



Addressing Learning Challenges in English Class through Design Thinking Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the challenges faced in English language learning at a senior high school in Jember, including students' negative perceptions about learning English, limited learning time, and dependence on technology as a shortcut. To solve these problems, the researcher employed the Design Thinking approach using the Double Diamond model, which consists of four key stages: Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver. Through classroom observations and interviews, the researcher identified student pain points and reframed them into opportunities using the "How Might We" method. Ideation and evaluation were conducted with the Impact-Effort Matrix to select practical and impactful solutions. The findings suggest five effective strategies: (1) Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), (2) use of authentic materials, (3) implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), (4) educative games, and (5) running-dictation text method. These strategies, categorized as low-effort but high-impact, offer innovative yet accessible solutions to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in English classrooms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English in Indonesia still faces various challenges. One of the main factors is the status of English as a foreign language, where it is rarely used in daily life. As a result, students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, making the learning process less contextual and disconnected from their real-life experiences. This ultimately affects students' interest in learning English. Hidayat and Devi (2024) stated that several factors contribute to the low interest, including unengaging teaching methods, misconceptions about the relevance of English in daily life, and the influence of social and cultural environments on students' attitudes toward learning the language.

An English teacher has the role in teaching four essential skills, those are speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Moreover, their role goes beyond teaching these language skills — they must also support, facilitate, and encourage students to develop enthusiasm, positive attitudes, and motivation toward learning English (Songbatumis, 2017).

So, the teacher's role is not only to deliver material but also to create meaningful learning experiences that engage students and help them understand that English is not merely a school requirement to complete, but a valuable skill with significant benefits in real-life contexts. On the other hand, this role becomes even more complex due to the diverse characteristics of students, including their academic abilities, socio-cultural backgrounds, interests, and learning motivation. According to Tomlinson (2001), every student possesses unique characteristics, encompassing diverse needs, preferences, abilities, and ways of learning. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to view these differences not as obstacles, but as unique traits that can be developed into valuable potential for the students' future.

The study was conducted by Agung (2019:266) revealed that challenges in teaching English in the least-developed region in Indonesia are the students' low proficiency in language comprehension, limited resources of materials, a communication gap between lectures and students, and students' lack of environmental support from society. Lestari (2021:62) conducted similar research on the challenges faced by English teachers at SMA Karya Ibu Palembang. The study identified several obstacles—both students and school facilities. Student-related challenges included limited vocabulary mastery, low concentration, lack of motivation, pronunciation difficulties, and speaking challenges. Additionally, teachers faced issues such as a lack of diverse teaching methods, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate facilities and resources.

From those studies, it can be concluded that challenges in learning English can appear from internal and external factors. Some students may have better access to additional learning resources such as courses or English-language media, while others rely on school learning with limited facilities. This situation requires teachers to design learning strategies that are not only effective but also inclusive to bridge the gap in students' abilities.

Additionally, teachers need to identify the challenges students face in learning English. By gaining a deeper understanding of these difficulties, teachers can provide appropriate treatment, making the learning process more meaningful and relevant for students. To achieve this, teachers need methods that accommodate different abilities and encourage creative problem-solving. One effective method that can be applied is Design Thinking.

Design Thinking is an inventive, creative, and human-centered approach and mindset that involves collaborating with interdisciplinary teams to create products, services, and experiences focused on the user (Lor, 2017). In the context of education, Loescher (2019) summarizes the application of Design Thinking into five key points: focusing on defining the needs of users (students, parents, or fellow teachers) before seeking solutions, being open to unexpected outcomes, embracing ambiguity or uncertainty, maintaining a

human-centered (empathetic) approach, and engaging in a reflective process to enhance contextual understanding, with empathy as the foundation for comprehension.

The study conducted by Johnson and Millard (2019), examined application of *Design Thinking* principles in English Language Teaching (ELT) and found that an approach emphasizing empathy and active problem-solving not only supported students in developing their language skills, but also enhanced their confidence and self-efficacy in communicating in English.

Furthermore, a study by Smith and Brown (2020) highlights the ideation phase within the *Design Thinking* approach in the context of ELT. They explored how multimedia projects and collaborative storytelling can encourage creative language use, ultimately contributing to the improvement of students' language skills and learning motivation.

Sotlikova (2023) also conducted research in the same area. The study revealed that Design Thinking was used as a powerful tool to make ELT classrooms centers of innovation and student empowerment. The learning models she used included technology integration and interactive learning, project-based learning that visibly strengthens language skills while offering real-world contexts, and encouraging language use outside the classroom by emphasizing the practical value of language acquisition.

Satria & Muntaha (2021) conducted a study entitled “21st century education innovation: the application of design thinking and project-based learning in Indonesian education”. According to him, education in Indonesia currently requires innovation for more advanced learning that is in line with existing technology. Design Thinking is an innovative “breakthrough” where students' potential can be maximized.

Based on observation and in-depth interviews with the students from one of Senior High School in Jember, several issues were identified in their English learning process. First, students tend to label English as a difficult subject — even during simple learning activities. They also perceive English as less useful in real-life contexts and unrelated to their future goals, resulting in low learning motivation. Second, learning process feel rushed and failing to meet their desire for a more relaxed experience. Third, the ease of accessing technology leads them to take simple way when completing assignments, hindering their skill development.

Based on the problem analysis and the findings from previous research, this essay aims to address these challenges using the Design Thinking approach, specifically by applying the How Might We (HMW) method.

2. METHODS

To address these challenges, the researcher will apply Design Thinking. The methodology of Design Thinking itself can be categorized into six models: Five-stage Design Process (Bootcamp Bootleg), Double Diamonds, Deep Dive, Collective Action Toolkit (CAT), Design for Change (D4C), and Designing for Growth.

However, in this case, the researcher will focus specifically on the Double Diamonds method. This framework was introduced by the Design Council in 2004. It views the Design Thinking process as consisting of two main phases: the “problem space” and the “solution space” (Lindberg et al, 2010, cited in Roterberg, 2018). In exploring the problem space and developing solutions, two approaches are used—diverge is broad-thinking approach aimed at gathering as much information as possible and converge is a narrowing-thinking approach focused on selecting the most important, actionable information for the next stage. The step of solving problem will be explained further below:

- a. Discover: The first stage of the Double Diamonds framework is Discover. Discover involves a divergent thinking where the designers conduct a research process to obtain various findings—this is equivalent with developing empathy (Sekarwulan & Josephine,

2024). In this research, the techniques used include observation during classroom learning activities and in-depth interviews conducted with four students from X-7.

- b. Define: The second stage is Define, which involves deepening the understanding of the problem. The technique applied in this phase is User Journey. This method maps the subject's experience sequentially, helping to visualize and analyse their learning process from start to finish, capturing key moments, challenges, and emotions along the way (Sekarwulan & Josephine, 2024).
- c. Developing insights: The third stage is developing insights, which involves transforming knowledge into deeper understanding. According to (Dalton, 2023 as cited in Sekarwulan & Josephine, 2024), insights go beyond mere observations or facts. They uncover deeper meanings — not just what someone does or when they do it, but why they do it. The data gathered from the user journey will be interpreted through a deeper understanding of students' needs and problems. This interpretation stage is referred to as identifying pain points. According to Sekarwulan and Josephine (2024), pain points are the most disruptive elements — experiences that cause significant discomfort or negative emotions for students. In the user journey diagram, pain points are typically linked to students' negative emotions and marked with red indicators.
- d. Formulating Goals: The final stage is formulating goals using the How Might We (HMW) method. After identifying key insights, goals are set by reframing these insights into open-ended, positive questions. Starting with "How might we..." shifts the problem into an opportunity for exploration, encouraging the generation of creative, alternative solutions.
- e. Ideate Phase: According to Porumboiu as cited in Sekarwulan and Josephine (2024), the ideation process involves three main stages: generating a range of ideas, evaluating and selecting them, and developing the chosen ideas into feasible solutions. Thus, the primary goal of ideation is not merely to produce as many ideas as possible, but to arrive at the most effective solution for addressing the problem.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The result of observation and interview are presented below:

a. First, observation and in-depth interviews (IDI)

The observation was conducted in class X-7 over four weeks, involving a total of 36 students. The in-depth interview process included four students from the same class, consisting of two high achievers and two low achievers as samples.

From the observation and in-depth interviews (IDI), the following findings were obtained:

- 1) Most students prefer group learning over individual tasks. They feel that group discussions help them explore ideas and understanding more deeply, interact with peers, and find answers more easily. Meanwhile, students who prefer individual learning said it allows them to work more freely and complete tasks anytime without interference from others.
- 2) A majority of students consider listening techniques to be effective for deeper understanding. However, in classroom practice, many students struggle to maintain focus. In contrast, interactive methods such as game-based media or kinaesthetic approaches tend to generate more enthusiasm and engagement. This finding suggests that learning preferences do not always align with actual effectiveness.
- 3) Students with higher English proficiency stated that their primary motivation for learning is to achieve their dreams — becoming English Teacher or studying abroad. On the other hand, most other students share a similar motivation: to make their

parents proud and happy. When asked further, they mentioned their plans after graduation, including studying at top universities, studying abroad, or becoming entrepreneurs.

- 4) Students with lower English proficiency tend to have lack motivation. They often label English as a difficult subject from the start, leading to minimal effort to improve. When explored further, they expressed that English seems unrelated to their future goals and has little use in their daily lives. As a result, they rely heavily on smartphones and the internet for assignments. This over-reliance on technology fosters laziness.
- 5) Students feel limited by a packed academic schedule and curriculum demands. Consequently, they find it difficult to dive deeper into the material, analyze it critically, and connect it to broader contexts — leading to superficial understanding.

b. Second, user journey

The data of user journey can be identified from the picture below:

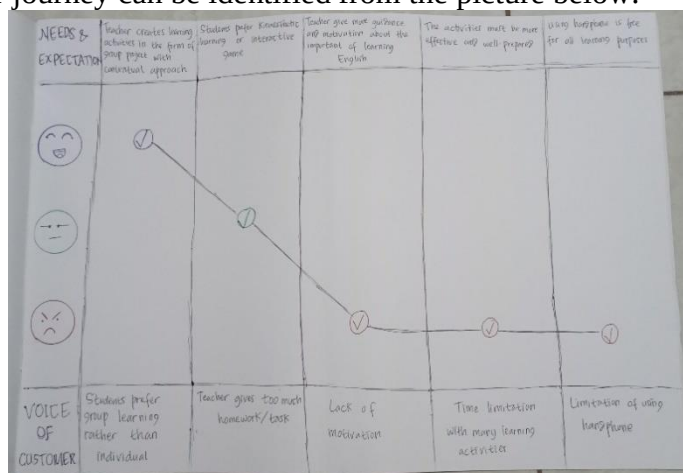


Figure 1. The User Journey Data

From the user journey data, several insights were gathered: (1) Students' preference for group learning over individual tasks has been fairly well accommodated, with the teacher designs learning activities in the form of group projects using a contextual approach. (2) However, students feel that the teacher gives too many formal homework or assignments. This is not quite accordance with their expectations about learning that facilitate their kinaesthetic learning style or give them interactive games. (3) Most students also have low motivation to learn English, which contrasts with their expectations. They feel the teacher provides insufficient guidance and motivation to help them understand why learning English is important. (4) Additionally, students feel that learning activities are too packed and the time given is very limited — making the learning process feel rushed and failing to meet their desire for a more relaxed experience. (5) Lastly, the teacher's rule on limiting smartphone use, make students feeling restricted and struggling to complete assignments efficiently.

c. Third, pain points

Based on the previous user journey diagram results, pain points can be identified through students' negative emotions. From this analysis, it can be concluded that the main pain points are found in points 3, 4, and 5.

- 1) Point 3 indicates that the teacher's role remains limited to being a knowledge transmitter, with English learning lacking contextualization in real-life benefits. As a result, many students perceive English as difficult and irrelevant to their future aspirations.

- 2) Next, point 4 highlights that the packed learning schedule leaves students feeling exhausted and rushed. This makes them feel that English is less dynamic and makes them unable to follow its learning with excitement and happiness.
- 3) Finally, point 5 reveals that students demonstrate resistance to handphone or technology in the learning process. They tend to label English as a difficult subject, even when teachers provide simple exercises. Their habit of relying on technology to complete tasks without understanding the content further reinforces this negative perception.

d. Fourth, formulating goals

The final stage of first diamond is formulating goals using the How Might We (HMW) method. Based on the pain points identified above, the following questions can be constructed:

- 1) How might we make English lessons feel more useful and meaningful to students?
- 2) How might we make English lessons more enjoyable to students?
- 3) How might we help students reduce their dependency on instant translation tools when learning English?

e. Fifth, ideate phase

This is the first step in second diamond. The methods used in this study is brainstorming to gather a wide range of ideas without initial filtering, and the impact-effort diagram to evaluate and select those ideas based on a comparison of the potential impact and the effort required to implement them.

1) Brainstorming

The ideas collected during brainstorming are presented below:

- a) How might we make English lessons feel more useful and meaningful to students?

The ideas collected during brainstorming are presented below:

(1) Integrating Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

An approach that connects lesson content with students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, routines, and current topics relevant to today's youth. Because the context of the material and learning is adjusted to the student's background, the absorption of the material will be more optimal, because students actually experience it in real terms and feel familiar with the situation.

(2) Using authentic materials

Incorporating real-world resources such as movies, current news articles, advertisements, brochures, newspapers, and other educational sources from platforms like YouTube and TikTok. By using this type of material, students will feel that English is indeed useful in daily life.

(3) Applying project-based learning approaches

Engaging students in activities like creating travel vlogs, role-playing, performing dramas, or participating in debates on current issues to enhance language use in meaningful contexts.

(4) Strengthening emotional connection

Involving students in reflective activities such as asking personal questions (e.g., "how does this topic relate to your life?"), creating English vision boards, sharing inspiring stories, and emphasizing the practical benefits of mastering English in daily life.

- b) How might we make English lessons more enjoyable to students?

The ideas collected during brainstorming are presented below:

(1) Integrating differentiated instruction

An instructional approach that tailors teaching strategies to accommodate

students' diverse backgrounds, characteristics, interests, and learning profiles. This is enough to make students enjoy because the teacher recognizes the diversity of students, sees it as potential, and facilitates it so that this potential can develop.

(2) Incorporating Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

An approach focused on developing students' social and emotional skills, such as self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, relationship building, and responsible decision-making. With this approach, students will feel more secure because their feelings are validated, their ability to manage emotions increases, and their socialization skills improve, so that they can feel a more meaningful existence.

(3) Including light activities during lessons

Adding simple activities like casual discussions or educational games in the middle of the lesson to keep students engaged and relaxed. Teacher can integrate various digital learning platforms—such as Quizizz, Zep Quiz, Padlet, Kahoot, and Wordwall—to promote interactive and engaging classroom activities.

(4) Providing time for peer teaching

Allowing students to explain concepts to one another to reinforce understanding through collaborative learning. Through peer learning activities, it is expected that students can enjoy the process more because those who guide are peers, so there is no awkwardness or fear of making mistakes.

c) How might we help students reduce their dependency on instant translation tools when learning English?

The ideas collected during brainstorming are presented below:

(1) Implementing clear guidelines and disciplinary measures regarding mobile phone usage during lessons to maintain focus and discipline.

This can be done through the creation of a class agreement, where students are actively involved and given space to contribute ideas. If students feel ownership of the agreement from the start, then they will be more likely to be motivated to adhere to the rules that have been mutually agreed upon.

(2) Returning to the old way of learning by using a dictionary book.

By translating English words word by word, students' critical thinking skills are expected to improve as they have to relate the meaning of the word to the context of the sentence. Through direct searching and reading activities in the school environment, students' memory of new vocabulary will also be more attached, so that their vocabulary mastery can improve significantly.

(3) Using Running Dictation Text method

Running dictation text method is an activity where students work in groups to answer questions based on a text. However, the text is posted on the blackboard or a certain corner of the classroom. Students are given the freedom to divide the roles in the group, for example who is in charge of reading the text and who records the answers. The teacher will also provide some difficult vocabulary words and their equivalents on the board as support. This activity requires students to understand the text based on the context by utilizing their prior knowledge without the help of an instant translator.

2) Impact-Effort Diagram

From the results of brainstorming, the ideas can be analysed using impact effort diagram. This diagram aims to map out the potential benefits and challenges of

implementing an idea by considering two main aspects: how impactful the idea is in solving the problem, and how much effort—such as time, energy, and cost—is required to carry it out (Sekarwulan & Josephine, 2024). The impact-effort mapping results are presented below:

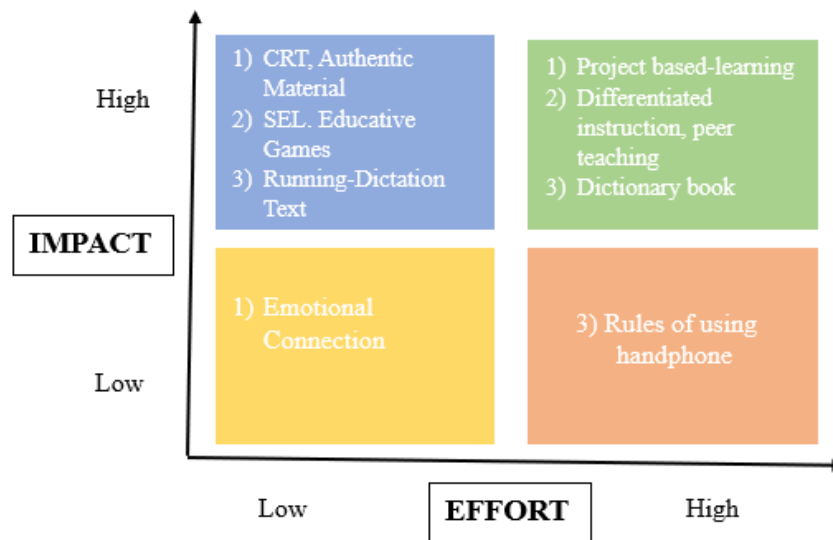


Figure 2. The Impact-Effort Mapping Results

From the diagram, it can be concluded that the ideas with low effort and high impact are using CRT, authentic materials, integrating SEL, educational games, and running-dictation text. Meanwhile, the ideas with both low impact and low effort are emotional connection. The ideas with high impact and high effort are implementing project-based learning, differentiated instruction, peer teaching, and using book dictionary. Lastly, the idea with high effort and low impact is the rules of using a mobile phone.

Discussions

Based on the impact-effort diagram, it can be concluded that the most efficient ideas are those that fall into the low effort and high impact category. These ideas provide significant results with relatively little effort. They are highly recommended for implementation because they deliver great impact on student learning without requiring much time, resources, or extra effort. Here are some ideas in this category, along with a detailed analysis:

a. Using CRT (Culturally Responsive Teaching)

According to Gay (2000), the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach is implemented by integrating students' cultural backgrounds, life experiences, prior knowledge, and diverse learning styles into the learning process. This approach fosters inclusivity, increases student engagement, and makes learning more meaningful. It requires relatively little effort—mostly adjustments in teaching strategies and materials—but it yields high impact by validating students' identities and improving academic outcomes, especially for diverse learners. CRT also promotes a more equitable and respectful classroom environment. For example, in teaching narrative texts, the teacher can connect the material by comparing stories from Western and Indonesian cultures. In the end, the teacher may also ask students to share the most popular story from their own cultural background.

b. Authentic Material

The use of authentic materials (such as news articles, videos, or materials created by native speakers) increases the relevance of learning because students can connect what they are learning to real-world situations. Providing materials that are directly related to their lives makes learning more meaningful and engaging. Furthermore, authentic materials reduce the effort required by teachers to create highly structured lessons, as these materials are readily available and can be used directly in the classroom. For example, in teaching narrative texts, the teacher provides a movie for the class to watch together, then asks the students to review the movie and analyze its generic structure.

c. Integrating SEL (Social and Emotional Learning)

Integrating SEL into teaching has a huge impact on students' social and emotional development, improving their ability to manage emotions, interact with others, and adapt to various situations. SEL programs can often be implemented easily through everyday classroom activities, requiring minimal preparation or extra effort from teachers. Its impact is significant in creating a positive learning environment and supporting students' well-being. Students with a high level of emotional intelligence (EI) tend to be more motivated, apply more effective learning strategies, and are better at managing stress and resolving conflicts (Wulandari, 2019). For example, the teacher checks in on students' emotions before and after the lesson, consistently gives appreciation when students show initiative, provides constructive feedback, and creates a classroom climate characterized by low control and high warmth.

d. Educative Games

Educative games are one of the most enjoyable ways to make learning more interactive and engaging. Well-designed educational games can have a significant impact on student engagement, enhancing material understanding, and encouraging students to collaborate and think critically. Although some preparation is needed by teachers, using games can create a very enjoyable and effective learning experience. Some educative games that can be used for the teacher are ZEP quiz, Educaplay, Quizizz, Kahoot, etc.

e. Running-Dictation Text

This activity encourages students to comprehend texts contextually by drawing on their prior knowledge, without depending on instant translation tools. It also helps students recognize their own potential in understanding English independently, which in turn fosters greater self-confidence and motivation to continue learning.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings show that English learning at one of SMA at Jember faces several challenges, including students' negative perceptions, tight learning schedules, and a tendency to rely on technology as a shortcut rather than as a meaningful learning tool. By applying the Design Thinking approach—specifically the Double Diamond model—these issues were explored, analyzed, and reframed into opportunities through the How Might We (HMW) method. After ideation and evaluation using the Impact-Effort Diagram, it was concluded that the most efficient and feasible solutions are those categorized as low effort and high impact. These strategies require minimal time and resources but have the potential to significantly enhance student learning outcomes.

These include: (1) Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which integrates students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles to make lessons more inclusive and meaningful (Gay, 2000); (2) Authentic Materials, such as films or real-world texts, which enhance relevance and engagement; (3) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which fosters students'

emotional well-being and motivation through simple routines like emotional check-ins and constructive feedback; (4) Educative Games, like Quizizz, Kahoot, Padlet, and Mentimeter that promote fun, interaction, and critical thinking; and (5) Running-Dictation Method.

It can be concluded that by adopting a Design Thinking approach-specifically the Double Diamond model-the study effectively transformed barriers into opportunities for innovation. The strategies chosen-from Culturally Responsive Teaching to the Running Dictation Method-reflect a balanced integration of cultural awareness, emotional support, authentic engagement and interactive learning. This demonstrates a thoughtful, student-centered approach to educational problem-solving that aligns with 21st century pedagogical values.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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