

## **TEACHING ENGLISH IN RURAL SCHOOLS: STRATEGIES AND BARRIERS IN ACEH SINGKIL REGENCY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to explore English teaching strategies and the obstacles faced by teachers in rural secondary schools in Aceh Singkil Regency. The study uses a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design, involving three English teachers from three different schools as participants. Data were collected through classroom observations and in-depth interviews, then analyzed thematically. The results showed that teachers applied flexible and adaptive teaching strategies, combining teacher-centered and student-centered approaches, using various learning models such as Discovery Learning, Direct Instruction, and Cooperative Learning, as well as varied learning methods, techniques, and media. This approach helped teachers tailor learning to students' abilities and needs, as well as limited classroom conditions. However, there were several obstacles that affected the effectiveness of learning, including limited facilities, minimal learning resources, challenges in developing teacher competencies, and low student motivation and participation. These obstacles underscore the importance of institutional and government support to improve infrastructure, provide learning resources, and enhance professional training for teachers. This study makes an important contribution to understanding English language teaching practices in rural contexts and shows how teachers can adapt in limited conditions. The results of this study can also serve as a reference for educators, researchers, and policymakers in designing more effective learning strategies in rural schools.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching strategies, Barriers, English, Rural schools, Aceh Singkil*

### **ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi strategi pengajaran bahasa Inggris dan kendala yang dihadapi oleh guru di sekolah menengah pedesaan di Kabupaten Aceh Singkil. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus berganda, yang melibatkan tiga guru bahasa Inggris dari tiga sekolah berbeda sebagai partisipan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan wawancara mendalam, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan strategi pengajaran yang fleksibel dan adaptif, menggabungkan pendekatan berpusat pada guru dan berpusat pada siswa, menggunakan berbagai model pembelajaran seperti Discovery Learning, Direct Instruction, dan Cooperative Learning, serta beragam metode, teknik, dan media pembelajaran. Pendekatan ini membantu guru menyesuaikan pembelajaran dengan kemampuan dan kebutuhan siswa, serta kondisi kelas yang terbatas. Namun, terdapat beberapa kendala yang memengaruhi efektivitas pembelajaran, termasuk fasilitas yang terbatas, sumber belajar yang minim, tantangan dalam

mengembangkan kompetensi guru, dan rendahnya motivasi dan partisipasi siswa. Kendala-kendala ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya dukungan institusional dan pemerintah untuk meningkatkan infrastruktur, menyediakan sumber belajar, dan meningkatkan pelatihan profesional bagi guru. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting untuk memahami praktik pengajaran bahasa Inggris dalam konteks pedesaan dan menunjukkan bagaimana guru dapat beradaptasi dalam kondisi yang terbatas. Hasil penelitian ini juga dapat dijadikan referensi bagi pendidik, peneliti, dan pembuat kebijakan dalam merancang strategi pembelajaran yang lebih efektif di sekolah-sekolah pedesaan.

**Kata Kunci:** Strategi pengajaran, Hambatan, Bahasa Inggris, Sekolah pedesaan, Aceh Singkil

### **A. Introduction**

English has become an important language in the current global world, where it plays a significant role in education, business, technology, and international communication. As one of the most commonly used international languages, English provides individuals with opportunities to access various information and interact with people from different cultures (Pratiwi, 2021). In Indonesia, English is being taught as a foreign language and has been integrated into the school curriculum from elementary to university level to enable students to prepare for academic and professional opportunities (Rao & Yu, 2019). Even though it's important, teaching and learning English in rural areas often faces many obstacles that affect the effectiveness of the learning process.

English is currently considered an essential skill in the era of globalization and has been taught at various levels of education, from elementary school through to university. Introducing English early in school is hoped to help students develop language skills that are beneficial for academic success, career opportunities, and international interaction. Therefore, English language proficiency is considered one of the key competencies that can enhance students' competitiveness in an increasingly globally connected world.

However, implementing English language teaching in rural areas still faces significant challenges. Limited infrastructure, inadequate internet access, a lack of learning resources, and a less-than-supportive learning environment hinder the learning process. These conditions indicate

that efforts to improve the quality of English language teaching in rural areas require greater attention and support to ensure a more effective learning process and provide more equitable learning opportunities for students.

Rural areas are commonly characterized by lower population density, a lack of infrastructure, and inadequate access to public services, such as education (Brown & Schafft, 2011). In most rural schools, the teachers and students face many challenges such as limited learning facilities, lack of teaching materials, and poor internet connection (Shan & Aziz, 2022; Supriadi & Korompot, 2023). These conditions can influence the quality of English language teaching and make the learning process more challenging for teachers. As a result, teachers need to implement the right strategies to guarantee that learning goals are achieved despite these limitations.

Aceh Singkil Regency is one of the areas in Aceh Province that reflects the characteristics of a rural region. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS Aceh Singkil, 2023), many villages in this region still experience limited road

access, uneven internet connectivity, and inadequate educational facilities. This situation also affects schools located in the region. An initial observation at a high school in Aceh Singkil revealed that the school had several limitations, including a lack of teaching aids, limited availability of learning resources, and limited access to technology. However, the learning was still ongoing, and teachers were trying to implement various strategies to support student learning.

Several previous research studies have investigated English language learning and teaching in rural environments. Gani et al. (2018) examined the English learning strategies of rural students in Aceh Jaya and finding that students used various learning strategies despite limited resources. Husna and Sari (2024) explored the competencies and challenges of English teachers in urban and rural areas of Aceh, reporting that rural teachers often have limited access to professional development opportunities. Similarly, Syahputra (2022) found that English teachers in rural areas face challenges related to sociocultural factors, low student motivation, and inadequate school facilities. These

studies highlight the difficulties encountered in English language education in rural areas.

Even though previous research has provided important insights into English teaching and learning in rural areas, research that specifically explores how teachers apply teaching strategies when dealing with obstacles in their daily classroom practices is still limited. It is crucial to understand both the strategies teachers use and the challenges they face in improving the quality of English education in rural areas.

Therefore, the research questions of this study are: (1) What strategies do English teachers use in teaching English in rural classrooms? and (2) What obstacles do English teachers face in teaching English in rural areas? The findings of this study are hopefully able to contribute to a better understanding of English teaching practices in a rural context and provide insights to improve teaching strategies in similar educational environments.

## **B. Method**

This study used qualitative methods because it aimed to explore and describe the detailed and

contextual experiences, challenges, and strategies of English teachers in rural areas. Qualitative research is suited to investigating social phenomena from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2012). The multiple case study approach allows researchers to explore English teaching strategies and the obstacles faced by teachers in several rural school contexts in Aceh Singkil District.

Multiple case studies were chosen because they allow researchers to analyse several cases in a real-world context, thereby gaining a broader and more credible understanding of the strategies and obstacles experienced by teachers in teaching English in rural areas. This study focuses on three high schools located in three different subdistricts: SMAN 1 Singkohor (Singkohor Subdistrict), SMAN 1 Suro (Suro Makmur Subdistrict), and SMA IT Al-Hafidz Rizqullah (Kuta Baharu Subdistrict).

The participants in this study were three English teachers from three different schools selected through purposive sampling to obtain relevant data and describe the variations in English teaching

practices in rural areas of Aceh Singkil. This study involved three English teachers from three different schools in rural Aceh Singkil, selected through purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on a minimum of two years of teaching experience in a rural setting to provide relevant information on strategies and barriers to English teaching. By involving teachers from diverse schools and communities, this study was able to describe a variety of teaching experiences and provide a more comprehensive understanding of English teaching practices in rural schools.

Data was obtained through observation and interviews. Observation was used to identify limitations in school facilities based on Permendiknas No. 24 of 2007, while interviews were conducted to explore obstacles in teaching, including limitations in facilities, teaching resources, teacher competence, student motivation, and class size. The data collection process in this study was conducted in three stages: pre-data collection, while-data collection, and post-data collection.

Data analysis in this study was conducted through three main stages:

data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the data condensation stage, the researcher reviewed and coded interview transcripts to identify information related to teaching strategies and challenges experienced by teachers. Next, the data was presented in tabular form to facilitate comparisons between participants and to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in the findings. In the final stage, the researcher interpreted emerging themes based on their relevance to the research questions. Then, the findings were verified by examining the transcripts and interview recordings to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research results.

### **C. Result and Discussion**

Based on observations and interviews, several teaching strategies were used by English teachers in rural schools in Aceh Singkil District. However, this study also found several barriers faced by teachers in teaching English in rural schools.

**Table 1. Teachers' strategies in teaching English**

No.	Category	Findings
1	Teaching Approach	Teacher-Centered Approach, Student-Centered Approach, Contextual Approach, Communicative Approach
2	Teaching Model	Discovery Learning, Direct Instruction, Cooperative Learning
3	Teaching Method	Grammar Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching
4	Teaching Technique	Reward and Punishment System, Questioning Technique, Ice Breaking
5	Teaching Media	Audio-Visual Media, Printed Media

The findings show that English teachers use various strategies in teaching English in rural classrooms. These strategies include several teaching approaches, such as teacher-centered, student-centered, contextual, and communicative approaches. Teacher-centered teaching is often used because many students have limited English language skills. Teachers explain that at the beginning of the learning process, students tend to be passive and lack confidence in using English. As one teacher said in an interview, "In

the process of learning English, students tend to be passive at first." However, to increase student participation, teachers also try to implement more student-centered activities, such as group games for speaking and grammar practice. Teachers stated, "And sometimes when I create group games, for example for speaking and grammar, then they become more active." These findings show that student-centered activities can help increase student engagement and participation in the learning process.

In addition, teachers also apply several learning models, including discovery learning, direct instruction, and cooperative learning. Teachers also use various teaching methods, such as the Grammatical Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching. In classroom learning practices, several teaching techniques were observed, including reward and punishment systems, questioning techniques, and icebreaker activities to increase student engagement. Teachers also used learning media such as audio-visual aids and printed materials to support the learning process.

However, this study also identified several challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in rural classrooms. These obstacles include limited school facilities, a lack of learning resources, limited teacher competence, and low student motivation. These obstacles have an impact on the effectiveness of English teaching and learning in rural areas. In addition, teachers also implemented several learning models, including discovery learning, direct instruction, and cooperative learning. They also employed various teaching methods, such as the Grammatical Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching. In classroom practice, several teaching techniques were observed, including reward and punishment systems, questioning techniques, and icebreaker activities to increase student engagement. Teachers also used learning media such as audio-visual aids and printed materials to support the learning process. The use of these various strategies demonstrates that teachers strive to create more varied learning and adapt teaching methods to the conditions and needs of students in the classroom.

However, this study also identified several challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in rural classrooms. These barriers include limited school facilities, a lack of learning resources, limited teacher competency, and low student motivation. These barriers impact the effectiveness of English teaching and learning in rural areas. These conditions indicate that English teaching in rural schools is influenced not only by teacher ability but also by environmental factors and the availability of resources that support the learning process.

**Table 2. Barriers in Teaching English in Rural Schools**

No	Category	Description
1	Facilities	The school has limited facilities, including unstable internet access and the absence of a language laboratory.
2	Teaching Resources	Teaching materials are mostly prepared independently by teachers using online resources.
3	Teacher Competence	Challenges related to teachers' digital and pedagogical competencies.
4	Student Motivation	Low motivation, lack of confidence, and passive classroom participation.

Limited facilities are one of the main barriers to English language learning in the schools studied. Based on interviews with teachers, it was found that the schools do not yet have language laboratory facilities, so learning activities are still carried out in regular classrooms. In addition, the condition of the internet network in the area is still unstable because the schools are located in rural areas. As stated by the teacher in the interview, "But at Singkohor 1 Public High School, there is no language lab yet. So, learning is still carried out in regular classrooms." The teacher also added that "the signal is still difficult here because we are in a rural area." This condition shows that limited facilities and access to technology can affect the variety of learning methods that can be applied by teachers.

In addition to limited facilities, several other obstacles were identified in the teaching process. Teaching resources in schools are still limited, so teachers must independently prepare learning materials by searching for various sources from the internet and other media. Furthermore, teachers also face challenges related to professional competence due to limited training and professional development

opportunities in rural areas. Factors related to students also have an impact on teaching effectiveness, particularly low motivation and lack of confidence in learning English, which often results in passive participation during classroom activities.

The findings of this study indicate that the English language teaching process in rural schools is significantly influenced by the learning environment, such as limited facilities, learning resources, and student motivation. These conditions require teachers to employ flexible teaching strategies and adapt learning methods to the needs and abilities of students in the classroom. In the context of rural schools, teachers often have to adapt to various limitations to ensure effective learning. This finding aligns with research conducted by Gani et al. (2018), which found that students in rural areas are still able to use various English learning strategies despite limited facilities and minimal exposure to English. These results indicate that the learning environment in rural areas not only influences the learning process but also encourages teachers and students to adapt to the various strategies available.

In addition to facility factors, challenges in teaching are also related to the professional aspects of teachers. Husna and Sari (2024) found that teachers in rural areas often face limitations in competency development and access to professional training.

Low student motivation is also one of the obstacles affecting their participation in English language learning. This finding is in line with Syahputra's (2022) research, which identified low student motivation and limited school facilities as the main challenges in teaching English in rural areas. These conditions show that the learning environment and facility support play an important role in increasing student engagement in the learning process.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that English language teaching in rural schools in Aceh Singkil is characterized by the use of flexible and adaptive teaching strategies. Teachers combine various approaches, models, methods, techniques, and learning media to adapt to classroom conditions and student needs. However, the learning process still faces several obstacles, such as limited facilities, limited

learning resources, challenges in developing teacher competence, and low motivation among some students. These conditions indicate that the success of English language teaching in rural areas depends not only on the strategies used by teachers, but also on adequate facilities and a supportive learning environment.

In addition to the challenges mentioned above, the school environment in rural areas also impacts the dynamics of the English learning process in the classroom. Learning environments devoid of English exposure leave students with very limited opportunities to use the language outside of the classroom. Unlike students in urban areas who may have greater access to English-language media such as the internet, films, or digital learning platforms, students in rural areas tend to only use English during learning activities at school. As a result, English practice is very limited, and students' language development is slower. This limited language exposure also impacts students' confidence when asked to use English orally. Many students feel hesitant or afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of their peers. This often leads to students

remaining silent or giving only very brief responses during learning activities. Therefore, teachers must strive to create a more supportive classroom atmosphere and encourage students to dare to try using English without fear of making mistakes.

Furthermore, relatively large class sizes can also pose a challenge for teachers in managing learning effectively. In some cases, the large number of students makes it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention to each student. This can impact the effectiveness of learning activities, particularly in speaking skills exercises that require direct interaction between teachers and students. To address this, teachers often employ group work strategies or collaborative activities to enable students to participate in learning activities despite limited time and attention. Another obstacle that arises relates to the availability of teaching materials relevant to the needs of students in rural areas. Available learning materials are sometimes not fully aligned with students' daily lives, requiring teachers to adapt or modify them to make them more easily understood. This adaptation effort

requires creativity and initiative from teachers to develop learning materials that are more contextual and closer to students' daily experiences.

Despite these limitations, teachers remain committed to implementing the English language learning process. They strive to find ways to maintain student interest and ensure effective learning. These efforts are evident in the use of flexible teaching strategies, the use of simple media, and the implementation of learning activities that encourage student participation. This demonstrates the crucial role of teachers in overcoming facility limitations and creating a learning environment that supports students' language development. Thus, barriers to English language teaching in rural schools are not solely related to limited facilities or resources, but also involve various other factors such as the learning environment, language exposure, student characteristics, and classroom conditions. Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of English language teaching in rural areas need to comprehensively consider these aspects to ensure a more effective and sustainable learning process.

The findings of this study support and extend previous research on English language teaching in rural areas. Gani et al. (2018) found that students in rural areas are able to use various learning strategies despite limited facilities and exposure to English. Unlike that study, which focused on student learning strategies, this study highlights the pedagogical strategies teachers use to overcome these limitations. The results show that teachers implement various adaptive teaching strategies to support the English language learning process in the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings of this study align with research by Husna and Sari (2024) and Syahputra (2022), which highlight various challenges in teaching in rural areas, such as limited facilities, low student motivation, and limited professional development opportunities for teachers. This study demonstrates that despite facing these limitations, teachers continue to overcome challenges by implementing various flexible learning approaches and strategies to increase student engagement in the English language learning process.

Furthermore, research by Kamarullah et al. (2024) highlighted the use of AI-based tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot in rural classrooms and the technological challenges faced. Unlike those studies, which focused on technology integration, this study examined teaching strategies more broadly across various language skills. The research findings indicate that in Aceh Singkil, technology use is still influenced by infrastructure limitations, leading teachers to combine digital media and printed materials in the learning process.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce previous research showing that English language teaching in rural areas is affected by various limitations, such as facilities, technology access, and student motivation. However, this study also shows that teachers are able to adapt to these conditions through various flexible and contextual teaching strategies in the classroom. Thus, the results of this study not only confirm the findings of previous studies but also provide a more comprehensive picture of how teachers practically manage existing obstacles and continue to strive to create an effective

English language learning process in rural schools.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study concludes that English language teaching in rural junior high schools in Aceh Singkil is characterized by flexible and adaptive teaching strategies. Teachers integrate various approaches, models, methods, techniques, and learning media to support the learning process of students despite limited facilities and learning resources. These strategies demonstrate teachers' efforts to adapt learning to classroom conditions, student abilities, and existing learning environment limitations. However, several obstacles still affect the effectiveness of teaching, such as limited facilities, lack of learning resources, challenges in developing teacher competence, and low student motivation in learning English.

These findings highlight the importance of teachers' ability to adapt and innovate in managing learning, especially in schools located in rural areas with various limitations. In addition, the results of this study also show that support in the form of facilities, learning resources, and

professional development for teachers is essential to improve the quality of English language learning in rural areas. Therefore, the findings of this study provide important insights for educators, researchers, and education policymakers in understanding English teaching practices in a rural context, and can be used as a reference for developing more effective learning strategies in the future.

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