

DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH AT THE FIRST SEMESTER STUDENTS OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM OF STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF DATOKARAMA PALU

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kesulitan belajar Bahasa Inggris pada mahasiswa semester satu Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif yang menggunakan wawancara sebagai instrumennya. Pertanyaan penelitiannya adalah “Apa kesulitan belajar Bahasa Inggris pada mahasiswa semester satu Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu?” Respondennya adalah dua puluh enam mahasiswa semester satu Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu. Melalui wawancara, peneliti menemukan empat kesulitan yang dialami responden terkait dengan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Yang pertama adalah pengucapan/pelafalan. Mereka sulit menebak pengucapan beberapa kata Bahasa Inggris yang mereka baca serta mengucapkan kata-kata tersebut dengan benar. Yang kedua adalah penulisan Bahasa Inggris. Sekalipun mereka sudah mengetahui pengucapannya, mereka masih merasa kesulitan untuk menulis Bahasa Inggris karena tulisannya berbeda dengan pengucapannya. Kesulitan berikutnya adalah tata bahasa. Meskipun materi Bahasa Inggris di sekolah telah mencakup banyak bagian tata bahasa, mereka masih merasa kesulitan untuk menyusun kalimat yang benar secara tata bahasa ketika mereka sudah menjadi mahasiswa. Hal terakhir yang menjadi kesulitan mereka adalah keterbatasan kosakata yang menyebabkan mereka mengalami kesulitan dalam mengembangkan keterampilan produktif seperti menyusun kalimat dan keterampilan reseptif seperti mendengarkan percakapan Bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: kesulitan, belajar Bahasa Inggris

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to find out the difficulties in learning English at the first semester students of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu. This is a qualitative research applying an interview as the instrument. The research question is “What are the difficulties in learning English at the first semester students of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu?” The respondents are twenty six first semester students of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu. Through the interview, the researchers discovered four difficulties the respondents shared related to learning English. The first is pronunciation. They find it hard to guess the pronunciation of some English words that they read as well as to pronounce the words correctly. The second one is the writing of English. Even if they already know the pronunciation, they still find it troublesome to write English since the writing is different from the pronunciation. The next difficulty is the grammar. Although the materials of English at schools have included many parts of grammar, they still find it tough to construct grammatical correct sentences when they already become university students. The last thing that becomes their difficulty is limited vocabulary that leads them to the problem in developing productive skill such as constructing sentences and receptive skill such as listening to English conversation.

Key Words: difficulty, learning English

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language can be a tough challenge for students. When learning a foreign language, learners need to cope with not only different vocabulary, but also different grammar as well as the pronunciation compared with Indonesian language. With the reality that English study in Indonesia takes a role as a foreign language and not as a second language, Indonesian people only use English in particular situation, not in everyday conversation. Linguistic intelligence is one of seven kinds of smart as explained by Armstrong (2002). People owning linguistic intelligence have the ability to listen to the words in their brains before the words come out from their mouths. Being able to communicate in English both in spoken and written type is a goal of every English learners. Therefore, they try to do anything they can in order to reach the goal. However, in reaching the goal, learners may find obstacles.

Obstacles undeniably exist in the process of learning a foreign language. Abdulholiqofna and Qurbonazarovna (2021) note at least three difficulties English learners need to encounter while learning the target language. They first is pronunciation. Indonesian people who have already familiar with the consonants and vowels in Indonesian language may find it difficult to adapt to some different sounds in English such as dental fricative sounds and lateral retroflex sounds which do not exist in Indonesian. The second difficulty is grammar. Every language has its own rules and patterns in forming sentences. The system of singular and plural nouns is just one of the problems that Indonesian people face in learning English. The third difficulty is vocabulary. Words are the main essential element of a language. The difference in words can be one of the problems English learners have to solve.

Besides pronunciation, listening skill is also become one of the considered problems in learning English. Learners may find difficulty in getting the words uttered by the interlocutors. Less of getting involved in a community speaking the target language may turn this problem to be worse. Being

less motivated to get involved in English speaking community become the core of this problem. Encouragement to enhance vocabulary stock may become one of the reasons

METHOD

The researchers conducted this research to answer the question, “What are the difficulties in learning English at the first semester students of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu?” The objective of this research is to find out the difficulties in learning English at the first semester students of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu. The type of this research is qualitative research with interview as the instrument. The respondents of this research are the first semester students of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu.

Quantitative research is a kind of research which demand specific and detail information from subjective inquiry (Creswell, 2005). So, the respondents were given five questions that they answered based on their own personal perspective. The total of the respondents is twenty six. This is a case study in the first semester students of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu. A case study, as explained by Nunan (1997), is a research that observes the characteristics of the participants of the research. By conducting a case study, the researcher tries to find out the uniqueness of the case (Flood, et al, 2005). In other words, the result of this research only represents the students of the first semester of Islamic Education Study Program of State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researchers conducted interview to twenty six respondents. The interview consisted of five questions. The first question is about the time when they started learning English. Ten of them replied that they began learning English since they were in Elementary School, while fifteen of them

responded that they have learned English since they were in the seventh grade of Junior High School. The reason of including this question to the list is to obtain information related to duration of time they have spent in learning English in life. One of the respondents explained that she started struggling to learn English since she was a little kid before entering Elementary School.

On the second question, the researchers asked about the way the respondents learn English. Majority of the respondents started learning English since Elementary School. They learned English by listening to music and watching movies. While listening to songs or watching videos, they opened dictionary or searched in Google the words which were unfamiliar to them. After that, they tried to construct English sentences by using the words they have known. Besides, they got involved in English by applying English as a default language program in their smartphones. Those who started learning English in Junior High School learned English in many ways. They memorized vocabulary they learned in schools and practiced conversation with their friends. Some of them learned English by watching YouTube, TikTok, and Reels in Instagram.

The third and fourth questions are the key questions to answer the research question. The respondents shared their opinion about the difficulties in English. Among twenty six respondents, eighteen of them stated that learning English is difficult, five of them thought that it is easy, while three of them declared that it is difficult and easy. The difficulties are about the pronunciation, the writing, the grammar, and limited vocabulary leading to the difficulty in constructing sentences and listening to English.

The respondents answered the fifth question by sharing the tricks they do to solve the problems dealing with the difficulties in learning English. To learn pronunciation, they keep listening and repeating words and sentences in YouTube. They open dictionary to search unfamiliar words or find them out in Google. In addition, practicing vocabulary they have

mastered and reviewing lessons are keys to improve their English.

The discussion about the perfect time to begin learning a foreign language still becomes the debating topic among linguists until now. Although there are negative effects found when children learn a foreign language at their early age, the positive influence such as the development of listening skill at the early age can lead to not only language development but also cognitive development (Cameron, 2003). Most of the respondents who declared that they started learning English in Elementary School tend to learn English by developing their extensive listening skill through listening to music and watch movies.

Most of the respondents in this research state that their biggest problem in learning English is pronunciation. This makes sense because the curriculum of English at schools skips the pronunciation. Actually the teaching of pronunciation not only enables the learners to recognize sounds but also to improve speaking (Harmer, 2013). The curriculum of English at schools focus more on reading comprehension and grammar but less on speaking, listening and writing. Pronunciation section has been omitted in the class discussion. Classroom activity is centered on reading comprehension, while reading aloud is neglected. Therefore, learners always find pronunciation is hard.

The next difficulty is grammar. Respondents explained that they find grammar a problem while they need to construct a sentence. They worry about the sentences they make although they have learned grammar at schools. When they try to link several words to be a sentence, they question themselves about the grammatical errors. When they try to speak, they always doubt the grammatical correctness of sentences they utter. The existence of spoken grammar and written grammar has never been discussed in classroom. The grammar taught to the learners at schools is focused on written grammar only (Thornbury, 2005). However, learners who develop their extensive listening by listening to music, watching movies, and using social

media will soon find the difference between the two grammar concepts. By owning the same level of grammar knowledge, a speaker and an interlocutor can communicate to transfer not only explicit but also implicit message (Slobin, 1979).

Limited vocabulary becomes the next difficulty the respondents shared to the researchers. Wallace (1987) explains that the problem encountered by learners in mastering vocabulary is retrieving vocabulary. No matter how many words they have learned, when they are asked to bring the words into the piece of writing or a conversation, they fail. This case is almost the same as learning grammar points that cannot enable learners to be alert in grammatical errors or mistakes. The point is teaching vocabulary and grammar in context. In order to enhance language skills, vocabulary and grammar are better taught in context.

CONCLUSION

After conducting interview to twenty six respondents, the researchers detected at least four difficulties the respondents encountered in learning English. The first difficulty is pronunciation. Trying to guess the pronunciation of particular words in English texts can be a tough activity to do with confidence. This difficulty cannot be separated to the fact that there is a difference between the writing and the pronunciation of English words which makes this part as the second difficulty the respondents perceive in learning English. The grammar is placed to the third difficulty the respondents discover in learning English. The knowledge about grammar is needed especially in constructing sentences and in detecting whether the sentence is syntactically correct or not. Finally, limited vocabulary is also included as the difficulty in learning English. Without having sufficient vocabulary, not only receptive skills such as listening and reading but also productive skills such as speaking and writing will be hard to develop.

Practicing is the key to learn a foreign language. Besides, there is also intrinsic motivation which leads to break any barriers a learner finds in the journey of

learning a foreign language. Practicing pronunciation is better to do with listening. The listen and repeat strategy still becomes the golden trick to learn pronunciation. To solve the problem of guessing the pronunciation of words in reading a text, a learner may try to read an audio English text to make hearing accustomed to the pronunciation of English words in the text. Besides, learners can also apply online dictionary to check the pronunciation. In learning grammar, learners will learn better with a tutor. However, if they find it difficult to meet a tutor, they may learn from grammar books by doing the exercises in the books. Another way to activate grammatical alertness is by reading English books. The more we read, the more we become alert to grammar errors. Enhancing vocabulary stock can also be done by listening and reading English regularly. The last but not least, practicing conversation in pairs or groups can become a solution to increase vocabulary.

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