THE CHALLENGES OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract *: As one of the foreign languages in Indonesia, English must be learned from junior high school to undergraduate level. As a foreign language, challenges arise both in terms of the teacher as the one who give instruction or students as objects as well as subject learners. Various responses can be found in class related to these problems, especially in the attitude of students during the learning process, student learning outcomes, and participation in carrying out group activities. This study aims to explore the obstacles faced by students in learning English and its causal factors in the environment of Karimun University. This study uses a qualitative approach with a questionnaire, observation, and video recording instrument. Analysis of research data is done in three ways, namely, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. The results showed that the research subjects had various learning difficulties in English. This happens due to the different levels of English mastery between individuals.*

Keywords: *Challenges, Undergraduate, English.*

INTRODUCTION

Mastering international languages such as English is an absolute must for students today. The expectation of English competence and other competence/skill that they are interested is concomitance. English is expected to bridge the necessary information gap, facilitate communication with outsiders where the mother tongue is not reliable. Nowadays, being bilingual or

mastering international languages other than mother tongue is a measure of academic success and must be had by university graduates (Rodriguest, Carrasquelo, & Lee. 2014)

The hopes for the role of English language skill to help students in global competence without state boundaries, indicated by government regulations that make English as a compulsory subject for students to have from elementary school to high school level as well as at the higher education level. In fact, all study programs at the higher education must provide English course for the first and second semesters even though the discipline taken is not related to English. Ihis is a proof of the importance of mastering English at the level of higher education in Indonesia as a basis for academic achievement from the initial level. (Munadzdzofah, 2017)).

There are two types of English instruction, so called General English and English for Specific Purposes (or ESP). How ever as long as the learners know the instruction in class, and can extend their knowledge beyond the curriculum which is very limited to undergraduate, they do not get English subject burdensome. The language learning process is a lifetime process, but can be measured and engineered during class learning (Susanto, Fazlinda, Nuwrun, 2018).

To be a good communicator, one must master the skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading from a foreign language (Sari, 2019). This covers to the English learning process called listening and reading as receptive skills while reading and speaking as productive skills. There is an opinion tendency from ordinary people that mastering speaking is an indicator of mastering a foreign language. It is not entirely true. Because other language skills such as writing, listening and reading also need to be mastered. For example, when someone opens the Internet and wants to respond to an e-mail, of course it takes the ability to read carefully along with the ability to write with the correct language structure so that it can provide the appropriate answer. In addition there are three elements of language that play an important role in supporting the four skills, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

To achieve optimal English language skills, professional language instructors are needed to produce quality alumni. Apart from the quality

of the teaching staff and the mastery of teaching materials, the balance between theory and training portion is very influencial. However, to realize an ideal language class is not as simple as expected. In addition to having sufficient material experience, a language instructor should know the level of language mastery of each student. If all conditions are generalized, it could be difficult to achieve the expected learning goals. Allegedly, every student has different characteristics, including learning strategies and the ability to understand the material being taught as in the concept of multiple intelligence (Stanford, 2003).

In the process of learning English, a student certainly has an obstacle experience to learn. These obstacles can lead to less than the optimal outcomes. This can happen to anyone, either they are taking English study program or not. Hasan (2000) states that the difficulty faced by many English learners is the lack of understanding of English pronunciation expressed at normal native speaker-speed through listening course. In reading skills, it is argued that the problem faced for reading text

comprehension lies in the lack of knowledge about reading material and ignorance of how to connect ideas one to another sentence within the text or the text beyod their vocabulary level (Susanto & Suhardianto, 2018, Susanto, 2017).

Writing skills are considered quite difficult to acchieve as they require complex and systematic thought processes. However, such a writing skill need to be mastered by English learners. In communication writing skills are also important to master whose benefits will be felt when the written language is published and read by others (Rukmini, 2011). Thus, the writing text level of quality must always be upgraded. In term of speaking skills, Megawati & Mandarani (2016) in their research found that the students difficulties dealing with limited of vocabulary. Vocabulary is the basis of achieving English language skills either as a second language or a foreign language (Susanto, 2017; Susanto, Fazlinda, & Nuwrun, 2018; Susanto, Salleh, Fazlinda, 2018).

Aforementioned, it certainly encourages a teacher or language instructor to pay more attention to the

conditions of their students followed by readiness in the implementation of learning. Without careful and well preparation, learning activities may not run effectively. The preparations can be seen from the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), material, media, and assessment. 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 as well as to improve students' level of quality.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Problems in learning English are not only found at the level of primary, secondary and upper education only, but continues to the tertiary level. Several studies have proven this for each English language skill (Panggabean, 2015; Megawati & Mandarani, 2016; Lituanas et al. (1999); Hasan, 2000). This applies also to students who are not from the English department. Each student must have an interest in different fields of science. So that, not all like English and choose English majors. This cannot be separated from the problems that will arise when the learning

process delivered. To fulfill their obligations as students at a university, they are required to take English courses and even have to pass a TOEFL test with a high enough score. For students who do not have a strong background in language starting from elementary to high school would feel very-burdened by the situation. So as English learners who do not explore knowledge in their fields (ESP learners) have the potential to produce a variety of responses in the learning process (Zuomin, 1995).

Based on the concepts 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 rather than in daily activities. Therefore, in this article the researchers are concentrating to explore the obstacles experienced by students dealing with the four language skills. This is considered necessary to be done as information material which can later be used to improve the concept of effective English learning for students who are not from the English department.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Based on the purpose of this research, which is to determine the difficulty of students in learning English, this type of research is a qualitative research that produces observable written or spoken words. The study was conducted from November 2019 to February 2020.

The research subjects were Karimun University students who took English subject II. Where before they had obtained English subject I which discusses the basic concepts of English. The number of research subjects was 38 students. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire, recording, and observation method. The questionnaire was distributed to research subjects to find out students' responses about the learning experience of English for two semesters including the difficulties experienced in the learning process. In addition, researchers also collected data through recordings at the end of semester activities where students were asked to describe the journal they had read in the form of video recordings for approximately 5 minutes. The results of the recording were then observed especially in aspects of the appearance of student, attitudes, and speech delivery.

Observation took place during one semester of learning activities to observe students who are classified as active, less active, and passive. Students can be categorized as active when in the learning process showing their participation to answer questions, ask questions, and often express opinions, suggestion, fast response during group activities. For those who are less active, it can be seen from the intensity of interaction that is rarely happened between the student and the lecturer. They are only active when asked or appointed by the lecturer to express their opinions and comments. The latter category is passive where students almost never contribute verbally during the class and having low score (<50).

The validity of research data from the technical and referral sources was measured using triangulation (Sugiyono, 2008). In this study, the data gathered then analised in three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification.

Data Reduction

The researchers summarize the data collection process during the learning activities taking place by looking for important points as the focus of the research. This is to classify answers related to difficulties encountered when learning activities according to the level of student.

Data Presentation

The researchers present the results of the research data that has been summarized by describing in detail and clearly things that are related to students' obstacles in the process of learning in English class.

Drawing conclusions

In the initial stages, conclusions are still temporary, which can change if no supporting data is obtained to reinforce the results of data collection. When there are valid and consistent supporting references, the researchersthen can draw credible conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A summary of the questionnaire that has been distributed that all students have diverse opinions about the skills that are the most difficult to master. Not a single skill has been missed. However, when compared from one language skill with another language skill, the results show that Speaking is at the highest level.

Some factors that became the reason why they chose Speaking were because of the lack of vocabulary, difficult pronunciation, affraid of making mistakes, laughed at by friends, and lack of grammar knowledge. Several factors cause student difficulties due to affective factors. This is reinforced by Afisa & Yolanda (2015) in their research states that the factors causing difficulties in learning to speak English are the number of frequencies of English speaking practice and psychological /affective factors.

The second position lies in the Listening skill. When listening to an english video, students feel unable to keep up with the normal speed of the sound of native English speakers. Then the lack of mastery of vocabulary and understanding of English accents makes them not understand the content spoken in the conversation even though the speed has been adjusted to Indonesian or the

speakers were not native. Listening problems were also discovered by Darti & Asmawati (2017) who examined the English learners of students at UIN Makassar that the lack of vocabulary, grammar and accent is the dominant thing experienced in mastering English.

Writing is the most complex activity to master for the learners in this context. However, only a few students make writing 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 the results of their English writing.

The writing process consists of outlining, drafting, creating, editing, revising-checking on the accuracy of the relevance of the content, and the last as publishing. If outlined more specifically, outlining is intended to arrange a paragraph outline, drafting to make the initial paragraph draft, editing to check the accuracy of writing, revising to check the accuracy of the content between paragraphs and titles, and publishing is to publish the results of writing to be read by others. The importance of the process

apporach in writing is highly recommended by linguists. This is because to put an idea in writing requires a process of developing ideas and designing sentences that reinforce one another. In addition to developing ideas, appropriate learning media are needed, so that the difficulties encountered can be minimized through these media. One of the media that can be used is comic strips if the ideas to be developed are related to narrative texts

The importance of the process apporach in writing activities is highly recommended. It is because in order to express an idea, a process of activities is needed. The process can develop ideas and improve the elements in them. In addition, appropriate learning media are needed so that the difficulties encountered can be minimized by these media. (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 which is used as the basis of answers by students is because of their interest in reading activities. So even though the language of instruction given is

English they still enjoy the activity. The second reason is that when reading students have a text that can be directly used as reference material to answer questions related to understanding text. But opinions that state reading as a difficult skill cannot be ignored even though the numbers are very few.

From the information obtained, students find it difficult to understand the contents of reading in English due to the low mastery of vocabulary, so that messages that are comparable to what they read are very difficult to interpret. This can be used as input for all language teachers to pay attention to the level of difficulty in the selection of English reading with student competence (Susanto & Suhardianto, 2018).

The results of the recording of the student's final project are analyzed as supporting data. Before recording, students are asked to an English-language journal thay prefer within the scope of the study program they are in. From the results of their understanding of the journal, they make a summary and present it to the class and do explain in brief. In order to facilitate the analysis of recorded data, the

researchers classified student recording results into three categories. They are active, underactive, and passive students. The analysis showed that students who actively participated in the English class were able to carry out the project confidently and fluently with pronunciation that was almost right. This can be seen from their expressions which not showing tense and eloquence when explaining journal they have read. They confidently explain what they got from their own chosen journal in English and explain in front of the class in their own language and expression.

For students who are less active in the learning process, their performance is quite good, especially in the pronunciation of English vocabulary even though it still sounds halting because they have not memorized or read the text in hand notes. The notes that have been prepared help provide ideas that will be conveyed on the recording. In term of their expressions, they look relaxed and not tense when describing what they understand from the journal they read.

However recordings of students who passively participated in

class during the English class, showed that they were not confident to explain in their own language about the journal they had chosen. While explaining, their voice was very slow, and expressions showed a shy or agitated expression. Mostly Indonesian words were chosec to express what they want to present. This is due to the English they use cannot represent what they want to say. In addition, the structure of the language used is not well arranged grammatically. This can be seen when they try to pronounce English vocabulary intermittently and repeatedly because they are not sure what was said. This is due to limitations in translating Indonesian into English without double checking or proofread.

From all the research results, it can be concluded that the difficulty of learning English in achieving full language competence is influenced by the level of language mastery of each student. This can be seen from the statement of research subjects who are classified as active in the opinion that Speaking is the easiest skill. This is in contrast with students who are classified as passive stating that

Speaking is the most difficult thing to master and it is very unattractive to speak in a foreign language among Indonesian environment.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

The process of learning English can not be separated with the emergence of various difficulties that occur mainly among students. These difficulties can be seen from each language skills or as a whole. In an English class that have different language competencies, the difficulties encountered are also vary. In this research showed difficulty learning English in four skills in the most difficult to easiest sequence as follows Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing. The factors that cause learning difficulties in English are very much influenced by the level of language mastery of each student. Active students tend to choose writing. However, passive students tend to choose speaking as a difficult thing to practice. Video recordings show that active and less active students can carry out the final project well in terms of confidence and grammar. But for passive students, the results show that

students lack confidence and cannot describe it smoothly.

SUGGESTION

From this research, the authors recommend that English learners need seriousness in mastering various language skills. Those who hope to master the language from just one skill, may be a false hope, because language is a combination of every element of the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Vocabulary is one of the initial determinants of these 4 expertise, and this needs to be done for beginning learners and improving vocabulary will have a tremendous impact on ability in general language skills. With the development of vocabulary skills, English learners need to improve their pronunciation and grammar skills that are useful for improving speaking, reading, listening and writing skills.

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