



The influences of interest in learning on the English language scores of IAT IAIN Takengon

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ABSTRACT

English plays an essential role as a global language, yet many students in Indonesia still face challenges in developing adequate proficiency. This study aims to explore students' interest in learning English and the difficulties they encounter in the learning process. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach by distributing interview-based questionnaires through WhatsApp Messenger to students of IAIN Takengon. Ten open-ended questions were designed to capture students' perspectives on their interest, difficulties, preferred methods, and perceptions of English learning. The findings reveal that most students demonstrate relatively low interest in learning English, particularly due to difficulties in understanding grammar such as past simple and past tense. Students also reported struggling when lecturers delivered lessons entirely in English, which often reduced their motivation. However, some students recognized the importance of English as a key competence in the era of globalization. In terms of learning preferences, students favored approaches emphasizing listening and reading, along with vocabulary memorization through practice-oriented activities. These results suggest that enhancing students' interest requires adaptive teaching strategies, integration of diverse media, and motivational reinforcement. In conclusion, students' interest plays a critical role in determining their learning outcomes, highlighting the need for more communicative and engaging English learning practices in higher education.

Keywords: English learning, student interest, motivation, grammar difficulties, higher education

ABSTRAK

Bahasa Inggris memiliki peran penting sebagai bahasa global, namun banyak mahasiswa di Indonesia masih menghadapi tantangan dalam menguasai keterampilan berbahasa yang memadai. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi minat mahasiswa dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris serta kesulitan yang mereka hadapi dalam proses pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan menyebarkan kuesioner berbasis wawancara melalui aplikasi WhatsApp Messenger kepada mahasiswa IAIN Takengon. Sepuluh pertanyaan terbuka disusun untuk menggali perspektif mahasiswa terkait minat, kesulitan, metode pembelajaran yang disukai, serta pandangan mereka terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa memiliki minat belajar yang relatif rendah, terutama karena kesulitan memahami tata bahasa seperti past simple dan past tense. Mahasiswa juga mengaku kesulitan ketika dosen menyampaikan materi sepenuhnya dalam Bahasa Inggris, yang berdampak pada menurunnya motivasi belajar. Namun demikian, sebagian mahasiswa menyadari pentingnya Bahasa Inggris sebagai kompetensi utama di era globalisasi. Dari sisi preferensi pembelajaran, mahasiswa lebih menyukai metode yang menekankan keterampilan listening dan reading, serta penguasaan kosakata melalui aktivitas praktik. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa peningkatan minat mahasiswa perlu dilakukan melalui strategi pembelajaran adaptif, pemanfaatan media pembelajaran yang bervariasi, serta penguatan motivasi. Kesimpulannya, minat belajar mahasiswa memiliki peran penting dalam menentukan hasil belajar, sehingga pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di perguruan tinggi perlu dikembangkan secara komunikatif dan lebih menarik.

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, minat belajar, motivasi, kesulitan tata bahasa, pendidikan tinggi

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rahman et al., 2022) Education is a deliberate effort to transfer cultural values from one generation to the next, with the aim of creating a structured learning environment so that students can actively develop their potential, including in spiritual, religious, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills that are useful for themselves and society., education aims to shape individuals holistically and prepare them to contribute positively to their lives and their communities as part of human endeavor, education aims to optimize the innate potential of individuals, both physically and spiritually, in accordance with the educational and cultural values that are shared, with the hope of advancing each other. An example of awareness of the importance of English can be identified in this context (Gordon, 2003) According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, article 37 paragraph 1 emphasizes that English is the only foreign language that must be learned by students from junior high school to college. The implementation of this can be seen in the structure of the elementary school curriculum which includes English as local content. In college, English courses are presented with the hope that students can compete in the ever-growing period of globalization.

(Sya et al., 2022) College students have a method to support students in carrying out their aspirations about their interests in English. Such as writing, reading, listening and speaking skills. All of them need to be mastered and studied carefully considering that mastering English requires a long process and time.

(Savignon, 2002) This confirms that in the context of a foreign language, students need to develop and practice four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. English has an important position as a general subject that plays a supporting role in the learning process of the main subjects in a particular field of study. Therefore, it is important for students to have good English skills in order to access the latest information in the disciplines they are studying. (Sya & Helmanto, 2020b) Until now, learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia is still a challenge for most students. Most of them think that learning English is difficult and are less enthusiastic about improving their abilities. Meanwhile, (Rahmadhita, 2020) English learning includes planning, implementation, and evaluation as well as the support of experts and facilities and infrastructure. (Muhria, 2020) Interest has a significant impact on the learning process, because if the subject matter does not match the interests of students, then they will not learn optimally. Without any attraction that motivates students, they tend to participate less in learning. (Rusmiati, 2017) Interest in learning has a major impact on learning outcomes because when someone has an interest in something, they tend to be more active and committed to doing it. Conversely, without interest, someone tends to be reluctant or difficult to do the activity. Interest is an emotional drive that motivates someone to do an activity, and this greatly affects a person's learning achievement. The interest in students can be seen in several aspects. According to (dalyono M, 2010) The presence of student interest in a lesson can be reflected in their level of participation in learning, the accuracy of the notes they make, and how well they pay attention to the material being taught. If the learning process does not match the student's interests, it will most likely have a negative impact on their learning outcomes. Interest has the potential to motivate someone to want to do an activity that they like. According to (Hurlock, 2003) Interest is a drive that triggers our interest in an activity that is considered positive, encouraging individuals to do certain activities in order to achieve certain goals as a source of motivation. This drive arises from the interest that arises, which then increases the individual's enthusiasm to achieve satisfaction and enjoyment from the activity. The greater a person's need, the stronger and more lasting the individual's interest in the activity.

(Asmin, 2015) Interest is an expression of an individual's interest in an object or concept, and is an intrinsic drive that drives individuals to explore and engage in the activity. Interest is a driving force in the learning process, providing motivation that drives individuals to learn with full awareness, and bringing feelings of pleasure, joy, and excitement to the learning experience. This is part of intellectual maturity, where the learning process and experience shape deeper understanding. Interests can change along with the individual's development and growth phase. (Dores et al., 2019) Data analysis is the stage where information obtained from interviews, field notes, and other sources is structured and systematically arranged. This is done with the aim of understanding the existing data and communicating findings effectively to others.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' interest in learning English and the challenges they encounter during the learning process. Qualitative research was chosen

because it allows for an in-depth understanding of students' perspectives, experiences, and expressions, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement (Somantri, 2005). As emphasized by Sya & Helmanto (2020a), qualitative inquiry is particularly useful for exploring language learning phenomena, where subjective experiences and contextual factors play a central role.

Participants

The participants of this study were undergraduate students from IAIN Takengon who were currently taking English courses. A total of [insert number if available, e.g., 30] students participated voluntarily. They were selected purposively, considering their direct involvement in English language learning and their accessibility through online communication.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview questionnaire, distributed digitally through the WhatsApp Messenger application. The questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended questions, carefully designed based on relevant literature to cover four main areas:

1. Students' level of interest in learning English.
2. Difficulties encountered in the learning process.
3. Preferred learning methods and strategies.
4. Students' perceptions of the importance and benefits of learning English.

The open-ended format allowed respondents to provide either brief or more elaborate answers, depending on their perspectives.

Question table

No	Question
1	How interested are you in learning English?
2	What difficulties do you experience when learning English? And the reason why?
3	What method do you want to enjoy learning English more?
4	How much do you understand the English material presented by the lecturer?
5	What is your response to the explanation given by the English language learning lecturer?
6	Is there a desire to ask questions about things the lecturer doesn't understand?
7	What do you think are the advantages of learning English?
8	Is interest in learning English important?
9	What do you think are the benefits of learning English?
10	Do you think it is important to learn English?

Data Collection Procedures

The interview questions were distributed digitally via WhatsApp Messenger, enabling flexible participation and reducing logistical barriers. Students were given sufficient time to reflect on the questions and respond based on their own experiences. This digital method was chosen not only because of its practicality and accessibility but also due to its familiarity among students, which helped create a more comfortable environment for sharing personal insights.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, all responses were transcribed, organized, and analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. The analysis involved several stages:

1. Data familiarization – reading and rereading the responses to gain an overall understanding.
2. Initial coding – identifying key expressions, words, and patterns that represent students' interest, challenges, and perceptions.
3. Theme generation – grouping codes into broader categories such as “interest in English,” “learning difficulties,” “preferred methods,” and “perceived importance.”
4. Interpretation – relating the themes to the existing literature on English language learning, particularly regarding students' interest and motivation.

The purpose of this analysis was to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the phenomena being studied, while also allowing for a deeper interpretation of the underlying factors influencing students' interest in learning English.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary. Students were informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and would remain confidential. Anonymity was ensured by not disclosing any personal identifiers in the research report.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the interviews with students revealed that the level of interest in learning English remains relatively low. Most respondents admitted experiencing difficulties in understanding the material, particularly in grammar aspects such as *past simple*, *past tense*, and other complex grammatical rules. This finding is consistent with Sya & Helmanto (2020b), who emphasized that learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia is still a major challenge, primarily due to limited foundational knowledge and low motivation to learn.

Nevertheless, there was a variation in students' perceptions regarding the importance of English. Some students acknowledged that English is an essential skill to face globalization, both in academic and professional contexts. This supports Gordon's (2003) argument that English proficiency provides access to global knowledge and broadens career opportunities. However, other students showed less awareness of this relevance, which led to lower motivation in improving their English proficiency.

In terms of learning methods, students reported a stronger preference for approaches that emphasize *listening* and *reading* skills. These methods were perceived as more helpful compared to approaches that rely heavily on grammar explanations. This finding aligns with the *communicative language teaching* approach (Savignon, 2002), which highlights the importance of practicing receptive and communicative skills as the foundation for developing productive skills such as *speaking* and *writing*.

Regarding material comprehension, most students found it difficult to follow lecturers' explanations when delivered entirely in English. Consequently, student responses to the teaching process varied: some felt it was beneficial to be exposed to the target language, while others became less motivated as they struggled to understand. This indicates the necessity for adaptive teaching strategies, such as the use of *code-switching* between English and Indonesian, to enhance students' comprehension.

The findings also demonstrated that students showed relatively high interest in vocabulary memorization, particularly through *listening* and *writing* activities. This preference suggests that practice-oriented strategies, such as vocabulary drilling, dictation, or listening comprehension exercises, may be more suitable for their learning needs. According to Hurlock (2003), learning interest increases when the activity brings enjoyment and satisfaction. Therefore, English learning should be designed creatively to align with students' interests.

Overall, the findings illustrate that students' interest is strongly correlated with their English learning outcomes. When students have low interest, their participation in the classroom tends to be passive, which negatively impacts their academic achievement. Conversely, students with higher interest demonstrated greater commitment and effort in mastering the material. This is consistent with Rusmiati (2017), who argued that learning interest plays a significant role in determining academic success.

Based on these results, increasing students' interest in learning English should be a primary focus. This can be achieved through:

1. Adapting teaching methods to be more communicative and skill-based.
2. Providing diverse learning media, such as audio, video, and interactive applications, to support *listening* and *reading* skills.
3. Integrating motivational strategies to raise students' awareness of the relevance of English for both their academic journey and future careers.

These findings are in line with Muhria (2020) and Asmin (2015), who emphasized that interest is an intrinsic factor that drives individuals to engage in learning and serves as a major determinant of educational achievement.

The findings of this study indicate that students' interest in learning English is relatively low, mainly due to difficulties in grammar mastery and comprehension of lessons conducted entirely in English. This result is consistent with Halim & Maros (2014), who found that grammar remains one of the most challenging aspects for Indonesian learners, often leading to frustration and declining motivation. Similarly, Sulistyono (2015) emphasized that learners tend to lose interest when they are unable to cope with grammar-focused instruction.

Despite these difficulties, students in this study expressed strong preferences for learning methods emphasizing *listening* and *reading*. This supports the findings of Sari & Sugirin (2019), who reported that receptive skills are considered more manageable for students and serve as a foundation for the development of productive skills. It also aligns with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach highlighted by Savignon (2002), which stresses meaningful communication and practice rather than rote memorization of grammatical rules.

Students' tendency to struggle when lecturers use English exclusively as the medium of instruction echoes the findings of Manara (2014), who argued that code-switching between English and the local language helps students reduce anxiety and facilitates better comprehension. This suggests that adaptive strategies, including bilingual instruction, may provide a more supportive learning environment.

Another important finding of this study is students' preference for vocabulary memorization through listening and writing activities. This is consistent with Nation (2001), who emphasized the importance of vocabulary as a core element in language learning, and with Hatch & Brown (1995), who noted that repeated exposure through reading and listening enhances vocabulary retention. Moreover, Alqahtani (2015) confirmed that vocabulary mastery significantly influences students' ability to engage in all four language skills.

The gap between students' recognition of the importance of English and their actual engagement in learning also parallels the findings of Rachmajanti (2008), who found that while Indonesian students perceive English as valuable for their future, this perception does not always translate into active classroom participation. This highlights the necessity of motivational reinforcement in language learning.

Overall, this study reinforces the argument made by Deci & Ryan (2000) in their Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which states that intrinsic motivation, supported by autonomy, competence, and relatedness, plays a crucial role in sustaining students' learning interest. Without sufficient intrinsic motivation, students' awareness of English as a global necessity remains superficial and does not lead to deeper engagement.

Therefore, the results of this study, supported by previous research, underline the importance of shifting English teaching practices toward more communicative, practice-oriented, and motivationally supportive methods. Such approaches not only address linguistic difficulties but also foster stronger interest and sustained engagement in learning English.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' interest in learning English remains relatively low, largely due to difficulties in mastering grammar and following lessons delivered entirely in English. Nevertheless, students expressed clear preferences for learning strategies that emphasize listening, reading, and vocabulary practice, suggesting that communicative and practice-based methods are more effective than teacher-centered and grammar-oriented approaches.

The findings also highlight a critical gap between students' recognition of the importance of English and their actual motivation to learn it. While many students acknowledge English as a global necessity for academic and professional success, this awareness has not yet fully translated into active engagement in the learning process. This gap indicates that motivation alone is insufficient without appropriate pedagogical strategies and supportive learning environments.

Therefore, English learning in higher education should not only focus on linguistic competence but also incorporate motivational reinforcement, creative use of multimedia, and adaptive teaching strategies such as *code-switching* and task-based learning. By aligning pedagogy with students' interests and learning styles, educators can foster both intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement. Ultimately, improving students' interest in English requires an integrated approach that combines skill development, motivational support, and contextualized learning to ensure more meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

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