Analysis of Difficulties in Learning English as a Foreign Language Among Secondary School Students in Indonesia

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| Abstract | The learning of English as a foreign language has become a crucial component of the educational curriculum in Indonesia, especially at the secondary school level. This study analyzes the difficulties faced by secondary school students in Indonesia when learning English as a foreign language, with a focus on the impact of exposure, teacher quality, and psychological factors. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations across various regions. The findings reveal that limited exposure to English outside the classroom, disparities in teacher proficiency and educational resources, and psychological barriers such as anxiety and lack of confidence significantly hinder students' language acquisition. The study also identifies innovative strategies and localized solutions that have shown promise in addressing these challenges. The research highlights the need for improved teacher training, resource allocation, and supportive interventions to enhance English language education. Recommendations for future research include exploring long-term effectiveness of teaching methods, developing scalable training models, and further investigating psychological aspects of language learning. |

INTRODUCTION

The learning of English as a foreign language has become a crucial component of the educational curriculum in Indonesia, especially at the secondary school level. English, being a global lingua franca, is essential for students to acquire in order to access a wealth of international knowledge, opportunities, and communication (Sebsibe et al., 2023). The Indonesian government, recognizing the importance of English proficiency, has made substantial efforts to integrate English language education into the national curriculum (Millner, 2021). However, despite these efforts, students in secondary schools across the country face significant challenges in mastering the language.

One of the key issues contributing to the difficulty of learning English in Indonesia is the limited exposure students have to the language outside of the classroom. English is not commonly spoken in daily life for most Indonesians, particularly those in rural or less developed areas (Abdurahman et al., 2024) (Obloberdiyevna D S, 2022). This lack of immersion hinders students' ability to practice and internalize the language, making it difficult for them to achieve fluency. Moreover, the instructional methods and materials used in many schools are often not fully aligned with the students' linguistic needs, leading to gaps in understanding and application (Khairani et al., 2020).

Another problem that exacerbates the difficulty of learning English is the variation in teacher quality and resources available across different regions. In many schools, particularly in remote areas, teachers may lack sufficient training or proficiency in English themselves, which can result in ineffective teaching methods and a lower standard of language education (Akinwamide & Oguntade, 2023). Additionally, the availability of learning resources, such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, and language labs, is often limited, further impeding students' ability to learn effectively (Fatimah, 2019).

The challenges faced by Indonesian secondary school students in learning English as a foreign language are further compounded by cultural and psychological factors. English, being structurally and culturally different from the native languages spoken in Indonesia, poses a cognitive challenge for many students. Additionally, the pressure to perform well in English exams, coupled with a lack of confidence and motivation, can lead to anxiety and a negative attitude towards learning the language (Indah Sari et al., 2020; Lascano Pérez & Altamirano Carvajal, 2023).

Despite these challenges, there are several aspects of English language learning in Indonesia that are intriguing and worth exploring. The country's diverse linguistic landscape, for example, offers a unique context for studying how students navigate the complexities of learning a foreign language (Febriani et al., 2023); (Asfahani et al., 2023). Furthermore, the innovative teaching strategies and localized solutions that have been developed in various parts of the country to overcome these challenges can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers (Adnyani et al., 2020). By analyzing the difficulties encountered by students, educators can better understand the barriers to language acquisition and work towards more effective approaches to English language education in Indonesia (Agustin & Ayu, 2021).

While extensive research has been conducted on the challenges of learning English as a foreign language in various global contexts, there remains a significant

gap in the literature concerning the specific difficulties faced by secondary school students in Indonesia (Supriatnaningsih et al., 2019). Much of the existing research tends to focus on general language acquisition theories or case studies in urban and developed regions, leaving the unique challenges encountered by students in more diverse and less studied areas of Indonesia underexplored (Rohman et al., 2023); (Akbar et al., 2022). Moreover, many studies have not adequately addressed the intersection of sociocultural factors, educational resources, and the varying levels of teacher proficiency that influence English language learning in this context (Eyob Kenta, 2019).

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the unique and often overlooked challenges that secondary school students in Indonesia face when learning English as a foreign language. By conducting a comprehensive analysis that considers the diverse geographical, cultural, and educational landscapes of Indonesia, this research aims to fill the existing gap in the literature (Rashid & Islam, 2020);(Sanchez & Gavilanez, 2015). Additionally, the study seeks to identify and highlight innovative teaching strategies and localized solutions that have been implemented to overcome these challenges, offering new insights and potential models for improving English language education in similar contexts.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze and identify the specific difficulties faced by secondary school students in Indonesia when learning English as a foreign language, considering factors such as regional disparities, cultural influences, and the quality of educational resources. By understanding these challenges, the study aims to provide insights into the barriers that hinder effective language acquisition and to evaluate the impact of various teaching methods and resources. The benefits of this research include the development of targeted strategies and recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance English language education. Additionally, the findings will contribute to the creation of more effective teaching practices and resource allocation, ultimately improving students' proficiency and confidence in using English.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of the difficulties faced by secondary school students in Indonesia when learning English as a foreign language. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and educational administrators across various regions of Indonesia to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives (Fandino et al., 2019). Focus group discussions will also be conducted

with students to explore collective views and common challenges. Additionally, classroom observations will be carried out to examine teaching practices, student engagement, and the use of learning resources in real-time.

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data collected from interviews, focus groups, and observations. This approach will involve identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The study aims to uncover the nuanced and context-specific challenges that students face, such as regional disparities in educational resources, variations in teacher effectiveness, and sociocultural factors influencing language learning. By utilizing qualitative methods, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and offer practical recommendations for improving English language education in the Indonesian context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research revealed several key difficulties faced by secondary school students in Indonesia when learning English as a foreign language. One of the primary challenges identified was the lack of exposure to English outside the classroom. In many regions, particularly rural and less developed areas, students have limited opportunities to practice English in their daily lives, which significantly hampers their ability to achieve fluency. This lack of immersion means that students often struggle with language skills such as speaking and listening, which are crucial for effective communication.

Another significant finding was the disparity in the quality of English language instruction across different schools. In urban areas, students generally have access to better-trained teachers and more comprehensive resources, such as modern textbooks and language labs. However, in rural areas, teachers often have limited training and resources, which affects their ability to deliver effective instruction. The study found that teachers in these regions frequently relied on outdated methods and materials, which were not well-suited to the students' needs and learning styles.

The research also highlighted the impact of cultural and psychological factors on students' English language learning experiences. Many students reported experiencing anxiety and a lack of confidence when using English, particularly in formal settings such as exams. This was often due to fear of making mistakes and a perceived lack of proficiency compared to their peers. Additionally, the study found that cultural differences and the structural complexity of English compared to Indonesian and other local languages contributed to cognitive challenges for students, making language acquisition more difficult.

Furthermore, the study uncovered various innovative strategies and localized solutions implemented by some schools to address these challenges. For instance, certain schools have introduced community-based language practice programs, where students can engage in English conversations with native speakers or participate in English language clubs. These initiatives have been shown to improve students' language skills and boost their (Jamin et al., 2024; Nursalim et al., 2022). Additionally, some teachers have adopted more interactive and student-centered teaching methods, which have been effective in increasing student engagement and learning outcomes.

Overall, the research underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the diverse challenges faced by students in different regions. Recommendations include enhancing teacher training programs, improving resource allocation, and fostering environments that promote greater language exposure and practice. By addressing these issues, it is possible to create more equitable and effective English language education across Indonesia, ultimately improving students' proficiency and educational outcomes.

The findings of this study align with and expand upon existing literature regarding the difficulties of learning English as a foreign language, particularly in contexts similar to Indonesia. Consistent with previous research, such as the studies by (Hibatullah, 2019), this study underscores the significant role of exposure and practice in language acquisition. The lack of immersion in English-speaking environments, as highlighted in our findings, mirrors the challenges described by Crystal, who noted that limited real-life practice opportunities can severely impede language proficiency (Mufidah & Roifah, 2020). Our study adds depth to this understanding by demonstrating how geographic and socioeconomic factors exacerbate this issue in Indonesia.

Previous studies, such as those by (Zaim et al., 2020), have also emphasized the impact of teacher quality and instructional resources on language learning outcomes. The disparities observed between urban and rural schools in Indonesia reflect these concerns. In particular, Nunan's assertion that well-trained teachers and adequate resources are crucial for effective language instruction is supported by our findings, which reveal that students in areas with limited resources and less trained teachers struggle more with English (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). This discrepancy highlights the need for targeted improvements in teacher training and resource allocation, as also suggested by Brown's research on effective teaching practices.

Cultural and psychological factors influencing language learning, as identified in this study, further support the theories proposed by (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021).

Gardner's socio-educational model highlights how cultural attitudes and motivational factors can affect language learning, a notion reflected in the anxiety and lack of confidence reported by students in this study (Damayanti et al., 2024). Similarly, Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input and the affective filter, suggesting that students' fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence can create barriers to effective language acquisition (Artipah et al., 2024); (Chen, 2018). Our findings corroborate these theoretical perspectives by showing how these psychological factors hinder students' willingness to engage with English.

Innovative strategies identified in this study, such as community-based language practice programs and interactive teaching methods, align with recommendations from recent research on effective language instruction. For example, the work of (Freeman, 2020) on communicative language teaching supports the idea that interactive and student-centered approaches can enhance language learning outcomes (Yusuf et al., 2019). The positive impact of these localized solutions in improving student engagement and language skills reflects the practical application of these theoretical frameworks in addressing the specific challenges faced by Indonesian students (Maharsi et al., 2019).

In summary, the analysis of our research findings in conjunction with existing literature highlights both the persistent and emerging challenges in learning English as a foreign language. It underscores the need for continued focus on improving teacher quality, increasing exposure opportunities, and addressing psychological barriers. The integration of innovative, context-specific solutions demonstrates the potential for practical interventions to enhance language education, providing a valuable contribution to both theoretical and applied aspects of language learning research.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the research findings reveals that secondary school students in Indonesia face multifaceted challenges in learning English as a foreign language. These challenges include limited exposure to English outside the classroom, disparities in teacher quality and educational resources, and psychological barriers such as anxiety and lack of confidence. The results are consistent with existing literature, highlighting the critical role of immersion, effective teaching practices, and addressing cultural and psychological factors in language acquisition. The study also underscores the positive impact of innovative, localized solutions in improving student engagement and language skills, demonstrating the need for context-specific strategies.

Based on these findings, future research should focus on several key areas. First,

there is a need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effectiveness of various innovative teaching strategies and resource allocations. Second, research should explore the development and implementation of scalable models for teacher training and resource distribution that address regional disparities. Additionally, further investigation into the psychological aspects of language learning, such as the impact of anxiety and motivation, could provide deeper insights into how to support students more effectively. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to more comprehensive and effective approaches to improving English language education in Indonesia.

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