

Challenges faced by teachers in teaching English to EFL students in rural schools

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ABSTRACT

English is introduced at the primary level and is continued until the higher level of education. The majority of kids in rural schools are deficient in English due to a lack of experienced and lack of classroom materials. Students in rural schools perform poorly in English when compared to their urban counterparts. This study explores the challenges of teaching the English language in rural schools that faced by teachers. This study looked into the aspects that affect students' English language performance in rural schools. This research used a qualitative descriptive approach. The participants in this research were two English teachers from two different schools. Data was gathered through interviews, the researchers used semi-structured interviews. The result of the study showed that there are challenges that must be faced by teachers when teaching English in rural schools, and challenges that often arise in teaching English in rural schools are lack of interest in students towards English lessons, lack of facilities for school needs, lack of parental support and the environment for the student in learning, resulting in teachers being overwhelmed when teaching in the class.

Keywords: *challenges; EFL Students; rural school; teaching English*

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the very important tools that humans have, and English is one of the languages that have the status as an international language because English has a high status in the global language economy, which means that English language education is increasingly being promoted in international development initiatives (Hossain, 2016). English is needed in almost all aspects of life such as in the world of education, the world of work, business, and so on. By mastering English, a person can be said to have a great opportunity in various opportunities to get a job. It was proven based on Crystal's statement which said that English is one of the most important languages in the world (Crystal, 1997). So, this makes all countries all around the world encourage their citizens to learn English, even in rural areas.

One of them is Bangladesh where English has been taught from the beginning in primary school and continues through tertiary education. The majority of students in rural primary schools are weak in English due to a lack of skilled and trained teachers who are familiar with modern methods and approaches to teaching, as well as a lack of classroom materials (Hossain, 2016). Indonesia is also a country that requires its citizens to study English at an early age, English has been introduced to children since elementary school, but it still cannot be denied that success in English is still difficult to achieve, considering that English is also a foreign language for Indonesia, teaching and learning English has its challenges in achieving its goals.

Teaching English is already difficult for students who are foreign to the language even though the facilities and circumstances are supportive, teaching English has become increasingly difficult due to various factors so it becomes a challenge for teachers in teaching English in rural schools because, in the process of learning and teaching process, resources and learning environment are very influential, where we know the rural area situation that lacks proper and sufficient facilities. Because of its limitations, area, facilities, and atmosphere, the teaching and learning process in a rural school is both interesting and challenging for both students and teachers (Mudra, 2018). Even there are some English teachers in Colombia who are hesitant to work in rural schools due to the difficulties they may face (Holguín & Morales, 2016).

Therefore, this discussion is interesting to explore some of the challenges for teachers in rural areas. Some research has also been done related to teaching in rural schools one of them is in South Africa, where so many challenges should face by them such as rural areas are not attractive for teachers: the marginalization of school principals, constraints of Role Multiplicity, problems of access in rural schools, challenges of technology, curriculum challenges, lack of resources and challenges of poverty (Plessis, 2014). Then Renganathan (2021) from Malaysia in his article about English language education in rural schools in Malaysia, his study findings reveal that persistent concerns such as rural students' lack of desire and need to use English, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources in schools, and a lack of parental involvement in aiding homework at home remain important hurdles for improving English education.

Then there is Mudra (2018), with the title "Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Practicum in an Indonesian Rural School." The purpose of this study was to characterize and distribute the challenges encountered by people teaching English in rural schools throughout their Teaching Practicum Program (TTP). The research included seventeen pre-service teachers, and the approach was a qualitative study. According to the findings of that study, the challenges that pre-service EFL teachers faced revolved around classroom management, learning materials or resources, teaching aids or media, teaching methods, learners' English skills, language use choice, slow internet connectivity, learners' motivation, evaluation technique, and parental support.

The other research is by Febriana, et.al (2018), who conducted research on how the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education prioritized education in disadvantaged, outermost, and frontier regions (3T) by implementing the *Sarjana Mendidik di daerah Terdepan, Terluar, dan Tertinggal* (SM-3T), a year-long program for teacher education graduates to devote their lives to teaching in Indonesia's rural areas. The study aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by teachers, particularly English language teachers, in carrying out teaching and learning activities in rural Indonesian schools. A qualitative study was used in that study. According to the findings of that study, SM-3T teachers who taught in rural Indonesian schools faced various problems, including 1) infrastructure; 2) source of learning; 3) language barrier; 4) parent mindset; 5) teacher inadequacy; 6) student competency and 7) student mindset.

Despite the fact that numerous studies have looked into the difficulties faced by teachers when instructing EFL students in rural schools, none of these studies have specifically focused on one region of Indonesia. Because of this gap, the researcher is interested in carrying out this study that pays attention to areas in North Aceh.

This study aimed to explore the challenges that arise in teaching English in rural schools in North Aceh. Rural school is synonymous with inadequate facilities in various aspects. For example, books as learning resources are often insufficient, materials or practice tools are not available in schools, inadequate classes, and there is no availability of internet service at the time this has become

common and commonly used to access learning resources, as well as the availability of school buildings that deserves to be a constraint too. Even some schools often can't do the learning process when the rainy season arrives due to flooding and other things.

Challenges in Teaching English in Rural School

For the majority of English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language teacher, teaching English in rural schools has proved difficult (Halik & Nusrath, 2020). Education is challenging in rural areas everywhere. Problems are similar because, despite cultural and environmental differences, the rural context shares characteristics that are problematic for the implementation of successful education policies (Holguín & Morales, 2016). Students in rural areas may also be unmotivated. For students who rarely come outside their country and typically only communicate with the closest town, the value of English as a global language remains abstract. English is therefore a rarity that has little bearing on their daily life (Holguín & Morales, 2016).

According to Halik & Nusrath (2020), ESL teachers have a number of difficulties when trying to teach English. Particularly, the teachers who engage in rural schools have a number of obstacles and challenges as they carry out their duties. As a result, it appears that teaching English in rural schools is failing. Numerous reasons contribute to failure, including poor learning environments, a lack of adequate learning and teaching materials, a lack of supervision and motivation, and a shortage of skilled and educated instructors in rural schools. One of the biggest difficulties for the majority of ESL teachers in teaching English has been the students' negative attitude toward learning.

According to Febriana et al (2018), The biggest challenge faced by Indonesia in the education system is the wide geographical location and a large number of rural areas, which causes a lack of attention to schools in rural areas which results in a lack of proper facilities for schools in villages so that equal distribution of educational facilities is difficult to achieve. Another issue that instructors in rural Indonesian schools face is a shortage of learning resources. Learning resources are components of the teaching and learning process that can help teachers offer educational materials to students in the classroom. The availability of a sufficient number of books as learning tools in classrooms helps students grasp the lessons given by the teacher.

Likewise, a teacher also must have the ability to design learning activities in a lesson plan, where the lesson plan is a complete learning package that is taken from the educational curriculum and becomes the leading guide for the learning process. As Nunan (1999) said that the educational curriculum is a very important element in the learning process and teachers as educators play an important role in implementing it in the classroom.

For schools, especially teachers in rural schools are also a challenge, because the curriculum that changes frequently makes it difficult for teachers to follow the new curriculum rules. For example, the use of the 2013 curriculum is currently a big challenge for teachers and students in rural schools. The content of the 2013 curriculum emphasizes scientific learning and this approach focuses on student activity in learning. This is a big challenge for students because learning for rural school students usually only focuses on teacher explanations. As well as teachers who still have to explain all the material plus students who sometimes don't want to listen and follow the teacher's orders.

Moreover, the 2013 curriculum is also expected to be able to be more creative and innovative in developing lesson plans in class. The success of this curriculum is seen as a greater opportunity in urban schools which has the right facilities and support. Meanwhile, rural schools that don't have all

kinds of educational facilities and support will make it difficult for teachers so the implementation of the 2013 curriculum will be hampered.

Rural School

According to McCracken (1991), rural schools have the characteristics of the number of students in each class tends to be fewer and the location of the school is far from urban areas. This statement was also said by Rich and Evan (2009) who said that the number of students in each class of rural schools is usually not more than 30 students.

In addition, Plessis (2014) mentions several characteristics of rural areas according to UNESCO 2005, there are rural distances which are generally far from urban centers, unsupportive topographical conditions, such as road conditions, bridges, and so on, and access to various information technologies is very less, and transportation infrastructure. And also learning support resources such as books, projector media, computers, and others are not available enough, so the focus of learning is only on the teacher's explanation, thus making them bored and no longer interested in the teacher's explanation.

The lack of attention from their environment also can be one of the challenges that will face in the rural school, such as parents who do not fulfill their children's education needs, perhaps because parents don't care about their children's education or because of the lack of funds to fulfill their children's school needs, considering the statement by Biddle and Azano (2016) they state that rural school areas also often use the concept of a school located in an agricultural area where agricultural areas are often associated with the middle to lower economic level community. Therefore, this may be the reason why their parents cannot fulfill the educational needs of their children.

The background of students related to low socioeconomic family factors is also one of the factors that influence their performance in English. Most students in rural areas are from low-income households, thus they do not have access to as many educational resources as students in urban areas. Students who have access to more facilities or resources benefit more than those from low-income households (Hossain, 2016).

According to Plessis (2014), most economic difficulties also make parents not send their children to higher education. Not a few rural communities who ever attended school since birth, not also elementary school. So, some of those parents are illiterate and can't even count found in rural areas. Thus, making Students in rural areas do not get enough support from their parents for these reasons. This condition is even worse because of the opinion of the surrounding community and even the government which considers this to be a common thing in rural areas. Rather than helping to straighten the mindset of rural people about education, they are more inclined to let it become a common thing.

From some of the conditions described by the expert above, we know that the situation and environment of rural schools greatly affect student learning because with such conditions it will be difficult for rural schools to produce students who are expected to be successful and toward school targets.

METHODS

This research purposed to determine the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in rural schools. This Research used was the qualitative descriptive approach, this research design used to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups related to social problems. According

to Ary (2010), the qualitative approach is a study focused on understanding social conditions and presenting conditions, the environment, and verbal explanations of participants.

The participants in this study were two English teachers from two different schools in north Aceh. To collect data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. According to Adam (2015), the semi-structured interview is an interview using a mixture of closed and open questions, often accompanied by follow-up questions about *why* or *how*. The dialogue can twist around the topic on the agenda, instead of following the questions verbatim as in a standard survey and perhaps investigating a completely unexpected problem. The semi-structured interview aims to find out the challenges of learning English from the perspective of English teachers. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain broader and deeper data.

The school that was the object of this research was located in a rural area in North Aceh where there are not many media or learning resources that support learning English. In addition, the condition of students at school does not pay much attention to the importance of learning English, as well as the family environment and the surrounding community. People's perspectives on urban and rural schools are different. Schools located in rural areas tend to have fewer students and lower tuition fees than urban schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that in learning English in urban school's areas compared to rural schools there are some very significant differences where schools in urban areas have a lot of access as well as learning media that support the learning process and this is inversely proportional to rural schools which have many challenges and difficulties faced in rural schools. This is due to various factors including students' interest in English lessons is low, lack of support from parents and the environment, as well as the competence of English teachers who are fairly low. Here is an explanation more about the factors that hinder learning English in rural schools:

Students' interest in learning English

English is one of the compulsory subjects in all schools in Indonesia including rural schools, but many of the students in rural schools are less concerned about English lessons because they consider it unimportant, due to a lack of knowledge about the importance of English lessons. English is very influential on interest in learning that grows in students. Besides that, the notion that English is a difficult lesson makes them not take great interest in learning English. Many of them learn English is not optimal, even many of the students aim to only answer the national exam.

We can see student interest in the students' behavior when they are in the class, as Holguin & Morales (2016) said low interest in learning is seen in the behavior of students during the learning process in the classroom takes place, such as students not showing enthusiasm during the English learning process.

In this study, it was found that most of the students don't pay attention to the explanation's teacher well. They even do other things like reading novels, drawing, and joking with other friends. This is following the results of interviews conducted with two teachers in two schools.

The first teacher said "Usually students are very afraid when they hear English lessons. Maybe because they think English is difficult and unimportant, so they rarely pay attention to the lesson when I teach. Only a few students seem enthusiastic in the learning process."

Another obstacle that occurs is not only that they don't want to pay attention to the teacher's explanation, but they also rarely want to finish their task, whether it's done directly in class or homework, they always make excuses so they don't have to make the task.

The first teacher: *"When given the task, they mostly complain, complain because they can't answer it or they think the task is too difficult for them. I finally had to make the task become homework because they never finish the task on time."*

Another case occurred in the second school where students were often absent from school or often skipped school during lessons.

The second teacher *"the average student interest here for school is very low, even they often skip school or don't come to class when lessons take place, they have been warned several times but nothing has changed, even telling their parents to come to school, some parents say their children always go to school every day, and even there are some parents who have not come when the principal calls them."*

From the teachers' explanation, we know that some of these students really don't care at all about their education, and also their parents don't pay attention to their children's education so they don't know what their children do when they are at school, they don't even come to school when the school calls them to talk about their children's behavior at school.

Environmental influence

The environment is very influential on a person. The environment influences the mindset and motivation of a person to do something, not least for rural school students learning English. The role of parents also greatly affects the children's educational environment, but from the teacher's answer, many parents don't care about their children so that students don't feel afraid or depressed if they don't go to school or get bad grades because there is no concern for parents about their children's education, parents never ask how their child's learning process is at school every time they come home from school.

In the second school, the teacher said that he once found his students smoking in the school area.

The second teacher *"the association here is very free because of the lack of attention from parents at home so they become stubborn, and I once found that some students were caught smoking in the school area because they might not be prevented at home, so they thought it was okay to smoke anywhere."*

The influence of the other environment is friends, usually in rural schools if there are students who are diligent, smart, and always doing their assignments or homework, the student will be ostracized and ridiculed by other students, because that's a lot once students who are diligent and smart are also affected by naughty students because they do not want to be ostracized and bullied. As said by the first teacher who always gets this case in her class.

The first teacher *"friends greatly affect students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning, here not all students are naughty and don't want to pay attention to lessons when I teach there are also some students who are diligent, obedient, and serious when learning process and always do their task and homework, but because there are some students who naughty or lazy to study, always mocking that student, that make those students feel inferior and become less active in class."*

Therefore, the role of parents, friends, and teachers are very influential for students learning so there are always motivation and improvement for the students from these people.

English Teacher Competence

Teacher competence is assessed by their ability to design and implement learning well and maximally so that learning objectives can be achieved optimally as well. Two English teachers from these two schools have different ways of implementing learning in the classroom.

The English teacher at the first school delivered the material according to what was in the textbook. The textbooks are divided into one book for two people, due to the lack of textbooks at the school so each table has one book for two students. Then, the teacher explains based on the material and described it in simple language to make students understand easily and quickly.

The second teacher prefers to be a facilitator for his students.

The second teacher "usually for teaching-learning process I ask my students to read the text in the book one by one then I ask them to search the meaning in the dictionary if they find words that they don't know the meaning of, but that is also a problem because not all students bring a dictionary, for various reasons, for example forgetting to bring it, haven't bought it yet, or don't have money to buy it."

In addition, a teacher must be able to design and implement learning in the classroom well and maximally, a teacher must also have the ability to create learning activity plans. Learning activities must be included in the lesson plan that contains learning objectives as the expected target of the teaching and learning process.

These whole learning activities are covered in the lesson plan or *Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran (RPP)*. A good teacher should have a learning plan that is used as a guide in learning. However, in reality, the use of a learning plan has never worked as it should. What is written in the learning plan is never in line with the reality of learning in rural schools. The two English teachers at the two schools admitted that they never used lesson plans when teaching.

The first teacher "in the teaching process I don't follow the lesson plans completely because there are some situations that impossible to follow the lesson plans 100 percent, so I tend to be flexible, linking each lesson to everyday life to make it easier for students to understand the learning."

The second teacher "for a lesson plan I always design and provide it, but I don't use it for the students here because the use of lesson plan can't work with the condition of the students here. They are hard to manage, they don't pay attention to my explanation, and I have to scream to explain it. So I don't ever teach them based on the lesson plan in the teaching process."

A learning plan is very important in the learning process because it functions to plan and direct teaching in learning activities. Therefore, a teacher must be able to organize and direct their students so that the teaching process will take place in a neat and orderly manner, but if students do not listen to the direction of the teachers they will also fail in teaching. That happened to the two rural schools experienced by the two teachers who were interviewed.

CONCLUSION

Rural schools are often underestimated by people due to various factors, and all of these factors cannot be separated from the lack of attention from the community itself to the school so other factors arise. Therefore, because of these factors, some challenges must be faced when teaching

English in rural schools, and challenges that often arise in learning and teaching English in rural schools are lack of interest in students towards English lessons, lack of parental support, and the student's environment, and also the facilities in the school do not support it and resulting in teachers being overwhelmed when teaching in the class.

Therefore, learning in rural schools cannot be underestimated, related to poor environmental conditions, English teachers are expected to have the proper ability for technique teaching in rural areas, as well as have a way to deal with the condition of students and the condition of school facilities that usually not sufficient. While other facilities do not support it, rural schools must get more attention to learning to be able to improve education in rural schools while at the same time improving the quality of life of those who are used to rural people who underestimate education.

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