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## Addressing the Challenges of English Language Acquisition among Social Science Students in Resource Constrained Environments

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### Abstract

A portrayal of pedagogical, motivational and resource dilemmas that hinder students in the acquisition of English language is discussed in this study. The study shows that students hardly bothered to learn English because they do not see any relevance of the language to their future professions. This is made worse by conventional theories which have insisted on mechanical language acquisition, memorization, drilling for grammar rules and structures without the development of communicative efficiency, and lack of instruction based on the individual learning abilities of the learners. Also, extreme scarcity of resources such as the English texts and technological facilities sufficiently affect opportunities of student language practice beyond the classroom. The study suggests that it is necessary to use more comprehensive approaches for overcoming these challenges such as changes is curricular in order to align it to English and students and their career needs, using more communicative and interactive methods, and supporting teachers for the implementation of differentiation. The study brings out important information that aligns well with other research done on language education especially in the developing countries so a policy maker or a practitioner you will find useful information to act on.

## Introduction

The issue of English language proficiency remains a focal concern for Indonesian students, especially the Students of Social sciences; the issue is closely connected with other problems of the Indonesian education, including limited equal access to education and deficiency of teaching methods. As for the Foreign Language in their academic context English language teaching and learning among Social Science students in institutions such as SMAN 2 Takalar is often lower than desired due to the interplay between various systemic and contextual factors. These students can be seen struggling with the curriculum that is geared towards the students' primary academic courses neglecting the development of language skills, and hence there is a

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mismatch between the aim of education and learning English (Merga, 2020; Bertram et al., 2021).

Like many other schools which are available in Indonesia, SMAN 2 Takalar faces a number of challenges that presents itself in form of limited resources this includes material resources and the teaching and learning support. These constraints greatly impact on the efficiency of the teaching and learning of English for students who do not find pertinence in learning a foreign language. To the students of social sciences, for whom history, sociology or economics are core subjects, English is considered more as an extracurricular activity than as an essential element in their characters building process (King et al., 2021; Borzova & Shemanaeva, 2019). This perception is also moulded by traditional methods of learning which are used in the school where emphasis is placed more on the mechanical acquisition of facts and theories and were little or no regard to language in use or communicative ability of the students (Fraile-Fernández et al., 2021; Minasi, 2022).

In research by Getie (2020) and Wang (2019) explain that, the opportunity to practice the language outside the classroom can be also viewed as a major factor influencing the student attitudes and language abilities. In the rural and semi urban environment such as Takalar Zone, students cannot practice English in real life situations hence, they lose motivation and confidence in using English language as desired (Mahmud & Legiman, 2021). This disengagement is well illustrated by the poor willingness of the students to speak English both in class and out of school which encourages their poor performance, align with research from Aubrey et al. (2022) and Skilling et al. (2021).

New findings cop how the approach of teaching English to the Social Science students requires a new perspective. It has become apparent that instruction of English language should be carried out within the student context in terms of their academic or career path to make them improve the perceived relevance (Sifakis, 2019; Xie & Curle, 2022). Embedded English with content from their major fields for instance using English in studying social, economic and political aspects can give a meaningful learning experience and increase participation (Cremin, 2022; Garzón-Díaz, 2021). However, the use of technology and work with the interactive material and learning facilities seems to have positive impacts helping to overcome some of the resource limitation in the study and make language easy to learn and more attractive for learners (Famuji & Sunarti, 2022; Shadiev & Yang, 2020). This study targets the problems that affect students in Social Science discipline studying in learning English language with a view to establish workable solutions. This study is a qualitative investigation of the nature and cause of the student vulnerability and the nature and source of the context in which they learn as well as the potential possibilities of innovative pedagogy for enhancing these student's linguistic performance.

## Research Methods

The kind of research used in this study is qualitative research, more specifically the research takes a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of identifying the challenges and best practices of enhancing English language acquisition for students of Social Sciences in SMAN 2 Takalar. Qualitative approach was considered most suitable for this research as it enables categorization of factors such as the contextual and experiences that affect students learning outcomes and offer depth of the experiences and perceptions of the students. This research was carried out in one of the senior high schools in South Sulawesi, Indonesia namely, SMAN 2 Takalar whose student population is mainly from rural and semi urban areas. This setting is

especially suitable for investigating the issues that learners experience in the contexts of learning environments with scarce resources which often entails low quality English language curriculum.

The sample of the study comprised of 13 participants, 10 of whom were the students from Social Science department and 3 of them English teachers from SMAN 2 Takalar. The students were purposefully selected and this is one of the sampling techniques where the researcher has the prerogative of choosing the subjects most likely to yield reasonable and relevant information given the standards set (Palinkas et al., 2015; Jølle & Skar, 2020). The variables that were used to select the students were their course registration into the Social Sciences stream and their consent to be used in the study. The selected teachers were well experienced and knowledgeable in teaching English to Social Science students and therefore the study employed an informed point of view of the challenges and strategies in imparting English skills, align with research from Fajriah & Septiyanti (2021) and Ruman (2021).

Participants were interviewed face to face using semi structured interviews and documents were also reviewed. Interviews were used and administered to both the students and the teachers with an aim of obtaining more detailed information about their experiences and views. This method afforded freedom in the interviews it gave the researcher a chance to delve deeper into particular responses given or to find out extra information that may crop up during the interview with the participants (Spencer et al., 2022; Kallio et al., 2016). The student interviews were on the purpose, difficulties and impressions about the efficiency of various learning activities, whereas the teachers were asked on their teaching methodologies, teaching difficulties in conveying English, and their opinions on how it can be enhanced. Further, document review was also made in regard to the teaching and learning materials like lesson plans, student's performances, and curriculum documents. This analysis served to place interview findings into context and to supplement the findings to give a broader appreciation of the institutional and curriculum contexts within which English language education is delivered at the school (Bowen, 2009; Bradfield & Exley, 2020).

They include data reduction where meaning condensation and data pattern simplification occur data display in which organization of the textual information as well as piles creation and revival occur and conclusion drawing or verification which involves interpretation of the constants and conclusion formation. First, the data were analyzed by means of systematic coding, enabling to reveal patterns and issues concerning the outlined research questions. The coded data were then sorted into matrices and diagrams in order to easily identify connections and patterns (Nobre et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020). This organization of data helped in coming up with a better understanding of how different factors affect learning of English language among the Social Science students. After the analysis of patterns and themes, conclusions were made. Then, procedures such as member checking and triangulation were used to make certain that the conclusions made were valid and contrasting findings from interviews with those from the documentation analysis with an aim of increasing credibility of results (Zairul, 2021; Motulsky, 2021).

## Results and Discussion

### Lack of Motivation and Interest in Learning English

The first major theme revealed was the poor morale and interest to learn English evidenced by the Social Science students of SMAN 2 Takalar. This was pointed out as a key factor when explaining why learners did not acquire a good command of the foreign language.

*"I find English difficult because it doesn't relate much to what I want to do in the future. I just don't see the point in putting in too much effort".*

This quote shows that students have a significant understanding that English is not related to or connected to any individual academic pursuits they may do or future careers they may choose. They seemed to have developed a perceived low relevance to the learning of the language which in turn decreases their intrinsic motivation to learn the language. In educational psychology this underscores the centrality of relevance as one of the major motivations for learning. One can also agree with Gibbons, who said that if learners cannot find an application of a certain subject in daily life or when pursuing a career, they will not be eager to spend time and energy on the subject, consequently, their performance will be affected.

*"English feels like an unnecessary burden. We already have so many subjects to focus on, and English is just an extra load"*

This statement also gives a testimony of the stress experienced by students when English as a subject is seen as an extra cohort, and an option, thus not important as the other core subjects. The feeling of English as a burden is an example of a curriculum design problem where the subject is taught in isolation and has no integration with other subjects hence it is perceived as an added burden to students. This disconnection may lead to compartmentalization of learning, whereby the students isolate English as not necessary, thus eradicating any interest and passion in the subject.

*"I would rather spend my time studying subjects that are directly related to my major because English feels disconnected from what I want to pursue"*

This quote provides an insight into the unfortunate irony of curriculum relevance and sheds light to a very significant reality. This means that when learners do not find the connection between the content of English lessons and their major subjects, the remaining areas of study become more important. This is a great concern in curriculum implementation, especially where relations between the language skills taught and the content areas that the students are most interested in are not made, leading to decreased motivation in language learning alongside poor language performance.

*"Even if I try hard in English, I don't think it will help me in my future career, so why bother?"*

This statement is especially informative as it points to the absence of any extrinsic motivation for language learning which is called by some the instrumental motivation. If students think that English is unfavourable for them to have in the future, then their perspective of having to do much better in the subject also decreases greatly. This perception can be unbeneficial as it does not only impact their further interaction with the language but also hinders further employment opportunities abroad where English language is often valued as a precious asset.

### **Inadequate Pedagogical Approaches**

The second emerging theme that was deduced from the data was perceived insufficiency in the prevailing learning instructional strategies in the teach English to Social Science students. Hence, the students and the teachers complained of several drawbacks regarding the methods applied in the classroom.

*"We often use traditional methods like grammar drills and vocabulary lists, but I know these are not engaging for the students. They don't see how this applies to real life situations"*

This quote highlights a huge disparity between what is being taught in class and what the students would use depending on their everyday language requirements. The conventional ways of teaching like grammar drills may be useful for drilling in the students but it does not make the students to use the language in meaningful and social context. This pedagogical approach does not conform to the presently applied theories in teaching languages of emphasis on context and communication. How do you get students to want to turn up to your class, let alone be interested in what you're teaching them if you yourself can't find any use for it?

*"There is a lack of interactive activities. Students need to practice speaking and listening in real contexts, but the curriculum doesn't provide much room for that"*

This statement reveals that communicative language teaching (CLT) is lacking in the present curriculum. The absence of other activities that would involve interaction impacts the students' speaking and listening in a given language thus would otherwise be important. According to CLT, learning should take place through meaningful communication which implies that learning enhances when learners are using language. The lack of such activities implies that the curriculum is laden with more of theoretical know how concerning language than helping the learner to effectively use it in practice.

*"Most of our classes are about memorizing grammar rules, but we rarely get to practice speaking or using English in ways that feel real"*

This quote also exposes the weakness of grammar translation method where the focus is on learning and not the use of language. It can hinder the development of students' communicative competency since it does not allow the latter to employ the language in communicative performance. Since there is very little practice, especially in actual language acquisition, students may know the rules to use the language or the language he or she is studying, but cannot use it to her or his benefit and this is the aim of language learning.

*"We spend a lot of time on reading and writing exercises, but I never feel confident when I have to speak in English"*

This quote is very apt in capturing a big problem which is that the confidence in the language is created through use of the language. Such a practice leads to neglect and imbalance of the oral language development by putting much emphasis on reading and writing as compared to speaking and listening. Fluency is considered a very important aspect of orality as it relates to language mastery, however, the current approach adopted in teaching and learning does not accommodate adequate practice in speaking hence students end up being nervous and uncomfortable when asked to speak English.

*"Our teaching methods are outdated. We need to incorporate more practical applications, but we're limited by the curriculum and available resources"*

This quotation is also symptomatic of a systemic problem in which ineffective, antiquated instructional practices are maintained because of the curriculum and lack of resources. The fact that the teacher recognizes the obsolete procedures as a problem shows that there is an understanding of the issue at hand, however, the continuation of such methods suggests conformity and rigidity of the institution. This underlines the fact that there is a need for systematic change that covers curricular development and distribution of resources for more effective and innovative methods that can effectively address the students' needs.

### **Resource Constraints and Limited Exposure to English**

The third theme identified was the acute shortage of resources and little practice in English other than in a learning context which was a barrier to learning English.

*"We don't have many resources, like books or access to English media. I only practice English in class, but I forget most of it afterward"*

This quote brings out the centrality of resources in the retention of language and how this is constrained by a lack of these resources. Over time, students don't have adequate material to practice the language learning they get in class hence they cannot develop a reinforcement of what they learn. The absence of exposure to English media also restrains students from meaningful use of the language meaningfully as a language; it can only be used in a formal way, and this makes true acquisition hard whenever it is required in the future as and when it is needed.

*"At home, I don't have anyone to practice with, and we don't have internet access to explore English content"*

This statement runs further in support the necessary need of having a favourable language environment out of school. There virtually is no practice for students at home with little or no internet access and this hinders their learning of English. This picture can be considered as the example of the digital gap and its effect on the learning of language: those children who do not have a chance to work with the Internet and other computer devices they automatically stay behind. Because language learning especially when aiming for fluency has to be continuous and be exposed to real life usage, the lack of language bath inclusion outside the learning institutions greatly limits the chances of language fluency.

*"The library doesn't have much in terms of English books or materials. It's hard to find anything to help me practice on my own"*

This quote clearly shows that the school lacks proper resources to facilitate independent learning of language. I proved that libraries are important in making sure that students get books and other inventions to learn from however the absence of English books in the school library itself shows that there are a lot of shortcomings that are being experienced by the students. This scarcity of materials does not only hinder students to independently practice the English language, but each resource also reduces the prospects of self-learning needed in the language learning process.

*"The school lacks adequate resources, such as multimedia tools and language labs, which are crucial for helping students engage with English more actively"*

This quote refers to the structure deficits that impact on the feasibility of realising appropriate methodology in language teaching. It is highly beneficial to incorporate multimedia and language tools to help make the classrooms effective learning tools for teaching and learning languages and specific for English language; language labs are an effective way of teaching English since students not only listen, but they actively speak and be engaged in other forms of learning like using the computer or multimedia. The lack of these resources defines the number of possible approaches to the lesson and hinders learner effective language practice in a creative and favourable atmosphere.

*"Without access to technology, students miss out on the opportunity to practice listening and speaking with native English content, which is essential for fluency"*

This quote underlines the importance of the technology in acquiring the foreign language with focusing on input availability. To be able to understand English and comprehend what is being said, watch or listen to native English programs, movies or tv shows. The absence of the technological tools, thus, greatly hinders the learning fitting to perform an involvement in the

language use, hampering their learning the natural context of the language or English, as well as inhibiting the development of the language proficiency of the students.

### **Differentiation in Instruction Based on Student Needs**

One other deduced theme from the data was the non-diversification of teaching approach to accommodate the needs of every learner in Social Science at SMAN 2 Takalar. The findings indicate that the current practices of instructional delivery are quite standardized and do not take into consideration the differences in students' linguistic abilities and their learning styles. Such an approach is problematic because it means that learners do not receive the kind of specific guidance that they need if language learning is to proceed efficiently.

*"We all get the same assignments and are expected to learn at the same pace, but some of us are struggling while others are way ahead"*

This quote underlines the major weakness I believe strongly conflicts the culture of the one size fits all system of education. Whenever instruction does not take into consideration the differences in the speed and ability to grasp what a teacher is teaching then it becomes harder to eradicate in equalness within a classroom. Low achievers are often left behind while on the other hand high achievers do not get challenged adequately. This approach negates the concept of 'learning for all' that implies that every learner should successfully learn regardless his or her background.

*"The teacher mostly focuses on the students who already understand, and the rest of us just try to keep up"*

This fictional quote is an indication of latent interaction patterns in learning environment in which central attention is paid to students who already demonstrate high levels of academic achievements. Such a system can create a pattern of low achievement with students who require more attention and at the same times are ignored. The failure to teach and/do not give instruction to these students slows down their learning process because besides that, the student may entice negative emotions such as low self-esteem and disinterest in learning that work against their language development.

*"It's challenging to differentiate when we have large classes and a set curriculum. We often end up teaching to the middle, which isn't ideal for anyone"*

This statement provides a typical scenario to the education system in many countries and the teachers are compelled to offer instruction that suits the larger population or the 'average' learner because the learner teacher ratio is high and there is limited flexibility in curriculum delivery due to standardized curriculum. When a teacher sets his/her medium pace in teaching, high learners as well as low learners are left with unaddressed needs. Such a practice may act only as a hindrance to the development of the more able learners, and the same time disadvantage those learners who require more support, resulting in the cycle of low academic achievement being continued among the students.

*"Sometimes I need more explanation or different examples to understand, but the teacher has to move on quickly to cover everything"*

Such a quote perfectly reflects the problems that occur when the curriculum is content based and the number of concepts to be mastered is rather high. The strict time constraint that comes with the dictates of the syllabi results in teachers being forced to go through the material at a given pace disregarding the students understanding of the subject. However, for students who need more time to grasp concepts and ideas and those who need to be offered different



explanations, this pace can be exhilarating and frustrating moving them a step backward in their learning abilities.

*"I try to give extra help to the students who need it, but if there's only so much time I can spend with each student during class"*

As with all the students' needs, the idea behind this is highly noble; however, given the constraints of minimized classroom time and overcrowded classrooms, it is often challenging to meet the needs some children have the opportunity to respond to and require unique attention for. This is a case of systemic barriers to learning such as inadequate staffing and lack of professional development relating to differentiated instruction which poses as challenges to the teaching profession by not supporting the diverse needs of all the learners.

These are pertinent examples that demonstrate that the issue of non-differentiation of instruction poses lots of difficulties in the context of SMAN 2 Takalar. As much as there is standard methodology applied in teaching Social Science, the needs of students are not fully met, meaning that the class is moved either downwards or upwards, yet all students cannot be of the same. The fact is that large class size, strict curriculum, and scarcity of resources only aggravates the problems, leaving the teachers with little possibility to adopt more individualized approaches to their lessons and students. It is for such reasons that this theme calls for systems reflexivity adjustment of curriculum arrangement for flexibility, decrease in class size, and teacher training to adept differentiated instruction for all learning-disabled individual who need support and are have the ability to learn English successfully.

The pedagogical issues there are some problems in the way that learning is being carried out for the picked students at SMAN 2 Takalar which are as follows poor follow up on learning Angela and Siti are some of students whose learning styles are still not. These are not peculiar issues inherent in this learning teaching context but are typical problems of language learning and acquisition especially in contexts where students fail to find purposes to learn English in their learner academic and career endeavours (Fraile-Fernández et al., 2021).

Another emerging issue revealed most profoundly is the apathy and the students lack of enthusiasm for learning the English language, which they consider irrelevant to their probable future careers. This is in par with Ryan & Deci's (2020) and Alamri et al. (2020) self-determination theory where they argued that intrinsic motivation is important for optimal learning. The students in this study frequently perceived English as an 'additional' or 'noncore' subject which was in no way linked to their course of study or academic or professional dreams. Abramovich et al. (2019) and Malone & Lepper (2021) have used similar concepts in their argument that whenever students see something to do with a subject as important in the achievement of their goals, their motivation and performance will boost. Consequently, improving the connection between the foreign language lessons and major subjects as well as the student's future occupations might lead to an increase in learning motivation and speaking skills.

The study also revealed the lack of proper approach in the pedagogy currently in practice which is mostly overt grammatical instruction and rote learning. Such methods, although helpful in some way to teach various facets of language, is not enough to foster the communicative competency that student requires in using English in an authentic setting. This finding concurs with the comments in the literature, which had postulated that the grammar translation method as limited in integrating practical language use in the learning process consequently the communicative proficiency of the students (Alvi & Alvi, 2019; Borsatti & Riess, 2021). Out of them, absence of activities that can be classified as interactive and communicative was most



concerning as such activities help students to practice speaking and listening, which constitute components. Currently, there is literature exist and concerning communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), which has identified that interaction and practical use of language in real life situations contribute to the development of communicative proficiency.

According to Akram et al. (2020) and Aizawa et al. (2020) that, the other important barriers to learning of language were named as resource limitations and poor practice opportunities in English beyond the classroom. The inability of the students to practice English language outside the classroom, lack of English language materials and multimedia tools hamper the ability of the students to build on what they have learned in school. This seems to support de la Fuente & Goldenberg (2022) and Hosseini (2019) input hypothesis, which posits the need of constant encounter with comprehensible input for language acquisition. Some of the challenges arising from the absence of such resources include the students get limited exposure to the language and they cannot interact with the language in various ways and this is very vital when it comes to language maintenance as well as achievement of fluency. To this, the question of the digital divide poses an additional problem since, for example, students cannot develop their language skills in a classroom and at home without a computer, align with research from Van De Werfhorst et al. (2022) and Mathrani et al. (2022). Closing such voids is important in ensuring all the students have a chance of performing well as there should be social equity.

Another major concern that came out clearly from this study was the failure to address the heterogeneous nature of students through differentiation of the teaching approach. Cohort or batch method now in practice is not sensitive to the students, and the ability, way of learning and the needs of the students differ crossing the allowed average; the slow learners end up being indifferent and underachievers. The concept of differentiation, where the instructor adapts the teaching process and teaching materials with due regard to the student's learning styles, proves effective, because it provides support where it is needed most, that is, among lower performing students (El-Sabagh, 2021; Lindner et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the problems of differentiation's practical employability are manifold and, in the case of extended classes or a non-negotiable curriculum, can be viewed as insoluble outside of systemic shifts. Training teachers to implement instruction differentiation approaches is vital in overcoming these problems since it enables students to be taught in organized manner that meets their needs (Nychkalo et al., 2020; Dack, 2019).

These findings bear testament to the scope of literature underlining the importance of taking contextual account in learning and teaching of English, especially in the context such as SMAN 2 Takalar our study found that talent development should be done in a contextual manner. The findings add to current knowledge on language education practices by highlighting how motivational, pedagogical and resource conditions coexist in a learning environment and how they may affect learner's performance. It also emphasizes the need to focus the English language education to the student academic and or career aspirations in order to increase motivation. Moreover, its reveal that for the given inadequate state of learning English currently, curriculum reform, augmentation of resources and training for the teachers in Differentiated Instruction are essential.

## Conclusion

Several of the challenges affecting English language learning amongst the Social Science students at SMAN 2 Takalar have been depicted in this study whereby motivational, teaching

and learning as well as resource constraints influence the learning process in a complex way. This suggests that motivation levels of the learners decrease terribly due to the perception that English has no relevance to their future professions thus reducing their interest in the subject. This is the case particularly given traditional approaches to teaching and learning that do not promote communicative competence and are not sufficiently variable to accommodate the variability of student need. Moreover, poor resource situations and restricted use of English other than inside classroom intensify these difficulties a notch higher especially for students in resource poor setting. These issues can only be solved by a combination of approaches that recommend curricular changes aimed at bringing the education of English language closer to students' future careers, educational communication methods that are more communicative and interactive than traditional ones, and improving the given facilities and tools for students along with increasing the support provided to the teachers. In addition, catering for the differentiated needs of the learners based on their readiness levels and mode of learning is also essential so that every learner is given a chance to succeed. The use of new modes of teaching to accommodate the large number of students, as well as the reduced class sizes, more flexible curricula, and better training for teachers in terms of the new progressive approaches to teaching English are some of the system reforms that are needed to support student with ESL needs.

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