

ANALYSING THE TYPES OF ENGLISH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OF THAI STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to find out students' difficulties in learning English. The method employed was a case study. The data was collected through interviews. The participants of this study were seven Thai students of the English Language Teaching Study Program of Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto. The results revealed that in learning listening skills, the students faced difficult accents and a lack of vocabulary. Next, in reading skill, the students encountered two types of learning challenges called lack of vocabulary and difficult to comprehend the whole text. In learning speaking skills, the students had four types of difficulties namely unconfident and nervous, lack of vocabulary, difficulty with accent, and fluency. In mastering writing, Thai students had several problems called lack of vocabulary and difficulty understanding the grammar rules. Furthermore, the pupils had certain challenges when learning subskills. The pupils encountered the difficulty of remembering and comprehending the meaning when learning new words. Secondly, the students believed that understanding English grammar was difficult when they were studying it. Finally, the students faced challenges with the complex pronunciation system, Thai accent effect, and suprasegmental feature (stress) when learning pronunciation. In short, Thai students who learned English as a foreign language in a foreign country faced several types of learning difficulties.

Keywords: *case study; learning English difficulty; Thai students.*

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language is commonly difficult for English learners. They frequently encounter learning difficulties. Wahab (2015) defines learning challenges as a state in which barriers or diversions prevent students from learning naturally. According to Hamdani (2010), there are two categories of factors that can impact learning difficulties: internal factors, or those that originate from within the student, and external factors, or those that come from outside the student.

Syah (2006) further notes that a decrease in academic performance or learning achievement typically indicates the phenomena of students' learning difficulties.

English learning difficulty is also faced by foreign students like Thai students who learn English in Indonesia. According to Samalee (2017), many of the Thai students can interact in English, many of them arrive in Indonesia without having a solid command of the language. In terms of expectations, learning assistance, academic standards, and the Indonesian language, Thai students now attend an educational setting where the teaching style and context differ from what they were used to. The issues that cause Thai students studying in Indonesia to feel a great deal of dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and worry. Wu et al., (2015) states that many overseas students encounter challenges like new living situations, schedules for studying, learning preferences, or other issues with language and interpersonal boundaries. They must so swiftly adapt to their surroundings in order to ensure a seamless learning process.

In English Language teaching Department of Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto, there were seven students who learned English. They said that during their study, they encountered several learning challenges of English. Therefore, the researchers tried to find out what types of learning difficulties they had. The researchers interviewed seven Thai students to explore deeply their learning challenges. The difficulties are classified into difficulties in learning English skills and sub-skills.

METHOD

The method used was a case study. Case study is a kind of qualitative research which makes an individual or certain unit as the research object. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), case study is a part of qualitative research method that examines individuals, groups, or significant examples to develop a case-specific explanation or provide a useful generalization. Furthermore, case study is a research method to analyze and describe the depth data from phenomenon or events. Crowe et al., (2011) states that case study method is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context.

In this study, the data were collected through interview. According to Sugiyono (2013), interview is used in a research to collect data and find out the problems that need to be researched, and it is employed to find out the depth information from the respondents. According to Winarni (2018), interviews are a type of data collection where the researchers and respondents must speak with one another directly. After doing the interview with seven Thai students, the researchers analyzed the data using Miles and Huberman in Sugiyono (2013). The data analysis process was done through data reduction, data display and data conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Listening Skill

In learning listening, Thai students encountered two different learning difficulties namely difficult accent and unfamiliar vocabulary. Here is the explanation:

a. Difficult Accent

The first type of challenging faced by the students was difficult accent. All of them said that they felt that the audios were played fast. Here the researchers concluded that the speakers spoke in the audios were native speakers, so that they spoke in their natural accent of English. The students thought that it was hard. Here is what the students said during the interview.

“Saya masih belum mengerti ketika saya mendengarkan audio yang cepat dan...” (S1)

‘I still don't understand when I listen to fast audio and...’ (S1)

“Saya masih sulit untuk memahami apa yang ada di audio terutama ketika audio memiliki suara rendah dan tidak jelas.” (S2)

‘I still find it difficult to understand what is in the audio especially when the audio has low and unclear sound.’ (S2)

Saya masih sulit memahami audio saat audio menggunakan aksen Inggris. (S3)

I still have difficulty understanding the audio when the audio uses a British accent. (S3)

“Saya masih sulit ketika listening audio terlalu cepat.” (S4)

‘I still have difficulty when listening to audio which is too fast.’ (S4)

“Saya masih sulit memahami audio yang diputar dengan cepat.” (S5)

‘I still have difficulty understanding fast-playing audio.’ (S5)

“Saya tidak dapat mendengarkan audio yang diputar dengan cepat.” (S6)
‘I can't listen to fast-playing audio.’ (S6)

“Belajar listening itu sulit, terutama ketika audio diputar dengan cepat.” (S7)
‘Learning to listen is difficult, especially when the audio is playing quickly.’ (S7)

b. Lack of Vocabulary

The second type faced by the students was lack of vocabulary. They said the difficulty in listening was lacking of English vocabulary. Here is what they said during the interview.

“...dan saya masih kekurangan vocabulary yang membuat saya sulit untuk memahami audio yang saya dengarkan.” (S1)
‘...and I still lack vocabulary which makes it difficult for me to understand the audio I listen to. (S1)

“..yang paling sulit adalah saya pikir saya masih belum banyak vocabulary.” (S2)
‘...the most difficult thing is that I think I still don't have a lot of vocabularies.’ (S2)

2. Reading Skill

a. Lack of Vocabulary

The first type of learning difficulty in reading skill faced by Thai students was lack of vocabulary. Four students said that in understanding English, they faced difficulty since they lacked of vocabulary. Here is the explanation.

“...Kemudian, vocab yang tidak dikenal membuat saya sulit.” (S2)
‘...Then, unknown vocab made it difficult for me.’ (S2)

“Saya masih sulit memahami teks ketika saya menemukan begitu banyak vocabulary yang tidak dikenal.” (S3)
‘I still find it difficult to understand texts when I encounter so many unknown vocabularies.’ (S3)

“Kesulitan saya hanya saja saya masih sedikit vocabulary-nya.” (S4)
‘My only difficulty is that I still have a small vocabulary.’ (S4)

“Saya masih sulit memahami keseluruhan teks karena vocabulary saya masih terbatas.” (S7)
‘I still have difficulty understanding the entire text because my vocabulary is still limited.’ (S7)

b. Difficult to comprehend the whole text

The second type of learning challenge in learning reading skill was the difficulty in comprehending the English text. Some of them felt that they still lacked of vocabulary. Here are what the students said during the interview.

“Saya masih sulit untuk memahami seluruh paragraf dalam teks.” (S1)
‘I still find it difficult to understand entire paragraphs in the text.’ (S1)

“Saya masih kurang memahami keseluruhan teks.” (S5)
‘I still don't understand the entire text.’ (S5)

“Saya masih sulit untuk memahami keseluruhan teks.” (S6)
‘I still find it difficult to understand the entire text.’ (S6)

“Saya masih sulit memahami keseluruhan teks karena vocabulary saya masih terbatas.” (S7)
‘I still have difficulty understanding the entire text because my vocabulary is still limited.’ (S7)

3. Speaking Skill

a. Feel unconfident and nervous

The first difficulty faced by the students was they felt unconfident and nervous when they had to speak in English. Here is the explanation.

“...dan saya masih belum memiliki kepercayaan diri yang baik untuk speaking.” (S1)
‘...I still don't have good confidence in speaking.’ (S1)

“Saya masih gugup setiap kali saya speaking.” (S2)
‘I still get nervous every time I speak.’ (S2)

“Saya masih belum cukup percaya diri ketika saya berbicara.” (S7)
‘I'm still not confident enough when I speak.’ (S7)

b. Lack of vocabulary

The second difficulty encountered by the students was they lacked of English vocabulary. Here is the explanation.

“Saya masih memiliki vocabulary yang terbatas.” (S4)
‘I still have a limited vocabulary.’ (S4)

c. Difficult Accent

The third difficulty faced by the students when they learned speaking was difficult accent. One of the students thought that English accent was hard to understand. Here is the explanation.

“Kesulitan saya masih sulit memahami speaking jika memakai aksen British.” (S3)

“My difficulty is still having difficulty understanding speaking when using a British accent.” (S3)

d. Fluency

The last difficulty encountered by two Thai students was they thought they could not speak English fluently. Here is what they said during the interview.

“Saya masih sulit untuk speaking dengan cepat dan lancar.” (S5)

“I still find it difficult to speak quickly and fluently.” (S5)

“Saya masih harus berpikiran dan harus pelan untuk ngomongnya.” (S6)

“I still have to think and speak slowly.” (S6)

4. Writing Skill

a. Lack of Vocabulary

In learning writing skill, the first difficulty was lack of vocabulary. There were three students who said that in writing their main problem was limited English vocabulary. Here is what they said during the interview.

“Saya masih sulit dalam belajar writing karena saya masih belum begitu mengerti tentang grammar dan kurangnya vocabulary. Saya masih harus terus belajar.” (S1)

“I still have difficulty learning writing because I still don't really understand grammar and lack of vocabulary. I still have to keep learning.” (S1)

“Vocabulary saya masih rendah, jadi saya harus belajar vocabulary lebih banyak.” (S2)

“My vocabulary is still low, so I have to learn more vocabulary.” (S2)

“Saya masih kekurangan vocabulary dan masih sulit untuk menggunakan grammar yang benar.” (S3)

“I still lack of vocabulary and still find it difficult to use correct grammar.” (S3)

“Saya masih belum memiliki banyak vocabulary dan saya sering lupa artinya.” (S5)

“I still don't have much vocabulary and I often forget the meaning.” (S5)

“Kesulitannya vocabulary saya masih sedikit.” (S6)

“The difficulty is that my vocabulary is still low.” (S6)

“Saya masih kekurangan vocabulary dan masih sulit memahami grammarnya.” (S7)

'I still lack of vocabulary and still have difficulty understanding the grammar.' (S7)

b. Difficult to understand the grammar rules

The second type of learning difficulty in learning writing skill was understanding English grammar. Three students said that grammar was one of their problems in learning writing. Here is what they said during the interview.

"Saya masih kekurangan vocabulary dan masih sulit untuk menggunakan grammar yang benar." (S3)

'I still lack of vocabulary and still find it difficult to use correct grammar.' (S3)

"... yang paling sulit dipelajari dalam writing adalah menggunakan grammar yang benar." (S4)

'...the most difficult thing to learn in writing is using correct grammar. Then, vocabulary is also important. I'm still a little bit.' (S4)

"Saya masih kekurangan vocabulary dan masih sulit memahami grammarnya." (S7)

'I still lack of vocabulary and still have difficulty understanding the grammar.' (S7)

5. Vocabulary

All the Thai students agreed that the types of difficulty they had in learning English vocabulary was memorizing and understanding the meaning. Here is the explanation.

"Saya masih sulit memahami arti vocabulary yang tidak dikenal. Saya juga sering lupa artinya." (S1)

'I still have difficulty understanding the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. I also often forget the meaning.' (S1)

"Saya masih mengalami kesulitan dalam menghafal vocabulary dan saya sering lupa." (S2)

'I still have difficulty memorizing vocabulary and I often forget.' (S2)

"Satu-satunya kesulitan dalam mempelajari vocabulary adalah saya masih sering lupa artinya." (S3)

'The only difficulty in learning vocabulary is that I often forget the meaning.' (S3)

"Kesulitan paling dalam mempelajari vocabulary adalah menghafalnya." (S4)

'The biggest difficulty in learning vocabulary is memorizing it.' (S4)

"Saya masih sulit menghafal vocabulary." (S5)

'I still have difficulty memorizing vocabulary.' (S5)

"Saya sering lupa dan sulit untuk menghafal." (S6)

'I often forget and find it difficult to memorize.' (S6)

“Saya jarang belajar vocabulary dan saya sering lupa.” (S7)

'I rarely learn vocabulary and I often forget.' (S7)

6. Grammar

The challenge face by Thai students was difficult English tenses. All of the students agreed that their problem was comprehending the tenses. Here is what they said during the interview.

“Saya masih mengalami kesulitan dalam menghafal rumus tenses.” (S1)

'I still have difficulty memorizing tenses formulas.' (S1)

“Saya masih sulit memahami tenses.” (S2)

'I still have difficulty understanding tenses.' (S2)

“Saya masih sulit memahami tenses yang sulit, seperti perfect tense.” (S3)

'I still have difficulty understanding complicated tenses, such as the perfect tense.' (S3)

“Saya sering lupa rumus tenses.” (S4)

'I often forget the tenses formula.' (S4)

“Saya belum tahu semua rumus tenses.” (S5)

'I don't know all the tenses formulas yet.' (S5)

“Saya masih sulit menghafal rumus tenses.” (S6)

'I still have difficulty memorizing tenses formulas.' (S6)

“Saya masih sering lupa rumus tenses.” (S7)

'I still often forget the tenses formula.' (S7)

7. Pronunciation

a. Suprasegmental Feature (Stress)

During the interview, one of the students said that her difficulty in learning pronunciation was stress. Here what she said during the interview:

“Saya masih sulit mengucapkan kata yang misalnya harus ada penekanan atau tinggi dan rendahnya.” (S2)

'I still have difficulty pronouncing words that, for example, have to be emphasized or high and low.' (S2)

b. Difficult Pronunciation System

The next difficulty encountered by the students was difficult English pronunciation. They agreed that comprehending pronunciation was hard and in English the spelling does not show its pronunciation. Here is the explanation.

“Bagi saya, pronounciation cukup sulit karena terkadang saya masih bingung bagaimana cara mengucapkan kata-kata apakah itu benar atau salah.”(S1)

For me, pronounciation is quite difficult because sometimes I am still confused about how to pronounce words whether they are right or wrong. (S1)

“Saya masih sulit mengucapkan kata yang memiliki ejaan rumit dan perbedaan kata yang harus diucapkan dengan jelas atau tidak.” (S4)

‘I still have difficulty pronouncing words that have complicated spellings and the difference between words that must be pronounced clearly or not.’ (S4)

“Belajar pronounciation sulit dipelajari karena tulisan dan pengucapannya berbeda.” (S6)

‘Learning pronounciation is difficult to learn because the writing and pronounciation are different.’ (S6)

“Saya masih sulit untuk mengucapkan dengan benar.” (S7)

‘I still have difficulty using correct pronounciation.’ (S7)

c. Thai Accent Influence

Lastly, one of Thai students encountered Thai accent influence. She said that when pronouncing words, she felt that her Thai accent still exist. Here is what she said during the interview.

“Terkadang saya masih mengucapkan vocabulary menggunakan aksen Thailand.” (S3)

‘Sometimes I still pronounce vocabulary using a Thai accent.’ (S3)

DISCUSSION

It takes effort to acquire English abilities and subskills. According to the findings, Thai pupils faced difficulties in their learning. After learning to listen, some students were still unable to comprehend spoken English words or sentences, even when they practiced listening on an audio. According to Sokip (2020), learning to listen might be challenging due to three factors: foreign terminology, a different cultural accent, and both. The majority of pupils have a limited vocabulary, particularly when it comes to words they do not often use or are unfamiliar with.

Speaking too quickly presented the second challenge. The way that the pupils understood the conversation's topic was impacted by this challenge.

The researchers identified two distinct categories of reading comprehension difficulties: vocabulary deficiency and text comprehension difficulties. Nuriati (2015) explains that reading is a means of communication. Reading is not just for information acquisition; it also calls for comprehension in order to grasp some of the text's most important ideas. It is clear from the statement that reading is crucial for students to improve their skills. Shehu (2015) discovered that pupils were still having trouble understanding what they read since they were still lacking in vocabulary, reading little to nothing, and occasionally the sort of content they were reading had an impact. This research also revealed this obstacle. The study discovered that because Thai students were still unable to comprehend, they still struggle to learn how to read.

Speaking is the next ability. The students struggled with fluency, vocabulary, difficult accents, nervousness, and lack of confidence when it came to speaking. Brown (2001), speaking is a participatory process of creating and receiving information. As a result, there are two parties involved in information delivery: the speaker and the listener. Wahidah (2016) states that speaking is a crucial component of communication for students learning English because it entails the production and reception of information that is influenced by participants, experiences, the physical environment, and goals. Speaking was actually not a simple skill to learn. The main reason why speaking involves knowledge of grammar rules, pronunciation, and other aspects is that students find it difficult to learn. Wahidah (2016) also discovered that students struggled with a number of other speaking-related issues, including a lack of vocabulary, a lack of confidence, shyness, and a fear of making mistakes. This research also revealed that most Thai students still lacked of confidence when speaking English. Thai students also reported that they were still anxious to speak in front of others and that they were still worried of making mistakes.

Writing is seen as a necessary ability for effective language development. All English language abilities are equally vital, but writing is particularly crucial since it is a powerful tool for expressing thoughts, feelings, experiences, and desires. Syatriana (2018) states that writing is a linguistic ability that allows for indirect communication through written form. Consequently, writing is a particularly helpful tool for communication since it allows people to convey ideas to readers in any way

they see fit. According to Sulasti (2003), most students struggle with writing because they do not know what to write, how to write it, do not have enough vocabulary, or do not use grammar rules. To write words correctly and know how to arrange them into sentences using grammar rules, students need to be creative and analytical thinkers. Additionally, Pratiwi (2016) discovered that children continue to struggle with vocabulary and grammar rules. According to the aforementioned assertion, grammar rules and vocabulary deficiencies continue to be major writing challenges for Thai students.

The next finding was concerned with vocabulary acquisition difficulties. According to Tozcu and Coady (2004), acquiring vocabulary is essential to both language learning and academic success. However, there are other challenges including meaning, similarity, and several terms that make acquiring vocabulary challenging. According to Freedman et al., (2013), students occasionally struggle with memorization. For instance, when pupils found it difficult to remember words, when they had trouble mentioning words, or when they had trouble telling apart words. This study also revealed that Thai pupils still struggle with memorization and frequently forget terminology.

In addition, the students found it challenging to acquire English grammar. Every student acknowledged that they had trouble understanding the tenses in English. Harmer (2001) is the process by which words are transformed into other words and joined to form sentences. Grammar is the study of the rules that defines words and the construction of sentences. Grammar is quite hard to master since most pupils still do not understand the rules or how to use tenses correctly. Natasya (2019) found most of the students still have difficulties in learning grammar. The students still difficulty in making grammatical sentences and choosing the right pattern of tenses. The case above also found out in this research. Thai students were still difficult to use the correct tenses. Even more, Thai students also still did not understand the pattern of tenses to make sentences.

Pronunciation is the final subskill. Pronunciation is an essential component of learning to speak English, according to Pollard (2008). Mustari (2010) defines pronunciation as the way a sound, word, or language is pronounced. It speaks of the way a sound is produced in language. Wei and Zou's (2002) analysis of Thai students revealed that they struggle with pronunciation, failing to create some pronunciations that are nearly comprehensible. Although the students' responses varied, the

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researcher came to the conclusion that the pupils' pronunciation was still poor. According to the interview results, the students stated that they still had trouble pronouncing words they were unfamiliar with.

CONCLUSIONS

Acquiring proficiency in English as a second language is often challenging. The pupils' exposure to the target language is restricted. For language learners who study abroad, this condition frequently gets worse. This phenomenon took place at Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto. The researchers discovered the difficulties students had in acquiring English language skills and subskills. As they learned listening skills, the pupils encountered word gaps and challenging accents. Next, the students faced two different learning problems related to their reading skills: a deficiency in vocabulary and difficulty understanding the entire text. The pupils faced four different kinds of challenges when learning how to speak: fluency, vocabulary deficiency, problematic accents, and nervousness. Thai pupils had a number of challenges in understanding writing, including a deficiency in vocabulary and a challenge in comprehending grammar rules. Furthermore, the pupils had certain challenges when learning subskills. The difficulty for the kids in learning vocabulary was in remembering and comprehending the meaning. Furthermore, in learning English grammar, the students had problem in comprehending English tenses. Finally, the students faced challenges with the complex pronunciation system, Thai accent effect, and suprasegmental feature (stress) when learning pronunciation.

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