

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This section initiates the research by highlighting six essential elements: background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, and definition of the key terms. Each of these aspects be discussed in detail as follows:

1.1 Background of the Study

Mastering foreign languages, particularly English, has become crucial for the younger generation amid global competition (Fansury et al., 2020). English, as an international language, is widely used for various reasons, and its importance is recognized in countries like Malaysia and Singapore, where it is a second official language (Pennycook, 2017). In Indonesia, however, English is mainly taught as a subject at different educational levels without a strong emphasis on language skills. English proficiency remains an important issue in Indonesia because English is taught as a foreign language and is mostly learned through formal classroom instruction. Based on the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Indonesia is ranked 80th out of 123 countries and regions, with an EF EPI score of 471, which is below the global average score of 488. In the same report, Sulawesi obtained a regional score of 460, while Manado obtained a city score of 478. These data indicate that English proficiency in Indonesia, including in the regional context relevant to this study, still requires serious attention. However, the EF EPI data are used only as a general national and regional context, not as direct evidence of students' English proficiency at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang (EF Education First, 2025).

Moreover, students' English proficiency is not a static trait; rather, it is shaped by a range of dynamic factors within the learning environment. These dynamics include ongoing interactions, evolving support systems, and changes in both instructional and socio-cultural contexts, all of which can enhance or hinder language development over time.

Stephen Krashen's (1981) theories on second language acquisition highlight the importance of comprehensible input and affective factors such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety in learning a new language. Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that learners need input slightly above their current proficiency level ($i+1$) to improve, while the Affective Filter Hypothesis emphasizes the impact of emotional factors on language learning (Bahruddina & Febrianib, 2020). These theories are directly relevant to understanding how students in Madrasah Aliyah can improve their English proficiency, particularly in environments where opportunities for comprehensible input and emotional support may be limited. For instance, addressing affective factors like anxiety and low confidence is crucial in creating a supportive learning environment that encourages students to practice English more actively.

A learning environment refers to the physical, social, and psychological conditions in which learning takes place, encompassing classroom settings, teaching methods, school policies, and the atmosphere shaped by interactions among students, teachers, and the wider school community (Ismail & Abdullah, 2018). The learning environment does not merely influence language acquisition at a single point in time; rather, it contributes to the ongoing dynamics of students' proficiency, affecting their motivation, engagement, and adaptability in language use. A 'supportive learning environment' is one that not only provides adequate resources and infrastructure but also fosters positive reinforcement, emotional safety, and opportunities for active participation and collaboration (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). Such an environment encourages learners to take risks, make mistakes, and develop confidence in using English, which are crucial for language acquisition. By integrating both physical and socio-emotional supports, a supportive learning environment enhances students' motivation, engagement, and overall proficiency (Cunningham & Tabur, 2012; Echiverri, 2024).

Lev Vygotsky's (1987) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) further underscores the significance of social interactions and support in the learning process. According to Vygotsky, the ZPD is the distance between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with assistance,

highlighting the role of collaborative and scaffolded learning. In the context of this study, Vygotsky's theory suggests that a learning environment enriched with social interaction and teacher or peer support can significantly enhance students' language acquisition (Shokouhi & Shakouri, 2015). By applying these theoretical perspectives, this research aims to explore how the dynamics of the learning environment in Madrasah Aliyah contribute to or hinder the development of students' English proficiency, offering practical insights for improving educational strategies.

Research by Lightbown & Spada (2021) emphasizes the importance of a supportive and interactive learning environment—comprising physical, social, and psychological aspects such as classroom settings, teaching methods, and interpersonal dynamics—in fostering second language acquisition. They found that environments facilitating active communication and exposure to rich input, such as authentic language materials, significantly enhance students' language proficiency, defined as the ability to effectively use a language across speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Colin Baker's (2011) further underscores that social support from family, peers, and the school community plays a crucial role in motivating students and improving their success in language learning. These insights highlight the necessity for inclusive and interactive learning environments to support students' language development.

In Indonesia, Santoso et al. (2024) identified major obstacles in English language learning, including limited opportunities for students to practice outside the classroom, a lack of engaging and supportive learning environments, and minimal exposure to English in daily life. These challenges are compounded by an exam-focused curriculum that prioritizes rote memorization over practical language use and insufficient teacher training to adopt innovative teaching methods. Hamied's research (2012) emphasizes the need for changes in teaching approaches and increased opportunities for students to use English in real-life contexts, such as through interactive activities and community-based learning initiatives, to address these barriers effectively.

In the context of English language education, the learning environment plays a crucial role in influencing students' language proficiency (Echiverri, 2024). A learning environment encompasses physical, social, and cultural aspects that directly or indirectly shape students' experiences and outcomes in language acquisition. For instance, physical components such as libraries, internet access, and comfortable classrooms form part of the learning environment by providing students with the necessary tools and spaces to engage in effective learning (Cunningham & Tabur, 2012). Research highlights that such facilities create a conducive atmosphere for language practice and encourage active engagement, both orally and in writing.

Social interactions are another integral component of the learning environment, as they foster collaboration and communication among students, teachers, and native speakers. According to Vygotsky's (1987), social interaction enables students to access higher levels of proficiency by practicing language use in supportive settings. Similarly, cultural influences—such as societal attitudes that prioritize English in academic and daily life—further enhance the learning environment by motivating students to adapt and actively participate in using the language. These cultural and social factors, when integrated into the learning environment, provide opportunities for immersive learning through activities like discussions, debates, and exposure to authentic English-language content via reading, listening, and watching.

However, unsupportive learning environments can hinder language acquisition. For example, a lack of attention from school authorities—such as failing to prioritize English in curriculum design or neglecting to provide adequate resources—combined with societal stigmas that label English usage as pretentious, creates barriers to students' confidence and practice (Behrens, 2018, p. 29). These challenges highlight the importance of designing inclusive and enjoyable learning environments that address both physical and psychological needs, empowering students to improve their English proficiency and utilize available opportunities effectively.

In the context of Madrasah Aliyah, English language teaching has particular characteristics because English is taught alongside general and Islamic subjects. This condition requires English teachers to manage not only linguistic materials but also students' motivation, classroom interaction, learning resources, and school-level support. Recent research on English teaching in Indonesian Madrasah Aliyah shows that teachers face internal challenges, such as the ability to use ICT in teaching, designing lesson plans, and motivating students, as well as external challenges, including limited time allocation and inadequate learning facilities (Erlina et al., 2024). Therefore, the learning environment in madrasahs needs to be examined as an integrated condition consisting of physical, social, and psychological components that shape students' English learning experiences.

In the preliminary observations and interviews conducted at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang, English was found to be formally taught as a school subject, but students' opportunities to use English beyond classroom activities remained limited. The English learning process was still strongly dependent on teacher explanation, textbook use, and simple classroom-based exercises. Facilities such as classrooms, whiteboards, and textbooks were available, but facilities that specifically support English exposure, such as language laboratories, audio-visual media, stable internet access, and varied authentic materials, were still limited. This condition indicates that students' English learning experiences in the two madrasahs are shaped not only by classroom instruction but also by the available physical, social, and psychological learning environment.

Limited practice opportunities are especially relevant in the context of Madrasah Aliyah because students often rely on classroom activities as their main source of English input and output. In non-urban Madrasah Aliyah contexts, low participation in English speaking activities, limited exposure to English, and the dominance of teacher-centered instruction have been reported as factors that influence students' speaking development (Hilmi, 2026). This condition is also reflected in the two madrasahs studied, where English practice mostly occurs

through reading texts, repeating vocabulary, answering teacher questions, and performing simple speaking or writing tasks.

To improve English language skills, a supportive learning environment is essential. Research shows that positive reinforcement, such as praising students' efforts or rewarding progress, can boost their confidence and willingness to engage with the language (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). Similarly, providing opportunities for real-life practice, such as through role-playing, group discussions, or community-based language activities, enables students to apply their skills in meaningful contexts, making learning more relevant and engaging. For example, programs like English clubs or conversation exchanges have been proven effective in motivating students to use English confidently in both academic and informal settings (Fernanda & Munir, 2023). Schools need to implement policies that encourage the use of English and create a social atmosphere that values language practice. By fostering an environment that supports educational goals, students' English proficiency can significantly improve. Conversely, an unsupportive environment will hinder progress, making it crucial to utilize the learning environment effectively to achieve educational objectives

Given the theoretical foundations and previous research findings, there are several gaps and novel aspects to explore. While studies have examined the influence of affective factors such as motivation and anxiety on language learning (Krashen, 1982; Bahruddina & Febrianib, 2020), research specifically addressing how these factors interact with the learning environment to influence English proficiency among Indonesian students remains scarce. Additionally, although existing literature emphasizes the importance of supportive learning environments (Baker, 2011; Lightbown & Spada, 2021), few studies have explored how components such as teacher attitudes, school policies, and peer interactions work together to foster language acquisition in Indonesian contexts. These gaps highlight the need for a focused investigation into the dynamics of affective factors and the learning environment in enhancing English proficiency.

The novelty of this study lies in its contextual analysis of the English learning environment in two private Islamic senior secondary schools in North Minahasa.

Rather than examining English proficiency only from the perspective of students' individual ability, this study analyzes how physical facilities, teacher support, peer interaction, classroom atmosphere, and students' psychological conditions work together in shaping English proficiency development (Krashen, 1981). In this study, teachers' positive attitudes refer specifically to teachers' encouragement of students' attempts to use English, tolerance toward students' mistakes, constructive feedback, and efforts to create a safe classroom atmosphere for English practice (Ai, 2014; Perry, 2023). These aspects are important because students' confidence, anxiety, and willingness to participate are strongly influenced by the social and psychological support available in the learning environment.

This study focuses on two Madrasah Aliyah in North Minahasa Regency, namely MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang. These two schools were selected because they represent the learning environment of private Islamic senior secondary schools that face challenges in English learning, particularly in terms of facilities, teacher support, social interaction, and students' opportunities to practice English. Therefore, the analysis is limited to these two schools in order to provide a more focused and contextual understanding of how the learning environment influences students' English proficiency.

The dynamic nature of students' English proficiency is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the learning environment. Supportive, interactive, and resource-rich settings not only enhance students' current proficiency but also empower them to adapt and grow linguistically in response to new challenges and communicative needs. Conversely, restrictive or unsupportive environments can hinder this dynamic development, resulting in stagnant or even declining proficiency levels. Therefore, understanding the relationship between learning environment and dynamic proficiency is critical for designing interventions that enable students to achieve continual progress in English. Understanding how the learning environment shapes the dynamics of English proficiency is essential, particularly in the context of Madrasah Aliyah, where student experiences and abilities are continually evolving.

1.2 Identification of the problems

Based on the background of the study, the problems identified in this research are focused on the English learning environment at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang. The identification of the problems is not directed at Indonesian students in general, but specifically at the two madrasahs selected as the research sites. This focus is important because the conditions of English learning in each school are shaped by its own physical facilities, teacher support, classroom interaction, students' psychological conditions, and opportunities for English practice.

First, the English learning environment in the two madrasahs still faces limitations in facilities and learning resources that specifically support English language learning. Although both schools have basic facilities such as classrooms, whiteboards, desks, chairs, and textbooks, facilities that can provide richer English exposure, such as language laboratories, audio-visual media, stable internet access, and varied authentic learning materials, are still limited. Previous studies on English teaching in Madrasah Aliyah also show that inadequate facilities, limited time allocation, and limited access to learning resources remain important challenges in supporting effective English learning (Erlina et al., 2024; Restika & Maisarah, 2025). Therefore, the physical learning environment becomes one of the main problems that needs to be examined in this study.

Second, students' opportunities to practice English remain limited within the existing school environment. Based on preliminary observations and interviews in the two madrasahs, English practice is mostly carried out through classroom-based activities, such as reading texts, repeating vocabulary, answering teacher questions, listening to teacher explanations, and writing simple sentences or short paragraphs. These activities are useful for introducing basic English skills, but they do not yet provide sufficient opportunities for students to use English communicatively in broader contexts. This condition is relevant to previous research in non-urban Madrasah Aliyah contexts, which found that low student participation in speaking activities and the dominance of conventional teaching methods can limit students' speaking development (Hilmi, 2026).

Third, the social and psychological aspects of English learning also need attention. Some students still show limited confidence and hesitation when using English, especially in speaking activities. This issue may be related to limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of regular English exposure. Research on English learning anxiety among Madrasah Aliyah students shows that students may experience nervousness when speaking English, fear of misunderstanding, and stress during English learning activities (Maisarah et al., 2024). Therefore, students' confidence, anxiety, peer support, and teacher encouragement are important problems to be examined as part of the social and psychological learning environment.

The psychological learning environment significantly influences students' willingness to use English. Students who are worried about making grammatical, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors may avoid participating in language activities. Putra et al. (2024) found that linguistic concerns and time pressure contributed to students' writing anxiety. In speaking activities, limited practice and fear of producing incorrect language may similarly restrict students' participation. Technology-supported speaking activities, including the use of voice-assistant applications, can provide additional opportunities for students to practise spoken English in a less threatening environment (Mahartana et al., 2024).

Fourth, the role of teachers and classroom interaction is central in shaping the English learning environment. In the two madrasahs, English learning activities still depend strongly on teacher guidance because students have limited access to English outside the classroom. Teachers' encouragement, feedback, tolerance toward students' mistakes, and ability to create a supportive classroom atmosphere are important for helping students participate in English learning. However, when learning activities are still dominated by explanation, repetition, and textbook-based exercises, students may have fewer opportunities to develop communicative competence, especially in speaking and listening.

Based on these problems, this study focuses on the physical, social, and psychological components of the English learning environment at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang. These components are

examined to understand how the existing learning environment supports or hinders students' English proficiency development and what challenges students experience in learning English within the two madrasah contexts.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of the English learning environment at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang in terms of its physical, social, and psychological components?
2. How do the physical, social, and psychological components of the English learning environment support or hinder students' English proficiency development at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang?
3. What challenges do students experience in learning English within the existing English learning environment, and how do these challenges affect their English proficiency development?

1.4 Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold:

1. To describe the characteristics of the English learning environment at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang in terms of its physical, social, and psychological components.
2. To analyze how the physical, social, and psychological components of the English learning environment support or hinder students' English proficiency development at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang.
3. To identify the challenges experienced by students in learning English within the existing English learning environment and to analyze how these challenges affect their English proficiency development.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to the English learning environment at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang. The study examines three main components of the English learning environment: physical learning environment, social-psychological learning environment, and instructional-programmatic learning environment. The physical component includes classroom

facilities, textbooks, learning media, libraries, audio devices, projectors, internet access, and other supporting resources for English learning. The social-psychological component includes teacher-student interaction, peer interaction, students' confidence, anxiety, motivation, and willingness to participate in English learning. The instructional-programmatic component includes teaching strategies, classroom activities, English practice opportunities, and school support for English learning.

This study also analyzes how these components support or hinder students' English proficiency development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The analysis does not aim to measure students' English proficiency through standardized tests, but to examine students' English learning development through qualitative data obtained from observation, interviews, focus group discussions, student learning tasks, and school documents.

1.6 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretically

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge in English language education, particularly in understanding the relationship between the English learning environment and students' English proficiency development. This study emphasizes that the English learning environment should not be understood only as physical facilities, but also as social and psychological conditions that influence students' experiences in learning English. By focusing on MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang, this study provides a contextual understanding of how physical, social, and psychological components of the learning environment may support or hinder students' English proficiency development in Madrasah Aliyah contexts.

2. Practically

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to be useful for English teachers, students, school administrators, and future researchers.

a. For Teachers

The findings of this study can help English teachers understand how the existing learning environment influences students' participation and English proficiency development. By identifying the physical, social, and psychological conditions that support or hinder English learning, teachers can reflect on how classroom atmosphere, teacher-student interaction, feedback, and students' opportunities to use English contribute to the learning process. The results may also help teachers adjust their teaching practices according to the actual conditions of the school environment.

b. For Students

The findings of this study can help students understand that their English learning process is influenced not only by individual ability but also by the learning environment around them. By recognizing the role of facilities, classroom interaction, teacher support, peer support, confidence, and opportunities for practice, students are expected to become more aware of the factors that support or hinder their English proficiency development.

c. For School

- 1) Findings can guide administrators in formulating school policies that prioritize English proficiency, such as allocating time for language immersion activities or ensuring access to adequate facilities like libraries and internet resources.
- 2) Insights into the role of physical and social aspects of the learning environment can help administrators allocate resources more effectively to support English learning.

1.7 Definition of Keyterms

1. English Learning Environment

English learning environment refers to the physical, social-psychological, and instructional-programmatic conditions that directly shape the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. In this study, the English learning environment is limited to the conditions found at MA Muhammadiyah Wori and MA Biharul Ulum Likupang, including

classroom facilities, learning resources, teacher-student interaction, peer interaction, students' emotional comfort, teaching practices, school support, and opportunities to use English inside and outside the classroom (Ni Nyoman Padmadewi, Ni Made Ratminingsih, 2018).

2. Physical Learning Environment

Physical learning environment refers to the tangible facilities and infrastructure that support English learning. These include classrooms, seating arrangement, whiteboards, textbooks, dictionaries, libraries, audio devices, projectors, internet access, lighting, ventilation, and other learning media. In English learning, the physical environment is important because it provides access to learning resources and language input. (Artini, 2017)

3. Social-Psychological Learning Environment

Social-psychological learning environment refers to the interpersonal and emotional atmosphere that influences students' participation in English learning. It includes teacher encouragement, feedback, peer support, classroom interaction, students' confidence, anxiety, motivation, and willingness to use English. This component is important because English as a foreign language requires students to feel safe and supported when practicing the language (Laviosa, 2016).

4. Instructional-Programmatic Learning Environment

Instructional-programmatic learning environment refers to the teaching practices, classroom activities, and school-level programs that provide students with opportunities to learn and use English. This includes teaching strategies, classroom tasks, speaking practice, listening activities, reading and writing exercises, English-related extracurricular activities, and school support for English learning (van Lier, 2004; Laviosa, 2016). This concept is used to clarify that teacher strategies and school programs are not separate topics, but part of the learning environment. (Anak Agung Ayu Novi Triananda, Ni Nyoman Padmadewi, 2023)

5. Students' English Proficiency Development

Students' English proficiency development refers to the gradual improvement of students' ability to use English in listening, speaking, reading, and writing within classroom and school contexts. In this study, proficiency development is not measured through standardized testing, but examined qualitatively through students' classroom participation, teacher and student interviews, observation of English learning activities, and students' English learning tasks. (Budiman, et al., 2023)

6. English Learning Challenges

English learning challenges refer to the barriers experienced by students in developing English proficiency within the existing learning environment. These challenges may include limited facilities, lack of English exposure, limited practice opportunities, low vocabulary mastery, grammar difficulties, pronunciation problems, low confidence, anxiety, and limited support for communicative English use (Echiverri, 2024).

