



# Junior High School English Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English at Rural Area

Siti Hardiah Nengsi<sup>1</sup>, Sharaini<sup>2</sup>, Magfirah Thayyib<sup>3</sup>, Wisran<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Tadris Bahasa Inggris, State Islamic University of Palopo, Palopo, South Sulawesi

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### Corresponding Author:

Siti Hardiah Nengsi  
[2205040009@uinpalopo.ac.id](mailto:2205040009@uinpalopo.ac.id)  
Tadris Bahasa Inggris, State  
Islamic University of Palopo,  
Palopo, South Sulawesi

## Abstract

*This study aims to investigate the challenges faced by English teachers in rural junior high schools and the strategies they employ to address these challenges. The research was conducted at SMPN 1 Rongkong using a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with three English teachers. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal eight major challenges, namely: curriculum implementation, inadequate school infrastructure, limited instructional time and teacher qualifications, students' lack of vocabulary mastery, low learning motivation, limited teaching resources and internet access, geographical isolation, and lack of parental support. Among these, limited resources and low student motivation were identified as the most dominant challenges. Teachers addressed these issues through adaptive and creative strategies, such as contextualized teaching, the use of local materials, interactive activities, and collaboration with parents. This study highlights the need for greater institutional support, improved infrastructure, and targeted teacher training to enhance English language teaching in rural areas. The findings provide practical implications for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in improving the quality of rural education in Indonesia.*

## 1. Introduction

Educating individuals in English as a second language presents considerable challenges across both rural and urban contexts. Educators must diligently address students' proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, they are tasked with leveraging technological resources, fostering positive attitudes and enthusiasm among students, and instilling motivation to engage with the English language.

This pedagogical endeavor is particularly demanding, particularly within rural locales where communities may require additional support in grasping the significance of English language acquisition. In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language and is a compulsory subject in secondary education. However, disparities between urban and rural education remain significant, particularly in terms of infrastructure, access to learning resources, and teacher professional development. Rural schools often face limitations that hinder the effective implementation of English language teaching compared to urban schools.

The challenges can be met by teachers, students, parents, and the school environment. In this case, the highlight issue that becomes the researcher's main concern is less qualified teachers; most primary school English teachers need qualifications in English education Yuwono & Harbon (2010). Furthermore, is the parents' support; they are unable to support or facilitate their children's learning continuity and language fluency at home (Masturi, et.al 2022). Facilities are crucial factors because lack of facilities will impact the process of instruction and acquisition of knowledge.

The distance of rural areas is isolated from growth centers or other areas due to needing more transportation facilities, thus hampering the growth or development of the region. Rural schools are delineated as educational institutions accommodating fewer than 600 students, situated at a minimum distance of five miles from urbanized regions, and exhibit greater shortcomings compared to their urban counterparts (Wulandari 2019). Addition, schools in rural areas face unique obstacles in teaching English subjects (Songbatumis 2017).

Rural schools face challenges in Indonesia due to the long distance between rural and urban areas, language diversity, and economic issues. Therefore, teachers who teach English in rural areas mostly need help teaching and communicating with students who do not speak English. Many people in rural areas still regard English as a foreign language and unlikely to provide direct benefits to their lives.

Moreover, because rural areas are far from urban areas, it needs internet an appropriate access or an electric network. The ongoing discourse on the importance of continuous English language learning remains pertinent, particularly in light of the prevalent need for English proficiency among students for effective communication beyond the confines of the classroom. Given that English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia and predominantly confined to classroom settings, it is imperative to address this matter consistently. However,

the predominant language in rural areas is not English, thereby presenting a significant obstacle for rural educators tasked with teaching and communicating with students who may lack proficiency in the English language.

Several previous studies related to this research have explored various challenges that have emerged, originating from diverse sources including students, teachers, and school facilities (Khulel, 2021). Students encounter difficulties stemming from inadequate mastery of vocabulary, diminished concentration, and lack of discipline, boredom, and speech-related issues. Conversely, teachers face a range of challenges, including inadequate training, difficulties with language proficiency, limitations in pedagogical techniques, unfamiliarity with information technology, and insufficient opportunities for professional development.

Furthermore, they also encounter issues related to facilities, which involve deficiencies in resources and infrastructure. Another study examining the primary challenges encountered by educators in the teaching process highlights the inadequacy of support for effective education, including a scarcity of proficient teachers and challenges related to the localization and implementation of the English curriculum (Ramón, Peniche, and Cisneros-Cohernour 2018). The third study identifies both specific and overarching factors that warrant attention for enhancing student education: inefficiencies in the formulation of educational policies, shortages in certain resources and infrastructure, insufficiencies in technological provisions, inadequacies in teacher training, and management of school administration. The school's implemented strategies aimed at mitigating these issues contribute to enhancements in student performance (Rajesh and Shrikhande, 2017).

This study is also grounded in several language learning theories to better understand the challenges faced by teachers. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes meaningful interaction and the use of language in real-life contexts, which is often difficult to implement in resource-limited rural settings. Additionally, Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky) highlights the importance of social interaction and environmental factors in language learning. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for analyzing how contextual limitations in rural areas influence English teaching and learning processes.

In light of these investigations, the researcher is prompted to discover deeper into the obstacles encountered by educators teaching English as a foreign language, particularly within rural settings. While some scholars have examined the difficulties of teaching English in rural areas, particularly at the elementary level, there is a shortage of research focusing on the challenges and strategies within rural junior high schools in Indonesia. Although previous studies have explored challenges in rural English education, most have focused on primary schools or general contexts.

There is still limited research specifically examining the challenges and strategies of English teachers at the junior high school level in Indonesian rural settings, particularly in remote areas such as Rongkong. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by providing a more context-specific analysis. As a result, this study aims to outline the challenges faced by English teachers in high schools at rural area and the strategies they use to overcome these issues. Previous research on the difficulties and approaches of English educators in this particular context is notably limited. This study aims to provide an understanding of the challenges faced by English teachers in rural areas and the methods they employ to improve the quality of English instruction, specifically in rural junior high schools.

In order to guarantee that their voices are acknowledged, it is crucial to give attention to their views and goals. In particular, parents' ought to endeavor to establish an atmosphere in which their children can acquire English, exposing them to the language from a young age. Institutions of higher learning in rural areas are regarded as centers of knowledge. This suggests that colleges or schools are viewed as ideal educational environments. Furthermore, educators need to uphold these settings with a steadfast commitment to teaching and mentoring students. Even if the classrooms may be packed, the instructor still must make every effort to see every student and help them improve their language skills (Jonathan, et.al 2020).

In Rongkong district, junior high school number 1 Rongkong would be subject of this study. The researcher selected one such school to conduct interviews with teachers. The school where the research took place only has a limited number of books to support the teaching and learning process, and even then, the books are only available in the library. There is also a projector that can only be conditioned; although the furniture is still decent, there are several classes that still need cement floors, so the class becomes very dusty. Also, no language laboratory can be used by students to practice what they have learned in the class.

The lack of student motivation in learning is a significant factor in the lack of students in the school, especially in English language learning; this factor is based on the parents of students who mostly do not have an excellent educational background, and even many of them do not go to school at all. It is challenging for teachers to teach English in the absence of proper facilities because of these issues. As a result, stakeholders must work together to identify the best ways to address the problems in rural areas.

This school must meet the requirements and goals outlined in the 2013 Curriculum, even if it is situated in a village. The difficulties that educators face should also be thoroughly investigated (Robert & Taylor (1973). Numerous factors influence the second language acquisition process, encompassing elements such as attitude, self-assurance, motivation, classroom dynamics, environmental factors, familial context, student aptitude, and the presence of qualified instructors.

Investigating rural areas is crucial due to the distinctive challenges these regions encounter, which are not typically found in more developed areas. The scarcity of infrastructure, resources, and modern technology often obstructs both educational advancement and community well-being in these settings. Conducting research in such environments can uncover specific limitations impacting educational outcomes and quality of life, and assess potential solutions to mitigate these issues. By offering comprehensive insights into the needs and difficulties faced by remote areas, this research aids in the formulation of fairer policies and more effective intervention strategies, ultimately improving socio-economic and educational conditions in these underserved areas.

Based on the background described earlier, this study aims to investigate the challenges faced by English teachers in rural junior high schools and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. Accordingly, the research questions of this study are:

1. What challenges do English teachers face in teaching English in rural junior high schools?
2. What strategies do teachers use to overcome these challenges?

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on rural English education in Indonesia. Practically, the findings may provide insights for teachers, policymakers, and educational stakeholders in improving the quality of English teaching in rural areas.

## **2. Method**

This study utilized qualitative research methodologies. Qualitative research would be using various methods to study natural settings to achieve research objectives. Qualitative techniques require descriptive data from the subject in through written, oral, or spoken words, as well as observable behavior (Taylor, 1990). A qualitative methodology is an investigative method that produces descriptive data obtained from individuals through written or oral communication and observable actions (Creswell 2016). Qualitative research is a type of research centered on explaining and understanding real life problems. This type of research uses qualitative methods to examine how certain community conditions affect events, behavior, and meaning.

The primary focus of this research centered on employing a descriptive case study approach within a qualitative framework. The problem under investigation was thoroughly examined and elucidated through descriptive data analysis. The research framework adopted for this investigation was that of a case study. The participants of this study consisted of three English teachers at SMPN 1 Rongkong. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their teaching experience and their direct involvement in English teaching in the rural school

context. Case study methodology is utilized to delve deeply into a single instance, such as an individual, organization, or community, to gain precise insights.

The defined scope of the study may be determined by temporal or spatial constraints, and the case itself may encompass diverse entities, such as programs, activities, or individuals (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Empirical materials such as personal experiences, introspection, life narratives, interviews, observations, as well as historical, interactional, and visual texts, are employed in qualitative research to explore both ordinary and intricate events and meanings within individuals' lives. Case studies serve as instances of such empirical materials utilized in qualitative research.

Data collection involves the researcher gathering information from various sources or informants. Research instruments play a pivotal role in the overall research process by furnishing the necessary data to address the research problems. In this study, researchers utilized interview guides and observation sheets to collect data. They conducted face-to-face interviews with both teachers and students to corroborate the observations and verify impressions. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted in a semi-structured format to allow flexibility in exploring participants' responses. Follow-up questions were also asked to gain deeper insights into the challenges faced by the teachers. Data were primarily obtained through these interviews, organized systematically to elicit specific responses.

Additionally, a recording device was employed to ensure no data were lost during the interviews. This device facilitated the researcher in revisiting interview findings to extract essential information; this helps reduce mistakes caused by limitations. The individuals being interviewed must also consent to the recording, photographing, and video recording. Ethical considerations were strictly followed in this study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were also ensured throughout the research process.

During the observation the researcher recorded take videos and take pictures the situation and all of the process of English teaching. The observations were conducted over several classroom sessions to capture a comprehensive picture of the teaching and learning process. These observations focused on classroom interaction, teaching strategies, student participation, and the challenges encountered during instruction. Commencing with salutations, leading a collective prayer, proceeding to attendance check, reviewing prior material, imparting new content from the companion book, and engaging in group discussions to foster student discourse, culminating in a recapitulation of the lesson provided by the English instructor in the classroom interview outcomes concerning the challenges encountered by teachers were corroborated solely through observational means.

The researcher monitored classroom dynamics and activities during instruction, employing non-participant observation for this study. To minimize researcher bias, the researcher-maintained objectivity by carefully recording data and avoiding personal assumptions during data collection and analysis. The use of multiple data sources, including interviews and observations, also helped ensure a more balanced interpretation of the findings.

Data collection was carried out until data saturation was achieved, meaning that no new significant information or themes emerged from the participants' responses. In analyzing the data for this research, the researcher employed the interactive model of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman, which comprises three primary components: (1) data reduction; the data reduction steps: a) Summarize data. Summarize data is the simplification and focusing of complex data to identify the most relevant information.

This begins with transcribing and sorting data from interviews, observations, and documents. b) Decoding, the researcher then codes the data with labels that reflect key themes or concepts. c) Exploring the theme, irrelevant or redundant data is filtered out, and similar codes are grouped to identify patterns or main themes. d) Creating clusters, this process concludes with organizing themes for thematic analysis, which allows the researcher to develop a deep and comprehensive narrative about the studied phenomenon (2) data display; To draw valid conclusions from the data, the researcher employs straightforward data presentation techniques, such as verbal descriptions, narrative sentences, and concise explanations displayed in a descriptive format and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions; Drawing conclusions or verification is the phase where research outcomes are generated to address the research focus, based on the findings of data analysis. It serves as the ultimate step in data analysis, during which the researcher synthesizes the research findings and discussions.

To validate the data, the outcomes of this study were compared with existing theories and previous research on the subject. The findings encompass an elucidation of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English, along with their strategies for addressing these challenges. In addition, method triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from interviews and classroom observations to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Sample interview questions used in this study are provided in the appendix to give a clearer overview of the data collection process.

### **3. Result**

The findings of this study are organized into several major themes to provide a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by English teachers in rural areas. These themes include: (1) institutional challenges, (2) teacher-related challenges, (3) student-related challenges, and (4) external challenges. Each theme is supported by data from classroom observations and interviews.

This research was conducted in UPT SMP Negeri 1 Rongkong, was located at Dusun Salutallang, Limbong, Rongkong sub-district, North Luwu regency. Before conducting interviews, the researcher first carried out classroom observation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the field conditions. The purpose of the observation was to directly examine how the learning process took place, including teacher-student interactions, the use of teaching methods, and the challenges faced during the teaching and learning activities. The results of the observation provided important contextual data to enrich the interviews, enabling the researcher to ask more specific and relevant questions based on the findings obtained in the field.

No.	Aspect of Learning	Observed Activities	Identified Challenges
1.	Opening	The teacher starts the lesson with a prayer and greets the students	Students do not respond well due to low discipline and lack of familiarity with formal routines
2.	Material delivery	The teacher explains basic English vocabulary	Students have limited understanding of English and struggle to follow the teacher's explanation
3.	The use of instructional media	The teacher uses simple pictures which they have prepared at home as teaching materials to help students learn new vocabulary	There is no access to technology such as projectors or the internet for more interactive teaching materials
4.	Students interaction	The teacher encourages students to ask questions and interact using English	Students tend to be passive due to low self-confidence and lack of practice in speaking English
5.	Assessment of Understanding	The teacher assesses understanding through oral questioning or simple tests	Students struggle to answer due to insufficient comprehension of the material

a. Institutional Challenges

The first group of challenges identified in this study relates to institutional factors, particularly those associated with curriculum implementation, school infrastructure, and the availability of teaching resources. These challenges are largely influenced by systemic limitations within the rural education context, which directly affect the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

b. Teacher-Related Challenges

The second category of challenges concerns teacher-related factors, including limited instructional time and inadequate teacher qualifications. These challenges highlight the constraints faced by teachers in managing their workload and delivering effective English instruction in rural schools.

c. Student-Related Challenges

The third category involves student-related challenges, particularly students' limited vocabulary mastery and low motivation to learn English. These factors significantly influence students' ability to engage with the learning material and achieve expected learning outcomes.

d. External Challenges

The final category consists of external challenges, including geographical isolation and limited parental support. These challenges are beyond the direct control of teachers but play a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences and access to educational resources.

To provide a clearer overview of the classroom learning process and the challenges observed during English instruction, the following table summarizes the results of classroom observations conducted by the researcher. The table presents key aspects of teaching activities, the observed practices, and the challenges identified during the learning process.

No.	Type of challenges	Specific challenges in the field	Overcome
1.	Curriculum	The teachers are uncertain about how to adapt the newly introduced curriculum materials to their classroom conditions, especially since they lack adequate references. Then the physical facilities at the school are often inadequate, lacking sufficient space and equipment to support activity-based learning required for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.	Incorporate vocabulary into everyday activities such as farming, planting, shopping at the market, or household chores. Create bingo cards with vocabulary words and their definitions. As you call out the definitions, students mark the corresponding words on their cards. Additionally, the researcher uses local folktales or traditional stories to introduce and practice vocabulary. Discuss the cultural context and the vocabulary used in these traditional narratives.

2.	School infrastructure and facilities	Classrooms with poor physical conditions, such as dusty floors due to the lack of proper tiling, significantly disrupt the learning process. The classrooms lack functional whiteboards, have broken chairs, damaged ceilings that leak when it rains, and old desks, some of which have been partially eaten by termites. Then the school does not have an adequate library, and the delivery of textbooks to the location is often delayed.	Use locally available books, newspapers, and magazines as teaching materials to make learning more relevant and engaging and integrate local cultural knowledge and practices into English lessons to make learning more contextual and relatable
3.	Insufficient time and teacher qualified	Teachers do not receive regular training in effective English teaching methods and are unable to access online practice materials due to limited internet connectivity.	Focusing on the most essential language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing emphasizing practical language use and the communication skills students need in real-life situations.
4.	Lack of vocabulary mastery	The students use the local language in their daily lives, making it difficult for them to understand basic instructions in English because they are not accustomed to the language. English is very unfamiliar to them.	Create vocabulary cards with target words on one side and definitions, pictures, or example sentences on the other, use songs with clear and repetitive lyrics that include new vocabulary and integrate new vocabulary into storytelling activities. Read stories that contain target words aloud, or have students create and share their own stories using the new vocabulary
5.	Students'	Students tend to be	Enhance student motivation

	motivation	unmotivated or lack enthusiasm in English lessons. They are often unfocused, sleepy, skip class, or are frequently absent.	and engagement, offer verbal praise, certificates, or small incentives to acknowledge their hard work and progress. Additionally, organize vocabulary contests where students can compete in spelling bees, word challenges, or quiz games to make learning more engaging. It is also important to maintain open communication with parents, providing updates on their children's progress and offering guidance on how they can support their children's learning at home.
6.	lack of resource, teaching media, and internet network	It is difficult to obtain English teaching materials that are appropriate for the students' proficiency level. The available textbooks are outdated or not aligned with the latest curriculum. Only a few students have cell phones, but accessing the internet is challenging due to inadequate network coverage.	Encourage teachers to develop customized teaching materials that cater to their students' specific needs, Plan outdoor lessons that allow students to experience learning in a natural or real-world setting. For example, language teachers can conduct storytelling sessions outside, using nature as inspiration, or organize scavenger hunts that require students to use target vocabulary in a practical context and promote collaborative activities such as group projects, peer teaching, or discussion-based tasks where students work together to solve problems or complete assignments
7.	The isolation	The school is located in an area with extreme	The learning design activities incorporate with local

		natural conditions, such as mountainous regions and landslide-prone areas. Teachers are often hindered by landslides that block access to the school, especially during the rainy season. This also prevents them from having opportunities to collaborate with other teachers or participate in language teaching communities.	cultural elements. This could include using examples from students' everyday lives, regional stories, or local traditions and create a classroom atmosphere where students feel safe and encouraged to participate actively
8.	Parental support	Parents do not assist their children with English homework because they feel incapable, largely due to the fact that most parents lack a proper educational background and do not know how to motivate their children. They typically only speak the local language and have no knowledge of English. Additionally, economic limitations prevent parents from providing learning resources such as extra books or internet access. Furthermore, education, especially English, is often regarded as unimportant by the parents.	Design homework tasks that encourage interaction between students and their parents, and employ innovative teaching methods that go beyond traditional techniques. This may include integrating creative storytelling or problem-solving tasks to actively engage students and develop their critical thinking skills.

Based on the table above, the researcher describes the challenges in detail, accompanied by the results of interviews with English teachers. The first challenge is the curriculum. The most significant challenge is the curriculum's importance, as it functions as a basic framework that directs the education and learning process.

Below are the answers of the interview questions to the English teacher.

### ***Curriculum Challenges***

The teachers reported that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is challenging due to limited access to teaching resources, unstable internet connections, and varying levels of students' English proficiency, as reflected in interviews conducted on 26 July 2024 and 4 August 2024.

### ***School Infrastructure and Facilities***

Teachers indicated that inadequate school facilities, including poor classroom conditions, lack of textbooks, and absence of technological tools, significantly hinder the learning process, as reported in interviews on 24 July 2024, 26 July 2024, and 19 April 2024.

### ***Insufficient Time and Teacher Qualifications***

The findings reveal that limited instructional time and a shortage of qualified teachers reduce the effectiveness of English instruction, as highlighted in interviews conducted on 24 July 2024, 26 July 2024, and 19 April 2024.

### ***Lack of Vocabulary Mastery***

Teachers emphasized that students' limited vocabulary knowledge affects their ability to understand and participate in learning activities, based on interviews conducted on 24 July 2024 and 19 April 2024.

### ***Students' Motivation***

The data show that students generally have low motivation to learn English, which leads to passive classroom participation, as reflected in interviews conducted on 24 July 2024, 26 July 2024, and 19 April 2024.

### ***Lack of Resources, Teaching Media, and Internet***

Teachers reported that limited teaching media, inadequate learning materials, and poor internet access restrict the use of effective teaching strategies, as revealed in interviews on 24 July 2024, 26 July 2024, and 19 April 2024.

### ***Isolation***

The findings indicate that geographical isolation limits teachers' access to training and professional collaboration, as described in interviews conducted on 24 July 2024 and 26 July 2024.

### ***Parental Support***

Teachers stated that limited parental involvement negatively affects students' learning motivation and discipline, based on interviews conducted on 4

August 2024.

The interview results indicate that despite the limitations in parental support for learning, teachers in rural schools overcome these challenges with creative and proactive approaches. They educate parents about the importance of involvement in their children's education, assign homework that involves parental participation, and use a relaxed approach to maintain students' engagement with English outside of school hours.

#### **4. Discussion**

This section discusses the findings of the study by relating them to existing theories and previous research, as well as highlighting their implications for English language teaching in rural contexts. The discussion focuses not only on describing the challenges but also on analyzing their underlying causes and broader educational impact. Based on the research findings, there are eight (8) challenges that English teachers face in teaching English in rural areas as presented in the previous chapter. The discussion will focus on connecting these findings to the existing literature and offering insights into the implications for English language teaching in rural contexts

##### **1. Curriculum**

The introduction of the Kurikulum Merdeka brought significant shifts in the educational landscape, emphasizing student autonomy, creativity, and contextualized learning. However, while the curriculum's flexibility offers potential benefits, it also presents specific challenges for English teachers in rural areas which are recognized for its excellence but not for its challenges (Jasrial, Syarif, and Zainil 2023). The Kurikulum Merdeka promotes contextual learning, encouraging teachers to connect their lessons to the local environment and culture. However, English teachers in rural areas face challenges in contextualizing lessons for students who may have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. These challenges highlight the various difficulties English teachers encounter in relation to the curriculum (Reza, Rohmah, and Abdullah 2023).

The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka presents various challenges for English teachers in rural areas, primarily due to the unique conditions and limitations they face. Although the curriculum advocates for flexibility, student-centered learning, and the integration of local culture into the classroom, achieving these ideals can be difficult in rural contexts. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of adequate resources. Many rural schools are underfunded and lack essential teaching materials such as updated textbooks, digital tools, and language laboratories, which are crucial for supporting effective English language instruction.

This resource gap creates a significant disparity between urban and rural schools, making it challenging for rural teachers to meet the curriculum's expectations (Fitra and Tiarina 2023). Furthermore, the limited availability of

professional development opportunities exacerbates this issue. Rural teachers often receive minimal training on the pedagogical shifts required by the Kurikulum Merdeka, such as project-based learning and the use of technology in the classroom (Wulandari, S, and Ilham 2024). Without ongoing support and training, teachers struggle to implement these methods effectively, which can lead to a reliance on traditional, teacher-centered approaches that do not align with the curriculum's objectives.

Moreover, rural teachers face the additional burden of contextualizing English lessons for students who have limited exposure to the language. In urban areas, students may encounter English through media, technology, or extracurricular activities, but in rural settings, students' exposure to English is often confined to the classroom (Wulandari, S, and Ilham 2024). This lack of exposure makes it difficult for teachers to create meaningful and relevant lessons that engage students in authentic language use. The Kurikulum Merdeka encourages teachers to integrate local cultural and environmental contexts into their lessons, yet doing so in English, a foreign language for most rural students, requires creativity and additional effort. Teachers must find ways to bridge the gap between the curriculum's expectations and the realities of their students' lives, often without sufficient guidance or resources.

In addition to these pedagogical and resource challenges, rural teachers also contend with socio-cultural barriers. The dominance of local languages and the prioritization of practical, community-centered knowledge over foreign language acquisition can make the teaching of English seem irrelevant to students' immediate needs and future aspirations. As a result, teachers may encounter resistance from both students and their families, who may not fully understand the value of learning English. This resistance can further complicate the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, as teachers must not only teach the language but also foster a positive attitude toward learning it.

Finally, the workload of rural teachers often limits their ability to fully engage with the curriculum. Many rural teachers are responsible for teaching multiple subjects and extracurricular activities, in addition to administrative tasks, leaving them with little time to plan and develop lessons that align with the curriculum's principles of flexibility and creativity. The demand to tailor lessons to students' needs while also meeting the broader goals of the Kurikulum Merdeka places a heavy burden on teachers, who may feel overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon them.

This combination of limited resources, inadequate training, socio-cultural challenges, and excessive workload creates a difficult environment for the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in rural areas. To address these challenges, there must be a concerted effort from policymakers to provide rural schools with the necessary resources and support, including targeted professional development, improved access to teaching materials, and strategies to

overcome socio-cultural resistance to English language learning.

Without such interventions, rural students may continue to face educational disadvantages compared to their urban peers, ultimately hindering their opportunities for future success. From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be explained through Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky), which emphasizes the role of environment and social interaction in learning. The limited exposure to English and lack of supportive learning environments in rural areas restrict students' opportunities to develop language skills effectively.

## 2. School infrastructure and facilities

One of the primary obstacles is the lack of adequate physical resources to support effective learning processes. The severely limited budgets directly impact the availability of essential facilities such as language laboratories, computers, and other digital tools. Without these facilities, English teachers struggle to provide interactive and diverse learning experiences that align with the curriculum's emphasis on technology and digital media (Lombo and Subban 2024). For example, the absence of a well-equipped language laboratory hinders students' ability to practice speaking and listening skills in a supportive environment.

Infrastructure limitations also affect the overall quality of learning. Inadequate classroom conditions often present an additional challenge. Small classrooms and a lack of appropriate teaching aids or media make it difficult for teachers to implement innovative and engaging teaching methods. The absence of interactive whiteboards, projectors, and other supporting devices can make learning monotonous and less stimulating, ultimately reducing student motivation and engagement in the learning process.

Additionally, the availability of library facilities and access to quality reading materials is limited. Incomplete and outdated libraries reduce students' opportunities to access up-to-date textbooks and relevant English reading materials. Without adequate reading resources, students are unable to expand their vocabulary, improve reading comprehension, or practice their English skills outside of class. This creates a significant disparity compared to urban schools that may have better access to resources and instructional materials.

These facility limitations also impact teachers' professional development. Training and workshops related to technology use and pedagogical innovations are often unavailable in rural areas (Ma'rifatullah, Ampa, and Azis 2019). This deficiency prevents teachers from fully utilizing the potential of digital tools and resources, making it challenging to implement more modern and effective teaching methods. The lack of adequate training facilities exacerbates this issue, resulting in teachers feeling unprepared and less skilled in meeting the demands of a more dynamic curriculum.

Overall, the limitations in infrastructure and facilities at rural schools create significant barriers to the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Addressing these issues requires increased attention and support from

government and related agencies to provide adequate resources and infrastructure. Investments in infrastructure improvements, provision of relevant teaching aids, and enhancement of teacher training facilities are essential steps to help bridge the gap between rural and urban schools (Showalter et al. 2019). Only by ensuring that all schools, regardless of their location, have equal access to necessary resources and facilities can we hope to achieve greater success in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka and improving the overall quality of education.

### 3. Insufficient time and teacher qualified

One of the primary challenges faced by English teachers in rural areas is the limited time available to effectively teach English materials. The findings of this study reveal that the demanding class schedules and limited time allocated for English often impede teachers' ability to deliver content in a comprehensive and structured manner. This limitation contributes to a hurried teaching approach, which in turn affects students' understanding and English language skills. A packed schedule can compel teachers to compromise the quality of instruction in order to cover the entire expected curriculum (Mukrim et al. 2023). In this context, inadequate time often forces teachers to focus on basic aspects of English, such as vocabulary and basic grammar, without sufficient attention to the development of more complex communication skills, such as speaking and listening.

Similarly, retention of teachers in remote areas is a must, so that they remain in the region. Teachers in remote schools often do not live well and are often not provided with proper accommodation. Enhancing English proficiency for teachers and students in rural areas is crucial not only for improving the quality of education but also for opening up more opportunities to face the challenges of globalization. Therefore, comprehensive and sustainable efforts are needed to overcome the various obstacles, by providing adequate educational resources, increasing teacher capacity, and creating an environment that supports the use of English.

In addition to time constraints, another challenge is the lack of adequate teacher qualifications. This study reveals that many teachers in rural areas lack appropriate qualifications or specialized training in teaching English. This issue stems from a shortage of affordable training programs and access to adequate professional development in remote areas. These findings are consistent with reports by the researcher, which indicate that rural teachers often receive insufficient support for continuing education crucial for their teaching skill development. This lack of training impacts teachers' pedagogical skills, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of their instruction. Without adequate professional development, teachers may be less adept at implementing innovative and effective teaching methods required to address the diverse learning needs of their students (Mukrim et al. 2023).

The combination of time constraints and insufficient qualifications creates significant challenges in ensuring optimal English language teaching quality. Teachers who are lacking in time and training may struggle to implement

approaches aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes competency-based and student-centered learning. Therefore, a comprehensive intervention from authorities is needed to provide additional time and access to relevant professional training for teachers in rural areas. Improvement in these two areas is expected to significantly enhance the quality of English language teaching, providing long-term benefits for the development of students' English language skills in rural areas.

The proficiency of English teachers has a significant positive impact on the learning process in the classroom. Students who are fluent in English tend to achieve higher academic performance, have greater self-confidence, and possess better communication skills. Additionally, teachers skilled in English can create a more interactive and engaging learning environment, which enhances student participation and motivation in learning (Mukrim et al. 2023).

#### 4. Lack of vocabulary mastery

The lack of vocabulary proficiency among students is a significant challenge faced by English teachers in rural areas. This issue is exacerbated by the limited exposure to English materials and experiences outside the classroom, which are crucial for developing a robust vocabulary. The findings of this study reveal that students in rural areas often enter junior high school with a minimal foundation in English vocabulary, a situation further compounded by a shortage of resources and additional learning opportunities. This deficiency in vocabulary not only hampers students' ability to understand and interact with more complex language structures but also affects their overall language skills and academic performance.

The mastery of vocabulary will also affect the aspects of the four skills in English such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Al-Khairi 2015). Student success in learning can be determined by their motivation. Students with high learning motivation tend to achieve high performance, while students with low learning motivation tend to achieve low performance. The level of motivation able to affect the amount of effort or enthusiasm someone puts into activities, and naturally, the level of enthusiasm will determine the results obtained. Almost all experts agree that a theory of motivation is concerned with the factors that drive behavior and give direction to that behavior. Additionally, it is generally accepted that a person's motive for engaging in an activity is based on an underlying need (Meningkatkan and Belajar 2021).

Research consistently indicates that a strong vocabulary foundation is essential for language acquisition and academic success. According to [Author], vocabulary knowledge directly impacts reading comprehension, writing skills, and overall language use. In rural settings, where access to diverse and enriching English language experiences is limited, students struggle to build this foundation. Teachers often have to allocate substantial time to basic vocabulary instruction, diverting attention from more advanced language skills and concepts. This challenge is further exacerbated by the reality that many teachers themselves may

lack access to effective vocabulary teaching strategies and resources, inadequate professional development opportunities hinder teachers' ability to implement innovative vocabulary teaching methods (Kompetensi et al. 2024).

The impact of insufficient vocabulary proficiency is particularly pronounced in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered and competency-based learning approaches. Without a solid vocabulary foundation, students find it challenging to engage with and benefit from these pedagogical strategies. As a result, the effectiveness of the curriculum is diminished, and students are less likely to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Addressing this challenge requires targeted interventions, including the provision of high-quality teaching materials, professional development for teachers, and the creation of enriching language environments outside the classroom. By improving vocabulary instruction and expanding students' exposure to English, it is likely that their language skills and overall educational experience can be enhanced.

#### 5. Students' motivation

In rural area, students' motivation to learn English is often a significant challenge for teachers. The lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, combined with the predominance of local languages and limited access to English media, can make students view learning the language as irrelevant to their daily lives and future goals. Teachers in these regions frequently report that students struggle to see the immediate value of learning English, especially when their communities prioritize practical knowledge and skills directly related to local livelihoods.

Moreover, rural students may lack intrinsic motivation because of limited opportunities to practice English in authentic contexts. Unlike their urban counterparts, who may have access to extracurricular activities, digital resources, or interaction with English speakers, rural students often encounter English solely within the confines of the classroom (du Plessis and Mestry 2019). This limited exposure hinders their ability to develop a meaningful connection with the language, which further diminishes their motivation.

Teachers, therefore, face the dual challenge of not only delivering English lessons but also fostering a positive attitude towards language learning. This requires creative strategies to engage students, such as incorporating local contexts into lessons, integrating culturally relevant materials, and using interactive methods that make learning English more relatable and enjoyable. Meanwhile Lack of self-confidence, difficulties in speaking English, and weak grammar comprehension are the main factors contributing to students' lack of motivation in learning English. Therefore, it is recommended that grammar be taught inductively, students be given more opportunities to practice listening and speaking skills, and teachers apply various motivational strategies to enhance students' interest in learning English at school (Dilshad, Nausheen, and Ahmed 2019).

However, the lack of resources, such as multimedia tools and engaging materials, often constrains these efforts. In summary, student motivation in rural areas is shaped by a range of factors, including limited exposure to English, socio-cultural attitudes, and the availability of engaging resources. Teachers must work to overcome these barriers by creating more meaningful, contextually relevant lessons that connect with students' lives and aspirations, though they are often hampered by a lack of adequate support and materials. In line with Motivation Theory, students' low motivation can be attributed to the lack of meaningful and relevant learning experiences. When learners do not perceive the usefulness of English in their daily lives, their engagement and participation tend to decrease. In line with Motivation Theory, students' low motivation can be attributed to the lack of meaningful and relevant learning experiences. When learners do not perceive the usefulness of English in their daily lives, their engagement and participation tend to decrease.

#### 6. Lack of resource, teaching media, and internet network

The lack of resources, teaching media, and internet connectivity presents significant challenges for teachers in rural areas. According to the research findings, many schools in these regions lack essential facilities such as textbooks, teaching aids, and access to the technology needed to support the learning process. The limited availability of teaching media, such as projectors, digital whiteboards, or other interactive learning tools, restricts teachers' ability to deliver lessons in an engaging and effective manner.

Furthermore, the limited or non-existent internet access exacerbates this situation. Teachers are unable to utilize online resources or internet-based educational technologies, such as instructional videos or learning platforms, which could enhance students' learning experiences. This condition widens the gap between urban and rural education, where urban students tend to benefit more from modern teaching media and technologies (Budnyk). To address this issue, greater investment in infrastructure in rural areas is required, along with teacher training on how to creatively and effectively utilize available resources despite the existing limitations.

One of the facilities related to students' interest in learning is the school building. If the state of the school building is less supportive, then the learning activities of students will be less than optimal. Besides that, a positive, orderly, and supportive classroom atmosphere is able to increase student concentration and interest in learning (Jadid 2019). It creates an environment where students feel safe and motivated to learn. Qualified teachers with effective teaching methods can motivate students and help them understand the subject matter better. School environment that is inclusive and supports positive interactions among students and between students and teachers' helps build social and emotional skills that are important for overall development.

## 7. The isolation

Geographical isolation is one of the primary challenges faced by English teachers in rural areas. According to research findings, the remoteness of these locations severely limits access to adequate educational resources. Teachers in rural areas often struggle to obtain up-to-date teaching materials, such as textbooks, digital teaching media, or even professional training to improve their teaching skills. Moreover, this isolation affects teachers' interactions with colleagues or the broader educational community, reducing their access to support and opportunities for sharing experiences.

The long distances from educational or training centers further restrict professional development and opportunities for collaboration with other teachers (Indiran, Ismail, and Rashid 2022). As a result, teachers must rely on their own creativity to adapt teaching methods to local conditions. This challenge is exacerbated by insufficient technological infrastructure, such as inadequate internet connectivity, making it difficult for teachers to utilize online learning resources that are increasingly important in the modern era. To address these challenges, greater support from the government and educational institutions is needed, including the provision of better infrastructure, access to regular training, and collaborative platforms that allow teachers in remote areas to share experiences and receive professional support (Risnawati et al. 2022).

Geographical isolation frequently leads to logistical issues, such as difficulty in reaching participants or data collection sites. Other challenges include language barriers and cultural differences, requiring researchers to be sensitive and to develop specific strategies for building trust and rapport with local communities. The socioeconomic conditions of rural populations often affect the availability and willingness of participants, potentially reducing the representativeness and depth of the data collected. Therefore, researchers must be adaptive, resourceful, and sensitive to the local context to effectively address these challenges and ensure the success of their study.

## 8. Parental support

Instilling the value of independence is not solely the responsibility of the school; the role of the family is also expected to shape the character of independence (Handayani et al. 2021). The role of the family environment is important in the implementation of good learning in schools for the following reasons:

**Emotional and Psychological Support:** Families that provide emotional support help children feel safe, accepted and motivated. This sense of security is important for concentration and readiness to learn. **Study Habit Formation:** Families can help children develop good study habits, such as discipline in doing assignments, reading regularly, and managing study time effectively. **Values and Attitudes towards Education:** Parents who value and emphasize the importance of education instill these values in their children. The positive attitude towards

education instilled at home is usually reflected in the child's attitude towards learning at school. **Practical Support:** Families that provide educational resources such as books, stationery and access to technology give children the necessary tools to learn.

In addition, parental involvement in helping with homework and school projects is essential. **Motivation and Encouragement:** Parents who actively provide motivation and encouragement can help children stay motivated, even when facing difficulties in learning. Positive encouragement from the family can boost a child's self-confidence. **Communication with the School:** Parents' involvement in school activities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings and participating in school events, helps build a strong link between home and school. Good communication between parents and teachers allows for better monitoring of the child's development. **Model Behavior:** Children tend to imitate their parents' behavior. If parents show interest and commitment to education, the child is more likely to adopt the same attitude. **Social Skill Development:** A family environment that supports the development of social skills such as communication, cooperation and empathy helps children interact well at school, both with peers and teachers.

Overall, a supportive family environment creates a strong foundation for children to do well in school, helping them overcome academic challenges and achieve success in education (Bloom, B. S. (2010) a taxonomy for learning, teaching 2011). The family is the first learning environment for elementary school students. The family's role is crucial in shaping the child's character and personality. As the child's initial environment, the family serves as the primary educator, providing fundamental education across all aspects that serve as a foundation for elementary school-aged children (Handayani et al. 2021).

To overcome the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in rural areas, particularly those related to socioeconomic background and family support requires a comprehensive approach. Teachers can serve as a bridge between the school and families by implementing parent engagement programs aimed at raising awareness of the importance of English education. Additionally, providing parents with simple guidelines on how to support learning at home, despite limited resources and English proficiency, can help create a more positive learning environment for students (Laila, Prastiwi, and Fauziati 2023). By enhancing communication between the school and families and offering appropriate support to parents, the challenges associated with socioeconomic background can be more effectively addressed, thereby enabling students to achieve better learning outcomes (Malaikosa and Taopan 2020).

Researcher conducting studies in rural areas often encounter various challenges that can impact the smooth progression of their research. One of the primary difficulties is the limited access to resources, such as educational materials, technology, and adequate transportation, all of which are essential for comprehensive data collection.

Additionally, geographical isolation frequently leads to logistical issues, such as difficulty in reaching participants or data collection sites. Other challenges include language barriers and cultural differences, requiring researchers to be sensitive and to develop specific strategies for building trust and rapport with local communities. The socioeconomic conditions of rural populations often affect the availability and willingness of participants, potentially reducing the representativeness and depth of the data collected. Therefore, researchers must be adaptive, resourceful, and sensitive to the local context to effectively address these challenges and ensure the success of their study.

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the study involved a small number of participants from a single school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative nature of the study relies heavily on participants' perceptions, which may be subject to bias. Third, time and resource constraints limited the depth of data collection. Future research is recommended to involve a larger sample size and multiple rural schools to obtain more comprehensive results. Additionally, language barriers and cultural differences posed challenges in deeply understanding the local context, which could impact the interpretation of the research findings. These limitations should be considered when evaluating the results of this study and their implications for broader contexts.

Although teachers have implemented various adaptive strategies, such as using local materials and interactive methods, these solutions are often temporary and do not fully address the structural challenges. This indicates that individual teacher efforts alone are insufficient without broader institutional support. The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and educational stakeholders. There is a need for increased investment in rural school infrastructure, improved access to digital learning resources, and the provision of continuous professional development programs for teachers.

Additionally, community and parental engagement programs should be strengthened to support students' learning outside the classroom. Overall, this study highlights that the challenges of teaching English in rural areas are complex and interconnected, requiring collaborative efforts from teachers, schools, communities, and policymakers to create sustainable improvements in English language education.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study reveals that English teachers in rural junior high schools face complex and interconnected challenges that significantly affect the effectiveness of English language teaching. These challenges include limitations in curriculum implementation, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, insufficient instructional time and teacher qualifications, students' low vocabulary mastery and motivation, limited teaching resources and internet access, geographical isolation, and lack of

parental support. Among these, limited resources and low student motivation emerge as the most critical barriers.

The findings indicate that while teachers have demonstrated adaptability through creative and context-based teaching strategies, their efforts alone are not sufficient to overcome structural and systemic constraints. This highlights that the challenges of rural English education are not merely instructional but are deeply rooted in broader socio-economic and institutional conditions.

Therefore, improving the quality of English language teaching in rural areas requires collaborative and sustained efforts from multiple stakeholders. Policymakers should prioritize equitable distribution of educational resources, enhancement of school infrastructure, and provision of continuous professional development for teachers. In addition, strengthening parental involvement and community awareness is essential to support students' learning beyond the classroom.

Finally, future research is recommended to explore rural education challenges in broader contexts involving multiple schools and regions, as well as to examine the long-term effectiveness of intervention strategies. By addressing these challenges holistically, it is expected that rural students will have better opportunities to develop their English proficiency and compete in a globalized world.

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