

Chapter 1. Introduction

This chapter aims to present a brief description of this study. In this section, there are six sub-headings: the research background in which current study is designed, the reasons for choosing this topic, the research questions of this study, the aim of the study, the contributions of the study and the clarifications of the terms.

1.1 Research Background

Motivation plays an important role in learners' success in acquiring English as a foreign language (EFL). In the Indonesian EFL context, motivation determines students' engagement, persistence, and success in acquiring foreign or second languages (L2) while low motivation students often faced difficulties to achieve success (Assholihy & Rohmah, 2025; Setiyadi, 2006). Weiner (1990), Imron (1996) and León Castañeda et al. (2025) explain that motivation functions as a propelling force which activates people to perform actions, maintain interest and working toward their desired objectives. In educational settings, motivation influences when students begin learning activities, how actively they engage, and how long they continue them before stopping.

However, students' motivation does not decline without cause. One major factor that contributes to motivational problems is the presence of language barriers in EFL learning. Language barriers often disrupt students' comprehension and participation in the classroom and trigger negative emotional responses, such as anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of failure. These emotional reactions can reduce learners' willingness to use English and limit their engagement in learning

activities. Dubey and Biró (2019) found that language barriers are among the most significant problems faced by students in academic settings, particularly when English is used as the medium of instruction. Similarly, Kuzairi (2025); Tenzer and Pudelko (2015) reported that language barriers have a strong emotional impact also affecting their psychological condition creating cyclical barrier to proficiency with hinder learners' language acquisition and reducing communicative participation during learning process.

These emotional reactions are part of broader affective challenges experienced by EFL learners. Affective challenges, particularly emotional and psychological factors such as language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, play a crucial role in shaping learners' motivation to learn a foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Papi & Hiver, 2020). Büyükkarcı and Özsarı (2022) and Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that language performance suffers from anxiety-based emotional responses which make learners less interested in communication activities. The negative feedback learners receive about their pronunciation speech leads to foreign language anxiety according to Büyükkarcı and Özsarı (2022); Gregersen and Horwitz (2002); Horwitz et al. (1986) which results in their avoidance of language use and reduced interest in language exploration. According Dweck (2006); Macnamara and Burgoyne (2023) learners who experience negative events will develop a fixed mindset which causes them to stay away from challenges and lose confidence in their pronunciation abilities.

Fear of negative evaluation is another affective challenge that strongly influences students' emotional experiences in EFL classrooms. Learners often compare their

abilities with those of their peers, and when they perceive themselves as less proficient, where others demonstrate higher, they may feel discouraged, and withdraw from participation (Büyükkarcı & Özsarı, 2022; Young, 1991). Macklem (2015) said that motivation has a big impact on students' confidence in learning which will ultimately influence students' attitudes and behavior to be successful in learning. This fear of embarrassment or judgment can significantly reduce their internal drive to actively participate, hindering their motivation and language learning progress (Büyükkarcı & Özsarı, 2022; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). These affective challenges are particularly evident among low-achieving students. In facing these affective challenges, students may employ various coping strategies to regulate their emotions and sustain engagement in learning, although such strategies are not always effectively developed or understood.

Low-achieving students are generally defined as learners who consistently perform below academic expectations or institutional benchmarks despite having access to the same instructional resources as their peers (Albaili, 1997; De Zoysa et al., 2020). Yusuf (2011) discovered that students with low academic achievement often lack self-efficacy and achievement motivation. Similarly, Uslu and Durak (2024); Zimmerman (2002) argues that students who struggle to regulate their motivation and learning behaviors tend to experience academic underperformance. In the context of EFL learning, low-achieving students frequently experience emotional difficulties related to affective challenges that often triggered by language barriers. Difficulties in English communication can lead to emotional factors such as anxiety,

low self-confidence, and fear of public evaluation, which reduce classroom participation and learning enthusiasm.

According to Krashen (1982), the Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that emotional factors such as anxiety and low self-confidence can block learners from processing language input effectively. Additionally, Dweck (2006) through the Mindset Theory suggests that repeated failure and public embarrassment may lead students to believe that they are incapable of improvement, further hindering their academic progress. Lehr and Harris (1988) found that once students begin believing they have failed because they lack ability, they tend to lose hope for future success. They develop a pattern of academic hopelessness and stop trying. (41), as evidence stated by Dweck (2006) in Macnamara and Burgoyne (2023) the Mindset Theory.

1.2 Reasons of Topic Selections

Although numerous studies have examined motivation and language barriers in EFL learning, fewer studies have focused on affective challenges as lived experiences of low-achieving university students in Indonesia. Öz and Polat (2022) as well as Pysarchyk and Yamshynska (2015) found that, students feel unconfident due to psychological factors (lack of experience and fear of making mistakes), while Ali et al. (2020) showed that international students might face serious academic challenges due to language barriers. However, many previous studies focused on international students, younger learners, or relied on quantitative methods. Therefore, there is a gap in understanding how affective challenges are experienced by local, low-achieving Indonesian EFL university students. This study addresses that gap by exploring the affective challenges experienced by low-achieving

Indonesian EFL university students and how they cope with these challenges in their learning process.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the rationale described in the research background, the research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What affective challenges do low-achieving EFL students experience in their learning process?
2. How do low-achieving EFL students cope with these challenges?

1.4 Aims of the Research

Regarding the research questions formulated in this study, the research objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the types of affective challenges experienced by low-achieving EFL students.
2. To describe the coping strategies used by low-achieving EFL students to overcome these challenges.

1.5 Contributions of the Research

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of English language learning.

1. Theoretically.

The findings of this study are expected to enrich the existing literature by providing a deeper understanding of affective challenges experienced by low-achieving EFL students and the coping strategies they employ. This study offers

qualitative insights into students' emotional experiences, which have been less explored in previous research.

2. Practically

The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for lecturers, students, and future researchers in understanding affective challenges faced by low-achieving EFL learners and the strategies used to cope with these challenges. The results may also inform the development of supportive learning practices that address students' emotional needs in English learning contexts.

1.6 Clarifications of Relevant Terms

In this study, Low-achieving students are generally defined as those who consistently perform below the academic standards expected for their age or grade level (Zyngier, 2007). Their academic difficulties are understood not as a result of intellectual deficits, but as being influenced by affective factors such as anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of negative evaluation (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). This definition is used to contextualize the participants' experiences explored in this study.