

Exploring the Experiences and Challenges of Non-English Teachers in Teaching English at Primary Schools in Poso, Central Sulawesi

By:

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore the experiences and challenges faced by non-English teachers who were occasionally required to teach English in primary schools when specialized teachers were unable to attend classes. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with three non-English teachers from rural primary schools in Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi. The findings revealed that non-English teachers felt pressured and unprepared due to the lack of prior preparation in English instruction. They experienced difficulties in selecting appropriate teaching methods, pronunciation, and vocabulary, which led to hesitation in acting as language models for students. To cope with these challenges, teachers relied heavily on online resources such as Google Translate and instructional videos. Although these strategies helped maintain classroom activities, instruction often focused on repeating previously taught materials rather than introducing new content, resulting in limited student learning progress and misalignment with curriculum objectives. Despite these constraints, the teachers expressed strong motivation and enthusiasm for professional development. The study highlighted the urgent need for basic English instruction training for non-English teachers to strengthen their linguistic competence and instructional confidence.

Keywords: challenges, experiences, non-English teachers, primary schools

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 2027/2028 academic year, English is expected to be introduced as a mandatory subject in Indonesian primary schools, as stated in Permendikbudristek Number 12 of 2024. This policy marks a significant

milestone in the national education framework, reflecting the government's recognition of English as a vital competency for the next generation. The inclusion of English at the primary level is not merely a curricular adjustment but a strategic investment in human capital development, aiming to prepare students for global communication and international knowledge. As English functions as an international language in many Asian contexts (Kirkpatrick, 2012), policymakers seek to cultivate language awareness and intercultural sensitivity through early introduction. However, as global primary English policies involve complex political and pedagogical considerations (Enever, 2018), this study is profoundly significant to bridge the gap between such national ambitions and the local realities in Poso, Central Sulawesi. By exploring the challenges faced by non-English teachers in this region, this research provides essential insights into how mandatory English instruction can be effectively and equitably implemented in areas with limited specialized resources. Teaching English to young learners requires a specialized approach, as children possess distinct cognitive and affective characteristics compared to older learners. Copland et al. (2014) and Garton and Copland (2019) emphasize that the primary challenge in global English education is the "implementation gap," where ambitious policies are not matched by teacher readiness. While early exposure is theoretically beneficial, empirical evidence from Zein (2017) and Butler (2019) reveals that many primary teachers in Indonesia and across Asia struggle with limited language proficiency and a lack of pedagogical training. This phenomenon is explicitly observed in Poso, Central Sulawesi, where the scarcity of English specialists forces generalist classroom teachers to handle the subject. These teachers face real-world hurdles, including high language anxiety and a lack of contextualized teaching materials, which directly impact the quality of instruction. This study is grounded in the "Teacher Agency" framework by Priestley et al. (2015), which provides a lens to understand how non-specialist teachers navigate and negotiate their roles within the constraints of new educational mandates.

The quality of English instruction is a key factor in determining students' language development and overall academic achievement. However, inconsistent

teaching approaches often result in fragmented learning experiences, which hinder the acquisition of critical language skills. Empirical studies from the last decade (e.g., Zein, 2017; Songbatumis, 2017) demonstrate that insufficient teacher preparation remains a primary barrier to successful English implementation in Indonesia, particularly in rural regions. Non-English teachers, who are frequently tasked with teaching English due to staff shortages in Poso, encounter significant challenges in planning lessons and implementing effective instructional strategies. These difficulties often lead to decreased classroom interaction and reduced student motivation. Recent research by Kusumam and Setyono (2021) further supports this, showing that limited teacher proficiency directly correlates with stagnant vocabulary expansion and grammatical errors among young learners. Furthermore, a lack of teacher confidence creates an environment where linguistic errors are insufficiently corrected, further impeding learning. Therefore, identifying and addressing the challenges faced by non-English teachers in Poso is crucial, as these factors directly affect student engagement and the overall sustainability of the mandatory English policy.

Although the 2027/2028 policy carries progressive goals, its implementation presents both promising opportunities and significant challenges. Schools in urban areas tend to adapt more easily due to adequate facilities and the availability of qualified English teachers. However, schools in rural regions continue to face a shortage of competent educators, often requiring non-English teachers to take over English teaching responsibilities as mention that English teaching in Indonesia is shaped by complex multilingual classroom realities and diverse educational contexts (Hamied, 2017). Although the government has provided professional development programs for teachers across Indonesia, there are still no specific initiatives designed to train English teachers or to offer basic English language training for teachers who do not specialize in English. This condition has the potential to reproduce problems identified in previous studies, such as low language proficiency and a lack of pedagogical confidence. Empirical evidence suggests that without structured intervention, teacher anxiety and linguistic limitations lead to fossilized errors in students' language acquisition (Zein, 2017;

Garton & Copland, 2019). Therefore, to truly achieve the vision of producing globally competitive learners, the government and educational stakeholders must implement complementary measures such as intensive language training for teachers, continuous professional development, and equitable distribution of educational resources throughout the country. Studies in similar Asian contexts have shown that localized, peer-supported professional development is more effective in rural settings than one-size-fits-all national workshops (Butler, 2019; Kusumam & Setyono, 2021). Furthermore, adequate resource distribution is crucial, as the availability of contextualized teaching materials significantly predicts the successful implementation of new curricula in remote areas (Songbatumis, 2017). A preliminary observation was conducted in rural primary schools to gain an initial understanding of the current condition of English instruction prior to the full implementation of the 2027/2028 English education policy. The observation revealed that although most schools have appointed English teachers, there are frequent situations in which these teachers are unable to attend classes due to various circumstances such as official duties, illness, or other school responsibilities. In such cases, non-English teachers are required to take over the English lessons temporarily to ensure that learning activities continue. This situation places non-English teachers in a challenging position, as they must handle a subject outside their area of expertise and often lack the confidence or pedagogical knowledge to deliver English instruction effectively. The condition reflects the ongoing struggle of rural schools to maintain instructional continuity despite teacher absences and limited substitute resources.

Non-English teachers were often required to attend English classes and teach the subject to their students as part of their general teaching responsibilities. Many of these teachers expressed feelings of uncertainty and a lack of confidence when faced with the task of teaching a subject outside their area of specialization. This lack of self-efficacy is a common phenomenon among non-specialist teachers, as highlighted by Thompson (2017), who argues that teaching a foreign language without formal training leads to significant pedagogical anxiety. To prepare lessons, they relied heavily on online resources such as Google Translate

and YouTube videos to support their explanations. While such digital tools offer immediate assistance, research by Kessler (2018) suggests that over-reliance on automated translation can result in inaccurate linguistic models for students. Although these efforts reflect the teachers' strong sense of dedication and adaptability, the situation underscores the urgent need for systematic support through targeted training and ongoing mentoring. According to Garton and Copland (2019), the success of early English programs is heavily dependent on "contextualized support," where teachers are not just given materials but are mentored within their specific classroom realities. Without such assistance, English instruction in rural schools is likely to remain inconsistent, limiting students' opportunities to achieve meaningful learning outcomes that align with the curriculum's communicative objectives. Despite numerous initiatives to improve English education in Indonesia, the government has begun implementing various training programs aimed at enhancing the competence of English teachers in classroom instruction. However, in practice, the issue extends beyond merely addressing the need for qualified English teachers. There is another situation that demands serious attention, namely, the condition of non-English teachers who are occasionally required to teach English. This issue also requires appropriate and sustainable solutions to ensure the effectiveness of English learning at the primary level. The experiences of these non-English teachers remain largely underexplored in existing literature. Previous studies have primarily focused on teacher competence, curriculum design, and instructional materials (e.g., Hawanti, 2014; Sulistiyo, 2016), but very few have examined the realities of teachers who temporarily assume English teaching duties without a formal background in the subject. Recent scholarly discussions by Zein (2017) and Garton (2019) have identified the shortage of specialized teachers as a global crisis in early English education, yet empirical data on how non-specialist teachers in remote areas like Poso navigate these challenges remain scarce. This lack of scholarly attention creates a significant gap in understanding how such teachers manage the demands of English instruction and how their experiences influence classroom effectiveness, student engagement, and learning outcomes, particularly in rural

educational contexts. Rural schools generally operate with limited infrastructure and offer minimal opportunities for collaboration or mentoring among educators. In such circumstances, non-English teachers often have to develop their own strategies for managing English instruction despite the lack of institutional support. Although some teachers in rural areas have participated in professional development programs, these initiatives typically emphasize general pedagogical skills rather than the specific competencies required for English language teaching. Consequently, while many of these teachers display creativity and innovation in managing their regular classes, the situation becomes significantly more demanding when they are required to teach English repeatedly due to unexpected circumstances that occur frequently in rural school contexts.

Furthermore, understanding the experiences and challenges of non-English teachers who teach English is essential for aligning national educational goals with on-the-ground realities. While the 2027/2028 policy aims to strengthen English competence from the early grades, its success depends not only on policy formulation but also on classroom execution. Teachers are the key agents in this process, and their preparedness, confidence, and access to professional support will determine the policy's effectiveness. Exploring how non-English teachers perceive and perform their English teaching responsibilities can reveal critical factors that influence the sustainability and success of this policy, particularly in marginalized educational settings.

The current landscape of English education in Poso Regency reveals a significant disparity between policy expectations and classroom realities. Based on preliminary interviews with local educators, primary schools in this region face a critical shortage of certified English teachers. Consequently, the responsibility for English instruction falls upon generalist classroom teachers who lack formal linguistic and pedagogical training in English. While these teachers acknowledge the abundance of online resources, they report significant hurdles in practical implementation, particularly regarding correct pronunciation (phonology) and providing clear classroom instructions. Furthermore, although digital media is utilized to engage students, its repetitive nature—due to the teachers' limited

ability to expand on the material—hinders progressive learning. This creates a stagnant educational environment where the national objective of achieving foundational English mastery remains unfulfilled. As Poso is a developing regency with unique geographical and administrative challenges, this situation underscores the urgent need for equitable resource distribution and specialized teacher support to ensure that the mandatory English program does not further marginalize students in rural Central Sulawesi.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by exploring the experiences and challenges faced by non-English teachers who are occasionally required to teach English in primary schools, with a specific focus on rural areas of Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this study aims to uncover the realities of English teaching as experienced by teachers from non-English backgrounds and to identify the strategies they employ to manage instructional challenges. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive and context-sensitive teacher training programs, inform policymakers about the practical implications of English education reform, and promote more equitable access to quality English instruction for all primary school students across Indonesia.

This study is based on several educational theories that offer insights into language acquisition and teaching practices. Constructivist Theory, rooted in the work of Piaget (1973) and further expanded in recent language education by Cameron (2001) and Pinter (2017), posits that learners actively build their own understanding, with meaningful learning taking place when new information is linked to prior knowledge and embedded in authentic contexts. This perspective highlights the importance of engaging students in activities that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and the practical use of language. In a similar vein, Social Learning Theory, as proposed by Bandura (1977) and further contextualized in modern education by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020), emphasizes the role of observation, peer interaction, and collaborative learning in the acquisition of knowledge. From this viewpoint, students develop language skills not only through direct instruction but also by observing, imitating, and

interacting with others. Together, these theories provide a foundation for understanding how teaching methods, classroom dynamics, and social engagement collectively enhance effective English language learning.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology to explore the experiences and challenges of non-English teachers who are occasionally assigned to teach English in rural primary schools in Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi. This approach is particularly suitable for educational research because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and the contextual factors that shape their instructional practices. By focusing on the lived experiences of teachers who primarily specialize in other subjects but are periodically responsible for English instruction, the study captures the practical realities, adaptive strategies, and constraints these educators face.

This research recruited non-English teachers from one public primary school located in Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi, through purposive sampling. The school was selected because it represents a typical rural educational context where English is taught as a local content subject but is often handled by teachers without an English education background. The participants were three classroom teachers who were occasionally assigned to teach English when the designated English teacher was absent or when staffing shortages occurred.

To ensure a structured and transparent data collection process, an interview guide was self-developed by the researcher. The indicators in the instrument were synthesized from the Teacher Agency framework (Priestley et al., 2015) and the principles of Teaching English to Young Learners (Pinter, 2017) to ensure content validity. The following table outlines the specific indicators and sub-indicators used to elicit in-depth information from the participants:

Table 1. Interview Guide Indicators and Sub-indicators

No.	Indicator	Sub-indicators
1.	Professional Background	Educational history, years of teaching, and prior English training.
2.	Instructional Challenges	Difficulties in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and lesson planning.
3.	Adaptive Strategies	Use of digital tools (Google Translate/YouTube) and classroom management.
4.	Psychological Factors	Language anxiety, self-confidence, and professional motivation.
5.	Institutional Support	Availability of materials, mentoring, and school-level policies.

Source: Developed by the researcher (2026) based on Priestley et al. (2015) and Pinter (2017).

The interview data were analyzed using the Thematic Analysis model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which was selected for its systematic approach to identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis began with data familiarization, in which the researcher transcribed the audio recordings into verbatim transcripts and read them multiple times while noting initial ideas such as “teacher anxiety” and “dependence on digital tools” to ensure deep immersion in the data. This was followed by generating initial codes through systematic manual coding, where relevant segments of the data were highlighted and labeled based on their connection to the research questions; for example, difficulties in pronouncing English words were coded as “Phonological Struggle,” while references to using YouTube were categorized as “Digital Adaptation.”

Next, the researcher searched for themes by organizing related codes into broader categories, such as grouping “Pedagogical Anxiety” and “Linguistic Barriers” under the theme “Instructional Constraints.” These potential themes were then reviewed against the coded data and the entire dataset to ensure their accuracy and relevance, as well as to confirm that no important information had been overlooked. Afterward, each theme was defined and clearly named, with detailed descriptions developed to explain how the themes reflect the challenges and strategies of non-English teachers in rural contexts. Finally, the findings were synthesized and reported by interpreting the themes through the lens of the Teacher Agency framework (Priestley et al., 2015), providing a

comprehensive understanding of how teachers navigate their professional roles and adapt to their teaching environments.

To ensure the credibility, dependability, and overall trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed several validation strategies as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). First, member checking was conducted by returning the interview transcripts to the three participants in Poso to verify the accuracy of their statements and to ensure that the transcriptions reflected their intended meanings. Second, triangulation was applied through a methodological approach by cross-referencing interview data with field notes and observations of instructional materials, such as YouTube videos and outputs from Google Translate, used by the teachers. Finally, an audit trail was maintained by keeping a detailed record of the entire research process, including raw data, transcription logs, and coding notes, to ensure the dependability and transparency of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight several challenges and adaptive strategies employed by non-English teachers who are occasionally required to teach English in rural primary schools in Poso Regency. Through thematic analysis, three core themes emerged: a lack of preparedness and confidence, instructional challenges leading to limited student progress, and the implementation of adaptive coping strategies. The following analysis grounds these themes in the participants' lived experiences through verbatim excerpts while connecting them to the theoretical frameworks of constructivism and social learning.

Lack of Preparedness and Confidence.

All participants reported intense feelings of stress and anxiety when assigned to teach English unexpectedly. This emotional burden stems from a lack of formal subject-matter background, which directly impacts their professional agency. For instance, S1 shared the psychological pressure of this role: *"I felt very pressured and completely unprepared when I had to teach English suddenly. It's*

not just about being in the classroom, but the responsibility of teaching something I never studied formally."

These feelings were primarily caused by limited English proficiency and the absence of pedagogical training. Teachers expressed particular concern about pronunciation accuracy, leading to hesitation in acting as language models. S2 admitted, *"I worry about my pronunciation and whether what I teach is correct. I'm afraid the students will remember the wrong sounds because of me."* This finding aligns with Zein (2015) and reinforces the Constructivist Theory as applied by Pinter (2017). From a constructivist perspective, if the teacher cannot provide an accurate "authentic context" or reliable input, students struggle to build meaningful understanding upon their prior knowledge. When teachers lack confidence, the "meaningful learning" intended by the curriculum is often replaced by a survivalist approach to instruction.

Instructional Challenges and Limited Learning Progress

Non-English teachers encountered significant difficulties in lesson planning and instructional delivery. Due to their limited mastery of the subject, English lessons often became repetitive rather than progressive. S3 explained this stagnation: *"I usually repeat the previous lesson because I'm not confident to continue to the next chapter. I'm afraid if the students ask questions about new words, I won't be able to answer them."*

This repetition directly contradicts the principles of Social Learning Theory and Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasize that learning occurs most effectively when students are challenged within their "Zone of Proximal Development." When teachers are stuck in a cycle of reviewing familiar content to avoid linguistic mistakes, they fail to provide the "scaffolding" necessary for students to progress. These challenges were further intensified by the rural school context in Poso, where inadequate infrastructure and limited collaboration opportunities restricted teachers' ability to develop effective instructional practices. Similar findings by Richards (2017) and Borg (2018) highlight that without professional guidance, instruction in rural settings becomes fragmented.

Adaptive Coping Strategies

Despite these constraints, the teachers demonstrated strong commitment and adaptability because Teacher autonomy plays an important role in managing classroom challenges (Lengkanawati, 2017). To sustain classroom activities, they relied heavily on digital resources such as YouTube videos, songs, and translation tools. These strategies helped maintain student engagement and prevented instructional disruption when English teachers were absent. This reliance on digital mediation is consistent with the findings of Sari and Zainuddin (2022), who observed that non-specialist teachers often utilize technology to compensate for their linguistic limitations and maintain pedagogical continuity. Furthermore, the use of songs and videos to sustain interest in resource-limited settings aligns with Pinter (2017), who argues that multi-modal input is essential for young learners to build foundational English familiarity when formal instruction is inconsistent. However, the reliance on online materials also limited interactive and communicative learning activities, which are essential for developing language proficiency.

Although these adaptive strategies allowed lessons to continue, they tended to support surface-level learning rather than deeper communicative competence. This finding supports Burns and Richards (2018), who argue that technology-assisted teaching requires adequate pedagogical support to be effective.

Overall, the results highlight the resilience of non-English teachers in managing unexpected teaching responsibilities. Professional development is closely related to teacher efficacy and instructional success (Derakhshan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the study underscores the urgent need for targeted professional development programs focusing on basic English proficiency, pronunciation, and instructional strategies. Teacher professional development in Indonesia still faces systemic challenges (Hamied & Lengkanawati, 2018). Providing systematic training, mentoring, and access to appropriate teaching resources is essential to enhance instructional quality and ensure that English education reforms achieve their intended outcomes, particularly in rural school contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences and challenges faced by non-English teachers who are occasionally required to teach English in rural primary schools in Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi. The findings indicate that these teachers often experience feelings of unpreparedness, anxiety, and low confidence due to limited English proficiency and the absence of formal training in English language teaching. Instructional practices were frequently constrained by difficulties in pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and lesson planning, which resulted in repetitive teaching and limited student learning progress.

Despite these challenges, non-English teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability by utilizing available digital resources such as Google Translate and instructional videos to sustain classroom activities. While these strategies helped maintain instructional continuity, they were not sufficient to support communicative and curriculum-aligned English learning. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted professional development programs focusing on basic English proficiency, pronunciation, and practical instructional strategies for non-English teachers. Strengthening institutional support through systematic training, mentoring, and access to appropriate teaching resources is essential to ensure the effective implementation of English education policy and to promote equitable English learning opportunities in rural primary school contexts.

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