

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH WITH ITS FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS IN A RURAL SCHOOL OF WEST KALIMANTAN

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Abstract

Teaching in rural area is somehow challenging due to geographic and distance challenges, limited internet access, insufficient school facilities, and students' low proficiency level. The challenges occur in the teaching English as well, especially in teaching four language skills. This study attempted to investigate the challenges in teaching four language skills in English class of a rural school, precisely at SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau, Sintang Regency. The research method used in this research was descriptive qualitative method. The data were gained through questionnaire and a set of English test for student participants, direct field observation, and teaching reflection. The participants were 37 students of 8th grade of SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau. The findings showed that the average of students' proficiency level were low in every skill. The data from the questionnaire showed particular problems faced by the students which caused their low performance in English class. 72% students found that they had difficulties in comprehending and applying English structure. Furthermore, students' concentration span were considered low. 54% of them found that they couldn't concentrate well in English class. The teaching reflection and questionnaire showed some challenges to come up in to alternative solutions in teaching four language skills in English class. The challenges are: only limited students possess English dictionary; students' low concentration, the lack of students' participation in additional English class, and the lack of supporting school's facility.

Keywords: Four language skills, teaching challenges, ELT in rural area

INTRODUCTION

It has been globally accepted that English is an international language in which its mastery is considered as a must in this global era. In the context of Indonesia, English is taught and used as a foreign language. Considering its importance, the government has recommended that English become a compulsory subject in secondary schools (Nurkamto, 2003). The impact is that it has widely been taught even since elementary school level, especially at schools in urban area.

However, the same trend doesn't apply in the context of rural areas of Indonesia. English subject has not been put into attention since the challenges of teaching and learning it are relatively more complex than in the counterparts.

In general, teaching English has particular challenges since geographically, Indonesia is located far away from English-speaking countries. The challenges can be summed up as follow: (1) severe shortage of training, (2) lack of vocabulary, (3) lack of English

exposure, (4) limited resource accessibility, (5) linguistic problems and (6) Psychological problems (Songbatumis, 2017).

In the context of rural areas, these challenges exist along with the more complex ones. Therefore, students' achievement in English class in the areas do not compete with those who came from urban areas. Many educators, researchers, legislators, and general public believe that students from rural schools mostly receive an education that is inferior compared to the students that live in the urban areas (Hossain, 2016).

There are some factors contribute to the unbalance English proficiency between students from rural and urban areas, which lead to the complexity of challenges faced in the class; (1) family factor, (2) financial factor, (3) logistic support, (4) less qualified teachers, (5) inadequate books (Hossain, 2016). Previous research conducted by Febriana, M et al. (2018) revealed that there are seven major challenges faced by English teacher in rural school, they are; (1) infrastructure, (2) source of learning, (3) language barrier, (4) parents mindset, (5) inadequacy of teachers, (6) student competence and (7) student mindset.

In the recent curriculum, all of four language skills must be put into attention, especially in teaching English. As stated by Mezrigui (2016), it is deeply believed that integrating language skills in teaching English as foreign language classes can contribute a great deal to the success of the teaching – learning process. All of the four language skills should be integrated in an effective way so that it helps the students to meet the standard and develops their communicative

competence gradually (Sadiku: 2015). However, in attempting to integrate the skills, some impediments arise especially when the setting of the classes are in rural areas, as happened in SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau.

Geographical challenge and the remote position cause SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau considered as the representative of rural school. It is located in Sintang Regency in the province of West Kalimantan, precisely in the district of Ambalau. It is a remote district in the regency. Speedboat is the fastest vehicle which can be taken to reach the district since land road does not support the area. According to WWF Indonesia (Surjanto: 2016), Ambalau District is situated in the 'Heart of Borneo' in which tropical rain forest mostly dominated the area. Such condition contributes to the considerably low quality of the education since the supporting facilities of the schools have not meet the required standard.

Therefore, this study emerged to investigate the challenges in teaching four language skills in English class of a rural school, precisely at SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau, Sintang Regency.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative descriptive research. In this qualitative research, the purposes are to explain, to examine, the relationship between the phenomena and the causes as the variables to be investigated. It was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau, a rural school in Sintang regency, West Kalimantan Province. The participants of this study were the 8th graders of the school in the academic year 2018/2019. There were 37

students in the class. The phenomena to be observed in this research were some challenges in teaching English with its four language skills at the school, which representing English language teaching in rural schools. The data were gained by referring to the direct field observation note, the researcher's teaching reflection, a set of English test and questionnaire. Direct field observation was conducted since the researcher, who was also the English teacher, directly experienced the phenomena. Questionnaire was given to the participants to collect information about their perception and problems they faced in learning English.

The collected data then were being analyzed and interpreted to give picturing of the condition and the challenges of teaching English in rural schools through qualitative description.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The finding showed that the average of students' proficiency level were low especially in speaking and writing as productive skills. The test of writing skill showed that 68% students got poor and the rest (32%) were average. Whereas for speaking skills, there were only 8% students who could perform good in the test and the other 92% were poor. The common problem was they did not have idea about what to say or what to write since they only mastered limited vocabulary.

Table 1. Result of four language skills test

Language Skills	Good	Average	Poor
Listening	5%	27%	68%
Speaking	8%	0%	92%
Reading	14%	19%	68%
Writing	0%	32%	68%

In attempting to find out the reason behind the low performance, the researcher used questionnaire to gain students' attitude toward learning English. 72% students claimed that they had difficulties in comprehending and applying English structure both spoken and written. Since English was not used in their daily life, they rarely heard and pronounced English utterances except in English class. Therefore, they found that pronouncing and memorizing English words were challenging. There were 89% students found difficulties in pronouncing English utterances. Nearly the same number also occurred in the difficulties of memorizing English words (86%). Most of them (76%) felt that the difficulties were caused by the significant difference between English as the target language and Indonesian language as well as their vernacular (Dayak Uud Danum language).

For listening skills there were some students which could perform good (5%), the rest were average (27%) and poor (68%). The set of tests used in gaining the data were cloze test and listening comprehension test.

Many ways had been tried to enhance students' listening and speaking performance, such as using songs, repeating the teacher utterances, and using audio recordings. The teacher used audio recordings in order to maximizing the 'limited' school facility, as well as trying to gain more students' attention and interest. However, the finding showed that 70% students preferred repeating the teacher utterances to listening through audio recordings or songs. Nearly the same result also occurred in the test of reading skill. There were only 14% had good performance,

and the rest were average (19%) and poor (68%).

The data from the questionnaire showed particular problems faced by the students which caused their low reading performance. Students' concentration span were considered low. 54% of them found that they couldn't concentrate well in the English class. This problem actually not only affected in the reading skills but also in the other three skills. In reading, concentration mattered. Students can comprehend a text better, if they perform good concentration. Even though one doesn't know the exact meaning of certain words, he can guess the meaning by referring to the context. However, the same idea did not apply in the context of SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau. The students tended to randomly guess the meaning of words and the answer of a reading comprehension test. Nevertheless, 57% students realized that in dealing with reading comprehension test they could refer the questions to the passage given. Thus, it can be derived that they actually did not comprehend English texts well.

Talking about the students' low concentration span, deeper evaluation had been done to seek the causes of the problem. From the gained data, only half of the students (43%) had breakfast in the morning before going to school. 86% students claimed that they had a little food or beverage in their break time. However, the school canteen did not provide sufficient amount of food to help their hunger and thirst. Therefore, it affected the students' concentration and performance in all the classes, not only in the English class.

The other problem affecting their low concentration in English class was the scheduled time for this subject. Students believed that when English was taught in the nearly last session, they felt less concentrating. Unfortunately, in this case, English was taught in nearly last session (7th - 8th session and 5th-6th session), before and after the second break. From the questionnaire, it revealed that 78% of the students found out that the ideal time to have English class was in the morning session, before the first break, since in that time they still had relatively good concentration. However, always placing English class in the first session needs some consideration since shortage of teacher still becomes the problem in a rural school, as happened in SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau. It was because one teacher sometimes had to teach more than one subject. In order to avoid 'one teacher teaches in the same class in the same day', the person in charge of making the schedule needed to shift the possibility. And sometimes, the result ended up with English class being placed in the last session.

Besides students' low performance and concentration span, some other challenges in teaching four language skills in English class of a rural school were also depicted in the teaching reflection and questionnaire. The challenges were: only limited students possess English dictionary; the lack of students' participation in additional English class, and the lack of supporting school's facility.

Teacher, text books, and dictionaries are the primary sources of learning English of most students in rural areas. In the case of English class in SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau, only 48%

students possessed English dictionary. However, from the students who possessed the dictionary, only 48% brought it along in the class. Therefore, the learning process of integrating four language skills experienced impediments since the teacher became the center of information source. This is in line with the finding of the research conducted by Febriana, M. et al (2018) which revealed that only a few students in rural school bringing along the dictionary in the English class. In addition, the dictionary is far from the adequate since it consists only a few words that cannot meet the needs of the students.

Nowadays, it is common to use ICT in the classroom but this case does not happened in rural schools. The teacher had ever asked the students who had their own smart phone to bring it to school in order to help them learning English even though there was no internet access supporting the area. However, only 27% of the students had smart phone, for this kind of gadget had not become the need of the society. Moreover, only half of the students possessing gadget utilized it to help them learning English. It can be inferred that even though they had the gadget but their motivation to use it in their learning process were still low.

The lack of internet access also became the other challenge faced by the teacher in attempting to provide additional material to support the integration of four language skills in the class. Various learning materials can be accessed through the internet. Yet, many of them can only be accessed online. English teachers in rural school found obstacles in providing interesting videos, pictures, and the other online media in the class. Hence, the teachers depended on the offline material

gained from the internet and other English teachers when occasionally having chance to go down town.

In attempting to enhance students' achievement in English class, the English teacher in SMP Negeri 3 Ambala provided additional tutorial as an extracurricular activity. The additional class was conducted twice a week. It was aimed to be a conversation class at first, so that the regular class could be focused on students' vocabulary building, writing, reading and listening. But sometimes, it became a kind of additional tutorial. Furthermore, not all the students joined the class that made it impossible to separate a single skill (speaking) for the afternoon class. If it was so, then the absentees would not receive the material.

Actually, many students had willingness to routinely attend the additional class. From all of the participants, only 46% of them admitted that they continuously joined the afternoon class, but the rest did not claimed the same. When being asked the reason behind their absence in the class, they gave various reasons. 70% students from the absentees claimed that they had no time to join since they had to help their parents doing some chores. It was common in the society to ask the adolescences to do the chores such as collecting firewood, fishing, farming, gathering vegetable, and transporting toilet water as well as drinking water. The rest, 20% claimed that they did not have interest to join the extra class, and 10% did not have motivation in learning English.

As widely believe; schools in rural areas experience the common problem that is lack

of supporting school facilities. Actually, SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau possesses a projector. In the practice, it could not be maximally used since the electricity relied on a 100 Ampere battery from solar energy which cannot stand long, or a generator as the alternative way. Unfortunately, using a generator costs large sum of money if it is used every school hours since the price of the fuel in the area is way higher from the standard price. The impact in the English class was that even though the teacher equipped the class with interesting media to enhance students' language skills, it couldn't be maximally presented.

Talking about the other supporting facilities, collection of books is there on the list. In the case of SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau, the number of books in the library was limited, so as the number of the English story books. The teacher then found difficulties in developing students' English literacy, especially in dealing with independent reading.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that teaching English with its four language skills in a rural school, precisely in SMP Negeri 3 Ambalau faced many challenges. They are; students low proficiency level in all language skills, students' low concentration span, only limited students possess English dictionary, the lack of students' participation in additional English class, and the lack of supporting school's facility. Some efforts had been done by the teacher to cope with the challenges but significant result had not emerged. It is because the solution of the problems are not only in the hands of the teacher but also in the hands of government, society, and curriculum developer.

Many efforts should be done in order to improve the quality of English teaching and learning in rural school. Thus, students in rural areas can possibly experience education that nearly the same in quality as students in urban areas.

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