
**LANGUAGE BARRIERS: A CASE STUDY ON ENGLISH TEACHING
PROCESS TOWARDS STUDENTS' LEARNING THE LANGUAGE
AT SMP NEGERI MOLIBAGU**

Meylirda Dewi Gobel¹
Harto Malik²
Sri Rumiyaningsih Luwiti³

*English Language Education Department,
Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas
Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia*

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Abstract

This research explores the challenges faced by English teachers in secondary schools, focusing on language barriers and strategies to overcome them. In Indonesia, where English proficiency is limited outside of academic settings, students often struggle with effective communication and participation in English classes. Qualitative methods, including interviews and observations at SMP Negeri Molibagu, were employed to gather insights directly from teachers. Teachers at SMP Negeri Molibagu encounter obstacles such as student proficiency limitations, inadequate teaching materials, and restricted instructional time, impacting their delivery of effective English lessons. To address these challenges, teachers employ strategies such as adapting teaching materials, integrating technology, and fostering collaborative learning environments. These efforts aim to enhance student engagement and comprehension despite language barriers. Thematic analysis of interview and observation data reveals recurring patterns in teachers' experiences and practices, emphasizing the adaptation of teaching methods, collaborative efforts to supplement resources, and strategies to boost student confidence and motivation in English learning. By addressing these challenges, this study offers practical insights for educators and policymakers aiming to improve English language instruction in Indonesia, advocating for tailored strategies that support diverse student needs and promote inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: *Language barriers, English teaching, Teacher strategies*

INTRODUCTION

A pre-observation conducted at SMP Negeri Molibagu revealed significant challenges faced by English teachers due to high language barriers. These barriers prevent teachers from conducting lessons entirely in English, which is considered the most effective method for teaching the language. During the pre-observation, it was observed that teachers had to explain the material twice: first in English and then in a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia. This dual explanation method was necessary because many students struggled with understanding English, necessitating a new grading system to accommodate their difficulties. This situation poses a risk of further hindering students' language development and growth. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for improving English language education in secondary schools. The focus of this study is to investigate the language barriers and the strategies employed by teachers at SMP Negeri Molibagu to overcome these obstacles, providing insights that could enhance teaching methods and student outcomes in similar contexts. Based on these observations, the research seeks to answer two primary questions: what challenges do teachers encounter in English language teaching concerning language barriers, and what strategies do they employ to overcome these challenges? The objective of this research is to understand the specific challenges faced by teachers in English language teaching, particularly those related to language barriers, and to identify the strategies they use to address these issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The language barrier in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) arises from several interconnected factors. Firstly, students' limited understanding of EFL hinders effective classroom communication. According to Tahang et al. (2019), language barriers are blockades that prevent coherent communication between individuals. These barriers comprise various components such as lack of enthusiasm, limited study schedules, inadequate teaching resources, and insufficient student motivation, as well as a lack of EFL learning skills (Malik et al., 2021). Cummins (2018) emphasizes that language barriers can hinder students from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in class, leading to frustration, anxiety, and low academic performance.

Teachers' competencies in grammar, phonology, lexical resources, and discourse are crucial for effective teaching. Purwati et al. (2023) highlight that grammatical knowledge is essential for constructing sentences, while Burns (2017) emphasizes the importance of phonological knowledge for proper pronunciation and intonation. Baker & Murphy (2011) argue that EFL or ESL teachers need to understand pronunciation and phonology. Furthermore, mastering a

sufficient vocabulary supports both receptive and productive language skills (Cahyono & Widiati, 2008). Newton et al. (2022) note that EFL learners often face challenges in acquiring these competencies, creating significant barriers to effective communication. TESOL (2019) recommends strategies such as using simple and clear language, providing practice opportunities, and creating a supportive learning environment to help students overcome these barriers.

Secondly, limited study schedules restrict the time available for effective learning. Marzulina et al. (2021) found that insufficient repetition during English lessons results in inadequate knowledge transfer from teachers to students, as teachers struggle with time management due to limited instructional hours. This issue aligns with MacIntyre and Gardner's (2019) findings that students' anxiety and lack of confidence in using a new language can further impede learning.

Thirdly, a lack of teaching resources exacerbates the problem. Malik et al. (2021) note that inadequate access to technology and educational tools like projectors, whiteboards, and computers hampers students' learning experiences, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic when home learning environments differed significantly from classroom settings. Warschauer and Healey (2018) discuss how tools such as machine translation and speech recognition software can assist students in understanding and expressing themselves in a new language, which could mitigate some resource-related barriers.

Lastly, the inadequacy of teaching materials further heightens the language barrier. Nindya et al. (2022) found that many textbooks focus primarily on local cultures, offering limited exposure to diverse cultural contexts. This narrow focus can restrict students' understanding of the broader world, which is essential for comprehensive language learning. Short and Crandall (2018) suggest that involving parents and community members can provide additional resources and support for students learning a new language, enhancing the breadth of cultural exposure.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including improving teachers' competencies, extending study schedules, enhancing resource availability, and broadening the cultural scope of teaching materials. By tackling these challenges, we can mitigate language barriers and improve the effectiveness of English language education.

METHOD

Research Approach. The research methodology that was employed in this research is qualitative research. This method is particularly useful when the research topic requires an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions, as well as observation. Qualitative research can also be helpful in generating hypotheses, and can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the research topic by taking into account individual perspectives and unique contexts.

Data Collection. In the data collection process, two main methods will be employed: observation and interview. First, for observation, the researcher will conduct direct observations in the classroom to record interactions between teachers and students during English language learning sessions. This observation aims to validate findings obtained from interviews and to gain a deep understanding of classroom dynamics that may influence English language teaching. Second, for interviews, the researcher will conduct a single semi-structured interview session with three English teachers. This interview will be designed to explore the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English and to investigate the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The semi-structured interview approach is chosen to allow flexibility in following emerging conversation paths, enabling the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Data Analysis. The data collection method adopted for this study involves conducting interviews and observations. During the subsequent data analysis phase, a thematic analysis approach shall adopt to effectively synthesize both the interview and observation data. Thematic analysis constitutes a qualitative data analysis technique that involves systematically exploring a dataset to discern, analyze, and document recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While this method serves a means of depicting data, it also entails a layer of interpretation during the stages of code selection and theme construction. A notable attribute of thematic analysis is its adaptability, making it applicable within a diverse array of theoretical and epistemological frameworks. Additionally, it is amenable to various research questions, designs, and sample sizes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Consequently, this approach emerges as suitable for addressing the research questions at hand. The execution of thematic analysis aligns with the framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006), which outlines six distinct phases of analysis, as indicated below:

Familiarizing with the data. During this initial phase, careful review of the collected interview and observation data from teachers at SMP Negeri Molibagu will occur. This process aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data and ensure accurate representation for subsequent analysis.

Generating initial codes. This phase involves systematically assigning codes to noticeable facets embedded within the interview and observation results. These codes will correspond to various dimensions concerning the challenges posed by language barriers and the strategies employed by teachers to overcome them.

Searching themes. Within this stage, assigned codes will cluster together to give rise to potential themes. By examining recurrent patterns across the interview and observation, discernible themes will emerge, shedding light on the interplay between language barriers, teaching strategies, and possibly teaching results.

Reviewing themes. In this step, identified themes will undergo thorough examination by comparing them against originally assigned codes and the entirety of the interview and observation data. A comprehensive validation of how language barriers intertwine with instructional approaches and subsequently influence student engagement and motivation will be achieved, aiding in formulating a coherent thematic framework.

Defining and naming themes. Building upon reviewed themes, this phase involves refining and clarifying each theme. Definitions will be fine-tuned, and appropriate names will be assigned to encapsulate the essence of each theme.

Producing the report. The conclusion of thematic analysis manifests in this phase. It encompasses selecting compelling interview and observation data that vividly exemplify the identified themes. These excerpts will undergo rigorous analytical examination, bridging the findings back to research questions while also weaving connections to existing literature on language barriers, teaching strategies, and student motivation. The outcome of this concerted effort will culminate in creating an academic report, chronicling the analytical outcomes, insights gleaned, and potential implications for enriching the teacher-student dynamic and fostering student motivation within the secondary school context.

Findings

In the context of English language learning at SMP Negeri Molibagu, teachers identify several primary challenges they face. Firstly, students' lack of understanding of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) poses a significant hurdle, addressed through a mixed-language approach and the integration of technology in teaching processes. Additionally, constrained study schedules compel teachers to adopt structured, integrated teaching strategies that foster the development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills within a unified learning framework. Secondly, limitations in teaching resources such as books and technological equipment necessitate creative solutions. Teachers often seek alternatives, such as utilizing

the "English Nusantara" e-book or leveraging online resources. Collaborative efforts among teachers to develop teaching materials also serve as a strategy to optimize available resources. Thirdly, inadequate official teaching materials require teachers to develop their own or use project-based learning as substitutes. This approach not only fills gaps in teaching materials but also ensures that the content delivered is relevant and effective in enhancing students' understanding of English. With this holistic approach, teachers at SMP Negeri Molibagu continually strive to overcome these barriers to enhance overall English language competence among their students.

Category	Statement
Lack of EFL Understanding	<i>Siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami vocab karena penguasaan vocab mereka masih terlalu sedikit.</i>
	<i>Pemahaman siswa dalam bahasa Inggris masih sangat kurang.</i>
	<i>Keterbatasan pemahaman bahasa Inggris siswa memengaruhi interaksi di kelas.</i>
	<i>Siswa pada awalnya mengalami struggle dalam listening, tetapi bisa terbiasa dengan pengulangan bahasa Inggris dalam pembelajaran.</i>
	<i>Guru fokus pada pengembangan keterampilan listening dan speaking sebagai pendekatan utama dalam mengajar bahasa Inggris.</i>
	<i>Pengalaman listening siswa</i>
	<i>menentukan pencapaian mereka dalam bahasa Inggris.</i>
	<i>Siswa yang belum bisa melafalkan bahasa Inggris diberi alternatif untuk membaca terlebih dahulu.</i>
	<i>Memanfaatkan pengalaman dalam bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua untuk pengajaran.</i>
	<i>Menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa utama di kelas dengan campuran bahasa Indonesia untuk memudahkan pemahaman.</i>
	<i>Memanfaatkan pengalaman dalam bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua untuk pengajaran.</i>
	<i>4 jam pelajaran dalam seminggu dianggap kurang efektif untuk penguasaan bahasa Inggris siswa.</i>

Limited Study Schedule	<i>Jadwal belajar yang padat menjadi tantangan dalam menguasai bahasa Inggris.</i>
	<i>Dalam kurikulum yang ada, para guru harus menyesuaikan dengan keterbatasan waktu pembelajaran.</i>
	<i>Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris membutuhkan tambahan waktu untuk kelas writing agar lebih efektif.</i>
	<i>Guru menggunakan pendekatan berdefrensiasi untuk memaksimalkan pembelajaran dalam waktu terbatas.</i>
	<i>Pembelajaran berdasarkan kebutuhan siswa untuk memudahkan memahami materi.</i>
	<i>Jadwal belajar yang padat menjadi tantangan dalam menguasai bahasa Inggris.</i>
	<i>Guru mengamati dan memodifikasi pembelajaran berdasarkan kebutuhan siswa.</i>
	<i>Menerapkan teknologi untuk mendukung pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.</i>

Teaching Resources	<i>Menggunakan buku "English Nusantara" dalam bentuk softfile karena lebih sesuai dengan kebutuhan pembelajaran.</i>
	<i>Menerapkan penggunaan proyektor LCD dalam kelas untuk mendukung media pembelajaran.</i>
	<i>Keterbatasan speaker untuk materi listening menjadi tantangan dalam pembelajaran, sehingga guru menggunakan lagu dalam buku paket siswa sebagai alternatif.</i>
	<i>Mengikuti web-binat PMM untuk memperoleh sumber daya tambahan dalam pembelajaran.</i>
	<i>Guru-guru berpartisipasi dalam program Systemable Development Goals untuk meningkatkan orientasi global dalam pembelajaran.</i>
	<i>Menggunakan sumber daya tambahan seperti materi online untuk mendukung kurikulum resmi.</i>
Inadequate Materials	<i>Kurangnya materi pengajaran berdampak pada pemahaman siswa terhadap pelajaran bahasa Inggris.</i>
	<i>Menggunakan materi pembelajaran online dan video untuk mengimbangi kekurangan sumber resmi.</i>
	<i>Sering melakukan penyesuaian atau membuat materi pengajaran sendiri untuk mengatasi kekurangan dalam materi kursus resmi.</i>
	<i>Menyusun materi pembelajaran berdasarkan MGMP untuk memaksimalkan sumber daya yang ada.</i>
	<i>Menggunakan materi pembelajaran tambahan untuk mengatasi kekurangan dalam sumber resmi.</i>

DISCUSSION

The discussion on language barriers in teaching English at SMP Negeri Molibagu highlights several key challenges faced by educators and strategies employed to overcome these obstacles. These challenges are categorized into Lack of EFL Understanding, Limited Study Schedule, Teaching Resources, and Inadequate Materials, each reflecting the nuanced difficulties encountered in the classroom setting.

The language barrier in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) arises from several interconnected factors. Firstly, students' limited understanding of EFL hinders effective classroom communication. According to Tahang et al. (2019), language barriers are blockades that prevent coherent communication between individuals. These barriers comprise various components such as lack of enthusiasm, limited study schedules, inadequate teaching resources, and insufficient student motivation, as well as a lack of EFL learning skills (Malik et al., 2021). Cummins (2018) emphasizes that language barriers can hinder students from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in class, leading to frustration, anxiety, and low academic performance.

Lack of EFL Understanding. The first category, Lack of EFL Understanding, centers around the difficulties students face in grasping English language concepts. Teachers at SMP Negeri Molibagu emphasize the importance of diverse teaching methods to accommodate varying student needs. Teacher 1 underscores this approach, stating, “In my opinion, teachers should not limit themselves to just one method. Teachers should have the ability to observe, imitate, modify (ATM).” This sentiment aligns with Tahang et al. (2019), who argue that addressing language barriers, including enthusiasm and motivation, is crucial for effective communication and class participation. By fostering a dynamic learning environment that encourages active participation and adapts to individual learning styles, teachers can mitigate the challenges posed by limited EFL understanding. Teachers' competencies in grammar, phonology, lexical resources, and discourse are crucial for effective teaching. Purwati et al. (2023) highlight that grammatical knowledge is essential for constructing sentences, while Burns (2017) emphasizes the importance of phonological knowledge for proper pronunciation and intonation. Baker & Murphy (2011) argue that EFL or ESL teachers need to understand pronunciation and phonology. Furthermore, mastering a sufficient vocabulary supports both receptive and productive language skills (Cahyono & Widiati, 2008). Newton et al. (2022) note that EFL learners often face challenges in acquiring these competencies, creating significant barriers to effective communication. TESOL (2019) recommends strategies such as using simple and clear language, providing practice opportunities, and creating a supportive learning environment to help students overcome these barriers.

Limited Study Schedule. The category of Limited Study Schedule addresses the impact of constrained teaching time on comprehensive English language education. Despite these limitations, educators at SMP Negeri Molibagu strive to integrate all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—into their lessons. This holistic approach aims to optimize the use of available class time while enhancing students' language proficiency. As Vygotsky (1978) and Johnson and Johnson (1989) suggest, cooperative learning and peer collaboration are pivotal in cognitive development and academic achievement. Teacher 2 exemplifies this by leveraging proficient students to assist their peers, fostering collaborative efforts that enrich learning experiences and

support continuous improvement. Marzulina et al. (2021) found that insufficient repetition during English lessons results in inadequate knowledge transfer from teachers to students, as teachers struggle with time management due to limited instructional hours. This issue aligns with MacIntyre and Gardner's (2019) findings that students' anxiety and lack of confidence in using a new language can further impede learning.

Teaching Resources. Teaching Resources encompass the availability and utilization of materials essential for effective language instruction. Despite challenges such as limited access to audiovisual aids and printed resources, teachers at SMP Negeri Molibagu demonstrate resourcefulness in adapting and creating teaching materials. Collaborative efforts within Subject Teacher Working Groups (MGMP) and participation in educational webinars are strategies employed to enhance teaching resources and pedagogical approaches. This adaptive stance resonates with Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000), who advocate for pedagogical flexibility to accommodate diverse learning contexts and student needs. Malik et al. (2021) note that inadequate access to technology and educational tools like projectors, whiteboards, and computers hampers students' learning experiences, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic when home learning environments differed significantly from classroom settings. Warschauer and Healey (2018) discuss how tools such as machine translation and speech recognition software can assist students in understanding and expressing themselves in a new language, which could mitigate some resource-related barriers.

Inadequate Materials. Inadequate Materials highlight the need for supplemental teaching resources to supplement official curricula. Teachers at SMP Negeri Molibagu often develop their own materials or adapt existing ones to address these gaps. By doing so, they ensure that students receive comprehensive and relevant instruction that supports their language learning journey. This proactive approach reflects a commitment to innovation and responsiveness in educational practices, echoing Fullan's (2016) perspective on the transformative power of innovative teaching methods. Nindya et al. (2022) found that many textbooks focus primarily on local cultures, offering limited exposure to diverse cultural contexts. This narrow focus can restrict students' understanding of the broader world, which is essential for comprehensive language learning. Short and Crandall (2018) suggest that involving parents and community members can provide additional resources and support for students learning a new language, enhancing the breadth of cultural exposure.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including improving teachers' competencies, extending study schedules, enhancing resource availability, and broadening the cultural scope of teaching materials. By tackling these challenges, we can mitigate language barriers and improve the effectiveness of English language

education. In conclusion, the discussion on language barriers in teaching English at SMP Negeri Molibagu underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by educators and the innovative strategies they employ to foster effective language learning environments. By addressing Lack of EFL Understanding, Limited Study Schedule, Teaching Resources, and Inadequate Materials through adaptive teaching practices and collaborative efforts, educators empower students to overcome language barriers and achieve academic success. Through these efforts, SMP Negeri Molibagu continues to nurture inclusive learning environments that prioritize student engagement, collaboration, and personalized support, thereby enhancing students' confidence and proficiency in the English language.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the research effectively addresses the two research questions by comprehensively examining the challenges faced by teachers in English language teaching, particularly regarding language barriers, and identifying the strategies employed to overcome these challenges. The findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of language barriers and highlight effective strategies for promoting inclusive and engaging English language education.

Furthermore, the themes identified in the study provide valuable insights into the various approaches adopted by teachers, such as adaptability, collaboration, and personalized support, to address the complexities of English language learning. By categorizing these themes into relevant aspects of language barriers, the research offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges encountered in English language teaching and underscores the importance of tailored strategies for mitigating these barriers. Overall, the findings contribute to enhancing teaching practices and fostering more effective English language education in diverse learning environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings presented in this study, several recommendations can be proposed for both this research and future relevant studies. Firstly, it is recommended that educators and policymakers prioritize the development of comprehensive language learning programs that address the identified challenges, particularly those related to language barriers. This could involve integrating targeted interventions to enhance students' linguistic competencies, such as grammar, phonology, vocabulary, and discourse, as well as providing additional support and resources to facilitate language learning. Additionally, there is a need for ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to strengthen their pedagogical skills and strategies for addressing language barriers effectively. Furthermore, future research endeavors could delve deeper into exploring the impact of specific interventions or instructional

approaches on overcoming language barriers in English language teaching, thus contributing to the refinement and enhancement of existing teaching practices. Lastly, collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and administrators, are essential in fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment conducive to English language acquisition. By implementing these recommendations, educators and researchers can work towards mitigating language barriers and promoting successful English language learning outcomes for all students.

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