



STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES AT LEARNING ENGLISH IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF PEKALONGAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Learning English has never been as simple as learning our mother tongue. This is due to the differences of structure, spelling, and pronunciation between those two languages. Besides, there is not much exposure of English outside of the classroom which contributes to the limited chances of English learners to listen and use English in their daily lives. Difficulties and challenges are of course anticipated to be found in the students' learning of English processes. So far, there have been a very limited number of studies of difficulties in learning English faced by university students in Indonesian higher education contexts. Indonesian university students majoring in English language are of course having greater opportunities to use this target language in their classroom environment but their real problems of learning are still unknown. This article reports the research findings of the students' difficulties in learning English at the English Language Education Department, Pekalongan University, the Republic of Indonesia. This study employed the tool of self-report questionnaire to collect data provided by 42 respondents. The findings show that the students had difficulties in learning speaking skill, mastering vocabulary, comprehending texts, and in mastering grammar. Astonishingly, English-major students from this university also faced their difficulties in mastering the target language even after spending years of learning English. From such findings, the writers recommended some teaching strategies for the lecturers of English from the studied Department to help students to overcome their difficulties in learning English.

Key words: difficulties, English learning, English Language Education Department, teaching strategies

INTRODUCTION

Learners in many educational settings all over the world are expected to be able to

master an international language like English. However, mastering English is far for being simple. As in Indonesian context,



English is not the mother tongue of Indonesians and the learners of English often face challenges and difficulties in mastering it due to various factors like the differences of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The mastery of English showed by the Indonesian learners has not reached the satisfactory category (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Lie, 2007, Mistar, 2005). Madya (2002) also found that the Indonesian students have been unable to achieve the goal of mastering English skills. Agustina (2013) found that Indonesian students' basic problems of learning English are on Grammar and Vocabulary Mastery. In other countries like Mexico, Arab and Sudan, students also feel that English is a difficult subject to learn. Despagne (2010) found that students in Mexico had the awareness that English is very important to learn even though they felt it hard to master. In Arab, Khan (2011) found that English mastery was also below the expectation and students faced difficulties in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. In Sudan, Abdalla and Mustafa (2015) found that students had problems mastering speaking skills due to several factors like the limited English exposure or environment, under-qualifies teachers, unsuitable teaching materials and methods as well as students' lack of motivation. Pulungan (2021) also found that students who are learning English have low speaking ability as they have very limited time to practice and they experience shyness, nervousness, worry of making mistakes, inability to pronounce English words and lack of vocabulary mastery. Mahrina et al (2023) reveal that students' difficulties in learning English are on translation, vocabulary and motivation.

The previous research above shows that English learners face difficulties and challenges in their learning. Further, considering the previous research findings, the writers are interested in studying the students' difficulties in learning English in English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University. The writers feel that this study is important to conduct as it will reveal important information related to students' difficulties in mastering English, which can serve as the feedback for the lecturers of English from the English Language Education Department to consider adjusting their effective teaching strategies to minimize their students' difficulties in learning English.

METHODOLOGY

The current research is in the form of descriptive qualitative research in which the writers used self-report questionnaire to



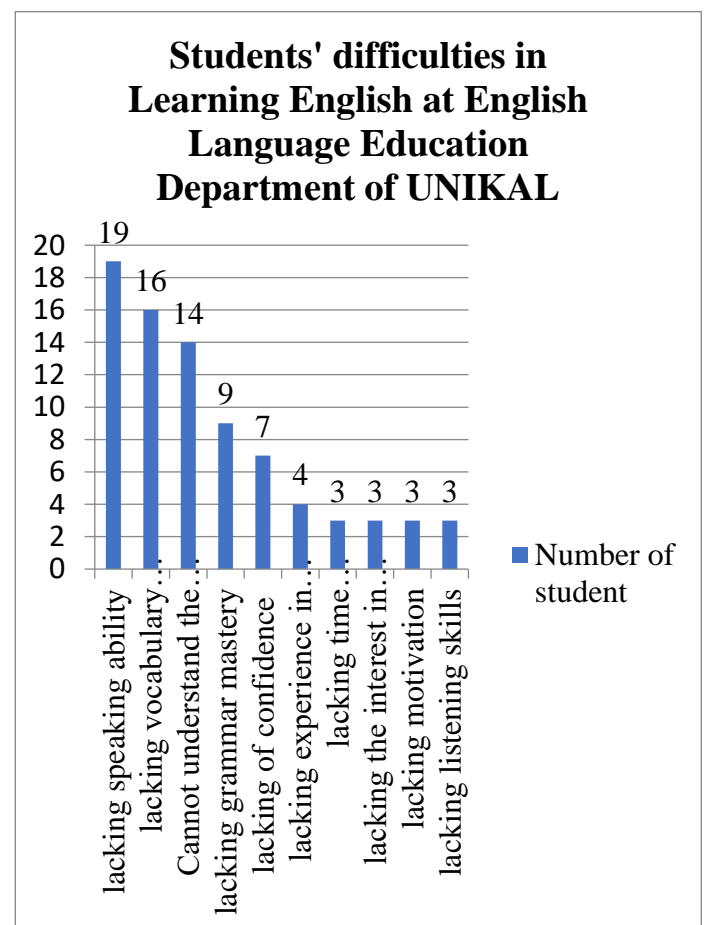
collect the data. The respondents were the students of English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University Indonesia in the academic year 2023/ 2024. The number of respondents was 42 students. The data was taken in the odd Semester and the students were required to answer open ended questions on their difficulties in learning English. In that case, the students were given the freedom to provide their answers with their own words. Once the students submitted their answers, the data were analysed to reveal the main difficulties faced by the students. The findings were presented in diagrams and description.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research conducted by the writers, it was found that there were various difficulties felt by the students majoring in English Language Education. As analysed from the students' answers in the questionnaire, there were 23 types of difficulties mentioned by the respondents in English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University. Those difficulties cover the difficulties presented by the target language (English) to the difficulties coming from themselves as language learners. Among the main difficulties related to the language are found in speaking, mastering

vocabulary, developing text comprehension and mastering grammar. Other difficulties relate to the learners' inability to manage time, to concentrate, to complete the task and to practice English outside the class. The research findings also cover the psychological factors such as the lack of motivation, the lack of confidence, the lack of interests, and the fear of making mistakes. There are also some other problems which are felt by the learners. The following tables show these difficulties:

Table 1: The students' main difficulties in learning English





It can be seen from Table 1 that the main difficulties in learning English are on mastering speaking skill (19 students or 19.79%), mastering vocabulary (16 students or 16.67%), understanding materials or text comprehension (14 students or 14.58%), and mastering grammar (9 students or 9.38%). In addition, the students felt the difficulties in learning English due to the lack of confidence (7.29%), the lack of experience (4.12%), the lack of time management (3.13%), the lack of interest (3.13%), the lack of motivation (3.13%) and the lack of listening skill (3.13%).

Further, the current research reveals some other difficulties as presented in the next table (Table 2). These difficulties however are only reported by one or two students only. Thus it can be said that the difficulties on Table 2 were the minor difficulties. Even so, the writers believe these difficulties have to be reported so that both teachers and learners of English have a complete picture of the difficulties faced by the English learners in Indonesia, and in English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University particularly.

Table 2. The students' minor difficulties in learning English

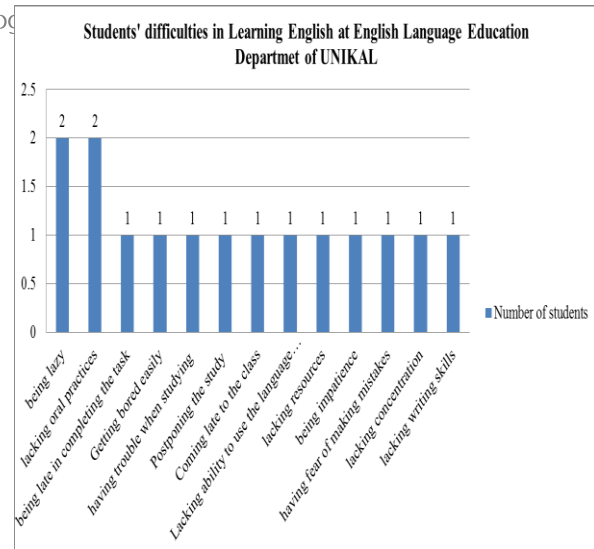


Table 2 above clearly shows that the students reported various other problems in learning English like being lazy, lacking oral or speaking practices, up to lacking writing skills. Mostly the problems are also related to psychological factors. Even only one or two students reporting these difficulties, this research shows that these problems and difficulties exist and call for our attention.

Overall, the study has revealed the difficulties in learning English faced by students majoring in English language education. There are a wide range of difficulties as reported by the students and the findings to some extent strengthen the previous research findings. This current research found that speaking becomes the main difficulties and this finding agrees to

the finding of the research done by Pulungan (2021) and Abdalla and Mustafa (2015).



Promoting Learner Autonomy in a Technology-Enhanced Language Learning Environment

Vocabulary, comprehension and grammar monologue, dialogues, discussion, role play also become part of the main challenges and difficulties and this finding is similar to the findings of a research conducted by Khan (2011) and Mahrina et al (2023).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that in Indonesia even when students take the major of English Language Education, they still face difficulties in learning English. There are various difficulties reported by the students. With these findings, the writers suggest the lecturers in English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University and English teachers or lecturers in other higher education institutions to pay attention to the students' difficulties and problems in learning English. Some English Language teaching strategies are recommended for the lecturers of English in this university and other higher education institutions to consider using in their teaching to help students over their difficulties in learning English. Firstly, for difficulties in learning speaking, it is recommended that more practices are offered to the learners

both inside and outside of the classrooms such as through asking students to present a

and so on. Training students to speak confidently and fluently is also necessary. Making sure students check the correct pronunciation through google translate or dictionary is another important practice. Secondly, for difficulties in mastering vocabulary, the lecturers can provide the practices on memorizing and using the difficult words in the sentences. Thirdly, for mastering grammar, it is suggested that students are given more practices on using grammar in both spoken and written exercises. More practices in using various tenses both in speaking and writing may help students familiarize themselves with the grammar of English which further can help them improve their grammar mastery.

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