

## Analyzing Students' Challenges in Acquiring English as Second Language: A Case Study of English Education Students

Junita Siahaan<sup>1\*</sup>, Maryanti Lucciana Sitorus<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> English Education Department, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas, Indonesia

\*Correspondence Email: [siahaanjunita@ust.ac.id](mailto:siahaanjunita@ust.ac.id)

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### Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the multifaceted challenges faced by students of English Education Department in acquiring English as a second language. This study employed descriptive qualitative method and case study as research design. 44 students of English Education Department were taken as the sample. The instruments used to collect the data were questionnaire and interview. The results showed that there are some challenges faced by the students which are categorized into two: linguistic challenges and non-linguistic challenges. In linguistic challenges, there are four types of challenges: grammar, vocabulary, speaking/pronunciation, linguistic differences. For non-linguistic challenges, the challenges are lack of practice, lack of confidence/language anxiety, environment factor, learning process/learning method and lack of motivation. To overcome the challenges, some strategies are proposed for both categories of challenges. For overcoming the linguistic challenges, the strategies that can be used are: a) using assistive technology, b) note-taking and repetition, and c) looking up words or phrases in a dictionary. For non-linguistic challenges, the strategies are: a) create daily opportunities for practicing English, b) establish a supportive environment, c) build your confidence through regular practice and seek constructive feedback, d) adopt more effective learning strategies, and e) discover personal reasons for learning English to boost your motivation

### INTRODUCTION

Acquiring English as a second language is very difficult for students in Indonesia since English is a foreign language, which means it is not used in the scope of daily life. Meanwhile, the ability to communicate in English has become a crucial skill needed in the globalized world. As the primary language of international business, technology, science and academia, proficiency in English opens up numerous opportunities for individuals and societies, and also very influential in assisting to get better educational opportunities, find a good job, and get a promotion (Bolton, 2010).

In Indonesia, the importance of English is reflected in its status as a compulsory subject from elementary school to higher education (Kandati, S. P., & Tatipang, D. P, 2021). However, despite years of formal education, many Indonesian students still struggle to acquire English as second language where to achieve proficiency in English is not an easy task for students. Furthermore,

common people also spend a long time to acquire the desired proficiency (Luom, 2004 as cited in Mohammed M, 2022).

The challenges faced by students in acquiring English as second language are varies and depending on several factors (Adwani P & Shrivastava S, 2017). Various factors, including linguistic differences between the students' native language (Bahasa Indonesia) and English, affect the process of acquiring second language. These linguistic challenges are compounded by internal factors, such as language anxiety, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence (Krashen, 1982; Adwani P and Shrivastava S, 2017; Mohammed M, 2022; Kuiken F, 2022), which can significantly hinder second language learning. Additionally, pedagogical challenges related to teaching methods, curriculum design, and teacher competence also play a crucial role in shaping learning experiences and output for the students as second language learners (Krashen, 1982).

Villarreal Arroyo Y et al (2023) also found another challenges faced by the second language learners in acquiring English as second language. In his research, it is revealed that environmental factors also play prominent role in acquiring second language, including the classroom environment, access to educational resources, and sociocultural influences. Those factors further impact students' ability to acquire the second language. In many cases, the learning environment may not provide sufficient opportunities for practical language use, which is essential for developing students' fluency. Moreover, Villarreal Arroyo Y et al (2023) also argued that sociocultural attitudes towards English and the perceived relevance of the language in daily life can either motivate or demotivate the second language learners.

Furthermore, Sulistianingsih, et al (2020) also opined that there are three factors that become the challenges in second language learning for higher education: lecturer, materials, and students. Firstly is lecturer. Sulistianingsih, et al (2020) argued that the lecturer's roles in second language learning, such as: educator, instructor, leader, mentor, motivator, and resource persons (researcher), were not optimal which gave significant impact to the success of second language learning. Secondly is materials. Anthony (1997; as cited in Sulistianingsih, et al (2020)) reported that English textbooks that are available in the market do not fit the second language learners' needs, in each tertiary institution, each academic year, and each class. Lastly is students. Students are known as the agent of change, but in reality, the students stay passive in the learning process. According Rooijkkers (2007; as cited in Sulistianingsih, et al (2020)), there are some reasons why the students could not complete the study: 1) students have low interest in reading; 2) students rarely perform in group discussions; 3) students have low critical thinking; 4) students are passive and tend to only memorize, and 5) students only study to pursue grades and diplomas instead of acquiring an understanding.

Regarding to the previous research, a research about second language acquisition was conducted by (Rong & Abdullah, 2002). In the research entitled "*A Case Study of Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of English Home Education Model for Children in China*", the researcher chose kindergarten and primary students as the sample. From the research, it was revealed that selecting the suitable audio-visual and textbooks materials can give high stimulation and maximize the process of acquiring second language for students in kindergarten and primary school in China.

Another research was also conducted by Labastida (2019), entitled "*Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of A One-and-A-Half-Year-Old Filipino Child*". In this research, the researcher investigated about how imitation and early gestures helped the students in acquiring second language, and how children at an early age assign words to things. As the result, it was found that imitation and the use of gestures are indeed two of the most helpful mechanisms in acquiring second language. Furthermore, conversations, playing and communicating with more knowledgeable helped a lot in learning the meanings of words.

Lastly, in higher education level, research about acquiring English as second language was conducted by Sulistianingsih, et al (2020). From the research entitled "*Discovering Second Language*

*Acquisition in Higher Education in Dealing with Industrial Revolution 4.0 Challenges*”, it is concluded that several skills need to be prepared, one of which is the mastery of English (Second Language Acquisition). Further, Sulistianingsih, et al (2020) also contended that a more innovative learning system in higher education, such as adjusting the learning curriculum to increase students' ability in mastering English as second language, also need to be prepared.

Multiple researches have been conducted to investigate about second language acquisition but almost all of them only focusing on using tools to maximize the process of acquiring second language and choosing children as the sample. Meanwhile, researches about analyzing the challenges in acquiring second language, especially English, with higher education students as the sample are still limited. Thus, to fill in this gap, this research aims to investigate about challenges faced by the students in acquiring English as second language and choose English Education students, who will become English lecturer in the future, as the sample.

There are two research questions formulated in this research: a) What are the challenges faced by students of English Education Department in acquiring English as second language?; b) What are the strategies to overcome the challenges?.

By knowing the various challenges faced by the students' in acquiring English as second language and providing the solution to overcome the challenges, this study is expected to give much benefit for second language learners as well as English teacher or lecturer in order to achieve the expected output in second language learning.

## METHOD

This research used descriptive qualitative as the method and case study as research design. According to Yin (2003:13; Yin, 2011:17), Case study investigated a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. This is in accordance with the objective of this research which was intended to investigate a phenomenon in real context. The phenomenon regarding to this research was the challenges experienced by the students of English Education Department in acquiring English as a second language. Furthermore, Gillham (2000) also claimed that case study can be used to investigate an individual and a group, such as family, an office, or a class. It also can be an institution, such as school or university. Since the sample of this research was the students of English Education Department, employing case study as the research design of this research was justified.

This research was conducted at English Education Department of one private university in Medan. The sample of this research was 44 students of English Education Department which were taken from each academic year. The number of the students from each academic year was the same in order to get fair and evident result. The detail of the sample was presented in the table below.

**Table 1. The Amounts of the Sample**

No	Academic Year	Amount
1.	2021/2022	11
2.	2022/2023	11
3.	2023/2024	11
4.	2024/2025	11
<b>Total</b>		<b>44</b>

The instruments used to collect the data were questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was the primary instrument for answering the problems in this research, which contained several questions based on the initial problems. The questionnaires were distributed to 44 students which were taken as the sample for this research. In answering the questions in the questionnaire, the

students could also provide their opinions on specific challenges not mentioned above, allowing the researcher to uncover personal challenges experienced by the students.

Qualitative data was also gathered through interview. After getting information from questionnaire, the interview was conducted to several students. This interview was done with several students selected by purposive sampling to discuss their best viewpoints towards the topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), in order to get deeper and clearer information about the challenges faced by the students.

After gathering all the data, the researcher analyzed the data. The data from questionnaires were analyzed and categorized first in order to find out the challenges faced by the students. For some points needed further explanations were explored and gained through interview. After analyzing the challenges, the researcher also analyzed the strategies used to overcome the challenges which were proposed by the students based on their experiences.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data from questionnaires and interviews, some challenges and proposed strategies are examined by the researcher.

### 1. CHALLENGES

After analyzing the data, it is revealed that the challenges are classified into two categories: linguistic challenges and non-linguistic challenges.

#### a. Linguistic Challenges

**Table 2. Amounts and Percentages of Linguistic Challenges**

No	Types of Challenges	Amount	%
1.	Grammar	21	47,7
2.	Vocabulary	10	22,7
3.	Speaking/Pronunciation	8	18,2
4.	Linguistic differences	5	11,4

From the table above, it can be seen that the most prominent challenge in linguistic category is grammar with 47.7%.

*Student 2: "susah kali kurasa miss (grammar). Banyak kali rumus-rumusnya. Gak kayak bahasa kita... (Indonesia)"*

*Student 11: "karna susah memahami rumusnya miss. Jadi gak ngerti".*

According to the data, the students find it difficult to understand the structures of the target language (English) since the structure of the target language is obviously different with their first language. Furthermore, the students also opined that the difficulty in understanding the structures gives impact to the process of acquiring English as second language. This condition approves the statement in the research conducted by Adwani P and Shrivastava S (2017) that states grammar is indispensable in the success of second language learning.

The second is vocabulary which was chosen by 10 students or 22,7% out of the total respondents. The students report that they have difficulty in understanding English due to the lack of vocabulary mastery as what can be seen below.

*Student 40: “Kalau saya sih merasa sulit di vocabulary itu karna banyak arti kata yang belum saya tau. Jadi kalau mau nulis atau ngomong bahasa inggris jadi susah karna gak tau apa yang mau diucapkan”*

*Student 42 : “beberapa kata aku gak tau bahasa inggris nya apa miss, jadi agak sulit kurasa... (to understand)”*

From the students’ answers above, it is revealed that the lack understanding of English vocabulary gives distraction to the students in second language learning process. As the result, this makes the students struggling to understand and acquire English as their second language. This condition gives further support to Wilkins, (1972; in Adwani P and Shrivastava S, 2017) that claimed vocabulary mastery is an essential factor in second language learning.

Speaking/Pronunciation is the third challenge revealed from the collected data which was chosen by 18,2% of students.

*Student 7: “susah ngucapin kata-katanya miss... (pronouncing the word)”*

*Student 32: “kalau bicara bahasa inggris kadang terbawa-bawa pake logat kita miss. Itu sih yang agak sulit sama ku”*

*Student 43: “yang paling sulit itu ngucapinnya miss. Karna gak semua kata aku tau cara ngucapkannya”*

From the data above, the students report that they struggled to speak English due to the lack of pronunciation’s understanding. Some students also stated that they have difficulty in pronouncing the words correctly due to the huge differences of dialect between the first language and the target language.

The last challenge in this category is linguistic differences, which was chosen by 11,4 % of students. For linguistic differences, the challenges are as follow:

*Student 44: “ kalau bahasa inggris itu banyak variasi nya. Itu yang buat bingung miss. Dia laki-laki sm perempuan beda. Tunggal dan jamak beda. Banyak lah miss yang bikin bingung. Frasanya pun kalau diterjemahkan dari indonesia ke inggris juga jadinya beda”*

According to the students’ answers got from questionnaires and interviews, the differences of variations in language usage between first language (Indonesia) and target language (English), such as the differences in using pronoun, singular and plural noun, phrases, etc, make the students struggling in understanding the language. The students opine this condition also gives huge impact to the successful of second language learning.

### **b. Non-Linguistic Challenges**

The second category is non-linguistic challenges. From the data, it is revealed that there are five types of non-linguistic challenges. The results are presented in the table below.

**Table 3. Types, Amounts and Percentages of Non-Linguistic Challenges**

No	Types of Challenges	Amount	%
1.	Lack of Practice	34/44	77,3
2.	Lack of Confidence/Anxiety	28/44	63,6
3.	Environment Factor	23/44	52,3
4.	Learning Process/Learning Method	22/44	50
5.	Lack of Motivation	7/44	15,9

### ***Lack of Practice***

This challenge was chosen by 34 out of 44 students. The students concede that lack of practice make them do not get adequate exposure to the target language (English), which is crucial for improving their knowledge and productive skills.

*Student 3 : “saya jarang melatih diri untuk bicara bahasa inggris”*

*Student 15: “memang gak pernah latihan juga saya bu. Ngomong pakai bahasa inggris pun jarang”*

Furthermore, it is also revealed that the students also rarely hear and use English in daily contexts so their ability to understand real-life conversations and communicate effectively is hindered.

### ***Low Self-Confidence and Language anxiety***

Low self-confidence and language anxiety are the top two challenges chosen by the students after lack of practice. This condition is also in line with (Adwani P and Shrivastava S, 2017); (Mohammed M, 2022); (Kuiken F, 2022) that stated self-confidence as one of the most influential factor in acquiring second language. In this research, it is found that 63,6% students feel less confident in using English, particularly when speaking in public or communicating with native speakers.

*Student 8: “gak pede aku miss. Takut salah ngomong aku kalau pake bahasa inggris. Nanti diketawain, jadi malu aku miss”*

*Students 15: “gak pede miss karna belum terlalu lancar itu aku bahasa inggris”*

*Students 20: “(smile)..... gak berani aku miss. Takut salah. Bahasa inggrisku gak terlalu bagus”*

From the students' statements above, it can be seen that the lack of confidence in using English contributes to students' language development. Furthermore, students with low self-confidence tend to be reluctant to participate in class activities, such as speaking in group discussions or answering questions in front of the class (Rooijkkers (2007); as cited in Sulistianingsih, et al (2020)). They also have fear in making mistakes and some attribute their lack of confidence to negative perceptions from their environment or people who mock or view English speakers as pretentious. Such experiences often contribute to a diminished confidence in using English.

Low self-confidence is often accompanied by speaking anxiety. Language anxiety is a significant challenge where students feel extremely nervous or fearful about speaking in the target language. According to the data, the students report that language anxiety leads them to avoid situations where they need to use the target language (English). Either in formal or informal contexts, this language anxiety hinder the students from practicing and improving their language skills. This is in accordance with Dewaele, Jean-Marc (2009) that claimed language anxiety linked to second language speech production and reception.

### ***Environment Factor***

Environment factor also becomes challenge in acquiring second language according to the students' experiences. Environment factor, which was chosen by 53,2% students, related to the exposure to the target language in daily life, such as direct interaction.

*Student 1: “karna jarang pakai bahasa inggris miss. Dirumah pun nggak. Orang tua ku pun gak bisa miss. Gak ngerti mereka”*

*Student 22: “di kampus pun jarang kawan-kawan mau ngomong pake bahasa inggris miss”*

*Student 38: “karna orang-orang disekitar ku pun gak pake bahasa inggris miss. Kek mana aku mau pake bahasa inggris”*

From the data got from interview above, this challenge happens due to the lack support from family, friends, or the surrounding community in using English for daily communication. This condition is also in line with the result found by Villarreal Arroyo Y et al (2023) that claimed environment may not provide sufficient opportunities for practical language use for second language learners.

**Learning Process**

The learning process became the fourth challenge in this category which was chosen by a half of the students.

*Student 42: “sulit materinya ku dipahami, miss”*

*Student 43: “banyak kali tugasnya miss. Jadi bosan”*

According to the data, the students find it difficult to follow the learning process, including difficulties in understanding the course material, completing homework, or taking exams. This condition happens due to the application of conservative way of teaching. As the result, some students find the learning process too hard or confusing.

**Lack of Motivation**

Students, with percentage 15.9%, consider a lack of motivation to be the challenge in acquiring the target language.

*Student 41: “kurang termotivasi untuk belajar bahasa inggris”*

This lack of motivation stems them in various factors, such as not seeing immediate benefits from learning English or lacking a strong interest in the language. This condition gives further support to the previous study conducted by Adwani P and Shrivastava S (2017) that stated motivation as one of the factors that contributed to second language learning.

**2. STRATEGIES**

Here are some strategies proposed by the students for overcoming the challenges both in linguistic and non-linguistic category.

**a. Strategies for Overcoming Linguistic Challenges**

**Table 4. Types, Amounts and Percentages of Strategies for Overcoming Linguistic Challenges**

No	Types of Challenges	Amount	%
1.	Using assistive technology	22	50%
2.	Note-taking and repetition	12	27,2%
3.	Looking up words or phrases in a dictionary	10	22,8%

Table 4 above shows the strategies proposed by the students for overcoming linguistic challenges. There are 3 strategies got from the data: using assistive technology, note-taking and repetition, and looking up words or phrases in a dictionary

**Using Assistive Technology**

Using assistive technology to address linguistic challenges is the most dominant strategy, with 50% of students indicating its effectiveness. This strategy is particularly

recommended as it is widely applied in students' lives when facing such challenges. The suggested assistive technologies include various tools and applications that aid in second language learning, such as: dictionary apps, translation tools, and other language learning software. These technologies can enhance language skills in an interactive and adaptive manner (Lai, C., & Li, H., (2011); Huang, H.,& Li, M. (2024)).

**Strategies:**

*Dictionary Apps:* Utilize dictionary applications accessible from mobile devices, such as Google Translate or Oxford Dictionary, for quick word lookups.

*Learning Software:* Apps like Duolingo, Babbel, or Rosetta Stone provide interactive language lessons that help reinforce language skills.

*Interactive Practice:* Use apps offering listening and speaking exercises, such as Speechling or Elsa Speak, to enhance pronunciation skills.

*Note-taking and Repetition*

Taking note and repetition are chosen by 27.2% of students. This strategy is crucial in the second language learning process to ensure that the information learned is well-understood and retained. It aids in organizing information and supporting continuous learning.

**Strategies:**

*Record New Vocabulary:* Take notes on newly learned words, including their definitions, synonyms, and usage examples.

*Employ Active Learning Methods:* Techniques such as concept maps or diagrams can aid in organizing and remembering information.

*Schedule to Review:* Set aside the time to regularly review the learning materials by using techniques.

*Looking Up Words or Phrases in a Dictionary*

This fundamental technique is highly effective for expanding vocabulary and understanding word usage in context according to the students' experiences. Dictionaries provide definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and example sentences that help the students in grasping the nuances and applications of words. This strategy is highly recommended by the students as well as the researcher and is commonly used in daily life to enhance students' vocabulary. It is particularly useful when encountering unfamiliar words while reading English texts, browsing the internet, or during conversations. Looking up and noting down the meaning of the words can be very effective for retention (Nation, I. S. P., 2001).

**Strategies:**

*Choose the Right Dictionary:* Utilize a dictionary suitable for English learners, whether in print or digital format. Bilingual dictionaries, such as English-Indonesian, or monolingual dictionaries like Oxford or Merriam-Webster, can be highly beneficial.

*Check Context:* Always review example sentences in the dictionary to understand how the word is used in different contexts.

**b. Strategies for Overcoming Non-Linguistic Challenges**

These suggestions aim to address each challenge in a way that is practical and tailored to individual needs.

*Lack of Practice*

To overcome this challenge, the second language learners can create daily opportunities for practicing English. This can involve engaging in conversations with native speakers, joining

English language clubs, or utilizing language learning apps. Consistent practice in speaking and listening is crucial for improvement. This strategy will facilitate the acquisition of the target language.

#### *Environment Factor*

This challenge can be overcome by encouraging family and friends to participate in using English for daily life conversation. Engaging family and friends to watch English movies and TV shows, or listening to English songs, will also be very beneficial for this case. Establishing a supportive environment by setting up a comfortable space and seeking out communities or friends who are active in using English will be helpful for second language learners.

#### *Low Self-Confidence and Language Anxiety*

Build your confidence through regular practice and seek constructive feedback will be very effective for second language learners who have low self-confidence and language anxiety. Learners can commence to speak in safer environments, such as small groups in English Education Department, before advancing to public speaking. Utilizing relaxation techniques or mental exercises are also beneficial to manage anxiety.

#### *Learning Process/Learning Method*

The challenges in learning process can be handled by adopting more effective teaching strategies as what suggested by Krashen (1982). Utilizing various teaching techniques and teaching methods, which are compatible for higher education students in second language learning, can also be considered by the lecturers or tutors.

#### *Lack of Motivation*

Discovering personal reasons for learning English, such as career opportunities or related hobbies will be helpful in boosting second language learners' motivation. Second language learners can set small goals and celebrate achievements to maintain motivation. Engaging in enjoyable and relevant activities related to English, such as joining English club, also can boost second language learners' motivation to learn English since motivation is fundamental to second language learning (Anjomshoa, L., & Sadighi, F. (2015).

## **CONCLUSION**

From the result of this study, it can be concluded that there are two types of challenges faced by students in acquiring English as second language: linguistic challenges and non-linguistic challenges. For linguistic challenges, there are four types of challenges appeared, such as grammar, vocabulary, speaking/pronunciation, and linguistic differences. The results also bring fact that grammar is the most prominent challenge faced by the students in acquiring English as second language. For non-linguistic challenges, the challenges faced by the students are varied, such as: lack of practice, lack of confidence/language anxiety, environment factor, learning process/learning method and lack of motivation.

In summary, this research highlights the significant impact of linguistic and non-linguistic challenges faced by the students in acquiring English as second language. To overcome the challenges, some strategies are proposed for both categories of challenges. For overcoming the linguistic challenges, the strategies that can be used are: a) using assistive technology, b) note-taking and repetition, and c) looking up words or phrases in a dictionary. For non-linguistic challenges, the strategies are: a) create daily opportunities for practicing English, b) establish a supportive environment, c) build your confidence through regular practice and seek constructive feedback, d)

adopt more effective learning strategies, and e) discover personal reasons for learning English to boost your motivation.

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