# University English Teachers' Challenges in Handling Unmotivated Learners: A Case Study

## Adaninggar Septi Subekti

*Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Yogyakarta. E-mail: adaninggar@staff.ukdw.ac.id*

## ABSTRACT

This exploratory case study investigated three university teachers' views about their students' unmotivation, the combination of amotivation and demotivation, in General English (GE) classes and explored challenges these teachers faced as written in their reflections during six semesters, from the second semester of the 2016/2017 academic year to the first semester of 2019/2020. The study used secondary document analysis with the teachers' reflections analyzed using thematic analysis per the purposes of the study. The study found that teachers generally perceived many of their students to be unmotivated. It could be seen from their passive, reticent, and not attentive behaviours in class. They also reported the widespread phenomenon of absenteeism among learners. These teachers faced complex challenges in dealing with unmotivated students. These challenges were attributed to various intertwining factors within the instruction such as unreliable assessment, fun, yet not very meaningful class activities, and learners' low proficiency level, as well as GE programme's position that seemed to be second-prioritized in learners' respective departments' curriculum. Though this case study may be unique in its context, a certain extent of replication in other contexts is possible. Suggested future studies include a more thorough investigation about the quality of assessment in English for non-English department's students' classes as well as a large-scale survey about absenteeism phenomenon in GE classes among non-English major students.

## 1. Introduction

Motivation is one of the aspects of individual differences affecting learners' ultimate success in the second language (L2) learning (Dornyei, 2005; Subekti, 2018). Derived from a Latin word "*movere*", meaning "to move", motivation is believed to be what moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, as well as to show efforts and persistence in that action (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). Hence, in a language learning context, motivation is seen as the driving force enabling learners to sustain in the language learning process, which can be long and tedious (Dornyei, 2005).

Due to this important role, there have been numerous studies conducted in the field of motivation (e.g.: Moskovsky et al., 2016; Papi, 2010; Subekti, 2017, 2018; Taguchi et al., 2009). However, despite the reiterated benefits of motivation, results of motivational studies seem to be inconclusive. For example, whilst Papi (2010) found that motivation significantly contributed to learners' intended learning efforts, Moskovsky et al.'s (2016) and Subekti's (2018) studies found that motivation had little effect on learners' actual L2 achievement. These findings may suggest that there may be other factors affecting learners' success in L2 learning that need to be further investigated.

In relation with that, and as far as individual difference factors are concerned, demotivation and amotivation are considered on the opposite side of motivation, and these are closely associated with learners' lack of success in L2 learning. Demotivation refers to specific external forces reducing learners' motivation in an ongoing action (Dornyei, 2001). Contrasting motives and de-motives, Dornyei (2001) stated that whilst motives energize action, demotivates de-energize it. Hence, whilst motivation becomes one of determining factors of success in L2 learning, demotivation can be a factor accounting for lack of success in it (Bahramy & Araghi, 2013). Several factors could be attributed to learners' demotivation in learning (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). Bradford (2007), for example, stated that when learners have to learn something not analogous to specific goals they want to achieve, they tend to be demotivated in the learning process. For example, high achieving learners could lose motivation after being able to fulfil their teachers' expectations effortlessly (Gryz, 2017).

In comparison, amotivation is widely believed in the absence of motivation (Lucas et al., 2016). Amotivated learners do not have personal motivation to guide goal-directed behaviours. These learners are typically unable to predict the consequences of their amotivated behaviours and unable to see the reason for learning (Lucas et al., 2016). As they lack initial motive or need to do certain actions (Kim, 2012), they invest minimal effort in learning (Lucas et al., 2016). Hence, amotivation is often thought to be negatively associated with language learning (Kim, 2012). For example, amotivation was found to be associated negatively with learners' self-perceived competence or self-efficacy in the Iranian context (see Fatemi & Vahidnia, 2013). In other words, learners who have low self-perceived competence in L2 tend to be amotivated to learn. Fatemi and Vahidnia (2013) further stated that their amotivated learner participants believed that learning English was too difficult for them, and thus learning it was seen as a waste of time.

Rather than distinguishing demotivation and amotivation, Sakui and Cowie (2012) proposed the term "unmotivation" to refer to similar but a slightly different idea in which both demotivation and amotivation are combined. In Saha's (2017) study in Bangladesh, his teacher participants believed that the community had an impact on his students' unmotivation, especially amotivation. Learners also already perceived learning as a long and tedious task and they were reluctant to undergo the process, the more so if they perceived irrelevance between the course being taught and their immediate needs (Saha, 2017). In general, Saha (2017) found that just like motivation, unmotivation is a complex phenomenon. Whilst learners' amotivation mainly comes from inter-related personal and social factors, demotivation mainly originates from teachers' instruction (Saha, 2017).

One observable unmotivated behaviour is perhaps absenteeism phenomenon among EFL learners (Al-Mekhlafi, 2016). Ozkanal's and Arikan's (2011) study in Turkey found that learners' absenteeism led to inadequate learning and academic failure. Al-Mekhlafi (2016) stated that attendance provides chances for learners to have a better rapport with their teachers and peers. Thus it enhances the atmosphere conducive for learning and increased motivation. By attending regularly, learners also have the opportunity to obtain complete curriculum contents (Nizar & Flah, 2014), which could enhance their competence. On the other hand, learners who often skip classes would further be left behind in their subsequent language performance, leading them to continue skipping classes (Klem & Connell, 2004). These absenteeism

behaviours could be attributed to learners' perceived unimportance and irrelevance of English mastery to their daily life.

EFL instruction across various learning contexts seems to be challenging. Several researchers have reported this finding, for examples, Liu (2015) in Taiwan, Lucas et al. (2016) in the Philippines, Saha (2017) in Bangladesh, Shah et al. (2013) in Saudi Arabia. Shah et al.'s (2013) study, for instance, found that learners, showing little interest in classroom tasks, typically underperformed. These learners resisted class participation and lacked motivation. Among underperforming learners, learners who repeated the levels were reported to pose challenges for teachers as they had no motivation to learn (Shah et al., 2013). These repeater students' perceived incompetence of English due to their failure to pass the course previously may negatively affect their class participation. In Taiwan, learners seemed to be uncomfortable speaking frequently in class and efforts to improve their communicative competence yielded limited success (Liu, 2015). Liu (2015) accounted for this to learners' fear of embarrassment if they make mistakes in speaking English. The limited success of EFL instruction could also be attributed to the quality of the assessment. A study by Munoz et al. (2012) in Colombia found that assessment lacking consistent criteria and arbitrary grading could impair the quality of instruction. Fareh (2010) also mentioned that assessment set by ministries was often remotely related to learners' communicative skills and this discouraged learners from using English actively to communicate.

In line with the limited success of instruction phenomenon in various EFL contexts, EFL instruction in Indonesia has also been considered unsatisfactory by some authors (e.g.: Kirkpatrick, 2007; Sulistiyo, 2016; Yulia, 2013). Kirkpatrick (2007) noted that the unsatisfactory result had been around for many years. It could be seen that despite English is taught for several years in formal schooling, Indonesian English learners still have limited English capability upon completion of courses. Additionally, Sulistiyo (2016) reported English language instruction for the non-English department at his university was not a success story, and the students had limited English performance. Sulistiyo (2016) further mentioned that several factors might come into play accounting for this result, one of which was learners' low motivation in learning English. Reflecting on his own experience, he recounted how unsatisfied he was with his teaching practice as many of his students seemed to be low motivated, and he had limited teaching time in class, which may be the only opportunity for these students to practice their English.

Albeit instruction failure being a massively shared phenomenon in L2 learning across various learning contexts, researchers seem to be more interested in motivation, what motivates learners as well as how to motivate them (Saha, 2017; Syukri & Humaera, 2019). In reality, important as motivation can be in L2 learning, focusing on learners' unmotivation may be as important (Sakui & Cowie, 2012). It is because focusing merely on positive motivation seems to have limitations which are related to institutional systems limiting teachers' ability to influence learners' motivation, some students' negative attitudes and 'no interest' in English, and teacher-student relationships such as teacher-students incompatibility (Sakui & Cowie, 2012). Besides, a more thorough understanding of unmotivation may help promote more effective and successful instruction (Sakui & Cowie, 2012). Besides, research on unmotivation, including both demotivation and unmotivation, is still scarce (Kim, 2012; Saha, 2017). To the best of my knowledge, specific research in the field has not been conducted in

the Indonesian EFL context, which has one of the immense numbers of EFL learners (Kachru & Nelson, 2006), though several studies have found that Indonesian learners have low motivation to learn English (e.g.: Sulistiyo, 2016; Yulia, 2013) accounting for unsatisfactory English instruction in Indonesia. Moreover, in Indonesia where English is mainly used in classroom context, learners' unmotivation could be widespread due to perceived irrelevance of English.

Hence, this study seeks to answer two research questions. First, what are university teachers' views on their students' unmotivation during six semesters from 2016_2 to 2019_1? Second, what are the challenges they face in handling unmotivated EFL learners during the same period?

## 2. Method

The present study employed a qualitative case study using secondary data analysis (Creswell, 2014; Pandey & Pandey, 2015). As a case study intends to investigate a phenomenon in-depth focusing on the uniqueness of the case (Basit, 2010), this study also seeks to present the "how" and "why" of the phenomenon through rich and in-depth descriptions (Gray, 2014) of the participants' experiences. The secondary documents analyzed were eleven reflections written by part-time university teachers teaching General English (GE) courses to non-English department students. These were written in English and typically 700-1000 words in length. These reflections were originally submitted to the Head of the Language Centre of a private university in Indonesia. They were submitted by the end of each semester from the second semester of the 2016/2017 academic year to the first semester of the 2019/2020 academic year. Teachers at this language centre could write in their reflections anything they were willing to share about their instruction during each semester. Though all teachers were encouraged to submit their reflections every semester, it was not mandatory. Thus, it might some teachers did not submit their reflections exactly once every semester.

The Head of the Language Centre, as the gatekeeper (Gray, 2014) and to whom the reflections were originally directed, granted permission to conduct the research. I then asked these participants' consent to participate with a prior explanation about the details of the study to ensure voluntary participation and informed consent (Oliver, 2003). As the teacher reflections were considered secondary data, not explicitly intended for the study (Walliman, 2011), the reflections were first examined in terms of sufficiency to answer the research questions. Next, these reflections were analyzed using thematic analysis in which findings were organized in the forms of reoccurring themes per the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The sequence of data collection and analysis could be seen in Figure 1.
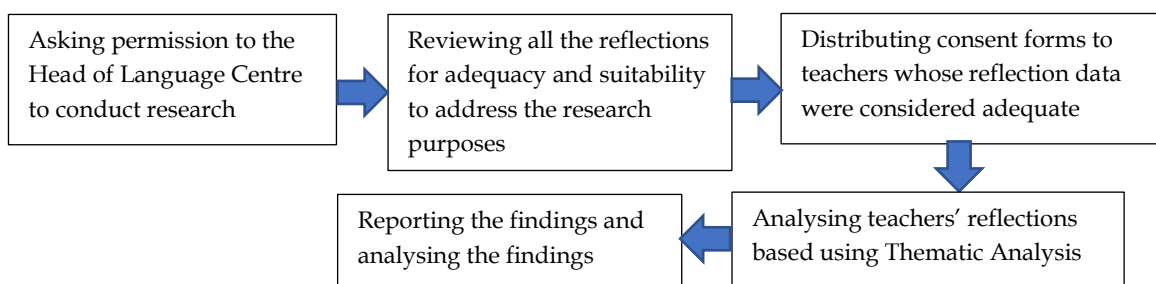


**Figure 1.** The sequence of data collection and analysis

In addition to research design, teacher participants' demographic information could be observed in the following Table 1.

**Table 1.** The participants' demographic information

| Pseudonyms | Highest degree | Teaching experience | Coordinator | Levels taught | Reflections yielded |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tania | Master's | > 10 years | GE Level 1 | Levels 1, 2, 3 | 3 entries |
| Putri | Master's | > 10 years | GE Level 2 | Levels 1, 2, 3 | 3 entries |
| Nayla | Master's | > 10 years | GE Level 3 | Levels 1, 2, 3 | 4 entries |

As observed in Table 1, the three recruited participants were the course coordinators of each level, Tania of Level 1, Putri of Level 2, and Nayla of Level 3. Thus, they were considered knowing the GE instruction contexts better than the other teachers. Though they were coordinators of a certain level, they taught GE classes of various levels. Hence, their reflections may be about the classes they taught regardless of levels.

The GE classes, which these participants taught, were non-credited English classes taken by non-English department students. There were three levels, Levels 1, 2, and 3, each of which was a two-credit course. Students needed to pass Level 3 to be able to take English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class, which was mandatory and credited, in their respective departments. Each GE level was taken in a semester. In each semester, around 1,000 students from various departments took GE classes, allowing each GE class to consist of students from different departments. Each level consisted of sixteen meetings, and the students were required to attend the minimum of twelve meetings (75%) to be eligible for the final test.

For reference-tracing, each of the participant's statement was coded. For example, "(Putri, 2016_2)" indicates that it was Putri's statements in her reflection submitted in the second semester of 2016/2017. The themes for each research question could be observed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Emerging themes based on research questions

| Research question 1 | Learners were generally reticent, passive, and not attentive. |
|---|---|
| | Learners' attendance rate was low. |
| Research question 2 | The lenient and subjective scoring system did not promote successful instruction. |
| | Teachers' frustrated feelings on learners' unmotivated behaviours. |

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1. University teachers' views on their students' unmotivation during six semesters from 2016_2 to 2017_1

*3.1.1. Learners were generally reticent, passive, and not attentive*

It was generally found in reflections across semesters that teachers reported learners' uncooperative behaviours. Putri, for instance, wrote that her students were very passive and did not seem to be willing to participate in class. She reported:

> Some [students] are just too lazy ... too disobedient ... too passive ...They just sit and keep silent ... it's annoying. Whenever I ask them to come in front to present something, it will take years for them to speak, even if ... to say one sentence or two. (Putri, 2016_2)

It is quite interesting that she wrote "it's annoying" in her reflection. It may indicate desperation and disappointment she felt when teaching this class where learners seemed not to care and did not do what she asked despite her efforts. Putri's experience may resemble that of Nayla's. Whilst realizing her students had low proficiency, she wished they had any intention for learning, which as she believed, they did not possess. She stated:

> They were busy with their phones... I did not mind their being slow, but I found it challenging to teach students who did not intend to be in the class. (Nayla, 2018_1)

Nayla also noted that learners did not seem to pay attention to teachers' feedback for improvement. She stated:

> Students do not usually learn a lot from the result of their tests. I gave feedback ... but ... they did not really pay attention. (Nayla, 2017_2)

These learners might not attend to teachers' feedback because of various possible factors. They did not feel the need to do so (see Saha, 2017) and they thought the material was too complicated and did not intend to look it up as the test was over (see Fatemi & Vahidnia, 2013). The similar findings between the present study's and those of Fatemi's and Vahidnia's (2013) in Iran as well as Saha's (2017) in Bangladesh could be attributed to the similar characteristics between Indonesian students and those of Iranian and Bangladeshi ones.

Putri noted learners' low self-efficacy could also trigger unmotivated behaviours such as inadequate time management, thus the bad feeling, and they had no familiar or close friends in GE classes consisting of students from various departments. She wrote:

> They might have difficulties in: time management: schedule, bad habit ... Low motivation ... Some of them have the feeling of being inferior (compared to others) related to their English competence ... they have no friends in the class, and it demotivates them to join the class. (Putri, 2017_2)

Tania also reported terrible time management and minimum efforts. She reported that none of her students came when they were scheduled to have a test. In the next meeting, only one student came, and this student did not make any effort to ask for a possible make-up test. Tania stated:

> On the test day, no one came to the class. [In the next meeting, one student] only said that he overslept. He didn't make any effort to ask for a make-up test so I didn't offer it either. [Another day] I asked him what was the most difficult thing for him in GE class and what do you think his answer was? "I am lazy, Miss. I can do it if I try." (Tania, 2017_2)

The finding on reticent, passive, and not attentive learners may not be new. In the Taiwanese EFL context, Liu (2015) also reported that learners seemed to be reluctant in participating actively in English classes. Putri's reflection in 2017_2 stating that having no familiar classmates and low self-perceived competence was attributed to unmotivated behaviours could be caused by learners' fear of embarrassment if they made mistakes in front of classmates they were not familiar with (Liu, 2015). Regarding this, Fatemi's and Vahidnia's (2013) study in Iran also found that the lower learners' self-efficacy, the lower their level of motivation tended to be. The present study's finding on learners' minimum efforts, seen from Nayla's students' neglecting her feedback and Tania's student not bothering asking for any possible make-up test in 2017_2 indicated unmotivation. Being unmotivated, they thus lacked the driving force enabling them to sustain in the tedious learning process (Dornyei, 2005; Kim, 2012) as they did not see any immediate reason for learning (Lucas et al., 2016).

### 3.1.2. *Learners' attendance rate was low*

The other recurring theme was absenteeism issues. GE students were reported to tend to skip classes despite knowing the consequence of being absent and despite teachers' efforts in reminding them not to do so. Regarding this, Putri seemed to have a strong opinion that GE students, despite knowing the consequence of being absent for more than six meetings (25%), simply did not make GE classes their priority. She reported:

> It IS stated that the tolerance of being absent is six times, at the most, for ANY reason. Otherwise, students may not join the final test. However, some students are just too ignorant ... Each meeting, I always ... reminding them, always, about the rule ... many of them fail to obey. Some students claim that they are busy, some are just too honest saying they overslept. (Putri, 2016_2)

In a similar vein, just like Sulistiyo (2016) reporting his discontent towards his teaching, Tania also reported that despite her continuous efforts in reminding her students repeating the class to attend the class so that they could pass the level, some of these students still "disappeared" from the class, thus failing the class, once again. She said:

> I feel a bit disappointed with some of my students from Level 1. Since most of them are repeaters, I repeatedly reminded them to give their best effort so that they could pass this level. However, some of them ... missing ... from the middle part of the semester. (Tania, 2018_2)

Nayla's reflection a year before may give some kind of explanation to GE students' unmotivation issue. She reflected that GE being non-credited programmes and the students' respective departments' second prioritizing GE programmes after

those of the departments may play a role in affecting the students' unmotivation in joining GE classes. She wrote:

> A lot of them [students] said that they had problems related to their [conflicting] schedule. It might always be a problem as their departments insisted that their classes are more important than GE ... GE has no credit; students often put it aside. They tend to skip the class ... and prioritize other activities ... The challenge then is how to motivate them to keep coming and follow the lesson. (Nayla, 2017_2)

Interestingly, Nayla's last sentence in the excerpt could be interpreted that due to unsupportive circumstances triggering learners' unmotivation, she already "made peace" with the situation and lowered the bar of her class objective from actual L2 learning to students' attendance. Also, students who were willing to attend the class regularly were already considered motivated enough.

Interestingly, Putri shared that many students believed attending regularly meant passing the level, and she acknowledged that might be the case. Regarding this, she commented:

> More than 90% of students did not pass a level because they couldn't join the final test. Why? Because they were absent for more than six times … attendance plays a big role in GE. It supports the students' belief: "as long as I come to the class, I will pass GE" (Putri, 2016_2)

That GE students were often absent from English classes was consistent with the findings in other EFL university contexts (e.g.: Al-Mekhlafi, 2016 in Yaman; Nizar & Flah, 2014; Ozkanal & Arikan, 2011 in Turkey). This similar phenomenon may be due to the similarity of these various learning contexts and characteristics of EFL learners. In the EFL contexts where the use of English was primarily confined to classrooms (Sulistiyo, 2016), with very little or no immediate use in their daily conversations, learners tended to find English learning having little relevance to their needs, thus feeling unmotivated (Saha, 2017). The GE students' departments considering GE classes less critical than their classes may also serve as the social factor of learners' unmotivation in English classes (see Saha, 2017) in which low motivated learners obtained some kind of the departments' supports to skip English classes for attending their department classes, whilst motivated learners could be demotivated in the process as well reducing the potentials for success (Bahramy & Araghi, 2013). Furthermore, students who repeated the levels were believed to be those who tended to be unmotivated and be absent. This finding was similar to that of Shah et al.'s (2013) study in Saudi Arabia in which their teacher participants reported that learners who had failed and repeated the same level posed enormous challenges for teachers as they had no motivation to learn. Just like Nayla stated in 2017_2, these learners needed much attention as well as encouragement (Shah et al., 2013). However, as Putri commented in 2016_2 that due to the high level of absenteeism among learners attendance in class "informally" means passing the level, several high achieving learners may lose their motivation in learning in the process due to lack of challenge (see Gryz, 2017).

### 3.2. Teachers challenges in handling unmotivated EFL learners during six semesters from 2016_2 to 2019_1

*3.2.1.  The lenient and subjective scoring system did not promote successful instruction*

Both Putri and Nayla were adamant that the scoring system in GE programmes was problematic. Putri, for example, believed that she had to pass several GE students even though based on their proficiency, they did not deserve a pass. The teaching environment may play a role in her decisions. Putri even took the liberty to summarise her fellow teachers' comments as to why they also gave lenient grading. She wrote:

> I've got several students who got 55 and, of course, PASSED a level, but they did not deserve it. If they did not deserve to pass a level, why did I make them pass the level? I discussed it with some GE teachers, and I found out that they had the same experience. Some commented: "They are repeaters", "The students are low, but are just too nice", "They are diligent and active", "They may not be fluent, but they remember the dialogue", "The content is not really good and out of the topic, but I appreciate their effort", "Well, they make a little progress, I think" ... Most of the tests are subjective tests, teachers can just "adjust" the scores using any and many considerations. (Putri, 2016_2)

From the excerpt, it was found that the assessments might not be reliable, and teachers could exercise their liberty to pass some students who, based on the proficiency, should not have passed. This practice could lead to classes of mixed ability students in the upper levels creating possible new challenges for teachers teaching the upper levels. This phenomenon was reported by Putri as well. She pointed out:

> ... I have some students with a level 2 competence in a level 3 class ... there are even some moments when the real level 3 students look at their "level 1-competent" classmates with their eyes questioning, "How could you be here? It is [in] Level 3." It's sad but true. I do not really have a solution ... as a teacher, sometimes it's just perplexing and annoying. (Putri, 2016_2)

Nayla reflected that when grading, she faced several dilemmas. In the GE environment, she knew that grading was not merely assessing students' real performances based on the scoring rubrics, which they already had. She even bitterly acknowledged that in GE, grades were "free to give" due to numerous considerations. She reported:

> I need to consider whether or not the decision to fail or pass them will affect their entire academic process. Then, when I see that they are third or fourth-year students, I need to rethink whether failing them will harm them. Grades, as a result, are free to give ... Won't it be better if they just play cards in the class and teachers pass them? They need to pass anyway for their failure will affect the institution's image. (Nayla, 2019_1)

As though in desperation, Nayla even mentioned that if grades and passing were guaranteed as far as students attended the class, then perhaps they could just play cards in class and not learning. Nayla once also questioned herself whether lenient scoring positively affected learners' learning. She wrote:

The question that I ask myself then is whether or not I have given what the students deserve to get ... Did the [lenient] score I give really motivate the students to do better? (Nayla, 2017_2)

She later also reported that one time she implemented stricter grading in her class and she found that the students tended to be more invested in learning. She also acknowledged that giving too lenient grading may make some learners demotivated due to a lack of challenges. She stated:

They [students] could prepare more [for the test]; I saw a great improvement in their effort in trying to discuss their test more seriously, to answer questions more thoroughly, and especially to attend class more regularly ... This experience assured me that students really need to be graded appropriately according to their efforts and performance. There are many students who lose motivation as they get a good score even without the need to try hard. I do not think that this is educating. (Nayla, 2018_1)

The finding on teachers' subjective scoring despite having the already set grading rubrics was quite surprising. Putri's fellow teachers' comments being all in agreement that they graded learners' performance based on various considerations outside language proficiency suggested unreliable assessment in GE classes, which could impair the quality of instruction (Munoz et al., 2012). The factors as to why it happened, however, may be quite complicated. As Nayla mentioned in 2019_1, she faced a dilemma when it came to grading. Her belief as a teacher to have to provide a reliable assessment on which learners could monitor their progress was conflicted with the pragmatic needs of various departments within the university.

On the one hand, GE programmes were intended to level up learners' English proficiency, so they were ready to take mandatory ESP classes in their respective departments. On the other hand, however, for many low-proficiency and unmotivated students, GE seemed to become a "barrier" from graduating on time, and these students' departments tended to have the same standpoint. This finding also resonated with Fareh's (2010) study in Saudi Arabia, revealing that there may be external factors outside teachers and students coming into play affecting instruction quality negatively. The same findings between these two studies could be related to the presumed less importance of English courses in tertiary education curriculum from the perspectives of non-English departments and their students compared to their respective content courses. Interestingly, Nayla commented that she once employed appropriate grading, and her students seemed to be challenged to show more efforts, suggesting that lenient grading GE teachers employed could lead learners to think that they could fulfil their teachers' expectations effortlessly, thus losing motivation (Gryz, 2017).

### 3.2.2. Teachers' frustrated feelings on learners' unmotivated behaviours

The second theme was on the teachers' frustration in handling unmotivated learners. At one point, Tania seemed to believe that making her unmotivated students motivated may not be her responsibility as a teacher alone. It was, as she believed, also the students' responsibility as they were all adult learners who were supposed to know the consequence of their actions. There was a certain degree of disbelief sensed in her

reflection that her adult students did not seem to understand their responsibility as students. She stated:

> Perhaps I [am] just being too sentimental ... a good teacher is someone who can motivate one's students ... But our students are young adults, so to speak. So we shouldn't pay too much attention to how to motivate them, should we? Because they already can think which way is the best for them. (Tania, 2017_2)

In line with Tania's experience, a year after, Nayla even reported her anger and desperation when she found one of her students did plain cheating of copying and pasting an article from the internet for assignment. To her disbelief, this student did not seem to acknowledge his mistake and without any remorse made excuses and justifications instead. She reported:

> "Miss, why did I get 0? I did not plagiarise," a student asked me. I told him that his writing was a copy-pasted writing from a website. I even showed him the link to the site. He argued again, "But Miss, I did not use my phone. I studied from the previous class. I took Level 3 before and we also got a similar test ... It was from my previous work. I got 73 on that test." I was stunned and flooded by a mix of anger, doubt, and desperation.... the effort to teach students about plagiarism seems to be in vain ... I thought that I was ready for everything; in fact, I was not. (Nayla, 2018_2)

Additionally, Nayla also reported that she tried to create a fun learning environment by having fun learning activities such as games. However, at one point, she realized that several learners might like such activities simply because these activities were easy and not tedious. She stated:

> Fun activities ... there is also a drawback. There were times when students said, "Why don't we play *Kahoot* until the end of the session?" ... students love games, but whether or not they learn is unclear ... Unfortunately, instead of trying to look for better solutions while having the 'fun' stuff in the class, I sank deeper [pleasing students with fun activities despite learning] ... (Nayla, 2019_1)

Regarding this theme, as seen from the reflections, the teachers' desperation may be attributed to several factors. First, their adult learners did not seem to feel responsible for their learning despite optimal efforts by the teachers to encourage them. Second, students seemed to underestimate GE classes and their English learning, at times to its core, by committing plagiarism, for example. Finally, when these teachers tried to make learning fun for learners' sake, they seemed to like it not because they could learn in a fun way, but simply because they did not need to work hard whilst attending the GE classes (see also Lucas et al., 2016). Many teachers from various EFL contexts reported their discontent with their teaching (e.g.: Al-Mekhlafi, 2016; Liu, 2015; Lucas et al., 2016; Sulistiyo, 2016), perhaps due to roughly similar findings.

Furthermore, in general, these three participants reported the dynamics of their experiences in teaching GE students. Though GE students might be heterogeneous in terms of motivation levels and proficiencies, reflections on having unmotivated and low achieving learners were very dominant. The teachers' reflections on their complex

experiences in teaching GE classes may offer one confirmation of Kirkpatrick's (2007) standpoint that EFL instruction in Indonesia is generally unsatisfactory as it is not prioritized in the educational institutions and the limited use of the language outside classroom contexts. Low reliability of assessment, whilst could be attributed to teachers' quality, could also be attributed to institutional pressures to teachers to pass the students at some point regardless of their competence because not passing English classes was at times seen as barriers for low achieving learners to graduate on time. This vicious cycle contributed to unsatisfactory instruction. This finding was incredibly unique because there was a mismatch in perceptions of learning goals between the GE programmes and the departments at the university. GE programmes were supposed to boost learners' language proficiency, but for many low achieving learners, the programmes were seen as barriers delaying their graduation. Understandably though sadly, the departments seemed, not to motivate their students to show their best efforts to pass GE, but to urge the GE programmes to employ more lenient policy and assessment.

## 4.   Conclusion

The present study has several contributions. It offers unique and in-depth perspectives of teacher participants on the complexity of their teaching context, especially related to their students' unmotivation. It also reveals that learners' unmotivation may be attributed to various intertwining factors in such a cycle that at times are beyond teachers' immediate control. In general, this study provides a detailed exploration of unmotivation among Indonesian EFL learners, which though intuitively widespread in EFL contexts, was relatively under-researched. Hence, it can give some insights for further studies on unmotivation in the context.

Furthermore, being an exploratory case study, this study entails limitations. This study's findings were unique in its context. It may not be applied to other contexts, though some extents of replications can be possible. Moreover, several future studies could be suggested. First, considering the issue of unreliable assessment, it might be worthwhile to interview teachers, the Director of the Language Centre, and several students to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from various viewpoints. Investigating the extent to which a university-scaled language policy is implemented in English for non-English department's students' classes can also be strategic. Investigating absenteeism and unmotivation phenomena in the Indonesian context in quantitative studies could also be beneficial as the results could yield generalizable data in the context.

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