

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the researcher discusses Related Theories, Related Studies and Framework.

A. Related Theories

1. Definition of learning English as a second language

Learning English involved building four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This process took time, regular practice, and effective learning strategies. Alqahtani (2015, p. 25) stated that students needed to improve both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing), and these skills had to be used frequently to achieve fluency. Learning English was not only about memorizing grammar rules or vocabulary. Students also needed to understand how to use English in real life situations. According to Cameron (2021, p. 19), students were encouraged to develop communicative abilities in different social and cultural contexts. Therefore, students had to practice English through real examples, not just through textbooks. Richards (2015, p. 5) explained that successful English learners possessed communicative competence, which meant they knew how to act and speak appropriately in various situations. Alqahtani (2019) also emphasized that learning English required time, practice, and the right methods. Richards and Schmidt (2010) pointed out that students needed to learn to use English appropriately when interacting with people from different cultural

backgrounds. This meant that learners had to understand when and how to use certain expressions depending on the context.

In Indonesia, many students found English challenging because it was very different from their first language, Bahasa Indonesia. These differences included pronunciation, grammar, word order, and sentence patterns. Nurkamto (2016, p. 26) explained that Indonesian students often struggled with English grammar due to the absence of tenses and subject verb agreement in Bahasa Indonesia. Marlina and Giri (2014, p. 8) added that, because English was not used in daily life in Indonesia, students had limited practice outside the classroom. Launder (2018, p. 4) also noted that students often mixed English with their native language, which caused errors in grammar and pronunciation. These expert views demonstrated that language differences were one of the biggest challenges for Indonesian students in learning English.

Learning English as a second language meant learning it after one had already acquired a first language, usually spoken at home. In many cases, English was not used daily, yet students still needed to learn it for school, work, or international communication. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013, p. 29), learning a second language differed from learning a first language because learners already had an existing language system, which could both help and interfere with new language acquisition. Saville Troike and Barto (2017, p. 9) stated that many people learned English as a second language because it served as an international language in business, education, and travel. Cook (2016, p. 12) also explained that learners had to connect their English learning with real

life goals, such as passing exams or gaining employment. These perspectives showed that learning English as a second language was often driven by practical needs, even if it was not used in the learners' immediate environment. When learning English, students worked on the four main skills and studied grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and how to use English in diverse situations. Learning English involved more than remembering rules; it required understanding how to apply the language in real conversations. Several factors affected how well someone learned English, including interest, age, exposure to the language, and teaching methods. Students who regularly used English at school or online improved more quickly. Practicing in real life contexts helped enhance fluency and confidence. Hence, language learning should not only focus on studying forms and rules but also provide learners with opportunities to use the language interactively. The ultimate goal of learning English as a second language was to use it in practical situations communicating, reading, succeeding academically, or advancing in a career. In conclusion, learning English as a second language was a long process that required time, motivation, and practice. It involved not only mastering grammar but also learning to communicate effectively and understand different cultures.

2. Difficulties in Learning English

Learning English was not always easy. Many students faced various problems when trying to understand and use the language. These difficulties occurred in listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation. The causes of these problems came from both internal and

external factors. These included a lack of interest in the subject, low motivation, limited self-confidence, ineffective teaching methods, an unsupportive learning environment, and inadequate learning facilities. One of the most common difficulties students encountered was building vocabulary. Many struggled to remember new words or to use them correctly in sentences. As Nation (2013, p. 85) explained, vocabulary learning was challenging because it required knowing the form and meaning of words as well as how to use them in context. Grammar also presented major challenges, especially since English grammar rules often differed from students' first language. According to Ur (2012, p. 77), these differences caused confusion and led to errors in both speaking and writing. In listening and speaking, students found it difficult to understand fast speech or unfamiliar accents, which in turn lowered their confidence. Richards (2015, p. 23) pointed out that listening involved real time processing, making it one of the most difficult skills for language learners. Furthermore, many students felt shy or afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of others. As Brown and Lee (2015, p. 144) noted, affective factors such as anxiety and low self-confidence negatively affected students' speaking performance. Reading and writing skills also presented difficulties. When reading, students often struggled with long sentences or unfamiliar vocabulary. In writing, they faced problems in organizing their thoughts, applying correct grammar, and expressing ideas clearly. Harmer (2015, p. 329) stated that these challenges made writing one of the most complex English skills to master. These difficulties showed that learning English involved multiple aspects, and

that each student faced unique challenges depending on their individual background, motivation, and learning environment. Overcoming these problems requires a supportive classroom atmosphere, effective teaching strategies, and encouragement to build students' confidence and skills.

A. Skills in Learning English

In the process of acquiring English as a foreign language, learners were required to master four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills were essential for achieving effective communication and overall language competence.

1. Listening

Listening was one of the most important skills in learning a language. It referred to the ability to hear and understand spoken language. In learning English, listening was often the first step in communication because students had to understand what others said before they could respond. According to Nation and Newton (2020, p. 38), listening provided students with input, which helped them learn new words and grammar. It also helped students become more familiar with how English sounded in real life situations. However, listening was often difficult for students. Field (2018, p. 49) explained that many learners had problems understanding spoken English when the speaker talked quickly, used different accents, or said unfamiliar words. Brown and Lee (2015, p. 338) also stated that students could feel confused or stressed when they tried to understand everything at once while listening. If students did not have good listening skills, they found it hard to

follow classroom instructions or understand conversations outside of school. That was why teachers needed to give students enough practice with real listening, such as listening to native speakers or using listening materials that were close to real situations (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 45).

2. Speaking

Speaking was an essential and complex skill in learning a foreign language. It involved the ability to express ideas, opinions, and emotions effectively through spoken language. As stated by Thornbury (2019, p. 1), speaking was not only about producing sounds but also about conveying meaning clearly and appropriately in real time communication. For many learners, speaking English was especially challenging. It required a combination of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range, and correct pronunciation. According to Brown and Lee (2015, p. 284), speaking was a productive skill that demanded learners to process language quickly and use appropriate grammar, sentence structure, and pronunciation while interacting with others.

Many students also experienced affective barriers, such as nervousness or a lack of self-confidence, which made speaking more difficult. Goh and Burns (2012, p. 29) emphasized that emotional factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and embarrassment often interfered with students' ability to speak fluently. These feelings discouraged them from participating actively in speaking tasks. Additionally, limited vocabulary and poor pronunciation hindered communication and made students reluctant to speak. As Nation and Newton (2020, p. 117) explained, vocabulary knowledge

played a central role in speaking proficiency, and learners who lacked sufficient word knowledge often struggled to express their ideas effectively. Therefore, developing speaking skills required not only language practice but also emotional support and opportunities for authentic interaction. Teachers needed to create a safe and supportive classroom environment that encouraged learners to take risks, use the language actively, and build their confidence over time.

3. Reading

Reading was one of the four fundamental skills in English language learning and played a vital role in developing students' comprehension and overall language proficiency. It involved the ability to decode written symbols, recognize words, interpret sentence structures, extract specific information, and construct meaning from a text. According to Grabe and Stoller (2019, p. 6), reading was a complex cognitive process that required both lower-level decoding skills and higher-level comprehension strategies. Many learners encountered challenges in reading English texts, particularly due to limited vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliar grammatical structures, and insufficient exposure to authentic reading materials. As Nation (2022, p. 84) noted, a lack of vocabulary was one of the main barriers to reading fluency, as students struggled to make sense of what they read when encountering too many unknown words. Moreover, students often lacked effective reading strategies, which were essential for understanding different types of texts. Bamford and Day (2018, p. 27) emphasized that extensive

reading, combined with proper guidance, helped learners build both speed and comprehension. When students were not trained in these strategies, they relied too much on word-by-word translation, which slowed down reading and reduced overall understanding. In addition, Koda (2018, p. 91) explained that background knowledge also played an important role in reading comprehension, especially when learners were faced with culturally unfamiliar content. Without sufficient practice and strategy use, students found it difficult to engage with texts critically or draw inferences beyond surface meanings.

Therefore, to improve students' reading abilities in English, it was crucial to integrate explicit reading strategy instruction, promote regular reading practice, and provide access to texts that matched learners' proficiency levels and interests.

4. Writing

Writing was often seen as the most difficult skill in learning English. It required more than just knowing vocabulary and grammar. Students also needed to organize their ideas clearly, use correct spelling and punctuation, and ensure that their sentences were connected well. According to Hyland (2019, p. 5), writing was not only about language but also about thinking, planning, and organizing ideas clearly.

Many students found it hard to write in English. Nation (2020, p. 77) explained that this was because writing required strong grammar and vocabulary knowledge. If students did not know the right words or grammar,

they could not express their ideas well. Harmer (2015, p. 327) also said that writing was harder than speaking because students had to think carefully about every word and sentence. Mistakes in writing were easier to see, so students often felt nervous or unsure. Some students did not know how to start writing or how to write a good paragraph. They may have had ideas but did not know how to put them into good English sentences. Richards and Renandya (2018, p. 303) suggested that teachers should help students through steps like planning, drafting, and editing. This step-by-step method made writing easier and less stressful. In short, many students had problems with writing in English because it required many skills at the same time. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing all need practice, support, and good teaching. Teachers needed to understand these problems so they could help students improve their English more effectively.

3. Perspectives by students on Learning English

Students' perspectives on learning English played an important role in shaping their attitudes, motivation, and learning outcomes. How students viewed the English language, and the learning process influenced their level of participation, confidence, and interest in class. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013, p. 5), learners' attitudes and beliefs about language learning were closely connected to their motivation and willingness to engage in learning tasks. When students had a positive view of English, they were more likely to be motivated, take risks, and participate actively in the classroom. Similarly, Mercer (2016, p. 17) explained that students' self-

perceptions and their beliefs about language learning affected their confidence and behavior in class. If they believed that learning English was useful and possible, they were more likely to succeed. Lamb (2017, p. 97) also stated that students' personal goals and emotional responses to English learning shaped their long-term commitment to improving their skills. These expert insights showed that students' perspectives were not just opinions, but powerful factors that influenced how they learned and how much they achieved.

Many students saw English as a valuable skill for their future, especially for higher education, career opportunities, and global communication. This positive view often increased their motivation to improve. However, some students also viewed English as a difficult and stressful subject, particularly when they struggled with grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary. Such negative experiences reduced motivation and led to fear or anxiety in using the language. Students' perspectives on learning were shaped by many factors, such as their learning environment, past experiences, teacher attitudes, and how useful they felt the learning materials were. When students felt supported and enjoyed their lessons, they were more likely to develop a positive attitude toward English and participate more confidently. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021, p. 91), students were more motivated and engaged when they felt that the learning environment was safe, encouraging, and meaningful. Similarly, Mercer and Williams (2014, p. 16) explained that the emotional climate of the classroom such as feeling

respected, understood, and included strongly influenced learners' beliefs and motivation. On the other hand, if students often felt pressure, boredom, or experienced repeated failure, they lost interest or developed negative attitudes toward English learning. As stated by Richards (2015, p. 102), negative classroom experiences, such as unclear teaching or unengaging materials, reduced student motivation and limited their willingness to participate. These expert insights supported the idea that students' attitudes and engagement were closely linked to their emotional experiences, classroom atmosphere, and the way teachers presented English learning.

In conclusion, understanding students' perspectives helped teachers adjust their teaching strategies and create a more supportive, engaging classroom environment. When students had a positive mindset, they were more likely to develop confidence and achieve better results in learning English.

a. Motivation

Motivation was very important in learning English. It helped students keep trying even when they faced difficulties. There were two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, which came from inside the student (such as interest or enjoyment), and extrinsic motivation, which came from outside (such as getting good grades or a job in the future). Both types helped students perform better in school. A study in Bangladesh by Hasan and Khan (2021, pp. 25–36) found that students who had low motivation often experienced problems with speaking and vocabulary. The researchers used both questionnaires and interviews.

They discovered that students who were afraid to make mistakes or who did not enjoy learning English often lost motivation. This made it harder for them to improve their skills. In Thailand, a study by Suksawas (2018, pp. 145–146) showed that students who had positive attitudes and strong motivation learned English more effectively. The students were motivated because they believed English was useful for their future. This demonstrated that motivation helped students enjoy learning and try harder, even when English was difficult.

From these studies, it could be concluded that motivation was a key part of learning English. Students who were motivated were more likely to try, practice, and not give up, even when English was challenging. Teachers, classroom conditions, learning materials, and emotional support all played a significant role in helping students stay motivated and overcome learning difficulties.

b. Learning Strategy

Learning strategies were the methods students used to help them understand, remember, and use English. These strategies supported the improvement of skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. When students used good learning strategies, they learned more effectively and overcame the problems they faced in learning English.

Oxford (1990) explained that learning strategies were "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new

situations." These included using a dictionary, repeating words, practicing with friends, or using English language media such as music and videos. In Malaysia, a study by Zare and Othman (2015, p. 640) showed that students who used metacognitive strategies such as planning their study time, setting goals, and checking their own progress achieved higher results in English. These students performed better in writing and reading tasks because they were able to control their learning process. On the other hand, students who did not use any strategy often felt lost and confused during English lessons. In Vietnam, research by Nguyen and Boers (2019) revealed that students with low English proficiency often lacked effective learning strategies. Many students did not know how to practice listening or speaking outside of class. The study recommended that teachers should teach students how to use learning strategies actively to reduce their difficulties.

Based on these studies, learning strategies were very helpful in solving learning problems. Students who used different strategies such as planning, practicing, asking for help, and using technology learned more independently and became more confident. Therefore, teachers need to not only teach language skills but also help students develop effective learning strategies.

c. Classroom Environment

Classroom environment was one of the important factors that affected how students learned English. A good classroom environment

makes students feel safe, comfortable, and motivated to participate. It included the way the teacher taught, the behavior of classmates, the classroom atmosphere, and how students were treated. A study in Iraq by Al Rikabi and Rashid (2024, pp. 147–155) found that many students had difficulties in learning English because their classrooms were not supportive. The students reported feeling nervous or embarrassed to speak because the teacher often corrected them harshly or other students laughed at their mistakes. The study suggested that a friendly and patient classroom atmosphere helped students feel more confident in practicing English. Hasan and Khan (2021, pp. 25–36) also found that students who had a positive relationship with their teacher and classmates showed higher motivation to learn English. They were not afraid to make mistakes and were more active in reading, writing, and speaking activities.

From all these studies, it could be seen that a good classroom environment helped reduce learning difficulties and increased motivation. Teachers played an important role in creating this environment. They did this by offering support, listening to students, encouraging participation, and making the classroom feel like a safe place to learn.

d. Confidence and Attitude

Confidence and attitude were important personal factors that influenced how students learned English. When students felt confident, they were more willing to try speaking, writing, and participating in class.

A positive attitude helped students enjoy learning and not give up easily, even when they face difficulties.

In Bangladesh, Hasan and Khan (2021) found that attitude played a big role in learning. Students who thought English was difficult or boring were less motivated to learn. However, students who believed English was important and interesting were more motivated and tried harder. Their attitude made a big difference in their learning progress (pp. 25–36). Sulaiman et al. (2020, pp. 178–189) explained that students with a positive attitude toward learning English were better at using strategies to improve their skills. They were also more likely to participate in group work, ask questions, and practice outside the classroom.

From these studies, both confidence and attitude influenced how students dealt with learning problems. When students felt confident and had a positive attitude, they were more likely to try, practice, and improve their English. Teachers helped by creating a supportive classroom, giving encouragement, and allowing students to learn from their mistakes without fear.

B. Related Studies

Several previous studies have examined the challenges students face in acquiring English language skills and their perspectives on the learning process. Rahmawati (2019) investigated students' perceptions at SMA Negeri 3 Malang and found that while students viewed English as an important subject, they faced difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. She also noted that

teaching methods and classroom experiences strongly influenced students' attitudes, emphasizing the importance of learner centered approaches and relevant learning materials. Similarly, Suryani (2020) explored vocabulary learning difficulties among high school students in Yogyakarta, revealing that many struggled to memorize new words due to limited practice and lack of English exposure outside school. However, students with a higher interest in English tended to adopt personal strategies, such as using digital tools or watching English language media. In a broader context, Alrabai (2014) studied learners in Saudi Arabia and found that students who believed in their ability to succeed were more motivated and engaged in their learning, indicating a strong link between self-efficacy and language learning outcomes. Nuraini (2021), in her research on senior high school students in West Java, reported common challenges in speaking and listening, often caused by low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities for real life English interaction. Her findings emphasized the importance of a supportive and interactive learning environment. While these studies provide useful insights, most of them focus on either specific language skills or general perceptions without offering a comprehensive view of students' difficulties across all four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing within a unified context. Moreover, few studies explore these challenges from the perspective of students in rural or private school settings, such as SMA Sinar Kasih Sintang, where limitations in resources, English exposure, and instructional quality may pose additional obstacles. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by investigating English learning difficulties holistically and capturing

students' perspectives within the specific context of a private school in Sintang. This localized, skill integrated approach is underrepresented in existing literature and is crucial for developing effective, context appropriate instructional strategies.

C. Framework

This study is guided by two main research questions. The first question seeks to identify the difficulties faced by students in learning English skills, focusing on the four core areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These difficulties are examined through the lens of both internal factors, such as motivation, anxiety, interest, and learning strategies, and external factors, including teaching methods, learning environment, curriculum, and available resources. The second question aims to explore students' perspectives on the process of learning English, covering aspects such as teaching approaches, learning materials, classroom interaction, use of technology, and the relevance of English to real-life communication. These two questions are interconnected, as students' perspectives can influence the challenges they encounter, while the difficulties they face can shape their perceptions of learning. By examining both the problems and the attitudes of students toward English learning, this framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the learning experience at SMA Sinar Kasih Sintang, offering insights that may contribute to improving teaching practices and learning outcomes.