

Students' Difficulties in Learning English and the Solutions: Case Study of Students of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University

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Abstract

This article discusses students' difficulties in learning English and the solutions by studying of students of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta. English is being treated as a world language because of its vast presence worldwide. Nevertheless, achievement of quality of learning English in Indonesia is still stagnant. One of the indicators is the students lack of mastering English. A lot of students still consider English as one of the most difficult subjects. This situation, of course, will influence the students learning process. Indonesian students consequently are asked to learn English through the mastery of the four skills, but it is not easy to master them well because the students encounter many difficulties in learning English. Such difficulties are also faced by most of students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga. This is a field research based on qualitative data. The object of research is students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. In gathering the data, I distribute a simple questionnaire to UIN Sunan Kalijaga students. The results of this study found that according to most of UIN Sunan Kalijaga students, among four English skills, listening is the most difficult skill in learning English. Speaking places as second position. Next, writing places as third position. The last is most difficult skill placed by reading.

Keywords: UIN Sunan Kalijaga students, Learning Solution, English learning

1. INTRODUCTION

English is being treated as a world language because of its vast presence worldwide. Undoubtly, it is international language ((Bimonthly) & 2010, n.d.). The amount of using English is more or less two billions. Moreover, it has become official language of United Nations (UN). In the global era, English is so needed. Many people from a lot of countries with different background use English as tool of communication. So, the good ability in English are important for the process of communicating, exchanging information, and transferring science and technology. Besides, the mastery of English is also useful in preparing the people to face the work competition which is firmly closed.

To be aware of the significant of English, Indonesian goverment through Ministry of National Education has decided English as one of core subject which has been taught to the student of the elementary school up to university. Moreover, English is recently introduced in the kindergarten. Educational institutions are right place to introduce English to the students as the international language. Nevertheless, achievement of quality of learning

English is still stagnant. One of the indicators is the students lack of mastering English (Chao, Chen, & Chuang, 2015). A lot of students still consider English as one of the most difficult subject which is scared. English is a boring and uninteresting subject to learn. This situation, of course, will influence the students learning process.

On account of its functions and purposes, English teaching is emphasized on the development of four language skills, i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing. As a part of the subjects in schools and universities, Indonesian students consequently are asked to learn English through the mastery of the four skills, but it is not easy to master them well because the students encounter many difficulties in learning English (Kohler, 2019).

Most students usually get difficulties in learning English particularly in listening and responding an instruction which is done orally by their teachers or friends. If the students do not know the meaning, they have difficulty in listening. Besides, students cannot transfer the meanings in writing or understand the written word ("The Importance of the Four English Language Skills: Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening in Teaching Iraqi Learners," 2022). They also get difficulty to make sentences based on appropriate grammar because it is different from Bahasa Indonesia. Students not only face problem in the language skill but also have difficulty pronouncing and reading English text. While they are reading, they may have trouble in distinguishing similar words and letter (Yani, 2008).

Such difficulties above are also faced by most of students of State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. The difficulties in learning English might be caused by the English teachers/lecturers, facilities, student's learning environment, student's physical or psychological factors, material, and so forth.. Considering the reasons, this article would like to find and highlight the difficulties or the problems faced by UIN Sunan Kalijaga students in learning English. This article also offers ways or solutions to overcome those problems.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a field research based on qualitative data. The object of research is students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. In gathering the data, I made a questionnaire distributing to UIN Sunan Kalijaga students. A questionnaire is designed to understand the students' point of view about English learning process at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. This research involves 27 students from 2 faculties. They are Faculty of Adab (Letters) and Culture; and Faculty of Syari'ah (Islamic Law) and Law. The number of students of Faculty of Syari'ah (Islamic Law) and Law are 17 students. Meanwhile number of students of Faculty of Adab (Letters) and Culture are 10 students.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Students' Difficulties in Learning English

Most of UIN Sunan Kalijaga students admit that they get difficulty in learning English. According to them, among four English skills (i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing), listening is the most difficult skill in learning English. There are some reasons stated by students related to this problem. *First*, the students are hard to catch English conversation. *Second*, the students are not usual to listen English conversation. *Third*, the students can not distinguish the voice of (native) speakers. *Fourth*, the students do not have vocabulary enough.

After listening, speaking places as second position of most difficult English skill. There are also many reasons stated by students regarding this problem. *First*, the students is not usual to speak English. *Second*, the students are not easy to arrange the words. *Third*, the students lack in mastering vocabulary and grammar. *Fourth*, the students are difficult in pronunciation. *Fifth*, the students view that English pronunciation is different from the words. *Sixth*, the students are not easy in pronouncing English words.

Other most difficult skill is writing. That is why the students consider that English possess a lot of rules of the grammar. Moreover, the students do not know much how to use English grammar correctly. Next, the last is the most difficult skill placed by reading. The reasons is that the students are difficult in reading English text. They talk that way of reading English words or sentences differs from the words or the writings.

Because of many difficulties faced by the students, they want their English lecturers to do: *First*, the lecturers deepen the material of English to the students. *Second*, the lecturers could give motivation so that the students have enthusiasm in learning English. *Third*, the lecturers understand the students' problems or difficulties in learning English and to give the solutions. *Fourth*, the lecturers must be patient when they face the students. *Fifth*, the lecturers explain the material as good as possible. *Sixth*, the lecturers want to reexplain the material of English in order that the students are sharper in catching lesson of English. *Seventh*, the lecturers should be able to create a relaxed English learning process. *Eighth*, the lecturers should give English exercises to the students. *Ninth*, the lecturers should take initiative to hold a discussion related to English subject. *Tenth*, the lecturers get the students according to their English ability into group. In Zahrul Wafa perspective, one of the students of Faculty of Adab (Letters) and Culture, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, by grouping the students in accordance with their English ability, the lecturers could give more attention to their students who are less capability in English. *Eleventh*, the lecturers should apply various, innovative, and interesting methods in learning English process so that the students are not bored. *Twelve*, the lecturers should

implement a policy requiring all students to use English (English area). The purpose is to endorse the students as to be able to master English more quickly, both oral and written.

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Students' Efforts to Solve the Difficulties in Learning English

There are several efforts done by UIN Sunan Kalijaga students to solve their difficulties in English. In general, those efforts can be described as follows:

- a. The students deepen English by joining English course institutions.
- b. The students get accustomed to use English either speaking, writing, listening, or reading.
- c. The students study English more seriously.
- d. The students memorize English vocabulary as much as possible.
- e. The students frequently consult with their teachers regarding English.
- f. The students practice English frequently.
- g. The students frequently attend English lecture.
- h. The students get accustomed to watch English movies and listen English songs.
- i. The students frequently ask to their friends and relatives or anyone understanding English.

Solutions to Overcome Difficulties in Learning English

There are some solutions that can be offered to overcome difficulties in learning English. These solutions may be implemented by anyone including UIN Sunan Kalijaga students. First of all, I am going to explain some solutions which may help us to master the English. I take these solutions from World English (2010), an international English teaching and learning institution.

1. Speak without Fear

The biggest problem most people face in learning a new language is their own fear. They worry that they won't say things correctly or that they will look stupid so they do not talk at all. Do not do this. The fastest way to learn anything is to do it repeatedly until you get it right. Like anything, learning English requires practice. Do not let a little fear stop us from getting what we want.

2. Use all of our Resources

Even if we study English at a language school or institution, it doesn't mean we can not learn outside class. Using as many different sources, methods and tools as possible, will allow us to learn faster. There are many

different ways that we can improve our English, so do not limit ourself to only one or two. The internet is a fantastic resource for virtually anything, but for the language learner it is perfect.

3. Surround Ourself with English

The absolute best way to learn English is to surround ourself with it. Take notes in English, put English books around our room, listen to English language radio broadcasts, watch English news, movies, and television. Speak English with our friends whenever we can. The more English material that we have around us, the faster we will learn and the more likely it is that we will begin “thinking in English.”

4. Listen to Native Speakers as Much as Possible

There are some good English teachers/lecturers that have had to learn English as a second language before they could teach it. However, there are several reasons why many of the best schools and universities prefer to hire native English speakers. One of the reasons is that native speakers have a natural flow to their speech that students of English should try to imitate. The closer ESL (English as a second language) or EFL (English as a foreign language) students can get to this rhythm or flow, the more convincing and comfortable they will become.

5. Watch English Films and Television

This is not only a fun way to learn but it is also very effective. By watching English films (especially those with English subtitles) we can expand our vocabulary and hear the flow of speech from the actors. If we listen to the news we can also hear different accents.

6. Listen to English Musics

Music can be a very effective method of learning English. In fact, it is often used as a way of improving comprehension. The best way to learn though, is to get the lyrics (words) to the songs we are listening to and try to read them as the artist sings. There are several good internet sites where one can find the words for most songs. This way we can practice your listening and reading at the same time. And if we like to sing, fine (Suwono, 2022).

7. Study as Often as Possible

Only by studying things like grammar and vocabulary and doing exercises, we can really improve our knowledge of any language. Furthermore, we have to study as often as possible. By studying hard, we could understand and increase our English ability. By learning hard, we will ease in remembering the lesson of English.

8. Do Exercises and Take Tests

Many people think that exercises and tests are not much fun. However, by completing exercises and taking tests we can really improve your English. One of the best reasons for doing lots of exercises and tests is that they give us a benchmark to compare our future results with. Often, it is by comparing our score on a test we took yesterday with one we took a month or six months ago that we realize just how much we have learned.

If we never test ourselves, we will never know how much we are progressing. Start now by doing some of the many exercises and tests on this site, and return in a few days to see what we have learned. Keep doing this and we really will make some progress with English.

9. Record Ourselves

Nobody likes to hear their own voice on tape but like tests, it is good to compare our tapes from time to time. We may be so impressed with the progress we are making that we may not mind the sound of our voice as much.

10. Listen to English

By this, we mean, speak on the phone or listen to radio broadcasts, audiobooks or CDs in English. This is different than watching the television or films because we can not see the person that is speaking to us. Many learners of English say that speaking on the phone is one of the most difficult things that they do and the only way to improve is to practice.

The description above concerning the solutions to master English generally. Below are some solutions regarding English learning process which may be implemented by stakeholders, teachers, lecturers, schools, universities, and other educational institutions.

a. Avoid Formality and Prioritize Quality

Since language is a skill, it requires practice intensively. Therefore, English learning program at educational institutions may not be generalized with other subjects. It should not be taught in the classroom. If it is taught in the classroom, capacity of English classroom does not big enough. It should be only around 20 students. It designs English learning like English courses hold by English language institutions.

b. Design English Learning Program Clearly

If the purpose of learning English, for instance, is making students able to converse in English, we have to design English learning model based on the purpose. In this context, a teacher or learner must be able to apply appropriate methods, that is, learning methods that can improve their students competency in speaking English.



By focusing the purpose, the teachers or lecturers will be able to design some activities, materials, and exercises so that the students able to reach the purpose. At English course institutions, English learning and teaching are classified into several parts. They are especially for english conversation, general English, English for Special Purposes, Writing, TOEFL, IELTS, and so on.

c. Teach English Skills, Not Components of English

We will be successful in learning English if we could erase old habit, that is, a habit teaching language component only. We have to remove the habit soon by teaching English skills. We can imitate model of English learning at English course institutions that can afford to produce students who able to master English. The most people graduating from English course institutions ease in doing English exams excellently.

Accordance with Budiharso (2005), English curriculum in Indonesia is too emphasis on grammar, not conversation. The students is required to memorize frames or patterns of sentence. Most English teachers do not train the students to communicate in English (Yang & Li, 2022)

d. Create a Conducive English Learning Envorinment

This can be done for example by holding English speech contests, English academic writing competitions, English quizzes, English gamaes, English drama and prose, English area. In addition, we can build a library collecting books, newspapers, and magazines in English, make announcements in English, and so forth .

There is an interesting example related to how to create a good English learning envorinment. Pandeiot (2002) in his research entitled "The Roles of A Multilingual Family Environment In Forming Reading Habits In A Child: A Case Study" mentioned that a family named Tulungen-Brenner was successful in creating a reading environment. Besides having a collection of books for their own, the parents provided many books for their chlidren. In other words, the children had their own library. As a result, their children loved to read books. From the whole explanation above, we can see that the parents could create an conducive English learning environment. They are successful in acquiring reading as a habit (Pandeiot, 2002).

e. Motivate the Students to Study Hard

The English teachers/lecturers need to motivate their students to study English hard. The students will be enthusiastic in studying English when they are encircled by the supportive environment. However, the students still need to be motivated. Though motivation is not the only factor that determines the success of English teaching and learning process, it is important enough to support the success of the process.

According to Harmer (2001), motivation are some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something. Motivation is probably the most often used-all term for explain the success or failure of virtually any complex task. It is commonly thought of as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves a person to do particular action. Some psychologists define motivation in term of certain needs or drives (Subhan, 2003). Motivation, viewed as the fulfillment of needs, is closely related to behaviorist enforcement theory. Since certain drives are being satisfactory met in a person, enforcement occurs. When learning to speak a foreign language improves one's ego, for example, the ego enhancement is in itself an internal reinforcement of the desired behavior (Syakur, 2005).

Motivation can be divided into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Penny Ur says that motivation is that which derives from the influence of some kind of external incentive. Meanwhile, Harmer says that it is one that comes from outside. In contrast with extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, however, that comes from within individual. Whatever motivation it is, its existences is important for the success in learning. In other words, motivation plays an important role in the success in learning. Arising students' motivation is so important in the teaching and learning process. it is one of the teachers or lectures' responsibility (Rochyati, 2009).

Therefore, the English teachers/lecturers have to arouse their students' motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation. Zoldan Dornyei and Kata Csizer as cited Brown (2001) describe that there are ten items for stimulating students' motivation. They are (1) setting a personal example with our own behaviour; (2) creating a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom; (3) presenting the tasks properly; (4) developing a relationship with the students; (5) increasing the students' linguistic self-confidence; (6) making the language classes interesting; (7) promoting students authonomy; (8) Personalizing the learning process; (9) Increasing the students' goal-orientedness; and (10) familiarizing students with the target language culture.

Making the language classes interesting is by avoiding a monotonous condition in the classroom. The teachers can introduce vaious activities in the classroom (Fitriati, 2009). Those activities, for example, are games, puzzle, fairly tales, sing a song, drama, debat, quiz, and so on.

f. Communicate with the Students

UIN Sunan Kalijaga students want their English lecturers to overcome all difficulties faced by the students. Thus, the lecturers and the students have to able to communicate each other. In other words, they must have a chemistry. As facilitator, the lecturers should able to facilitate

students' willingness to share with them. The lecturers find time for discussing with the students. The aim is that students can consult their problems so that the students' difficulties in English learning can be solved.

4. CONCLUSION

From the whole explanation above, there are several things that can be concluded as follows: First, according to most of UIN Sunan Kalijaga students, among four English skills, listening is the most difficult skill in learning English. Speaking places as second position. Next, writing places as third position. Meanwhile the last is most difficult skill placed by reading. Second, there are several efforts done by UIN Sunan Kalijaga students to solve their difficulties in English. They are for instance: (a) the students deepen English by joining English course institutions; (b) the students get accustomed to use English either speaking, writing, listening, or reading; (c) the students study English more seriously; (d) the students memorize English vocabulary as much as possible; (e) the students frequently consult with their teacher regarding English; (f) the students practice English frequently, (g) the students frequently attend English lecture; (h) the students get accustomed to watch English movies and listen English songs. (i) the students frequently ask to their friends and relatives or anyone understanding English. Third, the solutions that can be offered to overcome difficulties in learning English. They are: (1) speak without fear; (2) use all of our resources; (3) surround ourself with English; (4) listen to native speakers as much as possible; (5) watch English films and television; (6) listen to English music; (7) study as often as possible; (8) do exercises and take tests; (9) record ourself; and (10) listen to English. In addition, there are some solutions regarding English learning process. They are: avoid formality and prioritize quality; design English learning program clearly; teach English skills, not components of English; create a conducive English learning environment; motivate the students to study hard; and communicate with the students.

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