

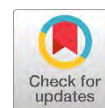
# Teaching English in rural settings: A systematic review of challenges and strategies in non-technological classrooms

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received 12 June 2025

Revised 12 July 2025

Accepted 4 August 2025

### Keywords

Rural education

English language teaching

Non-technological classrooms

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to understand what challenges encountered by English teachers and how they cope with the barriers, particularly in low-resource, non-technological settings. Using the PRISMA framework, this study conducted a systematic literature review to synthesize the twenty articles published between 2018 and 2024 from Scopus, Connected Papers and ERIC. This study identified eight major challenges which are: inadequate resources for learning, poor school infrastructure, lack of teaching media, overly teacher-centered pedagogy, heavy workload, insufficiency of prepared teachers, adaptation issues, and low levels of student motivation. To cope with these challenges, teachers applied six primary strategies which included development of teaching materials by hand, content simplification through local dialects, application of teacher-centered pedagogy, peer collaboration, curriculum improvisation to fit local context, and informal professional development activities. These results have noted the creativity and adaptability of teachers within constrained environments and underscore the necessity for situated educational policies. Moreover, the study contributes to a better understanding on the preservation of English instruction in rural settings and offers useful information to policy makers, educators, and other divisions which work towards resolving inequities in education.



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**How to Cite:** Candrawati, A. C. & Purbani, W. (2025). Teaching English in rural settings: A systematic review of challenges and strategies in non-technological classrooms. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 8(2), 54-65. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v8i2.14081>

## 1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign or second language serves as one of the ways through which an individual, especially from a non-English speaking country, can access global information, education, and economic opportunities (Zeng & Yang, 2024). However, the stubborn lack of educational equity around the world makes it more difficult to provide proper English language instruction in rural regions. Unlike urban areas, rural schools are usually resource poor in terms of qualified teaching personnel, teaching aids, and infrastructural facilities (Baharuddin & Burhan, 2025). These systematic inadequacies not only impede students' language acquisition but also restrict their overall academic development and employability in the future. Although English is known as the language of international communication and is an essential requirement for joining a knowledge-based society (Crystal, 2003), providing English language education in under-resourced rural classrooms requires overcoming profoundly entrenched structural obstacles.

One of the most pressing challenges in these rural classrooms is the limited or nonexistent use of technology. Technology integration has improved teaching English in many urban well-resourced

settings using digital tools, multimedia resources, and technology enabling students to actively participate and learn languages (Haleem et al., 2022; Persichitte et al., 2018; Poudel 2022). However, many rural schools have not adopted these practices. In this case, the region's technological infrastructure, including internet availability, electricity, and even basic digital devices, is absent or extremely unreliable (Donald & Hashim, 2025). Thus, there are no opportunities for participatory engagement teaching methodologies to be employed due to technology's absence in learning (Anggela et al., 2024).

Within these constraints, it is important to explore how English is taught in remote, non-technological classrooms. Gaining insight into this scenario reveals important aspects of how teachers modify their teaching within the bounds of resource limitations. It demonstrates the need for low-tech, scalable and sustainable approaches relevant to resource-poor educational contexts. As Zein et al. (2020) emphasized, the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—must be taught using appropriate context-aligned sociocultural frameworks. Knowing how better to teach English without technology is crucial towards achieving educational equity and improving outcomes in rural areas.

A number of studies have looked into the challenges faced by English teachers in rural areas. As cited in Harlina & Yusuf (2020), several challenges such as insufficient facilities, absence of modern instructional tools, sparse professional training, and minimal active involvement of parents surfaced. Additionally, Kusuma (2022) pointed out that owing to the lack of basic amenities like electricity, teachers are somewhat compelled to employ outdated techniques which greatly hampers the use of physical audio materials. Still, some researchers do highlight the self-sufficiency and tenacity displayed by educators within these constraints. Halimi et al. (2020) documented that teachers use their own money to provide supplemental resources for classroom activities and to improve the physical environment of the classroom so students will engage better. These local experiences combined with the rich cultures of the students themselves are adapted into the lessons.

While these studies provide meaningful insights, most are concerned with more of an isolated issue or context-specific case which makes it nearly impossible to reach a broad-based conclusion. There is a gap of systematic and integrative reviews that shows the scope of English teaching in rural, non-technological classrooms around the globe. In the absence of such holistic amalgamation, efforts to create appropriately customized and impactful foundational frameworks, be it through educator workshops, curriculum creation or even resource distribution, continue to be contextually shallow and disorganized. What is lacking is an overview that synthesizes all documented challenges and devised teaching strategies from various rural settings to aim for evidence-based educational practices for all and not some.

This study addresses that gap by conducting a systematic literature review on English language teaching in rural classrooms that have no access to technology. The purpose is to compile and critically evaluate available research to expose patterns of reoccurring challenges, devisable learning hurdles, instructional approaches, and pedagogical adaptations made within non-technological frameworks. Through the provision of synthesized understanding, the review aims to assist educators, researchers, policy developers and instructional institutions towards fostering equitable, adaptable, sustainable solutions towards English language education problems in rural contexts.

To guide this inquiry, the study poses the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by English teachers in non-technological classrooms?
2. How do English teachers modify their teaching strategies to adapt to the absence of technology in rural classrooms?

## 2. Method

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to investigate the challenges and strategies experienced by English teachers in non-technological classroom settings, especially in rural areas. To guide the review process, the researchers adopted PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021) along with procedures from Petticrew & Roberts (2006). The review was carried out through several steps: formulating research questions, developing search strategies, carrying out the article searches, stating the inclusion criteria, screening the research articles, presenting the findings, summarizing and

analyzing, drawing the research results. Detailed information regarding the article selection process can be seen in Figure 1.

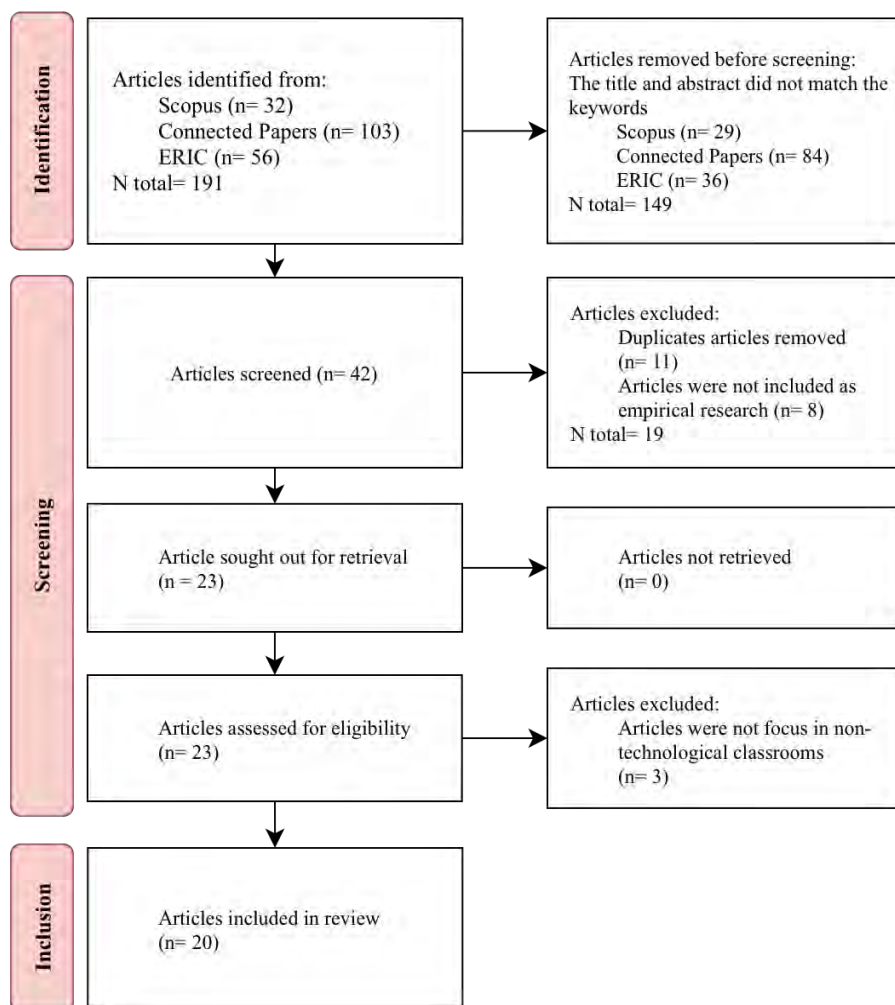


Fig. 1. Article selection using the PRISMA framework.

## 2.1. Identification Phase

This research was conducted by using three databases, namely Scopus, Connected Papers and ERIC. When accessing those databases, the researchers searched the articles by giving the available filters. The searches were limited to several inclusion criteria such as (1) articles which are written in English; (2) articles which are published between 2018 and 2024; (3) empirical articles; (4) keywords “challenges OR issues OR problems encountered in teaching English in non-technological class OR rural OR remote settings” and “solutions OR recommendations OR suggestions to overcome the challenges in teaching English in non-technological class OR rural OR remote settings”. Then, the duplicates are removed to identify whether the research has many duplicates on the same database or even on a different database. During the identification process, we found a total of 191 articles. Out of these 32 articles were discovered in Scopus while 103 articles were found in Connected Papers. Additionally, 56 articles were located in ERIC. Afterward, the articles underwent a screening and eligibility process to select the ones for our research scope.

## 2.2. Screening and Eligibility

Before starting with the screening phase, the researchers identified the title and abstract based on the inclusion criteria, and 149 articles were removed before the screening. Once the article filters were applied, the researchers evaluated the 42 remaining articles to assess how well they complied with the inclusion criteria. In this iterative process of refinement which has been termed as “screening”, 19

articles were discarded because they redundantly failed these criteria. Their exclusion was because of the duplication and types of the articles. From this screening, 23 articles were selected for the next stage. Next, the researchers read the entire contents of these articles and conducted another screening. The result showed that 3 articles did not meet the inclusion criteria due to their relevance to teaching English without modern technology. Therefore, the final result of the review included 20 articles that met the inclusion criteria.

### 2.3. Inclusion

The inclusion phase consisted of picking articles from the Screening and Eligibility step which had been filtered out earlier based on specific criteria. These articles aimed at assessing the issues and coping mechanisms dealt with by English teachers in rural, non technological classrooms. The chosen papers analyzed how these issues were resolved within the rural areas and how teachers attempted to resolve challenges. In this case, the focus was purely on studies that illuminated some aspects concerning the teaching of English in a non technological environment. There were 20 papers selected: 5 were sourced from Scopus, 12 from Connected Papers and 3 from ERIC.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done by using the thematic analysis approach, following several phases proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This process included familiarizing with the data by reading and re-reading the 20 selected articles, generating initial codes to identify key features related to challenges and strategies, searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes, reviewing themes to ensure they accurately represented the data, defining and naming themes to capture the essence of each theme, and producing the report by organizing the findings into meaningful categories.

## 3. Finding and Discussion

Based on the purpose of the study stated in the background, the authors presented the data that have been analyzed here. Besides describing teachers' challenges and strategies in teaching English at non-technological classrooms, the authors also provided some information related to the data of author and the research title in this section.

### 3.1. Data of Authors and Research Title

The [Table 1](#) below shows the author's data and the research title.

Table 1. Data of author and research title

No	Author(s)	Research Title
1	Akter et al. (2024)	Teaching English in Rural Settings: Challenges and Solutions
2	Anggela et al. (2024)	Teaching English in Rural Area: Difficulties and Strategies
3	Aziz et al. (2019)	Coping with stress: Exploring the lived experiences of English teachers who persist in Malaysian rural schools
4	Belatrech (2018)	Novice EFL Teachers' Challenges in Mostaganem Rural Areas
5	Endriyati & Abasa (2019)	Challenges in Teaching English at Rural and Urban Schools and Their Solutions
6	Fadilah et al. (2023)	Teachers' Teaching Reflection: English Teachers' Challenges in Rural Areas of Indonesia
7	Febriana et al. (2018)	Understanding Teaching in Rural Indonesian Schools: Teachers' Challenges
8	Halik & Nusrath (2020)	Challenges Faced by ESL Teachers in Teaching English to the Students in Rural Schools
9	Harlina & Yusuf (2020)	Challenges of Learning English in Rural School
10	Kadel (2024)	Challenges in Teaching English Speaking and Listening Skills in Rural Nepal
11	Kumar (2024)	Challenges and Solutions in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Rural Settings: A Case Study in India
12	Kusuma (2022)	EFL Teachers' Online Teaching in Rural Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stories from Indonesia
13	Laila et al. (2023)	Challenges of Teaching English for Elementary School Student in Indonesian Rural Areas
14	Mncube et al. (2021)	Teaching in English across the Curriculum: A Lived Experiences of the Novice Teachers in A Selected Rural Fet Schools in South Africa

15	Rosyida et al. (2024)	Navigating Global Standards: Assessing English Teacher Quality in Rural Areas- Challenges and Opportunities
16	Saha (2023)	English teachers' attitudes towards learners: Effects on the rural pedagogies in Bangladesh
17	Saiful & Triyono (2018)	EFL Teachers' Reflection in Teaching English to EFL Students of Rural Areas
18	Saputri & Sukarno (2024)	Teacher's Challenges and Strategies in Teaching English in Rural Areas
19	Sekar Pramesty et al. (2022)	Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners in Rural Area
20	Singh (2024)	Navigating English Language Education Challenges in Resource-limited Contexts

### 3.2. Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English at Rural Classrooms without Technological Resources

This study revealed many pertinent challenges faced by English teachers in rural classrooms without access to technological resources. These challenges range from inadequate instructional materials and low infrastructure qualities to insufficient teacher readiness and low student participation. The challenges derived were persisting obstacles experienced through various rural educational settings and literature review resulted in uncovering eight distinct yet interrelated enduring challenges. The synthesis of these categories, along with the corresponding studies, is detailed in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Category of the challenges in teaching English at non-technological classrooms

No.	Category	Challenges	Author(s)
1	Learning resources	Teachers often faced the frustration of having very few or outdated textbooks and no access to digital resources like videos, audio files, or educational apps. This severely limited their ability to create engaging and varied lessons, forcing them to rely on traditional, less interactive methods which can bore students and reduce learning effectiveness.	Akter et al. (2024); Aziz et al. (2019); Fadilah et al. (2023); Febriana et al. (2018); Halik & Nusrath (2020); Kadel (2024); Kumar (2024); Laila et al. (2023); Rosyida et al. (2024); Saiful & Triyono (2018); Pramesty et al. (2022); Singh (2024)
2	School facilities	Many rural schools lacked reliable electricity, internet access, and multimedia equipment such as projectors or speakers. Classrooms were often overcrowded, poorly lit, and insufficiently furnished. Teachers reported that these conditions make it difficult to maintain student attention and deliver lessons effectively, often causing physical discomfort for both teachers and students.	Akter et al. (2024); Anggela et al. (2024); Aziz et al. (2019); Endriyati & Abasa (2019); Febriana et al. (2018); Mncube et al. (2021); Rosyida et al. (2024); Saputri & Sukarno (2024)
3	Teaching media	Teachers depended on blackboards, chalk, and handwritten worksheets for lesson delivery. They found that this increased preparation time and limited creativity, making it difficult to present language in dynamic and memorable ways. The absence of audio-visual tools also restricted students' exposure to authentic language use, a crucial element in language acquisition.	Akter et al. (2024); Endriyati & Abasa (2019); Mncube et al. (2021); Saiful & Triyono (2018); Saputri & Sukarno (2024); Pramesty et al. (2022)
4	Teaching methods	Without access to interactive media or technology, teachers felt compelled to use lecture-style teaching, repetition, and direct explanation. They found it challenging to apply student-centered or communicative approaches, which research supports as more effective, especially for language learning. This limitation reduced student participation and enthusiasm for learning English.	Febriana et al. (2018); Pramesty et al. (2022)

5	Teacher workload	Many teachers reported that they were working long hours and creating all teaching materials by hand to tailor lessons to their students' needs. They also managed classroom discipline, lesson planning, and administrative tasks without assistance, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion, which hinders their ability to innovate or provide individualized student support.	Anggela et al. (2024); Aziz et al. (2019); Saha (2023)
6	Teacher quality	Teachers often felt underprepared for rural teaching due to gaps in pre-service education and a lack of ongoing professional development adapted to resource-poor settings. This results in low confidence when delivering lessons and adapting to diverse learner needs, particularly without technological aid, which further undermines teaching effectiveness.	Akter et al. (2024); Anggela et al. (2024); Endriyati & Abasa (2019); Fadilah et al. (2023); Belatrech (2018); Rosyida et al. (2024); Saha (2023); Saputri & Sukarno (2024)
7	Teacher adaptation	Many novice teachers, especially those trained in urban settings, struggled to modify their teaching strategies for large, mixed-ability classes without digital tools. They faced challenges managing classrooms and adapting curricula to local realities, which affected their job satisfaction and instructional success during their initial years.	Belatrech (2018); Saha (2023)
8	Student motivation	Teachers observed that students frequently lack interest in learning English due to limited exposure outside school and the absence of engaging or relevant learning materials. This low motivation made it difficult to sustain classroom attention and participation, requiring teachers to spend additional effort to encourage and support student engagement and persistence.	Akter et al. (2024); Anggela et al. (2024); Aziz et al. (2019); Endriyati & Abasa (2019); Fadilah et al. (2023); Halik & Nusrath (2020); Kadel (2024); Kumar (2024); Laila et al. (2023); Mncube et al. (2021); Saiful & Triyono (2018)

As shown in Table 2, this research discovered eight particular categories of the challenges that English teachers faced in technologically barren rural classrooms. The most frequent was resource constraints, discussed in 12 articles which expressed reliance on outdated textbooks and the absence of digital audio or visual materials. This scarcity limited the variety of lessons and student engagement. Organizational issues were also cited in 8 articles which discussed unreliable electricity, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient furniture. The third major challenge, teaching media, was described in 6 studies, which reported the use of chalkboards and handouts for teaching due to lack of audiovisual equipment. Moreover, teaching methods were discussed in 2 articles where the absence of technology confined educators to lectures, restricting the implementation of communicative or student-centered models. 4 studies focused on the impacts of teacher workload, citing long hours, extensive manual prep work, and excess admin work. Along with this, 8 other studies associated poor teacher ability with lack of adequate preparation and few professional development options, resulting in a lack of confidence and constrained teaching autonomy. The problem of teacher adaptation was discussed within the confines of 2 articles, paying particular attention to new teachers and their inability to cope with the rural realities. Finally, 12 articles focused on student motivation, revealing that limited contact with the English language as well as dull materials severely restricted the learners' interest and participation. All these factors create a picture of multilayered and interconnected problems in teaching that go beyond instruction and define the culture of teaching and learning in rural, low-resource settings.

### 3.3. Teachers' Strategies to Teach English in Rural Classrooms without Technological Resources

In response to the lack of technological resources in rural classrooms, English teachers have adapted their teaching strategies in creative and resourceful ways. These modifications are essential for maintaining effective instruction and student engagement in under-resourced environments. Table 3 presents a synthesis of the most common strategies employed by teachers.

Table 3. The synthesis result of teachers' strategies

No.	Category	Strategies	Author(s)
1	Creating and adapting materials manually	In the absence of technological tools such as projectors, e-books, or interactive platforms, teachers created their own instructional materials. These included handwritten worksheets, paper-based flashcards, vocabulary lists, and board illustrations. Some teachers repurposed materials from outdated textbooks or created analog games (like word-matching cards) to make learning more active and personalized.	Aziz et al. (2019); Singh (2024); Febriana et al. (2018); Fadilah et al. (2023); Kumar (2024)
2	Simplifying content and using local languages	Teachers reduced the complexity of English content by focusing on key vocabulary, translating abstract words into the local language, and explaining grammatical rules in simplified terms. In multilingual communities, code-switching is often used to bridge comprehension. For example, when teaching verbs, teachers may use local analogies or storytelling in the students' mother tongue to ensure understanding.	Mncube et al. (2021); Saiful & Triyono (2018); Fadilah et al. (2023); Kumar (2024)
3	Applying teacher-centered instruction methods	Due to large class sizes and limited resources, teachers adopted more traditional methods like lectures, dictation, and translation. Instruction was primarily one-way, from teacher to student, with less interaction. For instance, a teacher read a passage aloud, translated it sentence by sentence, and then asked students to memorize key words or recited definitions—prioritizing coverage over communication.	Akter et al. (2024); Halik & Nusrath (2020); Saha (2023); Saiful & Triyono, (2018); Saputri & Sukarno (2024)
4	Encouraging peer learning and collaboration	Teachers facilitated small-group discussions, peer teaching, or partner-based exercises where stronger students help explain material to weaker peers. Common practices included reading dialogues in pairs, vocabulary games in teams, or writing assignments reviewed by peers. These activities were especially effective in classrooms lacking individual attention or multimedia support.	Anggela et al. (2024); Fadilah et al. (2023); Saputri & Sukarno (2024)
5	Adapting the curriculum with improvisation	Teachers creatively modified national curriculum topics to fit local realities and available resources. Teachers also reordered units and removed non-essential content to suit the school calendar or community events.	Akter et al. (2024); Kumar (2024); Saputri & Sukarno (2024)
6	Engaging in self-learning and informal professional development	Teachers, aware of their training limitations, sought self-improvement by reading guidebooks, consulting with senior colleagues, attending local workshops (if available), or reflecting through teaching journals. Some teachers formed study groups to share lesson ideas or seek out free printed materials from education offices. In rare cases where the internet is accessible, they downloaded printable lesson plans during school visits to town centers.	Anggela et al. (2024); Fadilah et al. (2023); Rosyida et al. (2024); Saha (2023); Saputri & Sukarno (2024)

### 3.4. Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the complex and deeply interwoven challenges that English teachers face in rural, non-technological classrooms. At the heart of these challenges lies a structural disparity between urban and rural educational environments, where access to technology, adequate infrastructure, and updated learning resources remains uneven. The persistent lack of electricity, internet connectivity, multimedia tools, and modern teaching materials not only limits the delivery of

content but also reduces the potential for dynamic, engaging instruction that fosters student interest and retention. In many cases, teachers are forced to revert to outdated, teacher-centered methods simply because they lack the tools and support to implement more interactive approaches. This context exposes a fundamental injustice in educational equity, where students' access to meaningful learning is determined not by their capacity to learn, but by their geographic location and the resources available to their schools.

The challenges identified also affirm key propositions in educational and sociocultural theory, particularly Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which emphasizes the influence of immediate environments on a learner's development. In rural classrooms, these environments are often constrained by poverty, limited community support, and a disconnect between school curricula and students' everyday experiences. Students' low motivation to learn English, as frequently reported in the studies reviewed, underscores the failure of current instructional approaches to resonate with their realities (Halimi et al., 2020). The assumption in traditional language acquisition models that learners are inherently motivated to learn a global language is challenged by this study's findings. Instead, the results align more closely with Dörnyei (2005) sociocultural model of motivation, which argues that learners' attitudes, engagement, and aspirations are deeply shaped by contextual and cultural relevance. The absence of multimedia and interactive tools not only strips English learning of its global appeal but also reinforces feelings of distance and disconnection between the learners and the language being taught.

Importantly, the review also reveals the emotional and physical toll that rural teaching takes on educators. Many of them not only create all their own materials by hand, but also manage administrative duties, discipline, and lesson planning—often with little to no institutional support. This workload contributes significantly to burnout and hinders innovation, posing a real threat to the sustainability of quality education in rural areas. Moreover, the mismatch between teacher training programs—typically designed for urban or better-resourced schools—and the reality of rural practice contributes to feelings of inadequacy among teachers. Novice teachers in particular struggle to adapt, which not only affects their performance but also their long-term commitment to working in such areas. These findings suggest that current models of teacher education and support are insufficiently responsive to the diverse contexts in which educators operate. Therefore, policies aimed at rural education improvement must go beyond simply recruiting more teachers; they must provide relevant, ongoing support that prepares teachers for the conditions they will face.

Despite the overwhelming constraints, the strategies employed by teachers in these settings speak volumes about their resilience, creativity, and commitment to their students. From manually crafting teaching aids to using local languages and cultural references and promoting peer collaboration to adjusting the curriculum to reflect local experiences, rural teachers are not passive victims of their environment. Rather, they are active agents of adaptation and innovation. These adaptive strategies provide critical insights into what a culturally responsive and context-aware pedagogy might look like. Importantly, they also prompt a re-evaluation of what constitutes “best practice” in language teaching. Pedagogies that prioritize flexibility, localization, and low-tech innovation may be more sustainable and impactful in resource-poor environments than imported, high-tech solutions that are impractical or irrelevant (Marouli, 2021).

In light of these findings, several practical and theoretical implications emerge. Practically, stakeholders must recognize that technological advancement alone will not close the educational gap between rural and urban learners. Interventions must include the development of localized teaching frameworks, investment in school infrastructure, and the provision of alternative teaching aids that do not depend on digital tools. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature calling for a shift from universalized models of language instruction to pluralistic, context-sensitive frameworks. It challenges the assumption that digitalization is the only path to modernization in education and highlights the value of grassroots solutions rooted in teachers' lived experiences (Canagarajah, 2005). Ultimately, addressing the educational needs of rural areas is not just a matter of logistical support—it is an ethical imperative that speaks to broader questions of inclusion, justice, and the right to quality education for all (Schuelka & Engsig, 2022).

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that English language teaching in rural, non-technological classrooms is shaped not only by persistent structural challenges such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, lack of teaching media, and teacher preparedness, but also marked by teachers' resilience and adaptive strategies. Through a systematic review of twenty empirical studies, it identified eight primary challenges as well as six coping strategies that showcase how educators resourcefully overcome difficult circumstances through manual material creation, integration of the local language, and peer collaboration. The findings highlight the urgency for zone educational interventions, tailored training for teachers in rural areas, and acknowledgment of low-tech, culturally adaptive teaching strategies. The review provides a comprehensive synthesis, although drawing from secondary sources highlights the need for primary fieldwork in order to capture lived experiences and test the long-term effectiveness of grassroots solutions for improving rural English education.

#### Acknowledgment

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) under the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia for supporting the publication of this article, and also to English Language Education Department, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, for providing the facilities and academic support needed for this study.

#### Declarations

**Author contribution** : Both authors carried out all stages of the research process collaboratively, including data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data, and preparation of the manuscript.

**Funding statement** : This research is funded by Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) under the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia

**Conflict of interest** : Both authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Ethics declaration** : We as authors acknowledge that this work has been written based on ethical research that conforms with the regulations of our university.

We support *English Language Teaching Education Journal (ELTEJ)* in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.

**Additional information**

No additional information is available for this paper.

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