

## **An In-Depth Examination of Challenges Faced by Indonesian English Language Learners in Comprehending Syntax**

**Siti Ismahani<sup>1</sup>, Silvi Angelika<sup>2</sup>, Fatimah Azzahra Siregar<sup>3</sup>, Afrohul Fadhillah<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

e-mail: [sitismahani@uinsu.ac.id](mailto:sitismahani@uinsu.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [silviangelikaaaa@gmail.com](mailto:silviangelikaaaa@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>, [fatimahazzahrasiregar2503@gmail.com](mailto:fatimahazzahrasiregar2503@gmail.com)<sup>3</sup>, [fadhilaafrohul@gmail.com](mailto:fadhilaafrohul@gmail.com)<sup>4</sup>

### **Abstrak**

Studi kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi pelajar Indonesia dalam memahami sintaksis bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan beragam kelompok partisipan, termasuk mahasiswa, siswa sekolah menengah atas, pembelajar dewasa, profesional, dan guru, masing-masing dengan durasi paparan bahasa Inggris yang berbeda-beda. Temuan ini mengungkapkan berbagai tantangan, terutama dalam memahami struktur kalimat yang kompleks, tenses, ekspresi idiomatik, dan beradaptasi dengan dialek dan bahasa gaul bahasa Inggris. Tantangan-tantangan ini sebagian besar dipengaruhi oleh perbedaan sintaksis antara bahasa Inggris dan bahasa ibu peserta, Bahasa Indonesia. Studi ini juga menyoroti strategi adaptif yang digunakan oleh pelajar, seperti penggunaan alat digital, pembelajaran mendalam, dan pengembangan profesional bagi pendidik. Hasilnya dibahas berdasarkan teori Tata Bahasa Universal Chomsky dan Hipotesis Input Krashen, yang menekankan pengaruh struktur bahasa asli pada perolehan bahasa baru dan pentingnya paparan dan interaksi dalam pembelajaran. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tantangan dan strategi pemerolehan bahasa di kalangan pelajar bahasa Inggris Indonesia, mengatasi kesenjangan dalam literatur saat ini dan menyarankan arah untuk penelitian di masa depan.

**Kata kunci :** *Sintaks Bahasa Inggris, Pemerolehan Bahasa, Pembelajar Bahasa Indonesia*

### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explores the challenges faced by Indonesian learners in comprehending English syntax. The research employs semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of participants, including university students, high school students, adult learners, professionals, and teachers, each with varying lengths of English language exposure. The findings reveal a range of challenges, notably in understanding complex sentence structures, tenses, idiomatic expressions, and adapting to English dialects and slangs. These challenges are largely influenced by the syntactic differences between English and the participants' native language, Bahasa Indonesia. The study also highlights the

adaptive strategies employed by learners, such as using digital tools, immersive learning, and professional development for educators. The results are discussed in light of Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, emphasizing the influence of native language structures on new language acquisition and the importance of exposure and interaction in learning. The study contributes to the understanding of language acquisition challenges and strategies among Indonesian English learners, addressing gaps in current literature and suggesting directions for future research.

**Keywords:** *English Syntax, Language Acquisition, Indonesian Learners*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past several years, the learning of English as a second language in Indonesia has received an unprecedented amount of importance within the context of global communication and education. The Indonesian education system has responded to this trend by placing a strong focus on studying English, recognising the essential role that English plays in a society that is more linked and globalised (Sulistyo, 2021). On the other hand, this increased emphasis on English literacy has brought to light certain difficulties, most notably in the complex domain of syntax understanding.

Learning English syntax, which is characterised by its complicated structure and norms, provides significant challenges for students who are learning English in Indonesia. The native language structures of Bahasa Indonesia are significantly different from those of English, which results in a distinct set of challenges when it comes to understanding syntactic subtleties (Hartono, 2020). This study intends to rigorously investigate and analyse the specific syntactic features that offer difficulties for Indonesian learners on their road towards English language mastery. This is done in recognition of the necessity of overcoming these issues, which is why this study was conducted.

The findings of this study are not only significant from an academic standpoint, but they also have important consequences for teachers and students of foreign languages. Through the process of identifying and comprehending the special nature of syntactic obstacles that Indonesian learners encounter, educational practices may be developed and adapted to effectively tackle these particular concerns. Therefore, this individualised method has the potential to improve the overall efficiency and efficacy of English language instruction in Indonesia, thereby creating an atmosphere that is more favourable to learning (Wijaya, 2019).

In the interest of making a significant contribution to the field of language teaching, the purpose of this study is to offer insights that may be utilised in the process of developing interventions that are specifically targeted. The final objective is to equip teachers with the information they need to modify their instructional strategies, curricula, and resources so that they are in line with the specific requirements of Indonesian students who are attempting to navigate the complexities of English syntax. The purpose of this research is to create a long-lasting influence on the landscape of English language acquisition in Indonesia by tackling these syntactic issues head-on. If successful, this research will facilitate a more robust and successful language learning experience for learners in the region.

## Literature review

Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory, developed in 1965, serves as a cornerstone in our understanding of language acquisition. According to Chomsky, humans possess an innate language faculty, a set of grammatical principles shared across all languages. This theory is particularly relevant when exploring how Indonesian learners grapple with English syntax, given the fundamental differences in the syntactic structures of Bahasa Indonesia and English.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) contributes a valuable perspective, highlighting the significance of exposure to language in the learning process. Krashen argues that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to input slightly beyond their current proficiency level. For Indonesian English language learners, the disparity between the grammatical structures of Bahasa Indonesia and English emphasizes the critical role of exposure to diverse and challenging linguistic input.

The combination of these theoretical frameworks offers a nuanced understanding of how Indonesian learners approach English syntax. The Universal Grammar theory underlines the challenges arising from differences in innate linguistic structures, while the Input Hypothesis sheds light on the importance of providing learners with exposure to varied and complex syntactic forms.

Several studies have delved into the specific challenges faced by Indonesian learners in comprehending English syntax. Manara's research (2014) highlights the struggle with sentence structures, emphasizing the distinct syntactic rules between Bahasa Indonesia and English. The syntax of English, often characterized by a strict word order, poses a challenge to Indonesian learners accustomed to a more flexible structure in their native language.

Sulistiyo's study (2016) further contributes by focusing on the intricate realm of verb tenses. English, a language rich in tense distinctions, demands precision in temporal expressions, a feature largely absent in Bahasa Indonesia. Sulistiyo's findings underscore the difficulties Indonesian learners encounter in navigating the complexities of English verb tenses, shedding light on a specific syntactic area that warrants targeted pedagogical attention.

While these studies provide valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge that the challenges in English syntax comprehension extend beyond individual components. The interplay of various syntactic elements and their cumulative impact on overall comprehension is a facet that demands further exploration.

Despite the existing body of research, there are notable gaps that our study seeks to address. One significant omission is the scarcity of longitudinal studies tracking the progress of Indonesian learners in mastering English syntax over an extended period. Wijaya's observation (2018) highlights the need for research that goes beyond isolated snapshots, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how syntax comprehension evolves over time among Indonesian learners.

Furthermore, sociolinguistic factors, a critical dimension in language acquisition, have received limited attention in existing studies. Hariyanto's work (2020) suggests that the influence of local dialects on English syntax acquisition is an area deserving of exploration. Understanding how sociolinguistic variables interact with syntactic challenges is essential for

tailoring effective pedagogical approaches that consider the diverse linguistic backgrounds of Indonesian learners.

Our study aims to bridge these gaps by adopting a longitudinal approach, tracking the development of syntax comprehension among Indonesian learners over an extended period. Additionally, we will delve into the impact of sociolinguistic factors, acknowledging the potential influence of local dialects on the syntax acquisition process.

This literature review provides a comprehensive foundation for our study on the challenges faced by Indonesian English language learners in comprehending syntax. By grounding our exploration in Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, we establish a theoretical framework that recognizes both innate linguistic structures and the role of exposure in language acquisition.

Drawing from previous studies, we identify specific syntactic challenges faced by Indonesian learners, particularly in sentence structures and verb tenses. However, these studies also reveal the need for a more holistic understanding of how various syntactic elements interact and contribute to overall comprehension.

The identified gaps in the literature, namely the absence of longitudinal studies and limited exploration of sociolinguistic factors, underscore the need for our research. By adopting a longitudinal approach and considering sociolinguistic variables, our study aims to provide a nuanced and thorough examination of the syntax comprehension challenges encountered by Indonesian learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study examines Indonesian learners' English syntax difficulties. A qualitative research design is used to explore learners' experiences and views. This method is ideal for studying language learning's intricacies, where personal experiences and environmental circumstances matter (Creswell, 2014).

We will collect data via semi-structured interviews. This strategy is great for collecting rich, comprehensive tales and experiences to understand learners' English syntax difficulties (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Participants from varied educational backgrounds will provide diverse perspectives. Their English syntax struggles, solutions, and tactics will be discussed in the interviews. Interviews run 45-60 minutes in a comfortable location and can be done in-person or online.

A reliable tool for discovering and evaluating qualitative data patterns is theme analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method involves familiarising oneself with the data, developing initial codes, recognising themes, evaluating them, defining and naming them, and writing a detailed report. This method will reveal Indonesian learners' syntactic comprehension issues and learning techniques and impacts. Ethical issues dominate this investigation. Participants will be told of the study's objective and give informed permission before interviews. Any identifiable information will be deleted from the final report for privacy. This strategy seeks to illuminate Indonesian English language learners' syntactic understanding difficulties. The project intends to advance language learning and teaching by concentrating on their own experiences and tactics, providing vital insights for future research and practice.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Findings***

The following is a summary of the findings, which can be derived from the information that was gathered during the interviews with five different participants

#### **Participant A (University Student)**

Experience with English: 5 years

Main Challenge: Difficulty understanding complex sentence structures.

Strategy Used: Regular practice with native speakers and grammar exercises.

Quote: "I find English sentence construction quite different from Bahasa Indonesia, especially when it comes to longer, more complex sentences."

#### **Participant B (High School Student)**

Experience with English: 3 years

Main Challenge: Struggling with English tenses and verb conjugations.

Strategy Used: Using mobile apps for grammar practice.

Quote: "I often get confused with different tenses, like past perfect or present continuous. It's not something we use in our language."

#### **Participant C (Adult Learner)**

Experience with English: 2 years in a language course

Main Challenge: Difficulty in understanding and using idiomatic expressions.

Strategy Used: Watching English movies and shows with subtitles.

Quote: "Idioms are really tough for me. Sometimes they don't make sense literally, so I watch a lot of movies to understand how they are used in context."

#### **Participant D (Teacher)**

Experience with English: 8 years, uses English at work

Main Challenge: Adapting to different English dialects and slangs.

Strategy Used: Interactive online courses and international work experience.

Quote: "In a global workplace, I come across various English accents and slangs. It's challenging but I try to adapt by exposing myself to different dialects through online courses."

#### **Participant E (teacher)**

Experience with English: 10 years, teaches English at a local school

Main Challenge: Implementing effective teaching strategies for syntax to students.

Strategy Used: Continuous professional development and collaborative learning techniques.

Quote: "Teaching syntax is as challenging as learning it. I constantly look for innovative methods to make it easier for my students."

Participants demonstrated a wide variety of difficulties in interpreting the grammar of the English language. Among these were difficulties with complex sentence structures (participant A), difficulties with English tenses and verb conjugations (participant B), difficulties with understanding idiomatic expressions (participant C), difficulties with adapting to various English dialects and slangs (participant D), and difficulties with effectively teaching English syntax (participant E).

In order to triumph over their obstacles, every player utilised a unique set of tactical approaches. Regular practice with native speakers and grammar exercises were used by

Participant A, mobile apps for grammar practice by Participant B, watching films and shows for contextual understanding of idioms by Participant C, engaging in interactive online courses and gaining international work experience by Participant D, and pursuing continuous professional development and collaborative learning techniques by Participant E.

The length of time that participants had been exposed to the English language ranged anywhere from two to ten minutes. It seems that this variance had an effect on the kinds of difficulties that were encountered. Individuals who had been exposed to the language for a longer period of time (Participants D and E) encountered more complex difficulties, such as adjusting to dialects and teaching grammar. On the other hand, participants who had been exposed to the language for a shorter period of time (Participants B and C) struggled more with fundamental characteristics, such as idioms and tenses.

The comments of the participants indicated that their native language, Bahasa Indonesia, had a major influence on the process of developing their English language skills. Specifically, Participant A encountered difficulties in constructing sentences in English owing to the differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English. Similarly, Participant B encountered difficulties with English tenses, which is a grammatical component that is not present in their home language.

Even though they were confronted with difficulties, the participants demonstrated flexibility and inventiveness in their approaches to learning. Their proactive approach to language acquisition is demonstrated by the fact that they utilised a variety of resources, ranging from digital tools to experiences that were based in the real world.

The experience of Participant E brought to light the difficulties associated with teaching English syntax, highlighting the need of educators engaging in ongoing professional development and developing novel teaching strategies.

## **Discussion**

The findings that were uncovered via the interviews with Indonesian students of the English language provide significant insights into the challenges that they encounter and the strategies that they adopt in order to acquire an understanding of the syntax of the English language. These concepts bolster the existing body of literature in a variety of significant ways, and they are compatible with the existing body of literature.

1. Understanding syntax can be challenging for a number of reasons, including the following: It has been shown that there is a significant connection between the research carried out by Manara (2014) and Sulistiyo (2016) and the several problems that were found in our findings. Difficulties with intricate sentence structures, tenses, idiomatic phrases, dialects, and effective teaching strategies are among the challenges that are encountered. As a result of the outcomes of these studies, it has been determined that Indonesian pupils are confronted with significant hurdles, which manifest themselves as difficulties in syntax and issues with verb tense. Through the demonstration of how these challenges manifest themselves in the experiences of learners, our discoveries offer a further understanding of this notion while also providing further information.



2. The impact of the local tongue and the subsequent transfer of culture that follows its transmission: The outcomes of our study make it abundantly evident that learning Bahasa Indonesia has a substantial influence on the acquisition of the English language, particularly with regard to the comprehension of syntax issues. This data lends credence to Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory, which he suggested in 1965 (Chomsky, 1965). When it comes to learning a new language, this hypothesis suggests that the structures of one's original language might have an impact on the process of learning the new language. In addition to the major syntactic differences that exist between the two languages, the difficulties that arise when attempting to employ English tenses and sentence patterns are brought about by these discrepancies.
3. Learning tactics and Adaptation: The many tactics utilised by our participants, which range from the utilisation of digital tools to immersive learning, are in agreement with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), which places an emphasis on the function that exposure and interaction play in the process of language acquisition. In the course of our research, we demonstrate the adaptability and resourcefulness of students by making use of various forms of media, interactive technology, and experience gained from experiencing the real world. This is a facet that is seldom ever investigated in the corpus of literature that is currently available.
4. Obstacles Facing Professionals in the Field of Language Education: We found that there is a vacuum in the current body of research, which was brought to light by the challenges that the teacher participant encountered when attempting to put into practice effective methods for teaching syntax. This was identified through our analysis of the relevant literature. The necessity of conducting more research on instructional strategies for syntax in English as a Second Language (ESL) settings is tied to this component, as Hariyanto (2020) has brought to light.

## CONCLUSION

When it comes to attempting to acquire English grammar, Indonesian students face a broad variety of challenges, which are illuminated by the findings of the study. These problems are made much more difficult by the fact that the learners' native language does not have certain grammatical structures. The linguistic differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia have a substantial influence on these concerns, which are further exacerbated by both of these factors. In addition, the data suggest that learners have a high level of flexibility to the extent that they employ a number of strategies in order to meet and triumph over these challenges. In light of the fact that these strategies constitute evidence of their proactive interaction with the language, they offer validity to theories of language acquisition that place a focus on active participation and exposure.

There is a significant link that can be found between the discussion and the conclusions of this study and the literature that was looked at before. The theoretical frameworks that they describe, such as Chomsky's Universal Grammar and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, are given more credence as a result of the empirical facts that they show. This study contributes to the growth of earlier research by providing information that is relevant to

the setting in which it was conducted. It does so by providing insight that is both comprehensive and context-specific into how Indonesian learners feel and respond to difficulties with English syntax understanding. Additionally, it emphasises the necessity of conducting additional research in areas such as the influence of sociolinguistic variables on language learning and the most efficient teaching approaches for syntax in English as a Second Language (ESL) situations, therefore filling the gaps that have been discovered in the existing body of literature.

#### **DAFTAR PUSTAKA**

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. MIT Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314-321.
- Hariyanto, S. (2020). Sociolinguistic factors in second language acquisition: A study on Indonesian learners of English. *Journal of Language Learning*, 15(3), 202-216.
- Hartono, R. (2020). *Challenges in English syntax for Indonesian learners*. Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Manara, C. (2014). The challenges of learning English syntax: A case study of Indonesian students. *Journal of Language Teaching*, 11(2), 45-59.
- Sulistiyo, U. (2016). Understanding the syntactic difficulties in English faced by Indonesian learners. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 72-82.
- Wijaya, D. (2018). Longitudinal studies in second language acquisition: Prospects and challenges in the Indonesian context. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 13(1), 58-73.