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# Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory: A Reflection from Indonesian Classrooms

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**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses how Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories can help English teachers in Indonesian classrooms. Naturalistic classroom observation was employed to generate authentic field data from students. Field notes were written up during and immediately following the observation sessions to ensure a detailed record of events and interactions. A part of increasing the credibility of data is that observations were repeated through multiple sessions, and later compared with interview findings to allow triangulation. It explains that students learn English while still using local languages such as Javanese and Sundanese. These local languages influence pronunciation, interaction, confidence, and learning strategies. The article also describes the importance of supportive corrective feedback, classroom interaction, and balanced use of local languages. In addition, it explains how technology, mobile applications, and AI tools are changing the role of English teachers. Rather than replacing teachers, technology helps students practice English more often, while teachers guide students in meaningful, ethical, and confident language learning. Teaching implications are also discussed in this paper as well.

**KEYWORDS:** Second Language Acquisition, Indonesian classroom, The multilingual country, Corrective feedback, The roles of technology

## INTRODUCTION

English teachers who understand SLA theories may feel less overwhelmed in practice. It is important to know that when children or teenagers learn English for the first time, the experience is similar to learning a foreign language for the first time. The process is quite challenging but not impossible. Moreover, it has been shown that language learning by the human brain is emotionally mediated. A low anxiety level and a sense of safety facilitate access to cognitive resources, while stress constrains processing. New languages are integrated into existing neural networks rather than learned in isolation, allowing prior linguistic knowledge to function as a scaffold for additional language development (Brown & Lee, 2025; Long, 2017). Therefore, it is important to be patient as teachers since a variety of factors simultaneously influence the process of learning additional language of English especially in Indonesian classroom contexts

## METHODS

Naturalistic classroom observation was employed in of the classroom environment to generate authentic field data from students. An observation guideline helped to zoom in on the relevant aspects: social engagement among students, children communicating fully or barely conversing with peers, emotional expressions by peers facilitating a link between kids and their coping strategies that had helped them cope (positive reappraisal) or not cope (escape-avoidance), and whether reactions were observed when confronted with difficult academic tasks. Field notes were written up during and immediately following the observation sessions to ensure a detailed record of events and interactions. A part of increasing the credibility of data is that observations were repeated through multiple sessions, and later compared with interview findings to allow triangulation. Ethical considerations. Behavioural measures were taken under ethical conditions: participants were informed that the behaviour in this particular observation was being observed and all information obtained through these observations have been confidential.

The study employed semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' day to day experiences, when teaching English classes. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allowed flexibility for participants to express their thoughts. In addition to the interviews, the researcher also wrote reflective notes after interview to capture contextual information and initial interpretations.

## FINDINGS (RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS)

### Multilingual Country

In a Grade 8 English classroom in a public junior high school, the lesson is started by asking the students to discuss their activities over the weekend. Rina, a girl who raised hand, spoke quite smoothly, but there was a distinctively Javanese rhythm to some pronunciation. The consonants were softened and the end of words was dropped occasionally. Other classmates understood without difficulty and the teacher decided not to interrupt. Instead, the teacher reformulated the sentence more naturally - "Oh, you went to your grandmother's house?", which gives Rina the opportunity to

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hear a more target-like version of the utterance. This moment is a reflection of the development of second language acquisition in multilingual Indonesian classrooms (Poedjiastutie et al., 2020; Zein, 2019), in which the learning of English is inseparable from the impact of the local languages (Sato & Storch, 2022; Poedjiastutie et al., 2020; Mahboob & Lin, 2016).

In such classrooms, behaviourist patterns are to be seen in subtle ways. Students that speak Javanese or Sundanese often carry over patterns of sounds in English such as reduction of consonant clusters or non-final stops. Some of these habits are slowly changed through repeated class exercise, chants, and correction. When students are repeatedly working with pairs like rice and rise, the teacher is not testing them but assisting in replacing speech habits from their first language with new English patterns (Atkinson et al., 2025; Horwitz, 2020). However, the reality of the classroom shows that the effect of repetition is not to eliminate local linguistic influence (Lightbown & Spada, 2021), but to facilitate meaningful engagement and motivation to communicate.

From this perspective of input-based learning, the role of the teacher is even more important (Poedjiastutie et al., 2018). In vocational high school in West Java, short stories, pictures, and acting out meanings were often expressed by the teachers instead of translation to bahasa and Sundanese. Students may not understand all of the words, but the general message gets communicated. For the Sundanese speaking students whose language has a different intonation pattern to English, this consistency of English input helps them to internalise new rhythms and sentence structures without conscious memorisation. In this context, the local language is used as a cognitive base upon which students interpret and predict meaning (Poedjiastutie et al., 2020).

Interaction further influences the process of local languages influencing the development of English (Mahboob & Lin, 2016). During pair work, students often start off in Javanese or Sundanese by negotiating tasks, clarifying instructions or joking, and then switch into English when they are producing the required output. In one classroom interaction, two of the students get into a quiet argument about the meaning of the word appointment in Javanese, then try to have an English conversation about the word, said correctly. This short switch back to the local language helps students resolve the confusion and reduces anxiety, which makes them more confident (Poedjiastutie et al., 2020). Instead of posing a hindrance to acquisition, the local languages are the strategic instruments that facilitate the interaction and meaning-making.

From the sociocultural perspective, English learning in Indonesia is closely related to social identity (Fitriati & Rata, 2021; Lie, 2017). Students know that English has prestige, while Javanese and Sundanese signify politeness, as well as hierarchy. A student may not want to interact in English too confidently with their peers for fear of being regarded as "showing off". Therefore, conscious teachers can create nurturing classroom atmospheres, which facilitate student cooperation and make English an additive, and not a substitute language. When students are permitted to use their linguistic repertoires, their engagement becomes better.

Overall, the real Indonesian classrooms indicate that the acquiring English takes place in isolation with Javanese, Sundanese, or other local languages. These are languages that shape pronunciation, patterns of interactions, classroom identities, and learning strategies. Rather than considering local language influence as interference, the time and effort for SLA-informed teaching in Indonesia has to be approached as a natural and productive part of multilingual development (Zein, 2019). When carefully supported, it enriches the students' progress.

**Corrective Feedback from Teachers**

In the Indonesian classroom as presented above, corrective feedback does not automatically impede English development as its effect will depend on the manner, time, and the elements of the language that are corrected (Maslucha et al., 2024). When feedback correlates with students' linguistic realities, particularly their Javanese, Sundanese, or other local language backgrounds, it often becomes a scaffold rather than a barrier.

When feedback is consistent with the linguistic realities of students, it often becomes a scaffold, rather than a barrier. In the scene above, rather than pointing out the Javanese-influenced pronunciation of Rina's words, the teacher reformulated the sentence. This type of implicit feedback, which is often referred to as a recast, helps students detect the differences between their speech and target-like English without embarrassment or silencing (Lightbown & Spada, 2021; Long, 2017). In multilingual Indonesian classrooms, where accent is closely related with identity and social belonging, overt correction of every local pronunciation feature may discourage participation. Students can become too careful and speak less English for fear of being corrected. However, when the teachers only correct the pronunciation to make a difference to the intelligibility (e.g. when it is difficult to understand ship vs sheep), then feedback is supporting the goals of communication and not devaluing the language identity. It is in this sense that corrective feedback on accent is beneficial to development as long as the focus is on clarity rather than perfection of the native speech (Phuong, 2022; Saito, 2021; Saito et al., 2016).

Correction of grammar and vocabulary error is more simply beneficial, as long as it takes place within meaningful settings (Saito, 2021; Phuong, 2022). A mild reformulation of a statement of student such as "Yesterday I go to market", is "Oh, you went to the market?" focuses on stressed situations without disrupting the communication. In the Indonesian classroom, where the time spent receiving English outside of school is limited, such moments can become important sources of input. As the students are repeatedly exposed to these reformulations, the interlanguage is restructured. Problems arise only when grammar correction becomes excessive, immediate, and evaluative and communicative tasks become tests. In these cases, students can care more for correctness than meaning and avoid interaction.

Feedback that involves the translation from local expressions into English is on a particularly sensitive space (Atkinson et al., 2025; Horwitz, 2020). When a teacher tells that "No worries" can be used in a similar way to No means "jangan", and Worries mean "Khawatir". The feedback can be a powerful experience. It connects English with the conceptual and cultural knowledge of the students that already exists such that new expressions are memorable and usable. In classrooms where students learn in their L1, semantic bridging helps them to acquire knowledge and consciousness of pragmatics. Students get to know the meanings of words, when, and how they are applied in real life. Nevertheless, when translation is made the most common form of a feedback, students can over-depend on the one-to-one equivalence and encounter difficulties in the types of the expressions that cannot be translated into the Indonesian language. It is all a matter of balance; translation is a temporary crutch and not a permanent one.

Overall, the story in the classroom appears to suggest that the most effective corrective feedback in Indonesia is the responsive feedback rather than the strict. Feedback honouring local accents, encouraging grammatical growth through meaningful interaction and judicious utilisation of

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translation is likely to help students learn English (Saito, 2021). However, feedback that does not consider the sociolinguistic environment of students can have a detrimental effect on confidence and engagement (Mao & Lee, 2022). Corrective feedback which is effective in multilingual Indonesian classrooms does not discourage the use of the local language, but it collaborates with local languages to get the students to use English progressively with higher levels of confidence and functionality.

**Input, Interaction, and Output**

In many English classrooms across Indonesia, input, interaction, and output are not three separate stages but an ongoing cycle shaped by multilingual realities and limited exposure to English beyond school environment. What makes these classrooms distinctive is that English is rarely used outside formal lessons, students return home to Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Minangkabau, or other local languages, with Bahasa Indonesia mediating public life. As a result, the classroom becomes the primary setting where English exists as a language.

Input in Indonesian classrooms is very teacher-dependent. Unlike situations where the students can get English from media, in peer communities, or even daily communication, Indonesian students tend to use the teacher as the primary source of comprehensible in English (Zein et al., 2020; Sundari, 2017). In practice, this means that the way teachers tell stories, issue instructions, the way they question and the things they say spontaneously are as important as textbooks. When a teacher tells a brief story, uses gestures while speaking or rephrases answer in the same language in a slightly more advanced form, students are given input that is both comprehensible and developmentally challenging. Difficulties result from input being oversimplified or dominated by translation. When teachers too quickly switch into bahasa Indonesia or local languages, English input is reduced and students do not have a chance to tune their ears to the English rhythm, vocabulary, and syntax. Conversely, when maintaining English, teachers use visuals and repetition strategically and provide contextual clues, students begin to tolerate ambiguity which is a necessary condition for acquisition in low-exposure environments.

Interaction is usually the weakest aspect in Indonesian classrooms. While teachers can plan pair work or group work, it is hard to create authentic interaction in English, as students have the same first language (Sundari, 2017). It is natural and cognitively efficient for students to switch back to Javanese or Sundanese to negotiate meaning, handle tasks or crack jokes. This does not mean interaction is unsuccessful, but means interaction is layered. Local languages are often used by students for scaffolding (Poedjiastutie et al., 2020), but then they switch to English in producing an answer or role play (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). The challenge faced by teachers is not to destroy this code switching but to organize tasks to make English a necessity and not optional. When activities incorporate the need for information gaps, exchange of opinions or personal storytelling, students are more likely to try to use English given that meaning cannot be achieved through silence or minimal responses. Without such design of tasks, interaction runs the risk of being mechanical, as students read scripted dialogues aloud with no real engagement.

Output in turn reflects the tension between confidence and correctness (Saito et al., 2016). In limited-exposure situations, students usually have more knowledge of English than use. They might be hesitant when asked to write or talk since they fear committing grammatical mistakes or pronunciation due to the local accents. Specifically, output becomes the most productive once students are made to believe that communication takes precedence over perfection or correctness (Loewen, & Sato, 2018; Saito et al., 2016). In the classrooms where responding to the student output, the teachers encourage and rephrase the students in a mild manner. Even the utterances of a few words, simple sentences, half-sentences, or utterances in mixed languages, are important steps of development. Problems exist when output is viewed only as a product to be adjudged and not a process to be supported. In such cases, students may try to minimize their output to avoid being corrected, which limits growth.

The small amount of exposure to English outside school makes the interdependence of input, interaction, and output stronger. Because students cannot trust outside environments to teach them, the exchange in the classroom holds more significance. Rich input feeds the interaction, meaningful interaction leads to move away from input towards output, and output, when responded to supportively, becomes new input for it to continue developing (Loewen, & Sato, 2018). In Indonesian classrooms, this cycle is best when teachers realize that authenticity does not mean "English only" in a rigid sense, but rather purposeful communication in which English gradually takes up more space. Within these constraints, even classrooms can be places of authentic language use. It is small and imperfect but developmentally powerful.

**The Use of Open AI**

Mobile apps, AI such as Open AI, ChatGPT, and online communities of English students are not a substitute to the English teacher (Nikitina & Ishchenko, 2024; Chan & Tsi, 2024; Gawate, 2019), but they are radically changing what it means to be an English teacher, particularly in a country like Indonesia where exposure to the classroom setting is traditionally limited. To begin with, these technologies import radically. Mobile applications, mini-videos, podcasts and artificially generated texts expose students to forms of English that were previously only available in high context or urban settings. Nowadays students are able to hear various accents, registers and discourse styles on a daily basis, often without the influence of school (Al-khresheh, 2024; Gawate, 2019). Due to this, there is a gradual reduction in the role of teachers as the only one providing the English input. Nevertheless, it does not diminish the role of teachers, as it alters their role to an input curator and contextualizer (Nikitina & Ishchenko, 2024; Chan & Tsi, 2024). The teachers are more and more asked to assist the students to assess what is acceptable, consistent, and grade-level English, and teach them to recognize the distinctions between informal AI-generated chat, academic English, and culturally situated.

AI applications and internet communities change the way people interact (Al-khresheh, 2024; Vashishth et al., 2024). Previously, interaction in the Indonesian classrooms was restricted by the shared local languages and low confidence. It has now become possible to find low-anxiety interaction partners using AI tools. Students can practice conversations with chatbots, ask questions without fear of bein g embarrassed, and get immediate feedback. Online groups, fan groups, gaming space, study groups, and others also enable the students to engage with actual English users outside of their immediate setting. Teachers also do not play the primary role of interlocutor in this landscape but become interaction designers (Al-khresheh, 2024; Vashishth et al., 2024). They are meant to connect classroom learning with these exterior spaces, enabling students to have experience of encountering the outside world, understanding pragmatic rules, and escaping passive consumption. The absence of teachers mediation means interaction will be superficial or repetitive, whereas interacting with mediation means that the interaction will be a place of critical awareness and development.

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These technologies make a significant impact on the output. AI devices will be able to encourage students to write, revise, and speak more (Butarbutar et al., 2025) than the classroom time will allow. Students can compose texts with the help of AI, train speaking with voice recognition, or share posts in social media. It is the presence of these opportunities of output that causes the teachers to be less accountable in creating output tasks and more accountable in the interpretation and response to output tasks created by students (Gawate, 2019; Al-khresheh, 2024). In this case, the skills of the teachers change to the area of identifying patterns, namely constant grammatical problems, pragmatic errors, excessive use of AI formulations and assisting students in creating a natural voice instead of an artificial and stylish but borrowed one.

The emergence of mobile apps and AI alters the pedagogical role of the teachers of English. Teachers no longer remain knowledge gatekeepers but meaning-makers, ethics and identity (Al-khresheh, 2024; Nikitina & Ishchenko, 2024). AI can provide students with fluent English, but they need teachers to assist them in learning why some phrases are effective, when they should be used, and how English relates to their language and sense of place. In multilingual societies, this will involve the process of assisting the students to resolve conflicts between the global and local linguistic values of the English norms.

In the future, the teachers of English will be more an agent of learning than a carrier of content (Gao & Cui, 2024); who can incorporate the aspects of technology into disrupted learning pathways, introduce a critical interaction with AI-generated language, and maintain the human aspect of learning empathy, motivation, and cultural sensitivity which cannot be simulated by the technology (Osadcha et al., 2025; Gawate, 2019). They do not undermine the role of the teachers in situations where there is historically a limited amount of exposure to English, they complicate the role, reflect on its nature, and eventually place it at the heart of meaningful English education. The contextualization of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) comes with potent benefits and that is exactly the reason language acquisition never occurs in a vacuum.

Contextualized SLA information can enable teachers, researchers, and policymakers to focus on pedagogical meaning in classes like those occurring throughout Indonesia, where English is mixed with Bahasa and various local languages.

**TEACHING IMPLICATION**

Firstly, contextualized SLA assists instructors to decipher students' behaviours more effectively (Sato & Storch, 2022; Spada & Lightbown, 2022). These behaviours are likely to be misconstrued as inability or unmotivated when they are seen by the students who are reluctant to speak, using local languages when working in a group, or writing English influenced by the phonology of the Javanese or Sundanese languages. They are perceived by SLA-informed teachers rather as natural phases of interlanguage development and strategic reaction to low exposure (Atkinson et al., 2025; Sato, & Storch, 2022). Such redefinition of the interpretation reduces deficit thinking and adds to more supportive and patient pedagogy. Teachers are no longer reactive but diagnostic, they react to what the students need and not what they do not need.

Secondly, the contextual meaning of SLA would help teachers to prepare learning environments that can optimize given limited resources (Brown & Lee, 2025; Atkinson et al., 2025). Scattered English is the input in other parts of the world; each classroom time counts. SLA expertise assists teachers in deliberate enrichment of input by storytelling, paraphrasing and meaningful classroom conversation; organize engagement in a way that makes English utilization purposeful not compulsory; and appreciate partial or partial output as developmental advancement. Instead of pursuing the native like norms, the teachers emphasize on intelligibility, communicative competence and incremental growth of learner repertoires

Thirdly, contextual SLA awareness enables the teachers to make principled judgments with regard to feedback and assessment (Horwitz, 2020; Atkinson et al., 2025; Cummins, 2021). Teachers should select the methods of feedback that correspond to the affective, social and cognitive realities of the students instead of strictly correcting all their mistakes or implementing the English only policies. They know when local languages are used as scaffolds, when translation helps in meaning construction and when advocacy in favor of more English usage is developmental. Evaluation, in its turn, is more of a formative approach, as it reflects development through the years, instead of punishing multilingual students.

Fourthly, contextual SLA enhances professional agency of teachers at the age of technology. With the growth of access to English through mobile apps, AI tools, and online communities, SLA-informed teachers are in a better position to be critical and ethical to integrate them (Chan & Tsi, 2024; Gawate, 2019). Students are able to draw the difference between superficial fluency and actual acquisition, teach students how to use AI as a learning companion and not as a crutch, and how to make students have a sense of ownership of their voices in English. The knowledge of SLA can help teachers stay pedagogically central despite the changes in technological environments.

Finally, the knowledge of SLA in its context humanizes the English education. It makes students multilingual as opposed to incomplete native speakers (Melo-Pfeifer & Tavares, 2026; Dewaele et al., 2022; Cummins, 2021), and teachers as professionals of reflection as opposed to teachers of content. This perspective makes classrooms an environment where English is nurtured, with the help of meaningful input and supported output.

The knowledge of SLA in its context humanizes the English education. It constructs students as emerging multilinguals and not incompetent non-native speakers and teachers. Contextual SLA, in contexts such as the Indonesian classrooms where both English is learnt and the rich linguistic repertoires, can shift the teaching practice that involves delivery of the linguistic form, to that of developing the meaning, identity and confidence. Therefore, the best promise of SLA-informed pedagogy lies in improved language outcomes, as well as fostering inclusive, resilient, and sustainable learning communities where English is not imposed, but gradually nurtured in meaningful and appropriately balanced ways.

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