

THE EFFECT OF TEACHER LANGUAGE STYLE ON STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION AT SMPN 11 MAKASSAR

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Abstract: This study explores how teachers' language styles affect students' comprehension and motivation in English learning at SMPN 11 Makassar. Adopting a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through classroom observations across three meetings and semi-structured interviews with the English teacher and selected students. Analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model of qualitative data analysis (data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing). The findings indicate that the teacher employed a combination of four language styles formal, informal, consultative, and expressive switching among them according to classroom context. The expressive style (characterized by varied intonation, humor, gestures, and positive feedback) was the most frequently observed and contributed significantly to students' engagement, willingness to participate, and comprehension of the material.

Keywords: Teacher language style, comprehension, motivation, EFL classroom

1. INTRODUCTION

English is a compulsory subject at the junior high school level in Indonesia (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). Mastery of English supports students' academic progression and future employability. However, many junior high school learners experience difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension, which can undermine their motivation to engage in English learning.

Teacher verbal communication is a central element of classroom interaction that shapes the learning atmosphere, supports conceptual clarity, and influences students' affective states. At the transitional stage of early adolescence (grade VIII), learners show developing cognitive abilities and sensitivity to social cues, making teacher language choices especially salient.

Although prior studies have examined teacher communication, motivation, and comprehension separately, fewer studies have systematically classified teacher language styles and examined their simultaneous effects on both comprehension and motivation. This study fills this gap by employing Keraf's (2010) typology of language styles together with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Anderson & Krathwohl's revised Bloom's taxonomy (2001) to analyze the interplay between teacher language style, student motivation, and understanding in an EFL classroom at SMPN 11 Makassar.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teacher's Language Style

Keraf (2010) defines style as the manner in which language users convey thoughts and attitudes, reflecting both personality and communicative context. He classifies language style into four types: formal, informal, consultative, and expressive. Formal style uses complete sentence structures and academic vocabulary appropriate for precise explanations. Informal style employs everyday language and humor to build rapport. Consultative style blends formal and informal elements and fosters two-way interaction. Expressive style emphasizes affective features such as intonation and gestures that enhance engagement.

2.2. Motivation: Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) posits that motivation is supported when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Teacher language that provides clear scaffolding, opportunities for student choice, and supportive interpersonal communication can foster these needs and cultivate intrinsic motivation.

2.3. Comprehension: Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revision of Bloom's taxonomy identify 'understanding' as a cognitive process that includes interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining. In EFL contexts, comprehension is facilitated by comprehensible input, contextualized examples, and opportunities to rephrase content in students' own words.

3. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore natural classroom interactions without experimental manipulation. The descriptive approach allowed the researcher to analyze patterns of teacher language use and students' responses. The research was conducted at SMPN 11 Makassar, from July to August 2025. The subjects included one English teacher (purposely selected based on teaching experience and willingness to be observed) and thirty-two grade VIII students. Several students were selected purposely for follow-up interviews based on their participation levels. Data were collected through three classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with the teacher and selected students. Observations focused on intonation, language formality, clarity of delivery, emotional expression, vocabulary choice, interaction patterns, and students' spontaneous responses. Field notes and an observation checklist grounded in Keraf (2010), Deci & Ryan (2000), and Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) were used. Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model (2014): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Observation notes and interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify instances of formal, informal, consultative, and expressive styles and their apparent effects on motivation and comprehension.

4. RESULTS

Observations showed that the teacher predominantly used Indonesian for explanations while providing English examples for modelling pronunciation and sentence structure. The teacher frequently switched styles depending on classroom needs clarifying grammar in a formal register, using informal humour during ice-breakers, employing consultative moves when guiding individual students, and adopting expressive features to regain attention. Four main styles were identified: formal (used in explanations and instructions), informal (used in casual interactions and ice-breakers), consultative (used in one-to-one guidance and questioning), and expressive (used in praise, motivational expressions, and attention-getting). Expressive style accounted for the highest observed frequency due to its use of intonation, gestures, and humour. Students reported that mixed-language instruction (Indonesian explanations with English exemplars) made material more accessible. They expressed higher willingness to participate when the teacher used expressive and informal strategies; however, some students noted occasional rapid speech that required repetition. The teacher's adaptive use of language styles supported comprehension by making input comprehensible and supported motivation by satisfying students' needs for relatedness and competence.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings align with theoretical expectations from Keraf (2010), Deci & Ryan (2000), and Anderson & Krathwohl (2001). The teacher's expressive and consultative moves created an emotionally supportive environment that promoted student engagement (relatedness) and offered scaffolded input that increased students' sense of competence. Using Indonesian to scaffold explanations while modeling English usage provided comprehensible input consistent with Krashen's input hypothesis, facilitating acquisition and immediate understanding. The blend of formal clarity and expressive engagement helped maintain cognitive focus while encouraging participation. Practical implications include recommending that teachers intentionally alternate between clarity-focused formal explanations and engagement-focused expressive practices. Teacher training should emphasize adaptive language use and strategies to slow speech rate when necessary to enhance comprehension.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teacher language style significantly influences students' comprehension and motivation in an EFL classroom. The teacher's flexible use of formal, informal, consultative, and expressive styles especially the frequent use of expressive features created a supportive and effective learning environment. Teachers are advised to combine clear, scaffolded explanations with expressive techniques (intonation, gestures, humour) to foster both understanding and intrinsic motivation. Future research might examine these relationships across larger samples and different grade levels to improve generalizability.

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