

Exploring Challenges in EFL Learning and Acquisition: A Case Study of a Rural High School in Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study investigates the challenges faced by students in learning and acquiring English as a foreign language (EFL) at MA Muallimin Rowoseneng, a rural private high school in Central Java, Indonesia. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, data were collected from 15 students and one teacher to explore barriers across four language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as broader acquisition difficulties. Findings reveal that students grapple with internal factors such as low motivation, lack of self-confidence, and mother tongue interference, compounded by external challenges like an unsupportive linguistic environment and inadequate learning facilities. Thematic analysis highlighted recurring issues in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, alongside systemic gaps in exposure and practice opportunities. The study underscores the interplay between psychological, environmental, and pedagogical barriers, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions to enhance rural EFL education. Recommendations include fostering motivational strategies, integrating contextualized teaching methods, and improving infrastructural support to create immersive English-learning environments. This research contributes to understanding EFL challenges in resource-constrained rural settings and informs stakeholders on actionable steps to bridge educational disparities.

Keywords: Foreign language; Language learning; Language acquisition; rural schools; EFL challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a cornerstone of human interaction, functioning as a tool for communication. It is a cornerstone of human interaction, functioning as a tool for expressing thoughts, emotions, and knowledge (Meylani, 2024; Nasution & Tambunan, 2022). It serves as a system of symbols and sounds understood by its users (Megawati, 2017). Mastering language, which facilitates intellectual development and social engagement, may also enhance social-cognitive abilities, positively influencing character engagement in general (Eekhof et al., 2023; Muhamad Taufan et al., 2024). Mastering language starts with first language acquisition through daily interactions, which shapes both communication skills and personal identity (Endayani, 2021; Yadav & Gulati, 2024).

In an interconnected world demanding foreign language proficiency (Kurniawan, 2024; Sholihah et al., 2024), English, as a global lingua franca, is vital for academic, professional, and international endeavors (Kopchak et al., 2022). Accordingly, Indonesian educational institutions actively embed English language instruction throughout all educational tiers (Manik et al., 2020; Syifa et al., 2022). However, many students still struggle to master English even in a big city in Indonesia (Ramadhan et al., 2022). These

difficulties are even more in rural areas, where educational resources, infrastructure, and access to qualified teachers are often limited (Pham, 2021).

Students in rural areas often face significant challenges in learning English, including difficulties with pronunciation, a limited vocabulary, and a lack of self-confidence (Basri et al., 2023; Nadia, 2023; Subramanian, 2024). Furthermore, the natural process of acquiring a language is hindered by factors such as low motivation and an environment that does not actively support language learning (Edrees & Stanikzai, 2024; Hasrina et al., 2024). The declining academic performance of rural students, particularly in standardized assessments and English competitions, emphasizes the need for immediate attention to these issues (Malik et al., 2022; Sultra & Baharudin, 2020).

A clear example of these challenges can be observed in MA Muallimin Rowoseneng, a private high school located in Temanggung. Operating in a rural setting with limited access to modern educational resources and qualified teachers, this school faces significant barriers to effective English instruction. According to the Central Statistics Agency of Temanggung Regency, it is the only high school in the district, further limiting students' educational opportunities. Identifying the root causes of these difficulties is essential for enhancing English language education in similar rural contexts.

The contrast between rural and urban students highlights the crucial influence of the learning environment on language acquisition. Compared to urban learners, students in rural areas have fewer opportunities to engage with English in real-life situations, which negatively impacts their language proficiency (Ochwo, 2022). This limited exposure often leads to slower language development and lower academic achievement (Zhang, 2023). Research also indicates that urban students generally exhibit higher levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, demonstrating greater enthusiasm and initiative in learning English due to their awareness of its significance for education, career prospects, and social mobility (Ma et al., 2021). Additionally, urban students tend to have stronger instrumental motivation, recognizing English as a key factor in securing better job opportunities in the future (Rahmat & Akbar, 2019).

While previous studies have examined foreign language acquisition in urban educational environments, research focusing on rural schools, especially within private educational institutions, remains limited. This gap emphasizes the need to explore how students in rural areas, such as those at private high school, navigate English learning and confront unique challenges. Unlike studies centered on resource-abundant settings, this research delves into the dynamics of limited resources, teaching strategies, and language acquisition processes in the context of a rural high school.

This study seeks to investigate how students at MA Muallimin Rowoseneng learn and acquire English and the specific challenges they face in the process. The research focuses on analyzing linguistic barriers, environmental limitations, and pedagogical practices that influence their English learning and acquisition experience. While the study is based on a single rural school, its findings are anticipated to provide valuable insights into the difficulties encountered by students in comparable rural settings. The study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What challenges do students at private high school MA Muallimin Rowoseneng face in learning English as a foreign language?
2. What challenges do students at private high school MA Muallimin Rowoseneng face in acquiring English as a foreign language?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to uncover not only the practices and challenges involved in learning English but also the broader factors shaping English education in rural settings like private high school. The findings are expected to offer practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to enhance the quality of English education in resource-constrained rural areas.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study on foreign language learning and acquisition among students of MA Muallimin Rowoseneng adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative research seeks to explore and interpret individuals' perceptions of social phenomena (Creswell, 2014), making it well-suited for understanding the personal experiences of students as they engage with learning and acquiring foreign language. The research follows an inductive approach which focuses on how specific instances of language acquisition can reveal broader patterns and challenges students face. This approach prioritizes the perspectives of the students themselves, offering insightful data into the cognitive and emotional processes involved in learning a new language. As Carrie Williams, (2007) notes, qualitative research builds conclusions from detailed, contextualized data rather than predefined hypotheses, which allows for a richer understanding of the topic at hand. The research design is systematically organized to explore how students' unique experiences with foreign language learning at MA Muallimin Rowoseneng form their success and difficulties. By focusing on specific case studies within this institution, the study aims to investigate the contexts of foreign language acquisition within a particular educational context which contributes to an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing foreign language learning outcomes, in this case English, in similar settings.

Research Participants

The subjects of this study were carefully selected to provide a diverse representation of the student body at a private high school, MA Muallimin Rowoseneng, located in Temanggung Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. Following Namey (2005), guidance on the importance of aligning research subjects with the study's problem formulation and research variables, the subjects were chosen purposively to reflect a variety of experiences and backgrounds. This study involved 15 students, comprising 5 students each from the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade. The selection of these subjects is intended to capture a wide range of experiences, as the students come from different hamlets with varied cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds, thereby offering a comprehensive view of their language learning experiences throughout their academic progression.

Furthermore, this study also includes an English teacher as an attempt to provide an additional perspective on the teaching methods and challenges involved in the language learning process. This variety ensures that the findings will be more comprehensive and reflective of the different challenges and successes encountered in language acquisition across grade levels. By focusing on these specific subjects, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the foreign language learning process in a specific educational context, enriching the broader understanding of language acquisition challenges and strategies. To provide a clearer understanding of the research participants, the following demographic table is presented. The codes assigned to each participant is used throughout the study to ensure clarity and efficiency in presenting and analyzing the research findings.

Research Instruments and Procedure of Data Collection

The data for this study was collected using two primary research instruments namely, interviews, and documentation. Interview, as a key qualitative method, allowed the researcher to gain insights into the dynamic challenges that students confront when learning and acquiring English language. In this case, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students and teachers to provide further depth and verification of the observational data. These interviews focused on understanding the students' perceptions of learning English, how they approach language acquisition, the difficulties they encounter in both learning and acquiring English, and how these challenges influence their

progress. Before the interviews were conducted, participants were provided with a consent form that outlined the study's information, interview procedures, including the use of audiovisual documentation, and assured them of confidentiality and voluntary participation. The interview process began with 15 students, five each from Grades 10, 11, and 12, followed by one English teacher to complement and verify the student responses. Each interview session with each participant lasted for five minutes and was conducted face-to-face in a quiet, conducive area within the school environment. The researcher used a prepared list of guiding open-ended questions designed to align with the research objectives, while allowing participants to elaborate freely based on their individual experiences, in line with the semi-structured interview format. The same set of questions was asked to both students and the teacher, with adjustments in point of view to match their respective roles in the learning process.

During each interview session, a set of documentation protocols was implemented to ensure the reliability and completeness of the collected data. First, the researcher prepared an interview note sheet to record key points and immediate observations during the participant's responses. With prior consent from each participant, audio recordings were captured using a mobile device recorder from the beginning to the end of each interview. These recordings supported the interview notes and enabled accurate transcription and in-depth analysis. In addition, visual documentation in the form of photographs was taken as complementary evidence to verify the actual implementation of the interviews. The combination of interview and documentation played a crucial role in facilitating method triangulation of the study. While interviews provided rich, first-hand insights into participants' experiences, the accompanying documentation offered tangible, verifiable support that reinforced the authenticity and consistency of the data. This integration of methods allowed the researcher to cross-check emerging themes, reduce subjectivity, and enhance the overall validity and trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Procedure of Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers followed a systematic procedure to analyze the data collected from semi-structured interviews and documentation. The analysis process began by organizing all interview transcripts and documentation materials according to the main research focus: how students learn and acquire English and the challenges they encounter. The interview data were transcribed from the audio recordings into detailed written form, supported by interview notes and photographs to preserve context. Following transcription, the researchers employed thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), beginning with open coding. In this stage, all transcripts were read multiple times, and initial codes were assigned to segments of text that reflected students' views, behaviors, or challenges (e.g., "lack of confidence," "reading confusion," "environment not supportive"). These initial codes were then grouped into broader categories based on similarity and relevance, such as "Difficulties in Learning English" and "Difficulties in Acquiring English." Through an iterative process of reviewing and refining, these categories were developed into overarching themes and sub-themes. For example, several students expressed confusion about how to pronounce or read English texts, which led to the sub-theme "Reading" under the theme "Difficulties in Learning English." Similarly, expressions of discomfort with speaking due to low vocabulary or embarrassment led to the sub-theme "Speaking." These coded insights were compiled into a thematic matrix, which served as the basis for Table 2 in the findings section.

While this study is qualitative in nature, the findings were further strengthened by noting the frequency with which certain themes appeared across participants. For example, difficulties in reading and speaking were mentioned by the majority of students across all grade levels, whereas environmental factors and first language interference were

raised by fewer participants. To enhance the clarity of these patterns, a bar chart is presented in the findings section (see figure 1 & 2), illustrating the number of participants who reported challenges in each specific area of language learning and acquisition. This visual aid complements the thematic table and provides a clearer view of the relative prominence of each issue. Moreover, documentation gathered during the interviews, such as field notes, audio recordings, and photographs, was actively used during the coding and interpretation stages to support the accuracy of the analysis. For example, when students expressed low motivation or embarrassment, these sentiments were cross-checked with non-verbal cues, tone of voice, and the researcher's immediate observations. This use of multiple sources during the analytical phase supported the reliability of the coding process and helped refine theme development, as initially established through the study's method triangulation strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study aims to explore the ways of learning and acquiring English, focusing on the challenges encountered by students. The findings are presented in alignment with the research questions, distinguishing between difficulties in language learning and acquisition, and further categorizing the barriers into internal and external factors.

The data we obtained through interviews regarding foreign language learning, foreign language acquisition and the obstacles, the following data we obtained.

Table 1. Thematic Data of the Semi-Structured Interview Findings

Theme	Sub Tema	Interview data	interpretation
Difficulties in Learning English	Reading	S10.5: "because I don't know how to read it" S11.2: "because the way to read it is different from Indonesian"	Students experience reading difficulties due to differences in reading styles between English and Indonesian, as well as a lack of understanding of how to read English texts.
	Speaking	T: "if I speak alone, maybe I lack confidence. What do I want to say? Do I lack vocabulary?" S11.5: "Because I am embarrassed and lack confidence in speaking."	Lack of self-confidence and limited vocabulary are the main obstacles for students in speaking English.
	Writing	S11.4: "When it comes to writing, I'm confused about how to write and read it."	Students' confusion in writing is caused by differences in structure and grammar between English and Indonesian.
	Listening	T: "If listening is really from here, sir, actually I already have speakers installed in the classroom..." S10.4: "Because I really can't"	Inadequate facilities and lack of student interest contribute to difficulties in understanding listening material.
Difficulties in Acquiring English	Lack of Motivation	S10.4: "don't know what it means, haha" R6: "didn't mean it"	Lack of motivation and interest in English is a major inhibiting factor in the language acquisition process.

Unsupportive Environment	S10.1: "non-English speaking environment" S12.5: "environment"	An environment that does not support the use of English hinders students' ability to master the language.
First Language Interference	S10.2: "already comfortable with the first language" R12: "meaning. and already used to the first language"	Dependence on the first language makes it difficult for students to adapt to the second language, namely English.

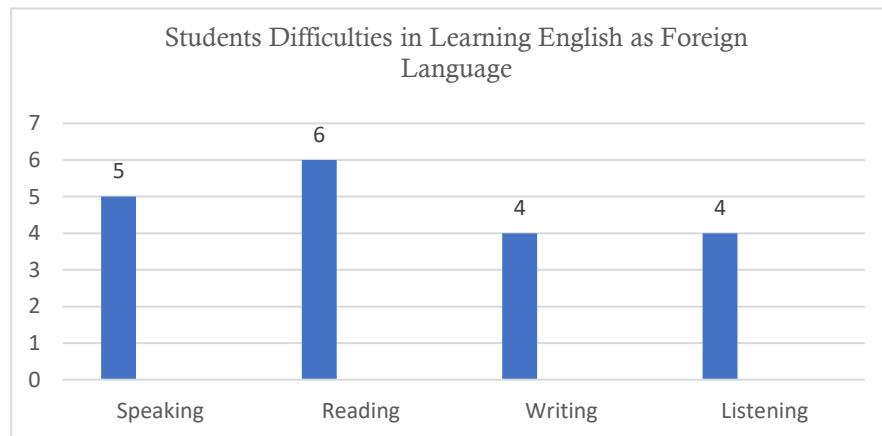


Figure 1. Distribution of Students Reporting Difficulties in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning

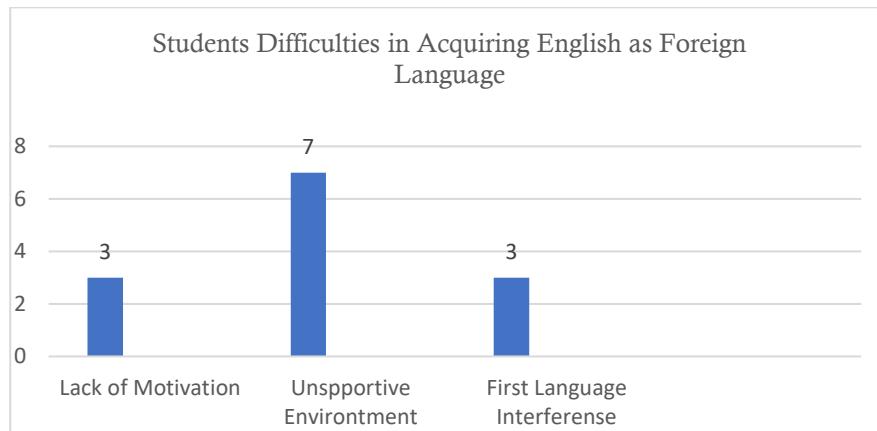


Figure 2. Distribution of Students Reporting Difficulties in Acquiring English as Foreign Language

Difficulties in Learning English

From the interview results, several difficulties were found in all aspects of learning English, the following are the difficulties in each aspect:

English Reading Difficulties

From the interview results, it was found that 6 out of 15 students had difficulty reading English texts. When asked about this difficulty, the students stated that the way of reading English is different from Indonesian. The statements from these respondents indicate that students not only experience technical difficulties in reading, but also difficulties in understanding the differences in pronunciation and writing between English

and their mother tongue. The internal factors are lack of reading strategies and limited vocabulary, while the external factor is lack of exposure to English texts.

English Speaking Difficulties

Many students cite a severe lack of confidence as the main barrier to their ability to speak English, which frequently impairs their speaking ability. When trying to speak in English, this widespread lack of confidence shows itself as feelings of embarrassment and self-consciousness. S.11.4, S11.5, S12.1, and S12.4 are among the pupils who have publicly acknowledged these sentiments, acknowledging that their insecurity keeps them from expressing freely and fluently. According to this data, psychological elements like fear and self-worth are very important in determining how well pupils can talk. For pupils to improve their spoken English abilities and become fluent, these psychological obstacles must be removed. Students can overcome their fear of speaking and gain confidence in a helpful and encouraging learning atmosphere, which will ultimately improve their communication abilities, the internal factors are low self-confidence and fear of making mistakes, while the external factor is limited opportunities to practice speaking English.

English Writing Difficulties

Writing in English is a major challenge for many students, as demonstrated by student S11.4's statement that the differences between English and Indonesian writing conventions contribute to this difficulty. The student pointed out that the spoken and written forms of English differ, highlighting the complexities of the language, and that this difference, along with concerns about English letter structure and writing style, creates uncertainty and fear in students. These concerns stem from a lack of confidence in navigating the nuances of English orthography and grammar, and as a result, this fear of writing becomes a major obstacle, impeding students' ability to effectively express their thoughts and ideas in written English. Overcoming this fear through focused instruction and encouraging feedback is essential for the development of students' writing ability, the internal factor is unfamiliarity with English grammar and structure, while the external factors are lack of structured writing practice and feedback.

English Listening Difficulties

Next is the difficulty in the aspect of listening, this is also a challenge for students. They mentioned that inadequate facilities and lack of interest are the main obstacles. This statement was also emphasized by T, that the facilities at school are less supportive for learning listening, because the facilities and infrastructure such as loudspeakers are not installed in the classroom. Students struggle greatly with listening comprehension, mostly because of a lack of motivation and insufficient resources. Students complain that the school lacks adequate listening equipment, with classrooms frequently without loudspeakers. This shortcoming makes learning more difficult and makes it harder for students to understand spoken language. The problem is made worse by the absence of appropriate tools, which makes it difficult to practice and enhance listening abilities. As a result, kids find it difficult to gain the requisite listening comprehension skills, which hinders their ability to acquire language in general, the internal factor is lack of motivation to practice listening, while the external factors are poor classroom infrastructure and insufficient listening materials.

Difficulties in Acquiring English

In addition to learning a language, acquiring English as a foreign language certainly has its own difficulties, here are the difficulties of students in acquiring English as a foreign language:

Lack of Motivation

Motivation is an important factor in learning English. From the interview results, it was found that 3 out of 15 students admitted to not having the motivation to learn English as a foreign language. They stated a lack of understanding of the meaning of words in English and minimal interest in learning it. For example, S10.5 stated that he had no motivation to master English as a foreign language. This shows that low motivation can hinder students' learning process, so they find it difficult to understand and use English. Without strong motivation, students tend to be inactive in learning, which has a negative impact on their ability to master the language, the internal factor in acquiring English as foreign language is low intrinsic motivation.

Unsupportive Environment

Next, it is undeniable that the non-English speaking social environment is also a factor inhibiting language acquisition. Three students stated that their environment did not support learning. This shows that the lack of interaction with native speakers or the use of English in everyday life can hinder the language acquisition process because the students' environment is in a rural area and of course there are rarely any residents who speak English, lack of English use in the community is the external factor of difficulties of acquiring English as foreign language.

First Language Interference

Some students (S10.2, S11.4, S12.2) feel comfortable with their first language, their first language or mother tongue has become attached to their daily lives, so when they receive a new language they find it difficult to adapt to the foreign language, the internal factor is strong attachment to the first language. The internal barriers are lack of motivation, low self-confidence, dependence on the first language, and limited vocabulary and strategies, while the external barriers are inadequate facilities (e.g., lack of listening equipment), unsupportive environment (e.g., rural area, non-English-speaking community), and limited access to English learning resources.

Based on the results of the interview, it can be concluded that the majority of students have difficulty learning English in all four aspects (reading, speaking, writing, listening) as well as in language acquisition due to lack of motivation, an unsupportive environment, and dependence on their first language. Only one in 15 students did not have difficulty learning and mastering English. These findings indicate the need for more effective interventions to improve students' motivation and engagement in English learning at Private secondary school. The findings demonstrate that students face multifaceted barriers in all four language domains, with both internal (psychological and motivational) and external (environmental and infrastructural) factors contributing to their difficulties. Only one out of fifteen students reported no significant difficulties. These results highlight the need for interventions that address both internal (e.g., boosting motivation and confidence) and external (e.g., improving facilities and creating a more supportive environment) factors to enhance English learning and acquisition at the private secondary school.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that students at MA Muallimin Rowoseneng encounter a range of significant and interrelated challenges in learning and acquiring English as a foreign language. These challenges are not isolated, but rather form a complex web that includes linguistic, psychological, and environmental dimensions. Linguistically, students struggle with mastering vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension—core components essential to building fluency. These difficulties are often exacerbated by limited exposure to authentic English usage in their daily environment, making it harder for learners to contextualize and retain new language input. Psychologically, factors such as low self-confidence, anxiety, and lack of motivation

significantly impede students' willingness to engage in English learning activities. Many students view English as a difficult and foreign subject, disconnected from their personal lives and future goals. This perception can lead to passive learning behaviors, minimal classroom interaction, and fear of making mistakes—all of which hinder language development.

The role of affective filters, such as stress and emotional readiness, is critical in determining how effectively learners can absorb and apply new knowledge. Environmental factors further complicate the learning process. Inadequate learning resources, limited access to skilled English teachers, and a classroom atmosphere that lacks communicative interaction restrict students' opportunities to practice the language in meaningful ways. As highlighted by Hoque (2017) and Sultra & Baharudin (2020), second language acquisition is a deeply layered process that extends beyond rote learning, requiring an immersive environment that supports linguistic input, cultural understanding, and emotional engagement. Addressing these interconnected challenges is essential for effective language learning.

Linguistic Challenges

A primary difficulty encountered by students is mastering the four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each skill presents its own set of obstacles. Reading, for instance, is hindered by differences in reading styles and spelling conventions between English and the students' mother tongue. This is consistent with previous research showing that first language interference can significantly impede second language acquisition, affecting vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Fitri & Alawiyah, 2023). As a result, students often struggle to adapt to the norms and subtleties of English, leading to repeated errors and a lack of confidence in both academic and social interactions.

Similarly, speaking skills are often undermined by limited vocabulary and low self-confidence. The psychological barrier of shyness, often rooted in fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers, further restricts students' willingness to participate in oral communication. This aligns with Basri et al. (2023), who highlight that self-confidence and vocabulary mastery are critical for effective language production. Writing is also challenging due to the discrepancy between English pronunciation and spelling, which is not commonly found in the students' first language. This often leads to confusion and errors in written communication, as supported by previous studies on the impact of orthographic differences on second language writing (Seftiawan, 2018).

Listening difficulties are exacerbated by limited access to authentic audio materials and inadequate learning facilities. The lack of exposure to native English speakers and insufficient technological support in classrooms can hinder students' ability to comprehend spoken English (Westwood, 2004).

Psychological and Internal Factors

Beyond linguistic barriers, the study revealed that internal psychological factors—particularly motivation and interest—are equally crucial in shaping students' success in learning English. Many students demonstrated a lack of intrinsic motivation, often viewing English not as a practical and valuable life skill, but rather as a compulsory subject imposed by the academic curriculum. This instrumental perception diminishes students' sense of personal relevance and ownership over the learning process, which in turn lowers their enthusiasm and participation in classroom activities. As supported by Edrees and Stanikzai (2024) and Nurhidayah (2020), low motivation is closely linked to reduced engagement, which can significantly hinder the natural and sustained acquisition of language skills.

In addition to motivational barriers, cognitive challenges further complicate the learning experience. The study observed that students frequently encountered difficulties in comprehending complex grammatical structures and understanding new or abstract vocabulary, especially when these were presented in decontextualized or culturally unfamiliar texts. Such difficulties often led to confusion, reduced confidence, and a reluctance to participate actively in discussions or reading tasks. When learners are repeatedly faced with materials they find difficult or irrelevant, they may develop negative attitudes toward the subject, leading to disengagement and poor academic outcomes. These findings underscore the need for instructional materials that not only accommodate diverse cognitive abilities but also actively engage learners by connecting content to their cultural context and lived experiences. By addressing both affective and cognitive dimensions, educators can create more effective and inclusive learning environments that foster deeper language acquisition.

Environmental and External Factors

External factors play a critical role in shaping students' ability to acquire English, especially in contexts where environmental support for language learning is minimal. The study found that many students at MA Muallimin Rowoseneng come from rural areas where English is virtually absent from everyday communication. In these communities, interactions are primarily conducted in the mother tongue, and exposure to English is limited solely to classroom instruction. This lack of real-life English usage outside the school environment significantly reduces opportunities for practice and reinforcement, which are essential for internalizing new vocabulary, grammar, and communicative patterns (Håkansson & Norrby, 2010; Sumrah, 2023). Without consistent exposure, students struggle to retain and apply what they learn, resulting in slower progress and lower confidence.

In addition, unsupportive learning environments further hinder language acquisition. In some cases, teachers may lack the training or resources necessary to deliver engaging and effective English instruction. Limited parental involvement, often due to parents' own unfamiliarity with English, deprives students of additional encouragement and support at home. Moreover, schools may lack access to textbooks, audio-visual aids, and interactive learning tools that are crucial for fostering language development. Previous negative experiences, such as repeated failure or harsh correction, may create psychological barriers, making students reluctant to participate actively in English lessons. The dominance of the mother tongue also exerts a powerful influence. Students deeply embedded in their native language and cultural identity may find it challenging to adopt the unfamiliar structures and norms of English, especially when these conflict with their first language (Jumadil & Siswana, 2023; Krashen, 1981).

Interplay of Factors and Implications

The interaction between these various factors-linguistic, psychological, and environmental-creates a complex web of challenges that must be addressed holistically. For instance, even if adequate instructional support is provided, students may still struggle if they lack motivation or are not exposed to English in their daily lives. Conversely, a supportive environment and strong motivation can help mitigate some of the linguistic difficulties faced by learners (Yadav & Gulati, 2024).

To improve the effectiveness of English language learning, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses both internal and external barriers. This includes enhancing student motivation, providing sufficient learning resources, fostering a supportive classroom environment, and encouraging the use of English outside the classroom. Teachers should also be aware of the influence of the mother tongue and design

instructional strategies that help students gradually transition to using English more confidently and accurately.

CONCLUSION

The study, which involved in-depth interviews with private high school students at MA Muallimin Rowoseneng, revealed that these students face significant and diverse challenges in all core aspects of English language learning: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. These difficulties are not only technical or skill-based, but are closely related to several important factors that influence the language acquisition process. Among these, lack of motivation to learn English is a major issue that significantly exacerbates the barriers faced by students. This low motivation is compounded by the interference of students' mother tongue, which often limits their ability to think and express themselves fluently in English. Furthermore, the learning environment itself is largely unsupportive; English is rarely used in everyday interactions outside the classroom, resulting in minimal opportunities for exposure and practice for students. This lack of environmental support creates a context in which students tend to rely heavily on their mother tongue, which further hinders their progress in English proficiency. Collectively, these factors of low motivation, mother tongue interference, and unsupportive environments form substantial barriers that prevent students from achieving higher levels of English language proficiency and competence.

The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that address these root causes, including strategies to increase student motivation, reduce reliance on mother tongues, and foster more immersive English-speaking environments both inside and outside the classroom. Without such comprehensive support, students in rural and under-resourced areas such as MA Muallimin Rowoseneng will continue to struggle with English language acquisition, limiting their future academic and professional opportunities. As such, this study highlights the importance of not only recognizing these challenges but also implementing practical pedagogical and environmental changes to create more effective and motivating English learning experiences for students in similar contexts.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research findings, it is expected that students in rural schools increase their motivation to learn by setting clear and realistic goals and actively practicing English through repetition of materials, group discussions, and the use of English-language media such as films, songs, or learning applications, while gradually reducing dependence on their mother tongue by trying to think and speak in English. Teachers are expected to create a fun and interactive learning atmosphere through language games, discussions, and collaborative projects, use contextual and communicative teaching methods so that students feel relevant and interested, and provide individual support for students who experience difficulties and encourage practice outside the classroom, including facilitating the use of English through language clubs or extracurricular activities. School administrators and stakeholders need to provide supporting facilities such as English libraries, internet access, and interesting learning media, hold training and workshops to improve teacher competence in effective and motivational English teaching, and encourage collaboration between schools, parents, and the community to create an environment that is more supportive of the use of English.

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