



Challenges in Teaching English as A Foreign Language in Indonesia

Adela Putri¹, Leza Marcella², Sri Wahyuni³

¹⁻³English Education, STKIP Muhammadiyah Pagaram, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author: sriwahyunipga86@gmail.com

Abstract. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia faces various challenges that affect learning effectiveness and student achievement. This article explores major issues related to students, teachers, instructional practices, technology, sociocultural factors, and educational policies. Many students experience difficulties due to limited exposure to English, low motivation, language anxiety, and differing proficiency levels. Teacher-related challenges include limited professional competence, large class sizes, and the continued use of traditional teaching methods. The development of educational technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), offers opportunities to enhance language learning, although unequal access, limited digital literacy, and academic integrity issues remain concerns. Sociocultural barriers, such as fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence, also reduce student participation in communicative activities. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among teachers, institutions, policymakers, and learners through professional development, improved resources, student-centered learning, and responsible technology integration to strengthen English language education in Indonesia.*

Keywords: *Educational Technology; EFL Teaching; English Language Education; Indonesia; Learning Challenges.*

Abstrak. Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (English as a Foreign Language / EFL) di Indonesia menghadapi berbagai tantangan yang memengaruhi efektivitas pembelajaran dan pencapaian hasil belajar siswa. Artikel ini mengkaji berbagai permasalahan utama yang berkaitan dengan siswa, guru, praktik pembelajaran, teknologi, faktor sosiokultural, serta kebijakan pendidikan. Banyak siswa mengalami kesulitan akibat terbatasnya paparan terhadap bahasa Inggris, rendahnya motivasi belajar, kecemasan berbahasa, serta perbedaan tingkat kemampuan bahasa. Tantangan yang dihadapi guru meliputi keterbatasan kompetensi profesional, jumlah siswa yang besar dalam satu kelas, serta masih digunakannya metode pembelajaran tradisional. Perkembangan teknologi pendidikan, khususnya Kecerdasan Buatan (Artificial Intelligence / AI), memberikan peluang untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran bahasa, meskipun kesenjangan akses teknologi, rendahnya literasi digital, dan isu integritas akademik masih menjadi perhatian. Selain itu, hambatan sosiokultural, seperti rasa takut melakukan kesalahan dan kurangnya kepercayaan diri, juga mengurangi partisipasi siswa dalam kegiatan pembelajaran yang bersifat komunikatif. Mengatasi berbagai tantangan tersebut memerlukan kolaborasi antara guru, institusi pendidikan, pembuat kebijakan, dan peserta didik melalui peningkatan kompetensi profesional, penyediaan sumber daya yang lebih memadai, penerapan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa, serta integrasi teknologi yang bertanggung jawab guna memperkuat pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Indonesia; Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris; Pengajaran EFL (Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing); Tantangan Pembelajaran; Teknologi Pendidikan.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most important international languages in the modern world. It functions as a global medium of communication in various fields, including education, business, science, technology, tourism, and international relations. Due to globalization, English proficiency is considered an essential skill that enables individuals to access knowledge, participate in international communication, and compete in the global workforce. Consequently, many countries have incorporated English into their educational systems. Indonesia is one of these countries, where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) at various educational levels.

The importance of English in Indonesia has continued to increase over the years. The government recognizes English as an important tool for preparing students to face global challenges and opportunities. Therefore, English has been integrated into educational policies and curricula to improve students' language competence and international competitiveness. However, despite years of English instruction, many Indonesian students still experience difficulties in developing essential language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Fitria, 2023). This condition indicates that English language teaching in Indonesia continues to face numerous challenges that affect learning outcomes.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language differs from teaching English as a Second Language because learners have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. In Indonesia, students generally communicate using Bahasa Indonesia or local languages in their daily lives. According to Richards (2022), language acquisition develops more effectively when learners are exposed to meaningful interaction and regular communication in the target language. However, Indonesian students often encounter English only during classroom instruction, limiting opportunities for language exposure and practice.

One major challenge in teaching English in Indonesia is the diversity of students' linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels. Indonesia is a multilingual country where many learners grow up using regional languages while also learning Bahasa Indonesia as the national language. The addition of English creates a complex learning situation that may affect pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, and overall language development. Interference from the first language may also contribute to difficulties in mastering English structures and communication patterns. Another important challenge is students' motivation and attitudes toward learning English. Motivation is widely recognized as a key factor influencing language learning success. However, many students perceive English as a difficult subject because of unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar, and differences in pronunciation. According to Dörnyei and Ryan (2023), language learning motivation is influenced by learners' confidence, experiences, and perceptions of the language's relevance to their future goals. When students fail to recognize the benefits of English or repeatedly experience learning difficulties, their motivation may gradually decline.

Teacher-related factors also contribute to challenges in EFL instruction. Teachers play a crucial role in creating effective learning environments and facilitating students' language development. Nevertheless, disparities in teacher qualifications, teaching experience, and professional development opportunities remain evident across different regions of Indonesia.

While some schools have access to qualified English teachers, others, particularly in rural and remote areas, continue to face shortages of trained language educators.

The issue of teaching methodology has also received considerable attention. Traditional teacher-centered approaches that emphasize grammar memorization and examination preparation remain common in many classrooms. Although such approaches may help students develop linguistic knowledge, they often provide limited opportunities for meaningful communication. Contemporary language teaching theories emphasize communicative competence, learner-centered instruction, and task-based learning activities that encourage students to use English in authentic contexts (Brown & Lee, 2024). However, implementing these approaches can be challenging because of large class sizes, limited instructional time, and curriculum demands.

In addition, educational resources and technological infrastructure remain important concerns. Access to quality learning materials, internet connectivity, digital tools, and language-learning technologies varies significantly among schools and regions. Urban schools often benefit from better facilities, whereas many rural institutions continue to experience limitations in educational resources. The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has also created new opportunities and challenges for English language teaching. AI-powered technologies can provide personalized learning experiences and immediate feedback, but issues related to accessibility, digital literacy, and academic integrity remain significant concerns (Kasneci et al., 2023).

Assessment practices and sociocultural factors further contribute to the complexity of EFL teaching in Indonesia. Standardized examinations often focus on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension rather than communicative competence and speaking proficiency. Furthermore, many students experience anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence when speaking English. According to MacIntyre et al. (2022), language anxiety remains one of the most significant psychological factors affecting foreign language acquisition. Therefore, supportive and inclusive classroom environments are essential for encouraging students to participate actively in language learning. Despite these challenges, English language education in Indonesia continues to evolve in response to educational reforms, technological advancements, and changing societal needs. Understanding the factors that influence the effectiveness of English instruction is important for improving teaching strategies, strengthening teacher preparation, enhancing educational resources, and creating supportive learning environments. Based on these considerations, this article aims to explore the major challenges in teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia.

The discussion focuses on student-related factors, teacher-related issues, instructional practices, technological influences, sociocultural barriers, and educational policy concerns that affect the effectiveness of English language teaching. By examining these challenges comprehensively, the article seeks to provide insights that may contribute to the improvement of English language education and support more effective EFL learning experiences for Indonesian students.

Various interconnected factors contribute to the complexity of English language teaching in Indonesia. These challenges originate from students, teachers, instructional practices, educational resources, technological developments, assessment systems, and sociocultural conditions. Understanding these factors is essential for identifying appropriate strategies to improve the quality of English language education. The following discussion elaborates on the major challenges encountered in Indonesian EFL classrooms and their implications for language learning outcomes.

2. DISCUSSION

Challenges Related to Students' English Proficiency

One of the most significant challenges in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia is the varying levels of students' English proficiency. Students enter educational institutions with different linguistic backgrounds, learning experiences, and levels of exposure to English. Some students have received additional English instruction through private courses, online learning platforms, or family support, while others encounter English only during formal classroom lessons. These differences create considerable gaps in language proficiency, making it difficult for teachers to design instructional activities that effectively accommodate all learners.

In many classrooms, teachers must simultaneously support students who possess relatively advanced language skills and those who still struggle with basic vocabulary and grammar. Such disparities often affect classroom interaction and participation. Students with stronger English proficiency tend to dominate discussions and learning activities, whereas less proficient learners may become passive participants due to fear of making mistakes or difficulties in understanding instructional materials. Consequently, teachers face the challenge of creating inclusive learning environments that encourage participation from students with diverse language abilities. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom further contributes to this issue. Unlike learners in English-speaking environments, Indonesian students rarely use English in their daily communication.

Their interactions with family members, friends, and communities are primarily conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or local languages. As a result, opportunities for authentic language practice remain limited. Without sufficient exposure, students often struggle to develop fluency and confidence in using English for real communication purposes. This situation demonstrates that language proficiency development depends not only on classroom instruction but also on the availability of meaningful opportunities for language use beyond the educational setting.

Students' Motivation and Learning Attitudes

Motivation plays a crucial role in determining the success of language learning. In the Indonesian EFL context, maintaining students' motivation remains a significant challenge. Many students perceive English as a difficult subject because of unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and pronunciation patterns that differ considerably from their native languages. These perceptions can create negative attitudes toward learning English and reduce students' willingness to engage actively in classroom activities. Some students learn English primarily because it is a compulsory subject rather than because they possess intrinsic interest in the language itself. When learners fail to recognize the relevance of English to their academic, professional, or personal goals, their motivation may decline. This lack of motivation can affect attendance, participation, assignment completion, and overall learning achievement.

In addition, repeated experiences of failure or difficulty can further reduce students' confidence. Learners who consistently receive low scores or encounter challenges in speaking and writing may develop feelings of anxiety and frustration. Over time, these negative experiences can contribute to a belief that English is too difficult to master. Therefore, teachers need to implement strategies that foster positive learning experiences, encourage student participation, and help learners recognize the practical value of English in their future lives.

Teacher-Related Challenges

The effectiveness of English language teaching is strongly influenced by teachers' qualifications, competencies, and instructional practices. Although many English teachers in Indonesia demonstrate strong commitment to their profession, disparities in teacher quality continue to exist across different educational settings. Schools located in urban areas generally have greater access to qualified teachers and professional development opportunities than schools in rural or remote regions. Some teachers face challenges related to language proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and classroom management skills.

The rapid development of educational theories and technologies also requires educators to continuously update their knowledge and teaching practices. However, opportunities for professional development may be limited due to financial constraints, geographic barriers, or institutional limitations.

Furthermore, English teachers are often expected to fulfill multiple responsibilities beyond classroom instruction, including administrative tasks, assessment duties, and extracurricular activities. These additional responsibilities may reduce the time available for lesson preparation, instructional innovation, and individualized support for students. Consequently, improving teacher support systems and professional development programs remains essential for enhancing the quality of EFL instruction in Indonesia.

Teaching Methodology and Classroom Practices

Teaching methodology represents another important challenge in the Indonesian EFL context. Traditional teaching approaches continue to dominate many classrooms, where learning activities often focus heavily on grammar instruction, vocabulary memorization, and textbook-based exercises. While these methods may contribute to linguistic knowledge, they do not always provide sufficient opportunities for communicative language use. Modern language education emphasizes communicative competence, which involves the ability to use language effectively in authentic situations. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and learner-centered approaches encourage students to participate actively in meaningful communication. However, implementing these approaches can be difficult in practice due to various contextual factors. One major obstacle is the large number of students in many Indonesian classrooms. Classes containing thirty to forty students make it challenging for teachers to provide individualized attention and organize interactive activities effectively. Limited instructional time also restricts opportunities for speaking practice, group discussions, and project-based learning. As a result, teachers often prioritize content coverage and examination preparation over communicative activities.

Additionally, some educational institutions continue to emphasize standardized testing outcomes. Consequently, teachers may feel pressured to focus on grammar and reading comprehension skills that are commonly assessed in examinations rather than on communicative competence. This examination-oriented culture influences both teaching practices and students' learning priorities.

Limited Educational Resources and Infrastructure

The availability of educational resources significantly affects the quality of English language instruction. Although technological development has improved access to learning materials in many areas, considerable disparities remain among schools and regions in Indonesia. Urban schools often possess better facilities, internet access, multimedia equipment, and digital learning resources compared to schools located in rural or remote areas.

Insufficient access to educational resources can limit students' opportunities to engage with authentic English materials such as videos, podcasts, digital libraries, and online learning platforms. Similarly, teachers working in resource-constrained environments may encounter difficulties in implementing innovative instructional practices that rely on technology. Infrastructure challenges became particularly visible during the transition to online learning in recent years. Many students experienced difficulties related to internet connectivity, device availability, and digital literacy. These issues highlighted the importance of ensuring equitable access to educational technologies in order to support effective language learning across diverse educational contexts.

The Influence of Technology and Artificial Intelligence

Recent technological advancements have transformed language education worldwide, including in Indonesia. Artificial Intelligence (AI), online learning platforms, language-learning applications, and digital communication tools have created new opportunities for English language instruction. Students can now access learning materials, receive immediate feedback, and practice language skills independently through various technological resources. AI-based tools such as grammar checkers, writing assistants, and conversational chatbots provide valuable support for language learning. These technologies can help students identify errors, improve writing quality, and practice communication skills outside classroom hours. For many learners, technology offers flexible and personalized learning experiences that complement traditional instruction.

Despite these advantages, technology integration also introduces several challenges. Unequal access to digital resources remains a major concern, particularly among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, excessive reliance on AI tools may reduce students' opportunities to develop independent thinking and problem-solving skills. Some learners may become dependent on automated systems for generating answers rather than actively engaging in the learning process. Issues related to academic integrity, plagiarism, and information accuracy also require careful consideration.

Since AI-generated content may contain inaccuracies or biases, students must develop critical evaluation skills to assess the reliability of information before using it for academic purposes. Therefore, technological literacy and responsible technology use have become increasingly important components of contemporary language education.

Sociocultural and Psychological Barriers

Sociocultural and psychological factors also influence English language learning in Indonesia. Many students experience language anxiety when asked to speak English in front of their classmates. Fear of making mistakes, receiving criticism, or being judged by peers can discourage active participation in classroom discussions. This anxiety is often intensified by cultural factors that emphasize avoiding embarrassment and maintaining social harmony. As a result, students may prefer to remain silent rather than risk making linguistic errors. While such behavior may help learners avoid uncomfortable situations, it limits opportunities for language practice and communicative development.

Self-confidence is another important factor affecting language learning success. Students who believe in their ability to learn and use English are generally more willing to participate in classroom activities and persist when facing challenges. Conversely, learners with low self-confidence may avoid communication opportunities and demonstrate lower levels of engagement. Teachers therefore play a critical role in creating supportive learning environments that encourage risk-taking, positive interaction, and constructive feedback. By fostering a classroom atmosphere where mistakes are viewed as natural parts of the learning process, educators can help reduce language anxiety and promote greater student participation.

Curriculum and Educational Policy Challenges

Educational policies and curriculum frameworks significantly shape English language teaching practices. In Indonesia, curriculum reforms have sought to improve students' communicative competence and prepare them for global challenges. However, implementing curriculum changes effectively remains a complex process.

Teachers often face difficulties in adapting to new curricular requirements while simultaneously meeting institutional expectations and assessment standards. In some cases, curriculum objectives may be ambitious, whereas available resources and instructional conditions remain limited. This discrepancy can create challenges in achieving intended learning outcomes. Furthermore, differences in educational quality among regions may affect the implementation of national educational policies.

Schools with stronger institutional support and better resources are generally better positioned to adopt curriculum innovations than schools facing infrastructural or staffing limitations. Therefore, policy implementation requires consideration of local educational contexts and challenges.

Addressing the Challenges of EFL Teaching in Indonesia

Although teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia involves numerous challenges, these difficulties also provide opportunities for educational improvement. Addressing these issues requires collaboration among teachers, educational institutions, policymakers, students, and communities. Professional development programs can strengthen teachers' instructional competencies, while investments in educational infrastructure can improve access to quality learning resources. The integration of technology should be accompanied by efforts to develop students' digital literacy and critical thinking skills. Similarly, instructional practices should emphasize meaningful communication, learner engagement, and real-world language use rather than focusing exclusively on examination performance. Educational policies must also support equitable access to quality language education across different regions and socioeconomic contexts.

Ultimately, overcoming the challenges of EFL teaching in Indonesia requires a balanced approach that considers linguistic, pedagogical, technological, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions. Through continuous improvement and collaborative efforts, English language education can become more effective in helping Indonesian students develop the language competencies necessary for academic success and global.

3. CONCLUSION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia remains a complex educational endeavor influenced by a variety of linguistic, pedagogical, technological, and sociocultural factors. Although English has become increasingly important in the era of globalization and international communication, many Indonesian students continue to face difficulties in achieving satisfactory levels of English proficiency. The findings discussed in this article indicate that challenges in EFL teaching arise from multiple sources, including students' limited exposure to English, differences in language proficiency, low learning motivation, language anxiety, and restricted opportunities for authentic communication outside the classroom. These factors collectively influence students' ability to develop communicative competence and achieve successful language learning outcomes.

In addition to student-related issues, teacher competence, instructional methodologies, educational resources, and technological accessibility also play crucial roles in determining the effectiveness of English language instruction. The persistence of traditional teaching approaches, large classroom sizes, examination-oriented practices, and unequal access to educational facilities continue to affect the quality of EFL education across different regions of Indonesia. Furthermore, while technological innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital learning platforms offer valuable opportunities to support language learning, their implementation also presents challenges related to digital literacy, academic integrity, and equitable access to technology.

The discussion also highlights the importance of addressing psychological and sociocultural barriers that may hinder students' participation in language learning activities. Fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and communication anxiety often discourage learners from actively using English in classroom interactions. Therefore, creating supportive, inclusive, and learner-centered environments is essential for encouraging students to develop confidence and engage more actively in the learning process.

Overall, the effectiveness of English language teaching in Indonesia depends on the ability of educational stakeholders to respond to these challenges through comprehensive and sustainable efforts. Teachers need continuous professional development to enhance their pedagogical and technological competencies, while educational institutions and policymakers must provide adequate resources, infrastructure, and policy support. At the same time, students should be encouraged to become active and independent learners who are willing to practice English beyond the classroom environment.

In conclusion, improving EFL education in Indonesia requires collaboration among educators, institutions, policymakers, and learners themselves. By addressing the various challenges identified in this article and adopting innovative, student-centered approaches, English language education can become more effective in supporting students' linguistic development, academic achievement, and readiness to participate in an increasingly interconnected global society. Future educational initiatives should therefore focus not only on improving language proficiency but also on creating learning environments that foster confidence, critical thinking, communication skills, and lifelong learning attitudes among Indonesian EFL learners.

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