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## A Netnographic Study on The Reasons Why People Fail to Learn English

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In a global and digital world, learning a language, especially English is essential for people to keep up with the developments in science, business, technology, etc. Despite starting to learn English early, students might not always reach desired proficiency levels. Therefore, the present study aims to find out some of the reasons why people fail to learn English. Employing a netnographic approach, the researchers examined asynchronous comments posted in online communities on a social media platform. Within the scope of this study, 198 comments answering the question of why people fail to learn English were obtained from three online groups of English language teachers on Facebook. The findings show that 154 out of 198 comments aimed to answer the question. They were analyzed through content analysis, which revealed that there are educational, social, personal, and linguistic reasons why people fail to learn English. Educational reasons were among the most mentioned reasons by the members of the communities. In addition, the analysis indicates a balanced representation of linguistic and personal factors, with social factors slightly less prominent in comparison. Considering the existing literature review, several implications are highlighted to overcome the difficulties and challenges of learning English. Finally, this study is limited by its reliance on Facebook posts collected within a specific timeframe; future research could enhance depth and scope by incorporating longitudinal methods, diverse social media platforms, and in-depth interviews.

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## **Introduction**

In contemporary global society, a good command of English is a must to follow the developments in science and technology (Özmat & Senemoğlu, 2021). In the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, English is the language used for instrumental purposes, especially in business and tourism (Cosgun & Hasırcı, 2017). While learning a language, a learner might face problems that emerge due to the influence of linguistic (Stern, 1975), social, personal, and educational reasons (Yurtsever Bodur & Arıkan, 2017). These problems might lead to failure in learning a foreign language even though students spend many years on it (Yurtsever Bodur & Arıkan, 2017). To be able to find a solution to these problems, academicians, educators, and governmental bodies have conducted a large number of studies. However, this issue remains unsolved despite all the efforts and investments (Aydemir, 2007; Işık, 2008; Kırkgöz, 2008; Yiğit, Keser, & Uzun, 2020). To illustrate this, Education First (2023) English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) in which Türkiye ranks 66th out of 113 countries in the low proficiency category proves the findings and arguments of these researchers.

Learning a language has become a must for students to be successful in their educational paths and professional life after school (Council of Higher Education, 2007). They are expected to use the language they are learning efficiently and in a communicative way (Özmat & Senemoğlu, 2021). Yet, the EF EPI 2023 ranking shows that the majority of students from some countries such as Türkiye, Algeria, and Kazakhstan fail to learn English, which might lead to further problems such as difficulty in finding jobs for students after graduation. Therefore, in Türkiye, the Ministry of National Education (2013) has revised foreign language teaching programs and English courses have become compulsory starting from the second grade. Interestingly, a large number of students still do not have enough proficiency in English (Coşkun, 2016).

According to Lightbown and Spada (2021) and Wang (2006), the language learning process might be affected by several factors such as the individual traits and experiences of the learner, the social and cultural context both within and beyond the classroom, the structure of both the native and target languages, chances for interaction with native speakers of the target language, and availability of corrective feedback and instruction focused on language. Language teachers do not have control over all these factors. Therefore, identifying the underlying causes of these problems could offer potential solutions, which might result in a more effective language learning and teaching process (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). To address these problems and solutions, the researchers examined a number of studies carried out in the literature (Ağçam & Babanoğlu, 2018; Akdoğan, 2010; Akkuş, 2009; Aksoy, 2020; Alsalihi, 2020; Cihan & Gürten, 2013; Coşkun, 2016; Demir-Ayaz, Özkardaş, & Özturan, 2019; Demirtaş & Erdem, 2015; Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Er, 2006; Gobel & Mori, 2007; Gürel & Demirhan-İşcan, 2020; Hamid & Baldauf, 2011; Hayırlı, 2019; Humaera, 2015; Liu, 2005; Özmat & Senemoğlu, 2021; Reiss, 1983; Sawir, 2005; Sevinç, 2006; Suryani, Suarnaja, & Pratiwi, 2020; Toni & Rostami, 2012; Wang, 1993; Yiğit et al., 2020; Yurtsever Bodur & Arıkan, 2017).

There are several studies conducted to identify the problems by evaluating curricula depending on the opinions of teachers, directors, or inspectors (Aksoy, 2020; Cihan & Gürten, 2013; Demirtaş & Erdem, 2015; Dinçer & Koç, 2020; Er, 2006; Gürel & Demirhan-İşcan, 2020). The findings reveal that the most common problems include insufficient time allocated for English classes, challenges in assessing listening and speaking abilities, a lack of appropriate teaching materials, the inadequacy of coursebooks tailored to students' needs, curriculum objectives surpassing students' proficiency levels, inadequate coursebook content, and overcrowded

classrooms.

Furthermore, Ağçam and Babanoğlu (2018) conducted a comparison of the 2017 English curricula for primary and secondary schools, revealing that primary school objectives mainly targeted lower-order cognitive skills, neglecting higher-order skills through a foreign language. Additionally, Demir-Ayaz et al. (2019) highlighted issues in English language instruction in Turkish high schools and proposed solutions. Their findings revealed widespread dissatisfaction among teachers with English coursebooks, along with challenges such as limited teaching hours, overcrowded classrooms, and students' low motivation levels. Moreover, previous studies (Akdoğan, 2010; Akkuş, 2009; Sevinç, 2006) on English language teaching in Türkiye identified common problems including excessive reliance on the grammar-translation method instead of communicative approaches, large class sizes, students' lack of efficiency in their native language, inadequate teaching materials, limited use of teaching aids and technology by educators, and students' lack of confidence.

Some of the studies (e.g. Hayırlı, 2019; Yiğit et al., 2020; Yurtsever Bodur & Arıkan, 2017) examined the reasons behind why students fail to learn English in terms of different aspects, namely social, personal, educational, cultural, and psychological reasons. The findings of Yurtsever Bodur and Arıkan's (2017) study showed that students blame sociocultural and economic factors for their failures. Also, they reported that their failure is the result of educational factors such as inadequate materials in the classroom. Hayırlı (2019) focused on the failure in terms of cultural reasons in his study and found that lack of motivation, teachers' professional knowledge and English language competency, lack of practice in the classroom, poor materials, overcrowded and authoritarian classes are the main problems which lead to the failure in learning English. On the other hand, Yiğit et al. (2020) aimed to determine the psychological reasons behind why students cannot learn English. The findings indicated that students' past experiences influence their perceptions. Their anxiety is the result of a lack of practice in the classroom in the past.

Özmat and Senemoğlu (2021) investigated foreign language learning difficulties. They highlighted several common difficulties among students, including inadequate opportunities for communicative practice in textbooks, limited utilization of visual and audio aids in classrooms, insufficient exercises targeting listening and speaking skills, absence of effective language learning strategies, low levels of self-confidence, overcrowded classrooms, and disciplinary issues. Coşkun (2016) focused on the syndrome 'I can understand English but I can't speak'. Based on the findings, a prevailing belief is that students struggle to speak English due to the emphasis on grammar rules during English lessons, disparities between English and Turkish languages, lack of exposure to English-speaking environments abroad, limited opportunities for speaking practice outside the classroom, feelings of anxiety when speaking English, instructors resorting to the mother tongue, and course materials lacking colloquial English.

Alsalihi (2020) conducted a study at the University of Baghdad to investigate the difficulties that EFL students face during the language learning process. The results indicated that the role of society in discouraging the language learning process, the students' shyness, class size, and crowdedness are the challenges that EFL students face. In a study conducted in Indonesia, Suryani et al. (2020) reported that there are two main factors inhibiting students' speaking skills, namely cognitive and affective factors. Affective factors are those related to shyness, a lack of motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-consciousness, and feeling uncertain toward the topic and interlocutor. Grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, familiarity with the

genre, and previous knowledge of the topic are considered under cognitive factors. Humaera (2015) in her study revealed that inhibition is one of the factors affecting students' language comprehension, arising from several reasons such as lack of motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, and language ego. In a study conducted in Iran, Toni and Rostami (2012) highlighted the importance of having a strong desire to succeed in learning English for language learners. Their attitudes towards language learning and the learning situation such as good relationship with the teacher, their motivation, language anxiety, and their purposes of learning a foreign language might influence their success and failure in the learning process. Hamid and Baldauf (2011) examined the language learners' perceptions and experiences in Bangladesh. They reported that Bangladeshi learners had poor educational environment; therefore, they were unable to learn it. Thus, the obtained results underlined the importance of students' educational environment. In another study, Gobel and Mori (2007) aimed to investigate the EFL students' perceived reasons for successes and failures in the language learning process in Japan. They found out that the failure might be the outcome of learned helplessness, lack of ability, lack of effort, and teachers' response to students' performance. To illustrate the problems faced by university students in Taiwan while learning a language, Liu (2005) initiated a study which addressed similar research questions. This study's findings revealed that students show resistance to the Communicative Language Teaching approach since they are used to the lecturing style. Therefore, they have problems learning English and communicating orally. Sawir (2005) studied language learning difficulties that international students face in Australia. The results showed that the previous experiences of the students - such as taking courses where teacher-centered methods and techniques are employed, grammar and reading are the main focus, and the exposure to language in and out of the classroom is limited - influence the students' success in the language learning process. Wang (1993) found out that language shock, cultural differences, cultural background knowledge, motivation, and ego permeability were the factors affecting Chinese language learners. Finally, Reiss (1983) suggested that to be successful in learning a foreign language, students need to be highly motivated, actively engaged, focused on meaning, comfortable in their learning environment, and dedicated to practicing outside the classroom.

Consequently, there are several reasons why people fail to learn English. Nevertheless, to our knowledge, there is no netnographic study found on this issue. Therefore, our study tries to fill this gap by seeking out answers to the following research question:

R.Q. 1: What are the reasons why people cannot learn English?

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

Ethnography is a research approach focused on investigating individuals' beliefs, viewpoints, and real-life encounters, usually conducted in authentic environments where researchers fully engage for an extended duration (Brewer, 2000; Brodkey, 1987; Paltridge, Starfield & Tardy, 2016). With the developments in technology, numerous communities in digital settings have become one of the focuses of ethnographers. In such communities, there are not only formal settings but also non-academic settings, online platforms and social media such as Facebook, Reddit, and the like (Kessler, De Costa, Isbell, & Gajasinghe, 2021). To be able to investigate and understand cultures and practices that exist in them, SLA researchers have begun to conduct netnographic research. Netnography was first used by Kozinets (1998).

It is an ethnographic approach that seeks to understand cultural experiences reflected in social media. It is also called online ethnography.

In netnography, researchers use online communications as a source of data. Netnography allows researchers to use participant observation, interviews, archival data, elicited data, and other forms of data available. A netnography can collect the data through wikis, blogs, microblogs (such as X), and social networking sites (such as Facebook). In this research design, data sources generally come from archival data, elicited data, interviews, and fieldnotes (Kozinets, 2010). Archival data, such as webpages and archived textual communication, offer observational insights unaffected by the researchers' presence. However, managing the vast amount of online archival data poses challenges in selection, sorting, and analysis. Elicited data in netnography includes asynchronous communication like postings in research forums or email exchanges, as well as synchronous communication via tools like Skype for interviews.

Fieldnotes are another crucial data source in netnography, distinct from traditional ethnographic practices. While online communities provide easily accessible textual data, netnography emphasizes the interpretive insights gained through reflective fieldnotes (Kozinets, 2010). Despite public access to online interactions, the researchers' interpretation, documented in fieldnotes, is what adds significant value to netnography. These fieldnotes capture the researchers' subjective experiences and impressions as participants in the online community, offering nuanced insights beyond mere data collection (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015).

In the current study, netnography is utilized to gather the data from online communities that exist in social media. Elicited data resources including asynchronous communication like posting and comments are the main sources of this study. This way of data collection helps the researchers to reach as many participants as possible. It also allows them to engage naturalistically with participants on Facebook.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

In the current research, netnography, which is a qualitative approach, is employed to gather the data. It was used to investigate three online communities comprising English language teachers from different parts of the world coming together to share their materials, opinions, and ideas on a social media platform called Facebook. In these three groups, the question "Why cannot we learn English?" was posted to solicit the members' perspectives. Under these posts seeking an answer to that specific question, 198 comments were given by the members of these online communities. All the comments posted in response to the question were transcribed into an Excel file to facilitate content analysis. According to Meyer and Avery (2009), Microsoft Excel might be a valuable tool for handling, organizing, and analyzing data. Therefore, in this study, Microsoft Excel enabled the researchers to conduct effortless and efficient comparisons and perform thorough analyses of extensive datasets. The analyses revealed that 154 out of 198 comments were related to the research question. The ones which were not related to the question were excluded from the analysis.

### ***Data Analysis Procedure***

To be able to analyze the collected data, the six steps for data analysis suggested by Creswell (2014) were followed in the current study: transcription and organization, thorough reading of the data, coding, grouping coded data into themes and generating descriptions, merging themes, and interpreting meanings from the themes. In this study, the data were first





prepared by transferring all the comments into a file verbatim and organizing existing written material. With the ultimate goal in mind, the next step involved reading through all the data to define its overall significance. Then, to identify patterns and manage the extensive data, it was coded by segmenting it into chunks and assigning representative words to categories. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explain the process of “coding categories” as follows:

As you read through your data, certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects’ ways of thinking, and events repeat and stand out. Developing a coding system involves several steps: you search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories. They are a means of sorting the descriptive data you have collected... so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. (p. 156)

While assigning the categories, Yurtsever Bodur and Arıkan’s (2017) categorization was taken into consideration. These categories are named as *social, educational, and personal reasons* why people cannot learn English. In the present study, a new category emerged as a result of the content analysis, which is labeled as *linguistic reasons*.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

According to Creswell (2014), the concept of validity differs between qualitative and quantitative research methods. In qualitative research literature, validity, also known as trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility, pertains to the accuracy of findings ensured by the researcher through rigorous procedures. Various validity strategies such as triangulation, member checking, detailed description, bias clarification, the inclusion of negative or discrepant information, extensive time investment, peer debriefing, and external auditing can be employed (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, some of these validity strategies were incorporated to enhance the validity of the content analysis. To enhance the reliability and validity of the data analysis, a second researcher, and two experienced experts coded the data. The coded information was then compared and utilized to ensure consistency between coders and to enhance credibility. The researchers utilized the Kappa statistic to assess data and ascertain the consistency among the coders. By following this procedure, the researchers aim to identify the degree, significance, and stability of their agreement (Cohen, 1960). The inter-coder reliability is determined to be  $\kappa = 0.84$ , indicating that the coders exhibit a strong level of agreement in analyzing the data. Additionally, detailed and comprehensive descriptions were provided to facilitate the transferability of the findings to different contexts. Furthermore, ethical approval from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University School of Graduate Studies Ethics Committee was obtained before conducting the current study.

### **Results**

In the present study, 154 comments on Facebook including the members of three online communities were analyzed through content analysis to be able to address the question of why people fail to learn English. As illustrated in Table 1, four hyper-categories emerged as a result of the analysis, namely *educational, linguistic, personal, and social reasons*. Eighty-one out of 154 comments (52.60%) are clustered under educational reasons. The analysis showed that

there is an equal distribution among linguistic and personal reasons (16.23%) while social reasons include 23 comments (14.94%) (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Hyper-categories that emerged in content analysis of the comments**

Hyper-categories	<i>f</i>	%
Educational	81	52.60
Linguistic	25	16.23
Personal	25	16.23
Social	23	14.94
Total	154	100

Under the hyper category of *educational reasons*, there are two categories, namely educational system, and teacher-oriented problems (see Table 2). Firstly, the most mentioned reasons why people fail in English that are clustered under the educational system are prioritizing grammar over other language skills, lacking an environment where students practice, lacking an adequate number of lessons, teaching methods and techniques. For the first reason, P24 states, “*Yes, learning starts in the mother’s womb. English, which has been an exciting activity since 3rd or 4th grade, turns into boring grammar lessons afterward. Kids do not learn it anymore.*” P26 mentions, “*In the new generation of teaching classrooms, the Direct Approach is preferred. This is also referred to as the opposite version of the grammar-translation method. Its most important feature is that in this approach, speaking any language other than the target language (usually English) is prohibited in the classroom. This helps students understand the thought structure and culture of the language being spoken. Unfortunately, we are still stuck with the outdated grammar translation method from the 1960s*”. In addition, P31 reports, “*It could be because the lessons are grammar-focused. The fear of choosing the right tense, pattern, or word and speaking without making mistakes can lead to this. It might be beneficial for the lessons to be more focused on speaking*”. As it is seen in the given excerpts from the comments, participants have a consensus on the fact that grammar-focused lessons might influence the students’ learning process, which might result in failure to use English effectively and efficiently. The second reason is the lack of an environment where students practice. To illustrate, P59 addresses this problem as follows, “*The education at school is inadequate, and since our native language is Turkish, English is not spoken. There is no practice. They can learn through additional lessons with practice*”. Another suggestion is given by P112 as follows, “*Because we don’t speak enough English in our classes, and we don’t encourage it. We only teach for exams. Language develops as you hear and use it. There should be speaking classes, and children should be spoken to and encouraged to speak English*”. All the comments under this reason are about the students’ access to the environments where they can practice English. Yet, it can be said that students are not given a chance to practice English in schools because of grammar-focused language education.

Another reason is the lack of an adequate number of lessons. For example, P96 declares, “*They’re not exposed. Reading, listening, writing, and speaking are not altogether. There’s not enough class time. We teach textbook English. There should be preparation and proficiency*



exams; those who fail should repeat or be required to take extra classes next year, etc.”. The rest of the comments under this reason are in line with this comment.

As for teaching methods and techniques, participants mention the importance of how English is presented to the students in the classrooms. If the presentation attracts the students’ attention, this might increase their motivation and desire to learn English. P14 summarizes the situation as follows, *“Presentation is everything. No matter how much you love a chocolate cake, unless it’s presented to you in the best way possible, it can suddenly become something you don’t like at all. Just as everyone loves an eye-catching and delicious cake, doesn’t it work the other way around? English and cake are the same thing. The cake is English, and the waiter is the teacher. The better the presentation the teacher makes, the more it is appreciated. It is definitely related to whether you like it or not.”*

Table 2. Educational reasons behind why people fail to learn English

Category	Codes	Participant Codes	f
Educational System	Prioritizing grammar over other language skills	P3, P4, P5, P11, P20, P24, P26, P31, P49, P89, P92, P115	12
	Experiencing a lack of an environment where students practice	P40, P47, P59, P66, P69, P76, P78, P112, P114, P135	10
	Having an inadequate number of lessons	P6, P53, P58, P71, P96, P98, P114, P169	8
	Teaching methods and techniques	P14, P15, P17, P26, P33, P58, P109	7
	Class size	P114, P120, P154, P89	4
	Memorizing	P6, P35, P60, P76	4
	Having exam anxiety	P20, P32, P33	3
	Experiencing a lack of practice out of the classroom	P25, P116, P118	3
	Focusing on passing the exam	P112, P130, P143	3
	Devaluing knowing a language	P91, P99, P136	3
	Not being exposed to language	P96, P112,	2
	Teaching students with different levels at the same time	P120, P121	2
	Not having authentic materials	P120, P89	2
	Not including new developments in teaching	P157, P160	2
Not giving importance to all skills at the same time	P37, P96	2	
Not including the novel input	P65	1	



	Not being included in the university entrance exam	P90	1
	Devaluing education itself	P145	1
	Beginning language education late	P163	1
Teacher-related problems	Lack of professional knowledge	P107, P123, P124, P126	4
	Not using L2 in the classroom	P135, P148	2
	Not experiencing abroad	P139, P148	2
	Letting the students use L1	P28	1
	Experiencing a lack of willingness to teach	P58	1
		Total	81

Class size is another reason mentioned by the participants which might affect the failure of the students in learning English. P120 reports, “*The classrooms are crowded (40 students) for group work and speaking activities*”. P154 makes it clear by mentioning it as follows, “*In crowded classrooms, English cannot be effectively taught. It is learned by gathering around the same table in groups of a maximum of four people and learning through playing, with a focus on speaking*”. As for memorization, which is the next reason, participants argue that the failure in English is because of the memorization-based lessons without focusing on practicing all four skills. Another reason is exam anxiety. P20 addresses this reason as follows, “*I have never been in favor of English being perceived as a subject to be anxious about exams or worried about getting grades. English should be seen as a fun activity. Speaking classes should be conducted. Teaching through natural listening and speaking, rather than relying on grammar, and allowing them to have fun would have been more successful, in my opinion. Moreover, this would have reduced some of the burden you mentioned*”. The other two comments are similar in their explanations. They propose that English should not be a course and students should not have exam anxiety for English so that they can learn and practice comfortably. When it comes to the lack of practice out of the classroom, participants claim that students do not have the opportunity to use and practice the language out of the classroom. The lessons are based on exams and students focus on how to pass the exam instead of focusing on learning a language and using it effectively and efficiently. In courses, exam English (P143) is taught by teachers. Besides, according to the participants, students think that they will pass the exam after all. In standardized exams, students get more points when they solve mathematics than when they solve English questions. Therefore, they do not pay enough attention to learning English. Two of the participants mention that students are not exposed to the language in and out of the classroom, which might lead to failure in acquiring English. Another reason indicated by the participants is the lack of authentic materials in English courses. P120 states, “*The materials used are not authentic. We should use books that expose students to the language they can use in their daily lives and acquire the culture of that language*”. This allows the conclusion that the new developments in education might influence our way of teaching and learning. Yet, two of the participants argue that their classrooms fall behind following these developments. Therefore, lessons are not appealing to students’ interests and needs. The next reason is about including all skills in an English course but not just focusing on one skill at a time. P37 states it as follows, “*We need to balance speaking, writing, listening, reading, and*

*vocabulary knowledge*".

One of the participants explains the reason why people cannot learn English by mentioning the novel input which is missing in English classrooms. Students might be bored since they are exposed to the same content and topics throughout the years. Another participant feels that since English is not included in the national university exam, students do not pay attention to learning it. According to one participant, none of the courses, not just English, can be taught to students effectively by the teachers because students have lost their respect for the school. Finally, another participant reports since students start learning language late, it might affect their learning process.

As for the category of teacher-related problems, the most mentioned one is the lack of professional knowledge of teachers. The participants believe that teachers' proficiency in English and knowledge about how to teach in English is not adequate, therefore, students fail to learn the language. Also, since language teachers do not use L2 in the classroom, students are not exposed to that language and fail to practice it in the classroom, which explains why students cannot learn English. Two participants report that teachers need to live abroad to be fluent in English. In doing so, they can help students to learn it efficiently. Another participant commented that teachers should prohibit L1 use in the classroom, which might improve students' proficiency. Finally, teachers' motivation to teach might influence the quality of language education.

The next hyper category is *linguistic reasons*, consisting of the categories of L1 related issues and L2 related issues (see Table 3). Under the category of L1 related issues, the most mentioned one is not having enough proficiency in their L1. P19 questions, "*How can you teach English to the children who cannot use their native language?*". As the rest of the comments show, participants agree on the idea that students' proficiency levels of L1 influence their language learning process. If they have a good command of their first language, they might achieve learning another language. Another reason under L1 related issues is about the quality of teaching the first language. One participant argues that teachers cannot teach even Turkish, which also affects learning a foreign language. Another participant states that since the first language of the students is Turkish, they fail to learn English.

As for L2 related issues, P2, P82, and P153 allude to the notion that the order we teach language skills affects the quality of teaching and the success of the students. P2 comments as follows, "*Learning to speak starts directly with practice, just like in infancy. I think if we first teach speaking and then writing, this issue would be resolved. In other words, babies speak first and then write*". Another reason is language structure. The different syntactic features of English and Turkish make the learning process more challenging for the students. Besides, P34 mentions that the written and spoken forms of English are different from each other, therefore, students try to memorize everything, which makes the learning process difficult. Finally, P44 claims that English is a language that can be forgotten easily if students do not practice the language in their lives.

Table 3. Linguistic reasons behind why people fail to learn English

Category	Codes	Participant Codes	f
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L1 related issues	Not having enough proficiency in their L1	P1, P19, P45, P46, P50, P73, P85, P95, P106, P108, P122, P132, P142, P147, P153, P162, P163	17
	Ineffective teaching of L1	P156	1
	Having a different language as a first language than L2	P43	1
L2 related issues	Not learning English as we learn L1	P2, P82, P153	3
	Having a different language structure from L2	P25	1
	Being difficult since written form is different from spoken form	P34	1
	Being a language forgotten easily	P44	1
Total			25

L1 = First Language, L2 = English

Table 4 below provides the information about the personal reasons affecting why people fail in learning English. As seen in the table, there are two categories, namely students' skills and emotional readiness and students' profile. Under the category of students' skills and emotional readiness, the most mentioned reasons are not having the capability to learn a language and lack of interest. For the first reason, P16 states, *"I think it's essential for a child in 5th and 6th grade to like and be interested in a subject to succeed in that class, especially in English-focused classrooms"*. The other comments clustered under this reason show that participants think learning a language depends on students' willingness, interest, and skills. Lack of interest is another reason revealed by the participants. P67 reports the importance of interest in learning English as follows, *"My children are 11 years old, and they have been attending language-focused schools since the age of 2. This year, they have 20 hours of English lessons per week. My daughter enjoys English very much and speaks it beautifully; she speaks English constantly with her father at home. However, my son doesn't like it very much, to be honest. He gets bored quickly. Overall, he's better at German. It's somewhat related to desire, and it's about explaining to the child why they need to learn English correctly"*. The rest of the participants also believe that the more interest a person has in learning a language, the more successful that person becomes in learning it. As for not taking learning a language seriously, all the participants agreed on the idea that people give up easily when they face challenges during the learning process. According to P4 and P70, motivation is one of the factors affecting success in language education. P70 explains it as follows, *"Children need to learn to listen first. And they need to want to learn and make an effort for it. No one can learn something by force. A child who wants to learn and puts effort into it learns very well. A child who hates school, doesn't bring their books and notebooks, and doesn't do their homework, why would they learn? They may learn a few words, but it's superficial. While there are problems with very basic issues like discipline, respect, love, getting along with friends, cleanliness, environmental awareness, and basic morality, lessons are now taking a back seat in this education system"*. P146 and P151 think that students face failure in language education because they resist learning English. P13 states that the relationship between a teacher and a student is another important reason affecting the success of the students. P27 reports that students have prejudices about learning English

because they start by saying ‘I cannot do it’. Finally, P165 explains that people do not read, and they are obedient, therefore, they cannot learn it.

Under the category of students’ profile, there emerged three reasons. The first one is related to students’ behavioral problems. P159 indicates that students are not ready to learn a language since at first, they need to solve behavioral problems such as kicking the doors of the classroom and harming the classroom objects. As for the purpose of learning English, P120 mentions that the missing point in learning English is the purpose and why they need to learn a language. According to P165, another reason is not being active, being critical, and making an effort to be life-long learners.

Table 4. Personal reasons behind why people fail to learn English

Category	Codes	Participant Codes	<i>f</i>
Student’s skills and emotional readiness	Not having the capability to learn a language	P16, P48, P72, P79, P88, P161	6
	Experiencing a lack of interest	P16, P51, P67, P102, P103, P141	6
	Not taking learning a language seriously	P97, P100, P104	3
	Experiencing a lack of motivation	P4, P70	2
	Having resistance to learn a language	P146, P151	2
	Not having good relationship with the teacher	P13	1
	Having prejudice	P27	1
	Not having habit of reading	P165	1
Students’ profile	Having behavior problems before language learning	P159	1
	Having no purpose	P120	1
	Being obedient	P165	1
	Total		25

The final hyper-category is the social reasons behind why people fail to learn English. Under the category of social interactions, there are four reasons mentioned by the participants in the comments (see Table 5). Eight participants state that students do not have opportunities to use English outside of the classroom. According to P80 and P128, to be able to internalize the language and make it part of their everyday life, learners need to use and practice English. Since there is a limited connection with the native speakers of the language, students fall behind in learning and internalizing the language. P54 and P87 state that to what extent students are exposed to the language is a factor affecting their learning process. P138 puts forward that students do not feel any need for having another language.

Table 5. Social reasons behind why people fail to learn English

Category	Codes	Participant Codes	f
Social Interactions	Not having opportunity to practice the language in real life	P77, P119, P120, P31, P144, P148, P150, P167	8
	Not having connections with L2 speakers	P80, P128	2
	Not being exposed to the language	P54, P87	2
	Not feeling a need for a language	P138	1
Culture related issues	Questioning why we need to learn English	P7, P38, P68, P111, P113, P152, P166	7
	Devaluing the culture of the target language	P140	1
	Not thinking like a British	P117	1
Family-related issues	Not having an experienced role model in the family	P55	1
		Total	23

As for culture-related issues, P68 explains this reason by stating as follows, *“This is for the same reason why English children do not speak Turkish”*. P111 states, *“It’s fortunate that we don’t feel the need for English. Look at the colonial countries; they are compelled to speak it. We only learn it when it’s necessary. Not everyone has to know English. I hope it stays this way. I think it’s enough if we lay the foundation”*. As can be understood, people do not know why they need English and the status of English around the world, which means that they are not aware of the instrumental reasons why they need to learn English. P117 says that people need to learn how to think like a British person to learn the language. The final category is family-related issues. P55 says that lacking a role model in the family and the support that family members give might lead to failure in language learning.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Overall, the researchers’ main purpose was to seek an answer why people fail in learning English. One hundred fifty-four out of 198 comments from three online communities on Facebook were analyzed to examine voluntary participants’ opinions about the issue with the help of online posts and comments. It can be inferred from the findings that there are four main reasons, namely educational, linguistic, personal, and social reasons. Educational reasons are the most mentioned ones by the participants. Yet, considering the big picture, the major element affecting students’ success is not having enough proficiency in their L1, which was examined under the hyper-category of linguistic reasons.

In terms of the hyper-category of the educational reasons, overall results indicated that there are two categories, namely educational system, and teacher-oriented problems. The reasons mentioned by the participants that are clustered under these two categories are in line with the findings of Hayırlı (2019). According to that study’s findings, the main problems are the following: weak teachers with bad English, lack of practice (only grammar focused approaches), poor materials, and crowded classes. All these problems emerged in the present



study. Similarly, Coşkun (2016) stated in his study that English courses are grammar-based, which prevents students from practicing the language. In the undertaken study, the same concerns were mentioned by the participants. They suggested that in the courses, teachers need to create an open environment where conversation-based lessons are conducted. In accordance with the presented results, Sawir (2005) and Reiss (1983) also found out that grammar-based lessons might affect students' success and failure. Besides, the findings of Yurtsever Bodur and Arıkan's (2017) study indicated that all four skills should be included in English lessons and more appealing topics and materials should be used to increase students' interest and motivation, which might lead them to learn English better and to internalize what they have learnt. Participants in our study mentioned the same reasons and offered similar solutions for the failures of the students. Coşkun (2016) also revealed that teachers do not prefer to use L2 in the classroom, which affects students' exposure to the language. This finding is consistent with what is found in this study. Mutlu and Kaşlıoğlu (2015) identified that crowded classes, focusing on assessment of the grammar, and inadequate teaching materials are factors affecting the failure, which emerged in the current investigation. Similarly, Alsalihi (2020) also uncovered that crowdedness might have an impact on the students' success. According to Hunutlu (2011), limited lesson hours might influence the learning process. The participants in our study also noted the same reason.

The hyper-category of linguistic reasons includes two categories, namely L1 related issues and L2 related issues. The findings showed that participants believe in the influence of a good command of L1 in learning English. According to Cummins's (1979) Interdependence and Threshold Hypothesis, learning a second language can be achieved only with the help of adequately developed native language skills. In the same work, he proposes that L1 proficiency provides a basis for L2 learning. The first language and the second language are interdependent since they use the same cognitive system. In the present study, most participants point out that the inadequate L1 competence of students might affect students' success in the language learning process. Therefore, they need to have a threshold level of linguistic competence in L1, which might help them overcome the cognitive disadvantages in L2. According to Krashen's (1980) Natural Order Hypothesis, children can learn linguistic forms, rules, and items in a similar order that they learn in their first language. In the carried-out study, participants state that the failure of the students is due to not following the natural order of language acquisition in the classroom, which is consistent with Krashen's hypothesis. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) and Khalilzadeh (2014) suggested that the phonological and orthographic differences between English and the first language might cause failure in the classroom. Therefore, teachers should raise students' awareness of those differences. The present study's findings showed that participants have concerns about these differences.

As for the hyper-category of personal reasons, there are two categories, namely students' skills and emotional readiness and students' profile. Yavuz and Höl (2017) wrote that there are internal and external factors affecting students' success. Teachers, as external factors in this process, play a significant role. By creating a positive atmosphere, teachers might influence students' engagement and performance in the classroom. Gobel and Mori (2007) and Reiss (1983) observed that teachers' responses to the students and the classroom atmosphere are the factors affecting their success and failure in the learning process. Similarly, the results showed that the relationship between students and teachers has an impact on failure. To illustrate another reason, Yavuz and Höl (2017) argued that students' perceptions of learning a language might affect their failure and success. Similarly, Gobel and Mori (2007) and Reiss (1983) pointed out that students' attitudes and motivation might have an impact on the students'

success and failure. In the completed study, participants mentioned a lack of interest and motivation, having prejudice and resistance to learning a language, which are in relation to students' perceptions. Students' profile includes students' behavioral problems, lack of purpose, and being obedient. In line with the present study, Yurtsever Bodur and Arıkan (2017) found in their study that students do not have a purpose to learn English and they believe that learning a language provides no use in their life. On the other hand, since students are passive and obedient in grammar-based classrooms, which hinders them to practice and produce the language, they face failure in English (Coşkun, 2016).

The final hyper-category is social reasons comprising social interactions, culture-related issues, and family-related issues. The results of the study revealed that lack of practice out of the classroom is one of the causes of failure in English. Similarly, Coşkun (2016) and Sawir (2005) stated that students have an opportunity neither to practice their English outside the classroom nor to travel to countries where they can practice. Therefore, the only place where they are exposed to English is the classroom. Yurtsever Bodur and Arıkan (2017) found out that students are not exposed to the target language in their immediate social environment. Consistent with the results of the present study, they also stated that since there are no speakers of the language around, they do not feel any need for learning a language. According to Coşkun's study (2016), cultural unfamiliarity might be the source of failure. In relation to that, one participant also reports a reason such as not thinking like a British person in the present study. Besides, several participants hold the view of cultural dominance such as the idea that learning English means the domination of another country in their own country. The findings of Wang (1993), which are in line with Coşkun's study, revealed that culture is one of the factors affecting students' success and failure in learning a foreign language. Finally, the findings in Yurtsever Bodur and Arıkan's study (2017) showed that not having a role model in the family might affect the failure of the students.

### **Limitations**

Finally, this study has several limitations. The data of this study was collected only via posts on Facebook in a limited time. In future studies, researchers can benefit from longitudinal studies in which both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments are employed. Additionally, conducting interviews with participants could provide deeper insights into the issue. On the other hand, to be able to reach a larger pool of participants and gather more comments, other communities on social media such as LinkedIn, and X might be used alongside Facebook.

### **Implications**

The findings of the current study might suggest several implications for the practice of and the research on language teaching and learning. This study identified that there can be educational, personal, linguistic, and social reasons for not being able to learn a language. Language teachers should be aware of the problems that lead students to failure in learning English so that they can overcome these problems together with the students. Additionally, parents should understand the importance of English language proficiency and actively encourage their children by setting a positive example. Since classrooms are overcrowded and there are limited instructional hours of English courses, integrating technology into English lessons might help students to improve and practice English out of the classroom. In this way, their motivation and interests might be cultivated towards learning a language.



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