Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia:
Teori, Penelitian dan Inovasi
ISSN (Online): 2807-3878
DOI: https://doi.org/10.59818/jpi.v6i1.2542
Vol. 6, No. 1, Januari 2026

STUDENTS' LOW INTEREST IN LEARNING ENGLISH DESPITE THE USE OF ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Destri Filinia Mendrofa[1], Joel Kristiawan Gea[2], Arosama Lase[3], Merihati Buulolo[4], Icha Mulyanti Telaumbanua[5], Yasminar Amaerita Telaumbanua[6]

[1,2,3,4,5,6] English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Nias, Nias
e-mail: destrifiliniamendrofa@gmail.com

RIWAYAT ARTIKEL
Received : 2026-01-02
Revised : 2026-01-14
Accepted : 2026-01-19

KEYWORDS
learning interest; active learning; affective factors; EFL; junior high school

KATA KUNCI
minat belajar; pembelajaran aktif; faktor afektif; Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL); sekolah menengah pertama

ABSTRACT

Low student interest in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains a persistent problem in junior high schools in Indonesia despite the implementation of active learning strategies such as discovery-based learning, collaborative learning, and Project-Based Learning (PjBL). This study aims to analyze the factors that contribute to low student interest in learning English despite the use of active learning strategies. Using a descriptive qualitative design, this study involved 24 seventh-grade students and two English teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Hiliduho. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis with data triangulation. The results showed that 41.7% of students showed low interest in learning, influenced by internal factors such as lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited vocabulary, as well as external factors including inadequate instructional guidance and ineffective group work management. These findings highlight the importance of integrating affective support and instructional scaffolding into active learning strategies to increase students' interest in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

ABSTRAK

Minat siswa yang rendah terhadap Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) tetap menjadi masalah yang persisten di sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia meskipun telah diterapkan strategi pembelajaran aktif seperti pembelajaran berbasis penemuan, pembelajaran kolaboratif, dan Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek (PjBL). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap rendahnya minat siswa dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris meskipun telah menggunakan strategi pembelajaran aktif. Menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif, penelitian ini melibatkan 24 siswa kelas VII dan dua guru Bahasa Inggris di SMP Negeri 1 Hiliduho. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan observasi kelas, serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dengan triangulasi data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 41,7% siswa menunjukkan minat belajar yang rendah, dipengaruhi oleh faktor internal seperti kurangnya kepercayaan diri, rasa takut membuat kesalahan, dan kosakata yang terbatas, serta faktor eksternal termasuk bimbingan instruksional yang tidak memadai dan manajemen kerja kelompok yang tidak efektif. Temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya mengintegrasikan dukungan afektif dan scaffolding instruksional ke dalam strategi pembelajaran aktif untuk meningkatkan minat siswa dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL).

1. Introduction

Student interest plays a central role in shaping engagement and achievement in English learning, particularly in junior high school settings. When students have little interest in the subject, they tend to participate passively, avoid classroom tasks, and make slow progress in developing language skills. Previous studies have shown that low learning interest often leads to weak motivation and minimal classroom involvement (Margawardani et al., 2024; Rosyiddin et al., 2023). In addition, several affective factors, including low confidence, anxiety about making mistakes, and limited self-efficacy, also influence students' willingness to participate in English activities (Sugianto, 2023; Kholdarova, 2025).

To address challenges of reduced engagement, recent educational practice encourages the implementation of active learning approaches. Active learning involves students directly in the learning process through inquiry, collaboration, and reflection, rather than merely receiving information from the teacher. Research has shown that strategies such as inquiry-based instruction, collaborative activities, and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) can improve students' motivation and help them construct meaning independently (Nguyen et al., 2021; Capone, 2022; Patiño et al., 2023). These approaches are also aligned with 21st-century learning goals, which emphasize communication, problem-solving, and teamwork.

Inquiry-based learning encourages students to explore concepts through questioning and investigation, and has shown positive results in improving language skills when students receive adequate scaffolding (Triwiyanti et al., 2023; Novianti, 2021). Collaborative learning creates opportunities for peer support and shared responsibility, and has been found to enhance confidence and foster critical thinking (Azhari & Mertosono, 2025; Shofiah et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Project-Based Learning gives students the opportunity to apply English in real-world contexts, which helps strengthen motivation and participation (Rusimamto et al., 2024; Maryanti et al., 2025).

However, despite evidence supporting these approaches, active learning does not automatically guarantee improvement in students' interest. Several recent studies reported that students continue to show low enthusiasm toward English even though teachers have implemented inquiry, collaboration, and project activities (Margawardani et al., 2024; Noor Emiliasari, 2025). This phenomenon suggests that the success of active learning depends not only on instructional methods, but also on students' affective readiness, clarity of guidance, and the classroom learning environment. Situations commonly found in Indonesian EFL classrooms such as limited vocabulary mastery, fear of making mistakes, and lack of structured support may reduce the effectiveness of active learning strategies.

Based on these observations, this research investigates why active learning strategies have not fully increased students' interest in learning English. The study focuses on identifying internal and external factors that contribute to low learning interest among junior high school students, even though activities involving inquiry, collaboration, and project-based work are regularly applied in the classroom. The results of this research are expected to provide insight that can help teachers design more responsive and supportive learning experiences that meet the needs of diverse learners.

2. Literature Review

Student interest in learning has been widely recognized as an important affective factor that influences students' motivation, participation, and learning achievement, particularly in English as a foreign language contexts. Research shows that students with strong learning interest tend to be more engaged in classroom activities and demonstrate greater willingness to take risks in using the language (Margawardani et al., 2024; Rosyiddin et al., 2023). Conversely, limited confidence, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety may reduce students' participation, even when teaching strategies are designed to be interactive (Sugianto, 2023; Kholdarova, 2025). This suggests that motivation and affective readiness play a crucial role in shaping learning outcomes.

Active learning is frequently recommended as an instructional approach to address low engagement. Inquiry-based learning encourages students to make observations, ask questions, and discover concepts through guided exploration. Studies have shown that students tend to develop deeper understanding when they participate actively in knowledge construction (Triwiyanti et al., 2023; Novianti, 2021). However, the success of inquiry-based activities depends heavily on the provision of clear instructions and appropriate scaffolding, as students may feel uncertain or confused when working independently.

Collaborative learning is another active learning approach commonly used in English classrooms. By working in groups, students are able to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and offer peer support while completing tasks. Research findings highlight

that collaborative learning can develop communication skills, strengthen confidence, and improve critical thinking abilities (Azhari & Mertosono, 2025; Shofiah et al., 2024). Nevertheless, this method may not fully increase learning interest when group roles are imbalanced or when some students become overly dependent on their peers (Amir, 2024; Wulandari et al., 2025). Thus, careful task design and monitoring are essential.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) integrates inquiry and collaboration into long-term assignments that require students to solve real-world problems and produce meaningful outcomes. Studies show that PjBL can boost student motivation and learning outcomes, particularly when students see relevance between the projects and their personal or academic goals (Rusimamto et al., 2024; Maryanti et al., 2025). Though effective for many learners, PjBL may also present challenges when students lack background knowledge or when projects require skills that are beyond their current capability (Mardiah & Desi, 2024).

In summary, while current literature generally supports the benefits of inquiry learning, collaborative activities, and PjBL, the evidence also suggests that these strategies are not universally successful. Relatively few studies have explored contexts where active learning has failed to stimulate student interest, especially in English classrooms where affective barriers persist. Therefore, this study positions itself within the existing research by examining conditions in which active learning does not automatically lead to increased motivation and interest, focusing on the underlying factors that shape students' responses to these instructional strategies.

3. Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to understand why many students still show little interest in learning English even when teachers apply active learning strategies. The research took place at SMP Negeri 1 Hiliduho and involved twenty-four seventh-grade students, along with two English teachers who helped provide additional perspectives. The participants were selected purposively based on teacher suggestions and preliminary questionnaire results that showed different levels of learning interest among students.

To collect the data, the researcher used three main methods: questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire helped identify how students feel about English class, what challenges they face, and how comfortable they are participating in inquiry, group work, and project tasks. Interviews with selected students and teachers were used to explore their experiences more deeply, while observations were carried out to see how students behaved and interacted during lessons. All data were gathered using prepared instruments, including an interview guide, an observation sheet, and a questionnaire form.

The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved organizing the information, giving codes to notable responses, grouping similar ideas, and interpreting the patterns that emerged. To ensure the accuracy of the findings, the researcher compared information across different sources and methods questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The study also followed ethical procedures by gaining formal permission from the school and keeping all participants' identities confidential.

4. Findings

The findings of this study show that students' interest in learning English varies even though active learning strategies such as inquiry, collaboration, and project-based tasks are regularly used in the classroom. Based on the questionnaire results, the average learning interest score was 17.33 out of a maximum score of 24. Although more than half of the students showed a moderate level of interest, a considerable portion (41.7%) still demonstrated low interest in English. The overall score distribution is presented below.

Table 1. Students' Learning Interest Distribution

Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage
14–16	10	41.7%
17–23	14	58.3%

The data suggest that the use of active learning strategies does not automatically lead to high student interest. Many students acknowledged that English is an important subject, but they still struggle to stay focused, actively participate, and enjoy learning activities. Several students admitted that speaking English in class feels uncomfortable because they are afraid of saying the wrong words or being laughed at by classmates. One student shared, *"I want to try, but I'm scared to speak because my friends are better than me"* (S3). Another added, *"Sometimes I don't*

understand what to do, especially when the teacher asks us to find information by ourselves" (S8).

These responses are consistent with students' experiences during discovery-based activities. Several students reported feeling unsure about what to search for or how to complete tasks independently. While discovery learning is designed to promote active exploration, it appears that many students still rely heavily on the teacher for guidance and reassurance. Observations also showed that some learners became passive when instructions were not clearly explained or when learning goals were unclear.

A similar pattern appeared in collaborative learning. Group activities encouraged discussion and peer sharing, and some students actively participated. However, in many cases, the workload was unevenly distributed, with stronger students dominating tasks while others contributed little. One student remarked, *"In groups, I just follow what my friends do,"* which suggests limited engagement among less confident learners.

Project-Based Learning provided opportunities for creative work and real-life application, which some students enjoyed. However, not all students felt confident managing long-term tasks. Projects that required presentations or extended planning tended to overwhelm students with weaker English skills or limited vocabulary, resulting in low interest and reduced participation.

Overall, the findings reveal that internal affective barriers such as low confidence, limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes play a major role in shaping students' motivation. External factors, including insufficient guidance, unclear instructions, and uneven group participation, also contribute to the persistence of low interest, even when active learning methods are applied

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of active learning does not automatically lead to higher student interest in learning English. Although strategies such as inquiry-based learning, collaboration, and Project-Based Learning are widely promoted as effective classroom practices, their success depends heavily on student readiness and classroom conditions. This result is consistent with previous studies showing that affective factors significantly shape how students participate in language learning (Sugianto, 2023; Kholdarova, 2025). Many students in this study lacked confidence, possessed limited vocabulary, and worried about making mistakes issues that prevented them from fully engaging with active tasks.

In the context of inquiry-based learning, the findings support Triwiyanti et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of scaffolding in open-ended activities. Students in this study often felt confused when expected to find information independently, suggesting that discovery tasks may be overwhelming without clear guidance. This indicates that while inquiry learning is meant to encourage curiosity and independence, it requires structured support, particularly for students with weak content knowledge or language skills.

Similarly, collaborative learning, although beneficial in theory, did not fully increase interest for all students. As Amir (2024) notes, group work can fail to promote equal participation when responsibilities are not distributed fairly. Observations in this study confirmed that more confident students tended to take over discussions and task completion, while less confident students remained passive. This imbalance reduces opportunities for meaningful involvement and can reinforce feelings of inferiority among weaker learners.

Project-Based Learning provided opportunities for authentic language use; however, the findings align with Mardiah and Desi (2024), who caution that projects can become demotivating when tasks exceed students' ability levels. Some students struggled with extended assignments and presentations, leading to anxiety rather than increased interest. This suggests that PjBL works best when projects are carefully designed, manageable, and accompanied by regular teacher support.

Taken together, these findings show that active learning does not guarantee increased motivation unless emotional, linguistic, and instructional needs are also addressed. Active learning requires students to take initiative, communicate, and solve problems skills that not all learners possess to the same degree. Therefore, teachers need to balance student-centered approaches with explicit guidance, modeling, vocabulary support, and affective encouragement.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this study implies that teachers should adopt a more adaptive approach to active learning. Rather than assuming that inquiry, collaboration, or project work will automatically engage all students, teachers should first assess student readiness and provide appropriate scaffolding. Confidence-building strategies such as gradual participation, structured roles in group work, and supportive feedback may help students feel more

secure and willing to take part. Curriculum developers and teacher trainers may also consider integrating affective and motivational components into active learning training programs, ensuring that teachers are equipped to support diverse learners.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of active learning strategies specifically inquiry-based learning, collaborative work, and Project-Based Learning has not fully succeeded in increasing students' interest in learning English in the observed junior high school classroom. Although these approaches offer opportunities for student engagement, many learners still demonstrate low interest due to internal and external challenges. Internal factors such as low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited vocabulary reduce students' willingness to participate. External factors, including unclear guidance, uneven group participation, and demanding project tasks, also contribute to disengagement. These findings highlight that active learning is not universally effective and must be supported by guidance and emotional reinforcement to benefit students with diverse readiness levels.

7. Implications

The findings suggest that teachers need to adapt active learning approaches to meet students where they are. Rather than assuming active tasks automatically motivate learners, teachers should provide clear scaffolding, structured instructions, vocabulary support, and opportunities for gradual participation. Teachers may also assign specific roles in group tasks to ensure balanced involvement. For curriculum designers and school administrators, the results indicate the importance of training teachers to incorporate affective support not just activity-based methods into language instruction.

8. Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size and single-school setting, which may not fully represent student experiences in other regions or school contexts. The research also focused on qualitative data, which may reflect subjective perceptions rather than broad generalizations. Furthermore, the study examined only one grade level, which means results may vary across different age groups.

9. Recommendations For Future Research

Future studies may involve multiple schools or larger samples to compare how active learning functions across varied student populations. Research could also examine how specific interventions such as confidence building, vocabulary pre-teaching, or structured roles in group work affect learning interest over time. A mixed-methods approach may offer deeper insights by combining student perceptions with measurable changes in participation and performance.

10. Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to SMP Negeri 1 Hiliduho for granting permission and providing access to conduct this study. Special appreciation is extended to the English teachers and students who willingly participated and shared their valuable experiences throughout the data collection process. Their openness and cooperation greatly contributed to the completion of this research.

The researcher also wishes to acknowledge the support of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Nias. The guidance, encouragement, and academic facilities provided during the research and writing stages were truly invaluable. Although no external funding was received for this project, the dedication and assistance from all parties involved made this work possible.

11. References

Amir, H. S. (2024). Perspectives of teachers to motivate EFL students. *Language Horizon: Journal of Language Studies, 12*(3), 1–12.

Apriliani, A., Rosyiddin, Z., Fiqih, A., Nugraha, H., Hadiapurwa, A., & Komara, D. A. (2023). The effect of interactive PowerPoint media design on students' learning interest. *Journal of Educational Media, 8*(1), 12–24.

Azhari, P., & Mertosono, S. R. (2025). Collaborative learning and its influence on English reading ability: A study of eighth-grade students. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature, 47*(7–8), 1860–1865. https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas

Aziez, F., & Sotlikova, R. (2025). The relationship between teacher–student interaction and students' motivation in junior high school EFL classrooms. *Premise: Journal of English*

Education and Applied Linguistics, 13(2), 227–237.

Capone, R. (2022). Blended learning and student-centered active learning environments: A case study with STEM undergraduate students. *Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education*, 210–236. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42330-022-00195-5

Hasanah, N., Ulfa, M., & Oktaviana, E. (2025). Keterlibatan siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. *DIAJAR: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran, 4*(4), 792–800. https://doi.org/10.54259/diajar.v4i4.5609

Kholdarova, S. (2025). Fostering active learning through interactive methods in English language teaching. *Pubmedia Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, 3*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.47134/jpbi.v3i1.2110

Mandasari, B., Aminatun, D., Ayu, M., & Hamzah, I. (2022). Pendampingan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris melalui active learning bagi siswa MA. *Journal of Empowerment Community, 4*(2), 46–55.

Margawardani, B. Y., Lail, H., & Susanti, M. (2024). An analysis of students' lack of interest in learning English among seventh-grade students. *Go-Science Education Journal, 5*(4). https://doi.org/10.29303/goescienceed.v5i4.481

Mardiah, R., & Desi, D. (2024). Enhancing students' engagement in learning English through non-digital gamification. *English Education Journal, 12*(1), 67–81.

Maryanti, R. D., Kusumaningrum, S. R., & Putra, B. L. (2025). Student responses and learning outcomes in STEM learning based on project-based learning. *Journal of STEM Education, 10*(2), 211–218.

Maulidah, Z., Susetyo, A. M., & Citraningrum, D. M. (2025). Peningkatan minat belajar siswa pada mata pelajaran bahasa Indonesia menggunakan model CTL. *Bahastra Journal, 9*(2), 10207–10213. https://doi.org/10.30743/bahastra.v9i2.9598

Nguyen, K. A., Borrego, M., Finelli, C. J., Demonbrun, M., Crockett, C., Tharayil, S., Shekhar, P., Waters, C., & Rosenberg, R. (2021). Instructor strategies to aid implementation of active learning: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of STEM Education, 7*, 1–18.

Novianti, H., & Rukminingsih. (2024). Investigating EFL learners' engagement in online language learning platforms. *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai, 8*(1), 2845–2860.

Noor Emiliasari, R., Nurhidayah, Y., & Putri, S. J. S. (2025). An exploration of students' engagement in EFL asynchronous classes. *DIAJAR: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran, 4*(4), 792–800.

Patiño, A., Montoya, R. M., & Fernández, M. B. (2023). Active learning and Education 4.0 for complex thinking training. *Smart Learning Environments*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-023-00229-x

Rosyiddin, Z., Apriliani, A., & Nugraha, H. (2023). Application of inquiry learning methods to increase students' learning interest. *Journal of Educational Research, 5*(1), 1–10.

Rusimamto, P. W., Novtiana, R., & Arif, F. (2024). Increasing activity and practical skills through the project-based learning model. *Journal of Vocational Education, 13*, 613–627.

Shofiah, N., Putera, Z. F., & Widiastuti, S. (2024). Collaborative writing learning through inquiry to improve critical thinking skills. *Journal of Language Education, 7*(1), 20–30.

Songidah, Feisal, A., & Sotlikova, R. (2025). The relationship between teacher–student interaction and students' motivation in junior high school EFL classrooms. *Premise: Journal of English Education and Applied Linguistics, 12*(2). https://doi.org/10.24127/pj.v12i2.5820

Sugianto. (2023). English learning interest of junior high school students: A mixed-methods study. *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia, 12*(3), 566–575. https://doi.org/10.23887/jpiundiksha.v12i3.65809

Suharno, Suherdi, D., Gunawan, W., & Info, A. (2024). Implementation of a community of inquiry in teaching English as a foreign language. *EduLearn Journal, 17*(4). https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v17i4.20550

Triwiyanti, I., Maliha, S., & Raudine, R. P. (2023). The implementation of inquiry methods to improve English skills. *Journal of English Education, 3*(2), 992–998.

Wulandari, I. S. (2024). EFL learners' motivation and attitude in English language learning: A qualitative study. *Language Horizon Journal, 12*(3), 1–10.

Wulandari, M. A., Senen, A., Wardani, D. S., & Ruqoyyah, S. (2025). Transforming education through project-based learning (PjBL). *Journal of Educational Innovation, 4*(1), 200–215.

© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike (CC BY SA) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).