

Teaching English in Rural Area: Difficulties and Strategies

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Abstract

The difficulty of teaching English in rural areas still exists. This study aimed to find out the teachers' difficulties in teaching English at a rural school in South Sumatera and the strategies they employed to overcome those difficulties. A qualitative method with a case study approach was used in this study. The participants in this study were limited to only one teacher. The data were collected using a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. Then, data from interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. After analyzing the data, the findings showed that there are four difficulties and strategies in teaching English for rural area. The difficulties were: (1) insufficient infrastructure and facilities; (2) lack of students' motivation; (3) less opportunity for professional teacher development; and (4) lack of parental support. In accordance with the difficulties, the strategies were: (1) applying teaching methods and procedures with personal funds; (2) giving motivation; (3) trying the best way to get proper training; and (4) promoting effective communication between parents and teachers. Overall, the study's contributions extend beyond the immediate context of rural English education in South Sumatera, providing valuable insights and implications for enhancing educational practices and policies in rural areas more broadly.

Keywords: *rural area; teacher's difficulties; teacher's strategies*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language. Since people only learn this language in school and do not use it in daily life, it is truly a foreign language to Indonesian students. Nonetheless, English is taught in classrooms all around the country. Even though it is not frequently used as the main language of communication in daily life, it occupies an exclusive place as a foreign language that is taught in schools. As revealed by Zein et al. (2020), among the non-English-speaking world's major countries, Indonesia has developed in significance as a market for language instruction in English. Furthermore, Gunantar (2016) believed that the demand for English learning has risen along with English proliferation globally, which has proven that English is now globally utilized. To sum up, although it is not widely used as the main language in daily life, English is still used in Indonesian classrooms, demonstrating its global significance and the growing demand for English proficiency across the globe as a whole.

Additionally, with changing times and societal demands, Indonesia's current educational system is also evolving and changing. Prihantoro (2014) argued that given the rapid progression of today's society, the realm of education is confronted with formidable obstacles, particularly in its attempt to cultivate a forthcoming generation that possesses the capacity to survive in the global era.

However, there are still significant issues with the educational system in Indonesia. The educational imbalance between urban and rural areas is one of them.

Teaching English as a foreign language has become a serious problem, especially in rural areas. Given the poor state of educational buildings and infrastructure, one of the main and ongoing problems faced by English language teachers in rural settings is the lack of a favorable and enabling setting for instruction (Songbatumis, 2017; Febriana et al., 2018; Wulandari, 2019; Shan & Aziz, 2022; Amelia, 2022). Additionally, Amelia (2022) emphasized that in rural regions, the quality of English education is still in question. Based on the study's findings at one school in Lahat Regency, Sumatera Selatan, it is clarified that the conditions and situations at school do not support the use of English during the teaching and learning process. The school's infrastructure is still insufficient, and there are still frequent problems with the electricity. The teacher stated that the school's internet connection was unstable and that it was not financially feasible to use electric devices due to the limited electricity supply.

The circumstances mentioned previously also existed in a number of locations in Indonesia, especially in the area where the researcher conducted a preliminary study. A preliminary study was conducted by informal interview and observation at a junior high school located in one of the villages of Tulung Selapan Sub-District, OKI Regency. Based on the observation, the researcher looked at how rural the school was. The journey to the village is quite difficult. It takes around five hours just to reach the district's center, and getting there takes some effort because many of the roads still use red dirt as their base. The stability of the internet network in that location is rather low, with limited availability of network cards, specifically Telkomsel and Axis.

Moreover, based on the informal interview with the principal of that school, English lessons are taught for 2 hours a week (for 80 minutes). There are only 35 people in class 7, 15 in class 8, and only 19 in class 9, with the total number of students attending this school being only 69 students. In the previous academic year, the student population reached a maximum of 100 individuals. However, the current enrolment figures have witnessed a decline due to the redistribution of students throughout other educational institutions within the Tulung Selapan Sub-District. The principal also explained that there was only one teacher for teaching English lessons (Interview, June 5, 2023). In addition, Sulistiyo (2015) said that the importance of formal education for rural populations is not considerable. Various factors, such as poor parental support, a lack of support in terms of teaching resources, and teacher's lack of training are, common difficulties in teaching English in rural settings (Milon, 2016; Rahayu, 2016; Febriana et al., 2018; Shan & Aziz, 2022). As a result, social factors, geography, resources, and facilities may all play a role in how well English teaching is provided to students in urban and rural settings. Furthermore, Wulandari (2019) emphasized that to overcome those difficulties, the teachers were promoting students' motivation and applying various kinds of teaching techniques and methods. In addition, Shan and Aziz (2022) stated that promoting effective communication between parents and teachers and providing proper training for English language teachers were strategies to overcome the difficulties in teaching English in rural settings.

Based on the background discussed above, the problems of this research were formulated in the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties encountered by the teacher in teaching English in rural area?

2. What are the strategies employed by the teacher to overcome the difficulties in teaching English in Rural Area?

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, qualitative research with a case study was used to determine the difficulties discovered by the teachers and the strategies they employed to overcome those difficulties in teaching English in a rural area. Creswell (2014) stated that a case study enables the researchers to understand, explore, and investigate a case that is happening and gain information from it. As a result, the qualitative method with a case study is the best option for investigating a teacher's difficulties and strategies in teaching English in rural areas.

Research Setting and Participant

This study was conducted at a junior high school located in one of the villages in Tulung Selapan Sub-District, OKI Regency. The participant in this study was an English language teacher using purposeful sampling techniques. Purposeful sampling is the deliberate selection of individuals and events by researchers with the aim of acquiring knowledge or gaining a deeper understanding of the fundamental phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, Cleary et al. (2012) believed that one of the key participant selections is that small numbers are studied intensively and chosen purposefully. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), in qualitative research, an accurate number of participants is not specified. Since there is only one teacher, the researcher used total sampling. Sugiyono (2015) emphasized that total sampling is a sampling technique where the number of samples is the same as the population. In conclusion, the number of participants in this study is limited to only one teacher.

Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. As stated by Jamshed (2014), semi-structured interviews refer to a sort of in-depth interview when designated participants are presented with a certain number of open-ended questions. This approach enables the researcher to gather additional information that may be relevant to the study. In this study, there were 19 open-ended questions that had been validated by two validators. In addition, one-on-one interviews were utilized with one participant in this study. According to Creswell (2014), a one-on-one interview is a method of data collecting wherein the researcher captures the responses provided by a single participant at a given time. Thus, semi-structured one-on-one interviews using open-ended questions were used to collect the data. The interview process consists of multiple sequential steps. The researcher develops an interview instrument designed for use with teachers or individuals involved in the educational process. Furthermore, the researcher records the interview until the interviewer has completed their responses to the questions. Ultimately, interviews are conducted until the necessary data is obtained.

Data Analysis and Data Validity

Data from interviews were analyzed to determine teachers' difficulties and strategies in teaching English in rural area. The researcher used thematic analysis

for this study as a part of the analysis. There are several steps to analyze the data. Cresswell (2014) emphasized a five-step process for conducting thematic analysis when examining qualitative data. Initially, the researcher carries out the task of organizing and preparing the data for analysis. Furthermore, the researcher thoroughly examines all of the available material. Next, beginning the process of encoding all of the data. This involves organizing the data into tables according to issues, namely themes and codes. The purpose of this organization is to establish connections between the various subjects and facilitate the extraction of meaningful insights during the data analysis phase. In this research, trustworthiness was used to validate the data through member checking. The researcher also offered transcripts and interpretations of the data to participants during member checking for the purpose of confirming the accuracy of the information being collected. To check the accuracy of the interview result, the participant was requested to double-check the interview transcript to validate the information that had been given to them. Then, the participant was later questioned regarding the transcript, specifically whether it is complete and acceptable based on the answer from the participant or not.

RESULTS

What are the difficulties encountered by the teacher in teaching English in rural area?

Insufficient Infrastructure and Facilities

Sufficient infrastructure and facilities can help teachers carry out an effective and efficient teaching and learning process. Nonetheless, most of the schools in rural areas are constrained by the infrastructure and facilities, especially the ones that were researched. It is supported by the statement from participant, the teacher said that *“There are many less or not enough educational equipment; we don’t have language labs. Even for the classrooms, it can be seen only three good conditions because they are newly built”* (R, Interview, 2023).

Furthermore, the electricity in that school also becomes a difficulty in teaching and learning, unless it was English or another subject. As supported by the participant, the teacher claimed that *“For the learning facilities here, they are not capable to be used, like projectors. We have projectors, but to use them is difficult because in the classroom there is no plug for electricity, so it is a bit hard to use them with limited electricity”* (R, Interview, 2023).

In addition, English teacher in that school have difficulties related to the internet connection. Having a stable internet connection can help teachers explore anything that can support their teaching and learning process. In fact, the internet connection at that school was still problematic. It is explained by the participant, the teacher stated, *“The difficulty here is that the lights keep going out and the internet often goes out. Even though the lights are on, the internet signal here is often lost”* (R, Interview, 2023).

Lack of Students' Motivation

The second difficulty of English teaching in rural area is that the researcher found students' lack of motivation. The teacher explained that persuading eagerness to learn is one of the obstacles encountered by the teacher. The teacher claimed, *"Their interest in learning here is low- not just English lessons, but all of the lessons. There are only a few students who area active or have a strong desire to learn"* (R, Interview, 2023).

Moreover, the teacher said that it was challenging to engage the students in the learning process. The teacher said, *"When I teach in a class, sometimes I mixed the language between English and Bahasa. They're confused. Even though what I say is not difficult. It is about daily expression, counting—they tend to be unable to answer."* (R, Interview, 2023).

Furthermore, the teacher believed that the students saw English as a difficult language because they perceived it as a foreign language. The teacher claimed, *"They knew what "one, two, three" meant, but when it was written on the board, I told them to read it, but they made mistake. They know the written form, but they cannot pronounce it correctly because it is a foreign language, so it is hard for them to understand it"* (R, Interview, 2023).

Additionally, the teacher explained that when the teacher gives homework or exercises. There are only a few students who submitted their assignments. She said, *"For exercise and homework, not all students do it, and some students do not collect it. In fact, from each class, only a few submitted their assignments. For example, in class 9, there were only a few people"* (R, Interview, 2023).

The teacher also explained that the student's interest in learning English is low; as a result, they are too lazy to do the assignment, and they often sleep during class. The teacher said, *"Their interest in learning is low, so they are too lazy to do their assignments. What's even worse is that they often sleep during class"* (R, Interview, 2023).

Less Opportunity for Professional Teacher Development

Teacher development is one way to increase their innovation in teaching. However, the English teacher in that school claimed that she never attended a training program, but she rarely attended an online training. The teacher said that *"I have never attended it, for the training of teachers carried out by institutions or official agencies or from the education service. I have attended it, for teachers training independently, for training from private institutions, which I found on Instagram or Facebook, and also sometimes ads from private education, I have followed the training online."* (R, Interview, 2023).

Furthermore, the teacher only took online training; she also experienced difficulty with the electricity and internet connection. As a result, she rarely participates in online training. Because the teacher comes from Kayuagung, the capital city of OKI, she is waiting for the opportunity to go home to take part in the online training. The teacher emphasized that *"The problem is the electricity and internet connection, so if I want to take part in training like that, I'll wait until I have the opportunity to go back to Kayuagung. Only then could I take part in the training, but when I was here, I couldn't take the training online because of the*

connection problems. I also look at the schedule; if the schedule happens to be in Kayuagung, I join. If it's here, I can't follow it" (R, Interview, 2023).

Lack of Parental Support

It is likely that there are exist parents who live in rural locations who have little or no awareness regarding the significance of English acquisition. They may view English as having uses that are not relevant to their current needs or the specific circumstances of the local community, because most of them are still poorly educated. The teacher said that *"The majority of students' parents job here are rubber farmers, and their educational background has completed junior high school level"* (R, Interview, 2023).

Furthermore, parents who live in rural area do not actively encourage their children to attend school. The teacher explained, *"Sometimes children come late; here they come at 7.30; there are students who come at 8.00. When I asked, "Why are you late?" "Didn't your parents wake you up? They answered, "I even woke them up.""* (R, Interview, 2023).

The role of parents in education is very crucial. They served as a supportive environment, so the learner was guided through the learning process. However, parents in rural area place the burden on teachers, even though parents also have to take part in their children's education. The teacher said that *"Sometimes, there are people who wake up their children because the majority of parents here work as farmers; they have to work early in the morning, so they think their children are at school, even though they do not come or are absent. The parents are of the opinion that their children are at school, studying here, and there are teachers who teach. They think that is enough, even though the role of parents is very necessary. That's the importance of parents' role, but there are also parents who don't care and also place the burden on teachers, even though parents also have to take part in their children's education"* (R, Interview, 2023).

What are the strategies employed by the teacher to overcome the difficulties in teaching English in Rural Area?

Applying Teaching Method and Procedure with Personal Funds

In order to adjust the limitations caused by inadequate facilities, it is imperative for the teachers to employ innovative and creative strategies. The teachers explained that *"I used to bring a little Bluetooth speaker that I had on hand to invite students to learn how to use songs for certain materials. I also bought other sponsorship books using personal funds"* (R, Interview, 2023).

In short, the interview data reveals the resourcefulness and dedication of teacher, who employ creative strategies and invest personal funds to overcome the difficulties posed by inadequate facilities. The teacher's use of a Bluetooth speaker and personal investment in supplementary materials exemplify a commitment to providing engaging and effective English instruction despite resource limitations. These initiatives underscore the resilience of educators in rural areas, highlighting the importance of recognizing and supporting their innovative approaches to enhance the quality of education for students in such settings. Addressing the

broader infrastructural issues remains crucial, but the teachers' proactive efforts exemplify a commendable commitment to fostering meaningful learning experiences in the face of challenges.

Giving Motivation

The teacher said that she always gives encouragement and guidance for them to learn English, especially for students who are unable to do so academically. When teaching in a class, she used to tell stories and tell characters that could motivate the students. The teacher said that *“every time I give assignments and exercises, I always prioritize the unable; students who want to shudder or who are sleepy are told to move forward to work on the matter. I often exemplify people who are successful in English, for example, Maudy Ayunda. Sometimes I also give examples of myself. Anyway, when I was teaching, I used to tell stories and tell characters who could motivate them”* (R, Interview, 2023).

As a result, the teacher's emphasis on motivation as a key strategy in English teaching in rural areas reflects a deep commitment to inspiring and encouraging students. The use of stories and relatable characters, including personal experiences and examples of successful individuals like Maudy Ayunda, serves as a powerful tool to engage and uplift students academically. By prioritizing those who may face academic challenges and actively encouraging their participation, the teacher not only addresses individual learning needs but also cultivates a positive and supportive learning environment.

Trying the Best Way to Get Proper Training

The importance of teacher competence in the field of teaching and learning cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts the quality of education and the academic achievement of students, particularly in rural education environments. The teacher tried to take part in training, even though it was online training. Additionally, because of the difficulty of the electricity and internet connection, she tries to match her schedule when she is in Kayuagung and takes part in the online training. The teacher said, *“Even though the lights are on, the internet signal here is often lost. The problem is the electricity and internet connection, so if I want to take part in training like that, I'll wait until I have the opportunity to go back to Kayuagung. Only then could I take part in the training, but when I was here, I couldn't take the training online because of the connection problems.”* (R, Interview, 2023).

In conclusion, the teacher's commitment to seeking proper training demonstrates a proactive approach to professional development in the field of English teaching in rural areas. The recognition of the importance of teacher competence and its direct impact on the quality of education underscores the teacher's dedication to enhancing her skills.

Promoting Effective Communication between Parents and Teachers

Recognizing the crucial role of parental involvement in a student's education, this strategy emphasizes the need for open and regular dialogue between educators and parents. The teacher tried to communicate with parents about their child's problems at school; they worked together in order to find out what should be done so that their children could change. The teacher said that *“we often call*

their parents, for example, if their child has been absent from school three times or they often sleep in class. We call, we explain, we invite to work together, and we ask for help because educating is not just our job because students are only at school for a few hours and the rest are at home” (R, Interview, 2023). In conclusion, the emphasis on promoting effective communication between parents and teachers emerges as a vital strategy for enhancing English teaching in rural areas. The teacher's proactive approach to reaching out to parents, addressing concerns, and fostering collaboration underscores the recognition of shared responsibility in a student's education. By creating an open dialogue, educators can engage parents in understanding and addressing their child's challenges, thereby working together to find effective solutions.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the data analysis using thematic analysis technique, the researcher discovered various difficulties and strategies for teaching English in rural area. The difficulties are insufficient infrastructure and facilities, a lack of students' motivation, less opportunity for teacher development, and a lack of parental support. The first difficulty encountered by the teacher was insufficient infrastructure and facilities. In rural areas, the presence of sufficient infrastructure and getting worse or unusable school facilities create significant obstacles to the effective implementation of teaching and learning activities (Vito & Kristiani, 2015; Songbatumis, 2017; & Febriana et al., 2018; Shan & Aziz, 2022; Amelia, 2022). It is related to the findings that were discovered during the interview session, in which the teachers mentioned that the teacher has difficulties when teaching and learning activities because the infrastructure in that school is still lacking, such as the electricity situation, which is still frequently problematic, and the school's electricity capacity means it cannot afford to use electric devices like projectors during the learning process. They also have a problem with the intermittent internet connection.

However, to overcome those difficulties, the teacher used a Bluetooth speaker, and personal investment in supplementary materials exemplified a commitment to providing engaging and effective English instruction despite resource limitations. It is supported by Wulandari (2019) that when trying to encourage students' enthusiasm for English language acquisition, teachers employ teaching techniques that prioritize enjoyment, even with limited resources. In conclusion, despite the formidable difficulties posed by inadequate infrastructure and facilities in rural areas, the teacher's provision of engaging and effective English instruction through creative solutions like using a Bluetooth speaker and investing in supplementary materials exemplifies a commitment to overcoming resource limitations and also fosters a positive learning environment for students.

The second difficulty encountered by the teacher was a lack of students' motivation. The teacher claimed that there are only a few students who are active in a class, and their English skills are passive, even low-tendent. Moreover, the students are too lazy to do the assignment and often sleep during the class. The teacher believed that the students' interest in learning was very low. In accordance with Eckert and Alsup (2015), Behram et al. (2015), Holguin and Morales (2016), and Songbatumis (2017), the most significant obstacle faced by English language teachers in rural Indonesia is the difficulty of handling uninterested students, those

who have just the minimum information-processing skills necessary to start the class, or those who easily surrender to disinterest and lose motivation.

Nonetheless, to overcome those difficulties, the teacher's emphasis on motivation as a key strategy in English teaching in rural areas reflects a deep commitment to inspiring and encouraging students. The teacher always gives encouragement and guidance for them to learn English, especially for students who are unable to do so academically. According to Wulandari (2019), the teachers regularly gave the students advice and encouragement to carry on with their studies while also providing information about the benefits of becoming proficient in the English language. In short, by prioritizing those who may face academic challenges and actively encouraging their participation, the teacher not only addresses individual learning needs but also cultivates a positive and supportive learning environment.

The third difficulty encountered by the teacher in a rural area was a less opportunity for professional teacher development. According to Rahayu (2016), Songbatumis (2017), Febriana et al. (2018), and Shan and Aziz (2022), teachers' perspectives on teaching issues involve insufficient training, a restricted comprehension of instructional approaches, a lack of experience with information technology, and a lack of opportunities for professional development. The teacher stated that she never attended the training of teachers carried out by institution, or official agencies or from the education, and she had rarely participated in online training because it was not supported by the internet connection.

However, to overcome those difficulties, the teacher stated that she tried to take part in proper training and tried the best way in online teacher training. In accordance with Salahuddin et al. (2013), Milon (2016), and Shan and Aziz (2022), it is imperative to offer professional training workshops or programs to English language teachers in order to guarantee that they possess the necessary information and pedagogical abilities to effectively deliver lessons and enhance their confidence in educating students. To sum up, despite the significant challenge of limited opportunities for teacher development in rural areas, the teacher's proactive approach to seeking proper training, including efforts to participate in online teacher training, underscores the importance of continuous professional development.

The last difficulty encountered by the teacher in a rural area was a lack of parental support. The role of parents in education is very crucial. As stated by Yunus and Khairunnisa (2011), they served as a supportive environment, so the learner was guided through the learning process. It is likely that there are parents who live in rural locations who anticipate or hold little awareness regarding the significance of English language acquisition. The teacher stated that there are parents who do not care for their important role as parents and place the burden on teachers, even though parents also have to take part in their children's education. In accordance with Febriana et al. (2018), Amelia (2022), and Shan and Aziz (2022), parents who live in rural regions do not actively encourage their children to attend school, particularly when learning English.

However, to overcome those difficulties, the teacher tried to communicate with parents about their child's problems at school. They worked together in order to find out what should be done so that their children could change. As revealed by Lekli and Kaloti (2015), and Sharmin (2019), establishing a strong connection between English language educators and parents is of utmost importance to

facilitate effective communication about the academic advancement of their children, constant obstacles that may limit their learning, and strategies to enhance their educational development. In conclusion, recognizing the crucial role of parental involvement in a student's education, this strategy emphasizes the need for open and regular dialogue between educators and parents.

CONCLUSION

The data gained from the interview was analyzed using thematic analysis. The result of this research showed that there were four difficulties encountered by the teacher and the strategies they employed to overcome those difficulties. Those difficulties and strategies were presented through several themes. The difficulties were: (1) insufficient infrastructure and facilities; (2) lack of students' motivation; (3) less opportunity for professional teacher development, and (4) lack of parental support. In accordance with the difficulties, the strategies were: (1) applying teaching method and procedure with personal funds; (2) giving motivation; (3) trying the best way to get proper training; and (4) promoting effective communication between parents and teachers.

The study's reliance on only one research site on a teacher as the participant limits the generalizability of the findings. Rural schools may vary widely in terms of their context, resources, difficulties, and the experiences of a single teacher may not fully represent the diversity of issues encountered across different rural settings. In addition, considering the factors contributing to the difficulties of insufficient infrastructure and facilities, it is recommended that the school principal propose the establishment of a language lab within the school to enhance English language teaching, providing dedicated space for language learning and resources. In response to the school principal's proposal for the establishment of a language lab, it is highly recommended that the National Education Service seriously considers and supports this initiative. The implementation of a language lab within the school not only addresses the difficulties posed by inadequate infrastructure and facilities but also signifies a proactive approach towards elevating the quality of English language education, offering both students and teachers a dedicated and enriched environment for language learning and resource utilization.

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