

Language learning barriers in english education: An analytical study

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ABSTRAK

Abstrak: Bahasa merupakan alat komunikasi mendasar yang digunakan oleh semua manusia untuk memfasilitasi saling pengertian antara pembicara dan pendengar. Penguasaan bahasa yang tidak memadai dapat menghambat komunikasi yang efektif, yang berpotensi mengubah makna atau pesan yang ingin disampaikan oleh pembicara. Lebih jauh lagi, keterampilan komunikasi yang buruk dapat berdampak negatif pada rasa diri dan kepercayaan diri seseorang. Untuk mengidentifikasi kesulitan umum—terutama di antara mahasiswa yang sedang mempelajari bahasa kedua—studi ini berfokus pada mahasiswa semester enam program Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Blitar. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa hambatan bahasa yang paling sering terjadi adalah karena kurangnya pemahaman tata bahasa dan penguasaan kosakata yang terbatas. Tantangan-tantangan ini secara signifikan memengaruhi kepercayaan diri mahasiswa dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris untuk komunikasi.

Abstract: Language is a fundamental tool of communication used by all humans to facilitate mutual understanding between speakers and listeners. Inadequate mastery of language can hinder effective communication, potentially altering the intended meaning or message conveyed by the speaker. Furthermore, poor communication skills can negatively impact an individual's sense of self and confidence. To identify common difficulties—particularly among students who are learning a second language—this study focuses on sixth-semester students of the English Education program at Nahdlatul Ulama University Blitar. The findings reveal that the most frequent language barriers are due to a lack of understanding of grammar and limited vocabulary mastery. These challenges significantly affect students' confidence in using English for communication.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential activity that humans engage in daily, as individuals and social beings, in order to connect with others. As Dwihartanti (2004) emphasizes, communication is a fundamental need because humans are inherently social creatures. Language serves as the primary tool for communication, allowing people to convey a variety of information, emotions, and ideas. However, communication is not solely reliant on words; it is also heavily influenced by expressions, tones, and the social context in which the interaction occurs. M. Devitt (2006) further elaborates on the role of language as a means of conveying messages, asserting that the effectiveness of communication is deeply rooted in expressions, which can vary in segmental and suprasegmental elements, whether oral or kinesic. Thus, a single sentence can carry different meanings depending on how it is expressed. For instance, the same message can convey warmth, anger, or sarcasm based on

the tone or body language accompanying it. These expressions are pivotal in ensuring that the message intended by the speaker is understood clearly by the listener.

In educational settings, particularly in university environments, the ability to use language effectively is essential for academic success. Both verbal and written communication skills are needed to convey ideas, engage in discussions, and present arguments. Reni Supriani (2016) highlights that a significant barrier to communication, especially in an educational context, is the lack of language skills. This deficiency often manifests in language errors, which can disrupt communication and cause misunderstandings. Such errors may include incorrect grammar, improper word choices, or pronunciation mistakes, all of which can hinder the clarity of a message and affect the speaker's credibility. These issues are particularly relevant in second language acquisition, where learners are navigating both grammatical and cultural nuances of the new language.

Effective communication, whether in speaking or writing, is not just about using the right words but also about structuring them in a way that makes the message clear to the listener. The listener processes the speaker's message, and if the language used is irregular or faulty, the listener may not receive the message as intended. This miscommunication can lead to confusion or even conflict. M. Devitt (2006) further explains that language is not just a set of expressions but a social tool that facilitates interaction in specific situations, depending on the context. Thus, for communication to be effective, both the sender and receiver need to share an understanding of the linguistic and cultural norms that govern the conversation.

One of the key elements that influence the success of communication is the speaker's self-confidence. Jeanete Ophilia Papilaya (2016) asserts that students, particularly at the university level, are expected to demonstrate critical thinking, creativity, and quick decision-making in their communication. A student's ability to express ideas effectively, especially in a second language, is closely tied to their self-confidence. When students are confident in their language skills, they are more likely to engage in academic conversations, participate in group discussions, and present their ideas clearly. Conversely, students who lack confidence may hesitate to speak up or express their thoughts, even when they understand the material well. This lack of confidence can significantly hinder their ability to succeed in an academic environment, as communication is crucial to the learning process.

Self-confidence, therefore, plays a dual role in communication. On one hand, it encourages students to use the language more freely, without the fear of making mistakes. On the other hand, it also helps them develop and refine their language skills through practice. As students continue to use the language in various contexts, they become more adept at applying it effectively. The combination of linguistic competence and self-assurance enables students to communicate more clearly, understand complex ideas, and contribute meaningfully to classroom discussions.

The challenge of mastering a second language, such as English, is compounded in multilingual societies where students switch between languages in everyday conversations. In countries like Indonesia, where Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese, and English are all spoken regularly, students are often exposed to multiple languages in their daily interactions. This bilingual or multilingual environment can lead to code-switching and code-mixing, where students fluidly alternate between languages depending on the context or the people they are communicating with. While this ability to switch between languages can be seen as a sign of linguistic flexibility, it can also complicate communication in formal settings, such as academic discussions or presentations.

In the classroom, where the primary medium of instruction is English, students may struggle to fully express themselves in a language they are still mastering. As Dwihartanti (2004) notes, communication in a multilingual context requires a keen understanding of when and how to use different languages appropriately. In academic settings, where the use of English is often mandatory, the frequent switch between languages may lead to confusion or misunderstandings, especially when students switch from Indonesian or Javanese to English without following the proper grammatical rules or structure.

To overcome these challenges, students need continuous practice, guidance, and support from their instructors. One of the key goals for educators in language learning programs is to help students navigate these difficulties and build the confidence needed to communicate effectively. As Reni Supriani (2016) suggests, language learning is an ongoing process that involves trial and error. Students must be given opportunities to practice their language skills in various contexts, allowing them to build proficiency and confidence over time. This iterative process of learning is essential for

overcoming the barriers posed by language errors and for developing the skills necessary for successful communication.

Ultimately, language acquisition is not just about learning vocabulary and grammar rules. It is about developing the ability to use language as a tool for communication in a variety of contexts. Whether students are interacting with their peers, presenting in front of a class, or engaging in academic discussions, the ability to express ideas clearly and confidently is crucial. By fostering an environment that encourages language practice, self-confidence, and cultural awareness, educators can help students develop the skills they need to succeed in both their academic and professional lives.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, focusing on data collected from students of Nahdlatul Ulama University Blitar. Qualitative research is particularly effective for exploring and understanding phenomena in depth, especially those related to human behavior, experiences, or perceptions. As Wahidmurni (2017) explains, qualitative methods are used to address research problems involving data typically presented in narrative form, which is collected through techniques such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. The aim is to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the subject matter, grounded in the lived experiences of the participants.

In this study, the descriptive method was applied through case analysis techniques, which allowed for a thorough examination of the language use and errors among students. Descriptive research, as outlined by Soendari (2012), is aimed at portraying a phenomenon, event, or situation as it currently exists, without manipulation of variables. This type of research is particularly useful when the goal is to explore real-life contexts and provide a detailed, factual account of a specific issue or occurrence. In the context of this study, the focus was on identifying and describing the language-related challenges faced by the students.

The findings of this study were derived from the analysis of language errors observed among sixth-semester students of the English Education Department at Nahdlatul Ulama University Blitar. The results revealed that these students frequently encountered difficulties when using bilingual language—specifically, English—during communicative activities in the classroom. These challenges were evident in both spoken and written communication, highlighting a gap in their language proficiency, particularly in the areas of grammar and vocabulary.

The students' struggles were particularly noticeable during interactions that required the use of English, such as in class discussions, presentations, and written assignments. In many cases, students switched between Indonesian, Javanese, and English, often mixing these languages in a way that disrupted the flow of communication and hindered their ability to express themselves clearly. This frequent code-switching and code-mixing were indicative of a lack of confidence in their English language skills, which may have led them to rely on their native languages to communicate more comfortably.

Moreover, the analysis revealed that the students' difficulties with grammar and vocabulary were major contributors to their communication barriers. Many students struggled to construct grammatically correct sentences and often used incorrect vocabulary, leading to misunderstandings or miscommunication. This is consistent with findings from previous research on second language acquisition, which suggests that learners often face challenges in mastering the rules of grammar and expanding their vocabulary in a new language (Supriani, 2016).

These issues underline the importance of addressing language proficiency in a comprehensive manner, incorporating both vocabulary acquisition and grammar comprehension into the curriculum. The study also points to the need for more targeted instructional strategies that focus on improving these areas. Teachers should consider implementing activities that promote both accuracy and fluency in English, such as grammar exercises, vocabulary drills, and opportunities for real-life communication practice. Additionally, fostering a classroom environment that encourages the use of English without fear of making mistakes could help build students' confidence and facilitate more effective learning.

In conclusion, the findings from this study highlight the challenges faced by students in mastering bilingual communication, particularly in English. The frequent errors in grammar and vocabulary suggest a need for more effective language instruction and support, focusing on areas where students struggle most. By addressing these issues, educators can help students improve their language skills and become more confident in using English as a medium of communication. This will

not only enhance their academic performance but also prepare them for future professional communication in English-speaking.

RESULT

The results obtained from this study indicated that 16 sixth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Nahdlatul Ulama University Blitar were analyzed. All 16 students were found to more frequently use bilingual language in their daily communication. In fact, some of them demonstrated the use of multilingual language, combining more than two languages in a single conversation. The most common language combination was Indonesian and Javanese. Despite their status as English Education students, many of them had not yet fully adopted English in everyday classroom interactions.

The examples below illustrate how the students commonly communicate:

“Mba Nis, sampean bawa pulpen berapa?”

One of the students who wanted to borrow a pen used bilingual language, combining Indonesian and Javanese. The sentence translates to “Nis, how many ballpoint pens did you bring?”

“Just kidding mba, engko sampean marah”

A student who was joking with a peer used a mix of English, Indonesian, and Javanese. The sentence means “Just kidding, you will be angry.”

“Can you explain easily all the material?”

This is an example of a student using full English during a learning session or class presentation.

From these examples, it is evident that students tend to mix languages in casual interactions. However, during formal classroom activities, such as when addressing lecturers or making presentations, some students attempted to use full English, although with occasional grammatical errors.

DISCUSSION

The observations were conducted throughout the learning sessions, starting from when the students entered the classroom until the class concluded. During this period, the researcher analyzed the communication patterns of the sixth-semester English education students at Nahdlatul Ulama University Blitar. It was discovered that the students predominantly used bilingual communication, especially combining Indonesian and Javanese, when speaking informally with their peers. This behavior aligns with Fishman’s (1965) theory of diglossia, where two languages exist side by side, each serving a different function within the community.

However, in certain contexts—particularly when speaking to lecturers or during academic activities—students made efforts to incorporate multilingual communication, including Indonesian, Javanese, and English. Some students even tried using full English, especially in structured situations like class presentations or Q&A sessions. According to Bialystok (2001), this is a natural phenomenon among multilingual learners, who often switch between languages depending on context, topic, or the communicative situation.

Nevertheless, challenges still arose due to limitations in grammar mastery and vocabulary usage, which affected their ability to construct fluent English sentences. As Ellis (2003) notes, second language learners often experience interference from their first languages, which can hinder their fluency and accuracy in the target language. This was evident in the students' use of code-mixing and code-switching, which, as Myers-Scotton (1993) explains, are common strategies used by multilingual individuals when faced with linguistic gaps in one language.

Despite these challenges, lecturers in the English Education Department consistently encourage students to speak English during class. This encouragement serves to create an immersive language environment, even though many students still depend on code-mixing and code-switching as transitional strategies. These practices are not entirely negative; instead, they can be seen as natural stages of language acquisition, especially among multilingual learners who are still developing proficiency in English. According to Gumperz (1982), code-switching can facilitate communication and may even enhance learning when it is strategically employed in the classroom.

The tendency to default to Javanese and Indonesian in communication reflects the students' sociolinguistic background. Most of them come from the Blitar area, where Javanese is commonly spoken as a mother tongue and Indonesian functions as the national language. English, in this case, is a foreign language that has not yet been fully integrated into their daily communication. This phenomenon aligns with Cummins' (2000) theory of language interdependence, which suggests that learners' proficiency in their first language can positively influence their acquisition of a second language, particularly when learners are in a supportive environment.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study highlights the need for language instruction that goes beyond grammar and theory. Instead, there should be more emphasis on practical communication, real-life interaction, and confidence-building exercises. Activities like role-playing, group discussions, and peer interactions in English can gradually help students transition from passive learners to active users of the language. Vygotsky's (1978) social interactionist theory emphasizes the importance of social contexts in language development, suggesting that learning English through social interaction and collaboration with peers is a crucial part of the acquisition process.

In conclusion, the results of this research show that although English Education students still face significant difficulties in using English fluently, they demonstrate strong potential for improvement. Their use of bilingual and multilingual communication should not be viewed as a failure but as part of the learning process. By adopting supportive and student-centered teaching strategies, educators can help these learners gain more confidence and proficiency in using English effectively in both academic and everyday settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that sixth-semester English Education students at Nahdlatul Ulama University Blitar still face challenges in using English effectively in daily communication. Although they are in an advanced stage of their studies, most students frequently use bilingual or even multilingual language combinations, primarily Indonesian and Javanese, in informal settings. While some students are able to use English during class presentations or when interacting with lecturers, their overall fluency remains limited due to difficulties with grammar and vocabulary.

The widespread use of code-mixing and code-switching among students indicates a transitional stage in their language acquisition process. Rather than viewing this as a shortcoming, it should be recognized as part of a natural progression toward English fluency. This suggests the importance of creating more immersive and supportive learning environments that encourage practical use of English and help build students' confidence.

Therefore, English language instruction should place greater emphasis on communication-based approaches and interactive learning strategies to facilitate more consistent and effective use of English in both academic and everyday contexts.

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