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## LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION CHALLENGES BY EFL STUDENTS

by

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### Abstract:

*Despite many studies on this topic, it is a rare report that EFL students need help interpreting English to Bahasa or Bahasa to English. This study aims to reveal the challenges faced by students in interpreting and find the most appropriate solution to overcoming these challenges. The subject of this research is the fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu. The instrument employs 10 statement items related to the difficulties that a novice interpreter might experience. The result shows that the students faced difficulties such as lack of vocabulary, terms translation, finding equivalent words, difficulty understanding pronunciation, mastery of the topic, remembering, limited time, anxiety, and concentration. While for the interpretation of numbers, the sample did not rate this as a difficulty. This study implies that teacher-educators to develop reading habits to overcome the lack of vocabulary by many models. Teacher-educators can use the original language, improve an equally good level of mastery in the source language and the target language, strengthen pronunciation skills, understand pre-condition in advance, take notes to face the memorization problem, broaden knowledge, have good preparation, realize the source of anxiety, mastering the topic to help reducing anxiety, having an excellent listening skill and self-control as the solution for concentration problem.*

**Keywords:** *interpretation, challenges, suggested solution 5, EFL students*

## INTRODUCTION

Research on translation can easily be found in offline and online sources. On the other hand, research on language interpretation still needs to be improved, especially in the country. Some

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of the interpretation research that can be found focuses on the interpretation of certain symbols or terms in the field of scientific study and not on translating one language into another orally. Therefore, this research was applied to language interpretation, especially in English and Bahasa. The objectives of this research are to list the challenges faced by the EFL in first-time interpreting and to formulate possible solutions for the challenges faced by the EFL in first-time interpreting. Thus, the results of this study are significant because of these contributions.

Previous researchers have carried out research related to translation and interpretation. (Richard, 2011) researched the Interpretation of Pragmatic Context in Language Learning. This research was conducted using the Descriptive Qualitative method, which results in comprehensive, wise, and thorough considerations of any situational aspects of the utterances, in addition to social and cultural aspects, which might also determine the correct interpretation of meanings of the language. (Hawaii, 2017) conducted an investigation regarding the Interpretation of Old Javanese Sound Segments: Speech Analyzer and Distinctive Features Analysis. She formulated this research to find out the interpretation of the sound segment, the different frequencies of adjacent sounds, and the generative rules of changes in the segment of Old Javanese sounds using the listening method with the tapping technique. As a result, she finds out that Each vocal segment in a specific syllable has a different frequency because the speech wave is highly dependent on the speed of the vocal cord vibrations. In addition, (Mappewali, 2017) studied the errors of English learners in writing descriptive texts which they translated from Indonesian to English.

It is Qualitative research in descriptive design using error analysis. Investigating four aspects of grammar errors, including addition, omission, misformation, and misordering, which is called surface strategy taxonomy, were then analyzed using grammar units of analysis. The investigation found that EFL learners tend to make grammar errors in writing descriptive paragraphs because they adopted a set of rules in Bahasa Indonesia into the target language, which becomes a language interference. (Omolu & Mappewali, 2020) also conducted an investigation entitled Thinking Aloud Protocol towards Smart Translation which discusses the strategies students use in translating so that good translation results are obtained and can be understood by readers. However, from these studies mentioned, only the research of Mappewali (2017) and Mappewali and Omolu (2020) discusses translation in the context of English teaching research. Unfortunately, it has yet to lead to interpretation. Seeing this, the researcher

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intends to conduct research on interpretation and focus the study's results on its use in classroom teaching.

Translation and Interpretation course is one of the compulsory courses listed in the curriculum structure of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Palu (Curriculum of FKIP Unismuh Palu, 2019/2020). The students in semester V are to enroll in an interpreting course. It intends for students to be able to translate and interpret languages from Indonesian to English, or vice-versa after students pass the Basic Language Learning Course, namely Structure starting from the Basic, Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate, and Advanced levels. However, in reality, it is not so. Interpreting a language is more challenging than translating, and students face many problems when first conducting language interpretation.

Experts give many definitions and opinions regarding the term interpretation. (Neale, 2017), in recorded interview documentation, defines interpretation as excitingly concluding something. Meanwhile, according to Nolan (2005) in (Hidayat et al., 2017), interpretation is what the speaker wants to say, or how he wants it to be conveyed, and how to make it understandable to the audience. Another opinion (Cerezo, 2015) states that interpretation means conveying the meaning of the source text to the target text in oral form, both oral and sign. (Suryasa, 2016) states that the interpretation process is how an interpreter produces the equivalence between spoken and the portion of the speech in other languages in spoken form. The interpreter communicates the results of his interpretation of the source language into the target language, both of which are spoken in spoken form. The opinion of Cerezo (2015) becomes the basis for this research, in which interpretation means transferring a source language to the target language in an oral way.

An interpreter is a party/person who listens to a speaker in one language and conveys information from that speaker to listeners in a different language. (Ma, 2013) interpreters help people overcome language barriers, eliminate guesswork, and bridge communication among languages. Furthermore, Ma (2013) explains that in carrying out their duties, an interpreter must have unique talents and abilities that make them become the attention of the wider community. Thus, the role of the interpreter is significant.

The need for more attention to the importance of good interpretive skills possessed by students is the basis for conducting this research. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the implementation of language learning, primarily to provide additional skills for

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graduates. These skills will equip graduates to enter the world of work. The world of work is divided not only into being a Civil Servant but instead being an entrepreneur who relies on interpretation skills. Based on the background explained, the researchers come to the research question:

- 1) What challenges are faced by English Language learners in first-time interpreting?
- 2) What solutions are suggested for the challenges the English Language faces in first time interpreting?

## **METHOD**

***Design***

This research is a survey study. (Ponto, Ph.D., APRN, AGCNS-BC, AOCNS®, 2015) states that this study allows various methods to recruit participants, collect data, and utilize various instrumentation methods. He also explains that survey studies can use quantitative research strategies, for example, questionnaires with numerically rated items, or qualitative research strategies, for example, open-ended questions, or even both strategies. This current study obtained primary data through a questionnaire to get information about students' challenges in interpreting.

***Participant***

The research subjects were the fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program, the Muhammadiyah University of Palu eliminating students who still needed to complete the Structure Course to the last level, and the Skills Course (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). The students who became the samples are listed in initials. The location of this research is the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, the Muhammadiyah University of Palu, especially the English Education Study Program. Researchers use the language laboratory as a place of observation.

***Instrument***

The instruments used to obtain data in this study were observation and questionnaires. The primary data comes from a questionnaire as a source of information related to the difficulties faced by students in interpretation. In comparison, an observation checklist is used

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to determine the students' interpretation ability as supporting data.

The questionnaire consists of 10 statement items adapted from (Alhiyari, 2013). The samples responded to the questionnaire in the form of four choices: strongly agree, agree, hesitate, and disagree. This response is then converted into numbers on a Likert scale of 1-4; the larger the number, the more students struggle with the item.

The Observation Checklist was prepared by making notes regarding the interpretation process. The note is related to fluency, coherence, and equivalence of interpreted sentences (understandable or incomprehensible).

### ***Data Collecting Technique***

In collecting the data, the researchers determine steps. These steps are listed as follows: 1) Introductory activity related to the interpretation; 2) conducting observation; 3) filling observation checklist; 4) spreading online questionnaires; 5) checking and analyzing the result of the questionnaire; 5) suggesting a solution for every challenge faced by students, and 6) making a conclusion.

### ***Data Analysis Technique***

Firstly, the researchers observed the class while the samples were interpreted. The observation investigates the samples' fluency, coherence, and equivalence. This observation becomes supporting data in explaining the challenges faced by English as a foreign language student in first-time interpreting. Next, the researchers computed the results and converted them into scores using the Assessment Rubric adapted from New York State Education Department.

After conducting observation in Interpretation Class, the researchers then spread questionnaires to have the exact information of the challenges students faced while making their interpretation for the first time. The responses are provided in four options, strongly agree, agree, undecided, and disagree. These response options were then converted into a Likert Scale of 4-1. After calculation, the  $> 2,5$  score is defined as agreeing, and the challenges stated in the questionnaire are listed. It becomes the primary data that is supported by the data from observation.

To confirm the data, the researchers then applied a theory triangulation. The main theories used are taken from the research of (Alhiyari, 2013), (Cerezo Herrero, 2020), (Şimon et al., 2015), and (Ma, 2013). Other theories also support these theories, explained in the

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discussion part. These theories used as suggestions for the challenges students face come from research results already published and supported by other research results. The results are then discussed to obtain solutions from previous research. On the other hands, the citing in both text and list of references employs automatic model called Mendeley Cite (Turmudi, 2020,p.59).

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The objectives of this research are to find out the challenges faced by EFL learners in their first-time interpreting and to find solutions for the challenges faced by English Language Learners in their first-time interpreting. The research found that third-level English generally faced several difficulties as foreign language students at the University of Muhammadiyah Palu in interpreting language-

***Findings***

Students' ability in the interpretation process is not the primary data in this research but is expected to be supporting data that explains certain phenomena in this study. The student's ability in Language Interpretation was observed from 3 items: fluency, coherence, and equivalence of sentences (comprehensible or incomprehensible). The result converted from the observation checklist is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Students' Ability in First-Time Interpreting

No.	Initial	Fluency	Syntax	Vocabulary	Score
1.	Din	4	3	3	83.3
2.	Sel	1	1	2	33.3
3.	Sof	2	2	2	50.0
4.	Dit	1	1	2	33.3
5.	Sit	4	4	3	91.7
6.	Ihs	2	2	2	50.0
7.	Bag	-	-	-	-
<b>Average</b>					<b>56,93</b>

Note: Assessment Rubric adapted from New York State Education Department

Researchers formulate ten challenges of Interpretation problems found in the research conducted by Alhiyari (2013). These items were displayed in the questionnaire given to the samples after the interpretation process. These challenges are; (1) Vocabulary; (2) Terms; (3) Equivalent Words; (4) Numbers; (5) understanding pronunciation; (6) Context Mastery; (7)

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Memorizing; (8) Time Limitation; (9) Anxiety; and (10) Concentration. From the results of filling out the questionnaire, the following results were obtained:

Table 2. Students' Challenges in First-Time Interpreting

No.	Challenges	Percentage				Average
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Hesitate	Disagree	
1.	My limited vocabulary makes it difficult for me to interpret.	100,0	0	0	0	4,00
2.	I need help translating some terms.	50,0	50,0	0	0	3,50
3.	I need help finding the correct equivalent word in the target language.	16,7	33,3	33,3	16,7	2,50
4.	I need help with interpreting numbers.		16,7	50	33,3	1,80
5.	I need help understanding the speaker's pronunciation.	33,3	50	16,7	0	3,73
6.	I do not master the topic being discussed.	66,7	33,3	0	0	3,67
7.	I need help memorizing the sentences spoken by the speaker.	66,7	33,3	0	0	3,67
8.	I need more time to prepare myself.	33,3	33,3	33,3	0	3,00
9.	I am worried about making mistakes in interpreting the language.	50,0	33,3	16,7	0	3,33
10.	Due to anxiety, I have difficulty concentrating on the speaker's whole sentences.	83,3	0	16,7	0	3,67

Note: adapted from Alhiyari (2013)

***Discussion***

This study aims at finding out the challenges faced by students in interpreting language for the first time, especially from English (Source Language) to Indonesian (Target Language), and how to solve each of these challenges. The challenges were adapted from Alhiyari (2013) into 10 statement items that the sample will most likely face. These items are then approved or disapproved by the sample. This subchapter will display the discussion and solutions to the results obtained.

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As a result, it is found that there are nine out of ten challenges EFL learners face the first time interpreting. They are limited vocabulary, interpreting terms, word equivalence, understanding pronunciation, mastering the topic, memorization, limited preparation time, anxiety, and concentration. However, in this discussion, the researcher will present solutions to the ten stated difficulties based on the results of previous studies.

The main theories used are taken from the research of (Alhiyari, 2013), (Cerezo Herrero, 2020), (Şimon et al., 2015), and (Ma, 2013). These theories used as suggestions for the challenges students face come from research results already published and supported by other research results. Here is the presentation.

#### ***a. The limited vocabulary***

For the first statement in the questionnaire, 100% of the samples agreed that they have limited vocabulary, making it difficult to interpret. Vocabulary is an essential thing in language learning. (Isaiah, 2017) emphasized that vocabulary plays a vital role in language learning. With vocabulary, it is possible to develop language skills. Many methods, techniques, or strategies to increase students' vocabulary have been experimented with at the university level. For example, research conducted by (Bensalem, 2018), namely, learning vocabulary through the *Whatsapp* application for foreign language learners, shows good achievement compared to learning using traditional methods (pen and paper).

Meanwhile, other studies have shown that English movies can provide effective results in learning English vocabulary (Br Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020). Alternatively, through understanding word morphemes to find other word forms, as in the research conducted by (Varatharajoo et al., 2015). These techniques and strategies are proven to apply to students in terms of vocabulary learning. So that students can use the techniques and strategies offered by these researchers. In addition to this, a web article on how to increase vocabulary, there are tips or easy steps in learning vocabulary (MasterClass, 2021):

- 1) Develop reading habits: It will be easier to understand vocabulary in context, so reading will help acquire new vocabulary.
- 2) Use a dictionary: the habit of opening a dictionary will help in acquiring and understanding new vocabulary.
- 3) Play word games: Many games are available (offline and online) to help foreign language learners acquire and understand new vocabulary.

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- 4) Use cards: language learners can independently create cards containing colored vocabulary for different word classes. The card model can be modified as needed.
- 5) Follow daily vocabulary sites; some learning websites offer daily vocabulary that helps foreign language learners remember new words. A more convenient form is to paste the new words comprehended daily or weekly in the most frequently accessed places in the home/room/study room.
- 6) Use mnemonics aids: these are tools to remember any information in songs, rhythms, acronyms, pictures, phrases, or sentences.
- 7) Practice new vocabulary in conversation: every time you get new words, the most effective way to remember them is to use them.

The seven steps shown above can be an option for students or anyone as a foreign language learner to master vocabulary.

***b. Interpreting Terms***

The second statement item shows that 100% of the sample answered agree and strongly agree that they have difficulty translating some terms from the source language. For example, when a student sample heard the phrase, Big Ben, she tried to interpret it as the enormous size of Ben. She did not refer this to the name of a giant bell icon of the city of London, which is generally not translated into other languages. Difficulty in understanding terms stems from the need for more information possessed by individuals. In some translation models, terms like this are not translated because they are considered common knowledge and known to many people. However, the sample did not own this information, making her create this error. (Newmark, 1988) describes five categories of foreign cultural words, namely a) Ecology, such as animals, plants, and climate; b) Material culture, such as food, clothing, houses, cities, and means of transportation; c) Social cultures, such as work and leisure time; d) Organizations, customs, activities, procedures or concepts; e) Body language and habits. So to translate the vocabulary of these cultural categories, a translator or interpreter can borrow, describe and adapt (Fernández Guerra, 2012). In this sense, the original language can be used, adding a description of the terms in the source language or adapting the phrase to the target language, so it does not feel unfamiliar. In addition, to overcome the difficulty of translating terms, reading or accessing the broadest possible information is the solution. Following the statement (Sulaiman & Harpiansi, 2018), students should build reading habits because they can gain a lot of new vocabulary,

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knowledge, and information from this activity. It will undoubtedly overcome ignorance of the terms mentioned in discourse, both spoken and written.

#### ***c. Word Equivalence***

Regarding word equivalence, 50% of the samples agreed and strongly agreed that they experienced this, while 33.3% said they were unsure, and the rest responded that they did not face these difficulties. Finding equivalence words of the target language difficulty is caused by many factors. One of them is the lack of vocabulary in the target language. It could be that an interpreter understands the meaning of the source language he is interpreting but needs help finding the right words in the target language. The ability to find equivalent words in a translation or language interpretation is an important thing to master, as stated (Yinhua, 2011), and translation equivalence is the central concept in Western translation theory. Provide the proper word equivalent to ensure a high-quality translation and interpretation. (Şimon et al., 2015) explain that prospective translators and professional interpreters must be able to communicate well in the source language and the target language. It means a language learner needs to improve an equally good level of mastery in the source language and the target language, especially a prospective interpreter, to provide a good translation equivalent.

#### ***d. Number Interpretation***

From the data obtained, most of the samples expressed doubt. The rest stated that they were able to interpret numbers easily. Misinterpreting numbers is caused by more precise pronunciation or speaking too quickly. (Cerezo Herrero, 2020) States that the problems that most interpreters usually face come from the verbal perception of the stimulus, such as highly technical terminology, unfamiliar accent, speaking speed, etcetera. The solution offered in this aspect is to practice listening skills. The ability to listen to an interpreter is essential. Herrero (2020) mentions that understanding listening to interpreting is usually fostered through traditional listening activities whose goals are not under those required in interpreter training, so professional needs are not prioritized. Therefore, it becomes a recommendation for Listening Skills lecturers of higher education to create one level of listening skill teaching that is prioritized for students' interpreting abilities.

#### ***e. Understanding Speakers' Pronunciation***

The samples' difficulty understanding the speaker's pronunciation during the interpretation process was caused by a weak listening skill discussed previously in part (d) and weak pronunciation—for example, one sample pronouncing the word *use* as pronouncing the

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word *us*. As a result, when they heard the sentence 'They use a camera to take a picture during the interpretation process, the sample found it took more work to interpret the whole sentence correctly. One of the causes of unsuccessful communication is the inability to speak as closely as possible to native speakers (Şimon et al., 2015). Strengthening pronunciation skills will be very helpful for a prospective interpreter as a form of habituation in listening and speaking.

#### ***f. Difficulty in mastering the topic of conversation***

The topic of conversation is an aspect that an interpreter must master. Usually, difficulties in this aspect are due to insufficient preparation time, inadequate information, and lack of general knowledge. While in the actual translation process, Ma (2013) explained that each interpretation activity is focused on one or more clear topics, and each speaker will maintain consistency on the given topic to allow memorization of the topic outline to discuss. So this needs to be emphasized by student interpreters to help reduce anxiety over matters related to topic mastery.

#### ***g. Memorization***

Difficulty in mainly remembering occurs in the consecutive interpreting type, where the interpreter will wait until the speaker finishes speaking to transfer his speech to the target language. To overcome this, of course, an interpreter needs to make notes. As emphasized by Ma (2013), to overcome this problem of remembering, additional activities, namely taking notes, are needed more in sequential interpretation (consecutive interpreting). The samples in this research were directed to carry out the interpretation process with a simultaneous model where interpretation is carried out concurrently with the speaker. Nevertheless, mostly, they waited until the speaker finished speaking to interpret. As a result, more information is needed in the preparation of notes.

#### ***h. Limited preparation time***

Preparation is one part that should be included in the interpretation process. Interpreters need time to gain initial knowledge about the topic, which supports understanding discourse (Galaz, 2011). It is proven that the interpretation process provides better results than the unprepared process. If there is not enough preparation time, it causes an interpreter not to have prior knowledge. Also, it will then trigger worries and disrupt concentration. So there is only one solution besides having to prepare a separate time to implement the interpretation process.

#### ***i. Anxiety***

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Anxiety about foreign language interpretation is higher than anxiety about learning a second language. So, an interpreter teacher should know that about one-third of interpreter students may suffer from foreign language anxiety (Chiang, 2009). Anxiety will affect the language performance of a speaker. To overcome anxiety, then we must know the source of the pressure. In one of the studies on anxiety, three factors contribute to learning English, especially in Indonesia, namely teacher, student, and environmental factors (U. Bogodad et al., 2021). These factors are language teachers who cannot motivate and cause stress, students who lack knowledge, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-esteem. They must be perfect when speaking, as well as an environment that does not intensify the use of English and classmates who do not support being part of the group. There are many contributors to the cause of anxiety. Knowing this, the teacher or instructor must avoid things that trigger anxiety, such as a lack of appreciation for students' efforts and sentences that seem threatening.

Meanwhile, as a learner, mastering the topic, having broad knowledge, and mastering the language will spur increased self-confidence that reduces or eliminates anxiety. A supportive environment will be conducive to increasing self-confidence. So, it is necessary to create an environment that familiarizes the foreign language being studied and fellow learners who provide mutual support.

#### ***j. Concentration***

An interpreter must have excellent listening skills, requiring great attention and concentration (Ma, 2013). Furthermore, Ma (2013) suggests that if an interpreter listens to the idea that a speaker is talking about and does not immediately understand it or loses essential information, the interpreter must remain calm and careful. Interpreters should fill in the missing information by referring to what they have caught before and listening to what the speaker says next. So it can be said that to maintain the distraction of concentration, the interpreter must remain calm, which stems from the interpreter's success in suppressing his anxiety.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This research intends to find out the challenges EFL learners face, especially university students, in first-time interpreting. The investigation found that nine out of 10 challenges were formulated through a questionnaire becomes the challenges faced by EFL Learners at the Muhammadiyah University of Palu. Generally, students have difficulties in vocabulary, interpretation of terms, word equivalences, understanding pronunciation, mastery of context,

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memory, time constraints, anxiety, and concentration. For each challenge, solutions that can be given or applied to overcome them have been described.

To solve the limited vocabulary challenge, EFL learners are suggested to develop reading habits, use a dictionary, play word games, use cards, follow daily vocabulary sites, use mnemonic tools, and Practice new vocabulary in conversation. For interpreting term challenges, it is suggested that EFL learners use the original terms and enrich their knowledge through reading. Challenges in word equivalence can be solved by balancing the mastery level of the Source (SL) and Target Language (TL). EFL learners' difficulty in understanding pronunciation is suggested to solve by strengthening pronunciation skills (good habituation in listening and speaking). To master the context in interpretation, EFL learners must be ensured that interpretation activities are focused on one or more well-defined topics. Therefore it is vital to broadening the topic's horizons by reading multiple sources. Challenge in memorization is dealt with note-taking activity, especially in consecutive interpreting mode. The solution for the time constraints is that EFL learners need to always have preparation before the implementation of the interpretation or translation process. While for the anxiety problem, EFL learners are suggested to find out the source of the anxiety, have a motivating instructor, not make perfect goals to reduce anxiety; and create a constructive linguistic environment. Moreover, to overcome the concentration challenge faced by EFL learners, it is suggested that they once again improve their listening skills, keep calm and be careful, and try to fill in the gaps of information if there are any unknown terms of words by referring back to things they have captured before to keep the concentration in interpreting.

This research was conducted on a small population. For this reason, it is recommended that other researchers conduct related or follow-up studies with a larger population so that the results can be more general. It is noted that research on interpretation carried out in foreign language learning classes is limited to students who have passed courses related to grammar, structure, reading, listening, speaking, and writing because interpretation learning can only give maximum results if students' mastery in these courses is optimal.

This research was conducted on a small population. For this reason, it is recommended that other researchers conduct related or follow-up studies with a larger population so that the results provided can be more general. It should be noted that research on interpretation carried out in foreign language learning classes can strictly only be applied to students who have passed courses related to grammar, structure, reading, listening, speaking, and writing because

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interpretation learning can only give maximum results if students' mastery in these courses is optimal.

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**Fikriani Aminun Omolu** holds her Bachelor of Arts in Russian Language and Literature from Padjadjaran University and continued her study for a Linguistics major at the same university. She teaches in the Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu for the English Education Study Program. Due to her profession, she took another magister's degree in English Education from Tadulako University. Her expertise is in Translation and Interpretation, Linguistics, and Literature.

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