

UPROOTING FOSSILIZATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: INSIGHTS FROM A MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH IN BANDAR LAMPUNG

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This study explores the fossilization of English language errors among students at a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Sukarama, Bandar Lampung. Using interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the research identifies systemic, pedagogical, and contextual factors that sustain recurring errors. Findings show that English is often treated as supplementary, with teaching focused on syllabus completion rather than comprehension. Teachers struggle to correct fossilized errors due to limited training and resources, while students face persistent difficulties in vocabulary and basic conversation. Despite corrective feedback, errors are repeated, reflecting low urgency and limited practical application. The headmaster, however, emphasizes English as essential for preparing students for Society 5.0 and in line with national policy to make English compulsory by 2025/2026. The study recommends targeted teacher training, contextualized pedagogy, and expanded language exposure to address fossilization and strengthen communicative competence. These measures are critical to ensuring Indonesian madrasah students are globally competitive and prepared for future societal demands.

Keywords: *Elementary Education; Error Analysis; Fossilization*

1. INTRODUCTION

This research originates from the authors' experiences teaching university students, where the English expressions used to convey messages were often inaccurate and formulaic. For example, many students consistently used the phrase "permission to collect..." as a direct translation of *mohon izin mengumpulkan*, instead of the more appropriate "I would like to submit...". Such persistent errors reflect a deeper issue of fossilization, where incorrect language forms become entrenched despite repeated instruction. Motivated by this phenomenon, the researchers examined how fossilization emerges at the earliest stage of English learning in Indonesia, namely in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools). This focus is important because early fossilization, if left unaddressed, can persist into higher education and negatively affect students' communicative competence.

In Indonesia, English is formally introduced in the fourth grade of elementary education (Bakri et al., 2024). However, it is not a compulsory subject in the national curriculum and is instead classified as *muatan lokal* (local content), dependent on regional or institutional regulations (Ruswandi et al., 2024a). This limited status contributes to inconsistent teaching practices and insufficient emphasis on English, resulting in relatively low proficiency compared to other ASEAN countries (English First, 2024). Consequently, there is a pressing need for a more structured and consistent approach to English education at the foundational level.

The integration of English language education into Indonesian primary schools has long been debated in scholarly discourse (Aulia et al., 2022; Magfirah et al., 2023). Proponents highlight its importance, citing the cognitive benefits of early language acquisition and the growing role of English as a global lingua franca in digital and professional domains (Ruswandi et al., 2024b). Critics, however, emphasize persistent challenges, such as a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate resources, and unequal access between urban and rural schools (Sitoresmi et al., 2024). Despite these obstacles, 84% of Indonesian primary schools include English in their curriculum, with 72% focusing heavily on grammar instruction (Sya & Helmanto, 2020). While grammar is prioritized, essential skills such as vocabulary and

pronunciation are equally critical for communication and for building a strong foundation for advanced learning (Handayani, 2024). Many students continue to struggle with vocabulary development due to inconsistent teaching methods and uneven levels of exposure and proficiency (Sutrisno et al., 2022; Yulizar & Hasibuan, 2022). Nonetheless, English education at the primary level remains a strategic investment (Fedora & Hasan, 2023), serving as a means of promoting communication skills, building confidence, and opening pathways for higher education and global opportunities (Ruswandi et al., 2024a).

Introducing English at the elementary level offers numerous advantages, including enhanced communication skills, greater self-confidence, and expanded educational and professional opportunities (Yulizar & Hasibuan, 2022). Early exposure helps students develop a strong linguistic foundation, which is crucial for meeting the demands of an increasingly globalized world (Larasaty et al., 2022). Furthermore, integrating local cultural literacy into English instruction not only strengthens students' national identity but also fosters cultural awareness essential for global engagement. This dual approach bridges the gap between preserving cultural heritage and acquiring skills for international participation (Purwaningsih & Suharto, 2022). These benefits highlight the urgency of more comprehensive policies and pedagogical strategies to maximize the potential of early English education in Indonesia (Hernanda et al., 2022).

The marginalization of English as a non-compulsory subject at the elementary level has significant implications for Indonesia's future. In today's globalized context, English proficiency is a critical tool for accessing knowledge, participating in international collaboration, and remaining competitive in the global workforce (Dwiyanti & Saputra, 2024). Stagnant English skills hinder students from excelling in higher education, especially in fields that require academic English. Limited proficiency also reduces employability in multinational industries and restricts opportunities for international mobility. Within ASEAN, where English often functions as a lingua franca, Indonesian professionals risk falling behind their regional counterparts, thereby affecting Indonesia's economic and cultural integration (English First, 2024; Fia et al., 2020). Addressing this challenge requires proactive and strategic measures to improve the quality and accessibility of English education from the earliest stages.

One immediate consequence of these challenges is the risk of fossilization, where learners—both students and educators—develop persistent errors in English due to limited exposure and inadequate instruction (Richards, 1975). As noted by Tollefson & Firn (1983), fossilization hinders learners from reaching higher levels of proficiency and contributes to a cycle of low competence, even among teachers. In the long term, this stagnation prevents students from excelling in higher education, particularly in disciplines requiring English for academic purposes. This concern directly reflects the researchers' prior observations of university students, as mentioned earlier. On a broader scale, the marginalization of English at the elementary level may have serious implications for Indonesia's global competitiveness (Hernanda et al., 2022). English proficiency is essential for accessing information, engaging in international collaboration, and competing in the global workforce (Na'imah, 2022). Weak English skills limit opportunities for higher education, reduce employability in multinational industries, and restrict international mobility (Andika & Mardiana, 2023; Han, 2004; Latif & Daud, 2023). Within ASEAN, where English often functions as a lingua franca, Indonesian professionals risk lagging behind their peers, as reflected in Indonesia's relatively low English proficiency ranking in 2024 (English First, 2024). These issues underscore the urgent need for early, structured, and consistent English education at the elementary level (SD or MI).

Several previous studies have examined the early introduction of English in Indonesian primary schools, highlighting both its potential benefits and persistent challenges (Savitri & Kadarisman, 2019). However, research that specifically focuses on fossilization at the elementary school level — whether in *Sekolah Dasar* (SD) or *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) — remains relatively scarce. Most existing works emphasize curriculum design, teacher preparedness, or general proficiency outcomes, without addressing how fossilized errors take root from the earliest stages of English learning. Building on and extending earlier findings, the present study positions itself as a continuation of such research, focusing specifically on the roots of fossilization in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* and the institutional strategies to address it. By

doing so, this research not only reinforces the urgency identified in prior studies regarding early English education, but also offers a more nuanced perspective on how persistent errors may be identified and uprooted as early as possible.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This particular research adopts a qualitative approach, which is designed to gain an in-depth understanding of specific phenomena, in this regard, fossilization (Mulyana, 2003). As Sugiyono and Lestari (2021) conveyed, this method relies on non-numerical data such as text, audio, and video recordings, making it highly suitable for this study. The fossilization that (Davidson, 2009) happened since the earlier education level is a complex social phenomenon that cannot be comprehended solely through explicit actions or statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hadiati et al., 2024). This complexity necessitates active researcher involvement, employing participatory observation and in-depth interviews to uncover the dynamics within these interactions (Sugiyono, 2013). The study focuses on investigating how the fossilization occurs at one of the private Madrasah or Integrated Islamic Private School in Sukaramé, Bandar Lampung, involving not only the principal but also two English teachers as well as some number of students of the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, and how to uproot the errors leading to fossilization as early as possible. Data were gathered through audio-visual transcription (Davidson, 2009), documentation, and observational field notes. In-depth interviews, characterized by open-ended questions, were conducted to explore the participants' perspectives on fossilization phenomena in English language learning, offering rich, nuanced insights (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Pseudonym was employed not only to respect the request from the research subjects (Saini et al., 2022), but also to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. This practice is particularly important in qualitative research where personal or sensitive information might be disclosed (Wang et al., 2024).

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, where information from principals, teachers, and students was systematically compared to identify consistencies and discrepancies. For example, classroom observations were cross-checked with teacher interviews, and students' responses were validated against both teacher accounts and documented lesson materials. This process strengthened the credibility of the findings by confirming recurring patterns across independent sources (Sugiyono, 2013; Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021). The analytical process followed Creswell and Poth (2018) six-step model. After data collection and preparation, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were carefully reviewed to identify preliminary themes. Coding was then conducted across all three data sources, allowing patterns to emerge within and between groups. These codes were clustered into categories, which were further refined into overarching themes that described the nature of fossilization in English learning. The themes were interpreted within the study's theoretical framework, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Member checking was employed by sharing interpretations with participants to confirm accuracy and reduce potential bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this meticulous process, the study provides a holistic understanding of fossilization phenomena and how to uproot it as early as possible.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study reveals several significant findings concerning the fossilization of English errors and the broader challenges faced in the teaching and learning of English at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Sukaramé, Bandar Lampung. The findings are categorized into three key themes as discussed in the followings

Teachers' Perception of English as a Supplementary Subject

Interviews with the two English teachers, Mrs. A and Ms. B, revealed that English is widely regarded as a supplementary or optional subject within the school curriculum. As Mrs. A explained during the interview, "We only need to finish the syllabus; students do not have to master everything because English is just an additional subject." This perception profoundly influences the teaching-learning dynamic. Both teachers admitted that their primary focus is to

cover the material outlined in the syllabus, while comprehension and retention of the language by students take a secondary or even tertiary position. As a result, students do not feel the urgency to achieve proficiency in English, contributing to a cycle where errors in language use persist and eventually become fossilized. The teachers' reflections on this matter underscore an irony that feels disheartening—a subject as globally significant as English is relegated to a less critical position, undermining its potential impact on students' futures.

Headmaster's Commitment to English Education

The headmaster of the madrasah expressed a more progressive and strategic perspective on English education. During the interview, the headmaster stated, *"English will become compulsory here by 2025, because our students must be ready to face a future where technology and international communication are inseparable."* Recognizing the increasing importance of English in the context of Society 5.0, the headmaster highlighted plans to position English as a core subject by the academic year 2025/2026, in line with government directives. This shift reflects the growing interconnectedness of the world, where proficiency in a global language is indispensable for leveraging advanced technological developments and engaging in international collaborations. Such institutional commitment signals a promising step toward addressing the shortcomings in English education, though significant challenges remain in terms of execution and impact.

Students' Struggles and Perceptions

Observations and interviews with students revealed significant struggles with basic English conversational skills and limited vocabulary acquisition. When asked about the relevance of English, students acknowledged its importance but admitted they did not understand its practical applications in daily life. One student commented, *"English is important, but I don't know how to use it except in class."* Furthermore, students highlighted a recurrent issue: while teachers provide corrections for their mistakes, the feedback often fails to result in lasting improvement. This recurring pattern suggests gaps in instructional strategies and the lack of reinforcement mechanisms to ensure that corrections translate into long-term learning.

Broader Implications of Fossilization in Indonesia

These findings illustrate that fossilization is not only a classroom issue but also reflects broader systemic and pedagogical challenges in Indonesian English education. At the elementary or madrasah ibtidaiyah level, research on fossilization remains scarce, with most studies in Indonesia focusing on junior or senior high school contexts. This scarcity highlights the contribution of the present study in filling an important gap by situating fossilization within the earliest stages of formal English instruction.

Comparable studies, though limited, indicate similar patterns. For instance, research by (Ruswandi et al., 2024a) found that persistent grammatical errors among junior high school students were linked to inadequate corrective feedback and limited opportunities for authentic language use. Likewise, (Handayani, 2024) emphasized that corrective feedback in primary classrooms often fails to prevent error recurrence, aligning with the observations in this study. By connecting these findings, the present research not only strengthens previous arguments but also extends them by showing that fossilization begins earlier than previously emphasized, raising important implications for curriculum design and teacher preparation at the foundational level.

The findings of this study reflect broader systemic and pedagogical issues in English language education at the elementary level in Indonesia, specifically within the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. One of the most significant aspects concerns teachers' perceptions and roles in shaping the learning environment. The view of English as merely a supplementary subject profoundly influences teaching practices and student attitudes toward learning. As reflected in the accounts of Mrs. A and Ms. B, comprehension often takes a backseat to syllabus completion, pointing to a lack of pedagogical alignment with the goals of promoting meaningful language acquisition. This situation is consistent with the broader trend in Indonesian primary schools, where English is frequently treated as an extracurricular subject

rather than an integral part of the curriculum (Ruswandi et al., 2024b). The lack of emphasis on comprehension and quality outcomes creates an environment where students do not feel motivated to strive for proficiency, while the limited focus on addressing fossilized errors can, as noted by Richards (1975), result in long-term linguistic stagnation. These findings highlight the need for teacher training programs that prioritize communicative competence alongside syllabus coverage and encourage reflective teaching practices that promote long-term skill building.

This issue is also linked to the institutional vision of English education. The headmaster's commitment to strengthening English instruction aligns with the broader national agenda to prepare students for the demands of Society 5.0. English proficiency is increasingly recognized as a critical tool for navigating the interconnectedness brought about by rapid technological advancements. As Na'imah (2022) notes, English serves as a bridge for accessing global knowledge and participating in international networks, making its integration into the curriculum an urgent priority. Yet translating this vision into practical outcomes requires overcoming systemic challenges, including limited resources, inadequate professional development opportunities for teachers, and outdated curricula. The upcoming transition to making English a compulsory subject presents an opportunity to design frameworks that not only prioritize foundational skills but also directly address fossilized errors and incorporate formative assessments to monitor progress effectively.

The struggles faced by students further illustrate the challenges of fossilization. Difficulties in vocabulary acquisition and basic conversational skills demonstrate the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application. Although students acknowledge the importance of English, their inability to perceive its practical value underscores the need for teaching methods that are both contextually relevant and engaging. Vygotsky (1978) socio-cultural theory emphasizes that learning is most effective when connected to students lived experiences and social contexts, suggesting that approaches such as situational role-plays, project-based learning, and culturally relevant materials may enhance motivation. Moreover, the recurring nature of errors, despite corrective feedback, suggests that instructional strategies lack sufficient reinforcement. As Handayani (2024) argues, effective feedback requires consistency and immediate application in meaningful contexts. Teachers therefore need tools to provide corrective feedback that students can apply in varied situations, reducing the risk of fossilization.

Within this study, fossilization emerges both as a symptom and as a cause of broader challenges in English education. Persistent errors in students' language use stem from limited exposure, inadequate instructional strategies, and the absence of reinforcement opportunities. This finding is consistent with Tollefson and Finn (1983) assertion that fossilization results from insufficient opportunities for authentic language use and meaningful feedback. Addressing this issue requires multifaceted interventions that target instructional as well as systemic factors. Teachers can adopt explicit error-correction techniques, such as metalinguistic feedback, which encourage learners to reflect on their mistakes and understand the underlying grammatical rules. At the same time, schools can expand students' exposure to English through extracurricular activities, language clubs, and digital platforms, thereby providing authentic practice opportunities beyond the classroom.

Finally, the implications of this phenomenon extend to both policy and practice. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive reform of English education at the elementary level. Policy-makers must recognize the critical role of early language education in preparing students for global engagement. Establishing English as a compulsory subject by 2025/2026 is a step in the right direction, but its success depends on the provision of adequate resources and support, particularly in underprivileged regions. At the institutional level, madrasahs and primary schools should prioritize capacity-building initiatives for teachers, equipping them to address fossilization while simultaneously promoting communicative competence. Collaborative efforts between schools, local governments, and educational organizations are also crucial for bridging resource gaps and fostering innovative teaching practices.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study highlights significant challenges and opportunities in the teaching and learning of English at the elementary level in Indonesia. Teachers' perceptions, institutional policies, and students' struggles collectively contribute to the phenomenon of fossilization, which poses long-term implications for language proficiency. However, the headmaster's progressive vision and the planned integration of English as a compulsory subject provide a promising foundation for reform. To uproot fossilization and enhance the quality of English education, stakeholders must adopt a holistic approach that addresses systemic, pedagogical, and contextual factors. Strategic investments in teacher training, curriculum development, and student-centered learning are essential to equip students with the linguistic skills necessary to thrive in an interconnected and globalized world. More specifically, policy-makers are encouraged to mandate the early introduction of English at the elementary level with clear guidelines that balance communicative competence with grammatical accuracy. They also need to allocate adequate funding and resources to ensure teachers receive professional development opportunities that equip them with strategies to identify and address fossilized errors effectively. At the same time, policy interventions should promote equitable access by providing sufficient teaching materials and digital support for rural and under-resourced schools, thereby reducing the learning gap across regions. For educators, the study suggests the importance of applying explicit corrective feedback techniques, such as metalinguistic feedback, which help learners not only correct errors but also understand the underlying rules of the language. Teachers should also integrate culturally relevant and contextualized materials into classroom practices so that English learning becomes meaningful and applicable to students' everyday experiences. In addition, fostering language exposure beyond the classroom—through extracurricular activities, project-based learning, and technology-assisted practice—can provide students with authentic opportunities to use English in varied contexts and gradually reduce the persistence of fossilized errors. By implementing these recommendations, Indonesia can build a stronger foundation for English education, preventing fossilization from taking root and preparing young learners for academic success and global engagement.

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