

Difficulties in Comprehending Effective English Learning for Undergraduate Management Students

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, English is a foreign language that is taught from elementary school to college. In practice, both teachers and students still face many difficulties during the learning process. Various responses can be found in class related to these difficulties, especially in student attitudes during the learning process, student learning outcomes, and participation in carrying out group activities. This study aims to describe the difficulties faced by undergraduate students of Management at Satya Dharma College of Economics in understanding English learning and the factors that cause them. This study uses a qualitative approach with questionnaires, observation, and documentation instruments. Data analysis was carried out in three ways, namely data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions and verification. The results of the study showed that the research subjects experienced various difficulties in learning English. This happened due to different levels of English language proficiency.

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INTRODUCTION

Mastering a foreign language, in this case English, which is an international language, is something that needs to be developed in this modern era. With the establishment of Indonesia as a member of the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community), it is fitting that the nation's generation is increasingly advanced in terms of science and technology supported by good and correct mastery of the language of instruction. English is an important international language that can connect society with the world in various aspects including education. This has been shown by government regulations that make English a compulsory subject for students to study from elementary school to high school. Even at the higher education level, all study programs must provide English courses for 1 or 2 semesters even though the discipline taken is not related to English. This shows how important it is to master a foreign language, especially English, as one of the introductions to someone's academic success or to support a career in the world of work (Sinaga, 2010)

Communication can be realized if someone masters four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This also applies to the English learning process which is called listening and reading as receptive skills while reading and speaking as productive skills. People often say that only by mastering speaking, a person can be said to be proficient in the language. This is not entirely true. Written language is also important to master. For example, when we open the Internet and want to respond to an email, of course it requires careful reading skills along with the ability to write with the correct language structure so that we can provide an appropriate answer.

In addition, there are three language elements that play an important role in supporting the four skills, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (language structure). To achieve optimal English language skills, professional language instructors are

needed to produce quality students. In addition, mastery of materials and practice must be given in balanced portions. However, realizing an ideal language class is not easy. In addition to having sufficient mastery of the material, a language teacher should know the level of language mastery of each student. If all conditions are equalized, it will be difficult to achieve the expected learning objectives. Because basically each student has different characteristics including learning techniques and the portion of absorption of learning materials such as in the concept of multiple intelligence (Stanford, 2003).

In the process of learning English, students certainly have experienced obstacles in learning. These obstacles can cause less than optimal student learning outcomes. This can happen to anyone, including students taking English and non-English study programs. Hasan (2000) stated that the difficulty faced by many English as a foreign language students is the lack of understanding of English pronunciation expressed at normal speed through listening materials. In reading skills, Rahmawati (2011) argues that the problem faced in understanding reading texts lies in the lack of knowledge about reading materials and ignorance of how to connect ideas between one sentence and another. Writing skills are difficult because these activities require a complex and systematic thought process, but they need to be mastered by English students. According to Rukmini (2011), in communication, writing skills are also important to master. The benefits will be felt when the written language is published and read by many people. So the quality of writing must always be improved. For speaking skills, Megawati & Mandarani (2016) in their research found that the difficulty often faced by students when speaking English lies in the lack of English vocabulary.

From the problems faced, of course, it encourages a teacher or language instructor to pay more attention to the condition of his students followed by readiness in implementing learning. Without thorough preparation, learning activities will not run effectively. These preparations can be seen from the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), materials, media, and assessments. By understanding the problems faced by students, an educator can reflect on themselves to find out how effective the implementation of the learning process in the classroom is and to improve the quality of students.

English learning problems are not only found at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, but will continue to the college level. Several studies have proven this in each English language skill (Kharma, 1981; Megawati & Mandarani, 2016; Lituanas et al. (1999); Hasan, 2016). This also applies to students who are not from the English department. Students majoring in S1 Management at STIE Satya Dharma are students who do not major in English but English courses are still available in semesters one and two. Each student certainly has an interest in different fields of science. So not all of them like English and choose English majors. This cannot be separated from the problems that will arise during the learning process. To meet the graduation standards and credits as students at a college, they are required to take English courses and even have to pass the TOEFL test with a fairly high score. For students who do not have a strong background in language knowledge obtained from elementary school to high school will feel very burdened by this. So that as students who do not study English in their field (ESP learners) they have the potential to produce various responses in the learning process (Zuomin, 1995).

Based on the concept presented in the introduction, it can be concluded that there are many difficulties faced by students when learning English, especially as a foreign language because the language is used in certain conditions and people, not in daily activities. Therefore, in this study, the researcher is interested in exploring more deeply what obstacles and difficulties are experienced by students in the four language skills, especially in learning English who are not from English majors or commonly called ESP learners. This is considered necessary to be done as information material that can later be used to improve the concept of effective English learning for students who are not from English majors (*ESP learners*).

METHOD

Based on the purpose of this study, which is to determine the difficulties of students in learning English, this type of research is qualitative research that produces written or spoken words that can be observed. The study was conducted on odd semester students of the 2024-2025 academic year in September 2024-January 2025. The subjects of the study were students majoring in S1 Management at the Satya Dharma College of Economics who took English courses in semester 1. Where previously they had received English lessons at the High School level. The number of research subjects was 65 students.

Data collection was carried out using the questionnaire distribution method, observation and documentation. According to Suharsimi Arikunto (2013:194) a questionnaire is a number of written questions used to obtain information from respondents in the sense of reports about their personality, or things they know. In this study, questionnaires were distributed to research subjects to determine students' responses to their experiences learning English for 1 semester including the difficulties experienced in the learning process. In addition, researchers also collected data through video documentation at the end of semester activities where students were asked to describe objects in the form of video recordings for approximately 7 minutes. The recording results were then observed, especially in terms of the appearance of students' attitudes and language delivery. Observations took place during one semester's learning activities to observe students who were classified as active, less active, and passive.

Students can be categorized as active when in the learning process they show their participation in answering questions, asking questions, and often expressing opinions during group activities. For those who are less active, it can be seen from the intensity of interaction that is rarely established between the student and the lecturer. They are only active when asked or appointed by the lecturer to express their opinions. The last category is passive where students almost never contribute verbally to the lecturer, and have low quiz or midterm exam scores (below 60 score).

Triangulation techniques are used to check the validity of research data. As stated by Sugiyono (2006: 241) that when a researcher uses triangulation, the researcher collects data while checking whether the data obtained is credible or not with various data collection techniques and reference sources.

In this study, the data analysis used consists of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification.

Data Reduction

The researcher summarizes the data collection process during the learning activities by looking for important points that are the focus of the research data. In this case, it is to classify answers related to the difficulties faced during learning according to the level of student activity.

Data presentation

The researcher presents the results of the research data that have been summarized by describing in detail and clearly the things related to the obstacles of students in the English learning process.

Drawing Conclusions

The conclusions presented for the first time are temporary. This can change when there is a lack of supporting references to strengthen the results of data collection. When there are valid and consistent supporting references, the researcher can draw credible conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the results obtained through the questionnaire, all students have various opinions about the most difficult skills to master. No skill is missed. However, when compared from one language skill to another, the results show that Speaking is at the highest level. Some factors that are the reasons why they choose Speaking are as follows: lack of

vocabulary in English, difficulty memorizing, difficult pronunciation because it is very different from Indonesian, fear of making mistakes, fear of being laughed at by friends, and lack of Grammar knowledge. Some factors that cause students' difficulties lie in the affective factors of students. This is reinforced by the results of a study by Afisa & Yolanda (2015) which stated that the factors that cause difficulties in learning to speak English are the frequency of English speaking practice and psychological factors (in this case it can be said to be affective factors).

The second position lies in Listening skills. When listening to videos or broadcasts in English, students feel unable to follow the normal speed of a native English speaker's voice. Then the lack of vocabulary mastery and understanding of English accents makes them unable to understand the content of the conversation even though the speed has been adjusted to Indonesian or the speaker is not native. Listening problems were also found by Paakki (2003) who studied English students between Japanese and Finnish. It was stated that the condition of English students from Japan was influenced by differences in English accents so that understanding in listening activities was not optimal, this had an impact on the pronunciation of the target language. In contrast to Japan, students from Finland felt that the British accent was very attached to them so that the language produced was still quite good.

Writing is the most complex activity to master. For ESP students in this context. However, few students consider writing as a difficult skill to learn. This is because in the learning process, they approach the writing process where there are several steps that must be passed before they publish their English writing. The writing process consists of outlining (compiling a paragraph framework), drafting (making an initial draft of a paragraph), editing (checking the accuracy of writing), revising (checking the accuracy of the relevance of the content), and publishing (publishing the writing to be read by friends). The importance of the process approach in writing activities is highly recommended because to express an idea, a process of activity is needed that can develop ideas and improve the elements in it. In addition, appropriate learning media are needed so that the difficulties faced can be minimized with the media. One of the media that can be used is comic strips if the idea to be developed is related to narrative text (Megawati & Anugerahwati, 2012).

The lowest difficulty in learning English lies in Reading. Most students think that reading skills are the easiest thing to do. The factor that is used as the basis for students' answers is because of their interest in reading activities. So even though the language of instruction is English, they still enjoy the activity. The second reason is that when reading, students have texts that can be used directly as reference materials to answer questions related to understanding the text.

However, the opinion that states reading as a difficult skill cannot be ignored even though the number is very small. From the information obtained, students find it difficult to understand the contents of reading in English due to their low vocabulary mastery so that the message contained in what they read is very difficult to understand. This can be used as input for all language teachers to pay attention to the level of difficulty in selecting English reading with student competence (Johnson, 1930).

As supporting material for research data, analysis was conducted on the results of students' final assignment recordings. Before making the recording, students were asked to read references to the idols to be described (English-language sources are recommended). Then, make a draft of the idol description of a maximum of two paragraphs and consult with the lecturer. After receiving input from the lecturer, students made revisions and prepared themselves by watching and listening to YouTube videos before making the recording. In order to facilitate the analysis of the recording data, the researcher classified the results of the students' recordings into three categories, namely active, less active, and passive students.

The results of the analysis showed that students who actively participated in English classes were able to carry out projects confidently and fluently with pronunciation that was almost correct. This can be seen from their facial expressions that did not show any tension and their fluency when telling their idol's profile. They confidently showed pictures of their

idols while describing the reasons they chose the figure as an inspiration. Some students even did very good improvisation to provide detailed information to the listener.

For students who are less active in the learning process, their performance is quite good, especially in pronouncing English vocabulary even though it still sounds hesitant because they have not memorized or read the text in the handwritten notes. The prepared notes help provide ideas that will be conveyed in the recording. For facial expressions, they look relaxed and not tense when giving a description of their respective idol profiles.

Participated in class during the English learning process for one semester showed that they were not confident in describing their idols in English even though they had prepared notes to read. While explaining the description of their idols, the voice produced was very soft and the facial expressions showed an embarrassed or anxious expression. In addition, the structure of the language used was not very good. This was seen when they tried to pronounce English vocabulary intermittently and repeatedly because they were not sure what was being said. This was due to the limitations in translating Indonesian into English without rechecking or proofreading. Although the consultation on the contents of the description had received input, the results of the improvements made were not satisfactory.

From all the research results, it can be concluded that the difficulty of learning English in achieving complete language competence is influenced by the level of language proficiency of each student. This can be seen from the statement of the research subjects who are classified as active who think that. Speaking is the easiest skill. This is in contrast to students who are classified as passive who state that Speaking is the most difficult thing to master.

CONCLUSIONS

The English learning process cannot be separated from the emergence of various difficulties that occur, especially in students. These difficulties can be seen from each language skill or as a whole. In class conditions that have different language competencies, the difficulties faced also vary in their results. In this study, the research subjects showed difficulties in learning English in four skills in the order from the most difficult to the easiest as follows: Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing. The factors causing difficulties in learning English are greatly influenced by the level of language proficiency of each student. Active students tend to choose writing. However, passive students tend to choose speaking as something that is difficult to practice. The results of the video recording show that active and less active students can carry out their final assignments well in terms of confidence and grammar. But for passive students, the results show that students are less confident and cannot describe fluently.

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