

# Pedagogical Gaps and Language Barriers: The Relationship Between Teaching Methods and English Learning Difficulties

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**Abstract** Language learning success in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts is strongly influenced by instructional practices employed in the classroom. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between teaching methods and students' English learning difficulties at SMKN 4 Banjarmasin, focusing on areas such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. A quantitative correlational research design was employed. The population consisted of 90 second-grade students, from which 20 students were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from previous research and a classroom observation checklist. The questionnaire demonstrated good reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' perceptions, while Pearson Product Moment correlation was applied to examine the relationship between variables. The findings revealed that students experienced the greatest difficulties in pronunciation and grammar, while vocabulary posed fewer challenges. Classroom observations indicated that limited instructional variation, inconsistent use of learning media, and insufficient adaptation to students' proficiency levels contributed to these difficulties. The correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship between teaching methods and learning difficulties ( $r = -0.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that improved instructional quality is associated with reduced learning difficulties. These results suggest that clear explanations, varied teaching strategies, interactive activities, and targeted feedback can positively influence students' English learning outcomes. The study concludes that enhancing teaching methods is essential for reducing learning difficulties and improving English instruction in vocational high school EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Teaching method, English learning difficulties, language barriers, pedagogical gaps, correlational studies

## INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential tool for human communication, serving as a medium through which individuals convey ideas, emotions, thoughts, and desires, enabling meaningful interaction in everyday life (Aristotle, 2001). Beyond being a mere collection of speech sounds, language functions as a structured symbolic system that allows speakers and listeners to encode, transmit,

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and interpret meaning effectively (Wardhaugh, 2006). From this perspective, language is both a cognitive and social phenomenon, encompassing not only the mechanics of speech but also the interpretation of context, intention, and cultural norms, which together shape communication in meaningful ways.

Among the myriad languages spoken globally, English has gained prominence as a global language due to its extensive use in international communication, commerce, education, and technology (Crystal, 1997). Its status as a lingua franca allows speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds to interact, collaborate, and access knowledge across borders. In countries such as Indonesia, English is classified as a foreign language (EFL), meaning that it is neither the first nor second language for the majority of the population, and its acquisition relies heavily on formal instruction within educational settings (Gebhard, 2006; Harmer, 2007). Learning English as a foreign language in schools typically begins with the introduction of basic vocabulary and simple sentence structures in elementary grades, followed by more complex grammar, writing, and comprehension tasks at the junior and senior levels, all aimed at developing communicative competence and literacy in the language.

In the Indonesian context, English instruction is guided by national curriculum policies, which have undergone multiple reforms, transitioning from the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) to the 2013 Curriculum, and more recently to the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM) (Jazadi, 2008). These curriculum frameworks provide structured learning objectives and pedagogical guidelines intended to enhance students' language proficiency and ensure consistent educational outcomes across schools. However, the successful implementation of these curricula depends not only on the content and standards prescribed but also on the effectiveness of the teaching methods employed by educators in the classroom. When teachers use inadequate or inappropriate instructional strategies, such as methods that fail to engage students, neglect diverse learning styles, or emphasize rote memorization over meaningful practice, students often encounter difficulties in understanding, retaining, and applying English language skills, resulting in challenges that hinder overall language acquisition.

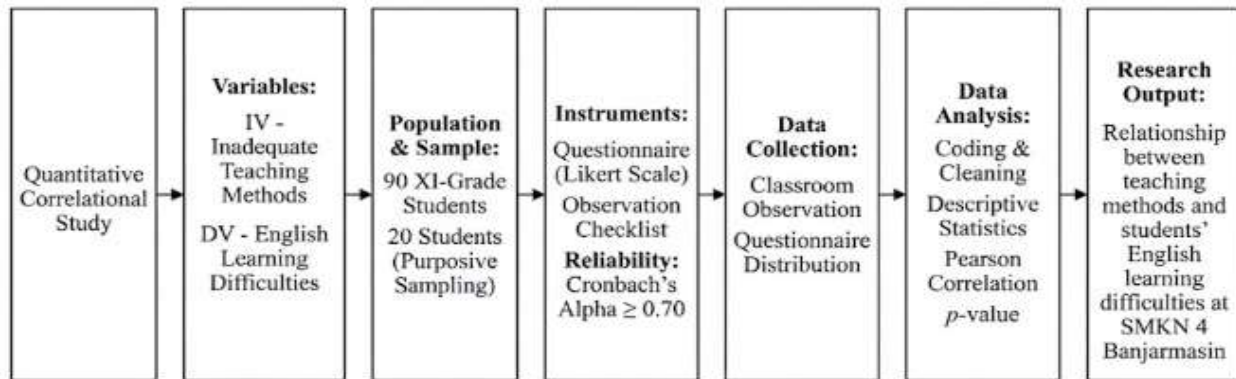
Although prior research has explored general challenges faced by EFL learners, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific relationship between teaching methods and students' learning difficulties, particularly in vocational high school contexts such as SMKN 4 Banjarmasin. Most studies tend to focus either on curriculum evaluation or student performance without directly linking instructional methods to observable learning outcomes. Moreover, few studies integrate quantitative data with classroom observations, which are critical for obtaining a comprehensive view of how instructional practices affect students' engagement, comprehension, and skill development. Addressing this gap is crucial for identifying which teaching methods facilitate learning and which contribute to difficulties, enabling teachers and curriculum developers to implement strategies that more effectively support students' English language development.

Based on this rationale, the present study aims to investigate two main aspects: first, to identify the specific difficulties students experience in learning English at SMKN 4 Banjarmasin, including areas such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension; and second, to examine the relationship between inadequate teaching methods and students' learning difficulties, using a combination of quantitative analysis and classroom observation to provide empirical evidence. By focusing on this relationship, the study seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically,

offering insights that can inform teaching practices, improve instructional design, and enhance English learning outcomes for vocational high school students. Ultimately, the findings are expected to guide educators in adopting more effective teaching methods that address students' learning needs, promote engagement, and reduce language acquisition difficulties, thereby fostering more successful EFL learning experiences.

## METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design. The figure below shows the schema on this research procedure.



**Figure 1.** Research method schema

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design. Quantitative research involves the systematic investigation of phenomena through the collection of numerical data that are analyzed using statistical procedures to test relationships among variables, as noted by Creswell (1994) and Punch (1998). A correlational design is particularly appropriate when the objective is to determine whether a relationship exists between two naturally occurring variables without manipulating them. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006) emphasize that correlational research is used to measure variables as they are and to examine the degree to which they are related. In this study, the correlational approach was used to examine the relationship between inadequate teaching methods as the independent variable and students' English learning difficulties as the dependent variable at SMKN 4 Banjarmasin.

The population of this study consisted of 90 second-grade (XI) students enrolled at SMKN 4 Banjarmasin. From this population, a sample of 20 second grade students were selected through purposive sampling based on accessibility and the relevance of their learning experience to the research focus. The sample size was considered sufficient for conducting correlation analysis at the classroom level. The data used in this research comprised primary data obtained directly from students through questionnaires and classroom observations, as well as secondary data derived from institutional documents and relevant literature related to teaching methods and learning difficulties.

The instruments used in this study included a structured questionnaire and a classroom observation checklist. In quantitative research, instruments function as tools for collecting data in a systematic manner. The questionnaire was designed to measure students' perceptions of the teaching methods

used during English lessons and to identify the types of English learning difficulties they experienced. It consisted of Likert-scale items that allowed students to indicate the degree of their agreement with statements related to classroom instruction and learning challenges. The second instrument, an observation checklist, was used to record the teaching behaviors observed during English lessons, including clarity of instruction, use of media, explanation strategies, classroom engagement, and feedback practices. The observation served to complement the questionnaire by providing contextual information about the instructional practices that might contribute to students' learning difficulties. Prior to administration, the questionnaire underwent validity testing to ensure that each item measured the intended construct, and reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for internal consistency.

Data collection in this study involved two main techniques: classroom observation and questionnaire distribution. The classroom observation was conducted using a structured checklist, and the researcher acted as a non-participant observer, ensuring that teaching activities proceeded naturally without interference. The questionnaire which adopted from Fikni, et al. (2023) was distributed to the selected students during class time, and the researcher supervised the completion process to ensure that the responses were accurate and complete. Both techniques enabled the researcher to obtain the numerical data needed to examine the relationship between teaching methods and learning difficulties.

The data analysis process began with organizing, coding, and scoring the students' responses based on the Likert scale used in the questionnaire. Raw data were checked for accuracy, and incomplete or inconsistent responses were removed to ensure the reliability of the analysis. The cleaned data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the students' learning difficulties and their perceptions of teaching methods. To determine whether a relationship existed between inadequate teaching methods and English learning difficulties, the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient was used, as it is suitable for interval data and normally distributed variables. The statistical significance of the correlation was further examined through p-value testing. The strength and direction of the correlation were interpreted using established criteria for r-values, and the findings were discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and previous studies. This analytical process enabled the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the influence of inadequate teaching methods on students' English learning difficulties.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary data on this study were collected using a structured questionnaire and classroom observation checklist. The questionnaire consisted of 10 Likert-scale statements, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items measured two main constructs: students' perceptions of teaching methods and their experiences of English learning difficulties. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire underwent validity testing, and all items were confirmed to have content validity. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of teaching methods and learning difficulties

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Teaching Methods	3.45	0.72	2.0	5.0

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Learning Difficulties	3.90	0.81	2.0	5.0

*Note:* Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores on Learning Difficulties indicate greater perceived difficulties.

The analysis of the Likert-scale responses shows that most students (65%) felt that the teaching methods used in their English classes were generally understandable, although not highly varied, while 35% indicated dissatisfaction or difficulty with the instructional approaches. In terms of learning challenges, students reported the greatest difficulties in pronunciation (95%) and grammar or sentence structure (80%), whereas vocabulary posed fewer problems, affecting only 35% of respondents. Additionally, 60% of students stated that they struggled to follow lessons delivered entirely in English, indicating that full-English instruction may overwhelm learners with lower proficiency. The classroom observation checklist complemented these findings. Observations indicated that student difficulties were influenced by limited time management, mismatched lesson materials, and insufficient adaptation to individual student needs. Teachers' use of media and engagement strategies was noted to partially support student comprehension.

**Table 2.** Pearson correlation between teaching methods and learning difficulties

Variable	1	2
1. Teaching Methods	1	-0.68**
2. Learning Difficulties	-0.68**	1

$p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

On the table above, negative correlation ( $r = -0.68$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates that as the quality of teaching methods improves, students' English learning difficulties decrease significantly. This supports the conclusion that teaching methods are strongly related to students' ability to learn English effectively.

The correlation analysis indicates that inadequate or less effective teaching methods are closely linked to higher levels of English learning difficulties among students. Lessons that are delivered clearly, incorporate engaging activities, and are adapted to students' needs tend to reduce challenges related to pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension. In contrast, teaching methods that are monotonous, lack clarity, or do not match students' proficiency levels tend to intensify these difficulties, making it harder for students to fully understand and absorb the material., grammar, and comprehension.

These findings are consistent with the theoretical framework and previous studies highlighting the critical role of instructional quality in language learning. While the results reflect the perceptions of a small, purposively selected sample, they provide meaningful insights into the impact of teaching methods on students' English learning outcomes at SMKN 4 Banjarmasin.

**Table 3.** Students' responses on teaching methods and learning difficulties

Category	Indicator	% Agree	% Disagree
Teaching Methods	Teaching methods are understandable, though not varied	65%	35%
Learning Difficulties	Difficulty in pronunciation	95%	5%

Category	Indicator	% Agree % Disagree	
		Difficulty in grammar/sentence structure	80%
Difficulty in vocabulary		35%	65%
Difficulty understanding full-English instruction		60%	40%

Classroom observations using a structured checklist revealed several factors influencing students' English learning difficulties. In term of instructional clarity, most teachers explained the material understandably, but some instructions were delivered quickly, making it challenging for students with lower proficiency to follow. Teachers occasionally switched between English and Indonesian, which helped comprehension but also indicated that lessons conducted entirely in English posed difficulties. The use of learning media, including slides, visual aids, and printed materials, appeared to enhance engagement and understanding; however, the application of media was inconsistent across lessons. Regarding explanation strategies, teachers primarily relied on direct explanation and repetition, with limited interactive activities such as group discussions or role-plays, reducing opportunities for active language practice. Observations of classroom engagement showed that students were generally attentive, but participation was largely passive, and those with weaker English skills were less likely to engage due to fear of mistakes. In terms of feedback practices, teachers frequently provided immediate corrective feedback on grammar and pronunciation errors, but it was mostly verbal and directed to the class as a whole, limiting individualized support. Overall, the observations indicate that while teaching methods were generally understandable and aligned with curriculum objectives, the variability in instructional strategies, limited use of interactive techniques, and insufficient adaptation to student needs contributed to students' learning difficulties. These findings complement the questionnaire results, supporting the conclusion that enhancing teaching methods, through clearer instruction, consistent use of media, interactive activities, and targeted feedback, can reduce students' English learning difficulties.

The results of this study revealed a significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between teaching methods and students' English learning difficulties, indicating that as instructional quality improves, students report fewer difficulties. This finding supports previous research showing that effective and varied teaching practices enhance student engagement and comprehension, leading to lower perceived learning barriers (Sugesti et al., 2020). A correlational study of teaching practices also found that higher teacher competency and instructional diversity were associated with better learner outcomes, lending credence to the conclusion that teacher behavior directly influences student language performance.

Analysis of descriptive data showed that students experienced notable difficulties in pronunciation and grammar, which were also identified qualitatively during classroom observations. Pronunciation challenges have been widely documented in EFL contexts, where learners struggle with sound differentiation, stress patterns, and phonological features due to limited exposure and teaching emphasis (Putri et al., 2024; Hidayatulloh, 2025). Similarly, grammar learning has been highlighted as a persistent challenge for EFL learners, with monotonous instructional methods and lack of contextualized practice contributing to student errors and difficulty retention (Mustakim et al., 2025; Ajaj, 2022). These studies collectively suggest that targeted pedagogical approaches in pronunciation and grammar can reduce specific language learning difficulties.

Beyond cognitive aspects, classroom practices that lack interactivity and varied strategies may contribute to affective and motivational barriers. Research in EFL education suggests that when teachers employ student-centered, communicative techniques rather than predominantly teacher-led lectures, learners experience increased participation, reduced anxiety, and greater confidence (Anggraini & Dewi, 2025). This aligns with observation results showing limited use of interactive activities and inconsistent media integration, which may restrict opportunities for meaningful practice and reduce learning efficiency. Therefore, the quality of teaching methods impacts not only linguistic understanding but also students' willingness to engage actively in English learning.

Another dimension of the findings relates to instructional contextual challenges such as media use, time management, and adaptation to learner needs. Previous research on EFL teaching in constrained environments indicated that limited resources and conventional practices hinder effective instruction and reduce opportunities for interactive learning (Focus English Language Teaching Methodology, 2025). These constraints often force reliance on direct instruction with minimal variation, which is less effective in addressing diverse learner differences. This supports the view that teaching environment and instructional flexibility positively correlate with learner achievement and lower difficulty levels in EFL contexts.

Overall, the results of this study contribute to the growing body of evidence linking teaching methods with language learning outcomes. The significant Pearson correlation underscores that improved instructional practices, particularly those emphasizing interactivity, media use, and targeted support for pronunciation and grammar, can mitigate English learning difficulties. Future research should investigate how specific teaching components (e.g., feedback type, peer collaboration, task design) influence learner performance across larger and more diverse samples to strengthen the generalizability of these findings.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that students at SMKN 4 Banjarmasin experience significant difficulties in learning English, particularly in pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension, which are influenced by both learner-related factors and teaching methods. The findings reveal a statistically significant correlation between inadequate teaching methods and students' English learning difficulties, indicating that monotonous, less interactive, and poorly aligned instructional strategies tend to increase learning challenges, while engaging and student-centered methods help reduce them. Classroom observations further support these findings, showing that limited use of instructional media, insufficient feedback, and unvaried lesson delivery contribute to students' difficulties. Overall, the study highlights the crucial role of effective teaching methods in improving students' English proficiency and suggests the need for methodological innovation, teacher professional development, and the adoption of interactive teaching strategies to enhance English learning outcomes in vocational high schools.

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