

An Analysis of Students' Obstacles in Learning English for Grade VIII Students at SMP Negeri 1 Selesai

Anindya Nabila¹, Desi Triana Ayunsari², Resa Kristianda³, Edi Suprayetno⁴
^{1,2,3,4}English Education Department, STKIP Al Maksu Langkat, Indonesia

anindia.nabila900@gmail.com¹

ayunsari23@gmail.com²

kritianda@gmail.com³

edisuprayetno@gmail.com⁴

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Abstract

This research explores the obstacles faced by students at SMP Negeri 1 SELESALAI in learning English, particularly in reading. The study was conducted through preliminary analysis and a questionnaire, revealing a strong preference among students for topics related to the internet and entertainment, which might distract them from focusing on reading English materials. The research also revealed that students prefer to learn in groups rather than individually, suggesting a strong influence of peer interactions. Despite the high interest in English, students still face numerous obstacles in their learning process, including a lack of understanding about word distribution and pronoun usage in English, and difficulty in understanding and interpreting complex terms and phrases. The study suggests potential solutions to overcome these challenges, such as the use of more varied and interesting teaching methods, increasing students' understanding of English sentence structure, and enhancing students' interest and motivation in learning English, especially in reading.

Keywords: *Obstacle; English learning; motivation*

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in the effort to improve human resources towards a better direction. This is stated in the National Education System Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 Chapter I Article 1, paragraph 1, which defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning processes so that learners actively develop their potential, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed for themselves, society, nation, and state (Sisdiknas as cited in Nasution et al., 2022: 422). The rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has positioned English as one of the primary languages for international communication and global interaction. In line with this role, English aims to cultivate students' attitudes, knowledge, and communication skills through diverse learning experiences involving both receptive and productive English language activities. English serves as a crucial international language connecting communities with the world across various aspects, including education, as reflected in government regulations making English a mandatory subject from elementary school to high school.

Even though English is a foreign language in Indonesia, it holds a significant position in our lives, especially in the realm of education. English is taught as a subject from elementary school to higher education. The introduction of English at the elementary level aims to familiarize students with the language as early as possible. Furthermore, English proficiency can enhance our intelligence. It is noteworthy that memorizing more than one language can have positive impacts on brain development and may help prevent cognitive decline or memory loss. Three essential elements of language, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, play a crucial role in supporting the four language skills. Balancing the mastery of content and practical application is essential. However, creating an ideal English class is not an easy task. In the process of learning English, students often encounter obstacles that may hinder optimal learning outcomes. One common difficulty faced by English language learners is the lack of understanding of English pronunciation due to a limited grasp of vocabulary.

Through initial analysis and a questionnaire on the interests and habits of students at SMPN 1 SELESAI in English language learning, it was identified that the main issue requiring attention is the low interest in reading English texts among students. Overall, the English learning outcomes of students are below the minimum passing criteria (KKM). In the English learning process, reading ability is a crucial variable influencing the achievement of learning outcomes according to the KKM for the English subject at SMPN 1 SELESAI. Based on the concepts presented in the introduction, it can be concluded that students face various difficulties when learning English, especially as a foreign language. This is because English is often used in specific contexts and by specific people rather than in daily activities. Therefore, this journal aims to delve deeper into the barriers experienced by students at SMP Negeri 1 SELESAI in language skills, particularly in learning English. The objectives of this research are 1) to describe the factors causing difficulties in reading English and 2) to describe solutions to students' difficulties in mastering English language learning.

METHOD

This research was conducted through preliminary analysis and a questionnaire. A questionnaire is one of the techniques in research data collection carried out by providing a set of written questions or statements to respondents regarding the subject that the researcher wants to investigate. Respondents then answer the questions based on their knowledge or experiences.

According to Sugiyono (2005), a questionnaire is a data collection method that involves providing a set of written questions or statements to respondents for them to answer. This method is commonly used in surveys to collect information regarding knowledge, opinion, behavior, or facts from a population.

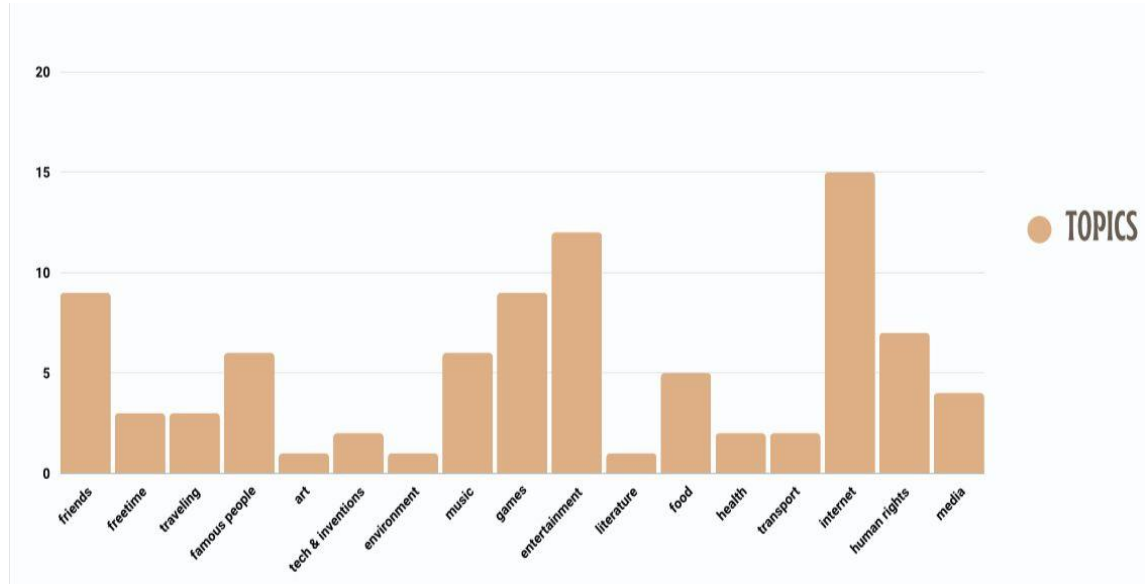
This research method was carried out at SMPN 1 SELESAI in the 2023/2024 academic year, in the first semester of October 2023. The research subjects were taken from 8TH students at SMPN 1 SELESAI, totaling 20 students, consisting of 9 males and 11 females, with heterogeneous student abilities. This means that the class includes students with high, moderate, and low thinking abilities. The researcher chose the 8th grade because it was observed that the English language learning outcomes were still low, especially in reading skills.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This analysis is conducted through two questionnaire formats with different topics, aimed at a more in-depth evaluation of the obstacles faced by students in learning English, especially in reading.

1. Favorite Topics

Graph 1:



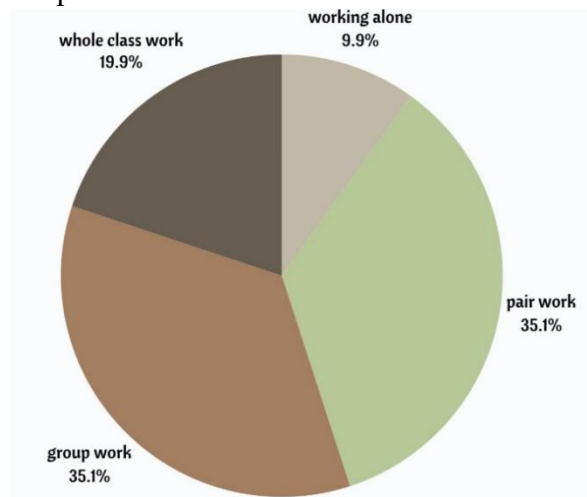
Based on the results from the first questionnaire titled "Favorite Topics," the highest-ranking topic is the internet (was filled by 15% students). This can occur because in this modern era, nearly 99% of students use gadgets for their daily needs, even though they are still underage, especially at SMP NEGERI 1 SELESAI. The second-highest favorite topic is entertainment, (was filled by 12% students). Many students nowadays find entertainment in English-related elements such as songs and movies. The third-highest favorite topic is friends (was filled by 9% students); given the age of the students who are still in the process of self-discovery, it is not surprising that this topic is mostly ranked third by the students. The fourth favorite topic they like is games (was filled by 9% students); even though the majority of students in this class are female, almost 60% of them play games, especially the male students.

The fifth favorite topic is Human Rights (was filled by 7% students). In this digital era, everything is easily accessible, and many criminal incidents, especially in wars between countries can be accessed. Civilian casualties, including children make students feel that such actions are unjustifiable and against human rights. The sixth highest favorite topic is music and famous people (was filled by 6% students). As mentioned earlier, today's youth seek entertainment more often on the internet than in their real lives. Moreover, in the current digital era, everything can be quickly accessed. Through applications and social media, students can easily reach the music they like and their idols, especially as foreign language songs are trending.

The next favorite topic is food. 5% Students often come across some foods with names in English, making them interested. The remaining results for favourite topics include media, free time, traveling, transport, health, tech & inventions, environment, art, and literature, was filled 1% until 3% students. Perhaps these topics are too challenging for some junior high school students, especially considering their own barriers when learning English.

2. Learning Strategy

Graph 2:



Based on the results of the learning strategy diagram, it can be seen that 9.9% of students prefer working alone. Minority of students indeed prefer tasks done individually. Besides being able to focus, they also feel calm and their motivation to learn increases. This is because students feel that they have the potential with the given material, especially when reading a story or task where the task needs to be done as calmly and focused as possible to enhance their understanding of sentences or words correctly, while 35.1% of students enjoy pair work and group work. One of the case studies on student learning motivation is the influence of peers, so it is not surprising that the majority of students in this class prefer tasks done together. Lastly, 19.9% of students favorite whole class work. As mentioned earlier, students feel motivated to learn due to the influence of their friends, allowing them to exchange ideas and thoughts about the discussed material. This is especially true in reading in English, where they lack vocabulary. Hence, they prefer working on assignments together to be able to inquire about the pronunciation of English vocabulary when given reading tasks by their teacher.

The obstacles faced by students in reading English can be attributed to various factors:

The first questionnaire indicates that students have a strong preference for topics related to the internet and entertainment. In the modern era, where students heavily rely on gadgets and digital content for daily needs, this preference might distract them from focusing on reading English materials. The learning strategy diagram highlights that the majority of students prefer tasks done together, indicating a strong influence of peer interactions. While collaboration is beneficial, it may also suggest a reliance on peers for motivation, and this preference might hinder individual reading efforts. The text mentions that students, especially in reading English, face challenges due to a lack

of vocabulary. This barrier might be contributing to their preference for working together on assignments, allowing them to inquire about the pronunciation and meaning of English words.

The influence of digital entertainment, mentioned in the context of favorite topics, can be a distraction for students. With easy access to online content, students may spend more time on entertainment-related activities rather than focusing on reading and improving their English skills. The text suggests that some topics, such as Human Rights, media, free time, traveling, transport, health, tech & inventions, environment, art, and literature, may be challenging for junior high school students. The complexity of these subjects could contribute to obstacles in reading comprehension and engagement. The overall preference for collaborative learning and the challenges with certain topics may reflect underlying barriers in the English learning process. These could include difficulties in grasping advanced vocabulary, complex concepts, or a lack of interest in certain academic areas.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that students at SMP Negeri 1 SELESAI face several challenges in learning English, especially in reading. One of the main factors found is the low interest of students in reading English texts. Additionally, the research shows that students prefer to learn in groups rather than individually. Other factors that can influence English reading skills of students include their interest in certain topics, such as the internet and entertainment, and their learning strategies. As stated in the research, many students prefer to study in groups because they feel supported by their classmates in understanding and interpreting English concepts and terms. However, this can also become a hindrance if students overly depend on their peers for motivation and understanding.

Moreover, other challenges faced by students in reading English include a lack of understanding about word distribution and pronoun usage in English, as well as difficulty in understanding and interpreting complex terms and phrases. This shows that despite students having a high interest in English, they still face numerous obstacles in their learning process. Therefore, potential solutions to overcome these challenges could include the use of more varied and interesting teaching methods, increasing students' understanding of English sentence structure, and enhancing students' interest and motivation in learning English, especially in reading. Additionally, the increased use of technology in English teaching can also be an effective tool in helping students understand and interpret reading in English concepts and terms.

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