

English Competence Barriers among Publishing Students at Higher Education Institutions in Jakarta: Challenges and Implications for Academic and Professional Success

Katherine Clayton^{1*}, Liza Amalia Putri²

¹University of Queensland

²Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif

E-mail: k.clayton@uq.edu.au¹, liza.aputri@polimedia.ac.id²

ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT This study investigates the barriers to English competence among publishing students at higher education institutions in Jakarta and explores the challenges these barriers pose for their academic and professional success. Despite the growing importance of English proficiency in the publishing industry and global academic communication, many students continue to struggle with language-related issues that hinder their learning outcomes and future career prospects. Through a mixed-method approach involving surveys and interviews with students and lecturers, the research identifies key obstacles such as limited exposure to English in daily academic contexts, lack of confidence in using English productively, and gaps in curriculum alignment with industry demands. The findings suggest that these barriers contribute to reduced engagement in English-based learning materials, limited participation in international publishing opportunities, and decreased competitiveness in the job market. The study concludes with recommendations for institutions to enhance English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction, integrate more authentic publishing-related English tasks, and foster an immersive language environment to better equip students for the global publishing landscape.

Keyword: English competence, publishing students, higher education

BACKGROUND

In the publishing industry, where information, ideas, and narratives circulate across national and linguistic boundaries, English has emerged as a global medium of communication (Crystal, 2003). For publishing students, particularly those enrolled in higher education institutions in urban centers like Jakarta, English competence is not just an academic asset—it is a professional necessity. Whether it involves editing bilingual manuscripts, analyzing global publishing trends, collaborating with international authors, or marketing digital content to a global

audience, a strong command of English enhances both academic performance and future career prospects (Hyland, 2007). Despite the increasing relevance of English in the publishing field, many students in Jakarta's publishing programs continue to struggle with basic and advanced language skills. This situation is concerning, as publishing students are expected to engage with English-language texts, write critical analyses, understand publishing contracts, and operate in digital platforms where English often dominates (Flowerdew, 2013). The gap between institutional expectations and students' actual language competence

can limit their academic growth and restrict their ability to compete in the evolving publishing industry (Rahman, 2019). Several interrelated factors contribute to this challenge, including unequal access to quality English education, traditional grammar-based teaching approaches, limited exposure to English in everyday life, and psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes or lack of motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). While English courses are typically embedded in higher education curricula, they often fall short in addressing the practical, discipline-specific language needs of publishing students (Basturkmen, 2010). This article explores the key barriers to English competence faced by publishing students in Jakarta's higher education institutions. It also discusses the broader academic and professional implications of these challenges and offers strategic recommendations for improving English education within publishing programs. By identifying these barriers and addressing them systematically, educational institutions can better prepare students to succeed in both local and international publishing environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the barriers to English language competence among publishing students in higher education institutions in Jakarta. The choice of this method was grounded in the need to capture the depth and complexity of students' experiences, perceptions, and the contextual factors influencing their English learning journey, particularly in relation to academic and professional demands in the publishing field (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data collection was carried out at three higher education institutions in Jakarta that offer publishing-related programs. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure

relevance to the research focus (Palinkas et al., 2015). A total of thirty individuals participated in the study, consisting of twenty-four final-year publishing students, three English lecturers, and three program heads or curriculum developers. The students selected had at least three semesters of academic experience in the publishing program and were actively involved in courses or projects requiring English language use.

To gather comprehensive insights, the study utilized multiple data collection techniques. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with students, lecturers, and program heads. These interviews aimed to explore participants' views on the challenges associated with English learning, the adequacy of English instruction within the curriculum, and the broader institutional support mechanisms in place (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition to individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with groups of students to further investigate collective experiences, challenges, and coping strategies related to English usage in academic and practical publishing contexts (Morgan, 1997).

Supporting data were also gathered through document analysis, which involved reviewing course syllabi, English-related assignments, and institutional language policy documents. This triangulation of data sources helped to validate the information gathered through interviews and discussions and provided a more holistic understanding of the issue (Bowen, 2009).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following an inductive coding process. Transcripts from interviews and FGDs were systematically reviewed to identify recurring patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes were then grouped into key categories, including linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and institutional barriers. The implications of these barriers for students' academic

success and professional readiness were also explored based on the coded data.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants for confirmation and feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, triangulation across different data sources and participant groups strengthened the reliability of the interpretations (Patton, 2015).

Through this qualitative method, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by publishing students in acquiring English competence, as well as the broader educational and professional implications of these challenges within Jakarta's higher education landscape.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that publishing students in higher education institutions in Jakarta encounter various barriers that hinder the development of their English language competence. These barriers are complex and multifaceted, often intersecting with personal, institutional, and systemic factors. The findings are grouped into four broad areas: linguistic limitations, instructional shortcomings, psychological challenges, and institutional constraints. Each of these categories is elaborated in the following to show how they affect students' academic experiences and their readiness for professional work in the publishing sector.

One of the most commonly reported barriers among student participants was their limited mastery of English vocabulary and grammar, particularly in contexts relevant to publishing. Many students admitted that they could follow general English lessons but found it difficult to understand technical terms used in editing, media production, and global publishing trends. This limitation not only affected

their classroom performance but also restricted their engagement with English-language resources, such as international articles, journals, and digital publishing platforms. The lack of familiarity with field-specific terminology reflects the broader issue of general English instruction being disconnected from students' disciplinary needs.

The issue of curriculum and pedagogy also emerged strongly during interviews and focus group discussions. While most students acknowledged that English courses were offered in their programs, they noted that these courses often relied heavily on traditional, grammar-based instruction and rarely incorporated real-world publishing scenarios. Lecturers also expressed similar concerns, stating that the curriculum lacked adequate space for practical English usage and that teaching materials were often generic, rather than tailored to the demands of the publishing industry. As a result, students were not adequately prepared to use English for editing tasks, project documentation, or international communication—all of which are crucial in contemporary publishing careers.

In addition to structural and academic factors, students described psychological challenges that negatively impacted their motivation and confidence. Many reported feeling anxious when asked to speak English in class or participate in group presentations. This anxiety was often rooted in a fear of making mistakes and being judged by peers or instructors. Several students also expressed that their limited exposure to English in everyday life further reduced their confidence and willingness to practice the language. Such psychological barriers contribute to a cycle of avoidance, where students become increasingly hesitant to engage with English, thereby hindering their progress.

The institutional environment itself played a role in shaping students' language learning experiences. Several participants

pointed out that their campuses lacked English-speaking activities, such as language clubs, workshops, or student-run publications in English. Access to resources such as up-to-date English textbooks, publishing tools, and interaction with native or fluent speakers was also limited. Furthermore, opportunities for professional engagement—such as internships or guest lectures from international professionals—were rare. These constraints limited students' ability to connect academic learning with practical applications, leaving them unprepared for professional tasks that require English proficiency.

Taken together, the findings suggest that English competence among publishing students in Jakarta is influenced not just by personal effort, but also by institutional design, curriculum quality, and the availability of meaningful learning environments. The gap between what students are taught and what the publishing industry demands remains wide, and without significant reforms, many students risk being academically underprepared and professionally disadvantaged.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort from both educators and institutions. English instruction should move beyond general grammar and reading comprehension toward a more integrated, context-based approach. Courses should be redesigned to reflect the linguistic realities of the publishing world—incorporating editing exercises, publication writing, translation skills, and cross-cultural communication. At the same time, institutions must foster supportive environments by offering relevant resources, encouraging language use outside the classroom, and connecting students with professionals in the industry.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, enhancing English competence among publishing students is not only essential for their academic progress but also crucial for equipping them

to navigate the evolving landscape of the global publishing industry. By acknowledging and systematically addressing the barriers they face, higher education institutions can play a transformative role in preparing a new generation of publishing professionals who are both linguistically capable and globally competitive.

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