

CHALLENGES FACED BY ENGLISH TEACHERS IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO RURAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BALI

[Tantangan Yang Dihadapi Guru Bahasa Inggris Dalam Mengajarkan Kosa Kata Kepada Siswa SMP Perdesaan di Bali]

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ABSTRAK

Penguasaan kosakata merupakan komponen fundamental dalam kemahiran berbahasa Inggris dan berperan penting dalam pengembangan keterampilan menyimak, berbicara, membaca, dan menulis siswa. Namun, pengajaran kosakata dalam konteks EFL di daerah pedesaan menghadirkan tantangan tersendiri, khususnya di wilayah dengan sumber daya pendidikan yang terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi guru bahasa Inggris dalam mengajarkan kosakata kepada siswa sekolah menengah pertama di daerah pedesaan Bali Utara, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan guru bahasa Inggris dari SMP di daerah pedesaan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menghadapi berbagai tantangan yang saling berkaitan, antara lain keterbatasan sumber daya pembelajaran, rendahnya paparan siswa terhadap bahasa Inggris, kurang memadainya strategi pembelajaran kosakata, serta kendala kontekstual yang terkait dengan lingkungan pendidikan pedesaan. Tantangan-tantangan tersebut secara signifikan memengaruhi efektivitas pengajaran kosakata. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pedagogi EFL dengan memberikan wawasan kontekstual yang spesifik serta implikasi pedagogis untuk meningkatkan pengajaran kosakata di pendidikan menengah daerah pedesaan.

Kata kunci: pengajaran kosakata; pendidikan pedesaan; guru EFL; Sekolah Menengah Pertama; Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of English language proficiency and plays a crucial role in developing students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. However, teaching vocabulary in rural EFL contexts presents unique challenges, particularly in regions with limited educational resources. This study aims to explore the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching vocabulary to rural junior high school students in North Bali, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving English teachers from rural junior high schools. The findings reveal that teachers encounter multiple interrelated challenges, including limited instructional resources, students' low exposure to English, inadequate vocabulary learning strategies, and contextual constraints related to rural educational settings. These challenges significantly affect the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction. The study contributes to EFL pedagogy by providing context-specific insights and pedagogical implications for improving vocabulary teaching in rural secondary education.

Keywords: vocabulary teaching; rural education; EFL teachers; junior high school; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of language proficiency. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to comprehend texts, express ideas, and participate effectively in communication. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, vocabulary

acquisition is particularly critical, as learners have limited exposure to the target language outside the classroom. Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language competence and serves as the basis for all four language skills. Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge includes both breadth (number of words known) and depth (quality of word knowledge). In EFL contexts, insufficient vocabulary is a major barrier to language comprehension and production.

According to Schmitt (2008), vocabulary acquisition requires repeated exposure, meaningful use, and appropriate learning strategies. However, these conditions are often difficult to achieve in contexts where English is not used outside the classroom.

In Indonesia, disparities between urban and rural education remain a persistent issue. Rural schools often face limited access to learning resources, technology, and professional development opportunities for teachers. These challenges are further intensified in English language instruction, where exposure to authentic input is minimal. In rural areas such as North Bali, English teachers are required to navigate contextual constraints while meeting curriculum demands.

Previous studies have examined vocabulary teaching strategies and challenges in EFL classrooms; however, research focusing specifically on rural junior high school contexts in Indonesia remains limited. Most existing studies concentrate on urban schools or higher education settings, leaving rural secondary education underrepresented in scholarly discussions.

In Indonesia, rural EFL teachers often rely on textbooks as primary instructional materials, which may not adequately address students' vocabulary needs (Suryani, 2020). These challenges underscore the importance of context-sensitive research on vocabulary instruction in rural schools. Rural education presents unique challenges related to infrastructure, access to resources, and student background. Studies indicate that rural EFL learners typically have lower exposure to English media and fewer opportunities for informal language learning (Wedell, 2017). Teachers in rural settings also face professional isolation and limited access to pedagogical innovation.

At the junior high school level, vocabulary teaching should emphasize contextualized learning and gradual expansion of lexical knowledge. Cameron (2001) argues that vocabulary instruction for young learners should involve concrete contexts, visual support, and interactive activities. Nevertheless, curriculum pressures and limited instructional time often restrict teachers' ability to implement effective vocabulary teaching practices.

In addition to pedagogical challenges, vocabulary instruction in rural EFL contexts is closely linked to broader socio-educational inequalities. Rural students often come from families with limited educational backgrounds and reduced access to literacy-rich environments. These conditions influence students' attitudes toward English learning and their capacity to acquire new vocabulary effectively. As English is rarely used in daily communication in rural North Bali, students tend to perceive vocabulary learning as an academic obligation rather than a meaningful communicative skill.

Furthermore, English teachers in rural junior high schools are required to implement a national curriculum that is largely standardized and does not always account for local contextual differences. This mismatch between curriculum expectations and classroom realities places additional pressure on teachers, particularly in vocabulary instruction, which requires extensive exposure and contextualization. Consequently, teachers must exercise pedagogical creativity while operating within structural limitations.

Teaching vocabulary in low-resource contexts requires adaptive instructional strategies that maximize limited materials. Nation (2013) argues that effective vocabulary instruction does not always depend on sophisticated technology but rather on meaningful repetition, contextual use, and learner engagement. In rural classrooms, teachers often rely on board work, translation, and drilling, which may limit students' depth of word knowledge.

Research suggests that contextualized vocabulary instruction, such as using local stories, real-life objects, and students' daily experiences, can enhance lexical retention in rural settings (Cameron, 2001). Additionally, explicit instruction of vocabulary learning strategies—such as word grouping, semantic mapping, and guessing meaning from context—has been shown to improve learners' autonomy and vocabulary development (Schmitt, 2008).

However, implementing these strategies requires sufficient teacher knowledge and instructional support. In rural Indonesian schools, limited access to professional development often restricts

teachers' exposure to innovative vocabulary teaching methods. This highlights the importance of examining teachers' challenges within broader systemic and institutional frameworks.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching vocabulary to rural junior high school students in North Bali. By examining teachers' perspectives and classroom practices, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence to inform context-sensitive pedagogical strategies and educational policy.

This study contributes to EFL research by (1) highlighting context-specific challenges in rural vocabulary instruction, (2) providing teachers' lived experiences as empirical data, and (3) offering pedagogical implications tailored to rural secondary education settings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching vocabulary in rural junior high schools in North Bali. A qualitative approach was chosen to capture teachers' experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities in depth.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted in three rural junior high schools located in North Bali. The participants consisted of six English teachers with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had extensive experience teaching vocabulary in rural contexts.

The selected schools were located in geographically remote areas with limited internet connectivity and minimal access to digital learning resources. English instruction was conducted primarily through face-to-face classroom interaction using government-issued textbooks. These contextual conditions provided a relevant setting for examining vocabulary teaching challenges in rural junior high schools.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through:

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews with English teachers.
2. Classroom observations focusing on vocabulary teaching practices.
3. Document analysis, including lesson plans, textbooks, and students' worksheets.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis** following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Coding was conducted iteratively to identify recurring themes related to vocabulary teaching challenges.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied credibility, dependability, and confirmability criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents was employed, and member checking was conducted to validate interview interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed four major challenges faced by English teachers in teaching vocabulary.

Limited Instructional Resources

Teachers reported limited access to teaching media, such as visual aids, audio materials, and digital resources. Most classrooms relied solely on textbooks, which restricted the variety of vocabulary input provided to students.

Students' Low Exposure to English

Students had minimal exposure to English outside the classroom. Teachers noted that students rarely encountered English through media, resulting in slow vocabulary acquisition and low retention.

Students' Limited Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Teachers observed that students lacked effective vocabulary learning strategies, such as using context clues or word associations. Vocabulary learning was often limited to memorization without meaningful application.

Contextual Constraints of Rural Settings

Contextual factors such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, and students' socio-economic backgrounds further constrained vocabulary instruction. Teachers reported difficulty adapting materials to students' real-life contexts.

Teachers' Professional Constraints and Workload

Another challenge identified in this study relates to teachers' professional workload and administrative responsibilities. Participants reported that extensive non-teaching duties limited their time for lesson preparation and material development. As a result, vocabulary instruction often relied on repetitive textbook exercises rather than varied and interactive activities.

This finding indicates that challenges in vocabulary teaching are not solely instructional but also institutional. Teachers' limited capacity to design engaging vocabulary lessons is influenced by workload distribution and systemic expectations within rural schools.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that vocabulary teaching in rural junior high schools in North Bali is influenced by interconnected pedagogical and contextual challenges. Limited instructional resources align with previous research indicating infrastructural disparities in rural education (Wedell, 2017).

Students' low exposure to English supports Nation's (2013) assertion that repeated and meaningful input is essential for vocabulary acquisition. In the absence of exposure, teachers must compensate through classroom-based strategies, which are often constrained by limited resources.

The lack of vocabulary learning strategies among students highlights the need for explicit strategy instruction. This finding supports Schmitt's (2008) argument that vocabulary learning strategies play a critical role in long-term lexical development.

The findings of this study further suggest that vocabulary teaching challenges in rural junior high schools are deeply embedded in structural inequalities within the education system. While teachers demonstrate awareness of effective vocabulary teaching principles, their instructional practices are constrained by contextual limitations. This supports Wedell's (2017) argument that teacher agency in rural settings is shaped by institutional and policy-level factors.

Moreover, the lack of vocabulary learning strategies among students reflects limited opportunities for metacognitive development. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) emphasize that language learners require explicit guidance to develop strategic competence. Without systematic strategy instruction, rural students are likely to remain dependent on rote memorization, hindering long-term vocabulary growth.

These findings extend existing EFL literature by illustrating how rurality influences both pedagogical practices and learner outcomes, underscoring the need for differentiated instructional policies that address contextual diversity.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective vocabulary instruction in rural contexts requires adaptive teaching approaches, professional support for teachers, and contextually relevant learning materials.

CLOSING

Conclusion

This study concludes that English teachers in rural junior high schools in North Bali face multifaceted challenges in teaching vocabulary, including limited resources, low student exposure to English, insufficient learning strategies, and contextual constraints. These challenges significantly affect students' vocabulary development.

Pedagogically, teachers are encouraged to adopt low-cost instructional strategies such as contextualized vocabulary tasks, collaborative learning, and the use of locally relevant materials. Policymakers should provide greater support for rural schools through resource allocation and teacher professional development.

Future research is recommended to involve students' perspectives and employ mixed-method approaches to examine vocabulary learning outcomes in rural EFL contexts.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest that English teachers in rural junior high schools should prioritize contextually grounded vocabulary instruction. Teachers may utilize locally relevant themes, real objects, and students' daily experiences to make vocabulary learning more meaningful. Explicit instruction of vocabulary learning strategies should also be integrated into regular classroom practice to foster learner autonomy.

Policy and Institutional Implications

At the policy level, educational authorities should provide targeted support for rural English teachers through continuous professional development programs focusing on vocabulary pedagogy. Resource allocation should consider the unique needs of rural schools, including the provision of supplementary teaching materials and reduced administrative workload for teachers.

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