

English in Everyday Life: An Analysis of English Language Skills through Daily Conversation among Students

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Abstract— English is an important skill for students in the globalized world because it is used as an international language in many areas, such as education, technology, business, and communication. However, many students still struggle to use English actively, especially in speaking skills. One way to improve this ability is by making it a habit to use English in everyday conversations. This study aims to examine students' English language skills by looking at how they use English in daily conversations and to identify factors that affect the effectiveness of its application. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques including observation and documentation. The research subject consists of students who have experience using English in daily communication activities, whether in school, family, or social interactions. The data collected was analyzed to find out the relationship between the intensity of English language use in daily conversations and the development of students' English language skills. The research results show that using English regularly in daily conversations has a positive impact on improving speaking ability, vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and understanding of language structure. In addition, the habit of communicating in English has been shown to help students feel more confident when expressing their opinions and interacting with others. The factors that help improve this ability include a strong study motivation, a supportive environment for using English, access to learning materials, and regular practice done consistently. Using English in everyday conversations can be an effective way to help students improve their language skills continuously and apply them in real-life situations.

Keywords— English language skills, daily conversation, students' speaking ability.

I. INTRODUCTION

English has increasingly become the dominant medium of international communication in academia, business, and social life. As a global language, English proficiency is considered a critical skill for students aiming to participate in the modern world (Crystal, 2003; Purba et al., 2026). In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory foreign language at all educational levels, yet many students continue to struggle with practical communicative competence despite years of formal instruction.

One of the most significant opportunities for authentic language practice lies in daily conversational interaction. Conversations serve as a natural laboratory for language use, providing learners with real-time practice that integrates multiple skills simultaneously. According to Nunan (1991), conversational interaction is central to second language acquisition (SLA) because it requires learners to negotiate meaning, adjust their speech, and employ communication strategies in spontaneous contexts.

The present study seeks to analyze the English language skills displayed through daily conversations among students at the Boarding School of Baitussalam, Simalungun, North Sumatra. This study examines the quality of students' communication in real life. Researchers can see to what extent students are able to use English in real communication situations. The research also aims to identify the barriers they face in using English and to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process

implemented. The results of this analysis are expected to form the basis of developing more effective learning strategies to improve students' English communication skills in daily life and to meet the demands of globalization.

Specifically, this study examines the quality of students' speaking and listening skills, the grammatical and lexical features of student conversations, and the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder language skill development through daily interaction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 English Language Skills in an EFL Context

In language learning, language skills are generally divided into four components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills do not stand alone—in real conversations, they are interrelated and complementary (Tarigan, 2015; Sinaga et al., 2025). However, in the context of everyday conversation, speaking and listening skills are certainly the most dominant.

In the context of Indonesia as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) country, speaking skills are often considered the "pinnacle" of English language proficiency. Unlike ESL (English as a Second Language) countries where English is used as a daily language, in Indonesia English is only encountered in a limited way—primarily in classrooms, digital media, and certain professional contexts (Suyanto, 2010; Herman et al., 2026; Sitepu et al., 2026). This limited exposure makes developing speaking skills a challenge.

Research by Widiati and Cahyono (2006) conducted at several schools in Java found that students tend to be more confident in reading and writing skills than speaking. They concluded that the lack of opportunities to speak outside the classroom was one of the main factors limiting the development of Indonesian students' oral communication skills. In language learning, language skills are generally divided into four components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills do not stand alone—in real-life conversations, they are interrelated and complementary (Tarigan, 2015). However, in the context of everyday conversation, speaking and listening skills are certainly the most dominant.

2.2 Daily Conversation as a Language Learning Space

Talking is not just a way to communicate—it is also a very effective tool for learning. When two or more people talk, there is a process of negotiating meaning, correcting, and adapting language, which indirectly helps improve the linguistic skills of everyone involved. This view aligns with what Krashen (as cited in Suyanto, 2010) called "comprehensible input"—language input that is understandable and serves as the main fuel for language acquisition.

In sociolinguistic studies, Chaer and Agustina (2010) explain that verbal interactions in everyday life gradually shape a person's communicative competence. This process does not happen all at once, but through repeated experience with the language. The more someone participates in English conversations, even in informal settings, the more likely their language skills will improve.

Nurhayati (2016) found that students who actively use English in informal communication with their peers show a more significant improvement in speaking skills compared to those who only rely on classroom learning. This finding shows that the space for learning English should not be limited to just formal classroom settings.

2.3 Challenges of Indonesian Students in English Conversation

Speaking English in front of classmates, especially spontaneously, is a challenging experience for many Indonesian learners. This phenomenon, known in literature as foreign language anxiety, can make individuals feel nervous when speaking or listening. Hewi Murdaningsih (2014) notes that learners with significant language anxiety may avoid using English altogether, even if they have a good grasp of the language.

Moreover, anxiety is often compounded by an insufficient vocabulary. According to Lubis (2012), it is common for students to halt their speech mid-conversation, not because they lack comprehension but because they cannot find the right words in English. As a result, they may switch to using Indonesian or their native dialect during discussions. Furthermore, student dialogue frequently involves code-switching, a subject that has been deeply investigated and is not always unproductive.

Muslich (2010) suggests that this can be used as a planned communication tactic instead of an unintentional one. This occurrence is well recognized. Individuals may use it to clarify their message, strengthen their rapport with listeners, or express ideas that may not be easily translated into English.

2.4 The Influence of Environment and Motivation in Language Learning

The setting in which learning occurs significantly impacts language skill development. Suyanto (2010) states that environments encouraging the use of the target language—both in tangible and social aspects—can greatly enhance how often and how well students practice the language. A program that promotes the use of English outside the classroom can foster a much more beneficial learning atmosphere than one that restricts English usage to classroom activities only.

Motivation is another crucial element. Santoso (2018) researched in various schools in East Java and found that learners with strong integrative motivation—reflecting the intention to communicate successfully with native English speakers—improved their speaking abilities at a faster rate than those who learned English only for academic achievements or examinations.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive method. This method was chosen because the purpose of this study was not to quantify or compare, but rather to understand and explain a phenomenon in greater depth—in this context, how female students use English in their daily interactions. As Moleong (2017) noted, qualitative research allows researchers to capture the details and complexities of data that cannot be seen through numbers alone (Sihotang et al., 2026).

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at the Boarding School of Baitussalam, Simalungun, North Sumatra. The school is an Islamic boarding school where students live on campus full-time, creating a unique environment for language practice. The school promotes English use through various programs and activities, though the extent of daily use varies among students.

The study involved 16 female students in the 11th grade of social studies at Baitussalam Islamic Boarding School, aged 15-16, who were selected as participants. This selection was deliberate because the 11th graders are seniors who have lived at Baitussalam Islamic Boarding School for a long time. Therefore, they are more comfortable and less reluctant to speak with their peers. The study focused on female students because the Islamic boarding school operates as a single-gender institution, with separate sections for male and female students, and the researcher had access to the female section of the school. Before the study began, all participants were given an explanation of the research objectives to facilitate their understanding.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected over two days, April 16-17, 2026, from 07.00-08.45 AM, utilizing three complementary methods:

- 1) **Participant Observation:** Researchers directly observed female students' interactions in various informal settings—such as the cafeteria, dormitory, sports field, and study groups. Field notes were used to record the patterns, frequency, and quality of English use observed.
- 2) **Direct Conversations:** Conversations were conducted with three selected pairs (a total of six female students), each lasting approximately 5-10 minutes. These sessions aimed to instill spontaneity in the students' everyday English, identifying the challenges they faced and their motivations.
- 3) **In-Depth Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with each of the three selected female students (one from each pair), lasting between 10-15 minutes. A semi-structured interview method was used to allow researchers to explore information more openly. The focus of the interviews included hobbies, interests, experiences learning English, and the students' perspectives on the use of English in everyday life. Data from these interviews were used to complement and strengthen the findings obtained from observations and conversations.

TABLE 1
IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH TIME

No	Materials	Time
1	Direct Conversations	07.00-07.30
2	In-Depth Interviews	08.00-08.45

TABLE 2
OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION

Techniques	Participant	Duration	Data Type
Participant Observation	12	2 days	Field Notes
Direct Conversations	6	10 minutes each	Field Notes
In-Depth Interviews	3	10-15 minutes/person	Interview Notes

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected through observations, conversations, and interviews were analyzed using a qualitative analysis method consisting of three steps: data simplification, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data simplification step, the researcher selected and grouped data related to the research theme. The data was then presented in narrative form for ease of understanding. The final step was drawing conclusions based on the patterns and findings emerging from all the analyzed data.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Key Language Skills in Daily Interactions

From the analysis of direct interactions, it is clear that speaking and listening skills are the most dominant in the students' daily activities. These two skills almost always appear in every conversation session observed, while reading and writing skills only emerge unexpectedly, such as when students read text messages or take short notes.

What is interesting is the interaction between these skills within a single conversation. While a student speaks, she also listens to the other person's response, responds verbally, and sometimes looks at the text written on her phone screen. This multitasking language process provides invaluable practice for developing language skills.



FIGURE 1: Direct Conversation with Partner A



FIGURE 2: Direct Conversation with Partner B

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF THE OCCURRENCE OF LANGUAGE SKILLS IN DAILY CONVERSATION

Language Skills	Proportion (%)	Ability Level	The Main Challenges Encountered
Speaking	35%	Intermediate	Fluency & Pronunciation
Listening	27%	Intermediate	Understanding Rapid Speech
Writing	8%	Basic-Intermediate	Grammar & Coherence
Reading	30%	Intermediate	Vocabulary Inference

4.2 Factors Influencing Daily English Use

Interview results revealed several key factors that influence how often and how well female students communicate in English in their daily lives.

- **The first factor, often highlighted, is peer influence.** As many as 76% of respondents stated that the English-speaking habits of their closest friends significantly influence their language use. Female students who interact with friends who are accustomed to using English in casual situations tend to speak English more often. This finding aligns with a study by Santoso (2018) on the role of internal motivation and the positive influence of the social environment in the language learning process.
- **The second factor is self-confidence.** Many female students reported feeling more comfortable speaking English in small, familiar groups than in larger settings. Hewi Murdaningsih (2014) refers to this as a reflection of situational language anxiety—where the level of anxiety changes depending on the context and the people involved.
- **The third factor is the availability of English-language media.** Around 68% of respondents stated that regularly watching films, listening to podcasts, or following English-language social media content helped them expand their vocabulary and acquire a more natural pronunciation. This aligns with Nurhayati's (2016) view on the importance of authentic language exposure outside of formal learning environments.

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Challenges in Implementation

5.1.1 Grammatical Accuracy and Richness of Vocabulary

Analysis of the transcripts revealed a fairly consistent pattern of grammatical errors across participants. The most common errors were in the use of tenses—particularly the simple past and present perfect—reflecting the fundamental differences between the tense systems of English and Indonesian. In Indonesian, there are no tense-dependent verb tense changes, so female students often "forget" to modify verb tenses when speaking English. This pattern of tense errors aligns with findings by Lubis (2012), who noted that such errors are not caused by ignorance of rules but by failure to automatically internalize them in spontaneous speech.

Besides tense issues, errors in subject-verb agreement were also very common—for example, saying "she go" instead of "she goes." Lubis (2012) found a similar pattern in his research and concluded that these errors were not caused by ignorance of the rules, but because they had not yet been automatically internalized in spontaneous spoken language use. From a vocabulary perspective, the average female student uses approximately 1,200 to 1,500 active words in everyday conversation.

General vocabulary predominates, while academic or specialized vocabulary appears less frequently. However, it is worth noting that many female students creatively employed periphrastic strategies—explaining something in different words when they could not find the right words. This strategy demonstrates good communication skills.

5.1.2 Pragmatic Competence and Code Switching

In terms of pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts—female students generally demonstrated a good understanding of how to politely begin and end conversations, as well as maintaining turn-taking. The use of small talk expressions such as "how are you" or "what's up" also felt natural and did not seem awkward.

Code-switching occurred in approximately 31% of all recorded interactions. This finding aligns with the findings of Muslich (2010) and Chaer and Agustina (2010): code-switching in the context of female EFL students in Indonesia is not merely a sign

of weakness, but rather a more flexible communication strategy. Some female students even used it strategically—for example, switching to Indonesian to convey humour or sarcasm that would feel more "real" if spoken in their native language.

5.2 Steps to Overcome the Challenges

Based on the challenges discussed above, several pedagogical strategies are proposed to address grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary, and pragmatic difficulties faced by female EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in Indonesia.

5.2.1 Addressing Grammatical Inaccuracy through Corrective Feedback and Explicit Instruction

One of the most effective ways to reduce grammatical errors—particularly tense-related mistakes resulting from first language influence—is the implementation of focused corrective feedback. Teachers are encouraged to combine recasting techniques during communicative activities with explicit grammar instruction in dedicated grammar review sessions. Recasting involves the teacher repeating a student's incorrect utterance in its correct form without interrupting the flow of communication, allowing students to receive an accurate language model without experiencing embarrassment or losing confidence.

To help students internalize grammatical rules automatically, regular practice through communicative drills, role-playing activities, and task-based learning is strongly recommended. Repeated and meaningful use of language structures in authentic contexts is more effective than isolated grammar exercises in supporting long-term language acquisition. Activities such as storytelling and interview simulations provide students with meaningful, low-pressure opportunities to practice using the past tense and present perfect naturally.

Additionally, teachers can encourage students to keep an error journal to record the grammatical mistakes they frequently make. This practice can raise learners' awareness of their errors and promote self-monitoring skills, particularly for mistakes caused by first language transfer, such as the omission of verb inflections that indicate tense.

5.2.2 Expanding Vocabulary through Extensive Reading and Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Considering that the participants in this study largely relied on a limited range of general vocabulary—which is insufficient for academic or professional purposes—a structured vocabulary development program is necessary. Students should be encouraged to engage in extensive reading using graded readers and accessible authentic texts related to their interests and fields of study. Consistent reading exposes learners to new vocabulary in meaningful contexts, which is more effective than simply memorizing isolated word lists.

The use of digital tools, such as flashcard applications that employ spaced repetition systems, can help strengthen long-term vocabulary retention. Students are advised to review newly learned words at increasingly longer intervals so that the vocabulary can be transferred from short-term to long-term memory. Beyond memorization, students should also understand how words are used in authentic contexts, including their meanings and appropriate usage in sentences and discussions.

Furthermore, the periphrastic strategies observed in this study—where students creatively used paraphrasing when they lacked specific vocabulary items—represent a positive communicative resource that should be further developed. Teachers can enhance this ability by teaching paraphrasing techniques, synonym identification, and collocational patterns as part of a comprehensive vocabulary learning program.

5.2.3 Enhancing Pragmatic Competence through Contextual and Sociocultural Learning

Although students demonstrated reasonably strong pragmatic skills in conversation, particularly in managing turn-taking and initiating small talk, adopting a more systematic approach to pragmatic instruction would help them improve their communicative abilities in more complex social situations using English. Pragmatic competence does not develop automatically; rather, it must be taught deliberately through exposure to authentic communicative contexts and reflection on language use.

Classroom activities such as discourse completion tasks, video analysis of native and non-native speaker interactions, and simulations of social situations can increase learners' awareness of speech acts, politeness strategies, and language variation. Role-playing activities that encourage students to adjust their language use across different contexts—formal, informal, and academic—can help bridge the gap between classroom language learning and real-world communication needs.

Teachers are also encouraged to introduce students to a variety of English accents and speaking styles through authentic multimedia materials. This exposure can help learners become more comfortable with the diversity of English used worldwide rather than constantly comparing themselves to an idealized native-speaker standard.

5.2.4 Reframing Code-Switching as a Bilingual Resource

The 31% rate of code-switching observed in this study should not be viewed as a teaching failure but rather as evidence of effective bilingual competence. Flexible shifts between languages can serve as a legitimate and useful communicative strategy, particularly in multilingual environments such as Indonesian EFL classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to adopt an approach that recognizes the strategic value of code-switching while still providing structured opportunities for students to strengthen their English communication skills.

Practical interventions may include the gradual introduction of "English-Only Zones" during specific classroom activities, accompanied by reflective discussions that help students analyze when and why they choose to switch languages. This approach can increase learners' awareness of their language choices while fostering confidence and fluency in English over time. At the same time, teachers should avoid imposing strict penalties or negative evaluations for code-switching, as doing so may create anxiety and discourage student participation. Instead, a gradual and supportive transition toward more active English use—viewed as an expansion of communicative competence rather than the elimination of the native language—is more likely to result in positive and sustainable progress.



FIGURE 3: Documentation with the Students after Socialization

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at only one institution—a single Islamic boarding school in North Sumatra—which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts in Indonesia. Second, the sample size was relatively small (16 participants), and the study focused exclusively on female students, so the findings may not reflect the experiences of male students or students in co-educational settings. Third, the qualitative nature of the study means that findings are interpretive and context-specific. Fourth, the data collection period was brief (only two days), which may not capture the full range of students' language use patterns. Finally, the presence of researchers during observation may have influenced students' behavior (the observer effect). Future research with a broader scope and longitudinal methods would significantly enhance our understanding of how everyday interactions contribute to the development of students' English skills in Indonesia.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

This study shows that everyday conversation is more than just a casual social activity—it is a significant venue for language practice. In their daily interactions, the female students combined multiple English language skills, with speaking and listening being the most prominent. Although grammatical errors and limited vocabulary persisted, these did not become barriers to communication—the students cleverly employed various techniques to maintain fluent conversation.

Another important aspect of this study is the extent to which factors outside the classroom environment influence language development. Friends, the atmosphere of the study program, self-confidence, and exposure to English-language media were shown to play as important a role as formal classroom instruction. This serves as a reminder that effective English language learning must go beyond what occurs in the classroom.

The research results show that using English regularly in daily conversations has a positive impact on improving speaking ability, vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and understanding of language structure. In addition, the habit of communicating in English has been shown to help students feel more confident when expressing their opinions and interacting with others. The factors that help improve this ability include a strong study motivation, a supportive environment for using English, access to learning materials, and regular practice done consistently.

7.2 Recommendations

- 1) **For Teachers and Administrators:** Create a positive atmosphere and encourage the use of English in a relaxed setting, such as through an English Corner, English Day, or English conversation groups outside of class time. Provide structured opportunities for students to practice speaking in low-anxiety environments. Consider implementing peer-mentoring programs where more proficient students can support their peers in developing speaking skills.
- 2) **For Students:** Do not wait until your language skills feel "adequate" before starting to speak. Consistent speaking—even with mistakes—will actually improve your language skills. Language anxiety can be overcome with regular practice and a supportive environment. Actively seek out opportunities to use English, both inside and outside the classroom, and do not be afraid to make mistakes as part of the learning process.
- 3) **For Future Researchers:** This study was conducted at only one institution and was qualitative in nature. Further research with a broader scope and longitudinal methods would significantly enhance our understanding of how everyday interactions contribute to the development of female students' English skills in Indonesia. Future studies could also compare different types of educational institutions (boarding schools, day schools, public schools) or examine the role of technology in facilitating daily English conversation practice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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