

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

Teaching English in Indonesian rural schools will always be challenging, particularly in terms of reading skills. Therefore, this research aims to find out the EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges they faced while teaching in the context of fostering students' reading skills at a rural junior high school and to find out the strategies used by the teachers to overcome the challenges. It is undoubtedly true that four language skills must be taught by an English teacher properly, including reading skills. According to Harmer (2007), "Reading skills are useful for language acquisition...the more they read, the better they get. Reading also has a positive effect on students' vocabulary knowledge, on their spelling and their writing" (p.99). Teaching reading skills to students in rural schools is not an easy task for teachers besides the fact that English is not an Indonesian second language. Moreover, fostering students' reading skills, an important aspect of contributing to language teaching development, is worthwhile, especially in a rural school for the students to acquire reading skills. Thus, this research focuses on the EFL teachers' challenges in fostering students' reading skills along with the strategies.

Rural school barriers relate to educators, students, and institutions. Some rural regions are overgrown, while others continue to struggle. Wulandari (2021) uttered that there are many struggles in teaching English at rural schools, including low enthusiasm for learning English, lack of competent teachers, restricted facilities, infrastructure, and learning materials. In most cases, the teacher explains things to the students only for the test, and some teachers barely prepare the learning strategies or techniques for students to improve their reading skills. "Students who have difficulties in reading, choose neither to read nor to engage in other tasks involving reading" (Stanovich, 1986). Students do not get a chance to read on their

own, as a result, they struggle with the new text in making sense of it in the real-life situation. All these issues and challenges have brought about difficulties in teaching English in terms of fostering Reading skills to students in rural settings among EFL teachers.

According to preliminary observations in a rural junior high school in Bandung Barat, teachers in many settings, especially rural areas, have inadequate access to teaching materials, and some students struggle with foundational skills such as vocabulary impeding their reading scores in tests. They believe that because English is rarely used in their daily lives, they are less motivated to study it, particularly in a reading setting. Therefore, this research investigates the challenges EFL teachers faced in fostering students' reading skills at Muslimin Junior High School located in the village of Cipongkor subdistrict, West Bandung Region, West Java. This school is considered a rural school since it is located on the outskirts of town and has less population of 1.243 residents. Khattri et al., (1997) stated that a rural area has been defined as a region with a population of less than 2500. In addition, Crockett (2000) examined rural areas have a less diversified economy and offer fewer job opportunities. According to Khattri et al., (1997), other aspects of a geographical area also seem relevant to its consideration as rural, including its degree of isolation from an urbanized area. Since the access to this school is still many forests and takes more than 3 hours 20 minutes from Bandung City by car.

The research is performed to explore further the issues experienced by EFL teachers in fostering reading skills at a rural junior high school. Also, we need to know the strategies they used that effectively develop students' interest in learning reading. Therefore, there is a gap in the present research. Thus, this research focuses on the EFL teachers' strategies for overcoming the challenges at rural schools which emphasizes the topic in the context of fostering students' reading skills in the research setting at junior high school in Bandung Barat using qualitative methods that emphasizes the insights and understanding of people's experiences and perspectives by studying social organizations and human behavior particularly related to teaching strategy.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background above, the following are the questions that arise to be answered by this research:

1. What are the challenges encountered by EFL teachers in fostering students' reading skills at a rural junior high school in Muslimin Bandung Barat?
2. What strategies are used by EFL teachers in fostering students' reading skills at a rural junior high school in Muslimin Bandung Barat?

C. Research Purposes

Based on the problems above, this research aims to:

1. To explore the challenges EFL teachers encounter in fostering students' reading skills at a rural junior high school in Muslimin Bandung Barat.
2. To explore the strategies used by EFL teachers in fostering students' reading skills at a rural junior high school in Muslimin Bandung Barat.

D. Research Significances

This study expects that the results will be useful both theoretically and practically.

1. Theoretical Significance

This research can potentially be utilized as a starting point for future relevant research about the analysis of teachers' challenges and strategies in fostering students' reading skills in remote areas. Hopefully, this research can be used as a guide for future teachers in teaching English in remote areas.

2. Practical Significance

1. Practically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of English language teaching by considering and providing input in the search for the proper approach to help students in rural schools acquire reading skills efficiently.
2. This research can be useful for EFL teachers in solving teaching challenges at rural schools and motivating future teachers to enhance lesson plans and elevate their teaching strategy, particularly in the classroom.

3. Learners should take proactive steps to overcome their challenges by utilizing available resources to familiarize themselves with new vocabulary and actively participate in collaborative teaching implemented by the teacher. They should immediately communicate any form of difficulty to their teacher to find a solution.
4. The research can be useful for the school regarding resourcefulness to utilize available resources creatively and provide ongoing teachers with opportunities through courses, collaborative equipment, and workshops to help teachers refine their approach to reading instruction, leading to more effective teaching practices.

E. Research Scope

The research scope proved to limit this research so that it could be done efficiently. This research will only discuss the EFL teachers' challenges and strategies in fostering students' reading skills at an Indonesian rural school. The study focuses on selecting two EFL teachers located at a rural junior high school in Muslimin Cipongkor, West Bandung Regency, West Java, Indonesia who teach English subjects within a context in a classroom aim they tend to give insights and strategies into how the teachers at rural schools overcome the problems and challenges regarding fostering students' reading skills.

F. Conceptual Framework

1. English as Foreign Language Teachers

Rasyid (2001) defined an EFL Teacher as a person who has obtained a teaching qualification for the English language in a teacher education institution, and whose training has been recognized by the award of an appropriate teaching certificate, and by decree, that they are officially appointed to teach English as a foreign language following their teaching certificate. Therefore, teachers must be able to know students' language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking to teach them. A teacher needs to support students and encourage them to learn English actively.

2. Challenges in Teaching Reading Skills in Rural Schools

Fareh (2011) investigated the issues experienced by teachers teaching English in a rural area, such as limited ability to implement the learning process, lack of learning resources and student enthusiasm, and teaching methods and strategies not in accordance with students' interests. In addition, Endriyati et al. (2019) stated that teachers in rural schools face various hurdles. The problems for teachers are mastering teacher training, teaching methods, and operating IT in the classroom. Facilities issues are facilities and time constraints that cause some rural areas to have a thriving economy, while others remain in poor condition. EFL teachers in Indonesia face difficulties when studying in rural areas. As such, it is more difficult for teachers to use educational applications to deliver materials, require energy, and even have difficulty accessing internet networks.

3. Reading skills

The research focuses on one of the language skills which is reading skills. According to Grellet (1981), reading is a continuous process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is frequently more essential than what one finds in it. Reading is the key to success in language learning, especially in foreign languages. Anderson et al., (1985) also added that reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a learner's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Therefore, teachers must focus not only on language development but also on reading strategy practice. In line with the previous statement, Wulandari and Masrul (2021) investigated the strategies applied by English teachers to teach reading comprehension. Thus, we must focus on reading skills as well as language problems. Thus, reading skills are essential to learning especially for English learners, read naturally programs develop and support the five (5) components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In addition to that, Donald et al (1987) stated that there are six major components of reading comprehension such as decoding knowledge, Vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge, discourse knowledge, readiness aspect, and effectiveness aspect.

4. Rural School

Greenough and Nelson (2015) examined that rural schools differ in terms of demographics, resources, and student needs, and they constitute contexts with unique difficulties and opportunities when compared to non-rural schools. One of the consequences of the education system's inadequacy in schools is rural schools' inability to deal with the city's rapid growth. Khatiri et al, (1997) stated that compared with urban education, rural education is generally seen as more problematic. Schools in the rural context are more likely to be in remote locations, have smaller budgets, fewer technology resources, and offer fewer courses, special programs, and extra-curricular activities. Munawwarah (2021) worries that teacher shortages stem mostly from geographic and social isolation, limited access to professional and personal support, a lack of qualified teacher training programs, troubled living conditions, and lower earnings and incentives. Furthermore, the research presents the concept of EFL teachers, rural schools, the challenges in teaching reading skills, and teaching strategies. The further chapter explains theories that support strengthening this research.

G. Previous Studies

There have been various earlier studies that are relevant to the current research. The first research was conducted by Yutisia and Salsabila, D (2023) investigated the factors that influence reading difficulties among elementary students in a rural area. Second, the research done by David and Ali (2022) focused on what language teachers have learned during the pandemic and post-pandemic for more effective teaching of reading skills. The third research conducted by Ali and Razali (2019) aims to see the teaching of reading strategies for ESL/EFL learners, which reveals that ESL/EFL teachers need to keep updating their teaching methods to meet the ESL/EFL students' needs. Further, Dawi et al. (2021) conducted a study to examine the learning strategies used among rural primary school pupils in developing their reading skills. In addition, Wongsothorn (2020) studied reading enhancement activities of students in rural areas in Thailand the goal is to investigate students'

reading abilities in both Thai and English, to construct reading promotion activities, and to assess the impact of these activities.

However, this research differs from the previous research in which this research focuses on EFL teachers' strategies for overcoming the challenges of teaching English at rural schools that emphasize students' reading skills with the research setting at using a case study as a qualitative method which emphasizes the insights and understanding people's experiences and perspectives by studying social organizations and human behavior particularly related to teaching strategy.

