

THE DIFFICULTIES FACED AND THE STRATEGIES USED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the difficulties faced and the strategies used by English Department students at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura in learning English. The study used a mixed-method approach, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The source of data was one class in the second semester that consisted of thirty-seven students. The data were the difficulties faced by the students in learning English and the strategies they used to deal with them. The research instrument used was questionnaires containing both close-ended and open-ended questions. The data that was obtained from closed-ended questions were analysed quantitatively while those that were derived from open-ended questions were analysed qualitatively. The results showed that the difficulties faced by English Department students in learning English include pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary and they exercised different strategies to solve them. Specifically, the strategies to solve the difficulty in learning pronunciation were listening to English songs, singing English songs, watching English movies or films, imitating using Google Translate, and practising the pronunciation by themselves. The strategies to tackle the difficulty in learning grammar were watching YouTube, reading English books, learning from the internet, learning through Instagram, and learning by themselves. Furthermore, there were several ways that they used to deal with the difficulty in learning vocabulary, for example, they used English dictionaries, watched English movies, read English books, used English songs, and memorized new vocabulary.

Keywords: *difficulties, second language learning, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary*

INTRODUCTION

English is a global language that can be used by people to connect with the world in many aspects of life. For some Indonesian people, English has become an important language besides the national language Bahasa Indonesia and other local languages (Hidayati, 2016). Due to its status as a foreign language in Indonesia, it does not come as a surprise that only a few people use English in their daily activities. However, it is still possible to find people using English to communicate with each other in their daily life such as English study program at universities, in English courses, or in international workplaces such as hotels and tourist attractions (Amrullah, 2015).

Language learner means a person learning a language. English learners in many countries do not only start learning it at elementary schools as formal education but also use another education such as informal or non-formal education. Many countries have made English one of the subjects in formal education. This for example can be seen in the Indonesian government regulations that make English as subject for students to study from elementary school to high school level. Although English learners in Indonesia begin learning English at a young age and some even for a long period of time, still they cannot use it properly. In fact, learning English is not an easy thing to do. This can be seen from the fact that many English learners are still unable to speak English even though they have studied it for many years at various levels (Salim, 2015).

English learners can be divided into two groups, namely young learners and adult learners (Dewinoviayanti, 2018). The students in English Department at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura are classified as adult learners. It is possible for them to also face difficulties in learning English. Learning a foreign language which has a different phonetic and phonological system from one's native language is not an easy undertaking. Although it is difficult, many English learners are interested in learning English as a challenge that must be faced. The difficulty can vary and to some extent, it depends on the learners. For example, Megawati (2016) found that there are three elements of language that play an important role in supporting these four skills, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (language structure); these are always obstacles in learning English.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that there are different types of difficulties that can be faced by English learners when learning English as a foreign language. As a foreign language, English is spoken in certain conditions and people do not communicate with it in daily activities. In this research, the writer is interested in identifying the difficulties in learning English as a foreign language and how English Department students solve them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses works related to the topic of this study. First, we review the literature related to the difficulties in learning English and secondly, we look at the strategies used by learners to solve the difficulties.

Second Language Acquisition versus Foreign Language Learning

A second language is usually the official or socially dominant language needed for education, work, and other basic purposes. It is often acquired by members of minority groups or immigrants who speak other languages natively (Saville & Troike,

2012). The second language is the language obtained after the acquisition of the first language with a relatively perfect mastery of the language. Saville-Troike (2012) also states that second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the process by which people learn a new language after their first language since they were born and it also refers to the learning process.

According to Panggabean (2020), the position of English in the world can be categorized into three major categories, namely English as a First Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Panggabean (2020) stated that the position of English in Indonesia is very important because it is included in the national curriculum from elementary school to university. The importance of English can also be seen in the fact that the TOEFL test and other accepted English proficiency tests are used as a requirement for entry and graduation at universities in Indonesia. English is still treated as a branch of science like other subjects and as a foreign language, not as a means of communication. In this context, English in Indonesia is not a Second Language (ESL) but a Foreign Language (EFL).

In this case, a foreign language is a language which does not have a certain function for daily communication in society; thus, English in Indonesia is an example of a foreign language. Foreign Language learning means acquiring the ability to ask and answer questions, make statements, and produce the normal authentic forms used by native English speakers. Furthermore, foreign languages are not included in the context of a language that must be urgently learned but they may be required, for example, to travel to other countries, or engage in social communication activities (Saville & Troike, 2012).

The Difficulties Faced by English learners

Lodges et al. (2018) suggest that difficulties are often an unavoidable but important part of the learning process. The factors that cause students to face difficulties in learning English do not only come from the teacher but also from the environment. Heinstrom (2012) states that personality also influences how students behave in an educational context, which is another factor that influences learning outcomes. Megawati (2016) found that students often have difficulty when learning English due to a lack of vocabulary in English words. In the following, we discuss three elements of language, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, all of which have always been considered obstacles in learning English.

Pronunciation is one of the difficulties that learners encounter in learning English. For example, Sholeh and Muhaji (2015) found that many students faced difficulty in pronouncing English. It can be said that pronunciation was one of the difficulties commonly undergone by English learners. The mistakes in pronunciation can make the meaning of a sentence different. That is why learning pronunciation is an important form of foreign language learning that requires attention from English learners.

English learners usually feel difficulty in learning grammar materials. Grammar is one of the difficulties that many English learners face when they start learning English. In grammar, learners have to remember many rules when using verbs, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives. According to Petra (2015), some students are afraid to speak in English because they have to think about the grammar to use and they are also worried about the grammatical errors they may make. Anceta and Simagala (2017) suggest that one of the most difficult things to learn in English is grammar rules

because English grammar has a different syntax system from Indonesian syntax, for example.

Mastering vocabulary will make it easier for someone to read, write, listen and speak in English. Learning a language was often associated with how to compose a sentence that is good for speaking. Many people think that they want to be able to speak fluently and interact with each other using the language being studied, but they rarely think that what is more important to learn is the mastery of the vocabulary of the language. Mastering a large vocabulary is the main facility for constructing sentences and speaking fluently. According to Suryanto and Sari (2021), learning English vocabulary is one of the difficulties that students often face.

The Strategies to Solve the Difficulties

In learning English, students possibly face difficulties. There are some strategies that they can use to overcome the difficulties in learning English pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

To overcome pronunciation difficulties, song is one of the strategies that can be used by the students to practice pronunciation. They can listen to the song along with the lyrics or they can listen and sing at the same time to practice the pronunciation. In this case, Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that listening to songs can be a strategy for learning pronunciation. Besides songs, watching English movies can be used to improve pronunciation. In watching movies, students can watch English movies and use English subtitles to know each word that is pronounced. Singing English songs may also help students improve their pronunciation. In addition, practising by themselves is useful to maintain their pronunciation in learning English.

In solving the difficulty in learning grammar, reading can be one of the strategies used by English learners. Reading English journals or articles can be included in extensive reading because it allows students to read and read (Lee et al., 2015). Suryanto and Sari (2021) suggest that reading books can be an effective way of learning grammar. Natasya (2019) states that the strategies or the solutions to the difficulties in learning grammar are asking other friends, asking a lecturer, reading other journals, and finding grammar resources on the internet. Reading journals, asking friends, and asking lecturers can help solve the difficulty in learning grammar.

Using social media can also help learners get a positive influence on their oral performance, grammar, and vocabulary as a medium to learn English. In social media, there are many things that learners can acquire especially in learning the English language (Suryanto & Sari, 2021). In learning grammar, learners can use Google as a medium to learn grammar. Through Google, students can find grammar materials instantly without wasting a lot of time. Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that Google can be used in learning grammar. Practising by themselves can be an effective way of learning grammar because by doing exercises, they can train their knowledge, especially about grammar since the students have supporting materials like guide books in mastering grammar.

In dealing with the difficulty in learning vocabulary, students can use flashcards to improve vocabulary. The reading approach can also be used as a solution in dealing with vocabulary difficulties to emphasize and control them (Atika, 2011). Writing the vocabulary that has been heard and read can also be useful in learning vocabulary because this can develop students' vocabulary. Listening to music and watching movies can help in learning new vocabulary. Vocabulary note-taking also can be

useful in learning vocabulary since this strategy can develop a student's vocabulary (Lee et al., 2015).

METHOD

In this study, we used a sequential mixed method with a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2003). Sequential explanatory design is a mixed methods research design where the research is carried out at different times and sequentially, starting with quantitative research first, then qualitative research. Specifically, quantitative research is first followed by qualitative research. The source of data for this study was one class of thirty students in the second semester in the English Department at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura. The data were the difficulties faced by the students and the strategies they used to solve them in learning English.

The research instrument used in this research was a questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study was close-ended questionnaires and open-ended questionnaires. The close-ended questionnaire was a list of questions that alternative answers were provided by the researcher. The open-ended questionnaire was a list of questions that allow the responders to freely write their answers to the questions provided by the researcher. The data that came from closed-ended questionnaires were analysed quantitatively while those which were obtained by open-ended questionnaires were analysed qualitatively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Difficulties Faced by English Learners

The close-ended questionnaire distributed to the students consisted of questions that students only give a check to the column provided by the researcher. We provided four options for the students namely strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. There were thirty-seven students from Class B in the second semester in the English Department at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura in the academic year 2021/2022 as the participants of this study. After calculating the answer to the questionnaire using Microsoft Excel, we obtained the result of the percentage of the question from the questionnaire. We described the result of the data in the table using words. To explain the difficulties faced by English learners, we used the following table which consisted of the questions and the percentage of difficulties faced by the students.

Table 1. The difficulties faced by English students

No.	Questions	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (DA)
1.	I face many difficulties in the process of learning English.	16.22% (6)	51.35% (19)	29.73% (11)	2.7 % (1)

2.	I have difficulty learning pronunciation in English.	13.51% (5)	43.24% (16)	37.84% (14)	5.43 % (2)
3.	The different spelling between Indonesian and English affected the difficulties of pronunciation.	8.11% (3)	43.24% (16)	43.24% (16)	5.41 % (2)
4.	I have difficulty in learning grammar in English.	37.84% (14)	51.35% (19)	10.81% (4)	0% (0)
5.	I have difficulty learning vocabulary in English.	8.11% (3)	62.16% (23)	29.73% (11)	0% (0)
6.	My environment is one of the factors that cause me to have difficulty in learning English	13.51% (5)	40.54% (15)	40.54% (15)	5.41% (2)
7.	My personality affects me to face difficulty in learning English.	5.41% (2)	29.73% (11)	45.95% (17)	18.92% (7)

The difficulties in the process of learning English

It can be seen from Table 1 (see point 1) that almost all of the students fill out the test that they have many difficulties in learning English. Only a few of the students disagreed that they faced many difficulties in learning English. This is in line with what Lodge et al. (2018) stated that difficulties are often an unavoidable but important part of the learning process. It is commonly understood that students face many difficulties in learning English because they learn a new language that is different from their mother tongue or their first language.

The difficulty in learning pronunciation

Based on Table 1 (see point 2), it can be seen that more than half of the students in the class faced difficulty in learning pronunciation and less than half of the students answered that they did not face any difficulty in pronunciation. Sholeh and Muhaji (2015) explained that the difficulties faced by students in pronouncing English as follows: difficulty in eliminating the influence of the mother tongue that is still strong, difficulty in pronouncing sounds with proper consonants and vowels (difficulty in getting used to phonetic sound pronunciation in English), and difficulty in determining stressed and unstressed syllable.

The cause of difficulty in learning pronunciation

The result is shown in Table 1 (see point 3) that there were more than half of the students in the class agreed and less than half of the students in the class disagreed that the different spelling between Indonesian and English affected the difficulties of

pronunciation. The students have difficulty pronouncing certain words because of the strong influence of the student's mother tongue and are not familiar with the English environment (Sholeh & Muhaji, 2015). Students find difficulty in learning pronunciation because of the huge difference between the pronunciation of the alphabet in English and their first language, namely Indonesian.

The difficulty in learning grammar

It can be seen in Table 1 (see point 4) that almost all of the students in the class faced difficulty in learning grammar and a few students in the class disagreed that they face difficulties in learning grammar in English. According to Petra (2015), many students are afraid to speak English because they keep thinking about grammar and worry about grammar mistakes.

The difficulty in learning vocabulary

It can be seen in Table 1 (see point 5) that more than half of the students in the class agreed and less than half of the students in the class disagreed that they faced difficulty in vocabulary. According to Suryanto and Sari (2021), learning English also includes vocabulary as one of the difficulties.

The environment causes difficulty in learning English

The result in Table 1 (see point 6) shows that half of the students in the class agreed and another half of the students disagreed that their environment is one of the factors that cause them to have difficulty in learning English. Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that the factors that cause difficulties in learning English do not only come from the teacher but also come from the environment.

The personality affects the difficulty

The result in Table 1 (see point 7) shows that less than half of the students in the class agreed and more than half of the students disagreed that personality affected them in facing difficulty in learning English. Heinstrom (2012) stated that personality also influences how students behave in an educational context, which is another factor that influences learning outcomes.

The strategies used by English students to solve difficulties in learning English

The data from the open-ended questionnaire was used to identify and explain the solution or the strategy to solve the difficulties faced by English Department students in learning English as a foreign language. The open-ended questionnaires distributed to the students consisted of four questions that students can give their opinions. There were thirty-seven students from Class B in the second semester in the English Department at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura in the academic year 2021/2022 as the participants of this study. They were free to fill in the questions according to their opinions. Based on their answers, we found several strategies that were applied by the students to overcome the difficulties they encountered in learning English. In the following section, we present and discuss the findings.

The strategies to solve a difficulty in learning pronunciation

We identified five strategies used by the respondents to solve the difficulty in learning pronunciation, namely:

1. Listening to English songs

“I usually listening English songs every day and it is very influential in learning English because we are used to listening to English pronunciation.”

“By often listening to English music I can learn how to pronounce English words properly.”

The statements above indicate that listening to English songs every day can help them to learn pronunciation and therefore guide them to overcome the difficulty in pronouncing English words. This strategy is in line with Suryanto and Sari's (2021)'s suggestion that listening to English songs can be a way to overcome difficulties in learning pronunciation.

2. Singing English songs

“To solve the difficulty in pronunciation I just practice with singing.”

“I just practice every day until I get used to it. Usually, singing helps me to improve my pronunciation.”

Those statements show that singing English songs can be one effective way of learning pronunciation and dealing with the difficulty in pronouncing English words. In this case, students can pronounce English words in the songs while listening to or after listening to the songs they are trying to sing. Again, this agrees with the previous study stating that singing songs can be an effective way to learn pronunciation (Suryanto & Sari, 2021).

3. Watching English movies or films

“I also like to watch a movie with English subtitles. So, I know how to pronounce English words.”

“I often watch English films and follow the sentences that they say.”

The statements suggest that watching English movies or films can help the students solve the difficulty in learning pronunciation. Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that in watching movies, students can watch English movies and use English subtitles to know every word that is spoken.

4. Imitation using Google Translate

“I usually check the pronunciation in Google Translate.”

“I usually use Google Translate to justify my pronunciation.”

All of the statements above show that Google Translate can be used as the solution to the difficulty in learning pronunciation. In that way, students can learn to repeat or imitate sentences or words in conversation and this will help them achieve better understanding and success in their language tasks (Suryanto & Sari, 2021).

5. Practice the pronunciation in their ways

“Always doing practice even practice by myself and check how the pronunciation.”

“Practice speaking English.”

The statements above indicate that students have their ways to solve the difficulty in learning pronunciation. Self-declared exercises are useful for maintaining their pronunciation in learning English (Suryanto & Sari, 2021). The students chose to practice in their ways instead of using media such as music or films.

The strategies to solve the difficulty in learning grammar

There were five strategies implemented by English department students to solve the difficulty in learning grammar, namely:

1. Watching Youtube

“I have learned grammar from Youtube.”

“I repeat learning grammar by watching Youtube.”

From all the statements above, it can be concluded that watching Youtube can be one of the strategies to solve the difficulty in learning grammar. Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that on social media, there are many things that students can learn, especially in learning English.

2. Reading English books

“By reading grammar books and asking a friend who understands it better.”

“Read the grammar book again with notes from the lecture.”

All the statements above show that reading books is one of the solutions implemented by students in learning grammar. According to Suryanto and Sari (2021), reading books can be an effective way of learning grammar.

3. Learning from the Internet

“I learn more about grammar on any website.”

“If I have difficulty in learning grammar, I will find out more from google.”

All of the statements above indicate that some students use the Internet or Google to learn grammar. Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that Google can be used in learning grammar.

4. Learning Using Instagram

“I will learn by taking free courses like on Instagram.”

“Usually I learned from taking online quizzes on Instagram.”

From the statements above, we can conclude that Instagram can be used as a learning tool to solve problems in learning grammar. Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that students get a positive influence on their oral performance, grammar, and vocabulary when students use social media as a medium to learn English.

5. Learning by themselves

“Practice it and understand the pattern. The more you practice the more you can solve your problem in grammar.”

“Understand the pattern and the meaning, and also do some practice.”

All the statements above suggest that there are a few students who still cannot find the proper way to solve the difficulty in learning grammar. Suryanto and Sari (2021) stated that practising alone can be an effective way to learn grammar because by doing the exercises students can practice their knowledge, especially in studying grammar using supporting materials such as guidebooks in mastering grammar.

The states to solve the difficulty in learning vocabulary

From the questionnaire, there were five strategies used by the respondents at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura to solve the difficulty in learning vocabulary, namely:

1. Using a dictionary

“I usually read the dictionary to look up vocabulary.”

“Searching a new vocabulary in the dictionary.”

Using a dictionary was used by some students to solve the difficulty in learning vocabulary. According to Atika (2011), the reading approach can also be used as a solution to overcoming vocabulary difficulties to emphasize and control it.

2. Watching English movies

"I watch movies and activate the subtitles option."

"I watch movies in English. So, I can learn a lot of new vocabulary."

The statements above indicate that watching English movies can be one of the ways to solve the difficulty in learning English vocabulary. Lee et al. (2015) state that vocabulary recording can be used as a way of learning vocabulary because this strategy can develop students' vocabulary.

3. Reading English books

"I read books in English so I can learn a lot of new vocabulary."

"I chose reading books as a way of dealing with difficulty in learning vocabulary."

All of the statements above show that reading English books is one of the ways that can be used to solve the difficulty in learning vocabulary. The reading approach can also be used in solving difficulties in learning vocabulary (Atika, 2011).

4. Using English songs

"I listen to music. So I can learn a lot of new vocabulary."

"By learning from an English song."

All of the statements stated English songs can be one of the strategies to solve the difficulty in learning vocabulary. Listening to music and watching movies can help learners in learning new English words (Suryanto & Sari, 2021).

5. Memorizing new vocabulary

"A lot of searching and memorizing new vocabulary."

"Memorizing new words often and trying to use the vocabulary."

From all the statements above, it can be concluded that memorizing vocabulary is one of the ways to solve the difficulty of learning vocabulary. Suryanto and Sari (2021) state that in addition to remembering vocabulary, several strategies that can be used to memorize vocabulary are to use objects.

CONCLUSION

The difficulties faced by students in the English Department at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura in learning English as a foreign language are due to the different spelling systems between Indonesian and English. This also affects students in learning pronunciation. The environment and the personality of the students also affect them in learning English. The difficulties from the English department student's perspectives include difficulty in learning pronunciation, difficulty in learning grammar, and difficulty in learning vocabulary.

The strategies to solve the difficulty in learning pronunciation include listening to English songs, singing English songs, watching English movies or films, imitating using Google Translate, and practising the pronunciation by themselves. Several ways are also used by students at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura in learning grammar; these

include watching YouTube, reading English books, learning on the Internet, learning using Instagram, and learning by themselves. And there are a number of ways exercised by students at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura to deal with difficulty in learning vocabulary, i.e., using a dictionary, watching English movies, reading English books, using English songs, and memorizing new vocabulary.

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