

ENGLISH IN USE: STUDENT LANGUAGE BEHAVIORS AT SMK NEGERI 1 KUPANG

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing students' behavior in using English and the strategies they employ to overcome challenges in the EFL classroom at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang. The problem addressed in this study is the inconsistency between students' awareness of the importance of English and their actual use of the language in classroom interactions. This research aims to identify both internal and external factors affecting students' behavior and to explore how students respond to learning difficulties. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, involving 56 tenth-grade students from Tourism and Marketing programs selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations and open-ended questionnaires, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that students' behavior is influenced by internal factors, such as motivation and attention, as well as external factors, including physical and social environments. While most students demonstrate positive perceptions of English and increased confidence, many still face difficulties in actively using the language, particularly in speaking. To address these challenges, students tend to engage in peer discussions, share understanding, and utilize online resources. In conclusion, improving students' use of English requires not only enhancing individual motivation but also creating a supportive and interactive classroom environment that encourages active participation.

Keywords: EFL classroom, students' behavior, motivation, classroom environment, language use

Introduction

The increase in the use of English around the world has led experts to say that there needs to be a big change in the way English is taught (ELT) to match the way people speak it in the 21st century (Rose et al., 2021). In Indonesia, even though English is a foreign language, it's really important in the national education system. The national curriculum mandates English language instruction from elementary through to high school levels, including vocational high schools (SMK), where students are expected to master both technical skills and English proficiency simultaneously in order to remain competitive in the global labour

market. English language instruction is mandated by Indonesia's national curriculum from elementary through high school, including vocational high schools (SMK), where English proficiency and technical skills are expected to be mastered simultaneously by students in order to remain competitive in the global labor market. This anticipation feels more pressing all the time, given that 70% of SMK graduates seek work immediately after finishing their studies, yet there's still a big difference between the language skills needed in the business world and what students can do (Safira & Azzahra, 2022). Effective language acquisition, however, extends beyond

curriculum requirements. It heavily relies on students' attitudes, motivation, and actual classroom behaviors (Starks & Paltridge, 1994; Gardner et al., 1985). Research consistently shows that learners with positive attitudes toward English are more likely to engage actively, persist through difficulties, and achieve communicative competence. Conversely, negative perceptions often manifest as avoidance, anxiety, or disruptive behaviors, ultimately hindering language development (Victori & Lockhart, 1995; Padwick, 2010).

These behavioural patterns are shaped by a complex interplay of internal factors, such as motivation, self-confidence and learning habits, and external factors, such as the classroom environment, teacher support and peer dynamics (Getie, 2020; Anokye, 2022). In practice, these factors become apparent through students' willingness to use English, their participation in class activities and how they overcome linguistic challenges. When students encounter difficulties, their responses, whether through code-switching, collaborating with peers, seeking teacher feedback or temporarily withdrawing, provide valuable insights into their language learning strategies and coping mechanisms. According to Pratama (2020), learning is fundamentally a process of behavioural transformation characterised by continuous, conscious and functional adjustments to knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Although extensive research has been conducted into English learning behaviours in general academic settings, vocational high school students have been underrepresented. SMK learners face unique challenges, such as balancing language acquisition with intensive practical training and having limited opportunities to use English in real-life situations. This gap highlights the need to examine how vocational students use English in real classroom interactions, what motivates or hinders their

participation and how they solve problems when faced with linguistic barriers. Guided by this context, the present study shifts the focus from theoretical engagement to the practical use of English. It investigates the tangible behaviours of students, such as how they speak, interact, adapt and overcome challenges during English lessons.

Specifically, this research addresses two central questions: (1) *What factors influence students' behaviors in using English at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang?* and (2) *How do students resolve the challenges they encounter in the EFL classroom?* The objectives are to identify the internal and external drivers of these language behaviors and to document the practical strategies students employ to navigate learning obstacles. Theoretically, the findings will expand existing frameworks on EFL problem-handling behaviors by grounding them in vocational learners' lived experiences. Practically, the study will serve as a reference for EFL teachers and curriculum developers to design more responsive, engagement-driven instructional strategies that foster positive language attitudes and active classroom participation.

Ultimately, by mapping the intersection of attitude, environment, and communicative action, this research aims to provide a clearer, practice-oriented understanding of how vocational learners navigate English in authentic classroom settings. Accordingly, the study is presented under the title: ***"English In Use: Student Language Behaviors At Smk Negeri 1 Kupang."***

Methodology

This qualitative descriptive study was explored students' authentic English language behavior in classroom interactions at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang. Fifty-six tenth-grade students from Tourism (n=29) and Marketing (n=27) programs were purposively selected

based on teachers' recommendations regarding their active participation and higher language-use intensity. Data were collected through three complementary instruments: structured classroom observations using a checklist adapted from Sugiyono (2017) to record teacher-student interactions, engagement levels, and spontaneous English use across four behavioral aspects (motivation, attention, environmental response, and social interaction); a six-item open-ended questionnaire exploring students' experiences, attitudes, and coping strategies, answered in English or Indonesian to support natural expression; and contextual documentation including field notes and activity photographs. Following formal permissions, the researcher conducted non-participant observations prior to questionnaire distribution to enable triangulation between observed behaviors and self-reported perceptions. Qualitative data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model through three iterative stages: data reduction (coding and categorizing recurring patterns), data display (organizing themes to reveal factor relationships), and conclusion drawing/verification (cross-checking interpretations against raw data following Astaman, 2012). This integrated approach ensured methodological rigor and context-sensitive insights into how vocational students navigate English use in real classroom settings.

Finding and Discussion

Findings

The study, entitled "*ENGLISH IN USE: STUDENT LANGUAGE BEHAVIORS AT SMK NEGERI 1 KUPANG*," was conducted using observation checklists and questionnaires. The detailed explanation is presented below:

1. Student Behavior and Participation in English Learning

The behaviour of the students in the Tourism and Marketing classes was

found to differ when they took part in the activities. The majority of students arrived in a timely manner and demonstrated an admirable level of compliance with the teacher's directives. However, there were occasional occurrences of tardiness, a tendency towards class inactivity, and the utilisation of mobile phones during pedagogical elucidations. Furthermore, there was a paucity of initiative in responding to queries in an extemporaneous manner. The English learning experience had triggered changes in both feelings and behaviour, as shown by the results of a questionnaire. An increased interest was reported by 36% of students, while 34% said they felt more confident. Changes in speech patterns were experienced by 14%, and 16% said they became more active. This suggests that student participation in the EFL classroom is not just physical, but also involves a cognitive and emotional shift as learning experiences build up.

This is in accordance with research conducted by Huang, C., Wang, T., & Li, Y. (2024), that although learning engagement has a positive effect on student achievement, there is still little research discussing changes in learning engagement based on student achievement levels in the context of self-paced digital learning. This study examined EFL students' engagement in mobile-assisted English learning (MAEL) outside the classroom among students with low and high proficiency levels at a Chinese university. The analysis of 409 questionnaires showed significant differences in the duration and frequency of MAEL use, where low proficiency students used MAEL more frequently and for longer than high proficiency students. However, language proficiency level did not affect the number of learning

resources used. In addition, semi-structured interviews revealed cognitive and emotional reasons that influence students' learning behavior. This study provides insight into the complexity of student engagement in self-paced mobile-based language learning.

Furthermore, according to Wang, X., & Liu, H. (2026), motivation influences English learning behavior by considering the role of emotions, language attitudes, environment, and teacher factors as moderators. Based on self-determination theory, research on 182 high school students shows that these four factors have a positive effect on intrinsic motivation, while language attitudes also influence extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation both increase English learning behavior, but intrinsic motivation has a stronger influence. Language attitudes do not moderate the relationship between motivation and learning behavior, while emotional, environmental, and teacher factors are able to strengthen the relationship. In addition, when teacher factors are at a low level, the influence of extrinsic motivation on learning behavior becomes insignificant.

2. Physical Environment and Classroom Management as External Factors

Based on the results of the observations, it was evident that the state of the learning environment and the teacher's instructional methods significantly impacted student focus and comfort. Observations revealed that natural lighting, ambient temperature, and the cleanliness of uniforms were adequately met in both classes. However, discrepancies in the arrangement were evident: the Tourism class was adjudged to be well-kept and methodically organised, while the Marketing class exhibited a less meticulous standard of maintenance,

with numerous items dispersed haphazardly. On the pedagogical side, the teacher had demonstrated readiness of materials. This included storytelling and narrative text. The teacher also demonstrated media utilization. This included PowerPoint and a microphone. The teacher had also demonstrated assignment/homework assignments. Finally, the teacher had demonstrated constructive feedback. The teacher also made good use of their time and was quick to provide assistance to students who were struggling to concentrate, showing that effective teacher support and a well-managed physical environment are key to creating a positive learning environment.

This is in accordance with research conducted by Hikmah, N., Khartha, A., & Roslina, R. (2025), that there is an influence of physical conditions and classroom layout on the quality of EFL learning at SMA Negeri 1 Tirawuta, Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through interviews, observations, and documentation, the results of the study showed that interactive learning strategies are often hampered by inadequate facilities, such as poor ventilation, insufficient lighting, and crowded seating layouts. These conditions affect student comfort, concentration, and participation. This study confirms that improving the quality of English learning requires the support of pedagogical strategies as well as a conducive physical classroom environment.

In addition, the research of Wijaya, E. A., Agustini, D. A. E., & Adnyani, L. D. S. (2020) added that, this study aims to determine classroom management practices by EFL teachers in inclusive schools. The focus of the research includes classroom rules, physical environment, classroom climate, and teacher roles. The study

used a qualitative case study design with observation and interview techniques on English teachers of class XI MM 2 at SMK Negeri 3 Singaraja. The results of the study showed that classroom management was successfully implemented for both inclusive and regular students. Teachers implemented effective rules, provided adequate space for students with physical disabilities, provided positive and negative reinforcement, and adjusted learning and assessments according to students' special needs. However, teachers have not interacted directly with parents of inclusive students, and there is no special companion teacher and training for teachers to support the learning process.

3. Utilization of Language Skills in Academic Collaboration and Communication

The most frequent use of students' English language skills was revealed to be in interactive academic contexts, with presentations and group discussions being the most common examples of this. The most helpful aspect of language skills for students during presentations was stated by 36% of respondents to be the ability to express themselves clearly. 41% of students said that they felt their language skills were most beneficial during class discussions, while 34% said that they were able to communicate with their classmates in English. Dominant collaborative strategies included problem-solving discussions. These made up 41% of the data. Another common strategy was peer explanations of difficult vocabulary/material. These made up 32% of the data. A small proportion of the data (7%) was from independent research. However, difficulty communicating effectively was still reported by 14% of students, and no collaborative experience was

had by 20% of students, suggesting a competency gap that requires strengthening more structured and inclusive cooperative learning.

This is in accordance with research conducted by Yuh, A. H., & Kaewurai, W. (2021), which aims to identify students' problems and needs in English speaking skills and the application of a collaborative and communicative approach to improve these skills. The results of the study showed that students experienced various obstacles, such as lack of mastery of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, understanding of English accents, fear of being teased by friends, and lack of confidence. In addition, teaching methods that are too teacher-centered and the dominant use of Thai also pose obstacles. Students need interactive activities such as group work, role-play, pair conversations, communicative games, and the use of video and audio to make learning more interesting and easier to understand. This study also found that a collaborative and communicative approach through group discussions, dialogues, role-play, and communicative games is effective in improving students' speaking skills, with the teacher acting as a facilitator and providing feedback.

And research by Kemalglu-Er, E., & Sahin, M. T. (2022) has stated that, English language teaching (ELT) at rural schools may pose challenges such as insufficient resources and a lack of students' interest. Integrating real-life-based and learner-centred methods like project-based learning (PBL) into rural English classes may help improve the quality of ELT in such contexts, yet the issue remains underexplored. This case study aims to develop a PBL model for the English classes at a rural school and investigate the effects of PBL on the

development of linguistic and non-linguistic competencies as well as the benefits and challenges of the process along with suggested solutions. The data were collected through closed-and open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and students' productions. According to the results, PBL was seen to affect students' progress in multidimensional ways. The data suggest that thanks to PBL, the students' interest and confidence in using English increased, and their English language proficiency improved. Besides, the students were found to have developed their real-life related skills like time management, creativity, autonomous decision-making, oral presentation, and computer use. However, PBL was also defined to be a challenging process requiring full devotion and a heavy workload. This study indicates PBL can be an effective means to improve the quality of ELT in rural education.

4. Perception of the Importance of English and Its Impact on Learning Motivation

The results of the study, which were based on both observations and questionnaires, showed that the majority of students had a very positive perception of the role of English in EFL vocational high school classes. In fact, 86% of students said that English was "very important" and 14% said it was "important", with no respondents considering it "not important". The students actively connected the learning of English with tangible advantages, fostering the development of essential skills and preparing them for success in careers within the tourism and marketing sectors. The psychological impact of the learning process was also clearly discernible: a reduction in the trepidation associated with assignments and examinations,

an increased propensity to articulate ideas in a class setting, and an augmentation in speaking confidence. However, 25% of students admitted to never having experienced the positive impact of English in expressing their thoughts, emphasising that intrinsic motivation needs to be supported by differential mentoring so that all students can experience the same positive impact.

This is in line with research conducted by Farid, A., Adara, R. A., & Ashar, S. (2023). This study discusses the motivation of Islamic boarding school students in Indonesia in learning English. Using the L2 Motivational Self System theory from Dörnyei (2009), the study was conducted on 376 students in three Islamic boarding schools with different Islamic organizational backgrounds. The results of the study indicate that institutional factors and school policies influence student learning motivation. In more conservative Islamic boarding schools, students' views of English tend to be less positive, resulting in lower learning motivation. This study confirms that a supportive educational environment and learning experiences are very important in shaping students' motivation to learn English. In his research, Li, M. (2024) also examined the English learning motivation of liberal arts and science students at a transnational university in China that implemented English Medium Instruction (EMI). Using mixed methods (questionnaires and interviews), the results showed that both groups were motivated by ideal L2 self, learning demands, international orientation, and the practical benefits of English. However, liberal arts students were more influenced by academic pressure, language anxiety, and the role of teachers than science students.

This study emphasized that the EMI context influences student learning motivation and recommended improving teacher training, integrating language learning with student goals, and strengthening cross-cultural interactions.

Discussion

Based on this section, there are several topics discussed.

1. Self-Efficacy through Self-Confidence and Intrinsic Motivation

The results of the analysis show that learning English improves not only linguistic competence, but also self-efficacy and future orientation. This aligns with the findings of Baharuddin, A. F. and Rustan, D. R. H. P. (2025) who argue that the status of English as a global lingua franca motivates students to learn it due to its utility in international communication and various life domains. This study uses a mixed-method approach to analyse students' independent learning motivation in English, considering intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The results show that both factors influence students' motivation to learn. Intrinsic factors are more dominant (66.7%), particularly with regard to securing employment (60%), enhancing self-confidence, and achieving good academic grades. Meanwhile, extrinsic factors (33.3%) include technological support, learning materials and family support. This study is expected to help educators design a more effective English learning curriculum.

Furthermore, according to Fang, F., Meng, Y., Tang, L., & Cui, Y. (2026), this study discusses the influence of digital nativity on students' intentions in conducting informal digital English learning (IDLE). The results of the study indicate that the desire to learn,

involvement, and self-confidence in online learning play an important role as mediators between digital nativity and learning intentions. In addition, digital nativity also has a direct influence on students' learning intentions. These findings emphasize the importance of emotional and motivational factors in supporting digital-based English learning.

2. Environmental Support & Pedagogical Scaffolding

Based on the results of the analysis, it shows that student engagement is highly dependent on the physical condition of the classroom and the quality of teacher-student interactions. This relates to the research of Abugohar, M. A., Salheen, D. A. A., Yassin, B., Saed, H. A., & Yunus, K. (2020), that this study uses a case study design to explore the effect of using the target language (L2), namely English, as the main language of classroom interaction on students' speaking fluency. For four weeks, qualitative data were collected through observations of 31 students using the Challenge, Action, and Result technique. The results of the study show that the use of English in classroom interactions has a significant positive impact on improving students' speaking fluency.

According to Alavi, S. M., & Esmailifard, F. (2021), this study aims to examine the effect of emotional scaffolding through the recast technique on the English language achievement and willingness to communicate of elementary school EFL students with high and low levels of anxiety. A total of 56 students were divided into experimental and control groups based on their level of anxiety and initial ability equality. The experimental group received learning accompanied by reinforcement of emotional intelligence and the teacher's emotional attitude when giving recasts,

while the control group did not. After 14 learning sessions, the analysis results showed that emotional scaffolding had a significant positive impact on improving learning outcomes and students' tendency to communicate, both in students with high and low anxiety. Therefore, this approach is recommended for application in EFL learning to reduce anxiety and improve student communication.

3. Peer-to-Peer Collaboration as an Academic Coping Strategy

The results of the analysis showed that students naturally form peer support networks to help each other with linguistic barriers and academic tasks. This is in accordance with the research of Moosivand, M., Rashtbar, S. and Zaremohzzabieh, Z. (2024), which this study discusses using a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative, respectively) to explore the opportunities and challenges of e-learning for university students. In the quantitative stage, which involved 237 students, the results showed that student perceptions of e-learning were high, with an average score of 4.05 out of 5. The qualitative stage involved interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with lecturers and students. Five main themes of challenges were identified: communication difficulties, technical issues, personal challenges, curriculum problems and social issues. Overall, this study concludes that, while e-learning has great potential, it still requires policy and strategy improvements to overcome various challenges from the perspectives of students and lecturers.

According to Shakir, M. S., & Jabeen, M. (2025) also, this study discusses lecturers' perceptions of the collaborative learning strategy in improving students' English skills in higher education. Using a quantitative survey method of 125 lecturers from

seven universities, the results show that the majority of lecturers have a positive view because this strategy can improve students' communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. However, there are obstacles such as large class sizes, uneven student participation, and lack of institutional support. This study concludes that the success of collaborative learning requires lecturer training, smaller classes, and adequate policy support and digital facilities.

4. Participation Gaps & Need for Differential Interventions

The analysis showed that not all students experienced the same positive impact. Some groups remained passive. Some groups were anxious. Some groups lacked communication skills. This is quite balanced with the research by Zulu, N. B., Mabalane, V. T., & Feltman, M. Y. (2026), that this study discusses the experiences of 7th grade English teachers in implementing inclusive intervention strategies to address literacy gaps in disadvantaged students. This qualitative study in six primary schools in Johannesburg North District involved six experienced teachers and used observation, interviews, and document analysis. The results indicate that the intervention strategies implemented have not been effective, mainly due to socio-pedagogical challenges, lack of training, resources, support, and unclear policies. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of increasing training and support for teachers in dealing with student literacy.

According to Ruiz, M. I. (2020), response to intervention (RTI) allows schools to support the academic success of English learners (ELs) while helping educators rule out cultural or linguistic differences and

educational background as the root of ELs' academic or behavioral struggles. However, in rural schools, insufficient training in how to effectively instruct ELs and limited experience teaching ELs due to local demographics may lead RTI teams to prescribe inappropriate interventions or to avoid putting ELs through the RTI process altogether. The framework proposed in this article guides rural RTI teams through the process of considering the factors that might influence the performance of struggling ELs to provide these students with the supports they need to benefit from core instruction and tiered interventions.

Conclusions

This study was designed to identify the factors that influence students' behaviour when using English in EFL classrooms, as well as the strategies they use to overcome learning challenges. This study provides an empirical basis for the dynamics of student participation by drawing on the research objectives, theoretical overview, and data analysis methods applied in the previous chapter. The main focus is on how internal and external factors influence communication, and how language and psychological barriers are dealt with together and on their own. This careful way of doing things makes sure that the results of the research are not only about the problem, but also follow a clear and fair scientific plan. It was revealed by the data analysis that English-language behaviour exhibited by students is significantly influenced by two categories of factors: internal and external. Internal factors include motivation. This is reflected in positive task orientation. It is also reflected in ego involvement. And in need for achievement. And in high aspirations. And in persistence. And in tolerance for ambiguity. Paying attention is also crucial, as demonstrated by students'

tendency to focus on the teacher, watch their classmates in class, take notes and have the confidence to voice their opinions. The physical and social environments are examples of external factors. The way a person speaks is influenced by their personality and character, which are in turn influenced by the physical environment. The social environment, meanwhile, encompasses teaching methods, curriculum, interactions between teachers and students, as well as between students, school regulations and learning facilities. These two factors interact to directly shape students' attitudes and readiness to communicate.

In practice, students at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang face major challenges in the form of low self-confidence and limited language experience, largely due to a lack of opportunities for direct practice. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that students actively develop adaptive strategies, such as discussing difficulties in understanding the material and conducting independent reference searches. These results confirm the importance of creating a supportive and interactive classroom environment that facilitates a safe space for students to express themselves and support each other. Discussion of these findings reinforces the idea that cognitive and emotional engagement will be at its best when psychological barriers are lowered through peer collaboration and continuous educational mentoring. Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that developing English language competency depends not only on mastery of the material, but also on bolstering motivation and attention, and optimising the learning environment. Teachers are expected to maintain students' attention by providing a variety of engaging indoor and outdoor learning activities to encourage authentic communication. As this study did not compare results across programmes due

to time constraints, the researcher recommends that future studies conduct a comparative analysis between the Tourism and Marketing programmes. This is expected to enrich pedagogical insights and support the development of more inclusive and effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

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