Challenges in English Language Learning at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan: A Case Study

[1] **Monica Gita Konipa**, [2] **Bambang Widi Pratolo***, [3] **Tran Thi Hoang Nguyen**

Email: [1] monica2100004012@webmail.uad.ac.id, [2] bambang.pratolo@pbi.uad.ac.id*, [3] r3gemstone@gmail.com
[1,2] Ahmad Dahlan University, Indonesia
[3] Van Lang University, Vietnam
*Correspondent

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This study explores the challenges in teaching English at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan, focusing on student proficiency variations, motivation issues, technological constraints, assessment difficulties, and classroom management. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Findings indicate that student proficiency disparities hinder effective lesson planning, while low motivation affects engagement. Limited access to technology restricts digital learning opportunities, and traditional assessments fail to capture overall language proficiency. Teachers implement strategies such as differentiated instruction, interactive learning, and alternative assessments to address these issues. Additionally, collaboration between teachers, parents, and administrators plays a crucial role in enhancing students' learning experiences. The study highlights the need for professional development programs, improved technological access, and innovative teaching methods to support English language instruction. Addressing these challenges can lead to better student outcomes and increased language proficiency at the junior high school level.

Introduction

Education at the Junior High School (SMP) level plays a pivotal role in students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. This phase serves as a foundation for their future academic achievements and personal growth. During this period, students undergo significant intellectual transitions, shifting from concrete thinking to more abstract reasoning. This cognitive shift enables them to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information more effectively, which is essential for higher-order thinking skills (Kania & Kusumah, 2025; Lestari & Pratolo, 2025; Ragab et al., 2024). Moreover, students develop problem-solving abilities, critical thinking skills, and the capacity to understand complex concepts, all of which are crucial for their academic success in later years. In addition to cognitive changes, students also experience profound social transformations. They begin to establish stronger relationships with peers and navigate various

social expectations that shape their learning behavior. Peer influence becomes more pronounced, impacting their attitudes toward education, self-discipline, and engagement in classroom activities. The emotional aspect of development further complicates this stage, as adolescents face challenges related to self-identity, self-confidence, and motivation (Ding et al., 2024; Mediani & Fuadah, 2025). These factors collectively influence their academic performance and adaptability to different learning environments. Given these complexities, educators must implement teaching strategies that not only cater to students' intellectual growth but also address their social and emotional needs, ensuring a holistic approach to education (Vostinar, 2024; Moslimany et al., 2024).

English, as a foreign language, plays a crucial role in preparing students for global communication and future career opportunities. Its instruction at the junior high school level is essential, as mastering English opens doors to a vast array of information, cross-cultural interactions, and enhanced critical thinking skills that extend beyond mere language acquisition. The ability to communicate in English provides students with access to global knowledge, online resources, and international opportunities, equipping them with essential skills for the modern workforce. Despite its importance, teaching English at this level presents several challenges. One of the most pressing difficulties is the need for adaptive and innovative teaching strategies that accommodate diverse learning styles, proficiency levels, and student interests. Traditional teaching methods that emphasize rote memorization and textbook-based instruction often fail to engage students meaningfully, leading to a lack of enthusiasm for learning English. To overcome these challenges, teachers must continuously refine their pedagogical approaches by incorporating interactive and student-centered techniques that enhance language acquisition and make learning more relevant and enjoyable (Martin-Alguacil, et al., 2024; Bhardwaj, 2025).

One of the major challenges in teaching English at the junior high school level is the significant variation in students' proficiency levels. Students enter junior high school with different levels of exposure to English, depending on factors such as their primary education background, family environment, and access to additional language-learning opportunities. Some students may have already developed basic English skills through extracurricular programs, private tutoring, or media exposure, while others have had minimal contact with the language and rely solely on formal classroom instruction. This disparity in proficiency levels often poses difficulties in lesson planning, as teachers must strike a balance between supporting struggling learners and challenging more advanced students. If not addressed properly, these differences can result in frustration for both students and teachers, potentially discouraging students from actively participating in class. To bridge this gap, educators need to implement differentiated instruction strategies that cater to individual learning needs. These strategies may include scaffolding

techniques, peer-assisted learning, and flexible grouping. Additionally, providing personalized feedback and utilizing a variety of assessment methods can help teachers better understand and address students' learning needs.

Another significant challenge is students' difficulty in seeing the relevance of English in their daily lives. When students do not perceive a clear purpose for learning English, coupled with traditional or less engaging teaching methods, their interest in the subject tends to decline. Many students view English as a subject required for exams rather than as a practical tool for communication and future success. Research has shown that Project-Based Learning (PBL) can enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by allowing students to apply language skills in meaningful contexts. According to Elvira et al. (2022), intrinsic motivation significantly impacts students' engagement and learning outcomes, whereas extrinsic motivation also plays a role in sustaining interest when students face learning difficulties. Through PBL, students engage in real-world tasks such as creating presentations, writing interactive stories, or conducting research projects that require English communication. Similarly, integrating interactive storytelling, role-playing activities, and gamification techniques can make learning more engaging and effective. These approaches help students see the real-world applications of English, thereby fostering greater motivation and enthusiasm for the subject. Technology has become an integral part of modern education, offering new opportunities for enhancing language learning (Ilahude et al., 2023). Digital tools, such as educational apps, online platforms, and multimedia resources, can improve student engagement and facilitate interactive learning experiences. Online learning management systems, video-based lessons, and virtual reality simulations can provide immersive language learning experiences that traditional classroom instruction may lack.

However, the integration of technology in English teaching also presents challenges (Ilahude et al., 2023). Not all schools have equal access to technological resources, creating a digital divide that affects students' learning opportunities. Schools in rural areas often face limitations such as inadequate infrastructure, poor internet access, and low digital literacy among both teachers and students (Utomo et al., 2020; Pratolo et al., 2022). One potential solution is the use of offline digital tools or blended learning approaches that combine technology with traditional teaching methods. Studies have found that digital literacy significantly impacts students' ability to engage with online learning materials, making it essential for schools to provide sufficient training in digital tools (Khoiriyah et al., 2015; Pratolo & Solikhati, 2021).

Assessment plays a crucial role in language learning, yet traditional evaluation methods often fail to provide a comprehensive picture of students' linguistic abilities. Many schools rely heavily on written exams as the primary form of assessment, which primarily measures reading and writing skills while neglecting essential competencies such as speaking and listening. This

approach can be limiting, as language proficiency extends beyond the ability to answer multiple-choice questions or write grammatically correct sentences. To address this issue, teachers must adopt more holistic and authentic assessment techniques that evaluate students' overall language proficiency. Formative assessments, such as classroom discussions, presentations, role-playing exercises, and peer evaluations, allow educators to gauge students' communicative competence in real-time. Additionally, incorporating self-reflections and portfolio-based assessments can encourage students to take greater ownership of their learning progress. By implementing diverse evaluation methods, teachers can ensure that students receive meaningful feedback that helps them develop their language skills more effectively.

Beyond the classroom, collaboration between teachers, parents, and school administrators plays a vital role in supporting students' language development. Parents can encourage English practice at home by fostering a language-rich environment, such as reading English books together, watching English-language films, or engaging in conversations using basic English phrases. Additionally, schools must provide teachers with access to professional development programs and teaching resources to ensure that educators stay updated with the latest pedagogical approaches. Classroom dynamics, including discipline issues and peer pressure, also influence learning outcomes. Establishing clear expectations and fostering a positive classroom culture can help create a more conducive learning environment. Teachers must also develop strong relationships with students to build trust and encourage active participation in language learning. By addressing these aspects holistically, educators can create a more inclusive and engaging learning experience, ultimately preparing students with the necessary language skills to navigate an increasingly globalized world.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the challenges faced by English teachers at the SMP level. A case study design was chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration of real-world teaching experiences within specific school settings. The primary data collection methods in this study included classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with English teachers. These methods provided comprehensive insights into teaching practices, student engagement, and institutional constraints. Classroom observations were conducted to examine the instructional strategies used by teachers and how students responded to different teaching methods. Observations allowed for firsthand documentation of classroom interactions, student participation, and the overall learning atmosphere. Additionally, field notes were taken to record key observations and recurring challenges faced by educators in real-time classroom settings.

Semi-structured interviews with English teachers served as another key component of the study, aiming to capture teachers' perspectives on the difficulties encountered in teaching English at the SMP level. Teachers were asked about their experiences with curriculum implementation, student motivation, resource availability, and strategies for overcoming teaching challenges. The flexible nature of the interviews enabled deeper exploration of emerging themes during discussions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data. Data triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility of the findings by corroborating insights from both observations and interviews. Through this methodological approach, the study provided a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing English language teaching at the SMP level and offered practical recommendations for addressing identified challenges.

Discussion

A. Findings

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and strategies employed in English language teaching at the SMP level. The results indicate that multiple factors contribute to the complexities of teaching English, including variations in students' proficiency levels, motivational issues, technological limitations, assessment challenges, and the need for collaboration among stakeholders. These challenges, if not properly addressed, can hinder students' ability to develop English language proficiency effectively. However, various strategies have been identified to overcome these obstacles, including differentiated instruction, interactive learning approaches, technology integration, and alternative assessment methods. The findings highlight the importance of continuous teacher development, resource accessibility, and a supportive learning environment in ensuring successful English language instruction.

1. Variations in Students' Proficiency Levels

One of the main challenges identified in interviews and surveys is the disparity in students' English proficiency levels. Teachers reported difficulties in designing lesson plans that accommodate both high-achieving students and those with limited basic understanding of English. Some students quickly grasp new vocabulary and grammar structures, while others struggle with basic sentence formation. These differences often result in varied levels of classroom participation, where more advanced students dominate discussions while struggling students hesitate to engage.

> "*Ada beberapa siswa lebih cepat memahami vocab baru dan grammar, tetapi yang lain masih kesusahan dengan pembuatan kalimat dasar.*"

To address this challenge, teachers implemented differentiated instruction strategies, such as leveled assignments, peer tutoring, and small-group instruction. However, some teachers mentioned that this approach increases their workload in managing the classroom effectively. Studies suggest that differentiated instruction not only enhances learning outcomes but also fosters an inclusive classroom environment where all students can progress at their own pace (Cochran, 2021). Leveled assignments ensured that advanced students were challenged while struggling students received additional support, preventing them from feeling left behind. Peer tutoring was particularly effective in promoting collaborative learning, as students with stronger English skills helped their peers through structured activities.

> *"Biasanya saya membagi kelas menjadi beberapa kelompok kecil berdasarkan tingkat kemahiran mereka, kemudian memberikan tugas yang sesuai, agar membantu mereka belajar dengan lebih efektif."*

The approach of dividing the class into small groups based on proficiency levels aims to provide more effective learning according to each student's ability. This way, more advanced students can be given more challenging tasks, while students who are still having difficulties get more intensive guidance. However, this method also has its challenges. Some teachers claim that this approach increases their workload in managing the class effectively. They have to prepare multiple versions of tasks that match students' proficiency levels, which takes extra time and effort. In addition, monitoring students' progress in more detail is also a challenge. Apart from the technical aspects, maintaining student motivation in a class with diverse abilities is also not easy. Students who are struggling can feel less confident or even discouraged when comparing themselves to their more advanced peers. Therefore, teachers need to create a supportive learning environment where each student feels valued and encouraged to develop according to their own abilities.

2. Student Motivation and Engagement

According to interviews, one of the biggest challenges in teaching English is students' lack of motivation. Many students perceive English as difficult and irrelevant to their daily lives, leading to passive participation in class. This issue is particularly prominent in students who do not have exposure to English outside the classroom, making it harder for them to see its practical benefits.

> *"Siswa sering banget kurang aktif di kelas, terutama saat proses pembelajaran dengan metode ceramah"*

This quote highlights that students are often less active in learning that uses the lecture method. This could be due to the one-way nature of the lecture method, where the teacher is more dominant in delivering the material while students are only passive listeners. Alternatively, research shows that interactive and student-centered learning methods can increase their

engagement in the classroom. Teachers who implement strategies such as role-playing, storytelling and project-based learning report higher levels of participation from students. Thus, a more interactive approach can be a solution to overcome the lack of student engagement in a lecture-based class.

> *"Ketika mereka membuat naskah dan memerankan peran, mereka menjadi lebih antusias karena rasanya seperti bermain sambil belajar."*

When students create scripts and act out roles in learning, they become more enthusiastic because this activity feels like playing while learning. This shows that interactive and fun learning can significantly increase student motivation. In addition, gamification techniques such as interactive quizzes and reward systems also play a role in increasing student motivation. The use of point systems, leaderboards and competitions in the classroom can encourage more active participation. With the element of play, students feel more motivated to engage in learning as they see it as a fun challenge. However, some teachers caution that implementing gamification requires careful planning to maintain the balance between entertainment and learning material. If not managed well, students may focus more on the competition aspect compared to the understanding of the material. Also, while external rewards such as points and prizes can increase motivation in the short term, it is important to balance them with intrinsic motivation to keep students motivated to learn and maintain language skills in the long term.

Based on observations made in class, it was found that many students showed low motivation to learn. This can be seen from their lack of enthusiasm in participating in learning, where most students tend to be passive when the teacher explains the material. When asked questions, only a few students were willing to answer, while others seemed to be daydreaming or unfocused. In addition, their disinterest can also be seen from their lack of responsibility in doing the assignments. Some students did not complete the assigned tasks, and some even claimed to have forgotten or not done them at all. It is also not uncommon to find students who only rely on friends in completing their assignments. In addition, many students prefer to play or joke during learning. They often talk to their classmates, busy with other objects such as cellphones, drawing on books, or even throwing small objects at friends. Even though the teacher has given a warning, some students still repeat this behavior. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that students' low motivation to learn can have an impact on their lack of understanding of the material and lower their learning outcomes. To overcome this, more interesting learning strategies are needed, such as the use of interactive media or project-based learning models. In addition, teachers can provide personal motivation to students, involve them in more interactive group activities, and implement a clear reward and consequence system to improve student discipline and responsibility.

3. Technological Limitations and Digital Literacy

Integrating technology into English language learning presents both benefits and challenges. In well-resourced schools, the use of language-learning apps, interactive whiteboards, and online collaboration platforms significantly enhanced students' learning experiences. Students were able to access a wider range of learning materials, practice with real-world English content, and receive instant feedback through digital tools. However, schools in underprivileged areas faced challenges such as limited internet access and outdated equipment.

> *"Saya itu sebenarnya berminat menggunakan banyak teknologi dalam mendukung pembelajaran, tetapi sekolah belum cukup memadai untuk akses device dan internet.*

Despite the interest in utilizing technology in learning, limited access to devices and internet in schools is often a challenge. These limitations hinder the optimal implementation of digital learning methods, especially those that rely on stable internet connections and the availability of adequate devices. To overcome this obstacle, some teachers implement alternative strategies such as using pre-downloaded learning videos and apps that can be used offline. This way, students can still access multimedia materials without the need for a continuous internet connection. In addition, a blended learning approach is being implemented, which combines traditional learning with limited digital resources. This method allows the use of technology on a more realistic scale according to school conditions, so that students' learning experience can still be enriched. However, the application of technology in learning also faces another challenge, which is the varying level of digital literacy among students and teachers. Some teachers may not have received formal training on how to integrate technology effectively in the classroom. Therefore, in addition to improving access to devices and the internet, improving digital skills for teachers is also an important factor to optimize the use of technology in learning.

> *"Saya sangat senang jika sekolah dapat memfasilitasi pelatihan terkait penggunaan teknologi dalam pembelajaran.*

The desire to get training in the use of technology shows that teachers realize the importance of mastering digital skills to make learning more effective and interesting. The challenge in integrating technology in the classroom lies not only in the limitations of devices and internet access, but also in teachers' readiness to utilize technology optimally. This gap in digital competence underscores the need for professional development programs that can equip teachers with the required skills. This training can include the use of various digital learning platforms, strategies for implementing technology in various subjects, as well as how to overcome technical obstacles that may arise in the classroom. For this to work, schools need to prioritize training initiatives and allocate sufficient resources to ensure all teachers have equal access to digital learning opportunities. With adequate support, teachers will be more confident in adopting

technology in the classroom, making learning more interactive, engaging and in line with the needs of students in the digital age.

4. Assessment Challenges and Alternative Evaluation Methods

Traditional assessment methods, such as written exams, were considered inadequate in measuring students' overall English proficiency. Many teachers found that written tests did not accurately reflect students' speaking and listening skills, which are essential for real-world communication. As a result, students who excelled in grammar and vocabulary-based exams often struggled with oral communication.

> *"Beberapa siswa di masing-masing kelas punya nilai tinggi setiap ujian tulis tapi mereka juga masih belum percaya diri kalau harus speak English."*

Some students who always get high scores in written exams but still feel less confident when speaking in English indicate a gap between academic ability and communication skills. This could be due to various factors, such as lack of speaking practice, fear of making mistakes, or a learning environment that is less supportive of oral skill development. To address this issue, teachers have begun to try alternative assessment methods that focus more on students' performance and active engagement. Some of the strategies implemented include performance-based assessment, self-evaluation, and peer assessment. With these methods, students are not only assessed based on their ability to take written tests, but also based on their ability to use English in real situations. For example, students are asked to give presentations or participate in role-playing activities as part of their speaking assessment. These activities provide opportunities for students to practice speaking more naturally in a supportive setting. In addition, with self-evaluation and peer feedback, students can be more aware of their progress and gradually increase their confidence in speaking English.

> *"Saya juga sesekali meminta mereka untuk membuat video percakapan bahasa inggris sebagai tugas, saya berharap dengan ini kepercayaan mereka dapat membaik."*

Asking students to make a video conversation in English as an assignment is an effective strategy to increase their confidence in speaking. With this method, students have the opportunity to practice speaking in a more comfortable setting compared to speaking directly in front of the class. They can re-record if mistakes are made, thus focusing more on correct pronunciation, intonation and expression. Moreover, this task also helps them build the habit of speaking in English more naturally. However, implementing this method requires additional preparation from the teacher, especially in designing an appropriate assessment rubric. Teachers must ensure that the assessment criteria are clear and objective to keep the evaluation fair and consistent. Subjective factors such as students' courage or speaking style also need to be carefully taken into account so as not to hinder students who are still in the confidence-building stage. Although it

requires more time and effort, alternative assessments such as making video conversations provide a more holistic picture of students' English language skills. In addition to assessing aspects of grammar and vocabulary, this method also encourages students to actively participate in language learning, so that they not only excel in written exams but are also able to use English in daily communication with more confidence.

5. Collaboration Among Teachers, Parents, and School Administration

Effective collaboration between teachers, parents, and school administrators plays a crucial role in enhancing English language learning. Teachers who worked together with colleagues reported better learning outcomes due to the exchange of innovative teaching strategies and shared resources.

> *"Beberapa kali saya dengan guru lain juga sering berbagi informasi terkait siswa dan metode ajar."*

Sharing information with fellow teachers about students and teaching methods is an important step in improving learning effectiveness. By discussing and exchanging experiences, teachers can gain new insights into more effective teaching strategies and better understand the individual needs of each student. Besides collaboration between teachers, support from parents also plays an important role in students' learning motivation. Students who receive encouragement from their parents to learn English at home tend to be more motivated and confident. However, challenges arise when many parents feel less confident in helping their children due to their own limited English skills. In situations like this, cooperation between teachers and parents becomes even more important. Teachers can share simple tips with parents on how they can support their children in learning, such as providing a supportive environment for English practice at home or using media such as English songs and movies. Thus, both teachers and parents can contribute to creating a more supportive learning environment for students.

> *"Banyak orang tua wali disini memang tidak tahu bagaimana cara untuk mendukung anak-anak mereka dalam belajar.*

Many parents do not know how to support their children in learning, especially in English language learning. This could be due to various factors, such as their own limited English proficiency, lack of understanding of effective learning strategies, or limited time due to their busy daily lives. To address this gap, some schools organize training sessions for parents. The training aims to equip them with basic knowledge and skills in supporting their children's learning at home. For example, parents are taught simple ways to help their children practice English through daily conversations, reading books together, or using media such as songs, movies and educational apps. With this training, parents not only feel more confident in assisting their children, but can also create a more positive learning environment at home. This in turn will help improve students'

motivation and ability to learn English.

> *"Sekolah kami sering melakukan sosialisasi sederhana kepada orang tua wali terkait proses dan hasil belajar anak-anak."*

Schools that regularly socialize with parents about their children's learning process and results demonstrate a commitment to building good communication between school and family. This socialization is important so that parents understand their child's academic development as well as the challenges faced in learning. Through this activity, the school can provide an overview of the teaching methods used, student progress, and areas that need improvement. In addition, parents also get the opportunity to discuss with teachers how they can support their children at home, especially in learning English or other subjects. However, effective socialization does not only focus on conveying information but also on actively involving parents in supporting their child's education. Some schools even organize short training sessions or provide simple guidelines to make parents better equipped to assist their children in learning at home. Thus, the cooperation between schools and families can work better, creating a more supportive learning environment for students.

6. Classroom Management and Behavioral Challenges

Maintaining a conducive learning environment for English instruction was a challenge for many teachers. Disruptive behavior, lack of focus, and students' disinterest in English often hindered learning. Managing large class sizes also made it difficult for teachers to provide individualized support.

> *"Ada beberapa siswa memang mudah terdistraksi dengan hal lain pada saat pembelajaran dimulai."*

Some students who are easily distracted when learning begins often have difficulty focusing and maintaining attention on the material being taught. Factors such as the classroom environment, lack of interest in the lesson, or distractions from peers can affect their concentration levels. To overcome this, teachers implement various strategies to keep students engaged in learning. One of them is to set clear rules and expectations from the start so that students understand what is expected of them during class. Positive reinforcement, such as providing praise or small rewards for students who show focus and active participation, has also proven effective in increasing their motivation. In addition, movement-based activities are also used to help students stay engaged. For example, in English language learning, teachers can incorporate interactive games, group discussions, or physical activities such as role-playing so that students do not feel bored or lose focus. Furthermore, creating a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere can help reduce students' anxiety in learning English. When students feel comfortable and supported by their teachers and classmates, they are more likely to focus and

participate in the learning process.

> *"Saya selalu mencoba untuk menciptakan lingkungan kelas yang nyaman dan kondusif agar siswa dapat lebih percaya diri pada saat pembelajaran bahasa inggris."*

Creating a comfortable and conducive classroom environment is an important factor in increasing students' confidence when learning English. Many students feel anxious or afraid of making mistakes when speaking in a foreign language, so they tend to be passive or hesitant to participate in class. To overcome this, teachers try to create a supportive classroom atmosphere by providing positive encouragement, building good relationships with students, and ensuring that each student feels valued. One effective strategy is to use a friendly and patient approach, so that students are not afraid to try to speak even if they still make mistakes. In addition, teachers can also apply more interactive and interesting learning methods, such as group discussions, language games, or role-playing activities. This way, students can learn in a more relaxed atmosphere, without excessive pressure. Building a supportive classroom culture is also key in boosting students' confidence. When they feel safe and supported by their teachers and peers, they are more likely to actively speak and use English in their daily communication. This will gradually improve their language skills and strengthen their motivation to continue learning.

B. Discussion

This study identifies key challenges in teaching English at the SMP level, including student motivation, technological constraints, proficiency gaps, assessment strategies, and classroom management. Addressing these issues requires effective instructional methods, stakeholder collaboration, and policy support.

One of the most significant challenges is the variation in students' English proficiency levels. Teachers must accommodate both high-achieving students and those who struggle with basic skills. Differentiated instruction, including tiered assignments, small-group teaching, and peer learning, is widely recommended to address these gaps (Tomlinson, 2014). Research shows that these strategies help students progress at their own pace. However, implementing them requires extra preparation and increases teachers' workload, especially in large classes. Findings indicate that some teachers already use differentiated instruction, such as assigning tiered tasks and utilizing peer tutoring. However, they report difficulties in managing diverse needs while maintaining lesson flow. To enhance effectiveness, professional development programs should equip teachers with strategies to implement differentiated instruction more efficiently.

Student motivation plays a crucial role in language learning, influencing engagement and long-term retention. Research suggests that students often disengage from English learning due to unengaging teaching methods (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Interactive approaches such as gamification, project-based learning, and role-playing can make lessons more dynamic and enjoyable. Teachers

in this study observed that storytelling, role-playing, and hands-on activities significantly increased student enthusiasm and confidence in using English. However, while engaging methods enhance motivation, they must be structured to ensure meaningful learning. Without clear objectives, students may focus on entertainment rather than language development. Therefore, teachers must design activities that balance interaction with curriculum goals to maximize learning outcomes. Additionally, motivation varies among students. While some thrive in interactive settings, others need extra support to participate confidently. Strategies such as scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and formative assessments can help sustain motivation across diverse proficiency levels.

Technology has the potential to transform English learning, but disparities in access create challenges, especially in rural areas. Limited internet connectivity and digital resources prevent some students and teachers from fully utilizing online learning tools. Findings show that while some teachers successfully integrate technology, many struggle due to infrastructure limitations (Ilahude et al., 2023). Research supports blended learning models—combining traditional teaching with digital resources—as a way to overcome these barriers. Moreover, training teachers in digital literacy is essential for effective technology integration in classrooms. Addressing these challenges requires investments in digital infrastructure and teacher training programs.

Another issue in English instruction is assessment methods. Traditional assessments, such as written exams, often fail to measure communicative competence. While they assess grammar and vocabulary retention, they do not adequately evaluate speaking and listening skills, which are critical for real-world communication. Alternative assessments, such as oral presentations, role-playing, and portfolios, provide a more comprehensive evaluation of student progress (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Teachers in this study have started incorporating these methods to assess speaking skills more effectively. However, implementing performance-based assessments requires additional preparation, including clear rubrics and consistent evaluation criteria. Formative assessments—where teachers provide ongoing feedback—are also beneficial. Unlike summative assessments, which measure final achievement, formative assessments support continuous improvement. Additionally, self-assessment and peer evaluation encourage students to reflect on their progress, fostering autonomy and deeper engagement in learning (Andrade, 2010).

Classroom management significantly impacts student engagement and learning outcomes (Marzano et al., 2003). A well-managed classroom promotes a safe and supportive environment where students can focus on learning. Teachers in this study employ various management strategies, including setting clear rules, reinforcing expectations, and fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Research suggests that structured routines and well-defined rules help

minimize disruptions, creating a productive learning atmosphere (Wong & Wong, 2018). Additionally, positive teacher-student interactions contribute to higher engagement and motivation (Pianta et al., 2012). When students feel respected and valued, they are more likely to participate actively and exhibit cooperative behavior. Effective classroom management also includes differentiated instruction and interactive teaching methods to sustain student interest while maintaining discipline.

Beyond the classroom, stakeholder collaboration is essential for effective language instruction. Parental involvement plays a crucial role in student success, as research shows that parental support enhances students' confidence and motivation in learning English (Jeynes, 2012). However, findings indicate that many parents feel unequipped to assist their children due to their own limited English proficiency. To address this, some schools implement parental guidance programs, providing resources and strategies for supporting English learning at home. Strengthening home-school collaboration ensures consistent support for students outside the classroom.

Teacher professional development is another key factor in improving language instruction. Findings suggest that teachers who receive training in differentiated instruction, digital literacy, and alternative assessments are better equipped to handle classroom challenges (Pratolo, et al., 2022). However, some teachers in this study reported a lack of access to adequate training. Expanding professional development opportunities—such as mentorship programs and peer collaboration—can help teachers refine their instructional methods and enhance student learning outcomes (Desimone, 2009).

Students from low-income backgrounds often face additional challenges in English learning due to limited access to books, digital devices, and private tutoring (Reardon, 2011). Findings show that some teachers mitigate these challenges by using free downloadable resources and offline instructional methods. However, addressing these disparities requires policy interventions, such as subsidies for educational materials and expanded access to language-learning programs in underserved communities (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011).

Language learning is deeply connected to cultural understanding. Findings suggest that students engage more when lessons incorporate cultural elements relevant to their backgrounds. Research supports culturally responsive teaching, which helps students relate to language learning and enhances comprehension. Teachers in this study noted that students showed greater enthusiasm when lessons included familiar themes or local cultural references. Additionally, exposure to global cultures through English learning broadens students' perspectives and fosters intercultural competence.

Enhancing English education at the SMP level requires addressing proficiency gaps, increasing

student motivation, integrating technology, improving assessment methods, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Evidence-based instructional strategies and ongoing teacher development are essential for creating an effective and inclusive learning environment. Future research should examine the long-term impact of instructional strategies on student outcomes. Policymakers should prioritize teacher training, technological resources, and equitable assessment practices to strengthen English education. Additionally, exploring the effects of multilingualism on English learning in diverse classroom settings could provide further insights. By adopting research-backed strategies and supporting teacher development, schools can enhance language instruction, ensuring students receive the skills and motivation needed for success in English learning.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges in English language learning at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan, revealing significant barriers related to student proficiency levels, motivation, technological access, assessment methods, and classroom management. The findings indicate that these challenges, if not properly addressed, can hinder students' ability to develop essential language skills, impacting their overall learning outcomes. One of the most pressing issues is the variation in student proficiency levels, which makes lesson planning difficult. Teachers must balance the needs of both high-achieving and struggling students, often requiring differentiated instruction and additional support. However, this approach can be time-consuming and challenging to implement effectively in large classes. Additionally, student motivation plays a crucial role in language acquisition, as many students struggle to see the relevance of English in their daily lives. To counter this, interactive teaching methods such as Project-Based Learning (PBL), storytelling, and gamification have proven effective in increasing engagement.

Technology has emerged as a double-edged sword in language instruction. While digital tools enhance learning experiences, limited access to devices and internet connectivity in some schools creates inequalities in student learning opportunities. Blended learning models, which combine traditional instruction with digital resources, have been identified as a viable solution to overcome these limitations. However, teacher training in digital literacy is essential to ensure the effective integration of technology in classrooms. Another key issue is assessment methods, as traditional written exams fail to fully capture students' communicative competence. Alternative assessments, such as oral presentations, peer evaluations, and portfolio-based evaluations, offer a more holistic measure of students' English proficiency. However, implementing these assessments requires careful rubric development and additional preparation time for teachers.

Beyond the classroom, collaboration among teachers, parents, and school administrators is vital in supporting students' language development. Parental involvement, particularly in

encouraging English practice at home, has been shown to enhance student confidence and motivation. However, many parents feel unprepared to assist their children due to their own language limitations. Schools have attempted to bridge this gap by offering parental guidance programs, but more structured initiatives are needed. Effective classroom management remains a fundamental aspect of language teaching. Teachers must address issues such as disruptive behavior and inattentiveness to maintain a productive learning environment. Establishing clear expectations, fostering strong teacher-student relationships, and implementing structured behavioral management strategies can improve student engagement and classroom dynamics.

In conclusion, addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes innovative teaching strategies, increased access to technological resources, alternative assessment methods, and stronger collaboration between stakeholders. Schools and policymakers must prioritize teacher training, equitable resource distribution, and curriculum adaptation to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to develop English proficiency. By fostering a more engaging and supportive learning environment, educators can equip students with the necessary language skills to succeed in an increasingly globalized world.

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