# Exploring the Interest to Learn English: Perspectives of Students of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang

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#### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi motivasi mahasiswa UIN Imam Bonjol Padang untuk belajar bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami mengapa mahasiswa terdorong untuk belajar bahasa Inggris dan faktor-faktor apa yang memengaruhi antusiasme mereka. Metode kualitatif deskriptif digunakan, yang melibatkan wawancara dengan enam mahasiswa dari semester yang berbeda. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa mahasiswa termotivasi oleh faktor internal dan eksternal. Secara internal, mereka menikmati belajar bahasa Inggris dan percaya bahwa hal itu meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan peluang masa depan mereka. Secara eksternal, persyaratan pekerjaan, kebutuhan akademis, dan komunikasi global merupakan motivator yang kuat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa mahasiswa memandang bahasa Inggris tidak hanya sebagai mata pelajaran akademis tetapi juga sebagai kunci untuk pengembangan pribadi dan profesional yang lebih luas. Memahami motivasi ini membantu pendidik merancang strategi pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang lebih efektif dan menarik bagi mahasiswa.

Kata kunci : Minat, Motivasi, Kendala, Strategi, Bahasa Inggris

#### **Abstract**

This study explored the motivation of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang students to learn English. It aimed to understand why students are driven to study English and what factors influence their enthusiasm. A descriptive qualitative method was used, involving interviews with six students from different semesters. The findings reveal that students are motivated by both internal and external factors. Internally, they enjoy learning English and believe it enhances their confidence and future opportunities. Externally, job requirements, academic needs, and global communication are strong motivators. The study concludes that students view English not only as an academic subject but also as a key to broader personal and professional development. Understanding these motivations helps educators design more effective and engaging English learning strategies for university students.

Keywords: Interest, Motivation, Constraint, Strategies, English

# INTRODUCTION

Language is the main medium in conveying ideas, building social relations, and accessing knowledge. In the era of globalization, mastery of foreign languages, especially English, is becoming increasingly important due to its function as an international language in various sectors, including higher education. English is not only a communication tool, but also a strategic competency that supports academic mobility and job readiness of university graduates.

In Indonesia, mastering English is still a challenge. Based on data from the EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) in 2024, Indonesia ranks 80th out of 116 countries, indicating a low level of English proficiency nationally. This demands special attention, especially in higher education, which has a strategic role in preparing globally competitive human resources.

At UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, English proficiency is an important part of developing students' academic competence. Although various language programs have been implemented, the effectiveness of learning still faces a number of obstacles. Some students show enthusiasm in

learning English, but many also experience obstacles such as lack of confidence, low motivation, and limitations in the learning methods used.

Some previous studies have addressed aspects of interest and challenge in English language learning, such as those conducted by (Milah et al., 2024) and(Hidayat & Devi, 2024). However, most of them are still limited to the context of school students. In-depth studies in the scope of higher education, especially in the environment of Islamic universities such as UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, are still relatively rare.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the self-efficacy approach, which refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to perform a particular task (Bandura, 1997; Klassen & Usher, 2018). In addition, affective factors such as motivation, attitude, and anxiety play an important role in the effectiveness of English language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). These factors shape students' learning behavior and their interest in English courses. Based on this background, this study aims to:

- 1. Analyze the level of English proficiency of students of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.
- 2. Identify the aspects of English that students are interested in.
- 3. Evaluate the effectiveness of English language learning on campus.
- 4. Exploring the factors that influence students' interest and motivation in learning English.
- 5. Finding the main obstacles in the English learning process.
- 6. Formulating strategies to increase the interest and effectiveness of English learning in Islamic universities.

This research uses a qualitative approach by involving six students as respondents. It is expected that the results of this study can make a real contribution to the development of English learning strategies that are more contextual, effective, and in accordance with the needs of students at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

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# **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods, which aims to gain an indepth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by students in learning English at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. This approach was chosen because it is considered suitable for exploring social and educational phenomena in a contextual and natural manner, without intervention or manipulation of variables.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through interviews with six students from different majors. The interviews focused on key themes such as interest in learning English, motivational factors, learning constraints, and proposed strategies to improve learning effectiveness. In addition, direct observation of the English learning process in the classroom as well as supporting facilities such as language laboratories and extracurricular activities was also conducted to obtain richer contextual data. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through a literature study of various scientific articles, journals, and other digital sources relevant to the topic of English language learning in higher education.

The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, namely by identifying and grouping the main themes that emerged from the results of interviews, observations, and literature studies. The analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing in accordance with the qualitative analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This approach is expected to produce a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of English language learning in Islamic universities, especially in the context of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

# **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

# English Proficiency Level of Students in UIN Imam Bonjol Padang

The results of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with six students of English Tadris Study Program of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. This study aims to describe the students' self-perception of their English language ability as well as the tendency of interest in its

use in academic and daily life. Based on the data collected, one student stated that she had very good English skills. She actively participates in English debate competitions and regularly uses English in his daily communication, both orally and in writing.

Two students stated that their English skills were in the good category. They feel quite confident in delivering presentations using English and are able to understand English materials well, although they still feel nervous in certain official or academic situations. The other two students rated their English skills in the fair category. They felt that they could understand written materials and listen to English audio, but had difficulty in spontaneous speaking and often hesitated in constructing sentences. One student revealed that her English skills were still lacking. He said that lack of vocabulary, difficulty in sentence structure, and lack of confidence were the main obstacles in using English.

The results of this study show that there are variations in students' self-perceptions of their English skills. This is relevant to Yashima's view in the journal (Husnayaini, 2016) which states that self-perception competence is an individual's ability to assess and believe the extent to which they are able to perform an activity, including the use of a foreign language. Positive self-perception can be the main driver for someone to be brave and active in using English.

Students who have a very positive self-perception tend to actively use English in various contexts, including competitions, academic forums, and daily communication. This indicates a belief in their own abilities, as well as an intrinsic drive to continue using and developing language skills.

In contrast, students who rated themselves moderately or poorly showed a tendency to avoid using English, especially in formal contexts. They recognized internal barriers such as lack of confidence, fear of mistakes, and limited vocabulary. This finding suggests that negative self-perception can limit students' opportunities to practice and improve their competence.

This finding also supports data from *EF English Proficiency Index*(2024), that mentioned ranks Indonesia 80th out of 116 countries with a score of 468, falls into the low category. Factors of low English proficiency nationally, such as unequal access to learning and lack of language practice in the social environment, also affect students' self-perception in the local context, including at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

Thus, students' self-perception of English proficiency plays an important role in determining how actively they use the language. Educational interventions that build confidence and create a supportive environment for English language practice are indispensable in improving students' ability and motivation to speak English.

# **Aspects of English That are Interesting to Students**

Based on the results of interviews with six students of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang from various majors and backgrounds, data were obtained regarding the most popular aspects of English learning. From the interview data, it can be concluded that speaking is the most popular aspect (mentioned by four out of six respondents), followed by listening (three respondents), vocabulary (two respondents), writing, reading, and grammar by one respondent each.

The interview results show that speaking is the aspect of English skills that students are most interested in. This is not surprising, given that speaking skills are essential for direct communication. Students feel that speaking can help them increase their confidence in conveying ideas orally, both in academic and social settings. This is supported by (Sulistiyaningsih et al., 2023), which states that success in speaking skills is often an indicator of success in learning English.

The listening aspect is the second aspect that is quite popular. Good listening skills enable students to understand context, intonation and meaning in conversations. Students mentioned that the habit of listening to English content, such as podcasts or movies, helps them to recognize the correct pronunciation of words and enrich their understanding of spoken language.

Furthermore, some students also mentioned an interest in vocabulary, arguing that vocabulary mastery is the basis for understanding all aspects of language skills, including reading, listening, and speaking. This is in accordance with the statement (Sulistiyaningsih et al., 2023) that language skills are highly dependent on having an adequate vocabulary.

Writing and reading were also mentioned by one respondent each. Writing is considered important for expressing ideas in writing, although it is recognized as a challenging aspect because it requires precision in structure and grammar. Meanwhile, reading was considered useful for gaining insight, expanding vocabulary, and understanding different types of English texts. This finding is in line with the view that reading can strengthen writing skills, as well as support the development of students' critical thinking (Sulistiyaningsih et al., 2023)

The grammar aspect also did not go unnoticed. Although only mentioned by one student, grammar is considered an important basis in forming structurally correct sentences, especially in academic contexts. Students realize that without a good understanding of grammar, they will find it difficult to construct sentences that are precise and easy to understand.

Overall, students' interest in various aspects of English reflects their need for communicative yet structured language skills. Thus, approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are highly relevant, as they combine real communication practices with language structure reinforcement. As stated by (Ashila et al., 2024), interaction-focused methods build students' confidence and readiness to use English in a variety of contexts.

# **Effectiveness of English Learning in College**

Based on the results of interviews involving six respondents, it was found that four students felt that English learning on campus was still ineffective. They stated that the teaching methods tend to be monotonous, too theory-centered, and provide less space for speaking practice.

One student mentioned that lecturers tend to only read material from slides without a variety of interactive activities. Two other students felt that the learning was quite effective, but highlighted the need for improvement in the approach, especially in more interesting and interactive learning media. They also mentioned that time constraints hindered the practice of speaking and listening skills.

These findings suggest that there are challenges in the English language learning process that need to be addressed. This is in line with the findings of (Darmayenti & Nofriadi, 2014) which states that lecturers' English competence, especially in speaking and writing skills, is still weak. This has an impact on the quality of teaching that students receive. Therefore, the current learning model needs to be evaluated and developed to better suit the needs of students.

On the other hand, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang has been trying to overcome this challenge through the Language Development Technical Implementation Unit (UPT). This UPT organizes various programs such as the Basic Ability Test (TKD) and language briefing training, as well as language competency improvement services for the academic community. This effort shows the institution's commitment to improving students' foreign language skills, especially in welcoming global challenges.

# **Motivational Factors for Learning English**

One of the six respondents, five mentioned that they were motivated to learn English because they wanted to develop their self-worth. Three respondents mentioned career preparation as an important motivation. Four respondents mentioned academic needs (e.g. TOEFL score). Two respondents also mentioned interest in traveling as an additional reason. The students realize that mastering English can improve their competence and competitiveness in the global era. With good English skills, they feel more confident in facing various opportunities, both in academic and professional contexts.

Mastery of English is also seen as an important asset to continue their studies to a higher level, including the opportunity to study abroad. Students understand that English is the key to accessing various international knowledge sources and building a wider network. This desire to develop self-worth through mastery of English reflects students' awareness of the importance of preparing themselves to face the demands of an increasingly competitive global world.

This finding shows that students of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang have a high awareness of the importance of mastering English in personal and career development. This is in line with the opinion of (Cahya Utari et al., 2023) In addition, the academic and career motivations mentioned by respondents support the results of research (Siregar et al., 2023) which states that English is

becoming an important tool to increase income and position in the world of work, especially in large-scale companies. For example, a good TOEFL score will open up opportunities for students to access higher education at leading universities, especially in English-speaking countries. This shows that mastery of English has a significant impact on the educational and career opportunities of individuals around the world (Juliantina & Permatasari, 2024)

Meanwhile, other factors such as traveling are also one of their motivating factors to learn English. In addition, interest in traveling to English-speaking countries also encourages individuals to learn the language. With English language skills, travelers can communicate more effectively, understand the local culture, and enjoy a richer travel experience.

# **Constraints in English Learning**

Five out of six students stated that the English learning process in class is still dominated by the monotonous lecture method and written assignments. This is considered to make the classroom atmosphere less interesting and boring. Four students revealed that they had difficulty understanding the material due to the lack of interaction with lecturers and the lack of direct practice in the use of English in class. The observation results show that the available language laboratory has not been maximally utilized. Some devices such as headsets and computers are in less than optimal condition. Three students admitted that they had difficulty dividing their time to learn English due to the tight schedule of lectures, coupled with campus organization activities.

Two students appear passive in the learning process and tend to avoid class activities, such as discussions or presentations. They feel less confident when using English. Some students expressed anxiety and fear when they had to speak in English, especially for fear of being wrong and being compared with other friends. Students also stated that they rarely use English in their daily lives, so they find it difficult to see the practical benefits of learning English.

Based on the results of interviews and observations, it was found that students' interest in learning English is influenced by various internal and external factors. First, monotonous learning methods are the main factor in decreasing interest in learning. This is in line with the findings (Amalia et al., 2024) which states that teaching methods that are less interactive lead to a decrease in student motivation. When learning only focuses on lectures and assignments, students become passive and unenthusiastic.

Secondly, the lack of interaction and hands-on practice makes it difficult for students to understand the material. In fact, English language skills rely heavily on oral practice and hands-on experience. Students' diverse learning styles are not accommodated in conventional learning methods, thus impacting on the effectiveness of the learning process.

Third, supporting facilities such as language laboratories that are not optimized hinder learning. The laboratory should be a place for students to listen, speak and interact actively in English. If well-equipped, these facilities can improve student interest and learning outcomes.

Fourth, time management is also a challenge. Busy lecture schedules and organizational activities make it difficult for students to pay special attention to improving their English language skills. As stated by (Listiani & Saragih, 2022) limited learning time can be an obstacle in developing language competence.

Fifth, boredom, low self-confidence and speaking anxiety are significant internal barriers. (Fitriani et al., 2022) states that factors such as fear of being assessed, fear of comparison, and lack of confidence can hinder active participation in English learning. (Mardatillah, 2024) also mentioned that many students feel nervous and unsure when they have to speak in front of the class, especially during presentations.

Finally, the lack of exposure to English in everyday life causes students to have difficulty applying theory to practice. As stated by (Yunita Yanti, 2021), Because English is rarely used in the surrounding environment, students only memorize the theory without understanding its real application. This makes learning irrelevant for some students.

# Strategies to Increase Students' Interest in English Learning

Based on the interviews with six students of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, there are several main strategies that they propose to increase their interest in learning English. These results are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Students' Proposed Strategies to Increase Interest in Learning English

Proposed Strategies	Total Number of Students
Organization of English-themed activities	6 people
Establishment of an English-speaking community/environment	5 people
Provision of external motivation (scholarships, incentives)	4 people
Engaging Learning Approaches	4 people
Native Speaker Involvement	3 people

In general, students gave open responses to the learning strategies that they found effective. The interview results showed that the majority of respondents agreed that competitive activities, language communities, and fun and hands-on learning methods can increase interest in English.

The findings from the interviews indicate a high awareness of the importance of innovation in English language learning. The following discussion explains each of the main strategies proposed:

- 1. Organizing of English-themed activities
  - Most respondents emphasized the need for academic and non-academic activities such as English-themed seminars, trainings, or competitions. Interactive activities such as English Speech Contest, Debating Competition, and English Camp are considered effective in motivating students (Suhaimi & Permatasari, 2024). At UIN Imam Bonjol Padang itself, the Fantastic English activity by the Student Association of the English Department already reflects this strategy, although its scope is still limited to TBI students.
- 2. Establishment of an English-speaking community/environment Students also realize the importance of an environment that supports the practice of English. The formation of communities such as the English Conversation Club (ECC) plays an important role in developing speaking skills (Ramadhania & Christanti, 2024) UKM Bahasa (AUSELL) on campus has become a platform for learning various languages, including English. In addition, proposals such as English Day and utilizing social media to share English content are considered to strengthen the learning community.
- 3. Providing of External Motivation
  - Some students suggested scholarships and subsidized TOEFL/IELTS certification for students who show progress. They also suggested sharing sessions with successful alumni or professionals to motivate students. This is in line with the purpose of providing external motivation to foster enthusiasm for learning and demonstrate the relevance of English in the world of work.
- 4. Engaging Learning Approaches
  - Innovative approaches such as the use of movies, social media or interactive learning apps are highly recommended. Technology is considered an essential tool in modern learning (Fatkhiyaturrizqi, 2024). The use of fun entertainment media can enhance students' understanding of the language context naturally.
- 5. Native Speaker Involvement
  - The involvement of native speakers in the learning process is also considered very important. They can provide a more authentic and interactive learning experience (*Native Speaker Dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris*, 2024)). Students suggested cooperation with foreign universities, the implementation of English only policy, and the presence of native speakers as guest lecturers as concrete steps.

Overall, the strategies proposed by students are very relevant and reflect the real needs in the English learning process. If implemented in an integrated manner, these strategies have the potential to increase students' interest, motivation, and learning outcomes in English at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang..

# CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the interest of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang students in learning English is influenced by personal, academic, and career motivations, but is hampered by monotonous teaching methods, limited facilities, and lack of self-confidence. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers and study program managers develop more interactive learning strategies, provide conducive language practice spaces, and involve native speakers to improve the effectiveness and interest of students in learning English.

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