Obstacles Encountered by the English Department Students in Learning English: Case Study of Universitas Negeri Malang

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to outline the obstacles encountered by the English department students in Learning English language at the English Literature Department in Universitas Negeri Malang. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study design and data were collected through interviews techniques and literature reviews. The collected data were organized, interpreted, and deeply analysed in order to develop concepts and abstraction of the research findings. Data credibility was checked through member checking and referential adequacy. The results of this study unveiled that students experience lack of self-confidence in speaking English and lack of extracurricular activities provided by the faculty to improve students' skills. For this reason, the following suggestions are very necessary, first, for the English Department students, they are encouraged to increase their self-confidence and to actively participate during the academic activities. Second, for the English Literature Department, to increase the number of extracurricular activities and to establish more cooperation with foreign institutions. Third, for the lecturers, they should always use English language during the academic activities and to provide more motivation to students to keep on working hard.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language has become an integral part of university curricula around the world. In Indonesia, English is not only considered an international language but also an essential tool for global communication, access to knowledge and career development (Zhang & Lin, 2021). Among Indonesia's many educational institutions, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM) stands out as the leading university offering specialized educational programs in English. The university's English Department plays an important role in training future educators, translators and professionals who will contribute to the dissemination of English throughout the country.

Although the importance of English has been recognized globally, language learning is often a complex and multifaceted process, especially for students whose first language is not English (Rahman & Zafar, 2022). The challenges faced by these students are influenced by a variety of factors, including linguistic, psychological, sociocultural and pedagogical factors (Hassan & Ali, 2023). Despite significant investment in English language instruction, students still face a number of barriers to language proficiency, which may impact their academic performance and success (Krashen, 1982; Rao, 2019). Therefore,

understanding these barriers is essential to improving teaching methods and enhancing the learning experience for future generations (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Emynorane et., 2024).

At Universitas Negeri Malang, students in the English Department are exposed to a variety of learning activities such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, despite the comprehensive program, many students report that they have difficulty in certain aspects of learning English (Baker, 2021). These challenges are particularly important because they directly affect students' ability to succeed in their courses, participate in academic discussions, and enter the professional world after graduation (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

One of the most common barriers to learning English is a lack of exposure to the language outside the classroom (Shakouri, 2020). In Indonesia, English is often learned in formal contexts, with few opportunities for students to practice conversational English in real-life situations (Cao & Wang, 2021). As a result, students may struggle with practical language skills, such as speaking fluently and understanding native accents or colloquialisms. This lack of immersion is exacerbated by the fact that English is not widely used in everyday life, making it difficult for students to acquire language patterns and vocabulary (Nunan, 2003).

Another important challenge is the individual differences in motivation and attitudes towards learning English (Aliakbari & Khosravi, 2021). Some students are intrinsically motivated, driven by a desire to learn and improve their language skills, while others may lack motivation due to perceived difficulties or limited future prospects for English proficiency (Lin & Feng, 2020). These differences in motivation can affect students' engagement in the learning process and hinder their overall progress towards language proficiency. Additionally, negative attitudes towards English can come from a variety of sources, including previous academic failures, lack of confidence or socio-cultural factors that view English as a foreign and unattainable language (Baker, 2011; Taha & Al-Ansari, 2020).

Psychological factors also play an important role in shaping the learning experiences of English language students. Many students feel anxious when speaking English, especially in front of their friends or lecturers (Al-Dosari, 2020). This anxiety often leads to a fear of making mistakes, which can lead to reduced participation, low self-esteem and inhibited language development (Goh & Burns, 2012). This anxiety can be compounded by the pressure to meet high academic expectations and the fear of being judged in a competitive environment (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Instructional factors, including teaching methods and resources, are another important aspect to consider. Despite the university's commitment to providing quality English language instruction, traditional teaching methods may still dominate the classroom, which may not fully meet the needs and learning styles of all students (Schunk, 2012). While lectures and textbooks provide basic knowledge, they do not always promote interactive learning or stimulate critical thinking (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In addition, limited access to advanced technology tools and language resources can limit students' opportunities to engage with English in diverse and engaging ways (Adams, 2022).

The role of lecturers cannot be overlooked either. The qualifications and teaching style of English instructors have a significant impact on students' language development. Lecturers who use communicative and student-centered approaches can encourage more active participation and provide a richer learning environment (Ali, 2021). However, when teaching is too teacher-centered or focused on rote learning, it can hinder students' ability to develop practical language skills and apply knowledge to real-world situations.

Social and cultural factors also contribute to the difficulties faced by English learners in Indonesia. The influence of the local language, Indonesian, often leads to language interference, as students may apply grammatical structures and vocabulary from their mother tongue to English. These interferences can lead to pronunciation errors, sentence construction errors, and general communication errors (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). In addition, cultural differences in communication styles, such as indirectness or reluctance to express opinions openly, can also affect students' ability to use English fully in an academic context.

In addition, the presence of external factors such as family expectations, financial constraints, and limited access to language support services can also create additional barriers (Zhou & Lee, 2022). For example, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have difficulty affording English classes or supplementary learning materials, which may further hinder their language development. Similarly, students who face pressure from their families to succeed academically may feel overwhelmed by the requirement to master English along with other courses (Saki & Sharifian, 2023).

Given these various challenges, this study aims to identify and analyze the specific barriers that students from the Department of English at Universitas Negeri Malang encounter in their English learning journey. By examining these barriers, the study will provide valuable insights into the factors that influence students' language learning experiences and provide recommendations for improving English teaching strategies at the university. Ultimately, the goal is to help create a more supportive and effective learning environment that meets the diverse needs of students and promotes a stronger foundation in English proficiency.

METHODS

Since the aim of this study is to reveal the obstacles encountered by the English department students in learning English language, a descriptive qualitative method with a case study design was applied. The objects to be examined as sources of research data are informants, documents, and any academic activities provided by the department. Informants in this study are those students who have passed the three-speaking course provided by the English literature department, which are speaking for general purpose, speaking for academic purposes, and public speaking.

Data analysis was done based on the results obtained from the interviews and the literature reviews. Data were organized, interpreted, and deeply analysed to find out the necessary information. Each piece of data classified was described qualitatively by giving comments on each interaction process directed to the research objective. The last procedure was to discuss the comments and to make interpretations based on the results identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Lack of self-confidence is the first common obstacle encountered by the students when they do the activities in learning to speak English. Most of the informants stated that they fear of making mistakes or being criticized by their classmates and lecturers if their sentences are wrong. *"I am afraid of mispronouncing a word and a grammar mistakes"* (Interview/Nur/2024); *"I am just afraid that I might look stupid if I make mistakes"* (Interview/Nin/2024); *" I am afraid of the pressure from my friends"* (Interview/Irw/2024); *"Nervous to speak, afraid of making mistakes"* (Interview/Pril/2024); *"knowing what*

to say, but hardly to convey the meaning and sometimes I'm afraid if the others will be misunderstand about what I'm talking about." (interview/Rid/2024); "*I often find it hard to arrange my sentences in my mind, so it takes longer to me to do the speaking*" (Interview/ASW/2024); "*high expectations from the lecturers and classmates, so when I make mistakes, my regret is overwhelming*" (Interview/Tam/2024); "*I know that I am not good enough and sometimes I make mistakes. When I do, I always regret my decision to be actively involved or speaking in the class. And because I am seen as the active one, sometimes I feel high expectations both from the lecturers and the classmates while it is not necessarily true that if you are active, you are better or smarter than others*" (Interview/Dew/2024); and "*the constant fear of being judged by others or the lecturers themselves*" (Interview/Sal/2024). Even though, students' motivation to actively participate in the class activities are depending on other factors such as the topic to be discussed (how interesting the topic is), lecturers' approaches to teaching and their relationship with students (how cool the lecturers are), and students' competence and ability (self-preparation before attending the class).

Lack of the extracurricular activities provided by the Department is another obstacle encountered by the students. Apart of student's laziness and low motivation to work hard, the English literature department offer a limited extracurricular activity such as a seminar/workshop, exchange program, English debate program. And even if those programs were provided, they are probably not free. Beside of that, students encounter some difficulty on accessing the campus facility such as library, as mentioned by one responded that "*the procedure is confusing*" (Interview/Asw/2024). Sometimes, it is difficult to find the right books while consulting the library. It is thus killing a lot of time, i.e. more time lost than expected. In addition, the number of books allowed by the library to bring home are limited. "*It is limited. I can't bring away many books at once*" (Interview/Pri/2024). Another issue is that the library operating time is limited, "*the library has limited working hours. Library is not exactly opened 24/7*" (Interview/Sal/2024). And the last important thing is, the discipline inside the reading room "*Many people are talking loudly in libraries. So, it is difficult to get concentration*" (Interview/Nur/2024). Concerning the wifi network facility, almost all the informants stated that the campus wifi hotspot is very slow, it is difficult to access the internet when many people are online and connected.

In related to the non-academic activities to improve English speaking skills, students use various learning application and watch tutorial videos in the social network such as YouTube/Facebook, but most of them stated that the obstacle is with the cost of the data internet package. Another thing is the accuracy of the information being watched, "*I discovered many inappropriate contents*" (Interview/Ade/2024); "*Well, it's not exactly like a classroom where you have a lecturer right in front of you to tell you what you might have said wrong or not*" (Interview/Sal/2024). Students also stated that they try to find some friends from other countries but they experience the following obstacles: "*different time zones between me and my friends*" (Interview/Sal/2024); "*my foreign friends use difficult vocabulary and sometimes I don't understand what they mean, so I can't respond them*" (Interview/Pri/2024); "*I don't know where to start while in conversation with foreigners*" (Interview/Ayu/2024); And according to Nur "*the way they talk is different than I imagine*" (Interview/Nur/2024).

Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with existing research on the challenges students face when learning English in non-English speaking contexts. Lack of exposure to English outside the classroom is a common problem for students in Indonesia and other non-English speaking countries

(Hosseini & Alavi, 2020). English learners often have difficulty applying what they learn in formal contexts to real-life situations. The lack of English communication environments can limit the ability to develop practical communication skills, especially speaking and listening skills (Jiang & Wang, 2022). Students at Universitas Negeri Malang are no exception, as many feel that their English proficiency is limited to academic areas and have difficulty engaging in everyday conversations.

Language anxiety is another important barrier that affects students' language learning (Khan & Hassan, 2021). This finding confirms previous research that has highlighted the role of psychological factors, such as fear of making mistakes, in language development (Fouzia & Bano, 2020). Fear of being judged in public speaking situations often leads to low levels of engagement, which prevents students from improving their English speaking ability (Gardner, 2010). This issue is particularly important for students who want to become English teachers or language professionals, as effective communication is central to their future roles.

Motivation plays an important role in language learning, and research shows that intrinsic motivation is essential to overcoming barriers to language acquisition. However, for many students at Universitas Negeri Malang, motivation is influenced by a variety of external and internal factors, including perceptions of language difficulty and the relevance of English in their daily lives. Students who lack strong intrinsic motivation are more likely to have difficulty maintaining their learning (Emynorane et al., 2024). This finding is consistent with the theory that motivation is a key determinant of academic success and language proficiency.

In terms of teaching methods, the study found that more interactive and communicative methods can improve student engagement and language skills (Madhavi & Rao, 2021). Traditional methods, while still valuable, may not be sufficient to meet the changing needs of modern language learners. Integrating technology, multimedia resources and collaborative activities can help students develop their English language proficiency (Mahmood & Ahmad, 2022). This is consistent with recent trends in language teaching, where communicative language teaching and task-based learning have emerged as effective methods for promoting active language use and student engagement (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Basturk, 2020).

Another important factors that prevent students' ability to speak fluent English include clustering, reduced form, redundancy, performance variables, colloquialisms, transmission rates, rhythm, intonation, stress as well as various writing characteristics, such as incomplete sentences, repetitions and contractions (Jafari & Abednia, 2023). These factors can be used to design assignments that allow students to meet these challenges. To overcome these challenges, lecturers should pay attention to accuracy and fluency when teaching speaking skills (Kumaravadivelu, 2021). They should consider important homework or tasks designed to boost students' communication skills, use of common grammatical and lexical features, expressive devices and use of negotiation (Baker, 2021; Saki & Sharifian, 2023).

Ultimately, the obstacles identified in this study highlight the importance of addressing both the psychological and pedagogical aspects of language learning. Students at Universitas Negeri Malang face significant challenges, but with the right support systems, teaching strategies, and motivation, these obstacles can be overcome. The study highlights the need for an integrated language teaching approach that combines exposure to real-life language use, a supportive learning environment, and innovative teaching methods to help students achieve their language goals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the obstacles that students of the Department of English at Universitas Negeri Malang face in learning English are numerous and complex, influenced by linguistic, psychological, sociocultural and pedagogical factors. Despite the importance of English in academic and professional contexts, many students struggle to achieve fluency and proficiency in the language due to a combination of limited exposure to English outside the classroom, varying levels of motivation, language anxiety and the limitations of traditional teaching methods. These challenges highlight the need for a more holistic, student-centered approach to English language teaching.

Psychological barriers, such as anxiety and lack of confidence, coupled with linguistic interference from students' native languages, pose significant challenges to the acquisition of practical language skills. Furthermore, students' varying levels of intrinsic motivation and engagement with the language further complicate the issue. These factors not only hinder the development of essential language skills such as listening and speaking, but also reduce students' overall confidence in their English language abilities. Therefore, it is essential to address these psychological and motivational barriers to foster a positive learning environment.

In terms of education, traditional methods that emphasize rote learning and teacher-centered approaches do not adequately meet the diverse needs of students. There is a clear need for more interactive and communicative teaching strategies that encourage active student participation and real-world language use. In addition, the availability of enhanced resources such as language labs, online platforms, and exposure to real-world languages can play a significant role in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Lecturers at Universitas Negeri Malang can improve students' learning experience by adopting more innovative and student-centered teaching methods.

Based on these findings, a number of recommendations are made for both the Department of English Literature and its students. For the Department, it is recommended to incorporate more interactive and communicative teaching methods to promote active student engagement. Providing students with additional language exposure, such as study tours, internships or language exchange programs, can help them practice English in real-life settings. Additionally, providing workshops or counselling services to address language anxiety and motivation issues can help students overcome psychological barriers. For students, we encourage them to adopt an active learning approach by engaging in language practice outside the classroom through media, peer interaction and self-study. Additionally, cultivating a growth mindset and resilience to mistakes can improve students' overall confidence and language proficiency. With the right combination of institutional support and student effort, barriers to learning English can be significantly reduced, resulting in better language outcomes for everyone.

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