

## Foreign Language Strengthening Programs Characteristics For Students In Non-Formal Learning At Several Universities In Indonesia

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### Abstract

The characteristics of foreign language strengthening programs for students at several universities, including how universities plan, organize, implement, and evaluate the program, are the focus of the discussion of this article. The analysis was carried out based on the students' views. This article utilizes qualitative methods and descriptive analysis to analyze the data. The research subjects were 606 students from the various departments and faculties in several universities in Indonesia. Data collection techniques used are questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The advanced technique used is the observation technique by directly observing the service pattern of the language center and the implementation of English language training. The language center is currently more focused on providing services related to the TOEFL test and training that strengthens the mastery of the TOEFL test. What is given to students generally leads to literacy skills. English courses use English to master the field of study that students follow, thus neglecting English listening and speaking skills. However, strengthening English for students at several universities in Indonesia aims to build a unique vocabulary in specific disciplines. In addition, it seeks to increase students' self-confidence and motivation in learning English.

**Keywords:** Strengthening English, Problematics, Language Institution, Needs Analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

Language skills (English and other foreign languages and mainly in Indonesian and local languages) are part of character and nation-building to achieve future competencies and form moral people (Udasmoro et al., 2015). The ability to speak English is an absolute requirement to become an active participant in

global life. English is considered not only as a foreign language to be learned but also as an essential qualification that everyone should acquire (Unal & Ilhan, 2017).

Based on the research findings in Turkey and Indonesia, English as a foreign language has been taught since elementary school level and continues until the end of higher education. Although it has been held for a long time, students do not acquire the essential skills at the targeted level in reading, listening, writing, and speaking (Unal & Ilhan, 2017). Students acknowledge their major weaknesses in English grammar, pronunciation, and word choice. Learners need more time to practice spoken language to avoid problems (Taufiq, 2016). The education system of English teaching is considered unsuccessful (Unal & Ilhan, 2017).

English is taught up to the university level, so the foreign language strengthening programs for students, especially English, have been pursued by universities in Indonesia. The problem got that the activities managed by higher education institutions are open and widely informed. However, there are still very few students who are interested in participating in various activities. The motivation of students, especially non-English study programs, to participate in this activity is also low. There is no interest in learning English because they do not like learning English. Some students are interested in learning English, but they do not have basic knowledge of English. Meanwhile, students who have high motivation to learn English, but their opportunity to learn is too short (Hermayawati, 2010). Students do not yet have the awareness and desire to participate in activities because they are busy with their respective college assignments. The lack of students' motivation to take English courses makes students' English skills low. One of the causes of the weak English skills of students in a teaching and learning environment is that the teacher does not provide opportunities for students to speak English actively (Masduki, 2011).

On the other hand, universities do not have intensive and continuous foreign language strengthening programs for students. The Intensive Course program is needed to provide a foundation for an active and fluent mastery of the English language. The Intensive Course Program is intensive and integrated. Intensive is marked by holding academic activities with a higher frequency and integrated with the characteristics of program implementation through careful and tight coordination of the intricacies of its performance, both in the selection and preparation of teaching materials, preparation of teaching schedules, teacher assignments, coordination between teachers, evaluation of progress study, and so on. Through thorough intensity and coordination, it is hoped that at the end of the Intensive Course program, students will have intermediate-level active English skills to be developed further and provide sufficient capital to participate in further academic activities (Masduki, 2011).

Formal learning in the classroom is a significant part of the means for teaching English in Indonesia. The same thing also happens in Jordanian schools globally that English as a foreign language is taught through formal learning from elementary to tertiary education (Al-Khresheh, 2010). As a result, English is only learned by the students when they enter class, or in a short time, there is not much attention to practice English competence outside of formal learning (Sokip, 2020). English has been officially taught as a compulsory subject for higher education in Indonesia for many years, but there are still complaints

about learning outcomes in English. Many students are still unable to overcome the problem of low English proficiency, which hurts their communication skills in English (Andi & Arafah, 2017). Learning foreign languages to non-English students or from non-linguistic specialties is still found because foreign language teaching at universities does not have a sufficient orientation on communicative skills and is not practically oriented (Shcherbakova & Ilina, 2021). Students in non-English study programs are much more in need of mastery of foreign languages, especially vocabulary and language skills. Without vocabulary mastery, it will be pretty challenging to master the four language skills, namely listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Arjulayana, 2018).

Similar conditions are found in Russia. The teaching and learning situation of this group of students is far from ideal in most Russian universities. Unjustifiably short courses (first year of university study), limited class time, and mixed-ability student groups make achieving the goals set by Federal State University Educational Standards (FSUES) in this area problematic. As a result, both lecturers and students are rarely satisfied with the results (Borzova & Shemanaeva, 2019).

The problem of mastering English in these students certainly requires a solution in organizing English language strengthening program activities. This English strengthening program is held outside of formal learning. The current context of modern education should focus on acquiring skills to acquire knowledge independently, creative thinking, and applying new knowledge. There is a need for intensive and comprehensive foreign language training to achieve this context, especially by building new teaching approaches and bringing in the latest training methods (Shcherbakova & Ilina, 2021). In addition, this foreign language training, especially English language training, will be better if it can foster positive motivation for independent learners, which is an essential factor in forming the communicative competence of foreign language students from non-linguistic specialties (Shcherbakova & Ilina, 2021). Students as users of this language center service are expected to provide criticism, suggestions, and input in response to satisfaction with the service. Students' expectations of getting benefits in English language training and the actual results experienced by them will affect their assessment of the quality service delivery. Providing good quality service is essential to retain existing and attract prospective student trainees to focus on quality (Li, 2013). Through this article, an in-depth analysis will be carried out on the characteristics of foreign language strengthening programs for students at several universities, including how universities plan, organize, implement, and evaluate foreign language strengthening programs for students. The analysis is carried out based on the views of students as recipients of this foreign language strengthening program.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The English language strengthening program for students must be based on students' difficulties in learning English and their strategies to overcome these difficulties. Suryanto and Zahra Eka Sari have tried to answer this problem in two different students, namely students from the Department of English Education and non-Department of English Education. Students of the Department of English Education overcome difficulties by strengthening independent learning. Meanwhile, the new strategy implemented by non-English Education Department students is to participate in the English language strengthening program (Suryanto & Sari, 2021). Suryanto and Sari have conducted research to uncover

the difficulties and strategies of students in learning English informal learning. This article will reveal the characteristics of foreign language strengthening programs for students outside of formal education at several universities.

Another study on non-English Education Department students, as conducted by Yuwin Rustam Saleh, focused on the needs of research subjects in learning English. The results of data analysis obtained through questionnaires as the main instrument got information that English material should be delivered using various strategies. The English subject covers four skills with more weight on competency-based vocabulary. Students expect this vocabulary to be a provision to be able to understand textbook material in other competency-based courses and be a provision in the world of work later (Saleh, 2018). Saleh has analyzed the needs of non-English students at IAIN Gorontalo. This article will reveal the characteristics of foreign language strengthening programs for students outside of formal learning at several universities.

Onishchuk et al. conducted a study on the characteristics of foreign language learning in universities. The first goal to be achieved is to systematize the theoretical problems of learning foreign languages at universities. The second objective is to generalize the experience of developing foreign language education for future humanities teachers at Ukrainian pedagogical universities. Analysis of the original literature from the study period allowed us to identify the most effective methods of foreign language education abroad (Onishchuk et al., 2020). Onishchuk et al. have recommended several solutions regarding foreign language learning in Ukrainian universities. This article will reveal the characteristics of foreign language strengthening programs for students outside of formal learning at several universities.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Qualitative research with descriptive research design (Moleong, 2009) was used to prepare this article. It is tried to reveal the characteristics of foreign language strengthening programs for students outside of formal learning at several universities. The research subjects are non-English majoring students from various majors and faculties in several universities in Indonesia.

Data collection techniques used are questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The advanced technique used is the observation technique by directly observing the service pattern of the language center and the implementation of English language training. These three steps are a form of method/technique triangulation, which is carried out by utilizing various techniques in data collection to ensure valid and valid data.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study utilizes questionnaires and interview techniques to collect data. The questionnaire was filled out by 606 respondents spread across 24 universities throughout Indonesia. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the respondents, as many as 52 people. As for the origin of the respondent's universities, as many as 24 universities can be grouped by region, divided into six areas. The division of the respondent's college area can be seen in the following diagram

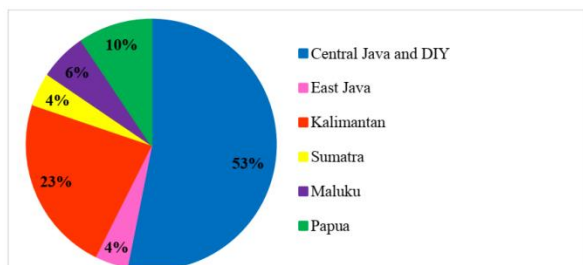


Figure 1. Respondent's university area

### 1) Characteristics of Foreign Language Strengthening Programs for Students in Several Universities

The foreign language strengthening program for students is carried out by including English courses in the curriculum. All respondents stated that this English course is mandatory for students. 84% of respondents noted that the study program provides compulsory English courses for students as many as two credits, and they must pass with a minimum grade of B. The study program does not offer additional English courses, even though it is an elective course. Based on the distribution of the curriculum, compulsory courses are considered to be very dense, so that English as an additional subject is not possible to be included in the curriculum. Meanwhile, 16% of respondents stated that the study program added 2-4 credits of English courses as elective courses, which are not mandatory for students.

The implementation of English courses as a compulsory subject varies between universities. 54% of respondents stated that English courses must be taken in semester one or semester 2. At the same time, 17% of respondents stated that English courses must be taken in semester three or semester 4. The following 17% of respondents said that English courses were opened throughout the semester, students have the freedom to take English courses in any semester. 5% of respondents stated that English courses must be taken in semester five or semester 6. 4% of respondents said that if English courses were opened only in odd semesters, students had the freedom to take them in odd semesters. The remaining 3% of respondents stated that if English courses were opened in even semesters, students had the privilege to take even semesters.

75% of respondents stated that universities do not provide intensive English courses for students. Universities in Indonesia already have a Language Institute. This language institute is responsible for administering the TOEFL test for students as a graduation requirement. Implementing the TOEFL test is the most significant task, so the provision of English language strengthening programs has not become a priority. Based on the interviews and observations, the Language Institute owned by universities has not held intensive English courses specifically. If students need additional mastery of English at some universities, they are welcome to take courses off-campus. The higher education institution will organize English course activities for students if there is a request and provide support if the student community organizes activities.

25% of respondents stated that universities provide intensive English courses for students. The university offers intensive English courses managed by the Language Institute, and students are required to take them because it is a prerequisite for graduation by taking the course. The Language Institute takes intensive English courses seriously, and students who take these courses must pay course fees.

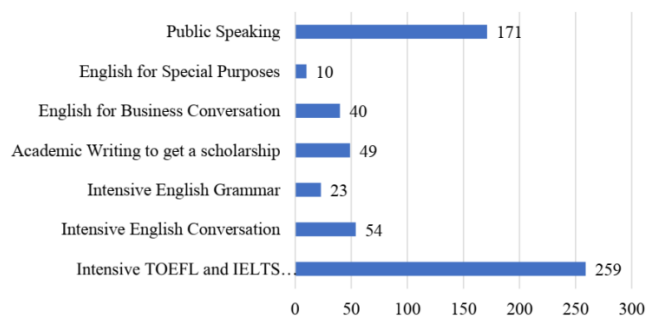
Students stated that the English language strengthening program in the form of intensive English training was essential. 69% of respondents said that the English courses taken were insufficient, and they had not been able to teach them English communicative skills. Students judge that English courses are inadequate because they are too focused on TOEFL preparation and not communicative English as expected. In addition, English courses emphasize grammar, listening, reading, and writing, not on communicative language skills. The required English course is only two credits, so it seems to impose a lot of material in a limited time.

31% of respondents stated that the English courses that students must take are sufficient. Students give reasons if they need English subject matter. The English courses that students must take are considered adequate because the English material is adapted to the field of study being occupied and can equip students to read and write good quality English articles.

Students are then asked to provide feedback regarding whether students need additional English language strengthening programs outside of the courses that students have taken. 13% of respondents are satisfied with the English courses and do not need an English strengthening program. Students give reasons that the hectic class schedule causes students not to have much time to take additional English programs. Students in this group reasoned that English was not their priority, so the English courses they received were sufficient and did not require severe English mastery. The student said that there is no need for an English strengthening program because they want to focus on completing college, and strengthening English can be overcome by independent practice.

The English language strengthening program is essential for students. In addition to the small number of credits for English courses, students need a good mastery of communicative English. 87% of respondents stated that they needed an English strengthening program outside of the compulsory English courses. Students need more English, incredibly communicative English because it will support their careers in the future. The English language strengthening program is believed to increase students' TOEFL scores. A high TOEFL score helps meet graduation requirements. In addition, students must also achieve the required TOEFL level when seeking further study or employment scholarships. In addition, strengthening English is needed by students, especially communicative English, to increase competitiveness in competing in the world of work.

Students are then asked to provide feedback about the type of material for the English strengthening program needed by students. Intensive English courses geared towards preparation for the TOEFL or IELTS tests are the most in-demand programs by students. Public Speaking is the second most needed material for students. The two materials, according to the students, are very helpful in getting a decent job. As for the other types of strengthening program materials, as shown in the diagram below.



**Figure 2** about the type of material for the English strengthening program needed by students

Based on the results of questionnaires and interviews with student representatives, we can conclude if the universities have prepared students and graduates with mastery of English through the implementation of compulsory English courses. Some universities even add 2-4 credits of English courses as elective courses. Regarding the provision of foreign language services, universities in Indonesia already have a Language Institute. This language institute is responsible for administering the TOEFL test for students as a graduation requirement. Implementing the TOEFL test is the most significant task, so providing an intensive English strengthening program has not become a priority. To respond to the high needs of students for strengthening English, universities hold English language training for students that are periodic, not intensive, and limited by the quota of participants. The English given to students tends to be directed at equipping students with the TOEFL test and reading English references according to the student's field of study.

The results of interviews with lecturers who teach English courses show that the primary purpose of teaching English is to increase student's proficiency levels to equips them with TOEFL test preparation. English also supports students' academic life, making it easier for them to read English references according to their studies. The main hope of some students in the English language strengthening program is to achieve satisfactory TOEFL test results. Students stated that they wanted to know that we were successful in getting a high TOEFL score, but this was not fulfilled (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017). Various communities worldwide consider that learning English provides access to a better life and an increase in socioeconomic status. Job opportunities are limited without a fluent command of English, as employers value English proficiency above other qualifications (Brown et al., 2019).

## **2) Planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating foreign language strengthening programs for students in several universities**

Universities need to plan, organize, implement, and evaluate related to implementing English language strengthening programs for students. The Language Institute plays an essential role in taking care of this. The language institution of a university is a crucial element in the implementation of the learning process. Language institutions are now supported and are a significant factor in the success of the educational process, especially those related to language. Language institution officers must provide

excellent, precise, fast, friendly service and always keep abreast of developments in information technology. Language institutions have several ideal characteristics implemented in the service process to their users (Irawan et al., 2014). The implementation of practical English training is one of the indicators of a good language center service.

The training design process includes needs diagnosis, goal formulation, content selection, content organization, learning experience selection, and determining what will be evaluated. The training design process may also include five main steps: situation analysis, formulation of objectives, derivation of content, selection of appropriate methods and media, and establishment of evaluation procedures and schedules. While the more comprehensive training design process consists of situational analysis, needs diagnosis, goal formulation, content selection and organization, selection and organization of learning experiences, selection of appropriate methods and media, and determination of what will be evaluated and schedule (Srijono, 2006).

The process of designing an English language strengthening program for students that is right on target, it is necessary to know whether or not students need an intensive and sustainable English strengthening program. 87% of respondents stated that they really need an intensive and sustainable English language strengthening program. The reasons behind the students are (1) weak English skills require a strengthening program, because English is very necessary when looking for a job. (2) an intensive and continuous English strengthening program is needed to get a high TOEFL score as a graduation requirement later. (3) The English courses that students get during their lectures are still small in portion, are felt to be less than optimal and have not succeeded in making students skilled in English. Students assessed that incidental English training seemed not well planned and the substance of the activities/training was often not obtained by the participants; activities become less meaningful and less useful.

Actually, English language training cannot be carried out incidentally, it must be intensive so that the final result can be measured. To be able to produce graduates who are able to act as good English users, it is necessary to strive for the implementation of teaching that allows the formation of English language skills in accordance with the demands of the job market. This effort needs to be carried out continuously (intensively) and continuously throughout the student's study period, by creating a supportive atmosphere and encouraging the active use of English (Masduki, 2011). To respond to this, the university held a TOEFL Preparation Intensive Course for students.

Meanwhile, 13% of respondents stated that they do not need an intensive and sustainable English strengthening program. Students gave reasons regarding this: (1) intensive English training requires more time, so it is not suitable for students who have a lot of busyness and college assignments. (2) Intensive English language training usually costs a lot, which is essential for students. (3) English language training that is incidental and made based on student needs is more appropriate for students because it supports English courses. In this category, students gave an example that they had previously participated in Public Speaking Training.



Some of the English strengthening programs that students receive from their campus have been assessed by students. The intensive English strengthening program is the TOEFL Preparation Intensive Course, while the incidental strengthening program is Public Speaking. 77% of respondents considered that the English language training program held by the campus was not well organized and planned. Students gave reasons related to this, namely:

1. English language training was not appropriately scheduled since the beginning of the year so that students found it challenging to plan the quota of participants' limited activities.
2. English language training on campus seemed unplanned, so students had to wait a long time to get a turn.
3. The English language training held by the campus is often carried out suddenly so that students are often late in getting information and cannot participate in these activities.

Meanwhile, 23% of respondents considered that the English language training program organized by the campus was well-organized and well-planned. The reasons given by students are (1) English language training has been neatly scheduled at the beginning of the year so that students can easily adjust their schedule, (2) English language training has been routinely organized by the campus, scheduled and programmed very well, and (3) language training Campus-run English runs according to schedule, students, are easy to register, and know the outcome.

Even though students judged that the English language training program held by the campus was not well organized and planned, students felt the benefits of their participation in English language training. The perceived benefits are not too significant, so students expect intensive and comprehensive English training. 83% of respondents stated that students get benefits and satisfaction after participating in campus English language activities or training. Students gave reasons related to this: (1) English language training organized by the campus answered students' needs for strengthening English language skills, especially strategies to increase TOEFL scores. (2) Students receive new material outside of English lectures when they attend English language training organized by their campus. The English language that has been taken, and (3) the English language training organized by the campus is helpful for students to prepare for when they graduate from college and find work.

Meanwhile, 17% of respondents assessed that the students had not received benefits and satisfaction after participating in English language training or activities organized by the campus. This student's dissatisfaction happened because (1) students considered that the English language training held by the campus presented the same material as the English courses that the students had taken so that it did not offer anything new. (2) Students do not feel the benefits of training because the campus rarely provides English language training for students, and (3) the campus only provides training for TOEFL or IELTS preparation, has not opened English language training with other particular purposes.

Students feel that language institutions on campus are very much needed, especially regarding the provision of foreign language strengthening services for students. 70% of respondents stated that students' needs for mastery of foreign languages, especially English, were met by the Language Institute

owned by their campus. Students give reasons regarding the role of the campus-owned Language Institute, namely (1) language institutions on campus provide services to students who will take the TOEFL or IELTS tests collectively, efficiently, and cheaply. The TOEFL or IELTS tests are neatly scheduled and well managed. (2) language institutes on campus regularly organize English language training/activities intended for students, and (3) language institutes on campus provide assistance and training for students who need English for Special Purposes training.

However, as many as 30% of respondents stated that students' needs for mastery of foreign languages, especially English, had not been fully met by the Language Institute owned by their campus. Students said reasons related to this, namely (1) language institutions on campus very rarely organize English language training for students, only providing TOEFL test services, (2) limited human resources owned by language institutions make the services provided are limited in quota, so they cannot serve all students, and (3) because of the infrequent activity and lack of information, students do not even know that the campus has a language institution.

Language Institution Services in a university also need to continually conduct evaluations related to work programs and services to students. Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick argue that to analyze the effectiveness of the training, it is not possible to evaluate the final results alone, but rather to assess the participants' reactions, which will show the learning outcomes obtained. The learning outcomes are then realized in actions to change behavior (Sitorus & Tania, 2012). The reaction level is the initial stage of evaluation, which aims to measure the trainees' reaction to the training program experienced. If the training program is responded well, there will be a learning process. The response was measured by collecting data from the trainees by filling out an evaluation sheet at the end of the training. The evaluation sheet measures how well they think the activity has been carried out (Sitorus & Tania, 2012). The reaction level helps measure the level of participants' satisfaction with the implementation of the training. The indicators used as a reference for this measurement are materials, facilities, consumption, and instructors during training (Utomo & Tehupeiory, 2014).

The interviews and questionnaires to students participating in the training showed that 70% of respondents stated that the English language training instructors organized by language institutions in universities had good competence. This good quality indicator leads to the training instructors being very competent and good at delivering material. Students feel their English language skills improve as a result of the ease of mastering the material. In addition, at several universities, language institution managers have started to schedule English language training regularly. This regularly scheduled training is presented in a fun way so that the trainees more easily understand the material.

Meanwhile, 30% of respondents stated that English language training held by language institutions in universities was considered not good quality. Weaknesses that appear in training are only incidental, not carried out intensively. In addition, the training participants were only passive, not active, so active discussions were not carried out, and the implementation of the training became inefficient. In addition, the performance of English language training is carried out online, so it is minimal. This limitation is

caused by the students' limited quota and internet signal and not many TOEFL practice questions. Students feel they do not understand the training material.

Students assess that the English language training managed by the Language Center is considered to have good quality. The quality of this training, which is regarded as good, still requires good management. According to student evaluations, good management includes (1) delivering a material; instructors must pay attention to heterogeneous students to understand English. Not all students participating in the training have a good basic knowledge of English. Submission of material in English is felt to be very difficult for students, so the material is not absorbed correctly. (2) updating the TOEFL practice questions is necessary so that students are more interested in learning English. Students complain that the number of practice questions is small and not varied, so it is considered boring and does not add new knowledge. (3) effective and efficient services are expected to increase. Students highlight that training is often delayed due to students waiting for the minimum quota of participants. So this causes the training is usually not according to schedule, seems sudden and inefficient. In addition, the lack of socialization and information on training programs to students is why the minimum quota of participants is difficult to meet.

Language institutions at universities in Indonesia are currently more focused on providing services related to the TOEFL test and training that strengthens the mastery of the TOEFL test. The English that was given to students lead to literacy skills generally. English courses use English to master the field of study that students are engaged in, thus ignoring English listening and speaking skills. Nevertheless, the strengthening of English for students that many universities in Indonesia have carried out is also carried out to build vocabulary for specific disciplines and increase students' confidence and motivation to learn English (Bocanegra-Valle, 2015). Learning a foreign language requires a strong commitment from both the teacher and the student. Instructors need to foster meaningful learning experiences, and students need to take advantage of meaningful language learning experiences created by instructors. These experiences can occur not only in face-to-face sessions in class but must also be designed for students outside the classroom (Ivone & Wulyani, 2006).

## CONCLUSIONS

The English training received by students, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, is considered reasonable by some students. However, students as recipients of Language Institution services also assess the training, often delayed due to waiting for the minimum participant quota. Some of the notes students give for improving English training managed by the Language Institution belonging to the university are as follows.

1. Universities respond to student needs related to mastery of English by providing compulsory subjects, administering TOEFL tests, and conducting English language training. 77% of respondents stated that they received the benefits of the English language strengthening program but criticized (a) English language training was not adequately scheduled since the beginning of the year so that students had difficulty planning activities, (b) English language training organized by campus was limited by the quota of participants, seemed unplanned, so that students have to wait a long time

to get their turn, and (c) English language training organized by the campus is often carried out suddenly, so students are often late in getting information and cannot participate in these activities.

2. Regarding students' needs for mastery of foreign languages, especially English, students feel that they have not been fully met by the Language Institute of their campus. Students stated reasons related to this, namely: (a) Language institutions on campus rarely organize English language training for students, only provide TOEFL test services, and have not opened English language training for other particular purposes. (b) Limited human resources owned by language institutions make the services provided are limited in quota, so they cannot serve all students and (c) The campus rarely provides English language training for students, so students do not feel the benefits. The campus lacks information regarding English training, so that not all students experience the training.
3. Language institutions at universities in Indonesia are currently more focused on providing services related to the TOEFL test and training that strengthens the mastery of the TOEFL test. The English that was given to students lead to literacy skills generally. English courses use English to master the field of study that students are engaged in, thus ignoring English listening and speaking skills. However, English language strengthening programs for students carried out by many universities in Indonesia are also carried out to build vocabulary for particular disciplines and increase students' self-confidence and motivation to learn English.

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