

## An investigation of the teacher's challenges and strategies in teaching English in a rural area

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**Abstract** - The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by an English teacher and the strategies to solve the challenges in teaching English in a rural area, namely Sebangki. This narrative study used interview with an English teacher at SMAN1 S. The results of this study indicated that there are two main themes of challenges faced by teacher including the challenges from the teacher consists of distance to school, teaching other subjects, lack of teacher training, and students problems consists of lack of interest, lack of confidence, lack of vocabulary mastery and students' attendance. To overcome those challenges, the English teacher employed some strategies including using media and strategy in teaching, giving motivation and even giving punishment to the students.

**Keywords:** rural education; teacher strategy; teaching method; English learning

### I. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that can be used to communicate with people around the world. Consequently, English has become a very important subject for people to learn. Fandiño et al., (2019) argue that English is one of the most important languages, and being able to communicate in English has become a core competence that should be developed in all academic contexts. As a result, the demand for English teachers will increase as more students come from non-English-speaking countries.

English is taught as a foreign language in many non-English-speaking countries, including Indonesia. Mappias and Sihes (2014) argue that "English language has been seen as a good medium of communication in Indonesia." In addition, as stated in Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia (2018, sec. 11), English becomes a compulsory subject in secondary school. In some areas in Indonesia, English is taught and learned in urban and rural area.

However, in the process of teaching and learning English in Indonesia are different from urban and rural area. Teachers in urban areas are more competent to teach because, in addition to having adequate equipment, they also have qualifications to teach more competently, such as having a background in English learning or being qualified in the field being taught (Pramesty et al., 2022). Whether it is teaching English or non-language teaching, both need what we call teaching strategy (Warda et al., 2017). On the other hand, teachers in rural area may face some challenges in teaching students. Endriyanti et al., (2019) states that schools in rural areas are lack of facilities, such as the school building and IT equipment. In addition, due to a lack of teachers, teachers who are not qualified with their fields are eventually required to teach English (Febriana et al., 2018; Wajdi, 2018; Wajdi et al., 2024). Furthermore, parental support factors, such as a lack of parental knowledge about learning English and a lack of parental financial resources to

support their children's English language learning, also have an impact on learning English in rural areas. It can be seen that less qualified teachers, limited educational facilities, and lack of parental support are the factors that are not available for students in rural areas (Pramesty et al., 2022).

SMAN1 S is one of the high schools, which is located in a rural area, at S, Landak Regency of West Kalimantan. This school is also located in 3T (*Terdepan, Tertinggal dan Terluar*) areas, which does not have many facilities, including the lack of technology and also poor internet connection. The road access to go to this school is far from the students' and teachers' house. Teachers and students may have to travel long distance to get to school. In addition, on the rainy seasons the road access to go to this school is damaged and not in a good condition. Moreover, there is only one teacher who teaches English subject in this school. For this reason, the researcher intended to investigate the English teacher in order to find the challenges and the strategies that can be used by teacher to solve the challenges in teaching English in a rural area.

Regarding to the challenges that might be faced by the teachers in teaching English in rural areas, there are several studies have been conducted related to this research in Indonesia. Febriana et al (2018) conducted a study entitled "Teaching in Rural Indonesian Schools: Teacher Challenges." The participants of the study are teachers who attended SM-3T program and taught at different junior high schools in rural area in Indonesia. The finding showed that teachers who have taught in rural Indonesian schools have experienced several challenges, such as lack of infrastructure, source of learning, language barrier, parents' mind-set, inadequacy of teachers, student competence and students' mind-set.

Second researcher, Saiful and Triyono (2018) conducted a research entitled "EFL Teachers' Reflection in Teaching English to EFL Students of Rural Areas." The finding showed that lack of facilities and learning resources as well as students' low motivation and proficiency in English language are the main challenges faced by EFL teachers in rural area. Third researcher, Endriyanti et al., (2019), with a research journal entitled "Challenges In Teaching English at Rural and Urban Schools and Their Solutions." The participants of the study were two English teachers from SMPN3 Gantiwarno and an English teacher from SMPN1 Prambanan. The findings indicated that there are different challenges in teaching English at rural and urban schools. The challenges are related to the students such as vocabulary mastery, students' motivation, parents support and the students' activeness. The challenges are related to the students such as vocabulary mastery, students' motivation, parents support and the students' activeness. The challenges related to the teachers, such as familiarity of IT, mastery of teaching method, teaching training and the facilities, such as lack of representative building, computer and LCD.

Another study from Pramesty et al., (2022) with a research journal entitled "Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners in Rural Area at SDN2 Sendang." The findings showed that learning English in remote areas was constrained by the status of English as a local content that created less supportive conditions for teachers to teach English; most of the teachers came from non-English educational backgrounds, which affected their competence; the learning curriculum was not in accordance with the existing learning conditions; and the socioeconomic status of parents had a significant effect on students' motivation and achievement in learning English.

The previous studies above have revealed the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching junior high school and elementary school in rural area, however, this present study focused on finding teachers' challenges in teaching English in senior high school. The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by English in teaching senior high school students in rural area, namely SMAN1 S. Therefore, the researcher was interested to conduct this research to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by a teacher in teaching English in the rural area at SMAN1 S?
2. What are the strategies used by the teacher to solve the challenges of teaching English in the rural area at SMAN1 S?

## II. METHOD

This research employed narrative inquiry as the research method. According to Rahatzad et al., (2016), narrative inquiry is a research methodology used in many disciplines, based on the foundational assumption that people create meaning of their lived experiences through the construction of narratives or stories. Since this research was intended to investigate the challenges experienced by teacher in teaching English in rural area, narrative inquiry method was appropriate to answer the research questions in this research.

The participant in this study involved an English teacher at SMAN1 S. The reason why the researcher conducted a research at this school was because this school is located in rural area, the distance to go to school is far from the city.

The semi structured interview was used as the tool of data collection. The researchers used some techniques to collect the data in this research. The first step was the researcher created the narrative interview guidelines and the questions which relevant to the research purposes. After designing the interview guide, the next step was the researcher confirmed and contacted the teacher as the interviewee to schedule the interview date. Then, the researcher went to the school to conduct the interview. During the interview, the researcher used a smartphone to record the audio, take notes and ask the questions based on the narrative interview guidelines. After obtaining the data from the interviewee, the researchers analyzed the data.

The result of the interview was analysed using thematic analysis. According to Barkhuizen et al. (2014), thematic analysis is one of the ways to analyze narrative data, it involves repeated reading of the data, coding and categorization of data extracts, and reorganization under thematic headings. The researcher used some procedures to analyze the data in this research. First, the audio recording data was transcribed into written form as the interview transcript. After transcribing the audio data for thematic analysis, the researcher read the interview transcripts. Then, the data from interview transcript was coded and categorized based on the challenges and strategies in teaching English at rural area. The final step was the researcher reported the data based on the research objectives.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the two research questions outlined previously, the findings in this research were presented into two categories: the challenges faced by a teacher in teaching English and the strategies used by the teacher to solve the challenges of teaching English in the rural area at SMAN1 S.

### 3.1. The Challenges in Teaching English in the rural area at SMAN1 S

The first category was the teacher' challenges upon their experiences in teaching English at SMAN1 S. The themes and sub-themes of teacher' challenges in teaching English in the rural area were presented in the table below.

Table 1 Themes and Subthemes	
Theme(s)	Subthemes
Teacher' Challenges	Distance to School
	Teaching other subjects
	Lack of Teacher Training
Students' Problems	Lack of Interest
	Lack of Confidence
	Lack of Vocabulary Mastery
	Students' Attendance

#### 3.1.1. Distance to School

According to the interview, she told that when the first time as the teacher, the distance between her house and the school is very far. She specifically said:

Excerpt 1:

*"Well, when I came here, there was an obstacle because the distance between where I lived and the school was quite far"*

### **3.1.2. Teaching other subjects**

Although the teacher graduated from English education background, she also taught other subjects, such as History (Sejarah) and Art Culture (Seni Budaya), she said:

Excerpt 2:

*"Then, at the first, I only taught English in a few classes because there were a lot of English teachers at that time, Mrs. Wina and Mrs. Agata. Well, at that time, I was also taught history and art culture. Because there were still a lot of teachers, there were a lot of them so I only get a few hours."*

According to interview, at first time being a teacher in the school, she only taught English in a few classes, she even taught History and Art Culture class. Because there were still two English teachers, so she only got a few hours to teach English. She also told that she needs to learn more and understand while teaching History (Sejarah). She said:

Excerpt 3:

*"So, there is a bit of a challenge, we have to learn first to understand the material, right? If we are already know the basic, maybe we don't need to learn much."*

While teaching history (Sejarah) class, she needs to learn more and understand before teaching; however, in teaching art culture (Seni Budaya), she said that she likes to teach the subject:

Excerpt 4:

*"As for Art Culture, I like it, because I like playing the guitar, I like singing, sometimes I also like practicing dancing with the students."*

### **3.1.3. Lack of Teacher Training**

Based on the interview, as long as being a teacher, she only attends the general training, there is no training especially to improve the teacher in the rural area. She said:

Excerpt 5:

*"While teaching in here, it's only general training, there is no special training. I was only obtained the special training during the 5th & 6th semester of college, it was when I attended the Sinka English Training Center, at SETC Singkawang, Gunung Poteng. At that time, I learned some methods to teach students. So, there is no actual special training."*

She also believed that the impact of teacher training is important for teachers especially for teachers who teach in a rural area. She argued:

Excerpt 6:

*"Teacher training for English teachers in rural areas is very important because the way we teach beginner students is definitely different from those who have often received English lessons. So, there is a way, maybe the methods we use in teaching them are definitely different from urban areas. So, there must be special training that may be given to teachers who teach in rural areas."*

### **3.1.4 Lack of Interest**

Students are not interested in learning English, they assume that English is very difficult. The teacher said:

Excerpt 7:

*"There is a lesson that students don't like, namely report text, there are students who complain that they don't understand, ma'am, until I repeat it over and over again, because how can they understand, because they don't enjoy it. It's like they are making English a burden."*

The teacher told that students are not interested during the learning process, so that they are having difficulties in learning English. In addition, the teacher also told that there is a student; he is not motivated in learning English. During teaching and learning process, he always goes to the toilet and even he just skips the class. She said:

Excerpt 8:

*"There is also a student, in eleventh grade, IIS B, he often gets permission to go to the toilet, for example, I taught their class for 60 minutes, but in those 60 minutes, many times he asked permission to go to the toilet. Actually, he was not peeing go to toilet, he was just hanging out in the bushes"*

### 3.1.5. Lack of Confidence

The teacher told that students are not confident and even they are afraid in speaking English. She said:

Excerpt 9:

*"They are lack of self-confidence, they are embarrassed and afraid to speak it, afraid of saying it the wrong way. I said it was okay, they were also afraid of their friends laughing if they said it wrong, it would be funny. That is why some of them are afraid to perform in front of the classroom"*

Students are shy and fear of making mistakes in speaking English, they also afraid of being laughed with other friends. The teacher also told that there is a student, who anxious in speaking English, and even he afraid to ask permission to go to the toilet using English. She said:

Excerpt 10:

*"There are also even students who are holding their urine, because they don't want to speak English, even though I have told the sentence: 'Ma'am, can I go to the toilet, please?' just say that right? they are afraid so they hold their urine"*

### 3.1.6. Lack of Vocabulary Mastery

The teacher told that students in a rural area are lack in mastering the vocabulary. She said:

Excerpt 11:

*"In this village, many students are lacking in learning English unlike students in urban areas. So, they are still lacking, very, very lack of vocabulary."*

She mentioned that many students in a rural area are lack in learning English, unlike the students in urban areas, so they are still lack of vocabulary mastery.

### 3.1.7. Students' Attendance

When the teacher gave the assignments, such as homework or presentation in groups, some students are not ready and even not attending the class. She said:

Excerpt 12:

*"Regarding assignments, there are also students who are not ready, sometimes in this group up to 2/3 of the people don't come in that day, on the day the homework is due, usually they use a permission letter. So in one group there was many reasons: 'ma'am, we didn't do our homework because of 'A', 'B' didn't bring the notes like this, so they didn't collect it, that's the reason they didn't do it. There is also a reason, they forgot to do it, even though I always keep reminding them, right, they don't submit the assignments. There are those who do it, but most of them are like that, they don't finish the work, they don't finish it. However, there are also students who are diligent in doing their assignments, they always do their homework, meanwhile for those who are lazy their homework is half done"*

According to the interview, the teacher told that students are lazy and even not attend the class when the teacher gave the assignment, such as in submitting the homework or doing presentation.

## 3.2. The strategies used by the teacher to solve the challenges of teaching English in the rural area

Aside from identifying the teacher' challenges, this study also found the strategies used by the teacher to solve the challenges of teaching English in the rural area at SMAN1 S. The following table shows the themes of teacher's strategies to overcome the challenges.

Table 2 Themes and Sub-themes of English Teacher's Strategies to Solve the Challenges in Teaching in a Rural Area

Theme (s)	Subthemes
Teaching Media	Using Pictures and Videos Using LCD Projector and Printers
Teaching Strategy	Storytelling Games and Singing
Managing Students	Giving Motivation

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## Giving Punishment

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### 3.2.1. Teaching Media

In order to make students more interested in learning English, the teacher always using media in teaching.

#### 3.2.1.1. Using Pictures and Videos

While teaching English in the classroom, the teacher told that she used pictures and videos as the media. She said:

Excerpt 13:

*"I usually use pictures and videos as the media in teaching English. Mostly, I used video with picture media for teaching English.....That is why if we use media, maybe the students will be more enthusiastic and focused in learning"*

According to the interview, the teacher argued that using media, such as Videos and pictures, can improve students' enthusiasm and they will concentrate in learning English.

#### 3.2.1.2. Using LCD Projectors and Printers

The teacher said that in teaching students, she used tools such as LCD projector and displayed the screen on a whiteboard. In addition to use LCD projector, the teacher also used many printers to print out the media such as pictures or text for students' worksheets/LKPD (*Lembar Kerja Peserta Didik*) in group learning. She said:

Excerpt 14:

*"The resources I use at school for teaching are LCD Projectors and then the white board. In the past, the board was black, but now we use a white board. So, we can display the screen on the blackboard using LCD Projector. In addition, there are the many printers used at school because sometimes I printed the pictures and texts for LKPD students in group learning, so it is very important to use printers for teaching in the classroom."*

She also believed that using LCD projectors and printers are very important to teach English in the classroom.

### 3.2.2. Teaching Strategy

Teachers use a teaching strategy to engage learning. There are three teaching strategy that she mentioned in the interview, such as storytelling, and using games and sing in teaching.

#### 3.2.2.1. Storytelling

The teacher use storytelling in the classroom as a teaching strategy, especially in teaching narrative text. She said:

Excerpt 15:

*"The strategies I use in class, especially for grades 10 and 11, using storytelling, because in their lessons there are narrative texts, so my strategy is to use storytelling. From the storytelling, I usually show a video, or in the form of a story text, whether it's a folktale, fable and so on. So by showing the storytelling, students are asked to find vocabulary from noun, adjective, and verb, and also adverb. So, they can be familiar with what nouns, adjectives and then verb in the use of words in each sentence and paragraph"*

She argued that applying storytelling in teaching narrative texts, students are expected to know the vocabulary, such as noun, adjective, verb and adverb in every sentence and paragraph.

#### 3.2.2.2. Games and Singing

The teacher said that using games and singing in order to encourage students in learning English. She said:

Excerpt 16:

*".....inviting students how to learn English comfortably, maybe by giving them games or singing."*



She believed that applying games and singing in teaching can make the students to be comfortable in learning English.

### **3.2.3. Managing Students**

In addition to use media and strategies in teaching, she also provides the strategies in managing the students such as giving motivation and punishment.

#### **3.2.3.1. Giving Motivation**

The teacher told that she gave motivation to the students in learning English based on her experienced. She said:

Excerpt 17:

*"...how do I deal with them, by inviting them to like English first, for example by motivating them with our experiences."*

#### **3.2.3.2. Giving Punishment**

The teacher also gives punishment to the students in order to enforce students' discipline. She said:

Excerpt 18:

*"...when I was explaining the lesson, they actually talked to their friends. I warned them not to do it again, sometimes I expelled noisy students, especially for those who repeated it 3 times, I warned them but they did not want to listen, I told them to study outside, so that they don't do it again."*

The teacher said that the teaching and learning process was interrupted by students were busy in talking to other students and doing other things. To overcome this challenge, she mentioned that she gave punishment for students who were noisy and naughty in the classroom.

This study investigates the challenges face by English teacher in teaching English in a rural area, namely SMAN1 S. The data in this study were collected using interview. Based on the findings, the teacher faced numerous challenges in teaching English in a rural area. The second challenge is that she also teaches other subjects in addition to English. Teaching other subjects requires a diverse skill set and a broad knowledge base. According to interview, while teaching other subjects, such as History, she required to learn more and understand before teaching. It might be challenging for teacher because she graduated from English educational background.

In addition to teaching other subjects, the teacher told that she was lack of teacher training. According to the interview, she only attends the general training, there is no training especially to improve the teacher in the rural area. In order to become a creative and inventive teacher, it is clear that attending teachers' training is necessary to develop teaching skills. Teaching English to student without having good training and knowledge, may become a challenge for English teachers, especially for those from rural regions. In line with this, teachers need programs or activities that can improve their qualities in order to improve the quality of education; particularly in rural areas where there are more geographical challenges that may undermine the teachers' commitment to teaching (Ikhsanudin, 2021).

The other challenges faced by teacher while teaching English in a rural area is student are lack of interest in learning English. Based on the interview with the teacher, some students think that English is a difficult subject to learn. She also told that when she was explaining the lessons, the teaching process was interrupted by the students who were always asked permission to go to the toilet and even they skipped the English class. This makes teacher should use the appropriate methods or techniques to teach students to be interested in learning English (Hossain, 2016).

In addition to lack of interest in learning English, students are also afraid and not confident in learning to speak. This happen because students in rural area are not familiar to speak English in their daily activities, they even use their mother tongue. Based on the interview, students are afraid of making mistakes in speaking English and they also afraid of being laughed by their friends. Songbatumis (2017) also argued that most of students in a rural area are afraid of making mistakes, especially in pronouncing or spelling incorrect words.

Another challenge faced by the teacher when teaching English is students are lack of vocabulary mastery. Based on the interview, many students in a rural area are lack in vocabulary, which makes them are not actively and interested in learning English. This happen because English is not used by them in their daily life conversation, which make students do not need to learn the words (Songbatumis, 2017; Darma & Suwardana, 2024; Mustika & Wardah, 2021).

Another issue faced by teacher when teaching English is students' laziness. Based on the interview, teacher told that when she gave the assignments, such as homework or presentation in group, some students are not ready and even not attending the class. This can affect students' grades in completing tasks given by the teacher.

In order to overcome those challenges, there are some strategies used by the teacher to solve the challenges of teaching English in the rural area at SMAN1 S. The first strategy is teacher always use the media in teaching English. Based on the interview, the teacher always uses media, such as videos, pictures and using LCD projectors and printers in order to make students interested in learning English. Using media in teaching English can be a powerful and engaging way to enhance language learning. Dailin et al., (2019) argued that media can help teachers to get students' attention back and to make learning process more effective. As a result, using media is very helpful for both teachers and students in teaching-learning process.

The second strategy is teacher use the appropriate teaching strategy in teaching English. According to the interview, teacher told that she used storytelling in teaching narrative text. She also believed that using storytelling in teaching narrative text, students are expected to know the vocabulary, such as noun, adjective, verb and adverb in every sentence and paragraph. She also said that using games and singing can make students to feel comfortable in learning English.

The third strategy is managing the students, including giving motivation and punishment to the students. Motivation is very important in the learning process, and teacher can have a significant impact on inspiring and encouraging the students in learning English (Fandiño et al., 2019; Yule, 1996). Giving motivation to the students is one of the ways to improve students' interest in learning English (Songbatumis, 2017; Silma et al., 2024). Based on the interview, the teacher said that she gave motivation to the students in learning English based on her experienced.

In addition to giving motivation, she also gives punishment to make students discipline. Based on the interview, when she was explaining the lessons, the students are always busy in talking each other and even doing other things. As a result, she needed to give punishments to the students, so that students who commit violations do not repeat and make them to be more disciplined.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Based on the research findings, the researcher found that the teacher faced the challenges in teaching English, including the distance to go to the school, teaching other subjects besides English, and lack of teacher training. In addition to the challenges from the teacher, the researcher also found the challenges that come from the students such as lack of interest, lack of confidence, lack of vocabulary mastery and students' attendance.

The results of this study also revealed that teacher using the strategies to solve the challenges, such as using media in teaching, using the appropriate teaching strategy, giving motivation to the students, and even giving punishment to make students more disciplined. It can be concluded that being a teacher in rural area is very challenging and teacher should use appropriate strategy to overcome the challenges.

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