (1st edition). Harper and Row: New York.

expectations are communicated and how students take them in. According to Chang (2011), the core idea is that a teacher's belief in a student's ability affects how they teach. When teachers expect a lot from students and show it by giving them tough tasks, helpful feedback, and steady support, it can boost students' confidence and willingness to try.⁶ On the other hand, if expectations are too vague or unrealistically high, it can stress students out or make them lose interest. Low expectations can be just as damaging, often leading to less support and fewer chances for students to grow.⁷

At Universitas Klabat, English major students have different motivation in learning, driven by internal factors such as personal growth or future career aspirations and external factors such as grades or teacher feedback. Because teacher expectations can play a big role in shaping these external factors and may even influence students' internal factors, it is important to explore how much these expectations actually affect their motivation to learn, which brings up the question of how much teacher expectations are influencing their learning.

This study takes a closer look at how English major students at Universitas Klabat feel their motivation is influenced by what their teachers expect from them. It focuses on their personal experiences, not on numbers or data, and explained into five themes: Nature of Teacher Expectations, Communication of Expectations, Impact on Motivation, Support Needed, and Effect of Low Expectations.⁸ The goal is not to prove any cause and effect, but to better understand how students see the connection between their motivation and their teachers' expectations. In doing so, the study hopes to offer helpful ideas for creating more supportive and encouraging classroom environments.

The Pygmalion Effect comes from an ancient Greek mythology about a famous sculptor known as Pygmalion, who made a gorgeous ivory statue of a woman. The statue

⁶ Chang, J. (2011). A Case Study of the "Pygmalion Effect": Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement. *International Education Studies*, 4(1), 198–201.

⁷ Amini, A.W. (2016). *Pygmalion Effect: Reflexive Strategies to Mitigate Teacher Bias* (Master's Thesis, University of Toronto).

⁸ The Education Hub (2018). *How to develop high expectations teaching*, 1–10. <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/How-to-develop-high-expectations-teaching.pdf>

had a magnificent beauty that made him fell in love with his own creation. Because of his love to the statue, he prayed to the goddess of love, Aphrodite—which was associated with Venus, the ancient Italian goddess of love, to give life to it. The goddess granted his wish and transformed the statue into a real woman named Galatea, and they lived happily ever after.⁹ In the context of education, this famous myth is a phenomenon which happens, when teachers believe genuinely in the capability of their students making their positive expectations as an enhancer in the students' performance and motivation.¹⁰

In the 1970s, American psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson introduced the concept of the Pygmalion Effect to the fields of education and psychology through their study, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, which they conducted in 1968 through an experiment with a group of students.¹¹ They randomly selected 20% of the class and informed their English teacher that these students were the brightest and would achieve great things in the future. In reality, these students were no different from their expectations. However, the teacher began to provide these “smart” students with more encouragement and guidance, consciously and unconsciously. After eight months, a similar test showed that these students had indeed excelled in their intelligence, created a great learning desire, and demonstrated enhanced adaptability and charm compared to their other classmates.¹²

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design, which aims to systematically describe phenomena through the analysis of participants' experiences, behaviors, and perceptions. According to Sugiyono (2017), qualitative research is characterized by its flexible and emergent design, focus on understanding complex realities, and reliance on the researcher as the primary instrument.¹³ The design emphasizes descriptive data

⁹ Bushra, F. T. (2024). *Pygmalion Effect in Tertiary Classrooms: Investigating the Relationship between Teachers' Expectations and Students' English Language Performance in Tertiary Level*. March 2024, 1–109.

¹⁰ Gündüzalp, S., and Boydak Özan, M. (2019). The Power of Expectations in School Management: Pygmalion Effect. *Journal of Education and Future*, 15, 47–62. <https://doi.org/10.30786/jef.412841>

¹¹ Wang, Y., and Lin, L. (2014). Pygmalion Effect on Junior English Teaching. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*. 5(6). <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.5n.6p.18>

¹² Yuan, L. (2019). *The Application of Pygmalion Effect in the Work of University Teachers*. *Icess*, 617–621. <https://doi.org/10.25236/icess.2019.115>

¹³ Sugiyono (2017). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R and D*.

collection through methods like interviews and observations, with continuous analysis throughout the research process.¹⁴ Key features include purposive sampling, non-representative sample sizes, and a focus on generating meaning from participants' perspectives.

This approach aligns with the study's goal of exploring how teacher expectations influence students' motivation in learning English, as it allows for in-depth exploration of individual experiences within the Pygmalion Effect framework.

Research Data Source

The primary data source consisted of semi-structured interviews with four English major students at Universitas Klabat. These participants were selected based on their enrollment in advanced English courses during the study period, ensuring they had recent and relevant experiences with teacher expectations. The secondary data sources included scholarly articles on the Pygmalion Effect, motivation theories, and language learning. The rationale for selecting these students lies in their firsthand exposure to the dynamics of teacher-student interactions in an English-learning context, making them ideal informants for understanding how expectations shape motivation.

Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique where participants are intentionally selected based on their ability to provide rich, relevant insights into the research topic.¹⁵ Four English major students from Universitas Klabat (three males and one female) during the second semester of 2024/2025 academic year were chosen. These participants were selected because they (1) were directly exposed to teacher expectations in English courses, (2) demonstrated varying levels of motivation, and (3) could articulate their experiences in detail. This sampling strategy ensured that the data captured diverse perspectives while maintaining focus on the study's core objective.

Instrument

The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide comprising 9 questions organized into seven themes: (1) Nature of Teacher Expectations with 1 question, (2) Communication of Expectations with 2 questions, (3) Impact on Motivation with 4 questions, (4) Support Needed with 1 question, and (5) Effect of Low Expectations with 1 question. The questions were designed to elicit detailed narratives about students' perceptions of teacher expectations and their motivational outcomes. Amini (2016) stated that the researcher also served as an instrument by adapting follow-up questions during interviews to clarify responses.¹⁶

Research Period

The study is conducted during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year,

¹⁴ Hammarberg, K, Kirkman, M, and Lacey, S De (2016). Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them. *Human reproduction*, 31(3), 498-501.

¹⁵ Etikan, I. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1). 10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

¹⁶ Amini, A.W. (2016). *Pygmalion Effect: Reflexive Strategies to Mitigate Teacher Bias* (Master's Thesis, University of Toronto).

allowing the researcher to observe and analyze the respondents.

Procedure of Data Collection

1. The researcher began by requesting a permission letter from the faculty secretary to gather data.
2. The researcher asked the respondents' willingness to be involved in this study
3. The researcher conducted an interview with some students. The students shared their experiences regarding their teachers' expectations and how it affects their motivation in learning English. The researcher asked permission to record the conversation during interview.
4. The researcher analyzed the interview results in five themes of Pygmalion Effect.
5. Finally, the researcher provided a descriptive analysis of the data and create a conclusion based on the findings in the study

Triangulation

In qualitative research, the reliability of data is very important. The author used data triangulation method for this study. Triangulation refers to the use of two or more data sources, methods, researchers, theoretical perspectives, and approaches to analyze data.¹⁷ The goal of triangulation is to avoid personal bias in analyzing the data.

To ensure the credibility of findings, this study employed data source triangulation by collecting responses from multiple participants (four students) and comparing their perspectives across the five predefined themes derived from the Pygmalion Effect framework. According to Denzin (2009), data source triangulation, which involves collecting data from a variety of sources such as different people, times, or settings; order to provide a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of the phenomenon being studied which allows researchers to cross-check information and identify consistencies or discrepancies across perspectives. This approach allowed the researcher to identify consistent patterns and discrepancies in how teacher expectations influenced motivation.

Data Analysis¹⁸

The data from the interview gathered were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The purpose of qualitative descriptive studies is to provide a thorough summary, in simple terms, of particular events experienced by individuals or groups (Lambert and Lambert, 2012). The data was analyze using Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) theory about the Pygmalion Effect which posits that teachers' high expectations can enhance students' motivation to do better in their work and feel more excited about learning.¹⁹

The interview responses were organized into five themes: (1) Nature of Teacher Expectations, (2) Communication of Expectations, (3) Impact on Motivation, (4) Support

¹⁷ Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., Dicenso, A., Blythe, J., and Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(5), 545-547. <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>

¹⁸ Denzin, N.K. (2009). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134543>

¹⁹ Rosenthal, R., and Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Needed, (5) Effect of Low Expectations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with four English major students at Universitas Klabat, addressing the research question: *What are the students' perspectives of teachers' expectations on students' motivation in learning English?* Thematic analysis was performed across five predefined themes derived from the Pygmalion Effect framework. Results are structured to illustrate how each theme clarifies the relationship between teacher expectations and student motivation, supported by direct participant responses and connections to existing literature.

Interview Result Analysis

Theme 1: Nature of Teacher Expectations

Q1: How would you describe your English teacher's expectations for your performance in class?

AA perceived their teacher's expectations as rigorous, emphasizing advanced language skills and active participation. This clarity fostered a growth mindset, directly linking to the Pygmalion Effect's premise that high standards enhance motivation when perceived as achievable.²⁰ AA's disciplined study habits (*"reviewing vocabulary daily"*) illustrate how clear expectations translate into actionable effort. GB's teacher emphasized practical application of lessons (*"use English in daily life"*), creating relevance that amplified motivation. This aligns with Şahin et al. (2016), who found that contextualized expectations deepen engagement.²¹

YM described a teacher who mandated full English use in class, creating an immersive environment. This rigorous standard reflects Rubie-Davies' (2008) observation that high expectations cultivate intellectual stimulation and accountability. AL acknowledged high expectations but reported no motivational impact, attributing their drive to intrinsic goals. This contrasts with the Pygmalion Effect and instead aligns with self-determination theory, where internal motivation overrides external influences (Dörnyei, 1998).

Theme 2: Communication of Expectations

Q2–Q3: How are expectations communicated, and how do they influence participation?

AA highlighted verbal encouragement and challenging assignments (e.g., advanced presentations). This mirrors Panda et al. (2014), who emphasized that task difficulty and feedback signal belief in student potential, fostering confidence.

²⁰ Rosenthal, R., and Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

²¹ Şahin, M., Seğer, Ş. Y. E., and Erişen, Y. (2016). Perception of 'English' and Motivation in Learning English. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4(9), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i9.1672>

GB experienced expectations through assignments and praise, particularly during speaking exercises. The teacher's tolerance for mistakes while encouraging participation aligns with TNTP's (2018) finding that supportive communication reduces anxiety and promotes risk-taking. YM received direct verbal affirmations (e.g., "Thank you for participating"), which reinforced their efforts. Such interactions reflect Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) cycle, where teacher behavior shapes self-perception. AL cited vague "motivational messages" as the primary communication method, which they deemed ineffective. This underscores TNTP (2018) that stated to caution that unclear expectations fail to translate into actionable goals.

Theme 3: Impact on Motivation

Q4–Q7: How do expectations affect motivation and effort?

AA reported increased discipline (e.g., grammar practice) but occasional anxiety under pressure. This duality reflects Dörnyei's (1998) concept of "optimal challenge," where motivation peaks when goals are demanding yet attainable.²² GB adopted daily English media consumption due to teacher expectations, demonstrating extrinsic motivation. However, stress from overly high goals highlights the need for balance, as noted by Chang (2011). YM felt "more motivated" by high standards but admitted mild anxiety. Their increased effort without habit changes aligns with Rubie-Davies' (2008) finding that task-specific expectations drive targeted improvement. AL remained unaffected by external expectations, relying on intrinsic resolve. This contrasts sharply with the Pygmalion Effect and instead supports self-determination theory.²³

Theme 4: Support Needed

Q8: What kind of support do you need from your teacher to meet their expectations?

AA and GB emphasized clear guidance and resources (e.g., grammar workshops), aligning with Chang's (2011) recommendation for scaffolding to bridge expectations and achievement. YM prioritized feedback to identify weaknesses, aligning to the explanation of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) emphasis on constructive critique. AL uniquely requested "spiritual support" (e.g., prayers), reflecting cultural or personal dimensions of motivation beyond academic.

Theme 5: Effect of Low Expectations

Q10: Imagine your teacher had lower expectations for you. How do you think that would change your attitude toward learning English?

²² Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 31, 117-135

²³ Rehman, A., Bilal, H. A., Sheikh, A., Bibi, N., and Nawaz, A. (2014). The Role of Motivation in Learning English Language for Pakistani Learners. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.4(1). 254-258.

AA, GB, and YM predicted reduced effort, confirming the inverse Pygmalion Effect. As Brophy (1983) noted, low expectations diminish opportunities for growth.

AL asserted that their motivation would remain unchanged, highlighting the resilience of intrinsic goals even in the absence of external standards.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the influence of teacher expectations on the motivation of English major students at Universitas Klabat, guided by the theoretical framework of the Pygmalion Effect. The findings reveal nuanced interactions between teacher expectations and student motivation, aligning with, and occasionally diverging from, existing literature. Below, the results are synthesized into key themes, contextualized within the broader academic discourse, and linked to the research question of the study.

High Expectations as a Catalyst for Motivation

The majority of respondents (AA, GB, YM) emphasized that clear, high expectations from teachers significantly boosted their motivation. AA noted that challenging tasks and verbal encouragement fostered disciplined study habits, such as practicing pronunciation and engaging in extracurricular English activities. Similarly, GB adopted daily practices like consuming English media, driven by the desire to meet teacher standards. These findings align with Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) assertion that high expectations create a self-fulfilling prophecy, wherein students internalize teachers' beliefs and strive to meet them. This mirrors Panda et al.'s (2014) study, where students labeled as "high-potential" improved performance due to increased support and encouragement. The consistency across these cases underscores the Pygmalion Effect's relevance in language learning contexts, where teacher expectations act as a motivational scaffold.²⁴

However, the pressure associated with high expectations also emerged as a double-edged sword. GB and AA reported occasional anxiety when goals felt unattainable, a tension noted by Dörnyei (1998), who warns that unrealistic expectations may demotivate learners. This suggests that while high standards are beneficial, they must be paired with structured support.²⁵

The Role of Feedback and Communication

Effective communication of expectations emerged as critical. Respondents highlighted verbal praise, constructive feedback, and challenging assignments as key methods through which teachers conveyed their beliefs. For AA and YM, feedback that

²⁴ Panda, S., Taylor, J., and Desiré (2014). Great expectations: The Pygmalion Effect. *Summer Ventures in Science and Mathematics*, University of North Carolina

²⁵ TNTP (2018). *The Impact of Teacher Expectations on Students Outcomes*. May, 1–7.

highlighted strengths and areas for improvement enhanced confidence and self-efficacy, reinforcing the Pygmalion cycle. This aligns with Brophy (1983) observation that feedback shapes students' self-perception, directly impacting effort and persistence. However, GB's sensitivity to overly critical feedback reveals a caveat: the tone and delivery of feedback matter. As Chang (2011) notes, supportive communication fosters resilience, whereas harsh critiques may undermine motivation, even among high-expectation students.

Individual Differences and Intrinsic Motivation

AL's responses deviated significantly from the Pygmalion framework. Unlike peers, AL claimed teacher expectations had no impact on their motivation, attributing their drive to intrinsic factors like personal principles. This challenges the universality of the Pygmalion Effect, suggesting that some students may be less susceptible to external expectations due to strong internal motivation. Such cases align with Rehman et al.'s (2014) findings, where intrinsic goals (e.g., career aspirations) independently sustained effort. AL's perspective highlights the interplay between external and internal motivators, implying that the Pygmalion Effect operates within a broader motivational ecosystem.²⁶

The Risks of Low Expectations

All respondents except AL agreed that low expectations would diminish their effort. GB and YM predicted reduced engagement, while AA foresaw minimal effort. This aligns with Rubie-Davies' (2014) findings, where uninspired teaching led to disengagement. However, AL's resilience to low expectations again underscores the role of intrinsic factors. These contrasts suggest that while the Pygmalion Effect is potent, its impact is mediated by individual differences in motivation sources.

Implications for Practice

The findings reinforce the need for differentiated expectations. As YM and GB advised, teachers should tailor standards to students' abilities while maintaining aspirational goals. This aligns with The Education Hub (2018) call for "realistic yet high" benchmarks. Additionally, support mechanisms, such as grammar workshops (AA), personalized feedback (YM), and emotional encouragement (GB), emerged as essential for translating expectations into achievement. These insights echo the study by Ketsman (2012), where resource-rich environments amplified the Pygmalion Effect in language classrooms.²⁷

Limitations and Future Research

The small size of this study, homogeneous sample limits generalizability. AL's

²⁶ Rehman, A., Bilal, H. A., Sheikh, A., Bibi, N., and Nawaz, A. (2014). The Role of Motivation in Learning English Language for Pakistani Learners. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.4(1). 254-258.

²⁷ Ketsman, O. (2012). Expectations in the Foreign Language Classrooms: A Case Study. *The Qualitative Report* 2012, 17(2000), 1–21.

unique response, for instance, may reflect cultural or personal factors not captured here. Future research could explore how variables like intrinsic motivation, cultural background, or prior language exposure moderate the Pygmalion Effect. Mixed-methods approaches, combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures of performance, might further complete the weaknesses of this study.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer the research question: *What are the students' perspectives of teachers' expectations on students' motivation in learning English?* By analyzing interviews with four students, the findings align with the Pygmalion Effect theory,²⁸ which suggests that teacher expectations significantly shape student motivation. Most students reported that clear, high expectations such as challenging tasks, constructive feedback, and verbal encouragement boosted their effort and confidence. For example, students like AA and GB adopted disciplined study habits (e.g., daily vocabulary reviews) and engaged more actively in class, mirroring the theory's idea that positive expectations create a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, unrealistically high expectations occasionally led to anxiety, as seen when GB felt pressured by overly ambitious goals. This duality reflects to study by Dörnyei (1998), where motivation thrives when expectations balance difficulty and achievability.²⁹

Interestingly, individual differences emerged. AL, for instance, relied entirely on personal goals rather than teacher expectations, highlighting that intrinsic motivation can override external influences. This aligns with self-determination theory, where internal drives sustain effort regardless of external factors. In summary, the Pygmalion Effect holds true for most students, but its impact depends on how expectations are communicated and individual traits. Teachers' beliefs can either fuel motivation or unintentionally hinder it, emphasizing the need for thoughtful expectation-setting.

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