

## **CHALLENGES OF DORMITORY STUDENTS IN IMPROVING FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS AT UIN SYAHADA PADANGSIDIMPUAN**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to identify and analyze the challenges faced by UIN Syahada Padang Sidimpuan dormitory students in improving their foreign language skills, especially English and Arabic as flagship programs. In addition, this study also explores the adaptation strategies used by students to overcome these challenges. Through a qualitative case study approach involving in-depth interviews and participatory observation, this study explores students' subjective experiences related to environmental constraints, motivation, access to resources, and social interaction in the context of foreign language learning in a dormitory environment. The findings show that the main challenges faced by dormitory children include the lack of an active foreign language environment, lack of supporting facilities such as books and interactive learning media, weak motivation to study independently, and limited guidance from the campus and dormitory management. In addition, differences in educational background and basic language skills are also inhibiting factors. This study recommends the need for the formation of a language community in the dormitory, the training of peer tutors, and the procurement of a routine foreign language coaching program that is integrated with dormitory activities. With the right strategy, the dormitory environment can be a potential forum for improving students' foreign language skills. The results of the research are expected to provide in-depth insights for universities and dorm managers in designing more effective interventions to support the development of students in foreign languages, which ultimately contributes to improving the quality of graduates at the international level.

**Keywords:** Learning Challenges, Dormitory Students, Foreign Language Learning (Arabic/English), UIN Syahada.

### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis tantangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa asrama UIN Syahada Padang Sidimpuan dalam meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa asing, terutama bahasa Inggris dan Arab sebagai program unggulan. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mengeksplorasi strategi adaptasi yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa untuk mengatasi tantangan-tantangan tersebut. Melalui pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif, penelitian ini menggali pengalaman subjektif mahasiswa terkait kendala lingkungan, motivasi, akses sumber daya, dan interaksi sosial dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa asing di lingkungan asrama. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa tantangan utama yang dihadapi anak asrama meliputi minimnya lingkungan berbahasa asing yang aktif, kurangnya fasilitas pendukung seperti buku dan media pembelajaran interaktif, lemahnya motivasi belajar secara*

*mandiri, serta terbatasnya pembinaan dari pihak kampus maupun pengurus asrama. Selain itu, perbedaan latar belakang pendidikan dan kemampuan dasar bahasa juga menjadi faktor penghambat. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan perlunya pembentukan komunitas bahasa di asrama, pelatihan tutor sebaya, serta pengadaan program rutin pembinaan bahasa asing yang terintegrasi dengan kegiatan asrama. Dengan strategi yang tepat, lingkungan asrama dapat menjadi wadah yang potensial dalam meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa asing mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan mendalam bagi pihak universitas dan pengelola asrama dalam merancang intervensi yang lebih efektif untuk mendukung pengembangan mahasiswa dalam berbahasa asing, yang pada akhirnya berkontribusi pada peningkatan kualitas lulusan di tingkat internasional.*

*Kata Kunci:Tantangan Pembelajaran, Mahasiswa Asrama,Pembelajaran Bahasa Asing (Arab/ Inggris),UIN Syahada.*

## **Introduction**

In this day of globalization, the ability to speak various languages, especially Arabic and English, has become increasingly vital for university graduates, including graduates of the State Islamic University (UIN). Arabic, as the language of the Qur'an and the major source of Islamic studies, plays a central role in religious understanding. Meanwhile, English, as the lingua franca of the globe, is the key to access to science, technology, and worldwide communication. Ideally, the UIN campus environment, including student dorms, should be a forum for conducive to the development of foreign language abilities. Language programs, interaction between students with varied language origins, and other supporting facilities are expected to boost the language learning process efficiently.

The dormitory atmosphere is designed to be a bustling language experiment. Interaction between students from varied scientific and geographical backgrounds might generate natural possibilities for language practice. Dormitory initiatives such as language buddy, language group talks, and language extracurricular activities can be conducted intensively. Ideally, dorms are equipped with supporting facilities such as a library with a variety of foreign language literature, a self-study resource center, and enough internet access. In addition, dormitory managers and peer tutors can play an active role in motivating and facilitating students to utilize foreign languages in regular interactions.

However, the reality on the ground often indicates that there is a gap between ideality and implementation. Although UIN Syahada Padang Sidimpuan includes language development programs, students living in dormitories may confront many problems that hamper their growth in Arabic and English. Limited time due to tight lecture schedules and dormitory activities, lack of language interaction outside formal classes, lack of adequate resources and supporting facilities in the dormitory, and varying learning motivations between students can be significant inhibiting factors.

In addition, disparities in the degree of language ability amongst pupils might often induce discomfort or reluctance to participate in language activities. High academic load and lack of spare time are also issues that hinder students from actively enhancing their foreign language skills in the dormitory environment.

Some indications that lead to problems in improving foreign language skills among UIN Syahada Padang Sidimpuan dormitory students include:

1. Low level of student participation in language extracurricular activities.
2. Lack of student initiative to use Arabic and English in everyday conversations in the dormitory environment.
3. Language proficiency test results that have not reached the expected standard.
4. There were complaints from students about difficulties in understanding foreign language lecture materials.
5. The lack of programs or activities in the dormitory that are specifically designed to improve foreign language skills.

To overcome these challenges, some solutions that can be considered include:

1. Integration of Arabic and English language development programs into the routine activities of the dormitory.
2. Establishment of informal language learning groups in the dormitory with the assistance of peer tutors or volunteers.
3. Providing easy access to language learning resources such as books, journals, and audiovisual materials in the dormitory environment.
4. Organizing workshops, seminars, or regular discussions in Arabic and English in the dormitory.
5. Increased motivation to learn a language through the awarding of awards or recognition for students who show significant progress
6. The use of technology and online platforms for more flexible and interesting language learning.
7. Increased collaboration between dormitory management, language study programs, and language development centers at UIN Syahada Padang Sidimpuan.

To overcome these challenges, comprehensive solutions that involve various parties are needed. First, there is a need to strengthen language development programs in dormitories that are more structured and sustainable. This can include intensifying language immersion activities through the establishment of a language environment (Arabic/English speaking zone), increasing the frequency and variety of language club activities (debate, drama, storytelling), and providing peer

tutors or language mentors from more competent students. Second, the university needs to increase resource support for language learning in the dormitory. This includes the provision of qualified and dedicated language teachers and easier and more diverse access to learning materials (books, journals, and e-learning), as well as supporting facilities such as language labs or interactive learning rooms. Third, efforts to increase students' motivation and awareness of the importance of mastering foreign languages need to be encouraged.

From a title about the challenges of boarding children in improving foreign language skills at UIN Syahada, several identifications of problems in it can be taken, including the biggest challenges faced by dormitory children in learning foreign languages in the dormitory, how the dormitory environment supports or hinders foreign language learning, and what strategies students use to develop foreign language skills in the dormitory. This article will discuss, based on the results of interviews and observations, several dormitory children in the Ma'had Al Jamiah environment of UIN Syahada Padangsidimpuan.

This study aims to identify and analyze in depth the challenges faced by the students of the UIN Syahada Padang Sidimpuan dormitory in an effort to improve their Arabic and English language skills. A comprehensive understanding of these challenges will be an important foundation for the formulation of more effective strategies and interventions to optimize the role of dormitories in developing the foreign language skills of UIN Syahada Padang Sidimpuan students. Second Language Acquisition Theory (Second Language Acquisition SLA): This theory will help in understanding the process of how students learn Arabic and English as a second language. Some of the key concepts in SLA relevant to this study include the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996), and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the role of social and environmental interactions in language learning. Concept of Learning Environment: This concept refers to the physical, social, and psychological conditions in which the learning process occurs (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2006). In the context of this study, the dormitory environment will be analyzed as a language learning environment. Factors such as resource availability, language social interaction, and support from the dormitory manager will be the focus of the analysis.

Improving the quality of foreign language education: This research can help identify the challenges faced by dormitory children in improving foreign language skills so that it can provide useful information for the development of foreign language education programs at UIN Syahada. Improving students' foreign language skills: By knowing the challenges faced by boarding students, this research can help improve students' foreign language skills so they can compete in the job

market that is increasingly global. Improving the quality of human resources: Foreign language skills are one of the competencies that are urgently needed by students to compete in an increasingly global job market. This research can help improve the quality of human resources at UIN Syahada.

The program uses technologies such as foreign language learning apps, video conferencing, and online platforms to improve the foreign language skills of boarding children. Community-Based Approach: This program involves the foreign language community around UIN Syahada to become a partner in improving the foreign language skills of the boarding children. Development of Learning Materials: This program develops foreign language learning materials that are specific to the boarding children, taking into account the needs and challenges they face.

## **Method**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to describe in depth the challenges faced by students living in dormitories in improving their foreign language skills. The data collection technique was carried out through in-depth interviews with dormitory students. Participatory observation of foreign language activities in the dormitory environment. The primary source in this study was 15 students of the UIN Syahada Padangsidimpuan dormitory. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Each data obtained is categorized based on themes such as motivation, internal and external barriers, and foreign language learning strategies. This research is focused on students who live in the UIN Syahada Padangsidimpuan dormitory in the current academic year. The foreign languages that are the focus of the research are Arabic and English, as the two main foreign languages taught and practiced in campus and dormitory environments

## **Results and Discussion**

The analysis data in this research found several major themes regarding the challenges of students in improving their foreign language skills at UIN Syahada Padangsidimpuan:

Aspects	Main Themes	Subthemes/Categories	Representative Quotes / Data Summaries
1. Early Language Challenges and Learning Experience	- Shocked and initial adjustments	- unfamiliar Learning from the environment	"It was difficult at first, but over time I got used to it because the environment was very supportive." (Lis) "The first time was quite

Aspects	Main Themes	Subthemes/Categories	Representative Quotes / Data Summaries
			surprising but it was an exciting challenge." (Riska)
2. Challenges Faced	Fear of being wrong and inferior	- Fear of being laughed at- Fear of being reprimanded in public- Minder because the interlocutor is more proficient	"Sometimes I hesitate to speak up for fear of being laughed at." (Lis) "A public reprimand makes me nervous." (Riska)
	Lack of vocabulary and grammar	- Minimal vocabulary- Pronunciation not fluent- Difficult to compose sentences	"There are still a lot of unknown vocabulary." (Riska) "Difficulties in pronunciation and union clauses." (Aisyatun)
	Social pressure	- Fear of being considered arrogant because they use a foreign language	"If you use a foreign language, you are considered proud." (Natasa)
3. Peer Support	Positive support	- Relaxed mutual correction- Learn together- Not embarrassed	"We often correct each other in a relaxed and unashamed way." (Lis)
	Negative/neutral support	- There are friends who allow mistakes to look superior	"Some like to let their friends go wrong so that they look superior." (Riska)
4. Effectiveness of Language Programs in Dormitory	Effective needs reinforcement	but - Language schedule (English/Arabic Day)- Vocab deposit- But: there are still many violations of the rules	"I think it's effective, but it can be maximized if there is a practice of debate or presentation." (Lis) "There are still many who violate the rules, using Indonesian." (Riska)
5. Helpful Activities	In-person and informal learning	- Spontaneous conversation- Role-playing- Morning vocabulary deposit- Listening to songs/podcasts- Watching foreign movies	"Spontaneous conversations make learning more natural." (Riska) "Learning vocabulary in the morning is very helpful." (Natasa)
6. Confidence-Building Strategies	Awareness that all learn	- Practice in front of the mirror- Dare to be wrong- Not afraid to ask questions	"I started by practicing myself in front of the mirror." (Lis) "If it's a

Aspects	Main Themes	Subthemes/Categories	Representative Quotes / Data Summaries
			mistake, it's important to be brave." (Riska)
7. The Role of Teachers Teachers/Musyrifah	as - facilitators and motivators	Motivating- and mistakes- (iqobah) discipline	Correcting - Giving punishment to strengthen discipline
			"They not only teach theory, but also encourage practice." (Lis) "Giving punishment if you speak Indonesian." (Wilda)
8. Consistency of Practice outside of Independent Learning	Practice outside of the classroom	- Journaling- Less consistent (some)	- Watching videos-
			"I try to be consistent, at least speaking or writing in a foreign language." (Lis) "It's not too consistent, sometimes I still use Indonesian." (Wilda)
9. Language Program Development Advice	Interactive activities supportive atmosphere	- Debates, language clubs, & dramas- Language-based games- Discussion after watching a movie	"Add fun activities like watching a movie and then discussing." (Riska) "Play games that focus on improving language skills." (Wilda)
10. Emotional Factors Motivation and Motivation	Motivation from Internal and (new theme)	- Personal targets- Encouragement from family	"The motivation from my family and myself was very influential." (Aisyatun)

Furthermore, the answers to the research questions in this study are:

### 1. The Main Challenge of Dormitory Children in Improving Foreign Language Skills.

Students living in dorms confront a variety of substantial hurdles in strengthening their foreign language skills, especially in terms of consistency in language use, confidence in speaking, and lack of qualified mentorship or mentors. One of the main obstacles is the inconsistency in the use of foreign languages in daily life, where despite policies such as English Day or Arabic Day, the implementation is often not monitored optimally. Salwa added, "We truly wish to speak English every day, but we often go back to Indonesian, sometimes to the regional language as well. So it's hard to be constant."

This social discomfort is amplified by affective elements such as shame or fear of making mistakes. Reyhan Muhammad said, "I often think before speaking, fearful of the linguistic mistake.

Sometimes I don't even talk at all." In addition, although some musyrif have high foreign language skills, their work is more focused on the aspect of worship than linguistic guidance, as stated by Khoirunnisah Nasution: "Actually, there are musyrif who can speak Arabic and English, but they are more focused on taking care of worship. Rarely does anyone instruct directly or invite them to practice." These constraints contribute to restricted opportunities to practice in real life, especially outside of official events. In keeping with the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), emotional barriers such as anxiety, shyness, and social pressure lower the likelihood of success in second language acquisition. In addition, these results confirm the work of Coleman (2010), which underlines the insufficient integration between language learning policies and practices in higher education contexts in Indonesia.

## 2. Support and Barriers of the Dormitory Environment to Foreign Language Learning

The dormitory atmosphere truly has great promise as a realistic foreign language learning ecology, but in fact this milieu is often ambivalent, able to be supportive but also a hindrance. Some students feel that there is structural assistance in the shape of a calendar of language activities, such as muhadharah or foreign language days. However, weak supervision and declining enthusiasm of participants made this initiative less effective. Salwa explained, "In Ma'had, we are actually obligated to use English Day and Arabic Day. But the implementation is sometimes sloppy, not well overseen." This suggests a lack of environmental control in punishing language behaviors on a continuous basis. In reality, in some circumstances, societal standards actually limit the use of foreign languages, as Khoirunnisah Nasution observed, "Sometimes even friends who are diligent in speaking English become the subject of jokes. "It's a bit British."

However, some students still feel benefits when surrounded by nice and supporting friends. Intan Inayah added, "I feel comfortable learning the language at Ma'had since there are muhadharah activities and vocabulary memorization. But it needs a more regular push." This behavior is in keeping with the sociocultural learning theory of Vygotsky (1978), which claims that cognitive growth is heavily dependent on social interaction and environmental support. In addition, peer support also illustrates the necessity of peer scaffolding as mentioned by Lantolf & Thorne (2006). On the other hand, the weak consistency and social limitations are also stressed in the findings of Lamb (2011) that the motivation to learn English in the Indonesian context is particularly sensitive to social dynamics and learning climate.

### 3. Student Strategies in Developing Foreign Language Skills in the Dormitory

In the face of varied obstacles, students adopt numerous techniques to continue exercising their foreign language abilities, both individually and jointly. The most popular technique is to organize a small group of language learners, view content in foreign languages, record idiomatic expressions, and employ official Ma'had events such as muhadharah as a vehicle for practice. Intan Inayah stated, "Two roommates and I created a lexical memorization group. Every day five new words, then we practice." This strategy demonstrates initiatives to create a small community-based self-learning environment. Meanwhile, Reyhan Muhammad stated that they took advantage of the opportunity following the dawn prayer to construct a modest talk forum in English. Activities like this suggest the existence of learner autonomy, as defined by Little (1991) that students who actively manage their learning tend to be more effective in language learning. Other measures such as watching foreign language films and taking notes of idioms are also significant methods. Salwa stated, "I often watch YouTube in English. Usually there are subtitles. From there I acquired intonation and vocabulary. This strategy falls into the domain of cognitive strategies and metacognitive awareness, as explored by Oxford (1990), which highlights the necessity of a diversified approach in language learning. Meanwhile, formal activities such as muhadharah are also exploited to the greatest by some pupils, as Roihatul said: "The muhadharah activity is really beneficial, because we are trained to give presentations in Arabic and English. Even if it's nervous, it's a vital experience." This highlights the need of public speaking experience to enhance language confidence.

## Conclusions

This study examines the challenges faced by boarding children in improving foreign language skills and the impact of the dormitory environment on language learning. Key challenges identified include inconsistency in foreign language policies, affective barriers such as shyness and fear of mistakes, and a lack of guidance from dormitory supervisors. The research highlights the importance of social interactions and a supportive environment for motivation, aligned with theories like the Affective Filter Hypothesis and Sociocultural Learning. Students employ various strategies including peer learning, media usage, and formal activities to enhance their skills. The findings suggest the need for structured policies, consistent oversight, and a supportive culture to optimize language learning in dormitories, underscoring the significance of the learning environment in fostering proficient language learners ready to engage in a global context.

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