

**English Speaking Difficulties Encountered
by Tourism Department Students' in EFL Public Interactions:
A qualitative study**

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ABSTRACT

Mastering English facilitates students' preparation for professional job applications. In the context of tourism school, learning the language, therefore, is a must. The study reported in this article explores the difficulties in speaking English encountered by a group of Indonesian learners of English and how they anticipated their perceived difficulties. A qualitative research approach was employed for data collection and analysis. Participants were from a Tourism Department of a university in the Province of Gorontalo, Indonesia, who voluntarily agreed to join in the interview sessions. Findings showed that most participants struggled to communicate in English, particularly when interacting with foreigners. The difficulties include a lack of vocabulary and comprehension of certain accents. In addition, it was found that in anticipating those difficulties, students employed regular English use practices, gestures, and information technology assistance. The study suggests that frequent meaningful English practices in and outside the English classroom should be facilitated, and the use of relevant technological tools for fostering English language practices be promoted.

Keywords: English speaking difficulties; public interactions; Tourism Department

INTRODUCTION

English has been essential in facilitating students' preparation for professional requirements. Mastering the language helps in seeking jobs since it is used as the working language in 85% of international organizations (Sudjasmara, 2013). Therefore, nowadays, people looking for jobs are demanded to use English in communication. Considering English use in the tourism industry, its role in delivering high-quality service is significant, making it a vital tool to make guests feel at home.

Guests' satisfaction is related to employees' roles in treating them during their visit. These roles include helping them with their daily chores or even explaining directions. During their daily

routine, guests are expected to communicate with the employees, and sufficient language skills are required for those who work in this field. Blue and Harun (2003) stated that hospitality-related language should be integrated into professional hospitality programs to understand cross-cultural communication better. Based on the previous explanations, it is safe to say that in tourism industry, English is considered as a requirement in providing sufficient amount of care to the tourists in this context, students of tourism department embark in the internship program to increase their experience in the said tourism industry. During this program, students are expected to obtain various benefits, which include experiencing employment, obtaining an insight into management and management methods, gaining greater maturity and self-confidence, getting involved in the diagnosis and solution of problems (Busby, 2002) and therefore, it can be said that internship program is essential for those who want to pursue a career in tourism industry.

By looking at the above explanations, this research focuses on two objectives. The first one is to reveal the difficulties in speaking English encountered by the students majoring in the Tourism Department to aid the students of the Tourism Department in improving their speaking skills. Thus, by revealing these difficulties, students could learn about the difficulties themselves, which could aid them in communicating with any English-speaking foreigners. The second one is giving the students' knowledge regarding the speaking difficulties so that they could avoid the difficulties and approach English, specifically speaking, to improve their speaking skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH FOR TOURISM PURPOSES (ETP)

English for Tourism Purposes (ETP) falls into one of the fields in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Paltridge and Starfield (2013) defined English for specific purposes (ESP) as a second or foreign language where the learners aim to use English in a particular domain. In tourism, communicating and interacting with foreigners boosts the necessity of foreign language skills. Leslie and Russel (2006, p.1405) stated that “language should be addressed earlier and a student majoring in the tourism sector should possess foreign language skill to improve the recruitment chance within this field and be eligible enough in the cross-cultural service interface.” Therefore, it can be said that to be successful in this field, one must master foreign languages, in this case, English, and the mastery over English includes speaking skills in it.

Therefore, it can be said that the importance of English in the tourism sector or field is necessary for executing a professional and effective interaction. Furthermore, learning English could open a perfect opportunity for tourism. In addition, learning specific English skills helps a learner work within a particular workplace or job that also needs specific language skills. Also, employees can make the guests' trips and traveling moments more delightful by utilizing English. Also, it is noted that by using English, the hotels' services, such as providing a tour guide, would be increased, which could be one of the assets for the hotels.

ENGLISH IN THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT

As the name suggests, the Tourism Department is a specific sector or area of knowledge heavily related to tourism. It goes along with the Tourism Department's definition, which is a department that studies all things related to tourism (Prodjo, 2019). One can learn about travel destination management, hospitality, tour and travel from this department. In the Tourism Department, English is widely used to communicate with foreign guests. It is claimed that general interaction,

such as greetings or thanking, requires some measure of familiarization with the relevant English expressions before a person can serve effectively as a guest-related employee (Blue and Harun, 2003). Thus, ESP is needed to accommodate the needs of English in the Tourism department. Learning English in a different context makes the tourism students focus and learn more about English in tourism terms. Sometimes, the students learn English to get a better achievement or even a job in the future. It leads them to take a course in English in a specific way, in this case, English for tourism.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE ABILITY

Communicative language ability is defined as utilizing a language in a particular condition in a proper context or situation. Thus, it can also be described as possessing both knowledge or competence and the capacity to implement or execute the command appropriately and contextualize communicative language use (Bachman, 1990). In utilizing a language in its proper context, assessing an individual's language skills is obligatory. Hymes (1972) as cited in Naoua (2017), wrote that communicative language ability (CLA) has continually been defined concerning two competencies: competence for grammar and competence for use. It is pointed out that when children acquire their mother tongue or learn a foreign language, they know how to construct and understand correct grammatical sentences and use them properly with their current social context. Thus, based on the previous explanation, it can be said that communicative language ability is a series of processes done to examine an individual in terms of their language proficiency beyond the test itself. Also, communicative language ability is divided into two competencies: competence for grammar and competence for use. During an interaction with another person, in this case, an interaction between a student from the Tourism Department and English-speaking foreigners or guests requires language skills to execute a successful conversation. Therefore, by understanding correct grammatical sentences and how to use them appropriately to the social context they occur in, the students would converse without leaving any confusion for the guests.

METHOD

A qualitative research method was used in this present study. The participants were recruited from the class of 2015 to 2017. They were recruited due to their association with tourism, which might oblige them to use English when interacting with foreigners. To collect data, a semi-structured interview was used. Data analysis was done by using a thematic analysis approach, which entails building categories and developing themes. To ensure trustworthiness, all participants were asked to confirm the transcription of their interview transcripts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

This research aimed to uncover the difficulties that students of the Tourism Department face when speaking English, and how they anticipated the difficulties. The findings are presented in two parts: Perceived difficulties in speaking English and Strategies for anticipating difficulties in speaking English.

**PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH
INSUFFICIENT AMOUNT OF VOCABULARY COLLECTION**

In learning to speak English, an English language learner needs to possess a sufficient amount of vocabulary to have a proper and straightforward conversation; otherwise, that individual will not be able to handle the conversation correctly. Therefore, an insufficient amount of vocabulary is considered difficult in English speaking.

In this theme, the first response was provided by participant 1, who stated that during their interaction with the foreigners, most of the time, this participant experienced a difficulty during the interaction due to not having a sufficient amount of required vocabulary. Moreover, due to not having extensive training, such as constantly reading English-related texts, this participant's speaking difficulty is worsening. This answer is shown below.

“belum fasih untuk soal vocab atau grammar kadang susah ya menurutku karena belum terbiasa kalau untuk soal vocab vocab itu ada sebagian vocab aku tahu artinya tapi sebagainya tidak jarang lihat orang baca juga.”

“I'm not fluent in vocab or grammar questions and sometimes it's hard for me because I'm not used to it, there are some vocabs that I know what they mean but not because I rarely see and read them.” (Researcher Translation)

As stated before, lack of practice is why this participant was having difficulty speaking English. Besides that, not paying attention to the given English materials and not finishing the learning program further increased the already worsened difficulty.

Based on the answers, it is shown that participant 6 joined in an English course prior their enrollment in the tourism department but unfortunately, they did not finish the said course. However, even with their prior English knowledge, this participant experienced a difficulty in speaking during their interaction with foreigners. It is stated that participant 6 had difficulty explaining the location of the bathroom, which are shown below.

“sempat beberapa kali saat ia bertanya letak tempat berbicara tentang kesulitan-kesulitan apa yang Anda alami salah satu kesulitan yang pernah saya alami ketika menjelaskan letak kamar mandi kepada tamu asing di hotel tempat saya magang.”

“There were several times when he asked the location of the place, such as when explaining the location of the bathroom to foreign guests at the hotel where I was an intern.” (Researcher Translation)

Based on the answers, participant 8 could not provide clear responses during their interactions with the foreigners since they lacked an extensive vocabulary. Aside from that, they did not have a proper grasp of English, such as pronunciation made it hard for this participant to speak English properly.

“saya mendapatkan kesulitan dalam berkomunikasi dengan tamu atau warga negara asing Apalagi saya sangat kurang dalam kosakata bahasa Inggris. Kesulitan yang paling sering dialami yaitu Saya kurang mengerti apa yang sedang ditanyakan oleh tamu asing karena kebalilagi penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris yang masih sangat kurang dan mungkin belum terbiasa menggunakan bahasa Inggris bahkan beberapa kata bahasa Inggris yang saya ketahui saja kadang-kadang saya tidak yakin kau pengucapannya sudah benar.”

“I have difficulty communicating with guests or foreign nationals, especially since I have little English vocabulary. The most frequent difficulty is that I don't understand what foreign guests are asking because again, the mastery of English vocabulary is still very lacking and maybe I'm not used to using English even some English words that I know sometimes I'm not sure you pronounce already correct.” (Researcher Translation)

Participant 10 also experienced difficulty speaking English due to not interacting with the English-speaking guests and only meeting non-English-speaking ones. It is shown below.

“untuk berkomunikasi sendiri itu Saya sering kesulitan karena kan Tidak semua orang asing berbicara bahasa Inggris Contohnya orang asing dari Cina ataupun dari negara lain.”

“I often find it difficult to communicate by myself because not all foreigners speak English. For example, foreigners from China or other countries.” (Researcher Translation)

As shown by the answers, it is discovered that the most difficulties experienced by the participants is the lack of sufficient vocabulary collection. It is revealed by some participants that in conducting a proper English communication, sufficient amount of vocabulary is a requirement since most guests speak English. Furthermore, this difficulty spawns several other problems, such as difficulties explaining directions and even a general conversation.

LACK OF COMPREHENSION IN CERTAIN ACCENT

When accents affect the spoken message, a communication breakdown may result in a delay or inaccuracy of the intended message, resulting in a distortion of the transferred messages. In this research, Participant 5 experienced difficulty speaking English, especially during their interaction with foreigners, whether from the English-speaking country or non-English-speaking country, since based on the answers, this participant did not understand them clearly and thus prevented them from being communicating in English.

“pada awalnya mungkin saya susah kan awalnya Karena ada sama sekali kan di Bahasa Inggris cuma karena kita kan di jurusan pariwisata itu salah satu penunjang jumlah karena kita berhubungan langsung dengan tamu. Apalagi kan kita akan menerima tamu-tamu luar kita masih menerima tamu tamu dari luar negeri bule-bule begitu tapi bicara sedikit-sedikit biasalah cuma kayak ditanya di mana tempat belanja dekat sini mall-nya di mana begitu kecuali saya bisanya dapat shift di front office, jaga di depan saya juga harus bicara walaupun hanya singkat-singkat saja tapi kita mengerti apa yang mereka katakan.”

“In the beginning, it might be difficult for me at first. Because there are no basics in English at all, just because we are in the tourism department, that’s one of the supports because we deal directly with guests. Moreover, we will receive guests from abroad, but even if we talk a little bit, I can because it’s just like being asked where to shop near here. However, if I usually get a shift at the front office, the guard in front of me also has to talk even if it’s just basic, but we understand what they are saying.” (Researcher Translation)

This participant also states it that the accents possess by each person are different based on where they come from. For example, American accent is considered to be clear by this participant, while the guests that have their English influenced by their mother tongue, such as Germans, Chinese, and Koreans, were hard to understand due to their unclear accents, which further hindered the participant from speaking English to the guests.

“Pernah saya magang di salah satu hotel di Manado dan di situ kebanyakan juga dari Cina, Korea, dan Jerman. untuk berbicara dengan mereka agak susah karena dialog setiap negara itu beda contohnya Jerman beda sama Cina, tapi kalau mereka bicara, saya masih bisa mengerti walaupun mereka dari negara yang tidak memakai bahasa Inggris, namun untuk berbicara masih agak sulit.”

“Once I did an internship at a hotel in Manado and most of them were from China, Korea, and Germany. It’s a bit difficult to talk to them because each country’s dialogue is different, for example, Germany is different from China, but if they talk, I can still understand even though they are from a country that doesn’t speak English, but speaking is still a bit difficult.” (Researcher Translation)

Participant 9 was shown to experience a problem in communicating since they had a hard time understanding various English accents which prompted them to have difficulties during their interactions with the guests without the proper comprehension regarding the guests’ accents, this participant could not clearly reply them. The answer is shown below.

“saya kurang menguasai vocabulary sehingga saya sangat kesulitan dalam berkomunikasi dengan orang asing. Selain itu, kesulitan yang aku alami dan saya juga kesulitan dalam membedakan aksen yang berbeda dari setiap tamu atau setiap orang asing apalagi tamu atau orang asing yang dari Asia itu sulit untuk ditangkap serta menyulitkan saya dalam berkomunikasi dengan orang tersebut.”

“I don’t master vocabulary so I have a lot of difficulty in communicating with foreigners. In addition, the difficulties that I experienced and I also had difficulty in distinguishing the different accents of each guest or every foreigner especially guests or foreigners from Asia were difficult to catch and made it difficult for me to communicate with that person.” (Researcher Translation)

Another difficulty experienced by the participants is the inability to understand some English accents. It is proven by the participants that English is used widely, and it turned out that some non-English-speaking countries also used English in a rather unconventional way due to their mother tongue. The participants are shown to face difficulties in understanding the English itself due to the guests’ various English accents, which prompted them to face difficulties.

STRATEGIS FOR ANTICIPATING DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH PRACTICING ENGLISH

Within the field of second language learning, the importance of practice is no exception, and the question is how practice can be maximized to improve second language skills. Participant 1 is no exception since they started to look for new and exciting English-related things that could boost their learning motivation and eliminate their boredom, such as looking for music sung in English and carefully listening to the lyrics to improve their vocabulary and speaking skills.

“cara menghadapi menghadapi kesulitan itu dari aku pribadi mencari hal-hal yang baru yang dapat membangkitkan kemudian menghilangkan rasa kebosanan dalam belajar belajar bahasa Inggris mungkin kayak apa ya dengerin lagu barat sambil melihat lirik artinya juga kemudian sambil nyanyi-nyanyi gitu kan itu bisa mengurangi Apa kesulitan yang aku hadapi.”

“My way of dealing with these difficulties personally is to look for new things that can arouse and eliminate boredom in learning English. maybe it’s like listening to a western song while looking at the lyrics and then while singing, it can reduce the difficulties I face.” (Researcher Translation)

Participant 2 had a unique way of talking in front of a mirror that presumably increases their confidence in speaking English. Also, it is stated that to further increase their skills in speaking, having a partner fluent in English would be a great help.

“belajar belajar lebih giat belajar lebih banyak tentang pronunciation terus pastinya sama dasar-dasarnya ya terus juga latihan speak up di depan cermin. Terus banyak-banyak ke interaksi dengan teman-teman yang paham bahasa Inggris.”
“Learn more actively about pronunciation and the basics. keep practicing speaking up in front of the mirror and lots of interactions with friends who understand English.” (Researcher Translation)

Participant 8 tried to be brave during their interaction since to master a language, a practice is the number one requirement. The answer is shown below.

“memberanikan diri untuk mencoba berinteraksi dengan orang asing agar bisa mengasah kemampuan komunikasi kita intinya harus terus berlatih serta berusaha karena pembelajaran bahasa Inggris penguasaan bahasa itu hanya dengan mempraktekkannya langsung.”
“To be brave to try to interact with foreigners so that we can hone our communication skills we have to keep practicing and trying because learning English is only by practicing it directly.” (Researcher Translation)

Participant 10 overcame the difficulty, aside from learning other languages, such as Mandarin, by learning English and its context to use the language properly. The answer is shown below.

“caranya yaitu dengan cara memahami definisi mana yang harus digunakan bila kita harus memperhatikan konteks agar bisa mengetahui definisi mana yang sesuai dengan lawan bicara.”
“The trick is to understand which definition to use if we have to pay attention to the context to know which definition suits the other person.” (Researcher Translation)

Based on the collected interview, it appears that some participants struggle in executing a proper English conversation due to lack of practice. One of the participants shows that their lack of English skills is affected by their low-level understanding of English. Therefore, the participants utilized several practice techniques to increase their English knowledge, such as practicing in front of a mirror, listening to English songs, and even using their field to practice speaking.

USING APPROPRIATE GESTURES

In communicating, using gestures is one of the available options in having a conversation with the guests since it is reported that spoken sentences were twice as high when the sentences were presented combined with the gestures than when they were not. Therefore, gestures are often used by the participants. Participant 4 was shown to use gestures as another way to make up for their lack of speaking skills, which is by using gestures to communicate with the guests and the answer is shown below.

“saya menggunakan bahasa verbal misalnya bahasa tubuh begitu seperti itu kalau misalnya Saya kurang mengerti dengan atau menghadapi kesulitan berbahasa dengan menggunakan bahasa tubuh agar mereka bisa lebih mengerti seperti itu.”

“I use verbal language such as body language like that if for example I don’t understand or face language difficulties so they can understand better.” (Researcher Translation)

Similarly, participant 6 tried to learn English more and during the implementation, they used gestures to communicate with the guests; the answer is shown below.

“mengulang kembali materi-materi yang pernah diberikan dosen sehingga jadi lupa Bagaimana cara anda menghadapi kesulitan tersebut memakai gesture atau gerakan tubuh dalam menjelaskan.”

“Not repeating the material that was given by the lecturer so that it becomes forgotten. Besides that, I face these difficulties by using gestures or body movements in explaining.” (Research Translation)

Aside from using the traditional practice method, some participants are shown to use gestures to transfer their thoughts to the guests. By using gestures, simple interactions, such as showing the directions might be transferred and thus the communication is successfully executed.

UTILIZING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

Technology is also used by the participants in helping them communicate with the tourists because technology has greatly improved the speed of communication; therefore, this method is necessary and helpful. Participant 5 is shown to use this method since using technology and asking those who are better in English in aiding them during the interaction with foreigners is rather general and easy techniques. The answer is shown below.

“cara saya menghadapi kesulitan tersebut mudah sekali Sebenarnya ini adalah hal yang sering dilakukan juga oleh banyak orang yaitu saya mengandalkan Google Translate dan selebihnya mendengar membaca dan terus belajar bahasa Inggris semampu saya agar saya bisa lebih hebat lagi dalam berbahasa Inggris selain itu juga saya tidak pernah takut untuk bertanya ke orang yang lebih paham bahasa Inggris.”

“My way of dealing with these difficulties is really easy. The method is also often done by many people, namely I rely on Google Translate and the rest listen and read and continue to learn English as much as I can so that I can be even better at speaking English. Besides, I am never afraid to ask people who understand English better.” (Researcher Translation)

Participant 7 not only tried to understand the lecturers’ materials, but also utilized technology such as Google Translate, shown in the answer below.

“Saya belajar bahasa Inggris di kampus tapi belum terlalu mengerti tentang materi yang diberikan dan saya pribadi mungkin belum menangkap Apa maksud dari dosen untuk saya dan cara lain adalah dengan menggunakan teknologi seperti lewat Google Translate.”

“I studied English in college but didn’t really understand the material given and I probably didn’t understand what the lecturer meant for me and another way is to use technology such as through Google Translate.” (Researcher Translation)

Participant 9 utilized technology such as Google Translate and gestures to communicate with the guests. The answer is shown below.

“kadang saya itu berkomunikasi dengan orang asing itu dibantu dengan body language Disamping itu jika mereka tidak memahami apa yang kita ucapkan Kita juga bisa menggunakan kamus online Google Translate dan lain-lain seperti itu.”

“Sometimes I communicate with foreigners, it is helped by body language. Besides, if they don’t understand what we are saying, we can also use the online dictionary Google Translate and others like that.” (Researcher Translation)

Some other participants solve this difficulty in a rather modern way, utilizing technology, such as using Google Translate. By utilizing this method, the participants could converse by using complex sentences due to the features of the translation machine itself, which is helpful for some of the participants.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it is discovered that there are five themes that consist of two themes for the speaking difficulties and three themes for how to overcome them. The first theme is the insufficient amount of vocabulary collection, which, as the name suggests, can be defined as individuals' lack of vocabulary collection. Based on the findings, some participants experienced difficulties in English speaking due to lacking English vocabulary, resulting in the inability to communicate correctly. One of the participants stated that they are not used to speaking English because they rarely see or hear the words. Another participant stated that the difficulties they faced were caused by being not serious during the learning process or even stopping entering that class before it was finished. By doing so, this participant experienced a hard time uttering the right words or sentences. This statement is supported by Hamad (2013), who stated that vocabulary is an essential factor in speaking since having improper vocabulary knowledge and an insufficient amount of vocabulary might result in failed communication. Therefore, one could communicate correctly by possessing an adequate number of vocabularies.

The second theme is lacking comprehension in certain accents since when accents alter the spoken message, a communication breakdown may occur, resulting in a delay or inaccuracy of the intended message, resulting in a distortion of the transferred messages. One of the participants proved that certain non-native English accents, such as German-influenced English accents, were difficult to understand, which might be caused by the influences of their mother tongue. This finding is supported by Abeywickrama (2013) as cited in Büyükahıska & Uyar (2019) who stated that non-native accents were more challenging to comprehend and seemed to distract ESL test-takers in the same native language. Similarly, EFL test takers were more familiar with native than non-native accents (Abeywickrama, 2013, as cited in Büyükahıska & Uyar, 2019), possibly since native accents were used in classroom listening activities.

The following themes explained how students anticipate their difficulties when communicating with foreigners. The first one is practicing English, where in this theme, it is discovered that to overcome the problems in speaking to the guests, participants practice English, as stated by the participants. This finding is supported by Thompson (2019), who found out that

language learning can be maximized through deliberate practice by studying at optimal times of the day and receiving regular feedback on performance. There is also a case that intensive practice involving more prolonged periods of study over shorter periods is more beneficial than shorter periods of study over a longer duration, resulting in improved speaking skills. By possessing the necessary skills, one would be a great worker in tourism since Blue and Harun (2003) explained that verbal communication, such as greetings, is necessary in making guests comfortable.

The second one is using appropriate gestures in communicating with the guests. The findings discovered that some participants used gestures to compensate for their lack of speaking skills. Some participants stated that during their time as an intern in a hotel, gestures are often used to make up for their lack of speaking skills. When it comes to communication, utilizing gestures is one of the available methods for having a conversation with the tourists, as it has been found that gesture does not only contribute essential information to a message but also actively facilitates the cognitive formation of messages and supports learning and memory (Clough and Duff, 2020).

The last one is utilizing information technology tools. It was found that participants use technology to assist them in communicating with tourists because technology has substantially improved the pace of communication, making its use necessary and beneficial. Nowadays, technology is also considered easier to reach because it existed in smartphones. According to Alhadlaq (2016), technology has considerably diminished communication cost, translating to increased accessibility. This claim supports the participants answers where technology, specifically the use of online dictionary, such as Google Translate, improve their difficulty in communicating with foreigners.

Aside from the findings mentioned earlier, it is also found that the difficulty in speaking English was mainly caused by their shyness and fear of mispronouncing a word. According to one of the participants, understanding the guests was not a problem compared to replying to them due to being nervous and shy to use English and as someone who works in this field, not being able to reply to the guests comprehensively is not a great sign. This finding is comparable with Gani (2018) study about the local tour guides' English-speaking ability to promote a museum in Aceh. Both findings showed that lack of confidence is also a factor that hinders the participants in performing appropriate English communication.

CONCLUSION

This study seeks to reveal the difficulties in speaking English encountered by the students majoring in the Tourism Department and how they anticipate the difficulties. The results showed that most participants struggled to communicate in English, particularly when interacting with foreigners. It was discovered that most of the time, the participants' difficulties were caused by a lack of vocabulary and an inability to properly enunciate English words. Furthermore, the findings show that in anticipating those difficulties, practicing English is always the go-to method since practicing allows one to improve their English skills. Using gestures is chosen as a communication method since it is reported that spoken sentences were twice as high when the sentences were presented combined with the gestures as when they were not. Finally, it is shown that technology also plays a significant role in the students' English communication due to its being easy to access and helping the speed of the communication flow. The implications of this study include the promotion of frequent uses of English in and outside the English classroom, as well as the integration of technological tools to facilitate English language learning and its uses during English communication.

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