



An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Learning English at Senior High School

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Abstract. English is considered one of the most essential international languages used in communication, education, technology, and global interaction. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language at different educational levels, including senior high school. However, many students still encounter various challenges in learning English effectively. This study aims to analyze students' difficulties in learning English at senior high school and identify the factors that influence these difficulties. This research applied a descriptive qualitative method involving senior high school students as participants. The data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, and questionnaires to obtain information regarding students' experiences and challenges in English learning. The findings revealed that students commonly experience difficulties in vocabulary mastery, grammar understanding, pronunciation, speaking confidence, and learning motivation. In addition, environmental factors, teaching strategies, and limited opportunities for practice also influence students' English learning outcomes. These findings indicate that teachers need to implement interactive teaching strategies and encourage students to participate actively in classroom activities to improve their English skills. Therefore, cooperation between teachers and students is important to overcome learning difficulties and improve English proficiency.

Keywords: English Learning; Grammar; Senior High School; Students' Difficulties; Vocabulary.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most important languages in the world. It is widely used in international communication, education, science, technology, business, and entertainment. The increasing importance of English in the global era encourages many countries, including Indonesia, to include English as a compulsory or important subject in schools. In Indonesian education, English is taught as a foreign language from elementary school to higher education. At the senior high school level, students are expected to develop English skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, to prepare themselves for future academic and professional challenges. Learning English provides many benefits for students. Through English, students can access international information, communicate with people from different countries, and improve their opportunities in education and employment. Furthermore, English proficiency supports students in understanding technological developments, academic resources, and international communication.

An essential aspect of language learning because it helps students understand texts, express. Consequently, mastering English has become a necessity for students in the modern era. Despite its importance, learning English is not easy for many students, especially those who learn English as a foreign language. Senior high school students often experience various difficulties in mastering English because English differs significantly from Indonesian in terms of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

These differences make English challenging for students and may reduce their confidence and motivation in learning. One of the most common problems faced by students is limited vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary is ideas, and communicate effectively. Students with limited vocabulary often struggle to understand reading materials, answer questions, and express opinions in English. As a result, they may lose interest in learning English because they feel incapable of understanding the subject. In addition to vocabulary problems, grammar becomes another major challenge in English learning. English grammar contains various rules regarding sentence structure, verb forms, tenses, and word order. Many students find grammar difficult because Indonesian grammar is different from English grammar. For example, students frequently experience confusion in using tenses such as simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense.

These difficulties often lead to mistakes in speaking and writing activities. Pronunciation is also one of the difficulties encountered by students in learning English. English pronunciation differs significantly from spelling, making it difficult for students to pronounce words correctly. Many English words are pronounced differently from how they are written. Consequently, students often feel afraid of making pronunciation mistakes when speaking in front of classmates. Another important issue is students' confidence in speaking English. Many students feel anxious, shy, or embarrassed when speaking English because they are afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at by others. This fear decreases students' willingness to practice speaking, even though speaking practice is essential for improving communication skills.

Lack of confidence becomes a major obstacle in developing English-speaking ability. Furthermore, motivation plays a significant role in language learning. Students who have strong motivation tend to be more enthusiastic and active in learning English. On the other hand, students with low motivation often show little interest in classroom activities and become passive learners. Several factors may affect students' motivation, including teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, peer influence, and personal interest. According to Brown (2007), successful language learning is strongly influenced by students' motivation and participation in classroom activities.

Similarly, Harmer (2007) argues that teaching methods and classroom interaction greatly influence students' language achievement. Teachers play an important role in creating an enjoyable learning environment and encouraging students to practice English actively. Several previous studies have discussed students' difficulties in learning English. Many researchers found that vocabulary, grammar, speaking confidence, and pronunciation are

among the most common challenges faced by students. Moreover, lack of learning motivation and limited opportunities to practice English also contribute to students' difficulties. Based on the explanation above, this study focuses on analyzing students' difficulties in learning English at senior high school.

The researcher aims to identify the major problems experienced by students and explore factors affecting their English learning process. This study is expected to provide useful information for teachers, students, and future researchers in improving English teaching and learning strategies. Recent studies also found that vocabulary limitations, lack of confidence, and low motivation remain dominant problems among Indonesian EFL students at the senior high school level (Sabilla & Kaniadewi, 2025; Malik et al., 2025). Furthermore, teachers' perceptions indicate that vocabulary difficulties significantly influence students' participation and achievement in English classes (Baharudin et al., 2025).

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

The Concept of English Learning

English learning is a process of acquiring language skills that include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In the context of education, English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, meaning that students do not commonly use English in their daily communication. Therefore, students often experience difficulties in understanding and practicing English effectively. According to Brown (2007), language learning is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Students need motivation, practice, and exposure to language to achieve successful learning outcomes. Similarly, Harmer (2007) states that language learning becomes more effective when students are actively involved in communicative activities. In senior high school, English learning aims to improve students' communicative competence. Students are expected to understand texts, express ideas, and communicate using English in various situations. However, many students still encounter challenges in mastering English skills because of language differences and limited practice opportunities.

Students' Difficulties in Learning English

Difficulties in learning English refer to obstacles experienced by students during the learning process. These difficulties may prevent students from achieving learning objectives effectively. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), students' language difficulties can arise from internal and external factors. Internal factors include motivation, confidence, intelligence, interest, and language ability. Students who have low confidence and poor motivation tend to experience greater difficulties in learning English. Meanwhile, external

factors involve teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, learning media, and family support. Several difficulties commonly faced by students include.

Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary plays an essential role in language learning because it supports communication and comprehension. Students with limited vocabulary often experience problems understanding texts, expressing ideas, and participating in classroom activities. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary is one of the most fundamental aspects of language learning because words are needed for communication. Students who lack vocabulary knowledge may become frustrated and lose confidence in learning English. Contextual vocabulary instruction has been reported to improve students' understanding and retention of new words. Teachers are encouraged to provide meaningful contexts when introducing vocabulary items (Kondo & Triasta, 2024; Farahdiba et al., 2025).

Grammar Understanding

Grammar is another important component of English learning. Grammar helps students understand sentence structures and language rules. However, grammar often becomes one of the most difficult aspects of learning English. Many students experience confusion in using English tenses because Indonesian grammar differs significantly from English grammar. Errors in verb forms, sentence arrangement, and tense usage are frequently found in students' writing and speaking.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation refers to the way words are spoken. In English, pronunciation can be difficult because many words are pronounced differently from their spelling. Students often struggle with unfamiliar sounds and accents. Poor pronunciation may reduce students' confidence in speaking because they fear making mistakes and receiving negative responses from classmates.

Speaking Confidence

Confidence plays a major role in language learning, especially speaking skills. Students who feel shy or anxious tend to avoid speaking English in class. Fear of making mistakes and being criticized often discourages students from participating in speaking activities. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Theory, emotional factors such as anxiety and confidence can significantly influence language learning success.

Learning Motivation

Motivation is an important factor that influences students' learning achievement. Students with high motivation are usually more enthusiastic and willing to practice English regularly.

On the contrary, students with low motivation often become passive learners. Teachers play an important role in increasing students' motivation by creating interesting learning activities and encouraging participation. Motivation can be promoted through supportive learning environments and engaging classroom activities. Students who receive encouragement and meaningful learning experiences tend to demonstrate better persistence in learning English (Yang, 2026).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design. According to Sugiyono (2019), qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena through in-depth data collection and interpretation. Qualitative research was chosen because it enables the researcher to describe and analyze students' difficulties in learning English deeply and comprehensively. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research aims to understand participants' experiences and social phenomena through observation and interpretation. In this study, qualitative methods helped the researcher identify students' challenges and learning problems. Research Participants The participants of this study were eleventh-grade students at senior high school. The researcher selected the participants because eleventh-grade students are expected to have basic English knowledge but still encounter learning difficulties. The participants were chosen purposively to provide information about English learning problems experienced in the classroom. Research Instruments. The researcher used several instruments to collect data:

Observation

Observation was conducted during classroom learning activities to identify students' participation, learning behavior, and difficulties in understanding English materials.

Interview

Interviews were conducted to gather deeper information about students' experiences, opinions, and feelings regarding English learning.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed to identify students' perceptions and common problems in learning English. Data Collection Procedure The researcher first observed classroom activities to understand students' behavior during English lessons. After observation, interviews were conducted with students to obtain detailed information regarding learning difficulties. Finally, questionnaires were distributed to support and strengthen the findings.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The researcher categorized students' difficulties into several aspects, including vocabulary mastery, grammar understanding, pronunciation, speaking confidence, and motivation. The findings were then interpreted to identify the causes and possible solutions to students' learning problems. Results and Discussion Based on the findings, several difficulties were experienced by students in learning English at senior high school.

Vocabulary Difficulties

The study found that vocabulary mastery became one of the biggest challenges faced by students. Many students had difficulty understanding English texts because they lacked vocabulary knowledge. Students often forgot word meanings and found it difficult to memorize new vocabulary. Limited vocabulary negatively affected students' reading comprehension and speaking ability. Students struggled to express ideas because they did not know appropriate words. To solve this problem, teachers should encourage students to improve vocabulary through reading activities, vocabulary games, and daily practice.

Grammar Difficulties

Grammar was another major problem experienced by students. Many students struggled to understand tenses and sentence structures. The most difficult grammar topics included: Simple Present Tense; Simple Past Tense; Present Continuous Tense; Present Perfect Tense.

Students frequently made mistakes in sentence construction and verb forms. These difficulties occurred because English grammar differs significantly from Indonesian grammar. Teachers can overcome grammar problems by providing clear explanations, exercises, and practical examples.

Pronunciation Problems

Pronunciation difficulties were commonly found among students. Many students found it difficult to pronounce English words correctly due to differences between spelling and pronunciation. Students often mispronounced words and felt embarrassed when speaking English in front of classmates. Teachers are recommended to use audio materials, videos, and pronunciation practice to help students improve speaking skills.

Lack of Confidence in Speaking

Many students showed low confidence in speaking English. They were afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by classmates. Fear and anxiety reduced students' willingness to participate in classroom speaking activities. Consequently, students lacked speaking practice

and experienced slow progress. Teachers should create a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable practicing English without fear of criticism.

Low Motivation in Learning English

The findings also showed that some students had low motivation in learning English. They considered English difficult and boring. Several factors influencing low motivation included: Difficult materials; Lack of interactive teaching methods; Limited practice opportunities; Fear of failure: Teachers can improve motivation by using engaging learning strategies such as group discussions, games, role play, and multimedia learning.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Vocabulary Difficulties

The study found that vocabulary mastery became one of the biggest challenges faced by students. Many students had difficulty understanding English texts because they lacked vocabulary knowledge. Students often forgot word meanings and found it difficult to memorize new vocabulary. Limited vocabulary negatively affected students' reading comprehension and speaking ability. Students struggled to express ideas because they did not know appropriate words. To solve this problem, teachers should encourage students to improve vocabulary through reading activities, vocabulary games, and daily practice. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that limited vocabulary knowledge becomes a major barrier for Indonesian EFL learners in comprehending texts and expressing ideas (Baharudin et al., 2025).

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Pronunciation Problems

Pronunciation difficulties were commonly found among students. Many students found it difficult to pronounce English words correctly due to differences between spelling and pronunciation. Students often mispronounced words and felt embarrassed when speaking English in front of classmates. Teachers are recommended to use audio materials, videos, and pronunciation practice to help students improve speaking skills. Various interactive speaking

activities have been proven effective in improving students' speaking performance and confidence (Aljalis et al., 2026).

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Several factors influencing low motivation included: Difficult materials; Lack of interactive teaching methods; Limited practice opportunities. Fear of failure Teachers can improve motivation by using engaging learning strategies such as group discussions, games, role play, and multimedia learning.

Discussion

The findings indicate that students' difficulties in learning English are influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include low confidence, poor vocabulary mastery, lack of motivation, and anxiety. External factors involve teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, and lack of learning media. These findings support Brown (2007), who argues that motivation and active participation significantly influence language learning success. Furthermore, Harmer (2007) emphasizes that interactive learning environments improve students' engagement and achievement. Therefore, effective teaching strategies are needed to reduce students' difficulties and encourage active participation in English learning. Positive attitudes toward English also contribute to better learning achievement. Students who possess favorable perceptions of English tend to participate more actively during classroom activities (Nurohmat et al., 2026).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that senior high school students experience several difficulties in learning English, including vocabulary mastery, grammar understanding, pronunciation, speaking confidence, and motivation. These difficulties are influenced by internal and external factors. Vocabulary limitation was identified as one of the biggest challenges because students struggled to understand texts and communicate effectively.

Grammar difficulties, especially in using tenses, also affected students' writing and speaking ability. Pronunciation problems and lack of confidence prevented students from speaking English actively. To overcome these problems, teachers should implement interactive and communicative teaching methods. Activities such as group discussions, games, speaking practice, and multimedia learning can increase students' motivation and confidence. Students are encouraged to practice English regularly and improve their vocabulary to achieve better language proficiency. Future researchers are recommended to explore different teaching strategies to improve English learning outcomes.

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