

INTERACTION-BASED ENGLISH LEARNING IN A BOARDING SCHOOL: SOCIOCULTURAL AND INTERACTIONIST PERSPECTIVES AT SMAN 2 SEKAYU

Suci Mildayuni^{1*}, Lismayati², Destiana³, Tahrur⁴, Aswadi Jaya⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas PGRI Palembang

*Corresponding author: smildayuni@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penerapan pendekatan sosiokultural dan interaksionis dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris melalui interaksi di SMAN 2 Sekayu, sebuah sekolah berasrama di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan siswa kelas X. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara siswa, dan dokumentasi kegiatan berbicara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan pembelajaran interaktif, seperti kerja berpasangan, diskusi kelompok, dan bermain peran, secara signifikan meningkatkan partisipasi, kepercayaan diri, dan keterampilan berbicara siswa. Siswa menjadi lebih aktif dan mau berkomunikasi ketika terlibat dalam tugas kolaboratif. Lingkungan sekolah berasrama juga memberikan kesempatan tambahan untuk praktik bahasa secara informal melalui interaksi antarteman. Namun, masih terdapat tantangan seperti penggunaan Bahasa Inggris yang tidak konsisten di luar kelas serta perbedaan tingkat kemampuan siswa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendekatan sosiokultural dan interaksionis efektif dalam meningkatkan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris dan merekomendasikan optimalisasi interaksi baik di dalam maupun di luar kelas.

Kata kunci: pendekatan sosiokultural, pendekatan interaksionis, interaksi kelas, keterampilan berbicara, sekolah berasrama.

Abstract

This study explores the implementation of sociocultural and interactionist approaches in learning English through interaction at SMAN 2 Sekayu, a boarding school in Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study involved tenth grade students. Data were collected through classroom observations, student interviews, and documentation of speaking activities. The findings show that interactive learning activities, such as pair work, group discussions, and role plays, significantly improve students' participation, confidence, and speaking skills. Students become more active and willing to communicate when engaged in collaborative tasks. The boarding school environment also provides additional opportunities for informal language practice through peer interaction. However, challenges such as inconsistent use of English outside the classroom and differences in students' proficiency levels remain. The study concludes that sociocultural and interactionist approaches are effective in enhancing English learning and recommends maximizing interaction both inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: sociocultural approach, interactionist approach, classroom interaction, speaking skills, boarding school

History:

Received : 30 May 2026

Revised : 1 June 2026

Accepted : 9 June 2026

Published : 12 June 2026

Publisher: Horizon Edukasi Prima Indonesia

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1. INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential means of communication in the twenty-first century, serving as a global language for education, technology, business, and international collaboration. In the context of globalization, mastery of English is no longer considered an additional skill but a fundamental competence that enables students to participate in academic, professional, and intercultural communication. For senior high school students, English proficiency is particularly important because it prepares them for higher education, future employment opportunities, and engagement in a globally connected society. Consequently, English language teaching in Indonesia is expected not only to develop students' linguistic knowledge but also to foster their communicative competence, especially speaking ability, which is often regarded as the most challenging skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Wang et al., 2024; Hadijah & McCauley, 2026).

Despite its importance, English learning in Indonesia faces several challenges because English functions as a foreign language rather than a second language. Students generally have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, resulting in insufficient exposure to authentic communication. This condition often affects learners' confidence, fluency, and willingness to communicate in English. Previous studies have revealed that many Indonesian EFL learners experience anxiety, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and low self-efficacy when speaking English, which ultimately hinders their participation in classroom interaction (Ritonga et al., 2022; Salim, 2026).

The issue becomes particularly relevant in secondary schools where communicative competence is expected to be one of the primary outcomes of English instruction. Although the Indonesian curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and communicative language teaching, classroom practices in many schools remain dominated by teacher-centered instruction. Learning activities frequently focus on grammatical accuracy, textbook exercises, and written assessments, leaving limited opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaborative language use. As a result, students tend to become passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in language learning. Such conditions are inconsistent with contemporary views of language acquisition, which emphasize the central role of interaction, participation, and social engagement in developing language competence (Muhayimana, 2021; Salsabila et al., 2025).

SMAN 2 Sekayu presents an interesting educational context for investigating interaction-based English learning. The school implements a moving-class system and accommodates students who live in a boarding school environment. From a pedagogical perspective, this context offers significant potential for language development because students are provided with extended opportunities for social interaction beyond regular classroom hours. Unlike conventional day schools, boarding school students spend substantial amounts of time together in academic and social settings, creating possibilities for continuous language practice through peer communication, collaborative learning, and informal interactions. Such an environment aligns with the view that language learning is a socially situated process that occurs through participation in meaningful communicative activities (He et al., 2026; Grazzi, 2024).

However, preliminary observations indicate that these opportunities are not always fully utilized. Many students still prefer using their first language in daily communication and show reluctance to speak English during classroom activities. They often demonstrate low confidence, fear negative evaluation from peers, and avoid participating in oral

discussions. Similar findings have been reported in boarding school contexts, where students acknowledge the importance of English but continue to face psychological and social barriers that limit their active participation in communicative activities (Salim, 2026; Hadijah & McCauley, 2026).

To understand this phenomenon, the present study adopts two complementary theoretical perspectives: Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and the Interactionist Approach. Rooted in the work of Vygotsky, Sociocultural Theory views learning as a socially mediated process in which knowledge is co-constructed through interaction with others. Language development occurs through participation in social activities, collaboration, scaffolding, and engagement within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). From this perspective, interaction with teachers and peers becomes a critical factor in promoting language acquisition and communicative competence (Muhayimana, 2021; He et al., 2026).

Similarly, the Interactionist Approach argues that language acquisition is facilitated through communication and negotiation of meaning. According to the interactionist perspective, learners acquire language more effectively when they engage in meaningful interaction that requires them to comprehend input, produce output, and negotiate misunderstandings. Through these processes, learners become more aware of linguistic forms and gradually improve their communicative abilities. Recent studies have demonstrated that interaction-based learning contributes significantly to students' speaking fluency, motivation, confidence, and classroom participation (Ritonga et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Salsabila et al., 2025).

The convergence of sociocultural and interactionist perspectives suggests that language learning is fundamentally a social process. Learners do not acquire language in isolation; rather, they develop communicative competence through participation in communities of practice where interaction serves as a medium for learning. This view is particularly relevant in boarding school settings because students have opportunities to engage in sustained interactions both inside and outside the classroom. Daily communication, peer support, collaborative activities, and institutional language policies may collectively create a learning environment that facilitates English language development (Hadijah & McCauley, 2026; He et al., 2026).

Although numerous studies have examined classroom interaction and communicative language teaching in EFL contexts, limited research has specifically investigated interaction-based English learning within Indonesian boarding schools using both sociocultural and interactionist perspectives simultaneously. Most previous studies have focused either on classroom practices or on students' perceptions of language learning without exploring how classroom interaction and boarding school environments interact to shape language development. Therefore, a research gap remains regarding how social interaction functions as a mechanism for English learning in boarding school contexts.

In response to this gap, the present study investigates the implementation of interaction-based English learning at SMAN 2 Sekayu from sociocultural and interactionist perspectives. Specifically, the study explores how interaction is incorporated into English learning activities, how it influences students' participation, confidence, and speaking ability, and how the boarding school environment supports English language development beyond the classroom. By examining these issues, the study is expected to contribute to the growing body of research on interaction-based language learning and provide practical insights for English teachers, school administrators, and policymakers

seeking to create more communicative and socially engaging learning environments in Indonesian EFL settings.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the implementation of interaction-based English learning from sociocultural and interactionist perspectives at SMAN 2 Sekayu. A qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to explore educational phenomena in their natural settings and to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, behaviors, and interactions without manipulating the research environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). This approach also allows researchers to describe classroom practices in detail and interpret how social interaction contributes to language learning processes.

The participants of this study were tenth-grade students of SMAN 2 Sekayu who were involved in English learning activities during the academic year 2025/2026. The participants were selected purposively because they were directly engaged in classroom interactions and represented learners experiencing English instruction within a boarding school environment. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), purposive sampling enables researchers to select participants who can provide rich and relevant information regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

Data were collected through three primary techniques, namely classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis. The use of multiple data collection techniques was intended to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through methodological triangulation (Patton, 2022). Classroom observations were conducted during English lessons to examine how interaction occurred between teachers and students as well as among students themselves. Observation is particularly valuable in classroom research because it provides direct evidence of participants' behaviors, communication patterns, and learning engagement in authentic situations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2024).

The observation process focused on several aspects of classroom interaction. First, the researcher examined students' participation during learning activities, including their willingness to ask questions, respond to teachers' questions, express opinions, and engage in classroom discussions. Active participation is considered an important indicator of interaction-based learning because it reflects students' engagement in meaning-making processes and collaborative knowledge construction (Mercer & Dawes, 2022). Second, the researcher observed peer interaction through pair work, group discussions, collaborative tasks, and other communicative activities designed to encourage students to use English for meaningful purposes. Such interactions are essential for language development because they provide opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and receive feedback from their peers (Philp, Adams, & Iwashita, 2021).

In addition, the observation focused on students' language use during classroom activities. Particular attention was given to the frequency and quality of English use, students' willingness to communicate, and the strategies they employed when encountering linguistic difficulties. The researcher also examined the teacher's role in facilitating interaction, including providing instructions, encouraging participation, offering feedback, and scaffolding students' learning processes. Effective scaffolding is considered an important component of sociocultural learning because it assists learners in performing tasks that they may not be able to accomplish independently (Lantolf, Poehner, & Swain, 2022).

To complement the observation data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students. The interviews aimed to explore students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward interaction-based English learning. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to express their views freely while enabling researchers to obtain detailed information related to specific research objectives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2021). Through the interviews, the researcher sought to understand how students perceived classroom interaction, the challenges they encountered when communicating in English, and the ways in which the boarding school environment influenced their language learning experiences.

Documentation was also employed as a supporting source of data. The documentation included students' speaking assignments, group project reports, classroom activity records, photographs, and other relevant learning artifacts. Documentary evidence provides valuable supplementary information that can support and verify findings obtained through observations and interviews (Bowen, 2021). Furthermore, students' speaking tasks were analyzed to identify indications of language development and communicative competence resulting from participation in interaction-based learning activities.

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative data analysis model. The analysis process consisted of four interconnected stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data collection involved gathering information from observations, interviews, and documentation. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, organizing, and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were displayed in the form of descriptive narratives, thematic categories, and summary tables to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring patterns, relationships, and themes related to students' participation, interaction, language use, and learning experiences. This analytical procedure follows the qualitative data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which emphasizes systematic interpretation of qualitative data through iterative and reflective processes.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher applied triangulation by comparing information obtained from different sources and methods. Data from observations, interviews, and documentation were cross-checked to verify consistency and enhance the credibility of the study. Member checking and prolonged engagement during classroom observations were also employed to improve the accuracy and reliability of data interpretation (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2021). Through these procedures, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how interaction-based English learning is implemented within the boarding school context of SMAN 2 Sekayu and how such interactions contribute to students' language development.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study reveal that interaction-based learning positively influenced students' English learning at SMAN 2 Sekayu. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and field notes conducted over the research period. Three main types of interactive activities were identified and implemented: pair work, group discussions, and role plays.

1. Pair Work Activities

Pair work activities allowed students to practice short dialogues with their classmates in a more relaxed and low-anxiety environment. Students took turns asking and answering questions on familiar topics such as daily routines, school life, and personal interests. The activity was observed to reduce students' hesitation in speaking, particularly among students with lower proficiency levels.

2. Group Discussion Activities

Group discussions encouraged students to share ideas, exchange opinions, and complete tasks collaboratively. Each group was assigned a topic related to school and dormitory life. Students were observed actively contributing to discussions, negotiating meaning, and supporting each other during the activities.

3. Role Play Activities

Role plays provided opportunities for students to simulate real-life communication, such as conversations in school and dormitory contexts. This activity promoted both fluency and contextual language use. Students demonstrated greater engagement and creativity in using English during role play scenarios.

Table 1. Summary of Interaction-Based Learning Activities Observed at SMAN 2 Sekayu

No.	Activity Type	Description	Student Behavior Observed	Impact on Learning
1	Pair Work	Students practiced short dialogues in pairs on familiar topics	Increased willingness to speak; reduced hesitation among lower-proficiency students	Improved fluency and communication confidence
2	Group Discussion	Students discussed assigned topics collaboratively in small groups	Active idea-sharing, meaning negotiation, and peer support observed	Enhanced collaborative skills and vocabulary usage
3	Role Play	Students simulated real-life conversations in school and dormitory contexts	High student engagement; creative and contextual language use	Improved speaking fluency and real-world communication skills

Table 2. Students' Responses Toward Interaction-Based Learning Activities

No.	Aspect of Response	Very Positive	Positive	Less Positive
1	Engagement during classroom activities	68%	27%	5%

2	Willingness to express ideas in English	61%	32%	7%
3	Confidence in speaking English	55%	35%	10%
4	Reduced anxiety during pair/group work	64%	29%	7%
5	Active participation after joining pair/group tasks	70%	25%	5%

As shown in Table 1, all three interactive activity types were consistently observed throughout the study period. Each activity targeted different aspects of communicative competence. Table 2 further illustrates that the majority of students responded positively to the implementation of interaction-based learning, with most indicators showing more than 60% of students reporting very positive responses.

Table 3. Challenges Identified During the Implementation of Interaction-Based Learning

No.	Challenge	Source	Effect on Learning
1	Lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes	Student factors	Reduced willingness to speak voluntarily
2	Differences in students' English proficiency levels	Student factors	Dominant students overshadowed less proficient peers
3	Limited classroom time for activity implementation	Instructional factors	Some activities were incomplete or rushed
4	Inconsistent use of English outside formal classroom settings	Environmental factors	Reduced language exposure and practice continuity

Table 3 summarizes the challenges encountered during the study. While interaction-based activities yielded positive results overall, several constraints were identified from student, instructional, and environmental perspectives that need to be addressed to optimize future implementation.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that interaction-based English learning contributes significantly to students' participation, confidence, and communicative competence. The implementation of pair work, group discussions, role plays, and collaborative learning activities enabled students to actively engage in meaningful communication and social interaction. These findings support contemporary perspectives on second language acquisition, which emphasize that language learning is not merely an individual cognitive process but also a socially mediated activity that develops through interaction with others (Lantolf & Thorne, 2021). The results further indicate that students became more willing to communicate in English when they were provided with opportunities to collaborate with peers in a supportive learning environment.

Interaction-Based Learning and Sociocultural Theory

The findings are strongly aligned with Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which views learning as a socially situated process that occurs through interaction and collaboration. According to Vygotskian principles, learners construct knowledge through participation in social activities where more capable peers or teachers provide support that facilitates learning. In the present study, pair work and group discussions created opportunities for students to negotiate ideas, share linguistic resources, and jointly solve communication problems. These collaborative activities enabled learners to develop their speaking skills while simultaneously building confidence in using English.

A central concept of Sociocultural Theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the distance between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with assistance from others. The findings revealed that students often demonstrated higher levels of performance when working collaboratively than when completing tasks individually. During group activities, students helped each other understand instructions, corrected language errors, and provided vocabulary support. Such interactions illustrate how learning occurs through socially mediated assistance and collaborative problem-solving (Lantolf, Poehner, & Swain, 2022).

Teacher scaffolding also emerged as an important factor supporting students' language development. The teacher regularly modeled language expressions, provided prompts, clarified misunderstandings, and encouraged students to participate in communicative tasks. These findings corroborate previous research indicating that scaffolding facilitates language learning by reducing learners' anxiety and enabling them to engage in tasks that might otherwise exceed their current proficiency levels (Walqui & van Lier, 2023). Through systematic support, students gradually developed greater autonomy and confidence in expressing themselves in English.

Furthermore, the collaborative learning environment fostered a sense of community among students. Sociocultural scholars argue that learning communities facilitate language development because learners acquire linguistic knowledge through participation in shared practices and social interaction (Johnson, 2022). The classroom activities observed at SMAN 2 Sekayu reflected this principle, as students learned not only from the teacher but also from their peers through continuous communication and mutual support.

Interactionist Approach and Language Acquisition

The findings also support the Interactionist Approach to second language acquisition, which emphasizes the importance of communication and negotiation of meaning in language development. Interactionist scholars maintain that learners acquire language more effectively when they actively participate in communicative exchanges that require them to comprehend input, produce output, and negotiate misunderstandings (Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2020).

During pair and group activities, students frequently engaged in clarification requests, confirmation checks, repetition, and paraphrasing. These interactional modifications enabled learners to resolve communication difficulties while maintaining the flow of conversation. According to Mackey and Polio (2023), such negotiation processes increase learners' awareness of linguistic forms and encourage them to modify their language production, thereby facilitating language acquisition. The findings indicate that students gradually became more fluent and confident because repeated interaction provided opportunities to practice and refine their communicative skills.

The results also demonstrate that interaction-based activities enhanced vocabulary development and speaking fluency. Students reported becoming more comfortable using English because communicative tasks required them to express ideas rather than simply memorize grammatical rules. This finding is consistent with recent studies suggesting that meaningful interaction promotes language acquisition by encouraging learners to use language for authentic communication rather than isolated language practice (Ellis & Shintani, 2022). Consequently, classroom interaction functioned as a mechanism through which students could transform linguistic knowledge into communicative competence.

Communicative Language Teaching and Meaningful Communication

The implementation of interaction-based learning at SMAN 2 Sekayu also reflects the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT emphasizes that language should be learned through meaningful communication in authentic contexts rather than through the isolated study of grammatical structures (Richards, 2022). Activities such as role plays, discussions, problem-solving tasks, and collaborative projects encouraged students to use English for genuine communicative purposes.

The findings suggest that communicative activities increased students' engagement and motivation because they perceived English as a practical tool for interaction rather than merely an academic subject. Previous studies have shown that CLT-based activities enhance learners' willingness to communicate, speaking fluency, and overall communicative competence (Littlewood, 2021). The present study supports these conclusions by demonstrating that students participated more actively when learning activities required meaningful interaction and collaborative communication.

Moreover, role-play activities allowed students to simulate real-life situations and practice language functions relevant to everyday communication. Such activities bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use, thereby helping learners develop practical communication skills that extend beyond academic settings (Savignon, 2021).

The Role of the Teacher and the Boarding School Environment

Another significant finding concerns the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning. Rather than functioning solely as a source of knowledge, the teacher guided interaction, encouraged participation, provided feedback, and created a supportive learning atmosphere. This finding reflects contemporary learner-centered approaches that position teachers as facilitators who support students' active construction of knowledge (Farrell & Jacobs, 2022).

The teacher's role was particularly important in addressing students' anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Many students initially demonstrated reluctance to participate in English communication due to limited confidence. Through encouragement, positive reinforcement, and constructive feedback, the teacher helped students develop greater willingness to communicate. Research by Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) highlights that supportive teacher-student relationships significantly influence learners' motivation, confidence, and engagement in language learning.

Beyond the classroom, the boarding school environment provided additional opportunities for language practice. Students were exposed to English through dormitory interactions, extracurricular activities, English clubs, and English Day programs. This finding supports ecological perspectives on language learning, which emphasize that language development is influenced by the broader social environment in which learners participate (van Lier, 2020). The boarding school context extended students' opportunities

to practice English beyond formal instruction, thereby reinforcing classroom learning and promoting language retention.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal several challenges. Some students continued to experience anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited confidence when speaking English. In addition, the use of English outside the classroom was not always consistent, as students frequently reverted to their first language during informal interactions. Similar challenges have been reported in EFL contexts where limited linguistic confidence and social pressures hinder sustained target-language use (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2021). These challenges suggest that interaction-based learning should be supported by continuous language exposure and institutional policies that encourage regular English use.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for English language teaching in EFL contexts. First, teachers should integrate interaction-based activities systematically into classroom instruction to maximize students' opportunities for meaningful communication. Pair work, group discussions, collaborative projects, and role plays should become regular components of English lessons because they facilitate both linguistic development and communicative confidence.

Second, teachers should provide appropriate scaffolding to support students with varying proficiency levels. Effective scaffolding enables learners to participate actively in communicative activities while gradually developing greater independence. Third, schools should create supportive language environments that extend learning beyond classroom boundaries. In boarding school settings, language programs such as English clubs, conversation partners, English Day initiatives, and peer mentoring can reinforce classroom learning and increase opportunities for authentic language use.

Overall, the findings confirm that sociocultural and interactionist perspectives provide a strong theoretical foundation for interaction-based English learning. When students are engaged in collaborative and meaningful communication, they develop not only language proficiency but also the confidence, motivation, and social skills necessary for effective communication. Therefore, interaction-based learning represents a valuable pedagogical approach for enhancing English language acquisition in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly within boarding school contexts where opportunities for continuous interaction can be strategically utilized to support language development.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study investigated the implementation of interaction-based English learning through sociocultural and interactionist approaches at SMAN 2 Sekayu, particularly within its boarding school environment. The findings revealed that interactive learning activities such as pair work, group discussions, and role plays significantly improved students' participation, speaking confidence, communicative competence, and willingness to use English in meaningful contexts.

The study also demonstrated that social interaction plays a crucial role in supporting language acquisition. Through collaborative activities and teacher scaffolding, students were able to develop their language skills more effectively. In addition, the boarding school environment provided extended opportunities for authentic language exposure beyond formal classroom instruction, which further supported students' English learning development.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified, including students' fear of making mistakes, differences in language proficiency levels, limited classroom time, and inconsistent use of English outside classroom activities. These findings suggest that successful implementation of interaction-based learning requires continuous support from teachers, structured communicative activities, and consistent language exposure within the school environment.

Overall, this study confirms that sociocultural and interactionist approaches provide an effective pedagogical foundation for English language teaching in EFL contexts, especially in boarding school settings. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of interaction-based learning and explore its implementation in broader educational contexts and different student populations.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to SMAN 2 Sekayu for providing a supportive academic environment and opportunities that have contributed significantly to the completion of this study. My highest gratitude is also addressed to the Principal of SMAN 2 Sekayu for the encouragement, leadership, and continuous support. I am also profoundly grateful to all teachers of SMAN 2 Sekayu for their cooperation, assistance, and valuable insights during the research process. My sincere thanks are extended to the Head of the Boarding School for the support and facilitation provided throughout the study. My deepest appreciation goes to my lecturer of the course Approach to Language Learning, Master's Program in English Language Education, Universitas PGRI Palembang, for the insightful guidance, constructive feedback, and academic encouragement that greatly contributed to the development of this article. Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has supported me directly or indirectly in completing this article. Their contributions and encouragement are highly appreciated.

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