
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards Internationalization of Indonesian Nursing Graduates: Essences Captured from Students' English Learning Barriers

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| ABSTRACT

This study explores the barriers and strategies associated with English language learning among Indonesian nursing students in support of the internationalization of nursing education. Specifically, it aims to identify motivational, institutional, sociocultural, and pedagogical factors that influence students' English proficiency and readiness for global healthcare practice. An exploratory qualitative research design was employed. Data were collected from 15 participants, including nursing students, English lecturers, and program administrators, through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings reveal that students face multiple barriers, including low intrinsic motivation, limited integration of English in the nursing curriculum, sociocultural stigma associated with speaking English, and reliance on traditional teaching methods that emphasize reading over communication. Institutional support was found to be insufficient, with English courses offered only in limited semesters and support programs remaining optional and underutilized. Despite these challenges, students demonstrated increased motivation when English learning was linked to career opportunities abroad, international exposure, and interactive learning approaches. Preferred strategies included role-playing, video-based learning, digital applications, and blended language instruction combining English and the native language. The study concludes that English proficiency among Indonesian nursing students can be significantly improved through a practice-based and integrated approach. Embedding English across nursing courses, implementing interactive and communication-focused teaching strategies, and establishing structured institutional support systems are critical to enhancing students' readiness for international careers. The findings highlight the need for a comprehensive program that aligns language learning with clinical practice and global competencies, thereby strengthening the international competitiveness of nursing graduates.

| KEYWORDS

English language learning; nursing education; internationalization; language barriers; global competence; higher education

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

Internationalization is increasingly becoming a pivotal and multifaceted element in higher education worldwide. Higher education institutions (HEIs), university associations, governments, and non-governmental agencies interpret internationalization in various ways. For some, it encompasses activities such as study abroad programs (Kor et al., 2022), international development projects (Karimullah et al., 2021), institutional agreements, and the establishment of branch campuses (Pevzner, 2024). Others view it as the integration of an international dimension into teaching, learning, research, and service functions (Sivaperumal, 2024). Additionally, some institutions aim to create an international profile or brand to remain competitive both domestically and globally.

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Across all regions, HEIs are addressing the international dimension of higher education, reflecting their values, priorities, opportunities, and resources. A key manifestation of this internationalization objective is the enhancement of opportunities for graduates. This is particularly evident in the field of nursing education, where countries like the Philippines have established a reputation for producing globally competitive nurses. Filipino nurses, recognized for their skills, efficiency, and compassion, are highly sought after worldwide (Beriones, 2022). They possess qualities such as proficiency in English, training in American-caliber medicine, and a cultural background that values caring for the sick and elderly (Beriones, 2022; Tan & Conde, 2021)

For Indonesian HEIs to achieve a similar level of internationalization and competitiveness, it is imperative to provide relevant training that aligns with international standards (Wolf et al., 2023). A crucial component of this training is English language proficiency. Mastery of English is widely regarded as a key factor for global competitiveness and career advancement (Abdul, 2022; A'yunin, 2023). As part of the ASEAN Economic Community, Indonesians need to be proficient in English, the medium of communication in various sectors such as finance, mass media, health, and education (Kurniarini, 2023, Rahadianto et al., 2022).

Despite governmental initiatives aimed at strengthening English education—such as its inclusion in national exams through Government Regulation No. 19 of 2015 and its introduction as early as the fourth grade in the 1994 curriculum—many Indonesian students continue to struggle with mastering the language. These challenges stem from limited exposure, ineffective teaching methods, and sociocultural dynamics that emphasize national identity, sometimes at the expense of international readiness (Hermawati et al., 2023; Lubis et al., 2024; Zamzani et al., 2022; Paauw, 2009; Dardjowidjojo, 2013). However, developing proficiency in English does not necessitate abandoning one's cultural and national identity; instead, it offers students broader opportunities, both personally and professionally (Zamzani et al., 2022).

In this context, it becomes crucial to understand the specific barriers Indonesian nursing students face in learning English, particularly those rooted in cultural perceptions and educational practices, and to identify effective strategies for overcoming them. This research aims to explore the perceived barriers and strategies related to teaching and learning English among Indonesian nursing students, with a particular focus on cultural issues. Furthermore, it seeks to propose a viable English language program that emphasizes the practical value of English proficiency, thereby contributing to the internationalization of Indonesian nursing graduates and enhancing their readiness for global practice.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate the perceived barriers and strategies in teaching and learning English among Indonesian nursing students, with a particular focus on cultural issues. Exploratory qualitative research was particularly suited for this investigation as it allowed for an in-depth, nuanced understanding of complex phenomena that were not well-defined or previously researched extensively (Ravik & Bjørk, 2023).

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 15 participants from a nursing higher education institution in Indonesia. These included: 10 nursing students from various academic years (semesters 2 through 5), to capture diverse experiences and stages of English language acquisition, three (3) English language lecturers who were directly involved in teaching English to nursing students, and two (2) nursing program administrators who were responsible for overseeing curriculum development and institutional language policies.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants with direct experience and insight into English language education within the nursing context (Polit & Beck, 2021). This sampling method ensured that selected individuals could provide rich, meaningful, and contextually relevant data aligned with the study's objectives.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study incorporated data source triangulation by including perspectives from students, lecturers, and administrators. Triangulation strengthened the validity of the research by corroborating evidence across different participant groups, thereby allowing for a more holistic understanding of the barriers and strategies in English learning (Natow, 2020).

The sampling process was further guided by the principle of data saturation, where data collection continued until no new information or significant themes emerged. This ensured that the data were sufficiently comprehensive and the interpretations were grounded in participant experiences (Naeem et al., 2024). Though the participant number may seem modest, the depth and richness of the narratives collected contributed substantially to the reliability of the study's findings.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and document analysis. This multi-method approach enabled a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the perceived barriers and strategies in English language teaching and learning among Indonesian nursing students.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with nursing students, English lecturers, and program administrators. These interviews aimed to elicit participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward English language learning. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to probe deeper into emerging issues and adapt questions as needed, thereby enriching the quality and depth of the data (van Heteren et al., 2023).

In addition to individual interviews, two focus group discussions were held with a total of 15 nursing students, with each group comprising approximately seven to eight participants. The group format encouraged interactive dialogue, allowing participants to build upon each other's responses and reveal shared challenges, attitudes, and norms surrounding English learning. Focus groups were particularly useful in uncovering the social dynamics and collective perspectives that might not have emerged in one-on-one interviews (Geampana & Perrotta, 2024).

Classroom observations were also conducted to provide contextual data on the teaching and learning environment. By observing English language instruction in real-time, the researchers were able to gather insights into instructional strategies, student engagement, communication patterns, and classroom interaction. These observations offered a valuable perspective on how English was being taught and how students responded to different pedagogical approaches (Brown et al., 2022).

To supplement the primary data, document analysis was carried out by reviewing institutional materials such as curriculum outlines, course syllabi, policy documents, and educational resources. This analysis helped contextualize the formal framework governing English language education and provided additional insight into the institution's strategic priorities and policy direction regarding language instruction.

Collectively, these data collection methods contributed to a rich, triangulated understanding of the institutional, pedagogical, and personal factors influencing English language acquisition in the nursing education context.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a qualitative method involving the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This approach was particularly well-suited to the exploratory nature of the study, as it offered the flexibility to generate a rich, detailed, and complex understanding of participants' experiences. An **inductive coding process** was applied, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data rather than being imposed based on pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

In the context of exploring the perceived barriers and strategies in teaching and learning English among Indonesian nursing students, thematic analysis was carried out in several systematic phases. First, the researchers became deeply familiar with the data by transcribing the interviews and focus group discussions, reading through transcripts multiple times, and listening to the recordings of classroom observations. This stage enabled immersion in the content and helped establish a foundational understanding of the participants' narratives.

Following familiarization, the researchers generated initial codes by systematically identifying and tagging data segments that reflected key aspects of English learning challenges, strategies, and cultural influences. These codes were then examined and grouped into broader categories to identify potential themes that captured recurring patterns and shared meanings across participant responses.

Next, the researchers reviewed and refined these preliminary themes to ensure they accurately represented the data and were supported by the full data set. Each theme was examined for internal coherence and external distinctiveness, ensuring that the thematic structure was both analytically rigorous and reflective of the participants' lived experiences.

The researchers then defined and named the finalized themes. Each theme was clearly articulated to encapsulate the core issues and dynamics in English language learning within the nursing context. This stage involved distilling the essence of each theme and selecting labels that effectively conveyed their meaning and relevance.

Finally, the findings were synthesized into a comprehensive report. This report presented each theme in detail, supported by rich, illustrative excerpts from interviews, focus groups, and observations. The discussion highlighted how each theme contributed to understanding the barriers and strategies in English learning, offering insights that could inform institutional policies and the development of targeted English language programs for Indonesian nursing students.

By adhering to Braun and Clarke’s methodical approach to thematic analysis, this study produced a robust and insightful interpretation of the data, grounded in participants’ voices and contextual realities.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from both the DYCI Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Universitas Sari Mulia (UNISM) Ethics Board, ensuring that the study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study’s objectives, procedures, and potential implications (Hennessy et al., 2024). Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, with all identifying information removed from transcripts and reports. Data were securely stored in password-protected digital formats accessible only to the research team. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty or negative consequences.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several rigor-enhancing strategies were employed. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, in which participants were invited to review and provide feedback on the preliminary findings to confirm their accuracy and ensure they resonated with the participants’ lived experiences (Polit & Beck, 2021). Transferability was supported by offering rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participant demographics, and the findings, thereby enabling readers to evaluate the relevance and applicability of the results to other educational or cultural settings.

Dependability was addressed by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail documenting all research procedures, coding decisions, and methodological changes. This allowed for transparency and increased the potential for replication or follow-up studies. Confirmability was ensured through ongoing reflexivity, whereby the researcher continually examined and acknowledged personal biases, assumptions, and potential influences on data interpretation, thus reinforcing the objectivity of the findings (Polit & Beck, 2021).

By adopting an exploratory qualitative approach, this study provided a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the barriers and strategies associated with English language learning among Indonesian nursing students. This approach enabled the researchers to deeply explore participants’ lived experiences, uncover the cultural factors influencing language acquisition, and generate meaningful insights for the development of more effective and contextually appropriate English language programs.

Results

The following presents the key findings of the study, highlighting barriers, strategies, and cultural influences related to English language learning among Indonesian nursing students, lecturers, and administrators.

Table 1. Sub-theme and Formulated Meanings under the Emergent Theme “Motivation and Perception Toward English Learning”

Emergent Theme	Sub-Theme	Formulated Meanings
1. Motivation and Perception Toward English Learning	a. Lack of Internal Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many students recognize the importance of English but struggle with self-discipline and consistency. • Students often express regret for not learning earlier and feel they are “late” to master English. • English is perceived as hard due to complex grammar and pronunciation. • Without clear external goals (e.g., working abroad), motivation is reduced.
	b. Career-Driven Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation spikes when students are exposed to career opportunities abroad. • Some students express strong intent to work overseas as a key motivator for learning English. • Students begin to value English after interacting with foreigners or during campus collaborations. • Public lectures by international speakers are a powerful motivator.

Table 1 explores the internal and external factors that influence Indonesian nursing students' motivation and perception toward learning English. The emergent theme "Motivation and Perception Toward English Learning," was chosen because it lies at the core of the challenges and opportunities surrounding English language acquisition among Indonesian nursing students. Since the research aims to explore barriers and strategies in learning English—especially in a culturally nuanced context—understanding students' motivation and perception becomes essential. Motivation not only influences students' willingness to engage in English learning but also shapes the strategies they adopt, their persistence through difficulties, and ultimately, their readiness for international nursing careers. The theme captures both intrinsic limitations (lack of internal drive) and extrinsic influences (career-driven awareness), revealing a dynamic interplay between personal mindset and professional aspirations.

Under the sub-theme "*Lack of Internal Drive*," the first formulated meaning reveals that *many students recognize the importance of English but struggle with self-discipline and consistency*. Although English is acknowledged as significant for future success, students often fail to maintain regular study habits or sustain interest. For instance, Student_01 admitted:

"I do want to [learn], but it's just about finding the right time... I'm lazy to study English because I find it hard to understand, so I avoid learning it, even though I want to."

This statement illustrates the dissonance between awareness and action. Despite understanding the value of English, the student's lack of internal discipline creates a self-imposed barrier, reflecting a common pattern where the intention to learn is hindered by poor study routines and procrastination.

The second formulated meaning, *students often express regret for not learning earlier and feel they are "late" to master English*, also recurs across interviews. Several participants reflected on missed opportunities or insufficient foundation in English. As Student_05 shared:

"I'm late to learn, I should have learned from the first time, so for example now I can."

This narrative underscores the retrospective realization that early exposure and consistent practice would have been beneficial. The sense of regret can either discourage further effort or, ideally, be redirected into renewed motivation—though in many cases, it tends to reflect demotivation or resignation.

The third meaning identifies that *English is perceived as hard due to complex grammar and pronunciation*. This perception contributes significantly to avoidance behavior. For many students, technical difficulties—particularly pronunciation and sentence structure—present a daunting obstacle. Student_02 noted:

"The challenge is difficult in learning because I am the type of person who has to learn from zero. While in this lecture we are taught directly to the core of English... From pronunciation, the arrangement of vocabulary to become perfect English sentences... this is what makes it difficult for me to learn English."

Such comments reflect how linguistic complexity feeds a sense of inadequacy, which in turn diminishes motivation and reinforces negative perceptions. Students often internalize English as an elite or inaccessible skill, rather than as a practical tool to be learned progressively.

The fourth formulated meaning explains how motivation is reduced when students lack clear external goals, such as working abroad. Many students see English as less urgent if they do not plan to leave the country. Student_04 mentioned:

"I'm not sure if foreigners will come here to South Kalimantan, so I think 75% is enough... I don't want to go abroad."

This statement reflects a utilitarian view of English. Without an external driver—like international career plans—students struggle to find compelling reasons to commit to learning English. In such cases, English is seen as optional, rather than essential, for professional development.

In contrast, the sub-theme "*Career-Driven Awareness*" shows how motivation increases sharply when linked to tangible future opportunities. The first formulated meaning under this sub-theme notes that *motivation spikes when students are exposed to career opportunities abroad*. When students perceive English as a gateway to better employment prospects overseas, their attitude shifts. As Student_03 explained:

"It is important because with the development of the times, English is used more, or there may be opportunities to work abroad... so if you have basic English, it will be easy to work abroad."

Here, the connection between English and career advancement drives stronger engagement with the language, especially when global mobility is a visible and realistic option.

Closely tied to this is the second meaning: *some students express strong intent to work overseas as a key motivator for learning English*. These students often have specific countries or goals in mind, and this clarity fuels their desire to improve. For example, Student_03 shared:

"If my parents give me the chance, I want to work in Singapore and Saudi Arabia."

The specificity of her aspirations suggests a strong instrumental motivation, where English is not only a subject but a bridge to life-changing opportunities. This awareness makes the learning process more purposeful and persistent.

The third meaning highlights how *students begin to value English after interacting with foreigners or participating in international activities*. First-hand exposure demystifies the language and makes its relevance more immediate. Student_01 recounted:

"They're from Malaysia. We met on Instagram, and they often use English... If it's basic English, I can understand, but if it's more complicated, I need help."

Such social interactions, even informal ones, introduce students to real-life applications of English. As a result, the language transforms from an abstract academic requirement to a functional skill for communication and connection.

Finally, the fourth meaning emphasizes that *public lectures by international speakers act as powerful motivators*. These events create a heightened sense of purpose and urgency around English learning. As noted by Administrator_01:

"Usually what motivates them is direct visits from friends who work with Sari Mulia University, by holding public lectures, experts, or collaborative activities... it can grow interest and motivation."

These experiences make the global dimension of nursing tangible for students, awakening their ambition and reaffirming the value of English proficiency.

In summary, the emergent theme "Motivation and Perception Toward English Learning" reflects a spectrum of internal and external influences shaping students' engagement with English. While many students struggle with self-motivation and perceive English as difficult, their drive increases significantly when linked to career ambitions, international exposure, or real-world interactions. These findings suggest that enhancing English programs requires not only pedagogical improvement but also strategies that align language learning with students' professional goals and global identity.

Table 2. Sub-theme and Formulated Meanings under the Emergent Theme "Institutional and Curricular Support"

Emergent Theme	Sub-Theme	Formulated Meanings
Institutional and Curricular Support	a. Limited Integration in Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English is only present in semesters 2 and 4 with 2 credits, deemed insufficient. Integration of English in nursing subjects is limited to journal readings. Lecturers emphasize reading, but oral practice is lacking. English programs exist but are optional and not well-followed.
	b. Availability of Support Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs like UFLA and Wednesday classes exist but have low student participation. Lack of institutional enforcement or incentives reduces student participation. Students rely on external apps like Google Translate or YouTube due to insufficient support. Faculty suggests creating pilot programs with structured rewards or penalties to increase engagement.

Table 2 on "Institutional and Curricular Support" addresses how the structure and delivery of English education within Indonesian nursing programs either support or hinder students' language learning. This emergent theme was selected because it directly reflects the institutional responsibilities that influence students' access to, exposure to, and engagement with English learning. As the study focuses on preparing nursing graduates for international careers, the extent to which institutions embed English into the curriculum and provide adequate learning support becomes a key determinant of student success. This theme reveals not only the

systemic limitations but also highlights efforts—or the lack thereof—by universities to create a language-rich environment that fosters both academic and practical English proficiency.

Under the sub-theme “Limited Integration in Curriculum,” the first formulated meaning explains that *English is only present in semesters 2 and 4 with 2 credits, deemed insufficient*. This limited exposure constrains students’ ability to build foundational and progressive skills in English. As Student_02 observed:

“Very supportive, because in the first semester I have received English learning until now, but because I...find it difficult to understand the learning because of... many people (in the classroom), I pay less attention.”

While she acknowledges that English classes were offered, the minimal number of credit hours and the large class sizes diluted the learning experience. Students are left without continuity or depth, making language retention and development difficult over time.

The second formulated meaning reveals that *integration of English in nursing subjects is limited to journal readings*. Students are often expected to read academic journals in English, yet they receive little to no preparatory instruction on how to comprehend and analyze these texts effectively. This narrow focus on reading omits other essential language skills. Administrator_002 explained:

“We usually focus more on learning or assignments with sources taken from journals, for example, international journals. Then students are asked to review the journal as a source of learning so that it is hoped that it can support students’ abilities in English, at least reading.”

While this strategy may strengthen reading comprehension, it leaves listening, speaking, and writing largely unaddressed, making students ill-prepared for real-life communication in international clinical settings.

The third meaning highlights that *lecturers emphasize reading, but oral practice is lacking*. Speaking and listening, which are essential for clinical communication, are often overlooked. Student_05 expressed this imbalance:

“There is less practice for speaking and interaction... usually just assignments and exams.”

His remark emphasizes a critical gap: the absence of opportunities to practice spoken English in interactive or clinical scenarios, which are vital for nursing professionals who must communicate effectively with patients and international colleagues.

The fourth meaning under this sub-theme states that *English programs exist but are optional and not well-followed*. Institutional offerings beyond the classroom, such as tutoring or language clubs, are often underutilized. Student_01 reflected:

“There’s English tutoring... but I haven’t joined yet. My friends invited me, but they haven’t joined yet either.”

This statement reflects both a lack of personal initiative and a broader structural weakness—optional programs that lack institutional encouragement or follow-up result in low engagement, even among students who are aware of their importance.

The sub-theme “Availability of Support Programs” reveals a similar trend. The first formulated meaning notes that *programs like UFLA and Wednesday classes exist but have low student participation*. These initiatives, though promising, fail to make an impact without student buy-in or structured expectations. As Administrator_002 explained:

“There is a language program called UFLA... I think this is very supportive, but it all depends on the interests of each student.”

The effectiveness of such programs is compromised when student motivation is the only driving force, especially when motivation itself is already low among many.

The second meaning emphasizes that *lack of institutional enforcement or incentives reduces student participation*. Without formal integration into assessment or graduation requirements, students deprioritize English learning. As the same administrator suggested:

“For example, are there any punishments or rewards for students or lecturers in nursing who are serious about implementing this English strengthening... we try it out first.”

This indicates a recognition at the administrative level that external motivators—such as making English a graduation requirement or offering academic incentives—may be necessary to drive consistent participation and effort.

The third formulated meaning points out that *students rely on external apps like Google Translate or YouTube due to insufficient support*. Lacking sustained institutional guidance, many students resort to self-study using free digital tools. Student_04 stated:

“After my English class, I try to learn by listening and using Google Translate to make it easier for me to learn English.”

Although resourceful, this reliance signals a disconnect between institutional provision and student need. Self-learning, while commendable, may not provide the structure, feedback, or clinical relevance that formal instruction can offer.

Finally, the fourth meaning underlines that *faculty suggest creating pilot programs with structured rewards or penalties to increase engagement*. This reflects a growing recognition among educators that optional programs alone are not enough. Administrator_002 emphasized:

“It is much better if we start from nursing first... as an example, as a model, so that if it is successful, we can apply it at the university or faculty level.”

Such a statement reflects the strategic importance of using nursing as a pilot department to demonstrate scalable and enforceable English programs, potentially influencing broader university policy.

In conclusion, the theme “Institutional and Curricular Support” reveals systemic gaps in how English education is structured and delivered within Indonesian nursing programs. While institutions have introduced programs and recognized the importance of English, the lack of curriculum integration, limited skill development, optional participation, and minimal incentives have weakened the impact of these efforts. Strengthening institutional frameworks, integrating English across semesters and nursing subjects, and implementing policies that enforce and reward language learning are critical for preparing nursing graduates to thrive in global healthcare environments.

Table 3. Sub-theme and Formulated Meanings under the Emergent Theme “Sociocultural and Environmental Influences”

Emergent Theme	Sub-Theme	Formulated Meanings
3. Sociocultural and Environmental Influences	a. Cultural Perception and Peer Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking English in some communities is seen as pretentious or “sombong.” • Students feel hesitant due to fear of judgment from peers or environment. • In campus settings, English use is more accepted, but peer encouragement varies. • Nationalism is not perceived as a barrier—most students see English as complementary.
	b. Learning Environment Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of English-speaking culture on campus weakens practical learning. • Students often revert to Bahasa or regional languages. • Some campuses try English day programs, but not consistently enforced. • Students suggest increasing real English interactions (e.g., exchange, visiting lecturers).

Table 3 on “Sociocultural and Environmental Influences” highlights how cultural attitudes and the surrounding learning environment shape Indonesian nursing students’ engagement with English language learning. This emergent theme was selected because it reflects the broader context in which language learning takes place—beyond curriculum and individual motivation. Cultural norms, peer perceptions, and the everyday use of language within and outside the classroom significantly affect students’ willingness to practice and improve their English skills. Given the research focus on preparing nursing graduates for international opportunities, understanding these sociocultural and environmental influences is crucial to identifying systemic barriers and designing effective, context-sensitive strategies.

Under the sub-theme “Cultural Perception and Peer Influence,” the first formulated meaning explains that *speaking English in some communities is seen as pretentious or “sombong.”* This perception stems from a cultural tendency to view foreign language use—particularly in informal or non-academic settings—as boastful or unnecessary, which discourages students from practicing English publicly. Student_05 reflected this issue:

"In my village, if we use English, it is said to be arrogant or smartass."

This statement reveals a social stigma associated with English, especially in rural or traditional communities. Such negative labeling can create psychological barriers, where students avoid speaking English even if they are capable, for fear of social judgment or alienation.

The second meaning builds on this, noting that *students feel hesitant due to fear of judgment from peers or the environment*. Even within the university setting, peer attitudes influence students' confidence and willingness to speak. As Student_01 mentioned:

"I need friends to motivate me. Without friends, I don't feel motivated to learn."

This comment suggests that peer reinforcement plays a major role in students' engagement. When surrounded by supportive peers, students are more likely to take risks and practice English. In contrast, unsupportive environments lead to withdrawal, hesitation, and reduced participation.

The third formulated meaning emphasizes that *in campus settings, English use is more accepted, but peer encouragement varies*. While universities are generally more open to English usage, the level of encouragement students receive is inconsistent. Student_05 acknowledged:

"In the campus environment, it's supportive... because it doesn't really matter if we use English—it's like normal."

This indicates a more tolerant institutional setting, which contrasts with conservative community attitudes. However, the absence of active peer encouragement means students may still lack the push needed to regularly practice and improve their language skills, especially in non-academic interactions.

The fourth meaning clarifies that *nationalism is not perceived as a barrier—most students see English as complementary*. Despite concerns about cultural identity, students generally do not view English learning as a threat to their nationalism. Student_02 asserted:

"I don't feel insecure using English due to cultural factors... I rarely use English to communicate with the public, but sometimes there are some writings in English."

This response reflects a pragmatic understanding that mastering English is a professional necessity rather than a cultural betrayal. For most students, English is seen as a tool for global communication, not as a replacement for national or regional languages.

The second sub-theme, "Learning Environment Dynamics," addresses the physical and social conditions in which English learning occurs. The first meaning under this sub-theme states that *lack of an English-speaking culture on campus weakens practical learning*. Even where students are expected to learn English, the absence of immersive, English-speaking environments hinders skill development. Student_04 commented:

"Honestly, I would find it very difficult if everyone here used English, because I'm not the only one who doesn't understand English well."

Her comment points to a paradox: while immersive environments are ideal for learning, the lack of foundational skills makes students fearful of such immersion, creating a cycle where poor practice leads to weak proficiency, and weak proficiency discourages practice.

The second meaning highlights that *students often revert to Bahasa or regional languages*. This tendency, while natural, prevents students from developing fluency and confidence in English. Student_01 said:

"In my environment, we speak in Indonesian... but on social media, I use English because I have friends from abroad."

This contrast illustrates how students compartmentalize English for specific contexts (e.g., social media) rather than integrating it into daily academic or peer interactions. The use of Bahasa and regional dialects remains dominant, even within university settings, limiting real-world exposure to English.

The third formulated meaning explains that *some campuses try English Day programs, but these are not consistently enforced*. Institutional attempts to create an English-rich environment are often short-lived or loosely implemented. Administrator_002 Suggested:

“The first strategy, for example, is that in one week there is a special day for every student or human resource to use English as much as possible.”

Although this reflects an effort to build language culture, the lack of consistent implementation means students may not feel enough pressure—or opportunity—to participate meaningfully. Without routine practice, the effectiveness of such initiatives remains limited.

The fourth and final meaning under this sub-theme proposes that *students suggest increasing real English interactions, such as exchange programs or visits from international lecturers*. First-hand experience with native or fluent English speakers significantly enhances student engagement and motivation. Student_03 shared:

“Because I like watching movies, it's better to be invited to study while watching English-language movies, then identifying the contents of the movie.”

Although this quote focuses on media exposure, it reveals students' openness to alternative and engaging learning experiences. Interactive, authentic settings—whether through virtual exchanges or guest lectures—can help bridge the gap between passive learning and active language use.

In conclusion, the theme “Sociocultural and Environmental Influences” illustrates how cultural attitudes, peer dynamics, and institutional practices collectively shape English learning experiences among Indonesian nursing students. While students generally view English positively and recognize its value for internationalization, their learning is significantly shaped by community perceptions, peer influence, and the absence of consistent, immersive language environments. Addressing these factors through culturally sensitive, practice-oriented strategies is essential for equipping nursing graduates with the English skills needed to thrive in a global context.

Table 4. Sub-theme and Formulated Meanings under the Emergent Theme “Pedagogical Methods and Learning Strategies”

Emergent Theme	Sub-Theme	Formulated Meanings
4. Pedagogical Methods and Learning Strategies	a. Ineffective Traditional Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture-based methods without translation create confusion. • Over-reliance on written exams neglects speaking and listening skills. • Students report lectures only in English are hard to follow without Bahasa support. • Mass classes and limited personal attention reduce comprehension.
	b. Preferred Learning Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students prefer interactive methods like role-plays, small group discussions, and video-based learning. • Use of digital apps and subtitles in movies is common and helpful. • Repetitive practice and gamified apps improve basic vocabulary. • Students favor blended explanations (English + Indonesian) for better comprehension.

Table 4 on “Pedagogical Methods and Learning Strategies” focuses on how teaching techniques and learning preferences shape the English language acquisition experience for Indonesian nursing students. This emergent theme was chosen because it directly relates to how English is taught and internalized in classroom settings—critical factors in whether students are empowered or hindered in their language development. Given the research goal of identifying barriers and strategies, especially within a culturally contextualized educational framework, examining the effectiveness of pedagogical methods and how students respond to them provides essential insights into improving instructional design and fostering international readiness.

The sub-theme “Ineffective Traditional Methods” captures common instructional practices that limit English learning. The first formulated meaning identifies that *lecture-based methods without translation create confusion*. When lecturers speak entirely in English without providing explanations in Bahasa Indonesia, many students struggle to grasp key content. Student_02 stated:

"Because I... find it difficult to understand the learning because of...many people in the classroom, I pay less attention... From pronunciation, the arrangement of vocabulary to become perfect English sentences... this is what makes it difficult for me to learn English."

Her comment illustrates the cognitive overload students experience when complex material is delivered without linguistic scaffolding. Large class sizes exacerbate the issue, reducing the opportunity for clarification, resulting in confusion and disengagement.

The second formulated meaning points out that *over-reliance on written exams neglects speaking and listening skills*. This imbalance results in students who may perform adequately on paper but lack the communicative competence required in real-world or clinical settings. Student_05 mentioned:

"Usually we're only given written exams, and we don't get to talk much in English."

This reveals a structural issue where assessment design limits skill development. Without active practice in listening and speaking, students remain unprepared for international communication, which relies heavily on verbal interaction.

The third formulated meaning emphasizes that *students report lectures only in English are hard to follow without Bahasa support*. Total immersion approaches, while theoretically beneficial, may not be effective for learners at beginner or intermediate levels. Student_04 explained:

"I don't understand if it's fully in English... I still need explanation in Indonesian so I can follow."

This statement underscores the importance of transitional bilingual teaching methods, where English is gradually introduced alongside Indonesian to build comprehension and confidence.

The fourth meaning identifies that *mass classes and limited personal attention reduce comprehension*. In large group settings, individualized instruction and feedback are often sacrificed, which hinders effective learning. Student_02 also touched on this:

"Because of the many people, I pay less attention... I find it hard to follow."

Her narrative confirms how overcrowded learning environments reduce focus and limit student-teacher interaction, making it more difficult to absorb language content, particularly for struggling learners.

In contrast, the sub-theme "Preferred Learning Approaches" reveals the strategies students find effective and enjoyable. The first formulated meaning explains that *students prefer interactive methods like role-plays, small group discussions, and video-based learning*. These formats allow for active participation, real-life simulation, and social learning. Student_03 emphasized this preference:

"It's better to be invited to study while watching English-language movies, then identifying the contents of the movie."

Her response suggests that engaging, context-rich activities promote deeper understanding and greater enthusiasm for learning. It highlights how visual and auditory content creates a meaningful connection to language use.

The second formulated meaning shows that *use of digital apps and subtitles in movies is common and helpful*. Students often complement classroom learning with self-directed tools. Student_01 shared:

"I learn from movies and TikTok, where English is used... and I use subtitles to understand."

This reflects students' adaptive behavior—using media to fill the gaps left by formal instruction. Subtitled content supports vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation awareness, and contextual understanding, making English learning more accessible and enjoyable.

The third meaning reveals that *repetitive practice and gamified apps improve basic vocabulary*. Tools like Duolingo, Quizlet, or English learning games appeal to students due to their interactive and low-pressure design. Although specific apps weren't named directly, the administrator's recognition of such approaches aligns with this trend. Administrator_002 commented:

"Maybe they are comfortable learning through TikTok or YouTube, because these platforms are simple and fun."

This confirms the importance of integrating technology-enhanced learning that caters to students' digital habits and learning styles, especially those who feel overwhelmed by traditional classroom tasks.

Finally, the fourth meaning emphasizes that *students favor blended explanations (English + Indonesian) for better comprehension*. This code-switching approach helps bridge the understanding gap, especially for complex terms or instructions. Student_04 remarked:

"Sometimes I understand English words but not the whole sentence, so if the teacher explains both, I can follow better."

This reflects the effectiveness of bilingual pedagogy in transitional learning contexts, where understanding is scaffolded through the native language while still promoting exposure to English.

In conclusion, the emergent theme "Pedagogical Methods and Learning Strategies" reveals that while traditional, lecture-heavy approaches often hinder English acquisition, students thrive with more interactive, technology-enhanced, and bilingual learning strategies. By aligning teaching methods with students' preferences and cognitive needs, institutions can better equip nursing graduates with the linguistic and communicative competencies necessary for international practice. These findings underscore the need for curriculum reform that prioritizes engagement, multimodal learning, and a balanced focus on all four language skills.

Table 5. Sub-theme and Formulated Meanings under the Emergent Theme "Readiness and Global Career Aspirations"

Emergent Theme	Sub-Theme	Formulated Meanings
5. Readiness and Global Career Aspirations	a. International Career Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students fear they are not ready to work abroad due to low English proficiency. - Some express interest in continuing studies overseas, but lack of confidence and resources holds them back. - Others choose to stay domestic due to parental concerns or fear of unknown cultures. - Even among those interested in going abroad, TOEFL or IELTS preparation is rare.
	b. Enhancing Global Competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administrators agree English enhances competitiveness and employability abroad. - English is seen as a "global attribute" vital to international recruitment. - International partnerships and immersion programs are seen as vital to promote readiness. - Students with early exposure (e.g., family who speaks English) show greater preparedness.

Table 5 on "Readiness and Global Career Aspirations" explores how Indonesian nursing students perceive their preparedness for working or studying abroad and the role of English proficiency in achieving these goals. As global mobility becomes an increasingly viable and necessary path in healthcare, the ability to communicate effectively in English and navigate international environments is crucial. This theme reveals both internal and external factors affecting students' readiness, including personal fears, cultural concerns, institutional limitations, and the strategic outlook of administrators.

Under the sub-theme "International Career Barriers," the first formulated meaning reflects that *students fear they are not ready to work abroad due to low English proficiency*. This fear often results in hesitation or avoidance when it comes to pursuing international opportunities. Student_02 voiced this concern clearly:

"If we go abroad, we must be ready. English is the main thing we need to be good at. But I'm still not confident... I think I will not pass the requirements."

This comment demonstrates how students equate English fluency with their overall eligibility for global careers. The perceived gap between their current level and the international standard leads to self-doubt, reinforcing a cycle where lack of confidence hinders ambition and effort.

The second formulated meaning shows that *some students express interest in continuing studies overseas, but lack of confidence and resources holds them back*. The aspiration exists, but financial constraints and psychological readiness are major barriers. Student_03 shared:

"I want to study abroad, maybe in Singapore or Australia... but I don't have enough money or know how to start."

Her narrative highlights not only economic limitations but also a lack of institutional support systems that guide students through the process of applying for international study, such as preparing for standardized tests or navigating visa requirements.

The third meaning explains that *others choose to stay domestic due to parental concerns or fear of unknown cultures*. Cultural expectations and familial influence significantly shape students' choices. As Student_04 expressed:

"Actually, I'm interested, but my parents are not very supportive. They say it's too far and too risky... they worry about me."

This statement reflects how traditional family values can act as a silent barrier, particularly for female students, limiting their access to international opportunities despite personal interest or potential.

The fourth formulated meaning points out that *even among those interested in going abroad, TOEFL or IELTS preparation is rare*. Without formal preparation, students are ill-equipped to meet the language requirements of most international programs. Administrator_002 noted:

"Not many students take TOEFL or IELTS seriously unless they have a scholarship or urgent need... and even then, the preparation is not institutionalized."

This reveals a gap in institutional support, where language certification is not embedded into the academic trajectory of nursing students. As a result, many are left unprepared when opportunities do arise, further limiting their international mobility.

In contrast, the sub-theme "Enhancing Global Competitiveness" focuses on positive institutional perspectives and strategies. The first formulated meaning shows that *administrators agree English enhances competitiveness and employability abroad*. English is not only viewed as a communication tool but as a professional asset. Administrator_002 emphasized:

"If students are good in English, they can go anywhere. Hospitals abroad need them. English opens doors."

This quote encapsulates the perceived link between English proficiency and global employability. Administrators recognize that language skills can significantly expand students' career prospects, both in clinical and academic environments.

The second meaning reinforces that *English is seen as a 'global attribute' vital to international recruitment*. It is not merely an academic subject but a competency that enhances a graduate's profile. As noted by the same administrator:

"We see English as a global attribute—it's not optional if they want to compete internationally."

This strategic view reflects a growing institutional awareness of global trends in healthcare and the need to prepare students accordingly. However, the challenge lies in translating this vision into actionable programs.

The third meaning indicates that *international partnerships and immersion programs are seen as vital to promote readiness*. Exposure to authentic English use in real-world contexts is believed to build both competence and confidence. Administrator_002 noted:

"We invite international speakers, hold joint classes, or send students for exchanges... these activities build their readiness."

This approach underscores the role of experiential learning in complementing classroom instruction, reinforcing language skills while also fostering intercultural competence.

The final formulated meaning emphasizes that *students with early exposure—such as having family members who speak English—show greater preparedness*. These students often enter university with more confidence and a stronger foundation in English. Student_01 mentioned:

"My sister speaks English fluently, so I often hear her talk and I try to follow... it helps me."

This suggests that informal exposure at home can significantly influence language development. It also indicates a disparity in readiness based on socioeconomic or familial background, highlighting the importance of creating equalizing opportunities within the institution.

In conclusion, the theme "Readiness and Global Career Aspirations" captures the dual realities faced by Indonesian nursing students: the aspiration for international careers and the barriers—both linguistic and socio-cultural—that stand in the way. While administrators recognize the importance of English and global exposure, many students continue to struggle with confidence, preparation, and access. To truly internationalize nursing education, institutions must bridge this gap by embedding global readiness into curricula, normalizing certification preparation, and addressing the cultural and emotional factors that influence students' decisions.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the perceived barriers and strategies related to English language learning among Indonesian nursing students, with particular attention to the cultural dimensions influencing their readiness for international engagement. At the core of this inquiry was the recognition that effective English proficiency is not only a linguistic skill but a critical requirement for Indonesian nursing graduates aspiring to join the global healthcare workforce. Through qualitative methods, this research uncovered key themes including motivation and perception toward English learning, institutional and curricular support, sociocultural and environmental influences, pedagogical methods and learning strategies, and students' readiness and global career aspirations. These findings illuminate the multifaceted challenges students face and offer insight into how nursing education and institutional practices must evolve in response.

Motivation emerged as a powerful but fragile force. Many students acknowledged the importance of English but struggled with self-discipline, often expressing regret over delayed efforts to learn the language. This reflects what Deci and Ryan (2020) describe in Self-Determination Theory as a lack of intrinsic motivation, which is crucial for sustained language acquisition. Students motivated by clear external goals—such as working abroad—demonstrated greater initiative, echoing similar findings in the literature (Lo, 2021; Le Huu Nghia et al., 2024). However, the inconsistency of motivation linked to unclear career paths highlights the need for more structured goal setting and career planning in nursing curricula.

The theme of institutional and curricular support revealed that English instruction in nursing programs is often superficial and inadequately integrated. With English offered only in limited semesters and heavily focused on reading, students lack the continuous, comprehensive exposure necessary for language mastery. These findings are consistent with those of Fisma (2024), who argue that fragmented English instruction fails to prepare healthcare professionals for global communication. The lack of speaking and listening components, along with optional and poorly attended support programs, suggests a systemic undervaluing of English as a core professional skill. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, emphasizing the importance of guided, social interaction in learning—a component missing in the current instructional model.

Cultural and environmental factors also significantly impacted learning. Students feared being labeled as arrogant or "sombong" for using English in certain community settings, leading to hesitancy and avoidance. While English was more accepted on campus, inconsistent peer support and the lack of an English-speaking culture limited practical application. These findings mirror the work of Zhong and Champion (2024) and Khawaj et al. (2018), who highlight how sociocultural norms can either facilitate or hinder second language learning. Importantly, the study found that nationalism was not a major barrier; students largely viewed English as complementary to their cultural identity. This contrasts with older assumptions that equated English proficiency with cultural erosion and reinforces the evolving perception of English as a global competency (Chun, 2023; Osborn & Wagner, 2023).

Pedagogical methods and student learning strategies further revealed the misalignment between instruction and student needs. Traditional lecture-based methods, delivered without translation, created confusion and discouraged engagement. Over-reliance on written assessments limited development in critical communicative skills. Conversely, students responded positively to interactive, tech-enhanced, and bilingual approaches. Similar findings by Cancino and Viguera (2024) suggest that gamified and blended learning environments not only improve retention but also reduce anxiety, particularly in language learning contexts. These results support the constructivist theory of learning, where knowledge is actively constructed through meaningful experiences and social interaction (Piaget, 1954).

The final theme, readiness and global career aspirations, brought the implications of these barriers into sharp focus. While many students aspired to work or study abroad, their low confidence, lack of preparation for standardized tests, and minimal exposure to English-intensive environments significantly limited their readiness. Family concerns and unfamiliarity with foreign cultures also emerged as non-linguistic deterrents. These observations echo the concerns raised by Kunaviktikul and Turale, (2020), who found that a supportive institutional framework—including mentoring, financial guidance, and test preparation—is critical to international student mobility. Institutional stakeholders in the study confirmed the importance of English as a global attribute and advocated for immersion programs and international partnerships to enhance competitiveness. This affirms Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, where self-efficacy, influenced by external support and role modeling, determines students' willingness to pursue challenging goals.

The findings carry several important implications for nursing education, practice, and policy development. First, nursing curricula must go beyond token English courses and embed language instruction into core subjects with equal emphasis on all language domains. Second, institutions should foster a campus-wide English-speaking culture through mandatory programs, immersion initiatives, and exchange opportunities. Third, educators must adopt learner-centered approaches that align with students' cognitive and social needs, incorporating digital tools and culturally responsive teaching. Lastly, policy at the institutional and national levels must view English not as a soft skill but as a professional requirement tied to Indonesia's ambitions in global healthcare.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations. Perspectives from practicing nurses already working abroad were not included, which could have added valuable insights into real-world challenges and solutions. Future research should explore longitudinal studies tracking students' English development and career outcomes over time. Comparative studies across nursing schools in urban and rural settings could uncover regional disparities in access and attitudes. Investigating institutional leaders' decision-making processes in curriculum design may also yield policy-level recommendations.

In conclusion, this study revealed that Indonesian nursing students' English learning is hindered by a confluence of motivational, institutional, cultural, pedagogical, and environmental factors. Yet, these challenges also point toward clear, actionable strategies. Aligning language education with global career goals, integrating English across curricula, leveraging culturally relevant pedagogy, and strengthening institutional support systems are essential to preparing nursing graduates for international roles. In an increasingly interconnected healthcare system, such transformation is not merely beneficial—it is imperative.

Conclusion

This study examined the barriers and strategies associated with English language learning among Indonesian nursing students in the context of internationalization. The findings demonstrate that students' English proficiency is influenced by a complex interaction of motivational challenges, limited curricular integration, sociocultural pressures, ineffective pedagogical approaches, and gaps in institutional support. While many students recognize the importance of English for global nursing opportunities, their learning engagement remains inconsistent due to low confidence, lack of structured exposure, and minimal alignment between language learning and professional goals.

The study further reveals that English is often treated as a peripheral subject rather than a core competency within nursing education. As a result, students develop fragmented skills—primarily in reading—while lacking the communicative competence required for real-world clinical and international settings. Despite these barriers, the findings also highlight students' openness to more interactive, technology-driven, and practice-based learning approaches, as well as their increased motivation when English is linked to career aspirations and global exposure.

Overall, the study concludes that advancing the internationalization of Indonesian nursing graduates requires a fundamental shift from traditional, classroom-bound English instruction toward a more integrated, experiential, and professionally aligned language learning model.

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