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Education Article

## Challenges and Innovations in Teaching English in Multilingual Settings in Stit Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara

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### KEYWORDS

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### A B S T R A C T

This study explores the challenges and innovations in teaching English within a multilingual environment at STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research involved English lecturers and students as participants, using interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis as data collection techniques. The findings reveal several key challenges, including linguistic interference from students' native languages, varying levels of English proficiency, and cultural perceptions that hinder motivation. In response, educators implemented innovative strategies such as translanguaging, culturally responsive teaching, and digital technology integration. These approaches significantly enhanced student engagement, language confidence, and overall classroom dynamics. The study concludes that embracing multilingualism through context-sensitive pedagogy is crucial for effective English instruction. Recommendations are offered for continued innovation, culturally relevant curriculum design, and further research to support language education in diverse linguistic settings.

## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, English has established itself as a crucial tool for communication across diverse linguistic communities. However, teaching English in multilingual environments presents unique challenges that require adaptive and innovative strategies. At STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara, an institution located in a region rich with linguistic and cultural diversity, English educators face a complex reality: students come from various language backgrounds, including Bahasa Indonesia, local Malay dialects, and indigenous languages. While this multilingual environment offers cultural richness, it also creates additional layers of complexity in the process of English language teaching

and learning, necessitating methods that are sensitive to students' linguistic and cultural contexts.

One of the major challenges encountered is the wide variation in students' levels of English proficiency, largely influenced by their first languages. Linguistic interference, particularly in grammar, pronunciation, and writing, often impedes the students' mastery of English. Additionally, cultural values inherent in students' native languages can affect their attitudes toward English learning, sometimes resulting in resistance, anxiety, or a lack of motivation.

In response to these challenges, educators at STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara have begun implementing innovative approaches. Techniques such as translanguaging, culturally responsive teaching, and the integration of technology into language instruction are emerging as effective strategies. These innovations not only recognize the students' multilingual realities but also utilize them as assets to facilitate English acquisition. By adopting these practices, teachers aim to foster a more inclusive, engaging, and effective English learning environment.

This study seeks to explore the multifaceted challenges faced by English educators in a multilingual setting, while also highlighting the innovative practices adopted to overcome these obstacles. The research is guided by the following questions:

- What are the primary challenges in teaching English within the multilingual context of STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara?
- What innovative strategies are employed by educators to address these challenges?
- How effective are these innovations in enhancing English language learning among students in a multilingual environment?

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the main challenges faced in teaching English in a multilingual environment at STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara;
- To describe the innovative strategies implemented by English educators to manage these challenges; and
- To analyze the effectiveness of these innovations in improving students' English proficiency in a multilingual context.

## **METHOD**

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the challenges and innovations in teaching English in a multilingual environment at STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows for a deeper and richer understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of both educators and students within the context of multilingualism. Through this approach, the researcher sought to capture the

complexity and diversity of the participants' responses and classroom practices.

Participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on English lecturers and students from the English Education Department who had at least two years of experience engaging with multilingual learning environments. A total of six lecturers and fifteen students participated, providing a balanced perspective from both the teaching and learning sides.

Data were gathered using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews with lecturers were conducted to explore their insights on the challenges they face and the innovative methods they apply. Classroom observations allowed the researcher to witness firsthand the teaching techniques and student interactions, providing contextual support for the interview findings. Document analysis, including the review of syllabi, lesson plans, and selected student assignments, was also conducted to further understand how innovation was embedded in the instructional design and delivery.

Thematic analysis was used to process and interpret the collected data. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and observation notes were systematically reviewed. Data were then coded and organized into themes that reflected the major challenges and innovations identified during the study. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through triangulation, combining data from interviews, observations, and documents. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, member checking was also carried out, allowing participants to verify the accuracy of the transcripts and the researcher's interpretations.

By combining multiple data sources and ensuring the authenticity of the participants' voices, this method provided a comprehensive understanding of how English teaching evolves within the multilingual context of STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that English educators at STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara face several significant challenges when teaching in a multilingual environment. However, they have also demonstrated remarkable creativity and resilience by implementing a range of innovative strategies to address these issues.

One of the most prominent challenges identified was the influence of students' native languages on their English learning. Many students exhibited difficulties in pronunciation, grammar usage, and vocabulary development due to linguistic interference from their first languages, such as local Malay dialects or regional languages. Lecturers reported that these linguistic patterns often persisted even after extensive instruction, indicating a deep-rooted influence of the students' mother tongues. Moreover, the variation in students' English proficiency levels created additional hurdles, requiring instructors to adapt their lesson plans to accommodate both advanced and struggling learners simultaneously.

Another major challenge was the cultural perception of English as a "foreign" language rather than a practical communication tool. This perception, shaped by the students' sociocultural backgrounds, often led

to a lack of motivation and anxiety in English language classrooms. Students sometimes viewed English as irrelevant to their daily lives, which negatively impacted their engagement and willingness to practice the language actively.

In response to these challenges, English lecturers at STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara have employed several innovative teaching strategies. One notable approach was **translanguaging**, where students were encouraged to use their first language strategically to support their English learning. For example, instructors allowed students to brainstorm ideas in their native languages before expressing them in English, thus reducing cognitive load and anxiety. This method validated students' linguistic backgrounds while promoting gradual development in English proficiency.

Additionally, **culturally responsive teaching** was implemented to bridge the gap between students' cultural identities and the English language. Lecturers integrated local contexts, familiar cultural references, and real-life applications into their English lessons, making the material more relatable and meaningful. This approach significantly increased students' interest and participation, as they could see the relevance of English to their own lives.

**Technology integration** also played a vital role in fostering innovation. The use of online learning platforms, language apps, and interactive multimedia materials provided students with more engaging and flexible opportunities to practice English both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers utilized WhatsApp groups, YouTube videos, and interactive quizzes to maintain students' interest and encourage autonomous learning.

The thematic analysis of the data showed that these innovations, while not without their limitations, contributed positively to the English learning experience. Students became more willing to communicate, exhibited greater confidence in using English, and developed more positive attitudes toward the language. Although challenges related to linguistic interference and cultural perceptions persisted, the innovative strategies employed by the lecturers proved effective in minimizing their negative impacts.

In conclusion, the teaching of English in a multilingual setting such as STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara is fraught with complexities. Nevertheless, through thoughtful and context-sensitive innovations, English educators have been able to turn linguistic and cultural diversity from an obstacle into a valuable resource for enriching the learning process. These findings highlight the need for continuous adaptation and creativity in language teaching practices, particularly in linguistically diverse educational environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that teaching English in a multilingual environment, such as at STIT Al Ittihadiyah Labuhanbatu Utara, presents both significant challenges and opportunities for innovation. The major challenges identified include linguistic interference from students' native languages, wide variations in English proficiency levels, and cultural perceptions that

affect students' motivation toward English learning. However, these obstacles have been met with creative and contextually appropriate strategies by English educators, such as the implementation of translanguaging techniques, culturally responsive teaching methods, and the integration of technology into the learning process.

These innovative practices have proven to be effective in promoting greater student engagement, improving language confidence, and fostering more positive attitudes toward English. Although some challenges persist, it is evident that by embracing the multilingual realities of the students and leveraging them as assets rather than barriers, English teaching and learning processes can be significantly enhanced.

In light of these findings, several suggestions are offered for future practice and research. First, English educators should continue to develop and refine their use of translanguaging strategies to support students' cognitive and linguistic development without undermining their native languages. Second, curriculum designers are encouraged to incorporate culturally relevant materials and activities that resonate with students' daily lives and identities, thereby strengthening the connection between English learning and real-world applications. Third, greater use of digital technology should be promoted, offering students diverse and flexible modes of engagement beyond the traditional classroom setting.

Furthermore, future research could explore longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of these innovative strategies on students' English proficiency and academic success. Additional studies could also investigate how collaboration among teachers, parents, and community members can further enhance English learning in multilingual environments.

Ultimately, recognizing and embracing linguistic and cultural diversity should be viewed not as a challenge to be overcome but as a rich resource to be celebrated and utilized in the pursuit of effective English education.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the above research, the researcher concludes that students' listening skills are closely related to learning that is not boring, one of which is by watching favorite movies. At a teenage age where students are more interested in watching than just learning in class with theory and material alone, learning will feel very monotonous and boring. Learning listening through English movies is not only listening, through English movies we can also learn pronunciation, new knowledge, and new vocabulary. The research A Study of Listening Skills Through Movie received a fairly good response from students, but there needs to be further research that can make students in the hope that they will further improve their listening skills for learning.

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