

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS
AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UIN AR-RANIRY**

THESIS

Submitted by

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FACULTY OF TARBIYAH AND TEACHER TRAINING

AR-RANIRY STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

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THESIS

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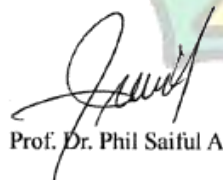
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STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY OF THESIS

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Banda Aceh, 2026

Declarant,



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The researcher is aware that this thesis still has many shortcomings. Therefore, the researcher would be happy to receive any criticism or suggestions from readers. Hopefully, what is written here will be of some benefit, however small, to anyone who reads it.

Banda Aceh, August 4, 2026

The Researcher



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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to understand how international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language barriers in listening, reading, and writing, as well as anxiety in speaking in an academic context, and to identify the strategies they use to overcome these barriers. This study employs a qualitative approach with phenomenological analysis, which aims to describe the structure of an experience as lived by those who experience it. Six participants from Thailand and Malaysia were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed in seven stages following Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological procedure, ranging from repeated readings of the transcripts to verification of the findings with the participants. The analysis yielded five themes. Four themes illustrate these barriers: difficulty listening is perceived as a processing time issue, not a hearing problem, and is further compounded by the use of the Acehnese language and unexplained academic terms; reading academic texts is perceived as a double burden, because the language must first be deciphered before the concepts can be understood; academic writing is perceived as a gap between thinking and writing, as ideas are formed in the native language before being transferred to the target language; and anxiety about speaking is perceived as a social risk that must be managed, arising from real-life events rather than imagination, so that remaining silent becomes a way to minimize that risk. The fifth theme describes five strategies used by the participants: the use of digital technology, assistance from friends and upperclassmen, guided self-directed learning, engaging with the surrounding community, and adapting their communication style. This study concludes that overcoming language barriers is a collaborative effort between international students, faculty, and local students, not solely the personal responsibility of the students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL LETTER	i
STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY OF THESIS.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iii
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF APPENDICES	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Background of the study.	1
B. Research Question.....	6
C. Research Aims.	6
D. Significance of The Study.....	6
E. Terminologies.	8
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
A. Phenomenological Analysis.....	10
B. Language Barriers among International Students.....	13
C. Reading Difficulties as a Part of Language Barriers.....	14
D. Listening Difficulties in Academic Contexts.....	15
E. Writing Challenges in Academic Contexts.....	16
F. Speaking Anxiety in Academic and Social Contexts.....	18
G. Cultural Adaptation and Social Communication.	19
H. Strategies for overcoming language barriers.	20
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	25
A. Research Design.....	25
B. Population and Sample.....	25
C. Instrument of Research.	29
D. Data Collection.....	29
E. Data Analysis.	31
F. Trustworthiness.....	33
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	34
A. Research findings.	34

B. Discussion.	55
BAB V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS.	63
A. Conclusion.	63
B. Contributions and Implications of the Research	66
C. Suggestions.	68
REFERENCES.....	71
APPENDICES... ..	75
AUTOBIOGRAPHY	89



LIST OF TABLES

Table 3 . 1 Profile of Potential Participants.	27
Table 3 . 2 Participants Profile.	28
Table 4 . 1 Themes and Subthemes derived from the Analysis	35



LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1.....	75
Appendix 2.	76
Appendix 3.....	77



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the study

In higher education, the mobility of international students turns the campus into a space where students from different language, cultural, and educational backgrounds come together (Kotamjani et al., 2018), and it can really affect whether students can follow their studies or not (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025). International students often face difficulties when speaking in class, understanding lecture material, and interacting with the social environment on campus. Language barriers don't just come from not knowing enough vocabulary or grammar; students also struggle with accents, how people talk, academic terms, and the new way of communicating in a different culture (Alzamil, 2021; Rahmatin et al., 2026). This can make students nervous, lack confidence, or even remain silent for fear of making mistakes. As a result, many international students become passive in class and struggle to adapt socially and academically.

According to Harjono and Wachyunni (2025), international students in Indonesia often face cultural, linguistic, and psychological barriers when entering a new environment. Therefore, it is not enough to just look at their language ability, we also need to pay attention to how they adjust to campus life and the community around them (Kršmanović, 2020). Academically speaking, language barriers arise when students have to understand course material, read academic texts, write assignments, and speak in front of the class. This may seem simple, but in real life it can be a burden for students as they process a language different from their own while still meeting academic demands.

According to Alzamil's (2021) research, listening is one of the most difficult skills to master because pronunciation, limited vocabulary,

and speaking speed all affect it. The same pattern is also evident in the immediate environment. According to findings by Rahmatin et al. (2026), students at UIN Ar-Raniry have significant difficulty with long, complex sentences when listening, as well as with dialectal variations. However, according to Mudita and Nurfarhanah (2025), international students often experience significant anxiety when they have to speak in public using a language other than their native language. Therefore, language barriers remain a critical issue that requires further research in the context of international students.

Reading is also a big challenge for international students because they must read articles, books, assignment instructions, and texts written in academic language, a language they do not yet fully master. Muliawati et al. (2025) found that international students from Pattani studying at the University of Indonesia have weak reading comprehension skills, particularly in identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meanings. This is considered important because reading is not merely about looking at words but also about grasping the main idea, understanding meaning, and connecting the text's content with prior knowledge. Reading difficulties can also exacerbate other academic barriers, including difficulties in writing and in participating in discussions (Suwanaroa, 2021).

Writing is also a challenge faced by international students. They may understand the course material, but they struggle to translate that understanding into academic writing. According to Gupta et al. (2022), international doctoral students often face difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, argument development, and academic style. This is not merely a language difficulty but is also linked to academic culture, how they structure arguments, and the writing standards set by the university. Consequently, writing challenges impact students' self-confidence, their ability to complete assignments, and the quality of their academic

performance (Tran, 2026). Findings by Muniruzzaman and Afrin (2024) also reveal that the most common obstacles students face when writing academic papers include weak grammar, limited vocabulary, the influence of their native language, and a lack of mastery of the technical rules of writing.

Findings from Ravichandran et al. (2017) also indicate that international students often face challenges in critical thinking when writing at an academic standard. In fact, students understand the course material but find it difficult to express it in written English. Consequently, students take longer to complete academic assignments because they must first translate the material into their native language before translating it into English. This means that language barriers can affect both the academic performance and self-confidence of international students throughout the learning process.

Public speaking anxiety is also a significant challenge affecting the lives of international students. Often, students have ideas but are afraid to express them for fear of making mistakes, being laughed at, or being judged incompetent. Mudita and Nurfarhanah (2025) note that international students may experience public speaking anxiety when speaking in a language other than their native tongue. This aligns with the concept of foreign language anxiety Theory, in which students feel anxious when required to use a foreign language in class, in discussions, or in social situations (Horwitz & Horwitz, 1986). Research conducted in Aceh also shows similar results. Basith et al. (2025) found that the most common form of anxiety experienced by international students is anxiety about communicating during proposal presentations, while research by Fakhrurrazzi et al. (2026), indicates that students' silence in class stems from a fear of being evaluated, not because they are not paying attention.

Previous studies have shown that language barriers significantly impact the academic lives of international students. Halali et al. (2022) explain that because they are not accustomed to using English directly in their daily lives, international EFL students often struggle to understand academic communication. The study found that students had difficulty understanding lecturers' explanations, academic terminology, and class discussions because the listening process was fast-paced and difficult to repeat.

Additionally, the research indicates that students require aids such as gestures, audiovisual media, and a supportive communication environment to facilitate understanding of the language being used. These two studies indicate that language difficulties are not only related to language but also to the psychological and social experiences of students from other countries. Therefore, language barriers can affect students' ability to learn and build social relationships in academic settings. (Halali et al., 2022; Laksmi Ady Kusumorini & Abdul Aziz, 2025). Through phenomenological research, Kusmorini and Aziz (2025) found that Indonesian students in English-speaking countries have difficulty understanding local accents, idioms, and native speakers' speaking speed.

The phenomenon of language barriers has also begun to receive attention at Indonesian universities that accept international students, including Ar-Raniry State Islamic University. In addition to facing challenges in an academic context, international students must also adapt to their environment and to using Indonesian in daily social life. This creates a different adaptation experience from that of students studying in countries where English is the language of daily life. Kotamjani et al. (2018) explain that international students often struggle to adapt to a new academic culture due to differences in language, educational systems, and communication styles on campus. Mulyono et al. (2019) reinforce these findings, stating that language barriers can lead to anxiety, fear of making

mistakes, and low self-confidence when students must interact in academic settings. In addition to these challenges, international students at UIN Ar-Raniry must also understand the communication culture of Acehese society, which possesses its own distinct religious and social characteristics.

Research on language barriers among international students has been extensive, yet several issues suggest that further research is needed across contexts. Most previous studies have focused on specific language skills, such as listening difficulties, fear of speaking, or academic writing, so international students' experiences with language barriers have not been understood as integral parts of their lives. For example, Halali et al. (2022) examined EFL students' difficulties with academic listening, while Gupta et al. (2022) and Ravichandran et al. (2017) emphasized the academic writing challenges faced by international students at Western universities. Although the study by Kusumoriny and Aziz (2025) employed a phenomenological approach, the social and cultural context examined differs from conditions at higher education institutions in Indonesia. Furthermore, most previous research has been conducted in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Malaysia. However, very few studies have examined the experiences of international students at Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Furthermore, previous studies have more frequently used quantitative or mixed-methods approaches. These approaches tend to describe the level of language difficulty without thoroughly examining how students understand these experiences within their academic and social lives. To gain a deeper understanding of international students' experiences at Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, this study employs a Phenomenological Analysis approach. This is because language barriers are related not only to linguistic ability but also to students' self-confidence, anxiety, social interactions, and cultural adaptation in a new

environment. The novelty of this study lies in understanding the language barriers that international students directly experience in their daily lives on an Islamic campus such as UIN Ar-Raniry. This study is expected to provide practical benefits for UIN Ar-Raniry, as its data and findings can serve as empirical evidence to help the university develop programs that better meet the needs of international students. This study also supports UIN Ar-Raniry's internationalization program, which aims to attract more students from various countries, thereby helping the university become better known internationally.

B. Research Question

- 1) How do international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language barriers in using the target language, particularly as they relate to listening difficulties, writing challenges, reading difficulties and speaking anxiety in an academic context?
- 2) What are UIN Ar-Raniry international students' strategies in overcoming their language barriers?

C. Research Aims

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the experiences of language barriers faced by international students at Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh as they navigate their academic and social lives on campus. The main focus of this study is to explore how international students perceive the language barriers they face and the processes of communication, learning, and cultural adaptation in a new environment. This study also aims to identify how language barriers affect international students' academic lives, social relationships, and adaptation processes during their studies. It is hoped that this study will provide a deeper insight into the experience of language barriers within the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

D. Significance of The Study

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study can broaden the discussion of language barriers as a phenomenon that occurs not only during the learning process but also in the social and academic adaptation of international students at UIN Ar-Raniry. It is also hoped that this study will strengthen research on language barriers as interrelated social, academic, and psychological experiences. (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025).

2. Practical Significance

This study is useful for instructors because it can help them understand international students, who often respond slowly, remain silent, struggle with writing, and are less active in discussions. This does not mean that students are not learning, but rather that they face language barriers, academic cultural differences, and anxiety. According to Halali et al. (2022), international students require strategies and support for academic listening, while Gupta et al. (2022) argue that structured writing support is crucial. This can help instructors explain material, provide instructions, offer feedback on writing, and create discussion spaces that are more accessible to international students.

This study is also useful for international students in helping them understand that language barriers are part of the adaptation process, not a sign of failure. They learn how these barriers are experienced and how to overcome them. It is hoped that these findings will serve as a guide for international students in choosing learning and adaptation strategies. (Pratama et al., 2025) Actually, college students have their own ways of dealing with it, such as changing their perspective, calming themselves down, building self-confidence, and improving their speaking skills (Diana et al., 2024).

This study is expected to assist UIN Ar-Raniry in developing academic support programs tailored to the real-life experiences of

international students. Guidance can be provided by addressing common classroom challenges, such as difficulty understanding lecturers' accents and speaking speed, difficulty reading academic texts and writing academic papers, and anxiety students face when speaking in front of the class. (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025) The results of this study can be used to develop more practical academic language support. This research is important and relevant to UIN Ar-Raniry's overarching program to become a university that better meets international standards. UIN Ar-Raniry aims to rank among the top 500 universities in Asia and become a world-class Islamic university by 2029 (*Visi Dan Misi - UIN Ar-Raniry*, n.d.; *Warta Ar-Raniry*, 2026). To achieve these goals, UIN Ar-Raniry needs to attract more international students and ensure they can study comfortably and successfully on campus. This research is also beneficial for the university; by identifying the communication difficulties they face, the challenges they encounter in their studies, the difficulties they have interacting with faculty and local students, as well as the strategies they use to adapt, the university can improve its academic system.

E. Terminologies

1. Language Barriers

Language barriers are communication challenges faced by international students due to limited understanding of the language used in both academic and social contexts. Language barriers can be influenced by limited vocabulary, pronunciation, and anxiety when understanding a foreign language (Alzamil, 2021) .

2. International Students

International students are foreign students currently enrolled at Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh coming from countries other than Indonesia. International students often face difficulties adapting to the academic culture and communication styles in their new educational environment (Kotamjani et al., 2018).

3. Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological analysis is a qualitative approach used to describe how a phenomenon is experienced by the people who actually experience it. Its purpose is not to measure how often something occurs or to test a hypothesis, but rather to uncover the structure of the experience itself, that is the elements without which the experience would no longer be the same (Prabhashini, 2024). In this study, phenomenological analysis is used to describe how international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience language barriers in listening, reading, writing, and speaking, and what meaning those barriers carry in their academic and social lives. The researcher worked based on the participants' own descriptions and set aside her personal assumptions as an Indonesian student who does not face the same barriers, so that the resulting descriptions belong to the participants and not to the researcher (John et al., 2025).



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological analysis is a qualitative approach that studies a phenomenon as it appears to the people who experience it. This approach evolved from Husserl's philosophy and was later adapted by qualitative methodologists into a set of research procedures, as a result, the term now refers both to a way of conceiving knowledge and to a method of data analysis (John et al., 2025). The focus is not on the frequency of an event or the relationships between variables, but rather on the structure of an experience, that is, the characteristics that make that experience what it is for the people who experience it (Prabhashini, 2024).

Three concepts form the foundation of this approach. The first is the phenomenon, that is, what is being experienced; in this study, the language barrier. The second is lived experience, that is, how a person actually copes with it in daily life, through actions, feelings, and their physical presence in a situation. The third is essence, that is, the description that remains after various individual narratives are read side by side. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) emphasize that lived experience is not the same as an opinion. When a student says that a professor should speak more slowly, that is an opinion, when the same student describes the moment when the professor moves on to the next slide while the student is still processing the previous sentence, that is lived experience. Phenomenological analysis is built upon the second type of narrative, that is why its questions typically take the form of an invitation to tell a story, rather than a request to offer a judgment.

In this approach, two schools of thought are generally distinguished. Descriptive or transcendental phenomenology, associated with Husserl and developed as a research method by Giorgi and Colaizzi, adheres strictly to what participants describe and requires researchers to set aside their personal assumptions. Interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology, associated with Heidegger and van Manen, views interpretation as inevitable and incorporates the researcher's own position into the analysis (John et al., 2025; Prabhashini, 2024). This study follows the descriptive approach. The reasons for this are both practical and philosophical, the participants spoke about a difficulty that the researcher, as a local student, had never encountered before, therefore, the safer approach is to carefully describe what they reported rather than describe their words through a framework they do not subscribe to.

Setting aside assumptions is achieved through what Husserl calls an "epoche," which is typically translated in research writing as "bracketing." Bracketing does not mean that the researcher pretends to know nothing. It means that the researcher documents their expectations before and during the analysis, so that these expectations can be identified as they begin to shape interpretations, and this is usually accompanied by reflexivity that is, an honest account of who the researcher is in relation to the participants (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; John et al., 2025). In this study, the researcher noted from the outset the expectation that the main barrier would be English, an expectation not confirmed by the data, as the barrier consistently mentioned by the participants was Indonesian and, underlying that, the Acehnese language.

As an analytical procedure, this study followed the seven steps proposed by Colaizzi (1978), which to this day remain one of the clearest approaches to processing transcripts into descriptions of an experience. These steps include reading each transcript repeatedly, extracting statements directly related to the phenomenon, formulating the meaning of those statements, grouping those meanings into themes, writing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon, summarizing that description into its basic structure, and finally returning to the participants to verify whether the description aligns with what they intended (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). Gumarang et al. (2021) demonstrate that these steps can be applied beyond the field of health sciences, including in educational research, and that their value lies in the effort to clarify for readers the path from the participants' words to the researchers' findings.

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Phenomenological analysis is well-suited to cross-cultural educational contexts for two reasons. First, this approach uses small, purposively selected samples, as the depth of description is more important than the breadth of coverage, and research with a small number of participants who have actually experienced the phenomenon yields more meaningful results than large samples with superficial descriptions (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Second, this approach allows researchers to describe experiences that participants might never have articulated themselves, such as the feeling of being half a step behind in classroom conversations. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) applied this approach specifically to students living in educational and social contexts that were foreign to them, a situation similar to that of the participants in this study.

Therefore, phenomenological analysis is used here as the framework for the entire study. The language barriers experienced by international students at UIN Ar-Raniry are not viewed as a level of proficiency that needs to be assessed, but rather as experiences that take specific forms, they occur in specific settings, with specific people, at specific times, and have consequences that the participants can describe. The subsequent chapters are developed based on this foundation, and the seven steps outlined above are elaborated in detail in Chapter III.

B. Language Barriers among International Students

When someone has difficulty understanding, using, or responding to language in academic and social contexts, this is referred to as a language barrier. The barriers experienced can include weak grammar, limited vocabulary, different pronunciation, speaking speed, different accents, and the difficulty of academic terminology. According to Pratama et al. (2025), the language challenges faced by international students in Indonesia include mastery of grammar, reading academic texts, listening comprehension, and speaking anxiety. This is because students of a new language cannot

communicate fluently, even though they know they must communicate (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025).

Language barriers often arise when students feel afraid, shy, or under academic pressure, as well as due to cultural differences in communication, not just linguistic ones. Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) found that international students studying in an Indonesian environment often face cultural, linguistic, and psychological barriers. Language is always tied to the social and cultural context in which it is used (Tiawati, et al. 2024). Students often misunderstand the use of greetings, formal and informal speech styles, levels of politeness, and how to express opinions to older people.

Language barriers can affect classroom participation as well as understanding of the material in an academic context. Students will find it difficult to read academic texts and prepare for class because those who do not understand the instructor's explanations will fall behind in their learning. Ennin and Manariyo (2023) indicate that students need to understand the language to learn and socialize, as language can hinder their ability to communicate. Therefore, language barriers constitute both academic and social problems (Pratama et al., 2025b).

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis can explain why language barriers can become more significant when students feel anxious. Krashen (1982) explains that an increased affective filter makes language processing more difficult due to anxiety, low motivation, and a lack of self-confidence; thus, emotions and a sense of security can also influence their success in addition to the language material itself. Students will find it more difficult to understand and use the target language when they are afraid of making mistakes, being laughed at or being judged (Halali et al., 2023).

C. Reading Difficulties as a Part of Language Barriers

The reading difficulties experienced by international students are not limited to understanding words but also extend to grasping main ideas, details, and relationships among texts (Suwanaroa, 2021). International students from Pattani studying in Indonesia have weak reading comprehension skills and

struggle to understand main ideas and vocabulary meanings (Muliawati et al., 2025).

According to the theoretical framework proposed by Anderson and Pearson (1984), reading comprehension occurs when readers can connect information from the text with their existing knowledge. Students will find it difficult to understand a text even if they know some of the words, because they lack background knowledge about the topic; consequently, they experience reading difficulties when the text contains contexts they are not yet familiar with (Muliawati et al., 2025). Suwanaroa (2021) notes that reading comprehension is influenced by grammar, vocabulary, personal experience, and understanding. International students need both language skills and knowledge to fully comprehend academic texts.

Reading comprehension is assessed through the main idea, unstated details, stated details, and vocabulary meaning. The ability to identify the core message of a text is called the main idea. Stated details can be understood by identifying information that is clearly written. Unstated details can be understood through the ability to infer information that is not explicitly stated. Vocabulary meaning refers to the ability to understand the meaning of words in context. This indicates that reading difficulties can manifest in various forms and are not necessarily due to students' lack of knowledge of word meanings (Muliawati et al., 2025).

Students often struggle to construct arguments based on academic texts because they have not fully understood the reading material, which makes them anxious when speaking in class because they are unsure of the content. In their study, Gupta et al. (2022) explain that academic writing also requires the ability to understand sources, construct arguments, and develop ideas; thus, reading difficulties can affect writing skills, discussion participation, and the ability to follow academic processes, meaning that reading difficulties are directly linked to writing challenges and speaking anxiety (Tran, 2026).

D. Listening Difficulties in Academic Contexts

Difficulties in understanding spoken language, particularly in academic settings such as lectures, class discussions, presentations, instructor instructions, and formal conversations, are referred to as listening difficulties. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explain that second language listening is not a passive activity but an active cognitive process that requires attention, prediction, monitoring, and evaluation. Listening difficulties can arise when international students do not understand the speaking speed, accent, pronunciation, or academic terms used by professors (Halali et al., 2022).

Listening becomes difficult because students must understand the content while processing the language in real time. According to Halali et al. (2022), international EFL students often face difficulties with academic listening because communication occurs rapidly and is not easily repeated, leaving students feeling left behind when the instructor moves on to the next explanation. Consequently, this directly impacts their comprehension of the material, their willingness to ask questions, and their active participation in class (Laksmi Ady Kusumoriny & Abdul Aziz, 2025).

According to the metacognitive listening theory proposed by Vandergrift and Goh (2012), before listening, students must plan, monitor their comprehension, solve problems when they lose track of meaning, and evaluate their comprehension. Students must be able to manage their processing of auditory information, not merely listen passively, so they do not quickly become flustered when they fail to grasp certain parts of the instructor's explanation.

Listening difficulties are part of the language barriers that can affect the academic experience of international students. Kusumoriny and Aziz (2025) indicate that idioms, speaking speed, accents, limited vocabulary, intonation, and stress pose challenges for EFL students in English-speaking countries. Although the context at UIN Ar-Raniry differs, the difficulties experienced remain relevant, as international students must also learn the language in their new environment (Halali et al., 2022).

E. Writing Challenges in Academic Contexts

Writing challenges are difficulties students face when they are required to write academic papers in accordance with university standards. In their coursework, students are asked to organize ideas, construct arguments, use sources, cite them properly, and write in an academic style, not merely to write grammatically correct sentences. In a study by Gupta et al. (2022), international doctoral students faced difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, organization, argument development, and academic style. Writing challenges can affect grades, the time required to complete assignments, and students' self-confidence; therefore, they should be understood as one of the challenges posed by language barriers (Karakuş, 2025).

In the theory proposed by Lea and Street (1998), titled "Academic Literacies Theory," it is explained that academic writing can be influenced by social practices such as academic disciplines, identity, institutions, and power relations, in addition to technical skills. Academic writing often has unwritten rules; students must understand what is meant by argument, critical analysis, evidence, and structure, but instructors do not always explain these aspects in detail. This can lead to confusion among students when their writing is deemed insufficiently academic (Tran, 2026).

Tran (2026) argues that academic writing needs to shift from being viewed as a set of skills to a set of practices. Students need to understand how writing functions within their academic discipline, how arguments are constructed, and how academic readers evaluate writing; it is not enough to simply be taught grammar, punctuation, and the structure of formal essays. This is important because international students may bring writing habits from their home countries that differ from campus standards in their new country. In this study, writing challenges are considered significant because they are viewed through the lens of academic adaptation rather than merely as language errors (Lea, 1998).

Furthermore, in some cases, students must thoroughly understand the course material but still face difficulties because they require more time to

complete assignments before translating them into English. This poses a challenge for international students, who require more time to complete academic assignments because they must first think in their native language before translating into English. This can affect international students' confidence in preparing academic assignments and participating in other academic activities. Therefore, writing challenges are one of the language barriers that most significantly impact the academic performance of international students.

International students will find it difficult to write reference-based papers because they also struggle to read academic sources; thus, writing challenges are also linked to reading difficulties. Research by Gupta et al. (2022) explains that students need assistance in understanding academic material, so support is necessary from the very beginning. Typically, students first translate ideas from the source language into the target language; consequently, they require more time and may feel less confident. Therefore, writing challenges are part of language barriers because they can directly impact students' learning processes (Karakuş, 2025).

F. Speaking Anxiety in Academic and Social Contexts

The fear, nervousness, or discomfort students feel when they have to speak in a foreign language, or the target language, is known as speaking anxiety. This anxiety is triggered when students have to answer a professor's questions, give presentations, participate in discussions, ask questions, or speak with local peers. Speaking anxiety often causes international students to remain quiet, even though they understand the material or have ideas to share (Mudita & Nurfarhanah, 2025). According to Mulyono et al. (2019), speaking anxiety among international students is influenced by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-efficacy. Additionally, Mudita and Nurfarhanah (2025) found that international students often feel nervous and uncomfortable when speaking a foreign language in public.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale theory, proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), explains that students often feel unsure when speaking,

panic when speaking without preparation, get nervous when they do not understand the instructor, and feel afraid when their peers laugh at their mistakes. This aligns with the experience of international students, who often fear grammatical errors, struggle to choose the right words, and worry about pronunciation mistakes. Therefore, speaking anxiety is not merely ordinary nervousness but a psychological barrier that can hinder academic participation (Halali et al., 2022).

The affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982) also holds true, anxiety and self-confidence can make it difficult to process language input. Students may lose focus when they hear a question or try to answer because they are afraid of being judged. Mudita and Nurfarhanah (2025) show that international students may experience public speaking anxiety because they have to speak in a language that is not their first language. Speaking anxiety is also related to emotions, performance, and the courage to use language appropriately in real-life situations (Mudita & Nurfarhanah, 2025).

In this study, speaking anxiety is understood as part of the language barriers that can affect both academic and social communication. Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) found that fear of judgment, anxiety, frustration, and low self-efficacy can act as psychological barriers to international students' use of Indonesian. Students often feel anxious, avoid asking questions, refrain from participating in discussions, limit interactions with local peers, and speak only with people they consider safe. Speaking anxiety needs to be examined as an experience faced by international students because it is not merely a symptom observed in language classes (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025).

G. Cultural Adaptation and Social Communication

Cultural adaptation is also linked to language barriers, as it involves not only words but also how we use those words in context. International students must understand when to use more formal language, how to address professors, how to ask for help, and how to respond to communication with local peers. Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) indicate that international students in Indonesia often struggle with greetings and politeness levels in the

language. Therefore, cultural understanding is a crucial component of successful communication for international students (Tiawati, et al., 2024).

Kršmanović (2020) argues that during the adaptation process, students will experience integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization. Students find it easier to learn the language and communication culture when they can build relationships with local students. Conversely, students are more likely to choose separation and interact only with groups that share the same language and culture when they fear being seen as outsiders or not being accepted (Handrianto, 2025).

Academic success is also linked to cultural adaptation. Handrianto et al. (2025) found that academic experiences and social support are associated with the cultural adaptation of Indonesian students at a Malaysian university. These findings are relevant because international students at UIN Ar-Raniry also require academic and social support to help them understand the campus environment. Students are more likely to establish communication with faculty and local students if the campus provides cultural orientation, language support, and safe spaces for interaction (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025).

H. Strategies for overcoming language barriers

Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) found that international students employ several strategies to support their language comprehension. They interact with native speakers, use technology, engage with the local community, seek help from peers, and practice self-regulated learning. This demonstrates that students are not passive participants, they actively seek ways to understand the language, attend classes, and build social relationships within their new environment.

International students often use technology to help them improve their language skills. They use Google Translate, digital dictionaries, language learning apps, YouTube, and social media to learn vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation. Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) indicate that international students use the KBBI, Google Translate, YouTube, and social media to aid their language learning and communication. Technology serves

as an initial aid when students are not yet able to understand the target language independently, although technology does not solve the problem. (Seri & Sutrisno, 2021).

Peer support is also a very important strategy. International students prefer to ask their friends for help rather than asking in class. Support from friends can also help boost their confidence in interacting with others and reduce feelings of loneliness. Students often ask local peers or bilingual friends for help with translation, clarification of meaning, and pronunciation. Thus, peer support serves as a language strategy within both social and emotional contexts (Krsmanovic, 2020).

Students often manage their own learning process through self-regulated learning. They assess their understanding by noting down new vocabulary, rereading texts they find difficult, practicing pronunciation, and watching videos. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) suggest that learners can control their thoughts and learning processes. Self-regulation is considered important because they do not rely entirely on instructors or peers. They need to develop strategies to cope with the academic and social demands of campus life (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025).

The study by Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) is relevant to this research as it discusses strategies to overcome language barriers faced by international students in Indonesia. This study identified challenges such as linguistic, cultural, and psychological barriers, as well as strategies including interaction with local residents and communities, peer support, and self-regulated learning. However, that study was conducted at a university in Jambi, therefore, this study can fill a gap in the local context of UIN Ar-Raniry, which has distinct religious, academic, and social characteristics (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025).

The study by Pratama et al. (2025) is also relevant, as it examines the language barriers international students in Indonesia face. The findings of this study include challenges in grammar mastery, reading academic texts, listening comprehension, and speaking anxiety. However, this study still

requires a deeper examination of how students understand these experiences in their social and academic lives. Therefore, this study employs Phenomenological Analysis to understand international students' experiences from their own perspectives (John et al., 2025).

A study by Muliawati et al. (2025) found that international students from Pattani studying in Indonesia have weak reading comprehension skills. This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach that focused more on the level of difficulty than on the meaning of the students' experiences. Suwanaroa's (2021) study also indicates that grammar, comprehension, personal experience, vocabulary, attitude, family support, and classroom instruction can influence reading difficulties.

The studies by Gupta et al. (2022) and Karakus (2025) are relevant to this research because they examine writing challenges that indicate that international students face difficulties meeting university standards. The study by Gupta et al. (2022) emphasizes vocabulary, grammar, organization, support services, and argumentation. Meanwhile, the study by Karakus (2025) found that speaking and writing skills are related to students' personal and social experiences.

Research by Halali et al. (2022), Kusumoriny and Aziz (2025), and Mudita and Nurfarhanah (2025) is relevant to listening difficulties and speaking anxiety. The study by Halali et al. (2022) explains academic listening strategies for international EFL students; Kusumoriny and Aziz (2025) discuss listening comprehension challenges from a phenomenological perspective; and Mudita and Nurfarhanah (2025) examine public speaking anxiety among students.

The research gap in this study lies in three aspects. First, the context of this study is an Islamic university in Aceh, not a Western university or a general university in Indonesia. Second, this study examines language barriers as interrelated experiences, namely listening, reading, writing, speaking anxiety, and cultural adaptation. Third, this study uses Phenomenological Analysis to understand the meanings of international students' experiences,

rather than merely measuring their level of difficulty. Bingham (2023) emphasizes a systematic qualitative analysis process to ensure that the findings are reliable and meaningful.

The conceptual framework of this study begins with international students' entry into a new social and academic environment. They still bring their native language, learning habits, and culture with them. At UIN A-Raniry, they must use the target language to understand and read course materials, write assignments in an academic context, speak in front of the class, and interact with the local community and their new campus environment. Research by Krsmanovic (2020) explains that the relationship between the students' home culture and the new culture can be influenced by the adaptation process undertaken by international students. Language barriers arise from linguistic limitations as well as the cultural adaptation required of each international student in an academic setting (Handrianto, 2025).

All the aspects examined are interrelated and can influence international students' academic experiences (Pratama et al., 2025). These challenges include linguistic, cultural, and psychological barriers; listening difficulties, such as trouble understanding spoken language; reading difficulties, such as trouble understanding academic texts; writing challenges, such as trouble with academic writing; and speaking anxiety, such as trouble speaking.

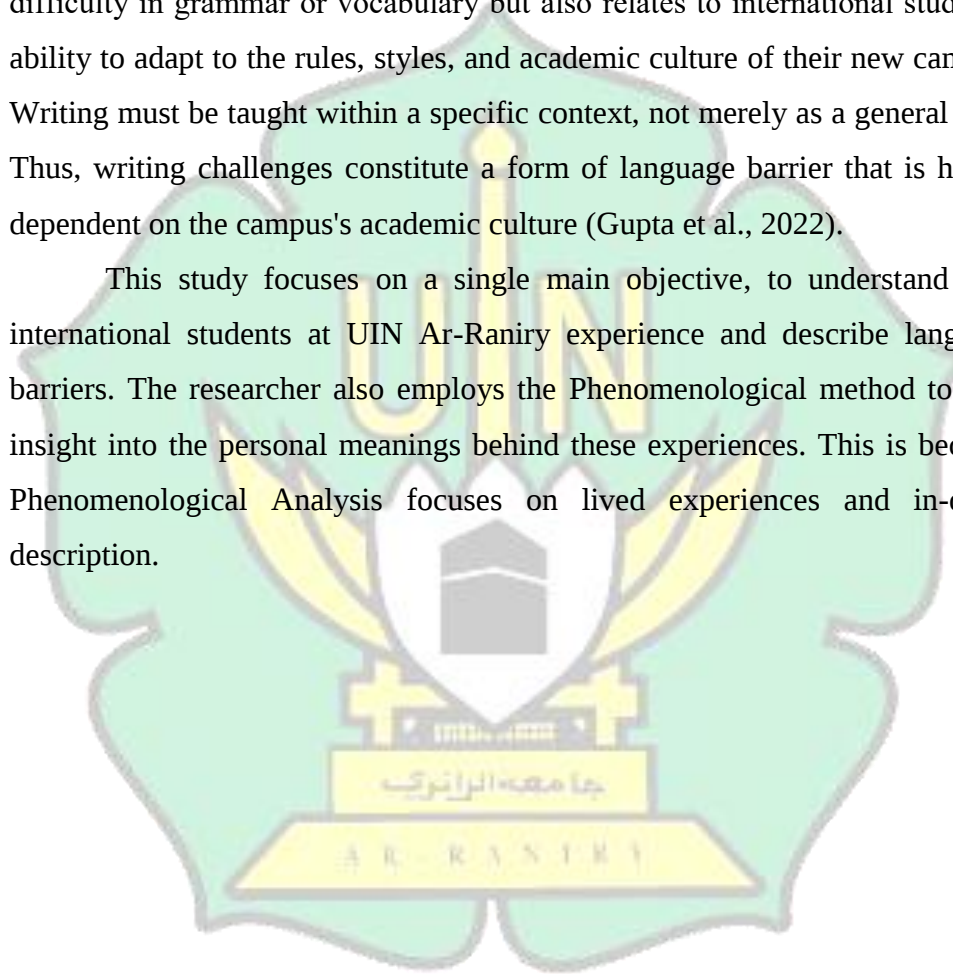
Reading difficulties are linked to writing challenges. When international students struggle to understand academic texts, they will have difficulty constructing arguments and putting their ideas into writing. Research by Muliawati et al. (2025) shows that international students struggle to identify the main idea and understand vocabulary meanings, while research by Suwanaroa (2021) found that reading difficulties are related to vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, and personal experiences.

Listening difficulties and speaking anxiety are also interconnected. When students struggle to understand a lecturer's explanations, they find it hard to respond. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explain that listening requires

metacognitive strategies so students can monitor their understanding, while Horwitz et al. (1986) note that students fear speaking in a foreign language, leading to speaking anxiety. If these two obstacles occur together, this can cause students to become passive in class and avoid academic communication.

Writing challenges in this concept are understood through the theory of academic literacies. Lea and Street (1998) argue that writing is not merely a difficulty in grammar or vocabulary but also relates to international students' ability to adapt to the rules, styles, and academic culture of their new campus. Writing must be taught within a specific context, not merely as a general skill. Thus, writing challenges constitute a form of language barrier that is highly dependent on the campus's academic culture (Gupta et al., 2022).

This study focuses on a single main objective, to understand how international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language barriers. The researcher also employs the Phenomenological method to gain insight into the personal meanings behind these experiences. This is because Phenomenological Analysis focuses on lived experiences and in-depth description.



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative framework with phenomenological analysis. This approach was chosen because the study aims to understand how international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language difficulties in their academic lives, rather than to measure their level of language proficiency. The focus of this study is on experiences such as limited vocabulary, difficulties with grammar, difficulties reading academic texts, difficulties following lecture material, and anxiety about speaking, as experienced by the participants themselves (Prabhashini, 2024).

This study follows the descriptive approach in phenomenology. The researcher adheres strictly to what the participants describe and sets aside their own assumptions through the process of “*bracketing*,” so that the resulting descriptions truly originate from the participants (John et al., 2025). This approach is appropriate for this topic because language barriers are not merely technical shortcomings in vocabulary or grammar, language barriers are something a person experiences in a room full of others, and they hold meaning for the person experiencing them. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) point out that phenomenological analysis is particularly well-suited for describing the experiences of students living and studying in unfamiliar social and educational environments, which is precisely the situation experienced by the participants in this study.

B. Population and Sample

The population of this study comprises all international students currently enrolled at UIN Ar-Raniry. However, because this study employs a qualitative case study design, the required number of participants is not

very large. Phenomenological research places greater emphasis on the depth of experience than on a large number of respondents (Bartholomew et al., 2021). Participants were selected based on criteria aligned with their experiences with the phenomenon under study, specifically their encounters with language barriers in their academic and social campus life (Busetto et al., 2020).

Purposive sampling with criterion sampling was used in this study. Participants were selected because they had direct experience with the phenomenon under study. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because it required participants capable of providing relevant data (Busetto et al., 2020).

The researcher selected 6 participants from among international students, including those enrolled in degree and non-degree programs, as well as undergraduate and graduate students. The rationale behind this is that phenomenological research requires a careful and detailed analysis of each participant's narrative, and an overly large sample tends to result in a superficial analysis (Bartholomew et al., 2021). In phenomenological studies, samples are evaluated based on the richness of their descriptions rather than their size, and small purposive samples are commonly used because the goal is a comprehensive description of a single phenomenon, not a claim about a population (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; John et al., 2025). Ultimately, six participants took part, a number that allowed the researcher to examine experiences of listening difficulties, reading difficulties, writing challenges, speaking anxiety, and social communication in a balanced manner across all cases.

1. Active international students at UIN Ar-Raniry
2. From a country other than Indonesia
3. Has completed at least one semester
4. Has used the target language in academic settings
5. Willing to attend an interview.

Participants must have firsthand experience with the phenomenon under study, making this criterion important. Language barriers experienced by international students arise during classes, when reading academic texts, writing assignments, interacting with local students, and speaking in class. (Pratama et al., 2025). Therefore, this criterion was established to ensure that the data collected is truly aligned with the research focus (Muliawati et al., 2025).

Table 3 . 1 Profile of Potential Participants

No	Criteria	Description
1.	Participants Status	International Students
2.	Number of participants	6 Participants
3.	Origin	Malaysia, Thailand, and other countries if available
4.	Semester	2nd Semester and Above
5.	Study Program	Graduate and Undergraduate
		Degree and non-Degree
6.	Gender	Male and Female

The participants in this study consisted of 6 international students selected using purposive sampling with criterion-based selection. Based on the criteria in Table 3.1, all participants were active international students at UIN Ar-Raniry, were not from Indonesia, had completed at least one semester, had used the target language in an academic context, and were willing to participate in an interview. These criteria are important because this study requires participants who have actually experienced the phenomenon under investigation, not merely those who are aware of it. To maintain the confidentiality of their identities, each participant was

assigned a code from P1 to P6, and all names appearing in the quotations were anonymized.

Table 3 . 2 Participants Profile

Code	Origin	Level	Study Program	Semester	Interview Language
P1	Thailand	Undergraduate	Social welfare	5	Indonesian
P2	Thailand	Graduate	Political Science	Graduate	Indonesian
P3	Malaysia	Undergraduate	Comparative Mazhab and Law	4	Indonesian - Malay
P4	Malaysia	Undergraduate	Comparative Mazhab and Law	4	Indonesian - Malay
P5	Malaysia	Undergraduate	Islamic Family Law	4	Indonesian -Malay
P6	Malaysia	Undergraduate	Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy	6	Indonesian - Malay

Source: primary data, processed (2026)

Based on Table 3.2, the participants came from Thailand and Malaysia. This difference in background was intentionally taken into account because language barriers are not experienced in the same way by all international students. Participants from Malaysia arrived speaking Malay, which is similar to Indonesian, while participants from Thailand arrived speaking a language with a completely different structure and writing.

All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and each participant was informed that they had the right to refuse to answer specific questions or to stop the interview at any time. Some participants mixed both languages when describing experiences that were difficult for them to express. All participants answered all eighteen questions in the interview guide, and at the end of the interview, they were also asked to provide suggestions for future international students as well as for the university. These suggestions

are not treated as separate findings but were be used in Chapter V as the basis for formulating recommendations, as they pertain to the participants' expectations rather than their actual experiences.

C. Instrument of Research

The instrument used in this study is the researcher themselves. The researcher plays a direct role in building relationships with participants, from asking questions and listening to answers to understanding the context and interpreting the meaning of their experiences. To ensure that the research process is not overly influenced by personal assumptions, the researcher is required to adopt a reflective attitude (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023) Throughout the interview and data analysis process, the researcher is asked to maintain openness, sensitivity, and caution (Busetto et al., 2020).

The semi-structured interview guide serves as a supporting instrument in this study. This guide outlines the themes to be discussed with participants while still allowing them the freedom to share their stories openly. This helps researcher maintain the direction of the conversation without limiting the experiences participants share. (Busetto et al., 2020) Interview themes include international students' experiences, listening and reading difficulties, writing challenges, speaking anxiety, cultural adaptation, and strategies for overcoming language barriers (Bingham, 2023).

D. Data Collection

Research data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen because the study required firsthand accounts from international students regarding their experiences with language barriers. This approach allows the researcher to use a set of questions while still providing flexibility for follow-up questions when needed to explore topics more deeply (Busetto et al., 2020). Through this technique, the researcher can delve deeper into the participants' experiences, the emotions they felt, the meaning of those experiences, and the strategies they (Aguas, 2022).

Interviews are conducted face-to-face whenever possible. If participants cannot be met in person, interviews may be conducted via Zoom,

Google Meet, or voice calls. Thus, the interviews remain valid as long as the research procedures are clearly followed (Bingham, 2023). The interview is expected to last 40 to 60 minutes to ensure participants have sufficient time to fully describe their experiences (Busetto et al., 2020).

The researcher explained the research objectives, interview procedures, participants' rights, data confidentiality, and permission to record before the interview began. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate in this study. This consent is a very important part of qualitative research because participants shared their personal experiences (Ahmed, 2024). Participants had the right to refuse to answer specific questions and could terminate the interview at any time without pressure from the researcher (Busetto et al., 2020).

Data collection involves several stages. First, the researcher identifies potential participants based on the criteria. Second, the researcher contacts the potential participants and explains the purpose of the research. Third, the researcher obtains informed consent from the participants; fourth, conducts semi-structured interviews. Fifth, they conduct the interview with the participant's permission. Sixth, they create an interview transcript and assign a code to each participant. This is done to ensure the analysis process is easily traceable and conducted systematically, as the data is organized from the outset (Bingham, 2023). The research data is expected to be accountable and have a clear collection process (Ahmed, 2024).

The language used was adapted to the participants' comfort level, primarily in simple English or Indonesian. This adaptation was designed to help participants explain their personal experiences without feeling burdened by the interview language. The researcher ensured that participants' voices were not lost during data collection and interpretation (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The researcher can preserve the main meaning of the transcripts and, if necessary, provide translations when participants use mixed language (Aguas, 2022).

E. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using phenomenological analysis, which aims to describe the meaning and structure of the participants' experiences, rather than the frequency of the difficulties they mentioned (Sundler et al., 2019). This analysis relies solely on the participants' own descriptions, and the researcher set aside personal assumptions through the technique of bracketing during the reading process (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

Among the various phenomenological procedures available, this study followed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process, which was chosen because these steps are descriptive, clearly articulated, and conclude by returning the findings to the participants (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015; Gumarang et al., 2021). The frequency of the difficulties they mentioned (Sundler et al., 2019). This analysis adheres strictly to the participants' own descriptions, and the researcher set aside personal assumptions through the technique of bracketing during reading (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

Among the available phenomenological procedures, this study followed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process, which was chosen because these steps are descriptive, clearly articulated, and conclude with the presentation of findings to the participants (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015; Gumarang et al., 2021).

1. Familiarisation with the Data

The recordings were transcribed, and each transcript was read repeatedly to understand the participants' stories in their entirety before breaking them down into sections, since the meaning of an experience is rarely revealed on the first reading (Sundler et al., 2019; Aguas, 2022).

2. Extracting Significant Statement

The researchers highlighted statements directly related to this phenomenon, such as P3's remark about his habit of remaining silent whenever the instructor switched to the Acehnese language and noted each statement along with its location in the transcript so that it could be traced back (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015).

3. Formulating Meaning

Each key statement was rephrased according to its meaning for the participants; for example, P4's fear of asking questions of the instructor was formulated as "fear of negative evaluation." The "bracketing" approach is crucial here, as the researcher must stick to what is actually said, rather than filling in the gaps with theory (Neubauer et al., 2019).

4. Clustering the Meaning into Themes

Meanings that point in the same direction were grouped together, so that difficulties related to terminology, accent, and speaking speed became themes of listening difficulty. Each group was then matched back to the transcript, and descriptions that differed from the others were retained rather than discarded (Sundler et al., 2019).

5. Writing the Exhaustive Description

These themes were formulated as comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon, supported by verbatim quotations, covering both the points on which the participants agreed and the points on which their accounts differed (Bartholomew et al., 2021; Morrow et al., 2015).

6. Producing the Fundamental Structure

This description was summarized into a key statement regarding what constitutes a language barrier for these participants, which is the point at which the analysis directly answers the research questions (Gumarang et al., 2021).

7. Seeking Verification from the Participants

The description was returned to the participants to confirm whether it matched what they meant, and any point they did not recognise was reconsidered (Morrow et al., 2015). This places the final judgement in the hands of the people whose experience is described (Ahmed, 2024).

F. Trustworthiness

This study employs a variety of methods, such as credibility, dependability, and confirmability, to ensure the accuracy of the data. Member

checking, which means asking participants to review the researcher's interpretations, helps build credibility. Keeping the research process consistent and organized is one way to ensure reliability. Meanwhile, confirmability means ensuring that the research results are based on the data, not on what the researcher thought. Ahmed (2024) argues that clear procedures and open analysis are essential in qualitative research. Bingham (2023) argues that the process of interpreting data must be conducted responsibly. So, this study maintains data validity to ensure that the results are credible and grounded in solid academic research.



CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.

A. Research Findings

This section presents five themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis. Each theme is presented using the same structure: a description of the participant's experience, verbatim quotes as evidence, the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of that experience, and a transition to the next subtheme or theme. The quotes presented were selected because they best represent the experience under discussion, while similar experiences from other participants were summarized to avoid repetition.

The presentation of these themes follows the two research questions formulated in Chapter I. Themes one through four address the first question: How do international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language barriers in using the target language, particularly those related to listening difficulties, writing challenges, reading difficulties, and speaking anxiety in an academic context? The fifth theme addresses the second research question: What strategies do international students at UIN Ar-Raniry employ to overcome their language barriers?.

Table 4 . 1 Themes and Subthemes derived from the Analysis

No	Theme	Subthemes
1	Listening difficulties in academic contexts	Speech rate of lecturers and classmates, Acehnese as a second layer of barrier; unfamiliar terms, abbreviations, and acronyms; accent and semantic shift between closely related languages
2	Reading difficulties with academic texts	Difficulty identifying the main idea; unfamiliar vocabulary and academic terms in reading material; difficulty grasping implied meaning
3	Academic writing challenges	Choosing appropriate academic diction; writing through the mother tongue first;

No	Theme	Subthemes
		sentence structure and formal register; clarity of the ideas conveyed
4	Speaking anxiety	Fear of making mistakes and of being misunderstood; shame and fear of being laughed at; silence as avoidance; a differing experience
5	Strategies for overcoming language barriers	Use of digital technology; peer and senior support; directed independent learning; mingling with the local community; adjusting communication

Source: Primary interview data, processed by researcher (2026).

1. Language Barriers Experienced by International Students in the Target Language

1.1 Listening Difficulties in an Academic Context

The first theme concerns the participants. When it comes to understanding spoken language in the classroom and in their daily social interactions, all participants touched on this theme, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis. This theme is divided into four subtopics:

1.1.1 The speed at which I speak with professors and classmates

Speaking speed was a challenge mentioned by almost all participants. This challenge persisted even though the participants had lived in Aceh for a long time. P6 stated that speaking speed could also make things difficult for her.

“When the conversation moves quickly, sometimes I understand what’s being said, and sometimes I don’t. If a lecturer or classmate speaks quickly and I can’t understand them, I’ll ask them to repeat what they said” (P6)

P2 describes a slightly different problem. According to him, the difficulty lies in the inability to grasp the gist of the conversation, not in the individual words.

“When the lecturers speak quickly, I have trouble understanding because I can’t grasp the main points. I usually ask my classmates. It would be more helpful if the lecturers wrote the main points on the board first, and then I could ask questions if there’s anything I don’t understand. If it’s a classmate who’s speaking quickly, I ask them to slow down and explain it again.” (P2).

Meanwhile, in P1, he recorded the lecture, and once he got home, he played it back and studied on his own. In P5’s experience, he was able to follow the lecture while still in class, but forgot the content once he left the classroom, so he had to ask his friends again. In P3’s case, he often found himself in the same situation and usually chose to remain silent at first; if the class wasn’t too crowded, he would ask the professor at the end of class.

These four different approaches all convey the same message: listening is not a one-time activity for participants. They still need assistance in whatever form, whether it’s repetition by the instructor, recorded explanations, or a recap from a classmate. For participants, the speed of speech is not a matter of hearing ability, but rather a matter of the time it takes to process what they hear.

1.1.2 The Acehese Language as a Secondary Barriers

The most notable aspect of this topic is the presence of the Acehese language. Participants came prepared to deal with Indonesian, but not with the regional language used in class. P3 described this clearly.

“often find myself in this situation. If the lecturers speak quickly in Indonesian, I might still understand some of it, but if they speak in Acehese, I don’t understand a thing. What I do in those moments is stay quiet.”(P3).

P4 also added that this shift in language often occurs after the relationship becomes closer.

“At first, when my friends speak Indonesian, I can still understand them, but once they feel comfortable or get to know me better, they immediately switch to Acehnese, and that’s when I have trouble following along.”(P4).

P1 also shared a similar experience, stating that he had difficulty when the instructor interspersed the language into the lesson, while P6 noted that an Acehnese accent in Indonesian wasn’t a problem for him, but when the conversation switched to Acehnese, he lost track of the entire discussion. P4 also admitted that after some time, he gradually began to understand Acehnese, but was not yet able to respond to it.

Social familiarity, which usually helps, can actually block access to the language. The more accepted an international student becomes within a social circle, the more likely it is that the conversation will shift to the local language, and once that happens, the international student is once again left out of the conversation. Thus, the Acehnese language is perceived as a second barrier that they did not anticipate before arriving, and it is this barrier that most often leads them to choose to remain silent.

1.1.3 Unfamiliar Terms, Abbreviations, and Acronyms

The next obstacle stemmed from vocabulary that was actually simple for local students but unfamiliar to the participants. P6 described his confusion during the early stages.

“When I first arrived here, I didn’t know what the term “prodi” meant in the context of college. I also didn’t know what “SPP” or “UKT” were. Then, while writing a paper, I came across the term “penanggulangan.” I had never heard that term in Malaysia. After living here, I finally learned that “penanggulangan” means “prevention.”(P6).

P1 also mentioned having difficulty with terms ending in the letter “i,” such as “komunikasi” and “Kualitatif,” which he initially did not understand at all. P2 faced the same issue at the start of the course, with terms like “Komunikasi” and “informasi”, because students from the same country were accustomed to communicating in Malay, so academic terms felt foreign to him. P3 faced a similar problem but in a different form, the habit of abbreviating words. According to him, abbreviations are widely used here, for example, “rapat kerja” is abbreviated to “raker,” so he didn’t grasp the meaning. As a law student, he also encountered various legal terms he wasn’t familiar with, making it difficult to follow the lectures. P4 highlighted the practice of writing acronyms.

“I don’t mean to compare, but in Malaysia, the full form of a term must be written first, followed by the acronym in parentheses, so that in subsequent sentences, only the acronym needs to be used. Here, the acronyms are used right away without first explaining what they mean.”(P4).

P4 also talked about the culture shock she experienced with everyday abbreviations, such as the word “curhat,” which comes from “curahan hati,” and “mager,” which comes from “malas gerak.” According to her, if her friends had used the full terms, she would have understood them. Meanwhile, P2 approaches academic terminology in a more organized way, by writing down every term the professor mentions and then looking up its meaning on campus once he gets home.

The barriers experienced by participants stem not only from language difficulties but also from the shared knowledge they possess. Local faculty and students speak using a number of expressions they assume everyone in the room is familiar with, and it is precisely this shared knowledge that international students lack. Their lack of familiarity stems from the fact that they have only recently entered a different

linguistic environment; it does not indicate a weakness in their language skills.

1.1.4 Accents and Shifts in Meaning among Related Languages

Participants understood the influence of accent in different ways. P1 stated that accents would greatly affect their comprehension, especially when they did not yet have a study partner and lacked confidence. P2 described the habit of mixing languages in a single conversation, which sometimes began in Acehnese and then switched to Indonesian, or vice versa. If they were confused, they would immediately ask for clarification. Meanwhile, P5 and P6 felt that accents were not a problem as long as the conversation partner continued to use Indonesian. For participants from Malaysia, the real challenge isn't the sound, but the meaning. P4 provides a clear example.

“For example, the word “percuma” in Malaysian means “free,” whereas in Indonesian it means “sia sia.” The word “budak” in Malaysian refers to “children,” while in Indonesian it means “servant.” So when I speak with Indonesian students, what I’m trying to convey is often misunderstood because of these differences in meaning. We actually understand what’s being said, but the Indonesian students interpret it differently.”(P6).

P6 also faced a similar situation while writing; he assumed the word “cabaran” would be understood, even though in Indonesia the word “tantangan” is used. P5 also experienced this when he used the word “terkendala,” which his friend did not understand, until he was told that the correct term is “kendala.” As for P3, he stated that he had difficulty following the person he was talking to when they spoke at length.

These findings highlight a group of students rarely discussed in studies of language barriers, where the similarity between two related

languages can create a false sense of security. Participants did not feel the need to double-check words that sounded familiar, yet those words could lead to misunderstandings. The barriers experienced by Malaysian participants more often took the form of misunderstandings rather than a lack of understanding, and these misunderstandings were difficult to recognize because the conversation continued as if it were flowing smoothly.

1.2 Reading Difficulties in An Academic Text

The second theme relates to the participants' experiences when engaging with course reading materials, whether in the form of books, articles, journals, or presentation materials.

1.2.1 Difficulty Identifying The Main Idea

Most participants stated that they were able to identify the main ideas, but at the cost of additional time and the use of assistive tools. P6 stated plainly that he was still able to understand and identify the main ideas, but that he had to read the text repeatedly and often ask the interpreter for help. P4 described a more challenging experience.

“To be honest, I don’t really understand it, I only catch bits and pieces. So, if I want to master a paper or a topic, I immediately translate it into Malay using artificial intelligence. This method makes it easier for me to understand the content, what I need to grasp, and what I need to memorize. Then, for midterm and final exams, I translate it back from Malay to Indonesian using words that are easy for me to understand.”(P4).

P5 admitted that he submitted text to an AI app to have it summarized so that the main ideas would stand out more, and he realized that part of the reason was his reluctance to read. Interestingly, P5 stated that when material is presented orally in class, he is actually able to

identify the main ideas on his own. In contrast, P1 found it more difficult to understand the professor's lengthy oral explanations, even though the main points were brief, and found it easier to understand when having casual conversations with friends because they could ask each other questions.

Reading difficulties are not experienced uniformly and are related to each participant's learning habits, not solely to their level of language proficiency. P2, in particular, takes the most independent approach, first looking up the meaning and definition in a dictionary, and only asking a friend or senior student when they truly do not understand.

1.2.2 Unfamiliar Vocabulary and Academic Terms in Reading Materials

The difficulty in identifying the main idea stems from something more fundamental: vocabulary. P6 mentioned the words *"Daring,"* *"Luring,"* and *"Penanggulangan"* as terms that felt completely new to him because they are not used in Malaysia. P3 gave an example from his field of study.

"When studying civil law: the term "hukum perdata" doesn't exist in Malaysia, so I first looked up the meaning of civil law on Google. After that, I turned to artificial intelligence and asked what civil law is, what its scope of discussion is, and what criminal law means. It was through that research that I came to understand the text's content."(P3).

For P2, because he was used to reading, the first terms he found difficult were political terms related to his major, and he found economic terms even more challenging. P5 mentioned legal terms that he had to look up on Google or ask friends about, while P1 searched for explanations using search engines and artificial intelligence apps for words like *"Kualitatif."*

Academic terminology poses a double challenge for international students. Local students need only understand the concepts, whereas international students must first decipher the language before they can grasp the concepts. Consequently, reading difficulties do not stop at being merely a language issue but extend to the mastery of the academic discipline itself.

1.2.3 Difficulty Understanding the Implied Meaning

Greater difficulties arise when the meaning isn't explicitly stated. P2 described their confusion regarding words with multiple meanings.

"My difficulty arises when a term has two meanings. For example, the words "fungsi" or "fungsional" have two meanings: one refers to utility, while the other relates to the authority of a position. I find myself unable to determine which meaning the term is intended to convey in the text. "(P2).

To address this, P2 asked friends and upperclassmen for advice, and they suggested that he review the module and focus on its main points. P4 openly admitted that distinguishing between the explicit and the implicit was indeed difficult for him, and without the help of artificial intelligence, he might have had to spend days re-examining the same material. P3 faced a different version of this problem.

"If the lecturers read from the text, we can still refer back to it, but if the lecturers explain it in passing, it's hard for us to understand. On top of that, some of our classmates don't take notes, so it's hard for us to ask them for clarification and difficult to study for both the midterm and final exams."(P3)

P1 stated that lecturers sometimes do not convey their meaning directly, so students have to figure it out on their own. When he had not yet mastered Indonesian, he even chose not to attend classes and only

began attending regularly after receiving guidance from upperclassmen. Meanwhile, P6 stated that he could still understand the meaning, especially if it was written in the textbook, a brief response that nonetheless reflects the same tendency.

This pattern shows that participants rely on explicit text. When meaning must be inferred on their own, they lose their footing, and that footing is replaced by digital tools or by peers. In other words, the very ability to understand, which is at the heart of academic activity, is the aspect they most often delegate to others.

1.3 The Challenges of Academic Writing

The third theme concerns the participants' experiences in translating their understanding into academic writing, whether in the form of papers, articles, or exam answers.

1.3.1 Choosing the Right Academic Vocabulary

The first difficulty arose in terms of word choice. P6 recounted his experience while taking a written exam, specifically when he assumed that a Malay word would be understood here when it was not, such as the word “*cabaran*,” which in Indonesia is called “*tantangan*.” P4 faced a more pronounced challenge.

“Previously, I was criticized and reprimanded by a lecturer for frequently using Malay in my papers. To be able to use Indonesian fully, the first thing I did was use artificial intelligence, and the second was to ask my friends. Among us Malaysian students, some are fluent in Indonesian and others are fluent in Acehnese, so we can ask each other for help. My Indonesian friends also helped with word choice, since we were in a presentation group, we would draft the papers first, and then our Indonesian friends would review them.”(P4).

P3 chose a different approach: looking up similar words that were easier to understand in the KBBI, such as when he came across the word *“fluktuatif,”* which his group didn’t understand, and replaced it with a more familiar term. P2 took his senior’s advice that when writing an assignment, he should look up sources and read them first, rather than copying directly. P5, on the other hand, described a different perspective.

“For me, choosing vocabulary is more of a reflex, because in Malaysia I’m used to written exams. So when there’s a written exam here, I just write down whatever comes to mind. However, my writing sometimes still includes words from the Malay language, so it does get a bit mixed up.”(P5).

These three experiences show that, for the participants, word choice is not a matter of writing style, but rather a matter of whether their writing will be accepted academically. Incorrect words do not merely sound awkward; they can lead to reprimands and lower grades.

1.3.2 Write in Native Language First

The second subtheme was one of the most consistent patterns in this study. Participants did not write directly in Indonesian, but rather formulated their ideas in their native language and then translated them.

“When I’m about to write or when I have an idea I want to express, I actually write it down first in Malay. I write down all those ideas, then I translate or convert them into Indonesian using ChatGPT or Google.”(P6).

P4 did the same thing but in a more elaborate way, translating the material into Malay to understand it and then back into Indonesian during the exam. P1 even admitted that he found it difficult to compose his writing without the help of an app. P3 stated that during the written exam, he did not use Indonesian exclusively because he was not yet fully

proficient in writing, so his writing contained a small amount of Malay. P5 first formulated his sentences in his mind before writing them down.

When assistive devices cannot be used, for example, during a written exam in class, a person steps in to take their place. P6 stated that in such situations, he asks his classmates first before writing his answer on the exam paper.

The participants actually had well-formed ideas, but those ideas were expressed in language that the instructor did not evaluate. As a result, it was not the quality of their thinking that was assessed, but rather their success in translating their ideas into language. This explains why some participants felt that their grades did not reflect their actual level of understanding.

1.3.3 Sentence Structure and Formal Language

The next challenge lies at a higher level, sentence structure and language style. P2 recounts his experience writing an article.

“When writing my journal, my sentences felt disjointed and didn’t flow well. Once I realized this was the problem, I made corrections. The reason is that sentence structure in Malay and Indonesian is different; in Indonesian, the part at the beginning sometimes needs to be moved to the end.”(P2)

P2 also explained that his first paper was still written in colloquial language, and he only realized this after a senior student assessed that while the content was understandable, the writing style did not meet academic standards, so he had to revise it. P3 made a candid admission that, up until then, his group’s papers had mostly been copied from books and articles, so he only experienced true academic writing when he took a

computer-based exam that prohibited copying. In his view, the results weren't perfect, but the Indonesian he wrote was still acceptable.

P1 stated that writing is the most difficult part because the writing style here is different, although he is now more fluent thanks to frequent practice. P4 highlighted English terms that have been adapted into Indonesian, such as "*method*," which becomes "*metode*," even though in Malaysia the word "*cara*" is used. P5 briefly noted that the real challenge is not everyday language but rather academic language, and that his long sentences still tend to follow the Malay style. P6 echoes this sentiment, noting that differences in vocabulary between the two countries require him to first search for words appropriate for an academic context, since terms like "*penanggulangan*" and "*tantangan*" are not used in Malaysia. P3 adds that the biggest challenge is unfamiliarity with terminology. Before exams, he can still memorize and write down these terms even if he doesn't fully understand them, but when he doesn't understand a term at all, he struggles to construct sentences in an academic style, whether when answering questions or giving presentations.

The challenges of academic writing for participants extend beyond vocabulary and grammar to include the proper way to structure ideas within an academic culture. Participants are not only learning the Indonesian language; they are also learning the ways of thinking and writing expected by the university where they are studying.

1.3.4 The Clarity of The Ideas Conveyed

When asked whether their ideas came across clearly, the participants' answers tended to be hesitant. P1 stated that his writing was still unclear because he himself did not yet fully understand the material. P4 offered the most candid admission.

“I had the ideas and the knowledge. However, during the presentation and when answering questions from my Indonesian friends, there were parts they could understand and parts they couldn’t. In my opinion, there were more parts they didn’t understand than those they did. So I think my delivery was still unclear, because even though I had the ideas and the knowledge, if no one understood what I was saying, it was because of the language barrier.”(P4).

In contrast, P5 felt that his writing was still understandable and clear enough, even though he wrote short words in Indonesian while his long sentences retained a Malay style. This difference in assessment shows that clarity for participants is not measured by linguistic rules, but rather by the reactions of others. As long as listeners or readers understand, they consider the idea to have been conveyed. Once that response fails to materialize, they immediately attribute the problem to the language, even when the cause may not be the language alone.

1.4 Speaking Anxiety

The fourth theme relates to the participants’ emotional experiences when they have to speak, both in the classroom and in their daily social interactions. All participants touched on this theme, although the degree and nature of the anxiety they felt varied.

1.4.1 Afraid of Making Mistakes and Afraid of Being Misunderstood

The most common form of anxiety is the worry that their message won’t get across. P1 stated that at first, he was afraid of making mistakes and worried that his professor and classmates wouldn’t understand what he was saying, until he eventually practiced his presentation and spoke to himself at home until he felt confident enough to present on campus. P3 described a more specific experience.

“When talking to lecturers. In my experience, there have been several times when I’ve phrased myself incorrectly, causing the lecturers to misunderstand my intention, even though what I meant was simple. Because of that, I am indeed afraid of being misinterpreted. For example, I

asked for my grade to be adjusted, but the lecturers thought I was asking for my grade to be lowered.”(P3).

P6 described a similar concern in a more subtle way. that every time he was about to speak, he had to think first, and sometimes the instructor needed to clarify what he meant. According to him, the situation was alleviated because most of the instructors in his program had studied in Malaysia, so when he struggled to express himself, they helped explain it in Indonesian. P3’s experience shows that the participants’ anxiety about speaking does not stem from imagination, but from real events that have previously caused them harm. After being misunderstood once, caution becomes understandable, and it is that very caution that subsequently limits their courage to speak.

1.4.2 A Sense of Embarrassment and Fear of Being Laughed at

The second form is social in nature. Namely, feeling embarrassed in front of classmates. P3 stated that she felt embarrassed and worried that her speech would be laughed at because she was not yet fluent in Indonesian, and she was concerned that her Indonesian classmates would think she was strange. P5 described this in greater detail.

“It’s more a feeling of embarrassment, because I’ll get teased later. It’s not really a matter of low self-confidence; what I’m afraid of is that my slip of the tongue will be brought up again when I meet my friends, and then that wrong question will be repeated over and over to make fun of me.”(P5).

P5 added that when speaking in front of a crowd, he feels shaky and nervous, which makes him stutter easily, and sometimes he loses control so much that things he shouldn’t say slip out. P6 shared an experience with two aspects. According to him, he is indeed a little shy, but some students are actually eager to learn and ask him about the meaning of words they don’t understand. Even so, there are also some who often laugh at the way he speaks. As for P4, he experienced the most

severe form of this because the reprimand actually came from a professor in front of a large audience.

“There are times when the lecturer is lecturing that I almost give up and ask myself why I’m studying here, and why I find it so hard to understand. Sometimes the lecturer says that I’ve been here a long time but am still like this, and he says it in front of a large crowd, in front of my Indonesian friends, “(P4).

Quote P4 shows that anxiety about speaking can extend beyond language issues to the point of causing participants to doubt their decision to pursue their studies. At this point, language barriers no longer merely hinder communication but begin to influence how participants view themselves as students.

1.4.3 Silence as a Form of Avoidance

When anxiety arose, the participants developed similar coping strategies, namely minimizing situations that caused anxiety. P3 chose to speak briefly and convey information bit by bit to minimize mistakes. P4 described himself as a quiet person who only speaks when he is absolutely certain, and he has a distinctive habit during question-and-answer sessions.

“Whenever there’s a paper presentation, there’s always a Q&A session. So, when I want to ask the presenter a question, someone else has to ask first, and only then do I ask. I feel more comfortable doing it that way because if I’m the first to ask, I’m afraid my classmates won’t understand. This happened often last semester, I’d ask one thing, but they’d answer something else, which was confusing” (P4).

P1 took a different approach: conveying their message to a friend who understands Malay, who would then relay it to the instructor. P5 also waited for their friend to respond and pay attention first before continuing with what they wanted to say, adding that this lack of confidence mainly arises when speaking with members of the opposite sex. P6 took a more organized approach, preparing brief notes before the presentation so he would know what to say and not stray from the main topic. According to

him, talking with friends feels normal, but speaking in front of a large audience makes him feel less confident, even though he still has to do it.

Participants continue to participate, but by placing another person as a buffer between themselves and the classroom. As a result, their participation appears passive from the outside, even though what is actually taking place is the management of fear.

Phenomenological analysis does not prioritize uniformity; therefore, narratives that differ from one another are reported alongside similar narratives as part of the same theme. Among the six participants, only P2 reported not experiencing anxiety while speaking.

diverse experiences. Among the six participants, only P2 reported not experiencing anxiety when speaking.

“I rarely feel lacking in confidence. My principle is to step forward first; I don’t worry too much about whether I’m right or wrong, the important thing is to have the courage to speak up. If a lecturer calls on me to come to the front to explain material, I haven’t had a chance to read or haven’t yet understood, I’ll tell the lecturer frankly that I don’t understand it yet.”(P2).

Nevertheless, P2 still has concerns, namely, that other students might not fully understand what he says, whereas he feels confident that the professor will understand him. He also acknowledges that during presentations he usually reads from a script, although on several occasions he has been asked to speak without preparation. This shows that his confidence does not come naturally but is supported by thorough preparation. This difference in attitude is closely tied to his background and experiences. Before starting college, he took Indonesian language classes with upperclassmen for one to two months, where he learned the basics such as the alphabet, writing, reading, and an introduction to vocabulary and terminology, and he was also active in student organizations.

Case P2 is therefore not an exception that undermines the findings, but rather a clue as to what might reduce speaking anxiety among other international students: language preparation before classes begin and participation in activities that require speaking in front of an audience.

1. Strategies Used by International Students to Overcome Language Barriers

The fifth theme addresses the second research question. All participants stated that they were not merely passive recipients of the circumstances they faced. They developed various strategies to keep up with class and build social relationships.

2.1 The Use of Digital Technology

The most frequently mentioned strategy was the use of digital applications, ranging from KBBI, Google, and ChatGPT to Gemini. P1 uses all three and asks for explanations in Malay for words or sentences they don't understand. P3 looks up unfamiliar words on Google and then compares their meanings in Malay using ChatGPT, and they find the app very helpful. P4 uses ChatGPT and Gemini while watching Indonesian-language movies and news to understand how people express themselves. P6 divides their usage by purpose. Google and ChatGPT for academic needs, and TikTok to look up slang terms, they believe these apps are very helpful in improving their Indonesian. This distinction is interesting because it shows that participants are aware of the need to master two language varieties simultaneously. The academic variety and the colloquial variety.

However, not all participants understood technology in the same way. P2, in fact, refused to use it.

"I don't use ChatGPT, not even for my thesis, because, in my view, some of its answers are correct, but others are wrong, or the sentence structure is flawed, so it doesn't provide any real insight for me."(P2).

Instead, P2 uses the KBBI and looks up word meanings in it because the dictionary includes example explanations. At first, he used a printed dictionary, then switched to a dictionary app on his cell phone. P5 falls

somewhere between these two approaches: he uses the app but feels that the explanations provided are sometimes incomplete and awkward.

This difference in attitude shows that technology serves as a shortcut that provides temporary relief, but the participants themselves realize that such shortcuts do not always lead to understanding. It is worth noting that P2, the only participant who rejected these tools and replaced them with regular reading of books, was actually the most confident participant in both speaking and writing.

2.2 Peer Supports

The second strategy is to ask for help from those closest to you. P1 described his habit of studying with friends at a coffee shop after class and reviewing the assignments they had just discussed. P2 found that having many group assignments helped lighten the load of material he had to present. P3 frequently asked questions of upperclassmen as well as program administrators and leaders, and he believes those questions improved his Indonesian. P5 described a distinctive way of asking questions.

“When asking for help with language, I usually explain what I want to say first, then ask if there’s a similar word in Indonesian. If there is, that’s fine, if not, I look it up on Google. Take the word “kendala,” for example. At first, I said “terkendala,” because that’s how it’s said in Malaysia. My friend didn’t understand, so I explained what I meant, and only then did he tell me that the term is “kendala.”(P5).

Help from friends also came in the form of proofreading, as mentioned by P4 regarding an Indonesian friend who edited his group’s paper, as well as in the form of oral translation, as done by P1 during the presentation. P6 took the most practical approach. Bringing along a friend who was fluent in Acehnese whenever he had to go to the market, since most sellers speak Acehnese, and he did the same on campus whenever necessary. It should be noted that not all participants found it easy to ask for help. P4 stated that he rarely asked for help and preferred to solve problems on his own using artificial intelligence.

“I’ll look up any words I don’t understand right away using AI, because it’s not practical to ask the lecturers about each one individually. I’m worried the lecturers might lose focus on teaching if they have to re-explain material I don’t understand. So, I took the initiative to use AI on my own.”(P4).

This statement shows that reluctance to ask questions does not always stem from shyness, but also from a reluctance to inconvenience others. Peer support, therefore, is not always automatically available. It depends on how comfortable participants feel about putting themselves in the position of the one asking.

2.3 Guided Self-Directed Learning

The third strategy is self-directed learning. P2 takes the most systematic approach, noting down every term the professor mentions and looking up its meaning at home, as well as reading two to three books each month, primarily books related to his field of study and history books.

“At first, I just read them without necessarily understanding everything, but that still had an impact on my Indonesian language skills, since the books were in Indonesian. That’s how I became proficient in standard Indonesian and written Indonesian.”(P2).

P1 learns through books, music, movies, and apps, and records lectures to review at home. P5 reads Indonesian-language manga and manhwa and watches anime with Indonesian subtitles, and believes that these habits are what help him not feel the language barrier too much in everyday life. P4 watches Indonesian-language movies and news to pick up on how people express themselves, while P6 watches movies and listens to Indonesian-language songs to expand their vocabulary and learns from everyday conversations with friends. As for P3, they rely on an Indonesian language class they took for one month at the UIN Ar-Raniry Language Center, as well as the habit of asking people around them questions. It should be noted that, according to P3, this course is no longer offered to the

class of 2025, so newly admitted international students face greater challenges.

This variety of sources shows that participants use materials they find enjoyable as a starting point. They do not view language learning as an additional task, but rather integrate it into activities they genuinely enjoy, and it is precisely for this reason that these activities can continue over time without feeling like a burden.

2.4 Mixing With The Local Community

The fourth strategy is socializing. P1 stated that he actually rarely socializes with fellow Thai students and instead spends more time mingling with local residents.

“I socialize a lot so I can speak Indonesian; that’s how I’ve learned the slang. If there’s a word I don’t know, my friends usually laugh and then teach it to me. My friends from Aceh sometimes teach me strange things, and sometimes they don’t; little by little, they teach me.”(P1).

P2 followed a similar path. At first, he communicated in Malay because most people in Aceh still understood it, later, he frequently participated in community service activities and joined student organizations because these activities gave him the opportunity to practice speaking. P3 stated that the more he spoke with the community, the better his Indonesian became.

In contrast, P4 and P5 acknowledged that they rarely socialize with others. P4 felt that such interactions did not have much impact on him because the local community mostly speaks Acehnese, a language he has not yet mastered. P5 stated that he lives in a rented house and usually only exchanges greetings when necessary.

“My vocabulary actually grows when I’m asked a question first, because if I’m not asked, I don’t ask either.”(P5).

P6 falls between these two groups. He is accustomed to exchanging greetings and having brief conversations with his neighbors, and when he goes to the market, vendors usually ask where he is from because they hear

him speaking a different language. In his view, it is his friends and neighbors who have helped him the most with his Indonesian, since they often converse with him in Indonesian. This comparison reinforces the previous description. The participants with the widest social circles, namely P1, P2, and P3, experienced the fewest language barriers, while participants who maintained social distance tended to rely on digital aids for longer periods. Social interaction, therefore, is not merely a consequence of language ability but also a determining factor in whether that ability develops.

2.5 Adjusting communication styles

The final strategy is a direct one: steering the conversation so that it remains easy to follow. P6 asks the person they're speaking with to repeat themselves and prepares brief notes before the presentation. P2 asks the instructor to write the main points on the board and asks their classmate to speak more slowly. and P3 raises their hand at the end of class to ask for clarification if the class isn't too large, and asks the person they're speaking with not to use Acehnese or to respond in Malay.

P3 adds an important observation.

"Lecturers who understand the situation usually immediately realize there are Malaysian students in the class and then adjust their teaching style to accommodate the international students."(P3).

This suggests that the success of the participants' strategies does not entirely depend on them alone. Some strategies can only work if others, particularly professors and local peers, are willing to respond. Thus, strategies for overcoming language barriers are essentially a collaborative effort, not solely the personal responsibility of international students.

B. Discussion

This section discusses the research findings by relating them to the theory and previous research outlined in Chapter II. To keep the discussion focused, the analysis is organized according to the two research questions posed in Chapter I. The first section discusses the findings that address the

first research question: how international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language barriers in relation to listening difficulties, reading difficulties, writing challenges, and speaking anxiety in an academic context. The second section discusses the findings that address the second research question: the strategies they use to overcome these barriers.

1. How the Participants Experienced Language Barriers

The first research question is: How do international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language barriers in using the target language, particularly those related to listening difficulties, writing challenges, reading difficulties, and speaking anxiety in an academic context? The findings from the first through fourth themes answer this question, and the discussion is outlined below in the order of the skills mentioned in the research question.

a. Listening Difficulties are understood as a processing issue, not a hearing problem

The findings regarding speaking speed align with Alzamil (2021), who states that listening is a difficult skill to master because it is influenced by pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and speaking speed. These findings also support Halali et al. (2022), who explain that the listening process occurs rapidly and is difficult to repeat, so students need supportive tools to understand the language being used. The participants' habits of recording lectures, asking for repetitions, asking lecturers to write down key points, and asking peers for clarification can be understood as metacognitive strategies, as described by Vandergrift and Goh (2012), that is, learners' efforts to monitor and control their own comprehension processes.

In relation to the research question, these findings show that participants did not understand their difficulty in listening as a weakness in their language ability, but rather as a lack of time to process what they heard. This description is important because it has direct implications for the type of assistance they need, namely, a second chance, rather than a simplification of the material.

This study also highlights an aspect that has not been widely discussed: the presence of regional languages in the classroom. Kusumoriny and Aziz (2025) found that Indonesian students struggled to understand the accents, idioms, and speaking speed of native speakers, however, the context of this study is different because the participants were not merely confronted with accents but faced a shift to an entirely different language. The Acehese language served as a second barrier that participants had not anticipated before arriving, and it was this barrier that most often led them to remain silent. The finding that this shift actually increased as familiarity grew demonstrates that social adaptation and linguistic access do not always proceed in tandem, as noted by Handrianto (2025) regarding the complexities of cultural adaptation among international students.

b. Reading Difficulties Are Seen As A Double Burden

The findings regarding difficulties in identifying main ideas and understanding vocabulary reinforce the results of the study by Muliawati et al. (2025), which found that international students have weak reading comprehension skills, particularly in identifying main ideas and understanding the meaning of vocabulary. These findings are also consistent with Suwanaroa (2021), who identified vocabulary, grammar, and personal experience as factors that influence reading difficulties.

In line with the research question, what needs to be emphasized is not merely the existence of these difficulties, but rather how participants understand them. They view reading as a multi-layered task, involving first deciphering the language before arriving at the scientific concepts. Consequently, reading difficulties do not stop at being a language issue but extend to the mastery of the academic discipline. The most challenging aspect is implied meaning, and it is precisely in this area that the act of description, which is the very core of academic activity, is most frequently delegated to digital tools or peers.

c. The Writing Challenges are Understood as The Gap Between Thinking and Writing

The connection between reading and writing is evident in this study. The participants who had to translate reading materials into their native language in order to understand them were the same participants who later had to translate their ideas back into the target language when writing. This two-way pattern demonstrates that reading difficulties and writing challenges are not two separate issues but rather a single process that is interrupted midway, as noted by Ravichandran et al. (2017) regarding students who required more time because they had to translate the material into their native language before rewriting it.

As for difficulties with sentence structure and formal register, these are best explained through Lea and Street's (1998) perspective on academic literacies, namely that writing is not merely a matter of grammatical skill, but rather the ability to adapt to the rules, styles, and academic culture of the university. The experience of P2, whose writing was assessed as not yet meeting academic standards even though the content was understood, clearly illustrates this point, and this is also consistent with Gupta et al. (2022) and Kotamjani et al. (2018), who frame writing challenges as issues of academic culture. P4's acknowledgment that their ideas were present but not effectively conveyed also supports Karakuş (2025) regarding the connection between speaking and writing skills and students' personal and social experiences.

In relation to the research question, the participants' description of the challenges of writing can be summarized as follows. What the instructors evaluate is not the quality of their ideas, but rather the success of the language transfer process. It is this description that explains why some participants felt that their grades did not reflect their actual level of understanding.

d. Speaking Anxiety is Perceived as A Social Risk

The findings regarding fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and the tendency to remain silent reinforce Horwitz and Horwitz's (1986) concept of foreign language anxiety and are consistent with Mudita and Nurfarhanah's (2025) findings on public speaking anxiety among international students, as well as with Mulyono's (2019) findings on factors that cause foreign language anxiety at Indonesian universities. These findings also support the application of Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis in the context of Islamic religious universities in Indonesia, namely that emotional factors can hinder language acquisition even when language input is available.

In line with the research questions, this study shows that participants do not understand speaking anxiety as a fear that arises on its own, but rather as an assessment of risks they have previously experienced, namely misunderstandings with professors, ridicule from peers, and reprimands in front of large groups of people. Case P4 clearly illustrates the functioning of this affective filter, as the lecturer's reprimand did not improve the participant's language proficiency but instead increased their reluctance to speak. Conversely, Case P2 demonstrates a situation where the filter is low, specifically when language preparation before class and involvement in student organizations enabled the participant to speak confidently without overly worrying about being right or wrong. A comparison of these two cases shows that differences in speaking confidence among participants are not entirely determined by their level of language proficiency but rather by their prior experiences and the classroom environment they encounter, as also noted by Krsmanovic (2020) regarding the fears of first-year international students.

e. The Four Barriers are Experienced As One Connected Difficulty

The first research question listed these four skills in sequence, but the findings of this study indicate that participants did not experience them in isolation. Difficulties with listening limited their comprehension, a

narrower comprehension made writing more difficult; difficulties with writing and speaking increased their anxiety, and anxiety caused them to practice less frequently, which caused these barriers to persist longer. This interrelationship is consistent with Pratama et al. (2025), who identified linguistic, cultural, and psychological barriers as factors that influence one another rather than operating in isolation.

Reading these four themes together also reveals that the obstacles faced are not the same for every participant, and that the differences lie in the nature of these obstacles, not their severity. For participants who have difficulty understanding, this issue is apparent to those around them and is usually met with patience. For participants who face difficulties due to being misunderstood, the problem is not visible, because what is being judged is not their language proficiency but rather the self-image they project. P6's observation that Malay and Indonesian are similar enough for him to manage them leads to the same conclusion, since it is precisely that similarity that causes misunderstandings for other participants. Therefore, the answer to the first research question can be formulated as follows: international students at UIN Ar-Raniry describe language barriers not as personal shortcomings but as a condition that leaves them half a step behind, both in the classroom and in social interactions.

2. Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers

The second research question is: What strategies do international students at UIN Ar-Raniry use to overcome the language barriers they face? The findings in the fifth theme answer this question, and the discussion is outlined below.

a. Consistent with Previous Research

The five strategy groups identified in this study align with the findings of Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) regarding technology use, interaction with native speakers, community engagement, peer support, and self-directed learning. The role of peer support as both a social and

emotional buffer also reinforces Krsmanovic (2020), while the participants' habits of noting down new terms, rereading difficult texts, and replaying lecture recordings reinforce Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) views on self-regulation in learning. These findings also confirm that international students are not passive recipients of circumstances but rather active agents seeking ways to keep up with their coursework.

b. Technology as An Initial Tool, Not A Solution

This study found that technology was not understood the same way by all participants. Most viewed it as a primary aid, but P2 refused to use it because they felt its answers were not always correct, and P5 felt that the explanations provided sometimes seemed incomplete. Interestingly, P2, who substituted technology with regular reading, was actually the participant who was most confident in both speaking and writing. This reinforces the view of Seri and Sutrisno (2021) that technology serves as an initial aid when students are not yet able to understand the target language independently, rather than a solution to the problem itself. In relation to the second research question, this implies that the number of strategies employed does not in itself indicate success; what matters is whether the strategies lead to understanding or merely complete the task.

c. Social Strategy As The Most Decisive Strategy

Among these various strategies, social interaction appears to be particularly helpful. Participants with broader social networks tend to report fewer language barriers. Participants with the widest social circles, namely P1, P2, and P3, experienced the fewest language barriers, whereas participants who maintained social distance tended to rely on digital tools for longer periods. These findings align with Handrianto (2025) regarding the link between cultural adaptation and academic success, and reinforce Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) on the importance of interaction with native speakers and engagement with the community. Social interaction, therefore, is not merely a consequence of language proficiency but also a determining factor in whether that proficiency develops.

d. Strategies That Depend On The Other People's Response

Some of the participants' strategies can only work if the other party is willing to respond. Requests for the instructor to repeat an explanation, write down key points, or refrain from using the Acehnese language are strategies whose success lies in the hands of the instructor, not the students. P3's observation that instructors who understand the situation usually adjust their teaching methods immediately illustrates this point. Thus, the answer to the second research question goes beyond a list of strategies used by participants, it also encompasses the fact that some of these strategies are reciprocal. Overcoming language barriers is essentially a joint effort between international students, instructors, and local students, not solely the personal responsibility of international students.

e. Differences in Strategies Based on Participants' Linguistic Backgrounds

This study also shows that the similarity between two related languages does not always make things easier. Participants from Malaysia did indeed understand everyday conversations more quickly than participants from Thailand, so their strategies were more focused on adjusting vocabulary and translating written text. In contrast, participants from Thailand adopted a more fundamental strategy: specifically studying Indonesian for several months before actually attending classes. This difference indicates that language support programs for international students cannot be standardized, as their starting points are inherently different. This aspect has not been extensively discussed in previous research, which generally compares languages that are linguistically distant, and thus represents one of the contributions of this study to the examination of language barriers in Indonesian higher education settings.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS.

A. Conclusion

This study aims to understand and describe the language barriers experienced by international students at UIN Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh, as well as the strategies they use to overcome them. This study employs a qualitative approach using the Phenomenological Analysis method with six participants from Thailand and Malaysia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed in seven stages, as described in Chapter III. Based on this process, the study identified five themes that address the two research questions posed in Chapter I.

1. How the Participants Experienced Language Barriers

The first research question concerns how international students at UIN Ar-Raniry experience and describe language barriers in using the target language, particularly those related to listening difficulties, reading difficulties, writing challenges, and speaking anxiety in an academic context. The research findings reveal four key points.

First, participants understood listening difficulties not as a hearing problem, but rather as a matter of processing time. The speaking speed of lecturers and peers caused them to miss the main points of the discussion, so they needed a second chance in the form of repetition, recordings, notes on the board, or explanations from peers. This barrier was compounded by the presence of the Acehese language in lecture halls and social interactions, which served as a second layer of barriers that participants had not anticipated before arriving. Interestingly, the participants also reported that their use of regional languages became more frequent as they became more familiar with their social environment. This sometimes created additional barriers to understanding. In addition, academic terms, abbreviations, and acronyms used without explanation cause participants to

fall behind, not merely because of their general language proficiency, but also because they are unfamiliar with because they are not yet familiar with some of the academic terms and abbreviations frequently used by professors and other students.

Second, the difficulty of reading academic texts is perceived as a double burden. Participants must first decipher the language before grasping the academic concepts, leading them to read repeatedly or translate the reading material into their native language. The greatest difficulty arises when meaning is not explicitly stated, and it is in these instances that participants most often rely on digital tools or peers to understand the text.

Third, the challenge of academic writing is perceived as a gap between thinking and writing. Participants formulate ideas in their native language and then transfer them to the target language; As a result, participants felt that difficulties in language transfer could affect how clearly their ideas were conveyed and understood in academic writing. This difficulty also extends to higher-level aspects, such as sentence structure and formal language usage, indicating that participants are not only learning Indonesian but also learning the ways of thinking and writing expected by the campus's academic culture.

Fourth, anxiety about speaking is perceived as a social risk that needs to be managed. This anxiety does not stem from imagination, but from real events such as misunderstandings with professors, ridicule from peers, or reprimands in front of a large audience. To mitigate these risks, participants speak briefly, wait for others to speak first, ask friends to convey their intentions, prepare notes before a presentation, or choose to remain silent. Although this behavior may seem passive, the participants use it as a way to cope with their anxiety. However, not all participants experience this, and these differing experiences provide an important insight: that preparing one's speech before class and engaging in activities that require speaking can reduce this anxiety.

These four findings are also connected. Difficulties in listening affected participants' understanding, which could make writing more difficult. Difficulties in writing and speaking could also increase anxiety and reduce their willingness to practice. The participants experienced them as a single, interconnected set of difficulties: difficulties in listening limited their understanding; that limited understanding made writing more difficult; Difficulties with writing and speaking increase their anxiety, and that anxiety can make them less willing to practice or participate, which can contribute to the persistence of those difficulties.

2. Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers

The second research question concerns the strategies used by international students at UIN Ar-Raniry to overcome the language barriers they face. This study identified five groups of strategies: the use of digital technology such as the KBBI, Google, and artificial intelligence apps, support from peers and upperclassmen in the form of rephrasing, translation, and editing of written work, guided self-study through reading books, noting down terms, recording lectures, and utilizing Indonesian-language films, news, and recreational reading materials, integrating with the local community and participating in organizational activities; and adapting their communication style by asking for repetition, requesting that key points be written down, or asking the person they are speaking with not to use the local dialect.

These five strategies show that international students actively strive to overcome the language barriers they face. However, three important points can be seen from these findings. Technology provides only temporary relief and does not always lead to understanding, as acknowledged by some participants themselves. Among the strategies identified, social interaction appears to be particularly helpful, as participants with broader social networks tend to report fewer language barriers. Furthermore, some strategies can only be effective if others, particularly faculty members and local peers, are willing to respond. Thus, overcoming language barriers is

fundamentally a collaborative effort, not solely the personal responsibility of international students.

Language barriers arise from the interaction of four factors: linguistic, psychological, social, and cultural factors, as well as institutional factors. First, linguistic factors emerge when participants possess everyday language skills but are not yet familiar with academic language, causing them to have difficulty understanding terms and abbreviations that are not explained (Pratama et al., 2025). Second, psychological factors arise from experiences of being misunderstood or laughed at, which can increase anxiety and make it more difficult for participants to utilize the language input available to them (Krashen, 1982; Jarar & Kurniawati, 2025). Third, sociocultural factors stem from the use of the Acehese language as an additional language for which participants are unprepared, while the similarities between Malay and Indonesian can also lead to misunderstandings (Xue & Kaur Mehar Singh, 2025; Syam et al., 2026). Fourth, institutional factors relate to language preparation, which participants must largely undertake on their own, while adjustments to classroom instruction depend on individual instructors (Jarar & Kurniawati, 2025). These factors interact with one another and contribute to the language barriers experienced by international students at UIN Ar-Raniry.

B. Contributions and Implications of the Research

Based on these conclusions, this study makes a number of contributions, both in the academic field and from a practitioner's perspective, as noted in Chapter 1 regarding the significance of this study.

1. Theoretical Contribution

This study shows that language barriers affect not only students' academic activities but also their social interactions and psychological experiences. The findings also indicate that anxiety related to listening, reading, writing, and speaking are interconnected, rather than being experienced as separate issues. The findings of this study also provide

contextual support for Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis in the context of an Islamic university in Indonesia that has adopted Indonesian as its primary target language, not English, and where participants' willingness to speak is shaped by prior experiences, not merely by language proficiency. Participants from Malaysia added another point: For participants from Malaysia, the similarities between Malay and Indonesian sometimes lead to misunderstandings, even though they find it relatively easier to grasp the language at first, so the barriers they face take the form of misunderstandings rather than an inability to understand.

2. Practical contribution

For UIN Ar-Raniry, these findings serve as empirical evidence for developing support programs, particularly Indonesian language classes at the Language Center, which are no longer offered, even though participants who previously took them demonstrated significantly better proficiency than others. For faculty members, these findings offer practical guidance for teaching classes attended by international students, while for the students themselves, For international students, these findings suggest that social interaction can provide significant support in addition to independent learning. These findings also support the university's internationalization, The experiences of current international students can also influence how prospective international students view the university.

3. Limitations of The Study

There are four limitations to note. The study participants consisted of six undergraduate students from Thailand and Malaysia; therefore, these findings provide an in-depth account of their experiences, not those of all international students at the university, and the experiences of graduate students and non-degree students have not yet been explored. Some interviews were conducted online and were disrupted by unstable connections, and the length of responses varied, resulting in uneven data depth across themes. This study also relied on participants' self-reports

rather than direct classroom observation, meaning it describes how they perceive their experiences rather than how those events would appear to an outside observer.

C. Suggestions

Based on the findings and limitations of the study, the researcher offers several recommendations. Some of these recommendations stem directly from the feedback provided by the participants at the end of the interviews.

1. For UIN Ar-Raniry

Indonesian language classes for international students should be reinstated and held before the semester begins, not after. Nearly all participants expressed this view. According to one participant, the one-month Indonesian language class at the UIN Ar-Raniry Language Center was still offered to their cohort, but is no longer provided to the class of 2025, leaving incoming students to face greater challenges. Another participant called the discontinuation of the program regrettable because the language classes had long been one of the strengths of the international student program. One participant stated that the orientation period should begin one to two months before the semester starts, because once classes begin, there is no longer an opportunity to learn the language at a leisurely pace. Another participant suggested that the classes should last several months, as is the practice at a number of universities in the Middle East, and expressed regret that the language program, which used to be one of the campus's strengths, is no longer in operation.

In addition, one participant suggested that the university organize more frequent joint activities between international and local students, such as international festivals, joint seminars, and halalbihalal gatherings, since such events serve as opportunities to practice language skills and build networks. Another participant raised the issue of rising visa costs and suggested that the university consider providing scholarship support for international

students, as these costs affect the number of prospective students interested in applying.

2. For Lecturers

Instructors are advised to explain concepts at a moderate pace, write down main points and key terms, explain the full forms of abbreviations when they are first used, and consistently use Indonesian when explaining material in classes attended by international students. Comments regarding language difficulties should not be made in front of the entire class, as the findings of this study indicate that such reprimands do not improve students' abilities but rather increase their reluctance to speak. Furthermore, a lecturer's willingness to adjust their teaching methods upon learning that there are international students in their class has proven to be very helpful, as noted by one of the participants.

3. For International Students

International students are advised to increase their direct interactions with local students and the surrounding community, as the findings of this study indicate that social engagement has a greater impact than self-study. Translation apps and artificial intelligence should be treated as temporary aids, not as substitutes for understanding, as some participants themselves recognized. The habits of jotting down new terms, regularly reading materials in Indonesian, and having their writing reviewed by local friends proved to help the participants adapt the fastest. In addition, participating in campus orientation and student organization activities from the very beginning can accelerate the formation of a social circle where they can ask questions. This advice was also offered by the participants themselves at the end of the interviews, in which they emphasized two things: making more friends among Indonesian students and reading more books in Indonesian.

4. For Local Students

Local students are advised to continue using Indonesian when speaking with international friends, especially in conversations related to their studies. The findings of this study indicate that the shift to the Acehese language often occurs after relationships have become close, so that the very familiarity that should be helpful can actually hinder language access. A willingness to repeat explanations using simpler sentences, to help proofread writing, and to avoid making language mistakes the subject of jokes constitutes small but very meaningful support for international friends.

5. For the Next Researchers

Future researchers are advised to include participants from countries with more diverse linguistic backgrounds, as well as graduate students and students in non-degree programs, so that differences in experience between speakers of related and unrelated languages can be further explored. Future research could also include direct observations in lecture halls so that participants' reported experiences can be supplemented with a picture of what actually happens in the classroom. Furthermore, international students' experiences with regional languages remain an aspect open to specific research, given that this aspect emerged strongly in this study but has rarely been discussed in previous research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Appointment Letter of Supervisor



KEPUTUSAN DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH
NOMOR: 513 TAHUN 2026

TENTANG:
PENGANGKATAN PEMBIMBING SKRIPSI MAHASISWA
DENGAN RAHMAT TUHAN YANG MAHA ESA

DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH

- Menimbang** :
- bahwa untuk kelancaran bimbingan skripsi mahasiswa pada Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh maka dipandang perlu menunjuk pembimbing skripsi;
 - bahwa yang namanya tersebut dalam Surat Keputusan ini dianggap cakap dan mampu untuk diangkat dalam jabatan sebagai pembimbing skripsi mahasiswa;
 - bahwa berdasarkan pertimbangan sebagaimana dimaksud dalam huruf a dan huruf b, perlu menetapkan Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.

- Mengingat** :
- Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003, tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional;
 - Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005, tentang Guru dan Dosen;
 - Undang-Undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2012, tentang Pendidikan Tinggi;
 - Peraturan Presiden Nomor 74 Tahun 2012, tentang perubahan atas peraturan pemerintah RI Nomor 23 Tahun 2005 tentang pengelolaan keuangan Badan Layanan Umum;
 - Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 4 Tahun 2014, tentang penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Tinggi dan Pengelolaan Perguruan Tinggi;
 - Peraturan Presiden Nomor 64 Tahun 2013, tentang perubahan Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Menjadi Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
 - Peraturan Menteri Agama RI Nomor 44 Tahun 2022, tentang Organisasi dan Tata Kerja UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
 - Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 14 Tahun 2022, tentang Statuta UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;
 - Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 492 Tahun 2003, tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang Pengangkatan, Pemindahan dan Pemberhentian PNS di Lingkungan Depag RI;
 - Keputusan Menteri Keuangan Nomor 293/Kmk.05/2011, tentang penetapan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh pada Kementerian Agama sebagai Instansi Pemerintah yang menerapkan Pengelolaan Badan Layanan Umum;
 - Surat Keputusan Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor 01 Tahun 2015, Tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang kepada Dekan dan Direktur Pascasarjana di Lingkungan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.

MEMUTUSKAN

- Menetapkan** :
- Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh tentang Pembimbing Skripsi Mahasiswa.

- KESATU** :
- Menunjuk Saudara:
- Prof. Dr.phil. Saiful Akmal, M.A.**
- Untuk membimbing Skripsi
- Nama : Silva Rizqi Qamal
- NIM : 220203007
- Program Studi : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
- Judul Skripsi : An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Language Barrier Among International Student at UIN Ar-Raniry

- KEDUA** :
- Kepada pembimbing yang tercantum namanya diatas diberikan honorarium sesuai dengan peraturan perundang-undangan yang berlaku;

- KETIGA** :
- Pembiayaan akibat keputusan ini dibebankan pada DIPA UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor SP DIPA-025.04.2.423925/2026 Tanggal 01 Desember 2025 Tahun Anggaran 2026;

- KEEMPAT** :
- Keputusan ini berlaku selama enam bulan sejak tanggal ditetapkan;

- KELIMA** :
- Keputusan ini berlaku sejak tanggal ditetapkan dengan ketentuan bahwa segala sesuatu akan dirubah dan diperbaiki kembali sebagaimana mestinya, apabila kemudian hari ternyata terdapat kekeliruan dalam Surat Keputusan ini.

Ditetapkan di : Banda Aceh
Pada tanggal : 06 Mei 2026
Dekan


Saiful Muluk

Tembusan

- Sekjen Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
- Deputi Pendidikan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
- Direktur Perguruan Tinggi Ekspansikan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;
- Kantor Pelayanan Perbendaharaan Negara (KPPN) di Banda Aceh;
- Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;
- Kepala Bagian Keuangan dan Akuntansi UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;
- Yang bersangkutan;
- Salang



Appendix 2. Recommendation Letter from International Office UIN Ar-Raniry



**KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH
FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN**

Jl. Syeikh Abdur Rauf Kopelma Darussalam Banda Aceh Telp/Fax. : 0651-752921

Nomor : B-4959/Un.08/FTK.1/TL.00/7/2026

Lamp : -

Hal : *Penelitian Ilmiah Mahasiswa*

Kepada Yth,

Kepala UPT Pusat Layanan Internasional UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Fakultas Tarbiyah Dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry dengan ini menerangkan bahwa:

NIM : 220203007

Nama : SILVA RIZQI QAMAL

Program Studi/Jurusan : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris

Alamat : Jl.T.Ibrahim Kehakiman Lueng Bata

Saudara yang tersebut namanya diatas benar mahasiswa Fakultas Tarbiyah Dan Keguruan bermaksud melakukan penelitian ilmiah di lembaga yang Bapak/Tbu pimpin dalam rangka penulisan Skripsi dengan judul *AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS AMONG INTERNATIONAL AT UIN-RANIRY*

Banda Aceh, 14 Juli 2026

An. Dekan

Wakil Dekan Bidang Akademik dan Kelembagaan



Prof. Dr. Buhori Muslim, M.Ag.

NIP. 197508152001121002

Berlaku sampai : 21 Agustus 2026

Appendix 3. Language Barriers Indicators

focus	Indicators	Description	Interview Guide	Theoretical Basis
Opening Question			1. How would you describe your experience dealing with language barriers while studying at UIN Ar-Raniry?	
Listening Difficulties	Lack of understanding of fast speech.	Students have difficulty understanding spoken target language when the speaker talks quickly, making it hard to follow conversations or lectures.	2. Can you tell me about your experience when a professor or classmate speaks the target language too fast in class?	Halali et al. (2022) explain that students often struggle to follow academic discussions because spoken communication occurs rapidly. Alzamil (2021) states that speaking speed directly affects listening comprehension.
	Unfamiliar vocabulary.	Students struggle to understand spoken messages because they do not recognize certain words, expressions, or academic terms.	3. What difficulties do you encounter when you hear academic terms that you don't know? What do you usually do when you don't understand a certain	Alzamil (2021) states that limited vocabulary is one of the main causes of listening difficulty. Halali et al (2022) found that students struggle to understand academic terminology during

			word during a class discussion?	classroom discussions. Kusumoriny and Aziz (2025) also indicate that unfamiliar vocabulary and speaking styles hinder listening comprehension.
	Poor pronunciation/accent.	Students find it difficult to understand speakers with different pronunciations, accents, or unclear articulation.	4. How do differences in accent or pronunciation affect your understanding when communicating in class?	Kusumoriny and Aziz (2025) explain that students struggle to understand local accents and speaking styles. Alzamil (2021) states that pronunciation affects listening ability. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) add that second language listening is an active cognitive process that requires the listener to manage speed, accent, and intonation.
	Reading	Difficulty Identifying	Students have difficulty	5. Can you describe your
				Muliawati et al. (2025)

Difficulties	The Main Idea	identifying the main idea or central message of academic texts.	experience trying to identify the main idea of an academic text?	explain that main ideas are a key component of reading comprehension and that international students often struggle with this aspect. Anderson and Pearson (1984) emphasize that comprehension depends on activating prior knowledge to connect with new information in the text.
	Difficulty understanding vocabulary meaning.	Students have difficulty understanding unfamiliar words, academic terms, or the meanings of vocabulary in written texts.	6. What difficulties do you encounter when you come across unfamiliar vocabulary or academic terms in your reading material? How do you handle them?	Suwanaroa (2021) explains that vocabulary affects students' reading comprehension skills. Muliawati et al (2025) found that international students from pattani studying in Indonesia struggle particularly with vocabulary meaning in

				academic texts.
	Difficulty understanding stated and unstated details.	Students have difficulty understanding academic texts if they do not understand the topic, concepts, or context of the text.	7. Can you describe a time when you found it difficult to understand both the explicit and implied meaning of an academic text? What made it difficult?	Muliawati et al. (2025) explain that reading comprehension encompasses both explicitly stated details and information that must be inferred. Sowanaroa (2021) notes that comprehension is influenced by grammar, vocabulary, personal experience, and the readers background knowledge.
Writing Challenges	Limited academic vocabulary	Students have difficulty choosing suitable words in the target language for academic writing.	8. What has been your experience in choosing the right academic vocabulary when writing assignments?	Gupta et al. (2022) explain that international students experience vocabulary difficulties in academic writing. Ravichandran et al (2017) also found that limited vocabulary is one

				of the primary writing challenges faced by international graduate students. Karakus (2025) adds that vocabulary problems hinder students ability to express ideas accurately.
	Difficulty organizing an idea	Students struggle to arrange ideas clearly and logically in written assignments.	9. Can you tell me about your experience expressing your ideas in academic writing? do you feel you can express your ideas clearly? Why or why not?	Gupta et al. (2022) explain that international students experience vocabulary difficulties in academic writing. Ravichandran et al (2017) also found that limited vocabulary is one of the primary writing challenges faced by international graduate students. Karakus (2025) adds that vocabulary problems hinder students ability to express ideas

				accurately.
	Difficulty using formal/ academic language.	Students find it hard to use formal and appropriate language in academic writing.	10. What has been your experience using formal academic language in your writing? What part of academic writing is most difficult for you?	Ravichandran et al. (2017) explain that students struggle with academic writing structure and academic culture. Gupta et al. (2022) found that grammar and academic style become challenges for international students. Trans (2026) argues that academic writing should be understood as a set of disciplinary practices rather than a fixed set of rules, which means students must learn to adapt to the specific writing expectations of each course.
Speaking	Fear of making	Students feel afraid of	11. How do you feel	Mudita and Nurfarhanah

Anxiety	mistakes	making errors when speaking the target language	when you are afraid of making mistakes while speaking? What usually makes you feel that way?	(2025) explain that international students often feel anxious when speaking in public using a foreign language. Mulyono et al. (2019) explain that students experience fear of making mistakes and speaking anxiety. Horwitz (1986) notes that students often panic when speaking unprepared and fear being laughed at by peers.
	Fear of negative judgment	Students worry about being judged by lecturers or classmates.	12. How do you feel when lecturers or classmates listen to you speaking? Can you describe that experience?	Speaking anxiety is influenced by fear of negative evaluation (Mulyono et al., 2019). Halali et al (2023) found that language anxiety, including fear of negative evaluation,

				mediates speaking challenges among international students. Krashen (1982) explains through the affective filter hypothesis that anxiety and lack of self-confidence raise a psychological barrier that makes language processing more difficult.
	Low confidence	Students lack the confidence to ask questions, join discussions, or present in class.	13. Can you describe a situation when you wanted to speak but felt not confident enough? What did you do in that situation?	Mudita and Nurfarhanah (2025) found that international students often feel nervous and uncomfortable speaking a foreign in public, which reduces their confidence. Krashen (1982) argues that low self-confidence raises the affective filter, making it harder for students to

				produce language even when they understand the input. Mulyono et al (2019) also found that low self-efficacy is one of the key contributors to speaking anxiety among EFL students.
Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers.	Use of technology and digital resources.	Students use digital tools such as translation applications, online dictionaries, and video platforms to support their language learning and comprehension.	14. What digital apps do you use to help you understand the target language? How do these apps help you overcome language barriers?	Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) found that international students use resources such as the KBBI, Google Translate, YouTube, and social media to aid their language learning and everyday communication. Seri dan Sutrisno (2021) highlights the role of mobile apps in supporting Indonesian language learning for

				non-native speakers.
	Peer support and social interaction	Students seek help from friends, classmates, or bilingual peers to clarify meaning, improve pronunciation, and reduce feelings of isolation.	15. Do you often ask your friends for help when you have trouble with the language? What kind of support do they give you? Can you share an experience where a friend's support helped you overcome language barriers in your academic or social life?	Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) found that interactions with fellow students and involvement in the community are among the most effective strategies used by international students to overcome language barriers in Indonesia. Krsmanovic (2020) explains that students who build relationships with local peers through the integration process tend to adapt more successfully to their new academic and social environments
	Self-regulated	Students actively manage their own language	16. What do you do to improve your	Harjono and Wachyunni (2025) found that self-

	learning	learning process by noting down new vocabulary, rereading difficult texts, practicing pronunciation, and monitoring their level of understanding.	language skills on your own outside of class? How do you track or evaluate your progress in learning the target language?	regulated learning strategies, such as independent practice and reflecting on one's own language use, are widely employed by international students in Indonesia. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue that metacognitive strategies, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own listening comprehension, are crucial for effective second language learning.
	Interact with native speakers and the local community.	Students improve their language skills through interaction with local students, as well as with the local community in both their academic and	17. Can you describe your experience interacting with local students or members of the local community? How did those interactions help	A study by Harjono and Wachyunnni (2025) explains that engagement with the local community and interaction with native

		social environments.	you overcome language barriers?	speakers are among the key strategies international students in Indonesia use to overcome linguistic, cultural, and psychological barriers.
18. How do language barriers affect your academic life and social relationships on campus?				Language barriers affect academic achievement, social communication, and cultural adaptation (Harjono & Wachyunni, 2025; Pratama et al., 2025).

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Personal Information:

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Elementary School : MIN 6 Model Banda Aceh
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