

Exploring Challenges and Strategies in Teaching English to Non-English Majors within the Framework of Community Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

In the current era, the demand for English proficiency extends beyond English majors to students from various academic backgrounds. However, non-English department students often face challenges in formal classrooms, and language communities have emerged as alternative spaces to foster informal English learning. Despite their growing presence, the experiences of English tutors in informal settings are rarely examined. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the challenges and strategies of teaching English to non-English major students within a university-based language learning community in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study design, two sixth-semester English department students, both active community tutors, were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and group discussions, and analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. Findings reveal two key challenges faced by tutors: students' low motivation and tutors' limited competence in utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT). To address these issues, tutors adopted Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to create a more engaging environment and ability-based grouping to tailor instruction to learners' proficiency levels. These strategies helped decrease classroom disparities and enhance student participation. This study concludes that the effectiveness of informal language learning is influenced not only by instructional methods but also by students' enthusiasm and tutors' adaptability. It also highlights the need for ongoing training of tutors in ICT and reflective teaching practices. While the study offers valuable insights, its scope is limited to two participants; thus, future research involving larger samples and a longer period are recommended.

Keywords: community; language learning; challenges; strategies

INTRODUCTION

In this globalized world, the ability to speak more than one language is essential. The interconnected world of business, international relations, education, and digital media means that people need to be able to communicate in multiple languages. Among all the languages spoken internationally, English is the most commonly used, especially in the world of business, science, education, and technology. Crystal (2003) calls English a global language due to its significant role in intercultural communication and its widespread use in many countries. English is important not only because of its function in global forums, but also because it helps people convey thoughts, feelings, and intentions clearly, both orally and in writing (Yunus et al., 2023). Despite this issue, not everyone has equal access to learning English, especially in a country like Indonesia. In many areas, students experience various problems in English lessons at school, such as limited learning time, oversized classes, and a lack of hands-on practice opportunities (Pratiwi, 2024). This problem is supported by the daily use of more local languages, Indonesian as a second language, and English as a foreign language is rarely used (Puspitasari & Devi, 2019). A recent study found that teaching English in a class with students from different backgrounds can be a difficulty because language skills, cultures, and learning styles are not the same. However, this can be overcome by teaching in a way that recognizes cultural differences, adapts learning methods, and encourages students to learn together and help each other (Safeer et al.,

2024). In addition, teaching English at a university can be better if it focuses on the needs of the students, uses many types of media, and is assisted by technology. Therefore, this is often hampered by the fact that students' various abilities, teachers' lack of training, and technology is difficult to implement properly (Li, 2025).

Apart from schools and technology, there are also language learning communities that provide an informal space to learn together through peers. As an organization, the community in the English language class acts as a shared learning space that allows its members to share insights and actively discuss in English. For students, this community is an effective means to practice their speaking skills and deepen their mastery of English (Soto et al., 2020). For Indonesian students, joining English communities is one of the most effective strategies to practice the language in a realistic and supportive environment (Sari & Junaidi, 2024). The community language learning method helps students learn English more easily. In this method, students have more time to practice. If the students are confused or don't understand some words, they can ask the teacher directly. In this concept, the teacher acts as a counselor, ready to help them find the right words to talk with their friends. Thus, the learning process becomes more comfortable and supportive (Prabhavanthy, 2012, as cited in Surahman & Sofyan, 2021).

In fact, in language learning communities, support from fellow members and the use of digital tools such as videos, apps, or games are very important to make learning more interesting and effective. The tutors have their own challenges, so they need different ways of teaching. Previous research has shown the key things that can help them learn are strong motivation, lots of practice opportunities, and interesting and creative ways of learning. Despite the growing popularity of language communities, most research still addresses students' experiences in formal classrooms. The challenges experienced by tutors in informal learning, such as community, are rarely examined. This study emerged from concerns about the current situation in a community, where recent changes in class participant dynamics in the English language learning community have led to confusion among tutors in determining appropriate teaching strategies. This situation has become one of the key reasons for conducting this research. Furthermore, limited studies discuss how the active role of communities and the use of technology can help the language learning process outside the formal classroom. To address this gap, the present study offers a detailed exploration of their instructional experiences, challenges, and strategies in an informal language community setting.

Therefore, this study sought to find out the experiences of English tutors who teach in a community at one of the campuses in Indonesia and discover the difficulties they face when teaching non-English speaking students. This study also seeks to explore what strategies tutors use to deal with students' different abilities in an informal learning setting. By looking at the tutors' side, this research can provide a deeper picture of the teaching process in language communities and help answer the broader question of how informal learning can be more open and effective in teaching.

To guide the investigation, the study is structured around the following research questions:

1. What are the main challenges encountered by English tutors in teaching non-English major students in a community language learning environment?
2. How do they deal with the varied levels of English proficiency among learners?

METHODS

Research Design

Based on the aim of this study, this study applied a qualitative approach to deeply explore the challenges faced by English tutors in teaching students from various backgrounds. By adopting a single case, the information will be explained as clearly as possible through an in-depth interview with the participant. In addition, the overall result, using a detailed description of the case, does not include a number.

Participants

This research involved of two English tutors (one female and one male) as participants. Both participants are sixth-semester English department students, aged 21, and active members of the language learning community. Each has approximately one year of experience teaching English in the community. In addition, to know the details of the participants the criteria of each participant were explained.

The first participant is experienced more less than two years as one of the online private tutors at the English language institute located in Purwakarta, West Java. English teaching activities have been carried out since November 2024 until now, with the number of classes between 1 to 5 per day and the duration of one hour per class. Students come from various backgrounds, ranging from elementary school children to adults and middle-aged people. In addition to providing online tutoring, she also offers offline tutoring services and teaches children face-to-face for the same duration. In addition, she also joined as an English tutor in the community.

The second participant has experience in English for tourism and is also a secretary in 2 periods of the community. The participants were selected by purposive sampling because the participants had good relations with the researcher also good at English academics. In addition, this study is centers in a language community in a university in Indonesia that provides free access for students to learn some foreign languages, including English, Arabic, Turkish, Mandarin, Russian, Japanese, and Thai. Some classes are taught by native speakers, while others are led by fellow students. Among the languages offered, English remains the most popular, particularly among non-English department students.

Data Collection

The data were collected by contacting the tutors, asking for their help to be a participant in this research, then making an appointment outside lecture hours to conduct an interview. In addition to obtaining more data, the researcher conducted a group discussion with the tutors in free time, also the authors used triangulation to ensure data validity.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis Yin (2003) through the detailed description of the case. The purpose of using thematic analysis use manual coding to classify the tutors' experiences into specific categories, then combine some categories based on the interview transcript to determine the specific themes of the case (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher applied several strategies to increase internal validity. One of the important steps taken was researcher also used participant feedback or validation from participants, where the participants were allowed to review interview transcripts and interpretations made by researchers. This aims to ensure that the data presented truly reflects the participants' experiences and views accurately. To strengthen the credibility of the data and gain a deeper understanding of the research context, the researcher also conducted direct observation during the learning process in the classroom. These observations were conducted over as many meetings as possible to capture direct interactions between tutors and learners in the community. Longer engagement with participants also allowed the researcher to build a good and trusting relationship, so that participants were more open in expressing their opinions. Through this combination of strategies, this research seeks to maintain methodological rigor and ensure that the findings are reliable, and reflect real experiences in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes the results of the interviews with the tutors. The results were analyzed using a thematic analysis, as described by (Braun & Clarke 2006). Using this method, the researcher looked for patterns that emerged repeatedly from the tutors' answers, and then grouped them into major themes. These themes represent the tutors' lived experiences of teaching English to students from non-English departments in the language learning community. As a first step, the first section focuses on the main challenges tutors face and the second sections focuses on tutors' strategies to overcome the challenges.

1. *The challenges*

These challenges came up frequently in the interviews, and the researcher divided them into subthemes to make them easier to understand. Each subtheme is explained with direct quotes from the interview participants so that readers can see a real picture of their experiences. After that, the researcher relates the findings to relevant theories or previous research results, so that the discussion is stronger and can be compared with other studies.

1.1 *Students' low motivation*

In doing something, motivation is needed, as well as in teaching and learning foreign languages. Motivation comes and goes like a wave, sometimes high, sometimes low. Both students and teachers need motivation to be consistent in learning a second language. In this context, students' lack of motivation to learn English as well as the lack of support from other parties also become obstacles for tutors in the learning process so that tutors experience difficulties in teaching. Therefore, the following finding will be served by discussing how the role of students' learning motivation affects the motivation of English tutors in informal settings. The following section will present the findings:

Table 1

Interview script of tutors

Q1: What are the biggest challenges you face when teaching in this community, and is there any support from the community or other parties that you feel helps?
R1: Students' interest in learning has decreased greatly also lack of support from participants, perhaps the support of tutor friends would be helpful in overcoming the problems that occur in this community.
R2: Lack of enthusiasm of students to attend classes and no support from other parties so far

The interview above shows that student motivation plays an important role for tutors in the community. According to Dornyei (2001), motivation is dynamic and can change over time, depending on factors such as the classroom atmosphere, teaching methods used, and students' personal goals. Based on the observation by the researcher, one of the tutors once revealed that if the students have high motivation to learn English, surely the tutors will be eager to teach them, and vice versa, if among the students have less motivation, then the tutors also lose enthusiasm for the learning process. Aligned with recent research by Ilimdarovna (2025) points out that one of the things that can make learners excited about learning is interest. If a foreign language teacher can keep their students enthusiastic and excited, then the learning process becomes more enjoyable and easier to achieve. To build students' motivation in learning English, tutors sometimes still confused about finding the right way to keep them enthusiastic in learning. One of the way adopted by the tutors is conducting self-reflection on learning after the class is held, with the aim of realizing weaknesses and preparing materials and learning models that will be used for the next meeting. By reflecting, teachers can identify aspects of their teaching that need improvement and develop new approaches to improve the effectiveness and quality of learning in the classroom (Ali et al., 2023).

1.2 Lack of understanding in using ICT

The familiarization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language learning, especially in informal settings, is not given much attention. Not all educators can apply ICT in their learning. In this technological development, the majority of students are already proficient in using technology. Some of the educators in their learning are still adopting traditional learning media. For this reason, it is important for educators to always stay updated on technological developments so that classroom learning becomes more in line with the current generation. Related to this issue, the current finding shows that not all tutors in this language community are proficient in using ICT in learning so that students' interest in learning decreases because they are a little bored. Based on the observations made by the researchers, students look a little bored if the delivery of material is done only by oral or written explanations without adopting other sources such as videos, games, or anything internet-based. For that reason, the following interview results were served:

Table 2

Interview script of tutors

Q1: What learning resources do you use most often: video, songs, or games? How effective do you think?

R1: from books, English websites on the internet, and compiling their materials based on experience. It very helpful and effective for me, I usually also use videos, songs, and internet-based games such as wordwall or quizzez to check the students' understanding of what I am saying and improve the participants' English skills and components.

R2: There is no class material, I just focus them on speaking, not yet because I lack knowledge about using media or applications that are accessed by the internet.

Refer to the interview with the tutors above, it points out that the importance of enacting Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language learning is very useful in this 21st era. Lack of understanding about using ICT in learning can affect to the students' learning interest. According to Qin and Shuo (2011), the use of ICT can create diversity in English teaching materials, learning situations, and teaching approaches used. ICT also makes the English learning atmosphere more interactive, customizable, and full of innovation. Aligning with the recent study, ICT has been shown to support improvements in English language learning and to develop literacy skills. Through easy access and innovative tools, ICT can evolve traditional teaching to the modern (Purwanto et al., 2025). Despite of this issue, tutors also often experience difficulties in integrating computers thoroughly into learning. They have to spend a lot of time on instructional activities, which reduces the time available for students to practice and experience the skills learned (Cox et al., 1999). However, a previous study conducted by Çakıcı (2016) found that the lack of teachers who have experience in choosing the most appropriate technology that suits the learning material, and the challenge of finding activities that suit students' learning styles, are factors that need to be considered before implementing ICT in language classes. In addition, the limited facilities of classrooms are also an important consideration in using technology in the teaching and learning process.

2. The strategies

After describing the main challenges, the following section focuses on the strategies used by tutors to overcome these challenges. These strategies are presented thematically and supported by quotes from the interviews to provide an overview of how the tutors managed the classroom situation. Each strategy is then discussed with relevant theory and findings from previous research to validate the practical approaches used by the participants.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

As the context is “community”, there will be a lot of free communication in it such as discussions, presentations or questions and answers. For this reason, it is very important for tutors and students of English classes in the community to actively speak and not be silent. After analyzed the data, it was found that the strategy that tutors do to keep their students actively speaking is by using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. In the following, the researcher will present the findings in a table below:

Table 3

Interview script of tutors

Q1: What is the most effective method to attract your students?
R1: Invite them to talk or engage in discussion sessions. Teach the material in a fun atmosphere so that it is not boring. Participants will not be interested in a class that is boring and too rigid. Therefore, it is best to intersperse the class with jokes. Invite participants to discuss while playing for a warm-up.
R2: Using methods such as involving students because they just need to be active not just get material like in general classes.

Based on the interview, it can be found that the participants examine the communicative language teaching. Communicative language teaching is a way to engage students to communicate actively. Dealing with this, Savignon (1987) employed that learning a second language will be more effective if it involves students as a whole, namely physically, emotionally, and mentally. This means that students are not just sitting still, but actively moving and talking. They also feel happy, interested, and involved in learning. In addition, their minds are working to understand and use the language. If all parts of the student are involved, then learning a language will be easier and more enjoyable. Linking with the previous study, Communicative language teaching (CLT) makes students more active and involved in the learning process. Unlike the traditional method, where students often just listen to the teacher speak, CLT encourages students to speak, listen and interact with their peers (Putri, 2025). This method is proven to help students master the language faster and make the classroom atmosphere more lively and fun. In addition, the finding can be proven from observation current study shows there is a significant difference between other foreign language classes that only provide explanations rather than involving students to communicate. For that, in English classes, researchers found that students are more active when invited to discuss rather than given a lot of explanations. Thus, students not only understand the language but can also use it directly.

2.1 Ability-based grouping

Students who join this language community, especially in English classes, of course they have different levels of English language skills. Some of them are already at the intermediate level and above, some of them are still really learning from scratch. Different from the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the Ability Grouping was used as a teaching method in the community. Based on the observation and depth-interview, the researcher found that to facilitate learning, one of the ways the tutors classify them to the appropriate level. The first time the English class was opened, the tutors conducted a pre-test to determine the level of the students' abilities. Not only in offline class, the tutors also divide them by level in online classes too. Thus, learning can take place easily in both online and offline classes.

Table 4

Interview script of tutors

Q1: How do you handle a class with participants who have widely varying levels of English proficiency? Have you ever made groups based on ability level? If so, what was the impact?

R1: Grouping participants by level, then asking them to discuss with group mates who have the same English ability as them. The impact is good because we don't have to bother to divide the material into more varied materials just because the class has participants with varied English abilities.

R2: By organizing based on skills such as basic, intermediate, and advanced, it is easy to deliver material or activities according to the level of ability. This also has a good impact on us because it makes it easier for us to find material that matches the level.

Result indicated that grouping students in language learning according to their abilities also needs to be considered. The importance of ability grouping can have a good impact not only on students but also on language teachers. Aligned to the research findings of Braddock & Slavin (1992) employed that that students should be grouped according to their ability level, for example, in groups of smart, medium, or those who still need a lot of help. Therefore, this is important because each student has different learning needs. Referring to the researcher's observations, it was found that in this community, students who have mastered the most basic material will be put into the middle and upper groups to improve their understanding and so on. Previous research also states that grouping students based on ability, teachers can provide materials and assistance according to the needs of each group, so that learning can run more effectively and not make students feel too behind or too easy (McCarter, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted in a language learning community in one of the universities in Indonesia. The main objective was to find out the challenges and strategies tutors face when teaching students from non-English majors. From the interviews and observations, two main challenges were found. First, students' low motivation to learn, and second, tutors' lack of understanding in using technology or ICT in the teaching process. To overcome these challenges, the tutors use two main strategies. The first strategy is to use the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method. In this method, tutors invite students to be more active in speaking and discussing. The class atmosphere is made more relaxed and fun so that students do not get bored. This method is proven to increase students' interest in learning and make them more confident when speaking English. The second strategy is to group students based on their English ability. This way, tutors can provide material that suits each student's ability level, both in online and offline classes. This makes the learning process easier and less overwhelming for students who are just starting. In addition, the results of this study also show that tutor enthusiasm is strongly influenced by student enthusiasm. If students are eager to learn, tutors will also be more motivated to teach well. In contrast, if students are less enthusiastic, tutors will also feel less enthusiastic. Thus, learning success depends not only on the teaching method, but also on the cooperation and enthusiasm between tutors and students. Although the results of this study provide an interesting picture, there are limitations because it only involves two tutors from one community. Therefore, future research should involve more participants and be conducted over a longer period of time so that the results can be more extensive and in-depth. In conclusion, learning English in the community can be an effective way, provided that tutors are given sufficient training, especially in the use of technology, and continue to reflect on their teaching methods. Support from the community is essential for the learning process to run smoothly and be enjoyable for all.

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