



Engaging Beyond Academia: Exploring Non-English Majors' Motivations for English Language Community Participation in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the motivations and experiences of non-English major students participating in an English language community at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai, Indonesia, where English proficiency is viewed as a crucial tool for personal, educational, and professional advancement. The research, conducted through in-depth interviews with 18 volunteer participants from diverse academic fields such as Sharia Banking, Sharia Economics, Sharia Economic Law, Family Law, Islamic Education, and Early Childhood Islamic Education, reveals that the English community plays a pivotal role in fostering language development. It provides a supportive and immersive environment that facilitates English practice, boosts confidence, and enhances cultural engagement. Moreover, the findings highlight the significant impact of instructors in motivating students by creating a pressure-free atmosphere and encouraging continuous professional development. The study concludes that English language communities, complemented by tailored instructional strategies, are effective in enhancing English learning for non-English majors, empowering them to meet their varied goals and succeed in global settings.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, student motivation, English language communities, immersive learning.

INTRODUCTION

English is primarily taught in Indonesia as a subject within the school curriculum, limited to classroom instruction. Unlike countries where English is considered a second language (SL), Indonesia treats English as a foreign language (FL), leading to distinct teaching approaches. Consequently, the learning process predominantly occurs within the classroom environment and doesn't extend sustainably beyond it. English isn't commonly used in students' daily lives as a second language, unlike in SL countries where it serves as a primary means of communication (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). This positioning of English as

a foreign language in Indonesia makes it challenging for students to communicate effectively in open spaces. They lack a supportive environment for using English outside of the classroom, necessitating an English-speaking community where they can converse freely without anxiety.

An effective means for Indonesia students to practice English in a natural environment is through English communities. According to [Kalocsai \(2013\)](#) and [Durán et al. \(2021\)](#), the English community serves as a collective approach to learning the language, where members interact using English as their primary means of communication. Essentially, it comprises individuals with a shared passion for English. Functioning as an organization, the English community provides a platform for members to exchange knowledge and engage in English-based discussions. English communities serve as valuable platforms for students to develop their speaking abilities and language proficiency ([Soto et al., 2020](#)). Research has shown that participation in English communities significantly enhances students' speaking skills ([Pangaribuan & Siahaan, 2021](#)). Moreover, beyond speaking proficiency, these communities also contribute to improving pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and overall communication skills in English.

Students' inclination to join English communities is driven by various motivating factors. Previous studies consistently show that motivation significantly impacts students' interest in learning a foreign language like English. Motivation serves as a crucial driver for students to start, persist, and even return to their English learning endeavors ([Bailey et al., 2021](#)). It closely intertwines with students' attitudes toward action, shaping their approach to learning. Ultimately, motivation serves as the primary catalyst for individuals to take action and achieve success. Motivation is an integral aspect of English language learning, inseparable from the students themselves. It wields significant influence and plays a pivotal role in the success of mastering a foreign language, particularly English ([Valizadeh, 2022](#)).

Students' interest in learning English is closely intertwined with their motivation ([Wang & Chen, 2020](#)). Each student harbors unique motivations and perspectives regarding the study of a foreign language, particularly English. Each student harbors distinct motivations and perspectives toward studying a foreign language, particularly English. Moreover, motivation is intricately linked to the delivery of teaching materials, necessitating educators to understand each student's unique characteristics to tailor motivation strategies accordingly. This sentiment is echoed by [Torres \(2019\)](#), [Baaqeel \(2020\)](#), [Darling \(2020\)](#), and [Getie \(2020\)](#), highlighting the collaborative efforts of curriculum designers and educators in crafting engaging learning modalities to bolster student motivation.

Besides, educators must establish a connection between students' motivation and their desired English language proficiency levels, fostering continual growth and advancement in English learning ([Bernaus et al., 2009](#)). Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant influence of motivation on students' English language learning. Motivation can be categorized into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Research by [Peng & Fu \(2021\)](#) indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation positively impact students' interest in learning English. However, intrinsic motivation holds greater importance in English learning as it stems from inherent interest and guides students toward understanding English culture ([Sun & Hsieh, 2018](#)).

Numerous studies emphasize the significant role of motivation in students' English language acquisition. For instance, [Sukri et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Vakilifard \(2021\)](#) highlighted

differences in motivational orientation between male and female students, with instrumental motivation prevailing among males (72.50%) and integrative motivation dominating among females (92.50%). Besides, [Khorsheed \(2021\)](#), [Khedimi \(2021\)](#), and [Almansour \(2022\)](#) found integrative motivation to be predominant among students at a Syrian international university, influenced by exposure to English in youth culture communities, TV shows, and online platforms. Conversely, [Dhakal \(2018\)](#) study at the University of Technology, Bangkok, revealed a stronger influence of instrumental motivation on students' interest, with no significant gender-based differences observed.

In Indonesia, where English is a foreign language, English-speaking communities like English clubs play a crucial role in boosting students' enthusiasm and motivation to learn the language ([Astriningsih & Mbato, 2019](#)). These extracurricular activities help students improve their English skills and support their academic achievement ([Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018](#)). Therefore, many factors influence students' interest in joining English communities. In an era focused on soft skills and global communication, developing English proficiency is vital for success. Educational institutions like Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai provide English communities to meet this demand. Their community is popular across various departments; approximately 40 to 50 students regularly participate, even though the institute don't have an English Language Education study program. This raises an intriguing question: what motivates students from other majors to join the English community?

METHOD

The research conducted is a descriptive qualitative study, employing a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. Qualitative description design then moves beyond the literal description of the data and attempts to interpret the findings without moving too far from that literal description ([Bradshaw et al., 2017](#)). The aim was to understand the experiences and perspectives of students participating in the English Community at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. A total of 18 students from six study programs—Sharia Banking, Sharia Economics, Sharia Economic Law, Family Law, Islamic Education, and Early Childhood Islamic Education—volunteered for exclusive deep interviews. These students were chosen to represent a diverse range of academic backgrounds and experiences within the English Community. Notably, participants encompassed various semesters, ranging from freshmen to advanced students, providing a comprehensive insight into the community's dynamics across different stages of academic progression.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing for open-ended questions and encouraging respondents to provide detailed responses without constraints. This approach aimed to capture the richness and depth of their experiences within the English Community. The motivation behind utilizing semi-structured interviews lies in fostering a comfortable environment for participants to express themselves freely. The primary methods employed in qualitative data analysis are content analysis and thematic analysis, which are frequently misused interchangeably ([Miles et al., 2014](#)). Following data collection, the interview transcripts underwent a meticulous analysis process consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data reduction, the researchers condensed the information to focus on

key themes and insights. Subsequently, the data were organized and presented in a coherent manner to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the analyzed data, and the findings were cross-verified to ensure their validity and reliability, adhering to the methodological framework outlined by [Rusandi and Rusli \(2021\)](#). This comprehensive methodological approach ensures the thorough exploration and understanding of the experiences and perspectives of students within the English Community, contributing valuable insights to educational research and community development initiatives.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to examine the drive and inclination towards learning English among non-English-major students at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. The study involved 18 students from six different study programs: Sharia Banking, Sharia Economics, Sharia Economic Law, Family Law, Islamic Education, and Early Childhood Islamic Education. The results yielded substantial evidence indicating that these students exhibited strong motivation to learn English.

Enhancing English skills and academic advancement

Student F expressed frustration with the difficulty of his ESP (English for Specific Purposes) classes, stating, "My other major courses are hard enough, but then they expect us to understand all these complex English terms in our ESP classes too! It's like a double whammy." He feels overwhelmed by the combination of his major courses' difficulty and the added challenge of understanding technical English terms. In his hope for a supportive community, he seeks solidarity with others who may be experiencing similar struggles. He stated, "I hope this English community has people dealing with similar stuff, maybe we can figure out how to make the terminology and concepts less intimidating." By sharing experiences and collaborating with peers facing similar challenges, he aims to find strategies to make the terminology and concepts more approachable and less intimidating.

Besides, student B shared her perspective on ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses, expressing, "ESP classes are challenging because they require us to understand not only the subject matter but also the technical English terms associated with it." She highlighted the difficulty of navigating both the content of her field and the specialized language used to communicate it effectively. She further elaborated, "I often find myself struggling to grasp the concepts due to the language barrier, which can be frustrating and overwhelming." Like Student F, she emphasized the importance of mastering English for her future career prospects. In seeking support, Student B echoed Student F's sentiment, stating, "I hope to find a supportive community where I can collaborate with peers facing similar challenges and improve my English skills in the context of my field." She sees the potential for such a community to provide valuable resources and strategies to enhance her understanding of ESP concepts and terminology.

Student G, in her interview, elaborated on her focus on academic advancement, stating, "Improving my English proficiency would remove a significant barrier to my academic development." She emphasized the importance of being able to engage directly with primary sources in her field and contribute her own research to an international audience. Reflecting on her interview, she added, "This English community feels like a crucial step towards achieving these goals, allowing me to fully participate in the global academic discourse." For her, joining the English community represents more than just language

learning; it's a means to advance her scholarly pursuits and broaden her academic engagement. Her response showcases a proactive approach, recognizing the value of language skills in unlocking opportunities for scholarly growth and broader academic participation.

Expanding Social Networks

Student C, in her interview, shared her perspective on the importance of English proficiency, stating, "Honestly, everyone posts these travel photos and talks about their international friendships. Speaking English kinda makes you seem more worldly and interesting, you know? Think of the cool stories I could share on Instagram or HelloTalk if I could actually string together a decent conversation!" She expressed her desire to leverage English proficiency to enhance her social and cultural experiences, envisioning herself sharing captivating stories and engaging in meaningful conversations with people from different countries. Student C also noted, "I figured this English community could help me at least sound the part, even if I'm not traveling every weekend. Plus, if I can actually chat with people from different countries without, like, totally embarrassing myself, that'd be awesome." She sees the English community as a valuable resource to improve her conversational abilities, allowing her to feel more confident and culturally connected, regardless of her travel frequency.

In addition, student G expressed her frustration, stating, "I've met some amazing people online, but it's frustrating when Google Translate gets more of a workout than my English skills!" She highlighted her desire to improve her English proficiency to better connect with people from different cultures. She emphasized, "I really want to connect with people from other cultures and learn about their lives." Student G sees the English community as a crucial step towards making her online friendships feel more genuine and meaningful. For her, it's not just about casual chatting; it's about deepening understanding and building authentic relationships across cultural boundaries.

Planning to travel and study abroad

Student A, expressing her aspirations to study in Europe, shared, "I've always imagined myself studying in Europe, surrounded by history and all those beautiful old buildings." She sees the English community as a pivotal first step towards this dream, highlighting the importance of being able to communicate effectively in English for making friends and understanding future professors abroad. Reflecting on her interview response, she emphasized, "If I can't even chat with people now, how am I supposed to make friends or even understand my professors once I'm there?" This sentiment underscores her recognition of the crucial role language skills play in her academic and social success. Moreover, Student A views obtaining a scholarship as a potential avenue to realize her dream, stating, "Plus, maybe a scholarship is my ticket to making that dream happen!" Her response reflects optimism, determination, and a clear understanding of the significance of language proficiency in achieving her goals.

Moreover, student D expresses frustration with navigating travel deals and websites, stating, "Everyone posts those amazing travel deals, but I always get frustrated trying to figure out the websites and all the fine print." Despite her desire to explore the world, she feels hindered by her inability to confidently interact with travel-related materials. She emphasizes the importance of English proficiency for travel, noting, "I want to see the world,

but not if I can't even ask for directions or understand the signs!" For her, the English community represents an opportunity to gain the confidence needed to navigate travel arrangements effectively. Her response highlights the practical aspect of language learning, emphasizing the need for confidence in English to facilitate travel experiences. By improving her language skills, she hopes to feel more capable and prepared when booking flights and navigating unfamiliar destinations.

English Proficiency for Business and Career Growth

Student J, speaking about her entrepreneurial ambitions, emphasized, "My local snack business is doing okay, but I know I could take it global with the right connections." She perceives English proficiency as a vital asset in this endeavor, enabling her to communicate directly with potential buyers and suppliers without intermediary translators. Reflecting on her interview, she underscored, "English lets me talk to potential buyers and suppliers directly, without relying on a translator who might not understand my products." For her, the English community offers more than just language learning; it represents a pathway to elevate Indonesian businesses onto the world stage. Student J's response embodies ambition, strategic foresight, and a profound understanding of how language skills can drive business expansion and global networking.

Student E emphasizes the importance of English proficiency in today's competitive landscape, stating, "The job market is so competitive. If his CV looks the same as everyone else's, what's the point?" He believes that demonstrating proficiency in English showcases his seriousness and opens doors to opportunities in multinational companies. Reflecting on his interview, he adds, "English shows I'm serious, and it opens up those multinational companies." For him, the English community represents more than just language learning; it's a strategic tool to stand out in the job market and pursue his aspirations. His response reflects a proactive mindset, recognizing the value of language skills in achieving his goals and leveraging resources like the English community to gain a competitive edge.

Experience English immersion and culture

The traditional classroom experience with grammar lessons and vocabulary lists pales in comparison to the vibrant atmosphere of the English community. He describes it as "being in a whole new world," a place where English is the common language and everyone is actively using it. The key difference lies in the collaborative spirit – members support each other, fostering a sense of natural interaction. This stands in stark contrast to years spent studying English in isolation from real-world application. Finally, Student M feels like he's truly becoming part of the language, not just memorizing its components. This immersive "English vibe" acts as a powerful motivator, driving him to further develop his skills and become a fluent participant in this exciting new world.

Furthermore, student N's interview reveals a unique motivation for joining the English learning community. While fluency is important, she seeks a deeper connection between language and culture. She expresses a desire to understand "why people say things a certain way," indicating a fascination with the cultural nuances embedded within the English language. This goes beyond mere grammatical correctness, delving into the customs, humor, and expressions that shape communication in different English-speaking societies. Furthermore, N highlights an interest in the variations between dialects, specifically mentioning British and American English. This demonstrates a desire to appreciate the rich

diversity of English genres beyond a singular, standardized form. Overall, Student N's experience underscores how the English learning community caters to students seeking deeper cultural immersion through language learning.

The study highlights how non-English-major students aren't just learning English because they have to, but because they have specific goals in mind. These goals range from improving communication skills to boosting academic performance and job prospects. Interviews with students reveal a strong focus on using English as a tool to reach personal and professional milestones, reflecting the importance of English proficiency in Indonesia. The English community plays a crucial role in supporting these students, providing a space where they can practice and feel comfortable expressing themselves in English. Overall, the study shows how motivation, cultural context, and supportive environments intersect to shape students' approach to learning English.

Students in this study are non-English majors from six different programs. The findings highlight instrumental motivation as their primary reason for learning English, with goals such as improved standard of living, higher income, and access to updated information (Zarrabi, 2018). This aligns with Indonesian context, where English is a foreign language. Surprisingly, even English Education majors in Indonesia demonstrate stronger instrumental motivation than integrative motivation (Radfar & Lengkanawati, 2020). Similar findings emerge from Chadian Cameroon, where English learners show a positive attitude towards the language, but prioritize practical goals like international travel (Safotso & Tompté, 2018). This trend, where instrumental motivation dominates in foreign language contexts, may reflect a strong focus on the practical benefits of English.

Students have the opportunity to enhance their English language skills within the English community or English club. Utilizing social networking sites in learning English as a foreign language encourages active engagement among learners for practical purposes (Taşkıran et al., 2018). This fosters motivation and real-world experience as students take on various roles. Engaging in these activities motivates students to speak English and allows them to simulate authentic English experiences. In addition, the drive observed among non-English-major students is primarily focused on professional advancement. This motivation exhibited by students can be attributed to the socio-cultural environment where English occupies a prominent role, as highlighted in the works of Le and Chen (2018). This environment encourages cultural interactions, opportunities for studying abroad, and access to desirable employment opportunities. Therefore, promoting an English-rich environment, along with clearly defined objectives, is vital for fostering both instrumental and integrative motivation for a well-rounded learning experience (Hromova, 2019).

The formation of English-language communities can play a crucial role in fostering integrative motivation, providing a comfortable environment for self-expression and skill development (Radfar & Lengkanawati, 2020; Orfan, 2020). These spaces offer a positive and enjoyable learning experience that can significantly improve students' attitudes (Orfan, 2020). Furthermore, creating a supportive environment and fostering a relaxed atmosphere can diminish students' anxiety across all language learning levels, thereby encouraging their active participation and enthusiasm in the learning process (Hussain et al., 2020; Said & Weda, 2018). However, developing a universally engaging learning environment is challenging due to diverse student needs and backgrounds (Abdullah et al., 2019). Success

demands a holistic approach, where students receive support from parents, educators, and institutions to enhance motivation.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the substantial impact of the English community on students at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai, even those not majoring in English. The participants in this study who were not English majors were acquiring English skills not out of obligation but with specific aims in mind, such as improving language communication, personal satisfaction, enhancing academic performance, and increasing career opportunities (referred to as the object). Student interviews uncovered a strong emphasis on instrumental motivation; they see English as a means to achieve personal and professional goals, aspiring to improve their quality of life. This aligns with the context of English as a foreign language in Indonesia. The English community provides a crucial support system, fostering a conducive learning atmosphere where students feel comfortable practicing and expressing themselves. Students have the opportunity to explore additional resources and activities beyond the classroom, which can enhance their educational journey and equip them with valuable skills for life. This research holds significant implications for educators and policymakers, highlighting the importance of understanding and nurturing student motivations for more effective English language instruction and proficiency development. However, the qualitative focus on a small group of students provides rich insights but limits generalizability. Future studies could expand the sample size or include other institutions to broaden the understanding of these motivational trends.

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