

An investigation of students' problems in learning English of the seventh grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean

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ABSTRACT

The ability of students in learning English is still lacking. This is because students have difficulty understanding the text in English. Students also have difficulty speaking English. The learning methods and media used by the teacher do not attract students' interest in learning English. With some of these problems, students are less and less interested in learning English and think that English is a difficult and boring subject. The purpose of this study is to analyze the types of difficulties in learning English experienced by students, and the factors that make students difficult to learn English. This research method used a qualitative descriptive approach. The research subjects were students of classes VII C and VII D of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean. The data collection techniques used were questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The difficulties experienced by students based on the aspects of English skills were listening and speaking skills. Namely internal factors and external factors. Based on the results of the questionnaire, it is shown that students had difficulty in learning English due to two things, namely difficulty in memorizing vocabulary and the influence of the first language. Further, from the results of interviews and observations, it is known that the internal factors consisted of motivation, self-confidence, attitude, and self-esteem. Meanwhile, the external factors consisted of teachers, teaching aids, and classroom conditions. These factors indicate that the causes of students' difficulties in learning English are the teacher's unattractive way of teaching, boring learning media, and classroom conditions.

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1. Introduction

Almost all countries in the world organize foreign language learning programs, especially English learning. This is because England is the oldest country in the world. Britain is also the most colonizing country in the world (Rao, 2019). Therefore, English is very familiar and often used in various countries, especially in colonial countries (Misbah, Mohamad, Yunus, & Ya'cob, 2017). Likewise with Indonesia, where the government organizes educational programs in which there is English program. The programs are organized by the government with the aim that students have foreign language skills, especially international languages. This foreign language will be very influential in the current era of globalization (Sawir, 2005; Ramadhan & Sugiyono, 2015).

Learning English is certainly more challenging for students, because most students communicate daily using Indonesian or their respective local languages (Ronald & David, 2001). In addition to challenging students, this also makes students experience various difficulties in learning English (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Raju & Joshith, 2018). The difficulties that are often experienced by students in learning English are difficulties in understanding texts and in understanding language skills (Hashemi, 2011; Hasibuan et.al., 2013; Kormos, 2020). If this is not addressed, it can lead to low students' understanding of learning English. This raises the assumption among students that English lessons are difficult and boring lessons, so that there will be more students who do not like English lessons. Therefore, if the problem is not handled properly, it will have an impact on students' low English learning achievement (Zhang, 2016; Tanjung, 2018).

The difficulty is a condition in which it is difficult to complete or perform a task. Learning difficulties are conditions where students face certain challenges in participating in the learning process and achieving optimal learning outcomes (Rumini & Sundari, 2004; John & Ehow, 2011). In addition, learning difficulties are things or disorders that cause failure or at least become a disorder that can hinder learning progress (Hamalik, 2003; Uno, 2011; Kusrini & Prihartanti, 2014).

According to Brown (2000), two factors influence the difficulty in learning English, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors consist of motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, and attitude. **Motivation** is the orientation toward learning. It, therefore, impacts how likely students are to give up or push forward. The higher the student's motivation to achieve something, the more likely the student will not give up easily. Motivation can also grow students' critical thinking skills that are strong and flexible. **Self-confidence** is the ability to do your best. For students, to maintain self-confidence is necessary. Students who have high self-confidence will be open to criticism and suggestions. High self-confidence, will greatly affect the ability of students to do their best and open themselves to new ideas. Therefore, students who have high self-confidence will not be afraid to make mistakes. **Self-esteem**, in academic self-esteem, is divided into two, low and high self-esteem. Of course, self-esteem is very influential in the academic field. Students who have high self-esteem will be active in learning activities such as asking questions when the teacher teaches, focusing during learning, and being able to face challenges. Meanwhile, students who have low self-esteem will be less active in learning activities. Low self-esteem can reduce students' desire to learn, ability to focus, and willingness to take risks. **Attitude** determines the ability and willingness of students to learn. Attitudes can be divided into two, namely negative and positive attitudes. In learning, the negative attitude of students is indicated by the presence of students who are cool to talk when the teacher is explaining the subject matter (Zuhro, 2016). Meanwhile, the positive attitude of students is indicated by the presence of students who focus on paying attention to the teacher. Attitude is very influential to the academic achievement of students (Irawati & Hajat, 2012). The more positive students' attitudes are, the more their academic achievement will increase.

Meanwhile, the second factor is the external factor. External factors consist of teachers, teaching aids, and classroom conditions. The teacher is a model or role model for students. The role of the teacher is very important, apart from being an example, of course, every activity carried out by the teacher will get the attention of students (Moller, 2015). Many things must be considered by the teacher, such as attitude, speaking style, and teaching method. Props are media that are used to explain the material that is less clear to be clearer. **Teaching aids** in education are very important because the existence of teaching aids can stimulate students' thoughts, feelings, concerns, and interests that lead to the learning process (Murray & Christison, 2010). This is certainly very useful for teaching to be more systematic and orderly. **Class condition** is the state of the class when learning takes place. Class conditions are very influential on students' achievement. Class conditions that are comfortable for learning will make students' achievement increase.

Previous studies that are relevant to this research are:

The first one was written by Sintadewi, Artini, and Febryan (2020). This research used a qualitative descriptive method. The research subjects were 22 students and 5th-grade teachers. The result of this research was that 16 students had difficulty in learning English, and did not understand when the teacher conveyed English material. This was caused by two factors, namely internal and external factors. For the internal factors, the students were still less motivated and less interested in taking English lessons, while the external factors were the teachers who did not use teaching aids and the

methods used were less. Based on the results above, it can be concluded that fifth-grade elementary school students learn English lessons. So, it can be concluded that learning difficulties are low.

The second relevant research was written by Rachmawati and Rachmawati, (2018). This study used a qualitative approach. The goal of this study was to find out how difficult it was for MTS students in learning English (focusing on external factors). External factors that influenced students' difficulties in learning English were family factors, school factors, and environmental factors. However, this study showed that the external factors that influenced students' difficulties the most in learning English at MTS Nurul Falah Cimahi were school and family factors.

The third relevant research was written by Misbah, Mohamad, Yunus, and Ya'cob (2017). The results of this study indicated that 4 main themes causing students' difficulties in learning English were the influence of the first language, lack of English vocabulary, and socioeconomic status of the family.

What makes this research different from previous research is that the researcher focuses on identifying difficulties in learning English at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean. In addition, this study is trying to reveal what factors make it difficult for students to learn English. With this research, researchers hope that teachers can find out how to overcome students' difficulties in learning English. So that students can understand well what the teacher teaches.

Students who are said to have learning difficulties can be identified based on the value of poor learning evaluation results. This low score could be due to students having learning difficulties, or it could be due to students not being prepared to face the evaluation (Syah, 2004; Slameto, 2010). Students experiencing difficulties in the learning process can be seen as a result of internal and external factors in the learning process. From there, the teacher seeks solutions or makes efforts to overcome learning difficulties among students. Efforts to overcome learning difficulties among students include providing repairs or remediation, enrichment programs, individual teaching, and so on (Syahputra, 2014). Students' achievement will increase to the desired expectations as a result of the teacher's efforts to solve problems in learning difficulties (Oluwole, 2008; Pardjono et.al., 2015).

Learning difficulties can be reduced by the teacher's efforts through teaching improvement, enrichment programs, and individual teaching. Efforts can be successful if there is good cooperation between teachers and students so that maximum learning achievement can be made. A mind-frame chart can be arranged as follows to clarify the above flow of thought:

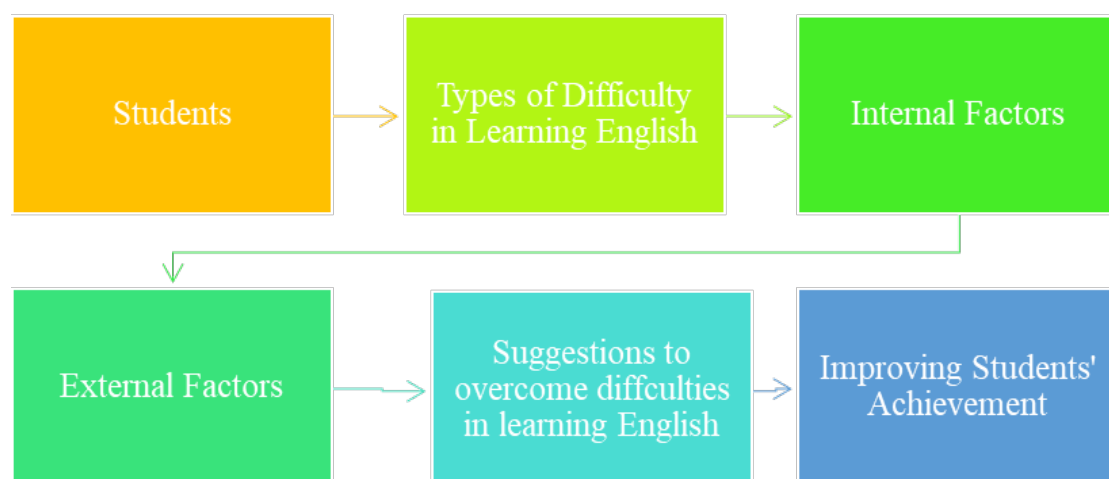


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

From the conceptual framework, it can be seen that in this study the research subjects were students. From the students, the researcher looked for information about the types of difficulties in learning English. In addition, the researcher tries to uncover what factors make it difficult for students to learn English, both from internal and external factors. After the researcher obtained the information, the researcher then tried to give suggestions to overcome the difficulties in learning English. The

results of this study are expected to be useful and the information obtained can be used to improve student achievement in learning English.

Two research questions guided the study:

1. What types of learning difficulties were experienced by grade VII students in learning English subjects?
2. What were the factors that cause learning difficulties in class VII students in learning English subjects?

The purpose of this study is:

1. To find out the types of students' learning difficulties in learning English subjects.
2. To find out the factors that cause students' learning difficulties in learning English subjects.

2. Method

This section presents the types of study, research setting, the subject and object of the research, data collecting techniques, research instruments, and data analysis techniques.

2.1. Types of Study

The qualitative analysis approach was applied in this study. According to Sugiyono (2010), qualitative research methods are philosophical research methods that function as researching the state of natural objects, with researchers serving as the primary tool and data sources being sampled with a specific purpose.

Qualitative researchers are interested in different points of view to better understand the thoughts and perceptions of the participants. To comprehend the words, the researcher attempts to investigate the experience from the participant's point of view. As a result, the researcher becomes involved and immersed in the phenomenon to become acquainted with it. By providing a solid description of the narrative data collected from the participants, as well as the interpretation and description of their experiences, the researcher's immersion aids in the generation of empathic understanding and experience. Immersion, on the other hand, is impossible to achieve in the absence of a dependable researcher-participant relationship. To establish the relationship, basic interviewing and interpersonal skills are used (Mohajan, 2018).

The qualitative descriptive research design used in this study was intended to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information about the types of learning difficulties for the grade VII students of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean in learning English from the aspects of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, using a qualitative approach, it is hoped that it will reveal what factors influence the grade VII students to struggle with English learning.

2.2. Research Setting

This study was carried out at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean. This location was chosen as the research site because the researcher had previously taught at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean. In addition, students at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean had difficulty learning or understanding English subjects. Therefore, the researcher wants to investigate this problem to find out the types of difficulties in learning English. And find out what factors make it difficult for students to learn English and provide suggestions to overcome these issues.

2.3. Research Subject

The subjects involved in this study were students of the classes VII C and VII D of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean.

2.4. Data Collecting Technique

This study uses observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Observation is a method to find data by observing the object of research (Anufia & Alhamid, 2019). In this study, researchers observed directly the process of learning English activities. This observation was carried out in grades VII C and VII D. During the observation, the researchers focused on observing the activities of teachers and students during English learning. While the questionnaire is a list of questions that must be answered

by the respondent. In this study, the researcher used 15 items of questions and statements related to English learning activities which were adapted from the research of Misbah, et al (2017). Questionnaires were distributed to all students in grades VII C and VII D, with a total of 69 students.

This study also uses interviews. The interview used in this research is semi-structured to check and prove the information that has been obtained previously. Semi-structured interviews were used to maintain the focus of discussion with research participants through topic groupings and informal questions that the interviewer could ask in different ways for different participants. Interviews were recorded via voice recorder. Interviews were conducted with six students, three students from class VII C, and three students from class VII D. Through this method, the researcher asked the participants several questions, such as what difficulties they experienced when learning English, and the factors that caused difficulties in learning English. Questionnaire data is used to determine the types of students' difficulties in learning English. Interview data is used to determine the factors that influence students' difficulties in learning English. While the observation data is used as supporting data from the data that has been obtained from questionnaire data (Mania, 2017).

2.5. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis techniques in this study would be processed based on qualitative analysis. Qualitative data analysis techniques are carried out through the stages of selecting, simplifying, classifying, focusing, making abstractions on the conclusions of the meaning of the results of the analysis. In this research, the researcher used Miles and Huberman Model Data Analysis. Miles & Huberman model data analysis includes: data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion.

3. Findings

This chapter describes the result of data collection and data analysis to answer the research question in chapter 1. The research collected the data from questionnaires, interview, and observation.

3.1. The Lack of English Vocabulary

Embi (Misbah, 2017) explains that it is very important for foreign language learners to have various vocabularies because it helps them to communicate effectively in the target language.

Table 1. Issues in Relations with Limited English Vocabulary

Issue	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Inability to understand conversation in English	39	28	1	1	3,49
Inability to speak in English conversation	36	28	2	3	3,41
Inability to understand content in English reading material	33	30	5	1	3,42
Inability to write English text according to proper writing structure.	35	20	10	4	3,25
Inability to understand the English material taught by the teacher	34	30	4	1	3,41

From Table 1 it can be seen that out of a total of 69 students, only 2 students understood conversation in English. Only 5 students could speak English. Only 6 students understood the content in English. Only 14 students were able to write English text according to the correct writing structure, and only 5 students were able to understand the English material taught by the teacher. Therefore, it can be seen that only a few students had language skills. These vocabulary limitations significantly affected students' ability to acquire four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. With all skills affected by the limited range of vocabulary, it can be concluded that the biggest obstacle students face in learning English was their limited vocabulary.

3.2. The Influence of the First Language

The first language is often the cause of difficulty for students to learn a foreign language or a second language. In addition to the influence of the first language, students' difficulties in learning foreign languages are also influenced by the presence of regional languages, especially in Indonesia where there are various ethnic groups and cultures. This, of course, greatly affects students in learning the language. Especially in communicating or speaking skills, this is because in communicating students often use their first language or regional language.

Table 2. Issues in Relation with the Influence of the First Language

Issue	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
The Indonesian language is easier than English	42	20	5	2	3,45
Achievement in the Indonesian language subject is better than in English subject	25	31	12	1	3,17
The grammar of the Indonesian language is easier to comprehend	41	21	5	2	3,45
Better understand Indonesian grammar because it is easy to understand, while The grammar of the English language is difficult to comprehend	42	21	5	1	3,48
More Confident in Speaking using the Indonesian Language than the English language	41	25	2	1	3,52
More interest in reading the Indonesian language than the English language	32	29	6	2	3,30
Inability to understand English reading because the structure of English is confusing.	37	22	8	2	3,35
More often communicate using the local language (Javanese) rather than Indonesian and English.	40	21	6	2	3,43
More reading in the Indonesian language than the English language	32	32	4	1	3,36
More often write in the Indonesian language than the English language.	35	29	1	4	3,38

As shown in Table 2, students scored better in Indonesian subjects and showed greater interest in reading material in Indonesian or speaking in Indonesian. This is due to the perception that the grammatical structure of Indonesian is easier to understand than the grammatical structure of English which makes it difficult for students to understand the meaning of words, both spoken and written. Indonesian is different from English in many aspects, which often results in inability to master both languages, especially for second and foreign language learners. In addition, students' habits in communicating, it is shown that students more often communicate using local languages than their first language or foreign language. This of course greatly affects students in mastering language skills, especially foreign languages.

3.3. The Factors of Difficulty in Learning English

To obtain in-depth data about students' difficulties in learning English and the factors that cause students' learning difficulties, interview and observation techniques were used. Open interviews were used to allow students to answer the widest possible range of questions. Interviews were conducted with six students, three students from class VII C, and three students from VII D. Observations were

made by observing the activities of students, teachers, and class conditions. Based on interviews and observations, some data were obtained, including the following:

Table 3. Themes of Difficulty Factors in Learning English

Topics	Themes	Sub-themes
Internal Factors of Difficulty in Learning English	Motivation	Student's perspective on learning English. Students' efforts in learning English
	Self-confidence	Student's participation in learning English.
	Attitude	Student's attention while getting information in learning English.
	Self-esteem	Student response for better English achievement.
External Factors of Difficulty in Learning English	Teacher	How the teacher teaches at the class.
	Teaching Aids	The availability of English teaching facilities, media, and tools in learning English.
	Class Conditions	Class conditions and atmosphere.

Based on Table 3 above, it can be seen that learning difficulties are influenced by two factors, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors come from the students themselves, while external factors come from outside.

4. Discussion

This section presents a discussion based on the research results. This relates to the types of difficulties experienced by students and the factors that make it difficult for students to learn English.

4.1. Types of Student Learning Difficulties

According to Mulyadi (2010), learning difficulties are a condition in the learning process which is characterized by the presence of certain obstacles in achieving learning outcomes. Overall, in the learning process, the obstacles are experienced by the people who experience them, and they may or may not realize that they are sociological, psychological, or physiological (Axelsson, 2007).

Based on the results of the research with classes VII C and VII D students, it was known that students in both classes still had difficulties in learning English. In understanding the subject matter. Based on the research findings, it was known that students' difficulties in learning English were influenced by various things. These happened especially with language acquisition skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, it was shown that the students had difficulty in learning English due to two things, namely difficulty in memorizing vocabulary and the influence of the first language. Meanwhile, based on the results of interviews, it was known that the students did not master all language skills. The most difficult skills according to students were listening and speaking skills.

In addition, one of the indicators that makes it difficult for students to learn is the situation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because, during the pandemic, learning activities were less than optimal, where teachers and students only interacted through WhatsApp groups. Even in WhatsApp groups, teachers only provided material without any explanation. This is one of the factors that make it difficult for students to learn, especially in learning English.

The next indicator is the application of blended learning. This is because, during blended learning activities, some students studied independently at home, while others studied at school. The next indicator is the lack of interest and motivation of students in learning English. This is certainly very influential on the success of student learning, especially in learning English.

This finding has differences from the research of Sintadewi et al. (2020). They revealed that 16 students had difficulties in learning English, and did not understand when the teacher delivered English material. It also has different findings from the research by Rachmawati and Rachmawati, (2018), whose finding showed that 85% of students experienced difficulties in learning English, which was not appropriate. This research has the same findings with the research by Misbah et al. (2017),

that mentioning that the type of difficulty in learning English was caused by the lack of English vocabulary and the influence of the first language.

4.2. Factors Causing Students' Difficulties in Learning English

Based on the results of the study, it was known that in learning English there were still many students who had difficulty. The factors that cause students' difficulties are divided into two, namely internal and external factors. The internal factors consist of motivation, self-confidence, attitude, and self-esteem, while the external factors consist of teachers, teaching aids, and classroom conditions.

Based on these findings, the researchers found the results of observations and interviews. In observation, the researcher wrote down every learning activity carried out by students, activities carried out by the teacher, and class conditions during learning. Meanwhile, in conducting interviews, researchers interviewed respondents one by one.

1) Internal Factors

Internal factors include motivation, self-confidence, attitude, and self-esteem. In terms of motivation, students said that English was a difficult subject. This was because some students learned English only when they entered junior high school. In addition, English was difficult because they found it difficult to memorize aspects. The second factor is confidence. Based on the findings, it was explained that the level of student confidence was still low. Students were afraid and embarrassed to ask the teacher during the lesson. This is because students felt afraid and embarrassed if they would make mistakes when learning English.

The third factor is the attitude factor. Attitude factors are seen from students who pay close attention to their teachers even though they do not understand what the teacher is explaining. Based on the findings related to the attitude factor, it was known that students sometimes paid attention to the teacher, but sometimes they were also busy talking to their friends during learning. Students who paid attention to the teacher's explanation felt and thought that when they paid attention to the teacher's explanation, they would understand more about the material that the teacher gave.

The last factor is self-esteem. From the results of the interviews with six students regarding the self-esteem factor, it was obtained that if all students received material that was difficult to understand they would try to find information from friends who understood, search on Google, and ask the teacher about the material.

However, among the six students, when they got bad grades, there gave different reactions. Three students indicated that they were normal when they got bad grades because some of their friends got bad grades, too. The other three students felt sad, embarrassed, and disappointed when they got bad grades. Some even compared themselves to the friends who got good grades. This is included in the factors that affect students' difficulties in learning.

From these results, it is known that there are still students who do not give up on bad test scores. Some even compare the results with higher values. Of course, this can be seen in both positive and negative terms. If viewed from the positive perspective, this will have a good impact on students. The more students feel embarrassed and compare the results obtained to their friends who get high scores, there is a chance that students will be more motivated to learn to get satisfactory grades. However, if viewed from the negative side, of course, this will make students feel inferior and will not develop well, especially in achieving learning achievement.

2) External Factors

In addition to internal factors, there are also external factors that affect student learning difficulties. The external factors consist of teachers, teaching aids, and classroom conditions.

Based on the results of interviews and observations, the factor that makes students difficult in learning was the teacher. It was known that the teaching method used by the teacher was monotonous. Teachers also always used the same learning media when teaching, namely books, whiteboards, and handphones. Based on these findings, it was also known that the students were bored and not interested in the teaching methods used by the teacher.

The second factor is the teaching aids. Based on the results of observations and interviews, it was known that the learning media that were always used by teachers were books, whiteboards, and handphones. In fact, during observation, the researcher saw that there was an LCD projector in the classroom. However, during the observation, the teacher never used the LCD projector for learning English.

The last external factor is the class condition factor. The findings stated that all students were quite comfortable with the classroom atmosphere, although there were still friends who were talking during the learning process. This sometimes made some students disturbed, because they could not listen to the teacher's explanation optimally. Meanwhile, the condition of the class was sometimes still dirtying the daily picket schedule had not been going well.

This finding has the same findings as the research by Sintadewi et al (2020), mentioning that the factors causing students' difficulties in learning English were lack of motivation in learning, and the teacher's teaching methods which were less varied and not innovative. However, it has different findings from the research conducted by Rachmawati and Rachmawati, (2018). They revealed that external factors that influenced students' difficulties in learning English were family factors, school factors, and environmental factors. This research has different findings from the research by Misbah et al (2017). The results of this study indicated that there were 4 main themes causing students' difficulties in learning English, namely the influence of the first language, lack of English vocabulary, and socioeconomic status of the family.

5. Conclusion

Based on the interpretation of the data and discussion, the researcher draws conclusions about the types of difficulties in learning English and analyzes the factors that cause difficulties in learning English among the seventh-grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean. The conclusion is based on the results of the study. The types of difficulties in learning English experienced by the students were difficulties in memorizing vocabulary. In addition, the difficulties experienced by students based on aspects of English skills were listening and speaking skills.

The researcher concludes that the factors that cause students' difficulties in learning English are divided into two. Namely internal factors and external factors. Based on the results of interviews and observations, it is known that the internal factors consist of motivation, self-confidence, attitude, and self-esteem. These factors are indicated by the fact that the students rarely ask their English teachers. They are not comfortable using English even during English lessons. This is because students are afraid and embarrassed if they make mistakes when learning English takes place.

Meanwhile, external factors consist of teachers, teaching aids, and classroom conditions. These factors indicate that the causes of students' difficulties in learning English are the teacher's unattractive way of teaching, boring learning media, and classroom conditions and atmosphere that sometimes make students not focus on learning. Because there are friends who talk to when the teacher explains the material.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material that may be helpful in the review process should be prepared and provided as a separate electronic file. That file can then be transformed into PDF format and submitted along with the manuscript and graphic files to the appropriate editorial office.