TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN OVERCOMING LEARNING BARRIERS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

STRATEGI GURU DALAM MENGATASI HAMBATAN BELAJAR DI KELAS EFL

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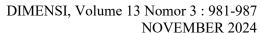
Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi strategi yang digunakan guru EFL untuk mengatasi hambatan pembelajaran di kelas. Pendekatan metode campuran digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data melalui kuesioner skala Likert dengan 30 guru dan wawancara dengan tiga guru dari berbagai daerah di Indonesia. Temuan kuantitatif mengungkapkan bahwa guru sering menggunakan strategi seperti pembelajaran yang dibedakan, dukungan motivasi, dan integrasi media digital. Melalui pengkodean tematik, analisis kualitatif lebih lanjut mengungkapkan teknik-teknik spesifik, termasuk menyederhanakan materi, menggunakan pembelajaran kolaboratif, mengelola fokus siswa, dan mendorong pembelajar pasif melalui pujian dan membangun hubungan baik. Hasil-hasil ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya praktik pengajaran yang adaptif dan berpusat pada siswa untuk mengatasi beragam tantangan di kelas EFL. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kombinasi strategi kognitif, emosional, dan teknologi sangat penting untuk meningkatkan hasil pembelajaran.

Kata kunci: strategi guru, hambatan belajar, EFL (English Foreign Learner)

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the strategies that EFL teachers use to overcome learning barriers in the classroom. A mixed methods approach was used to collect data through a Likert-scale questionnaire with 30 teachers and interviews with three teachers from various regions in Indonesia. Quantitative findings revealed that teachers frequently employed strategies such as differentiated instruction, motivational support, and digital media integration. Through thematic coding, the qualitative analysis further revealed specific techniques, including simplifying materials, employing collaborative learning, managing student focus, and encouraging passive learners through praise and rapport building. These results underscore the importance of adaptive, student-centered teaching practices for addressing the diverse challenges in EFL classrooms. The study suggests that a combination of cognitive, emotional, and technological strategies is essential for improving learning outcomes.

Keywords: *teachers' strategies*, *learning barriers, EFL (English Foreign Learner)*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right that must be fulfilled by both the state and citizens, as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution, Article 31, Paragraphs (1) and (2). However, the reality of learning practices varies significantly. Many teachers of English as a foreign language encounter challenges such as low student motivation, language anxiety, differences in ability levels, and limited learning resources (Sukmadinata, 2012; Susanto, 2016). In the context of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, the teacher assumes a multifaceted role that extends beyond the mere transmission of information. The teacher functions as a facilitator, responsible for reading the dynamics of the class and selecting adaptive strategies. For instance, the implementation of differentiated instruction, scaffolding, interactive media, and the integration of digital technology to support student learning (Faudi et al., 2023)

However, the understanding of the most effective strategies remains limited, particularly across different contexts (e.g., urban versus rural schools). Research conducted by (Bachtiar & Puspitasari (2024) revealed that educators frequently encounter obstacles, including constrained resources, inadequate training, and opposition to innovative approaches in collaborative learning settings. This finding emerged from a comprehensive mixed methods study involving 42 teachers and 6 interviews. A related study in Indonesia reported the use of various strategies by EFL teachers to manage students with deviant behavior, including seating position, verbal rewards, and group discussions (Wulandari & Andanty, 2023)

Furthermore, Zulfikar et al., (2022) found that teachers' questioning strategies, such as simplified question structures, repetition, allowing time for reflection, and positive verbal responses, promoted student engagement and improved EFL classroom learning outcomes.
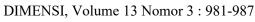
While certain studies have addressed specific aspects, such as classroom management, psychological support, or technology, an integrated understanding of teachers' strategies when dealing with learning barriers in an EFL context is rarely presented. A paucity of studies exists that integrate quantitative and qualitative data in a balanced manner within a local context, such as that of Indonesia. Therefore, this study employs a mixed methods approach to capture the strategies actually used in the field—both through Likert-scale questionnaires and direct teacher interviews.
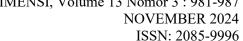
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research design. According to Sugiyono (2020) mixed methods research is a methodological approach that combines numerical data and in-depth descriptive analysis to explore complex problems. The researchers employed a dual-methodology approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by teachers to overcome learning barriers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The quantitative data were gathered using a Likert-scale questionnaire, while the qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with selected teachers.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling, targeting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers with active teaching roles and relevant experience in handling learning challenges.

A total of 30 EFL teachers from various regions across Indonesia completed the online Likert-scale questionnaire, ensuring a diverse contextual representation from different school environments (urban, suburban, and rural areas).

Furthermore, three teachers were selected for semi-structured interviews, chosen for their availability and extensive experience in implementing classroom strategies.

This sampling approach was designed to ensure both breadth and depth of data, consistent with the mixed-methods design of the study.

Instruments

Two primary research instruments were utilized in this study:

1. Questionnaire: The study utilizes a structured Likert-scale questionnaire, which is a tool designed to systematically assess teachers' strategies and perceptions in addressing learning difficulties. The items were constructed based on prior studies and relevant literature.
2. Interview Guide: The following set of inquiries is designed to explore teachers' perspectives, challenges, and strategies in a more detailed and contextual manner. The interview questions covered a range of topics, including classroom management, instructional adaptation, and psychological support strategies.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire disseminated to EFL teachers across several regions in Indonesia. The link was disseminated through professional teacher groups and networks.

Concurrently, qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews conducted in person and online, contingent on the teacher's availability. Each interview was recorded for transcription and analysis purposes, with each interview lasting approximately 15–30 minutes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were employed to analyze the questionnaire data using SPSS (Mackiewicz, 2018). The subsequent statistical analysis entailed the calculation of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and coded thematically using a manual thematic analysis approach. This approach focused on recurring patterns, strategies, and teacher reflections related to learning barriers in EFL classrooms.

FINDINGS

1. Questionnaire Results

The Likert-scale questionnaire was disseminated to 30 English teachers from diverse regions in Indonesia. The utilization of SPSS for data analysis has yielded insights into the prevalent strategies employed to address students' learning barriers.

Table 1 Questionnaire Results

Variable	Mean	Std	Description
Building students' confidence through motivation	4.17	0.747	Very High
Implementing differentiated instruction	4.27	0.691	Very High
Using digital media to enhance student understanding	4.10	0.803	High
Giving individual attention to students with learning difficulties	4.13	0.776	High
Providing verbal praise to increase student enthusiasm	4.07	0.868	High

The results of this study suggest that teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) tend to employ motivational strategies and differentiated learning methods to address the diverse needs of their students. The integration of digital tools and the attention to individual learners also reflect a strong adaptive teaching practice in overcoming learning barriers.

2. Interview Results

Interviews were conducted with three EFL teachers. From thematic analysis, five major themes emerged:

a.) Material Adaptation

Teachers employed a variety of strategies to facilitate comprehension, including simplifying sentence structures, clarifying vocabulary, and utilizing Bahasa Indonesia when appropriate. One teacher prepared at least 10 essential vocabulary words before class.

b.) Use of Digital Tools

The integration of digital media, such as PowerPoint presentations, video recordings, and online quizzes, has been identified as a significant factor in enhancing student engagement and enthusiasm. One teacher noted that the digital review "exceeded student expectations."

c.) Group Work and Peer Support

The utilization of group work exhibited variability in its application. The utilization of this method was infrequent among some teachers, who prioritized individual task emphasis. Conversely, other teachers employed it regularly to foster peer-assisted learning. Grouping students with different abilities was a common pedagogical technique.

d.) Managing large or Distracted Classes

The implemented strategies encompassed a reconfiguration of seating arrangements, the utilization of ice-breakers, and the allocation of group-based assignments. These methods proved effective in maintaining classroom focus and participation.

e.) Encouraging Passive Students

In order to engage students who were characterized by a propensity for reticence, educators employed a variety of strategies, including the use of praise, points, gentle questioning, and personal interaction. The implementation of strategies such as fostering rapport and

allocating modest tasks proved to be efficacious in enhancing participants' sense of self-assurance.

These themes reflect the dynamic, student-centered approaches adopted by EFL teachers in real classroom settings. The qualitative data corroborates the findings of the questionnaire and emphasizes specific strategies employed across diverse teaching contexts.

DISCUSSIONS

This study revealed that EFL teachers consistently implement various strategies to overcome learning barriers among students. Quantitative and qualitative data suggest that differentiated instruction, motivational support, and integrating digital tools are the most frequently used and effective methods.

The high average score for differentiated instruction (M = 4.27) underscores its significance in catering to diverse student abilities. This finding aligns with Zulfikar et al., (2022), who emphasized the importance of adapting teaching approaches to foster equitable learning outcomes. Interview results further supported this idea, showing that teachers simplified materials and translated complex vocabulary, especially for younger learners.

Motivational strategies, including verbal praise and confidence-building, were also widely reported (M = 4.17 and 4.07), which reinforces the idea that emotional support plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Teachers described their efforts to engage students personally through rewards, one-on-one questions, and positive reinforcement, which mirrors findings by Ahmed (2022). Ahmed emphasized the impact of psychological barriers, such as low self-confidence and anxiety on language learning.

Digital media emerged as a key component in overcoming learning difficulties, with an average rating of 4.10. Interviewees cited the use of videos, PowerPoint presentations, and interactive quizzes as helpful resources. These findings align with those of Faudi et al., (2023) and Gobel et al., (2024) who discovered that technology supports comprehension and increases student engagement and motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

Interestingly, the qualitative findings revealed nuances in the implementation of collaborative learning. While some teachers used group work regularly, others were more selective due to curriculum constraints. Nevertheless, the use of peer-assisted strategies is consistent with the findings of Wulandari & Andanty (2023) who observed that group discussions and peer support can facilitate classroom management and foster inclusivity.

Classroom management techniques such as icebreakers, groupings, and seat rearrangement were also highlighted. These findings resonate with the work of Marashi & Assgar (2019) who found that effective classroom organization reduces student anxiety and enhances learning conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the strategies used by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to address learning barriers in the classroom using a mixed methods approach. The results revealed that teachers frequently utilized differentiated instruction, motivational techniques, digital media, collaborative learning, and various classroom management strategies to assist their students. These practices were reflected not only in the quantitative findings, but

also supported by the rich insights gathered through interviews.

Integrating adaptive, student-centered strategies highlights teachers' proactive role in overcoming academic and affective obstacles. Teachers' ability to simplify materials, engage students with interactive tools, and foster a supportive learning environment is crucial to ensuring an inclusive, effective EFL education. The findings underscore the importance of professional flexibility, digital literacy, and emotional intelligence for navigating diverse classroom settings.

Suggestions for future research include examining the long-term impact of these strategies on student outcomes and exploring ways to better prepare educators to address learning difficulties through teacher training programs. Schools and educational policymakers should provide sufficient support systems, including access to digital resources and ongoing professional development, to enable teachers to consistently implement effective strategies.

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