

## An Identification Of Students' Problems In Learning English at SMP N 30 Muaro Jambi Indonesia

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### Abstract

*This study aimed to identify students' difficulties in learning English at SMP N 30 Muaro Jambi, Indonesia. The descriptive qualitative method was used in the present study. Ten tenth-grade students participated in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to collect research data. The finding of the study revealed that there were several problems consisting of external and internal problems. The internal problems came from within the students themselves. It consists of 1) lack of motivation, 2) lack of concentration, 3) lack of self-confidence, 4) fear of mistakes, and 5) shyness. Meanwhile, the external problems came from the students' environment, such as a lack of English lesson hours. Therefore, the participants also explained some solutions to overcome their problems. The researchers have proposed several recommendations for teachers and further studies to gain better improvement.*

**Keywords:** Identification, Learning English, Problem, Students

### 1. Introduction

In some cases, learning English for EFL students is one of the most complicated subjects to master. Classically, its general cause is the unfamiliarity with English in their daily life. Several students perceive that English is less exciting than other lessons. As a result, the students perform poorly in class (Tambunsaribu, 2022).

English is proven to be not easy for students to learn. Therefore, it makes some students fail to achieve the score of the minimum criteria. Several difficulties are often experienced by the students in learning English, which causes unsuccessful learning of English in school. The students feel English is difficult to understand because they are not used to using English daily. As (Schwarz and Terrill, 2000) stated, since effective language learning involves various skills, abilities, practices, and resources, there may be a combination of reasons for the lack of necessary and expected progress. It is essential to determine the possible and likely causes for the lack of expected progress in such a learner to address potential problems and for the learner's self-image, confidence, and

The difficulties of learning English for people or students who are not used to using English in daily life are also experienced by junior high schools in Jambi, especially the students at SMP at 30 Muaro Jambi, Indonesia. These referred to some students who did not complete the lesson and had scores below the minimum criteria (KKM).

The data have been obtained from the mid-semester exam results given by the English teacher in class VIII C. Based on the data, it can be concluded that from 25 students, only 6 students passed the minimum criteria, and 19 students had a grade below the minimum standards (KKM). The data is obtained from the results of the mid-exam score for the English lesson the teachers gave.

Hence many researchers researched the problems of learning English (Lynda Yates & Beth Zelinski, 2009). However, several previous researchers investigated the problems in one or two skills in English. Therefore, this study aimed to make some diversity from existing research because the researchers examine students' problems in English in general. It also aimed to discover the students' solutions to overcome the problems.

In response to the previous explanation, the researchers examined the students' problems in learning English. By knowing the problems in learning English, the teachers can easily guide the students' activities

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motivation to continue the language learning process.

based on the problems. Moreover, the teacher can provide a solution to each problem. The researchers hope this study can help students share their problems in learning English to increase their English skills.

There are many definitions from the experts about the terms of learning. Millah (2015) explains that learning is a way to get new information, skills, and value. Based on the explanation above, learning is an activity to gain new knowledge. Also, learning is a way to change a person's behaviors due to the experience (Millah, 2015). Thus, learning is a good way to change human behavior based on the understanding that has been done in the past. Besides, learning is an activity that aims to get new knowledge from many sources. In conclusion, learning is how someone gets information and expertise.

Between 320 and 380 million people speak English as their first language (Harmer, 2007). This happens because until now, English is still an international language. In response to this matter, until now many people have been competing to learn English well.

In learning English, there are several skills that the learner must master. These skills consist of 1) listening, 2) speaking, 3) reading, and 4) writing. Listening is one of the skills that are available in English. Raharjo (2007) claims that listening is the basis of all language and cognitive development aspects. Besides, listening is an essential part of the process of learning English and communicating in English. It means that the primary skill that has to be mastered is listening.

The next skill that students must learn is speaking. According to Fitriana (2012), speaking is communicating using verbal or nonverbal symbols. It means that speaking can be done using verbal (the sound) or nonverbal (signs). As explained by Kharisatul (2011) speaking is the oral skill necessary for communicating with someone else.

Furthermore, the third skill is reading. Reading is one of the skills that have a complicated process since reading is the process of bringing the writer's message to readers with different knowledge (Lutfia, 2012). It means that reading has a long process skill. Reading is also claimed as a long process skill (Kusein, 2011). Additionally, reading is also defined as the process of transferring information using text to the readers.

Another skill of English that language learners should master is writing. According to Brown (2001), writing results from thinking, drafting, and revising procedures. In doing writing process, the researcher should be able to organize the idea to be a good paragraph or essay. In addition, a good writer can communicate their point of view to the audience through

the fluff and in a way that easily comprehends by the readers.

Student problem is a condition student that can obstruct the process of learning activities. Many factors may cause the problem. The factors can come from internal or external students. Syah (2007, as cited in Pristiyan, 2010) underpins that two factors influence students' learning process. The factors are an internal factor and an external factor.

Firstly is the internal factor. It is the factor that comes from the students themselves. It refers to the psychological condition. Students in learning English face several psychological factor. According to Juhana (2012), the first problem is fear of mistakes. It is influenced by the student's fear of being laughed at by other students or criticized by the teacher. Therefore, teachers must convince their students that making mistakes is not wrong or bad because students can learn from their mistakes.

Secondly is shyness. Shyness is an emotional thing that many students suffer from at some time when they are required to speak in English class. This indicates that shyness could be a source of problems in students' learning activities in the classroom, especially in speaking. The students felt shyness made their minds blank, or they would forget what to say.

Thirdly is a lack of confidence. It is commonly understood that students' lack of confidence usually occurs when students realize that their conversation partners have not understood them or when they do not understand other speakers. In this situation, they would rather keep silent while others talk, showing that the students lack the confidence to communicate.

Lastly is a lack of motivation. Motivation is essential to notice because it can affect students' reluctance to speak English. In this sense, motivation is a crucial consideration in determining the readiness of learners to communicate. However, several studies reveal that lacking motivation is still problematic in learning the target language (Shaw, Gomes, Polotskaia, & Jankowska, 2015).

## **2. Method**

The researchers used a descriptive qualitative study among ten grade students at SMP N 30 Muaro Jambi, Indonesia. The purposive sampling method is the type of participant selection method that the researchers used in this study. The names of the participants are anonymous, as ST. There were 10 students who participated in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in this study. To ensure the validity of this research data, researchers used member checking. In this research, the researchers analyze and describe the data descriptively. The data was analyzed through several steps proposed by Lodico, Spaulding,

and Voegtle (2006). It consists of 1) preparing and organizing the data, 2) reviewing and exploring the data, 3) coding the data, and 4) Reporting and interpreting data.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### Result

After conducting the present study, the researchers found several problems for students learning English. It was divided into two-part, four sub-themes in the internal problems and two sub-themes in the external problems. It is explained in the explanation below:

##### a. Internal Problems

Based on the study result, There are five internal factors in Learning English Problems. It consisted of a lack of motivation, concentration, self-confidence, fear of mistakes, and shyness. As explained by some students, learning a language is not attractive. They even only think about passing the course. According to the interview result, some students said they lacked the motivation to learn English. ST1 said that he has a problem in English originating himself; lazy, bored, and not eager to learn the material presented in the class. It is explained by ST1 below:

ST1: *"I am lazy. There is no intention to learn, I have less interest (in learning), and my friends influenced me (on the negative side). There are also problems with the subject. I do not understand, cannot understand the material, and the lesson is boring. If someone does not explain what the lesson is, I have no idea."*

ST6: *"I often got sleepy. Because I do not understand the material what the teacher said"*

ST8: *"I feel bored and sleepy. I cannot understand English because I do not find it fun (to learn). And I do not have any interest in learning English."*

In response to the previous explanation, ST1, ST6, and ST8 they explained that their problem in learning English is laziness. They assumed that he did not understand the material presented by the teacher. Therefore, it made them lazy to pay attention and clueless about the material. Not only that, but they also added that the lesson was boring due to the teacher only focusing on textbooks without using other learning media. The problem makes the teaching does not interested in learning English, which causes them to feel bored, insulted, and uneasy in class when lessons go on. Additionally, it significantly affects students' problems in learning English.

In any case, growing self-confidences is still a problem that requires a lot of time to solve. According to Sar, Avcu, and Isiklar (2010) stated in Gurler (2015),

there are two large groups of self-confidence: inner confidence and outer confidence. Inner confidence is composed of the love of self, self-knowledge, setting explicit goals, and thinking positively. The factors of communication and the capability of controlling feelings constitute confidence. If someone cannot have one or both of these factors, he will be considered a person who is not confident to do certain activities.

In response to self-confidence, students' problems in learning English cause some of them to feel insecure. Based on the data, ST1 said that one factor that caused the problems he experienced in learning English was the lack of self-confidence. Therefore, he felt scared and ashamed when a teacher asked to speak in class. Also, based on the explanation given by ST1, he often fears being wrong in the reading that will be delivered to him.

ST1: *"When I was asked to go to in front of the class then the teacher asked me to introduce myself in English I was very scared that time. I was lack in confidence because I was afraid of being misspelled. I (am) shy."*

Along with ST1, ST6 agreed that self of confidence also became a problem in speaking. Self-confidence is essential in learning English skills. If the student does not have the courage or self-confidence then it is influenced on their English skills. As explained by the students, lack of confidence is making the students unable to speak, forget what they want to say and cannot understand what the teacher wants to convey. Moreover, lack of vocabulary could become the factor that increase the students' self-confidence.

ST6: *"When asked to speak in front of the class I do not have any confident in speaking English"*

The data explained that some students have several problems. As explained by ST6, and ST8 they could not concentrate on listening to what the teacher said. It explained on the following explanation:

ST6: *"If I have to listen to in English I often do not concentration because too fast the way I do not understand at all"*

According to Juhana (2012: 101), this fear to enhance learning skills is influenced by the teachers' correction. In other words the students' fear in studying English due to negative feedback given by their environment. As explained by ST2, one of the fears that students worry about when speaking English is the fear of being laughed at by the other students. not only that teacher's correction also become a factor of increasing this feeling of fear. Related to this, ST2 explained that

he did not dare to speak in front of the class because of his minimal English skills.

ST2: *"I am groggy; I do not have the courage to speak in front of the class. I am afraid of being laughed"*

While ST4 said that it is one of the problems in learning English. Lack of confidence and fear of being wrong is to be the one factor. It is often experienced by most students when learning to speak in English. They do not believe themselves to using English. Also, they are too afraid to misspell in English words. Nevertheless, the fear also made them blank while expressing their thoughts.

ST4: *"When I was asked to go to in front of the class, I forget everything. I am afraid to say something wrong"*

Shyness is an emotional thing that many students suffer from at some time when they are required to speak in English class. This indicates that shyness could be a source of problem in students learning activities in the classroom especially in the class of learning English:

ST7: *"I (am) shy, because I cannot speak with good English. English is difficult and the words are hard to say"*

As explained by ST7 shyness is the problem when learning English processed. She said that do not had a good vocabulary when she speak English. Therefore this problems is one of the factor faced the experienced by the students in learning English. She assumes that when she shies, cannot speak, and do not know what will be speak.

#### **b. External Problems**

According to the finding of the present study, the researchers found some external problems that influence students' difficulty in learning English namely lack of English lesson hours. Lack of English lesson hours became the bigger external problem. Based on the finding, the researchers found that the students only follow the English course twice a week. In this case, it is not enough for students. In this regard, it is explained by ST5 below:

ST5: *"it is not enough for me, because only done twice a week on Monday and Tuesday so it is also not familiar for me"*

Furthermore, students also do not have extra hours to attend English lessons. Some of the students also did not take English courses outside of school. This makes students do not have the opportunity to study English intensively. It is explained by some students bellows:

ST2: *"We do not have English lessons outside of the school"*

ST7: *"We learn English in school only and at home, I do not learn English"*

In conclusion, several factors lead to students' problems in learning English one of them is the lack of lesson hours learning English. So this problem will not very effective in learning the English language. Students learn only by memorizing the contents of the books and eventually forget all the material after a few months or perhaps they learn when they would face the examination.

#### **The way students solve the problem in learning English**

Responding to some of the problems in learning English, the researchers also found that the students had several ways to solve the problems in learning English. The solution is asking the teacher and friends toward the material, checking the unfamiliar vocabulary to the dictionary and re-reading the material at home. Based on the explanation given by some students, one way to solve the problems is asking about the material taught to the teacher. Apart from that, they also asked their friends who understood the material better. This is explained in the following quote:

ST3: *"For me, when I do not understand the material I ask my friend and from that, I get an explanation about the material. So I can understand."*

ST4: *"I asked the teacher every time I don't understand the material"*

Besides that, the next solution is to check the meaning of unfamiliar words in the dictionary. Because in the dictionary there is a written vocabulary that is correct and there is also a way of reading. This is explained in the following explanation:

ST9: *"Checking the dictionary if there are unfamiliar word, in the dictionary there is a way to read a words. If I still do not understand usually I asked the teacher"*

Then, another solution to overcome this problem is to re-read the material. The students did this to overcome the lack of understanding of existing materials. It is explained in the following explanation:

ST4: *"For the solution, when at home I open the book about the material when I' am study at school and then I read again until understand"*

#### **Discussion**

The main purpose of this research was to discover the problems students faced in learning

English. After analyzing the interview result, the researchers found that the students' problems came from two factors that cause the problems there are internal and external problems. Syah (2007, as cited in Pristiyan, 2010) explains that two factors influence students' learning process. The factors are internal and external. This statement was similar to the result found by the researchers.

Lack of motivation is one of the causes that the students SMPN 30 Muaro Jambi faced problems in learning English. Based on the participant's confession, the lack of motivation in learning English made they do not excited to learn the lesson. The students feel bored and not willing to pay attention to the lesson. The students feel sleepy and sometimes feel lazy to study. These problems cause the students to feel that learning English is one of the difficult subjects to learn and create their motivation for learning English to be less. In line with Sukmadinata (2011:63) explanation, "motivation also can function to activate and increase the activity" if the students have a good motivation, they will be more enthusiastic in the studying process and surely they will get better results than the students without motivation.

Lack of self-confidence is another of the reasons that students of SMPN 30 Muaro Jambi faced problems in learning English. Based on the result, lack of ability to learn English made the students feel insecure when asked to speak in English. These problems make it students difficult to develop their ability in learning English. Students felt they cannot speak English, which causes them to feel insecure or lack self-confidence. Haidara (2016) supports this finding that the fear factor is induced by the phenomenon that audiences will laugh them if they make mistake in their performance.

Moreover, the lack of concentration caused the students to feel difficult to focus on when learning process. These problems caused the students' difficulty in understanding the material explained by the teacher. The students often have problems because they are used to not paying attention to the teacher during when learning process. This could happen because be affected by a friend such as chatting with a friend, or the material is difficult to understand which makes the students cannot focus and then feel sleepy when the learning process can make the learning process not be effective.

Another problem was the fear of mistakes faced by the students in learning English. Students sometimes encountered unfamiliar words which caused them cannot speak English and because of that, the students fear mistakes in mentioning the words in English. Accordingly, it was important to say that the students need to know the vocabulary in learning English used the material explained by the teacher to have a better comprehension of it. Juhana (2012: 101) adds that this fear is linked to the issue of correction and negative

evaluation. In addition, this is also much influenced by the student's fear of being laughed at by other students or being criticized by the teacher.

Shyness is one of the reasons that students faced problems in learning English. Shyness thing that is often faced by students especially in learning English. These problems, make the student feel difficulty because cannot speak English which causes them to feel ashamed and afraid of being laughed at if ask to speak in English.

In SMPN 30 Muaro Jambi Indonesia learning English had the smallest time portion compared to other skills. Students only spent around four hours to learn learning English from the total in a week of English lessons. Moreover, the students only to get the learning English in school, and the student cannot the lesson outside of school such as English courses or studying at home, etc. these problems also can affect students' ability in learning English. Learning English is unable to learn effectively because the time learning available is insufficient

Several of the solutions are considered well since they match the problems. In overcoming the problems in learning English. Based on the finding of the present study, it was found that asking to the teachers to re explained the material couldn't understand is one of solution used by the students. Thus some students also stated that asking to friend to the material they understand yet is also a solution to reduce their difficulties. Thus the researchers also found that, re-read material and checked the material are also the solution in solving the difficulties in learning English. Even though their efforts are considered good, they still could not give maximum results because the student did not do those efforts continuously and regularly.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The finding of the study reveals several problems for students in learning English. In this case, the problems consist of internal and external problems. Whereas, the internal problems come from within the students themselves. It consists of 1) lack of motivation, 2) lack of concentration, 3) lack of self-confidence, 4) fear of mistakes, and 5) shyness. Besides, the external problems come from students' environment, such as lack of English lesson hours. Meanwhile, some efforts were made by the students during the learning process to solve problems such as; 1) asking people, and 2) repeating material at home.

Based on the findings in this study, the researchers formulated several recommendations for teachers and further researchers. For this reason, the researcher suggests teachers, especially English teachers, be aware of the students' problems while learning English. Through this, the researchers hope that

teachers can determine learning methods that suit the abilities and needs of students. then the researcher also suggests that further researchers be able to conduct research that can reveal the latest teaching methods. The purpose of this is to assist teachers in knowing and overcoming student problems while learning the target language.

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