

Teachers' and Parents' Perspectives on Early Literacy Development in Rural ELT Classrooms

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Abstract

- Purpose** : This study investigates teachers' and parents' perspectives on early literacy development in rural English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms, focusing on the challenges encountered, strategies employed, and expectations for improving literacy support.
- Method** : A qualitative approach was employed involving 10 English teachers and 10 parents of children aged 5–8 years from rural primary schools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to challenges, instructional and parental strategies, and expectations for early literacy development.
- Results** : The findings reveal that early literacy development is constrained by limited English learning resources, parents' limited English proficiency, students' minimal exposure to English outside school, relatively large class sizes, and teachers' administrative workload. Despite these limitations, teachers developed contextualized strategies by creating learning materials, using storytelling and role-play, and integrating local cultural elements into literacy activities. Parents also supported children's reading habits through home-language assistance despite limited English proficiency. Both groups emphasized the need for improved learning resources, teacher professional development, parental guidance, and stronger school–family–community collaboration.
- Conclusion** : Early literacy development in rural ELT contexts requires context-sensitive and collaborative interventions that integrate teacher creativity, culturally relevant pedagogy, accessible resources, parental participation, and sustained institutional support.

Keywords: early literacy, perspective, rural area.

1. Introduction

Early literacy is an important component in a child's educational journey, laying the foundation for successful future learning. In the world of education, early literacy is the knowledge, skills, and attitudes possessed by children at an early age, which are the basis for reading and writing before they comprehend the reading and writing skill, (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001; Humaira et al., 2022; Moreira & Dima, 2022; Putri, 2024). Early literacy refers to the skills and knowledge that children develop before they become conventional readers and writers (Putri, 2024). In the context of ELT, early literacy includes phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and vocabulary development in English. Research suggests that early exposure to English literacy is

crucial for children, as it helps them build the foundational skills necessary for reading and writing (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Cofino, 2023; Read, 2023). In rural settings, early literacy development often faces constraints due to socio-economic and infrastructural limitations (Pillay & Yu, 2010).

In the process of a child's development, early literacy is very important in language teaching, including English (ELT). Early literacy is the fundamental ability for children to help them form a strong foundation in learning to read and write when they start formal education, focusing on reading and writing. Early literacy includes phenomenological awareness, text awareness, alphabet mastery, vocabulary development, spoken language development, narrative structure skills, and reading motivation (Saracho, 2023). These skills help children to understand written language's meaning and communicate effectively. (Baucom et al., 2023; Sumaral & Jordan, 2023; Murphy, 2023) added that early literacy milestones include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening builds comprehension skills, speaking expands vocabulary, reading fluently begins with print and phonemic awareness, and writing evolves into structured form. Early literacy forms a strong foundation for formal education, improving communication skills, language comprehension, and vocabulary, which are crucial for academic and social success. Early literacy typically occurs from birth to around 2 to 8 years of age. At this stage, children develop early reading skills, including how letters and sounds are related, as well as how printed and spoken words are related. They can read basic texts with high-frequency words and pronounce short, monosyllabic words.

In the children's early literacy development, there are several natural stages of progression, starting with exposure to spoken language and sound awareness (Raban & Raul, 2023; Cardova et al., 2024). The early literacy stages began with the pre-literacy stage, from babies to 2-year-old toddlers, who will develop receptive language skills, sound awareness, and interest in books. They also will recognize language sounds, rhythms, and basic patterns, laying the foundation for successful reading and writing in later years. Next is the children's early literacy stage, which ranges from 2 to 5 years and is the emergent stage. In this stage, children will develop their phonological awareness, print awareness, alphabet knowledge, listening and speaking skills, and vocabulary. They also learn how to decode words and use phonemes to read simple words and sentences. Next is the early reading and writing stage. In this stage children will start experimenting with writing and understanding simple stories. Another stage is the transitional writing and reading stage, in which the children will improve their decoding skills, fluency development, and understanding of story structure. They also develop early writing fluency and use simple sentences to express ideas. In the final stage is consolidated literacy stages, which children's literacy development will shift from reading to learning, focusing on understanding the text's meaning. They develop enhanced vocabulary and comprehension, infer meaning from context, and improve spelling and writing skills. They also develop critical thinking skills, analyzing, interpreting, and making judgments about what they read.

Early literacy also has an important role and function in English language teaching (ELT). In the context of learning English, it really helps children understand English letters, words, and structures, even if they are not yet able to read or write fully. Developing these early skills can make it easier for children to understand written English later in life. Early literacy has a very important role in forming the basis for future reading and writing skills, as well as preparing children for future English language learning. By strengthening language and literacy skills from an early age,

children will have better communication and cognitive and problem-solving skills, which are essential in English language teaching. Early literacy also helps overcome challenges in rural environments, motivates children to engage in language learning, and narrows learning gaps between students with different access to resources. In teaching English in rural areas, early literacy provides a strong foundation for students to learn a second language more efficiently. By incorporating early childhood literacy into English language learning activities, teachers can help reduce the gap between students with limited access to learning materials and those without. Everyone agrees that the role of parents and teachers is crucial in fostering early literacy. Parents, especially in rural areas, play a key role in supporting literacy activities at home, such as reading stories or engaging in oral language activities in English or the home language (Abril & Haikal, 2023). On the other hand, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide structured literacy instruction in the classroom. However, rural producers often need to be more creative due to limited resources. This is evident in how knowledge of the home language and local culture is incorporated into literacy teaching (Comber, 2016). Students and producers must collaborate to maintain the literacy characteristics of rural data.

Numerous barriers can impede early literacy development, especially for those living in regular systems. Children growing up in rural areas face various challenges, including a lack of resources, limited exposure to English, and the sociocultural factors that shape their learning experiences. Challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to high-quality equipment, and fewer supplies hinder English literacy progress in rural areas. In line with previous problems, related studies also found that challenges such as lack of compatible learning resources, lack of parental and less positive support from teachers are still becoming the main problems in developing early literacy (Alatalo & Westlund, 2021; Bigras et al., 2021; Kiviranta et al., 2024; Lavidas et al., 2022).

Early literacy development is crucial to the program's educational process because it provides learning opportunities. This highlights the importance of teaching English, especially when children living in rural areas face challenges such as a lack of resources, limited exposure to English, and sociocultural factors that affect their learning experience. Children learning English face challenges such as access to a wide range of educational options, training, and technological infrastructure. To see the possible outcome for a good literacy development in early ages, three research questions were asked to get the data. The first research question is what challenges do parents and materials face in supporting children's early literacy in rural ELT classrooms?. The second question is: What are the strategies for parents and teachers to help children learn English? Finally, how do parents and students expectations in rural language schools support early literacy development? First, the fundamental problems faced in delivering early literacy in rural English language teaching classrooms must be identified. Second, tracking and identifying strategies to help children learn better is crucial. Finally, determining the prediction of early literacy status for reproduction and dissemination is essential.

2. Method

This study explored how a qualitative study perceives the process of follow-up and dissemination of early literacy development in English language classrooms in rural areas. These

views explored parents and teachers about their detailed information, distribution, experiences, challenges, and expectations that they encountered in early literacy development. This approach generally allows for a comprehensive examination of the elements of literacy development and the techniques used to promote it.

The participants of this study are two main groups of participants: teachers and parents, as the source of primary data. The purposive sampling of 10 English teachers from primary schools in a rural area was selected in this study. The teachers were shared their experience related to their teaching early literacy in ELT classrooms. In addition, a purposive sample of 10 parents whose children are in early grades (ages 5-8) and are learning English in the same rural schools were also be selected. The Participants were chosen based on their involvement in the literacy development of young learners and their willingness to participate in in-depth interviews.

The primary instruments for data collection are interview guideline that design to capture detailed responses about challenges, strategies, and expectations in early literacy development. Next are observation checklists that are used during classroom visits to observe literacy practices employed by teachers. In addition, the field notes are also taken to document non-verbal cues and additional observations during interviews and observation. The research data from interviews and observation were transcribed and analysed thematically using a coding process to identify key patterns and themes related to the research questions. Thematic analysis was focused on challenges faced by teachers and parents., strategies used to promote literacy development, and expectations regarding literacy outcomes. The data analysis was written to see the connection between the experiences of teachers and parents, highlighting areas of commonality and difference in their perspectives

3. Result

This study investigated teachers' and parents' perspectives on early literacy development in rural English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes. The findings are presented according to the three data collection instruments to provide a clear account of the challenges, strategies, and expectations related to early literacy development.

3.1. Findings from Interviews

The interview data revealed three major themes: challenges in developing early literacy, strategies used to address the challenges, and teachers' and parents' expectations for future literacy development.

3.1.1 Challenges in Developing Early Literacy

The interviews indicated that limited learning resources represented one of the major challenges faced by teachers and parents in rural ELT classrooms. Teachers reported that they had limited access to English books, teaching materials, and other resources that could support varied literacy activities. One teacher stated:

T1: *"We often lack sufficient teaching materials and books in English. Sometimes, even the students' families cannot afford basic supplies."*

The limited availability of resources restricted teachers' ability to provide varied learning experiences and made it difficult for students to access additional English learning materials outside the classroom.

Another significant challenge concerned parental involvement and parents' English proficiency. Although parents expressed concern about their children's English learning, some felt unable to provide direct academic support because they had limited English proficiency. As one parent explained:

P1: *"I can't speak English, so I feel it is hard for me to help or assist my child while they learn English."*

The interviews also revealed a language barrier between students and their learning environment. English was largely unfamiliar to students, while opportunities to use English outside the classroom were limited. A teacher explained:

T2: *"Students often struggle because English is an entirely foreign language for them, and their influence outside the classroom is almost nonexistent."*

These findings indicate that early literacy development in rural ELT classrooms is influenced not only by classroom instruction but also by the availability of resources, family support, and students' exposure to English beyond school.

3.1.2. Strategies for Developing Early Literacy

Despite these challenges, the interviews demonstrated that teachers developed several strategies to support students' literacy development. Teachers reported creating their own teaching materials, including flashcards, posters, and worksheets, to compensate for the lack of available resources.

T3: *"I make my own materials, such as flashcards, posters and worksheets, to make lessons engaging."*

Teachers also reported using storytelling, interactive activities, and local cultural elements to make English learning more familiar to students. Parents similarly attempted to support their children despite their limited English proficiency. One parent stated:

P2: *"Even if I can't teach English, I help them in learning or reading with their reading habits even though I have to use our native language."*

This finding suggests that parental support does not necessarily depend on parents' ability to speak English. Parents can still contribute to literacy development by encouraging reading habits and supporting children's learning in their first language.

3.1.3 Teachers' and Parents' Expectations

The interviews further showed that teachers and parents expected stronger institutional and community support. Teachers particularly emphasized the need for professional development, better learning resources, and improved educational infrastructure.

T4: *"We hope that the government can provide us more training and better resources to teach literacy effectively in English."*

Parents also expressed a need for practical guidance regarding their role in supporting literacy development at home:

P3: *"We need guidance on how to support our children's learning at home because sometimes we do not know what things we should teach."*

Thus, the interview findings demonstrate that teachers and parents recognize the importance of early literacy but require stronger resources, training, and collaborative support.

3.2 Findings from Classroom Observations

The classroom observations provided evidence that supported the challenges identified during the interviews. The observations showed that rural ELT classrooms had limited learning resources and limited access to modern technology. Teachers frequently relied on available textbooks, improvised teaching aids, and conventional teaching methods.

The observations also indicated that classrooms often consisted of more than 20 students, which made individualized attention difficult. Limited resources combined with relatively large class sizes created challenges for teachers in providing differentiated literacy support.

Despite these limitations, teachers demonstrated creativity in their classroom practices. They used available materials to support vocabulary and literacy activities and incorporated storytelling, local cultural elements, collaborative reading, and role-play into their lessons. These practices provided students with opportunities to interact with language in meaningful contexts.

The observations also showed limited interaction between teachers and parents in supporting literacy development. Although some parents attended school meetings and showed interest in their children's progress, sustained collaboration between home and school remained limited.

3.3 Findings from Field Notes

The field notes reinforced the interview and observation findings. The notes documented three important conditions: resource limitations, teachers' workload, and opportunities for community involvement.

First, the field notes confirmed that teachers worked with limited teaching materials and technology. As a result, teachers frequently developed or adapted their own teaching aids. This demonstrated their willingness to innovate despite limited institutional resources.

Second, the field notes indicated that teachers experienced a considerable workload because teaching responsibilities were accompanied by administrative duties. Teachers expressed enthusiasm for supporting students but also experienced fatigue from managing both instructional and administrative responsibilities.

Third, the field notes documented opportunities for strengthening collaboration between schools and families. Occasional workshops and school meetings demonstrated that parents were willing to participate, although their involvement was constrained by limited knowledge, time, and English proficiency.

Overall, the field notes confirmed that rural early literacy development requires not only classroom-level innovation but also broader institutional and community support.

4. Discussion

4.1. Interview Findings: Resource Constraints, Language Barriers, and Family Support

The interview findings demonstrate that limited learning resources, parental language barriers, and insufficient exposure to English constitute important challenges in rural early literacy development. Teachers' accounts indicate that the lack of English books and teaching materials limits opportunities to provide varied literacy experiences. This finding is consistent with Blanden et al. (2021), who highlighted inequalities in access to educational resources and qualified teachers in disadvantaged contexts.

Parental English proficiency also emerged as an important issue. P1's statement demonstrates that parents may want to support their children but lack the linguistic resources to provide direct assistance. However, P2's response suggests that parents can still contribute by developing reading habits and supporting literacy activities in their native language. This indicates that parental involvement should not be measured only through parents' ability to teach English.

The findings also correspond with Hill et al. (2023), who reported concerns regarding language ability among children and young learners. In the rural context examined in this study, limited exposure to English outside school appears to intensify students' difficulties in developing early English literacy.

4.2 Observation Findings: Teacher Creativity and Contextualized Learning

The observation findings demonstrate that teachers responded to resource limitations through creative and contextualized teaching practices. The use of flashcards, posters, storytelling, role-play, and local cultural content demonstrates teachers' efforts to make literacy learning accessible and meaningful.

This finding supports the argument that learning materials should be adapted to students' contexts. Hadiananto et al. (2022) found that literacy materials incorporating local cultural discourse can support students' reading development because familiar cultural content can facilitate comprehension and engagement.

The observation findings also align with culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2018) emphasizes the importance of connecting classroom learning with students' cultural experiences. In the present study, the use of local cultural elements provided students with familiar contexts for interacting with English.

Furthermore, collaborative reading and role-play reflect the social dimension of learning. These activities are consistent with the principles of Vygotsky's social constructivism, which emphasizes interaction and social support in the learning process.

4.3 Field Notes: Systemic Challenges and the Need for Collaborative Support

The field notes demonstrate that the challenges of early literacy development cannot be addressed solely through classroom-level interventions. Teachers' administrative workload, limited technology, large class sizes, and weak home-school collaboration indicate the need for systemic support.

Teachers' willingness to develop their own materials represents an important strength. However, continuous dependence on teacher-created materials may increase teachers' workload if schools do not provide adequate institutional support. Therefore, professional development programs, accessible teaching resources, and appropriate infrastructure are needed to sustain teachers' efforts.

The field notes also indicate that parents are willing to participate but require practical guidance. Epstein (2018) emphasizes the importance of school-family-community partnerships in supporting students' educational development. In rural ELT contexts, parent workshops could focus on simple literacy practices that parents can implement at home without requiring advanced English proficiency.

The findings further support the importance of providing accessible literacy resources. Sarama and Clements (2019) and Sari et al. (2024) indicate that appropriate educational resources and literacy support can contribute to learning development in low-resource settings.

4.4 Integration of the Three Data Sources

The three instruments provide complementary evidence regarding early literacy development in rural ELT classrooms. Interviews captured the perspectives and experiences of teachers and parents. Observations demonstrated how these challenges and strategies appeared in actual classroom practices. Field notes provided contextual information concerning teacher workload, resource conditions, and school-community interaction.

The convergence of these findings indicates that rural early literacy development is affected by three interconnected dimensions: resource availability, pedagogical practices, and family-community support. Teachers have demonstrated creativity and commitment, while parents have shown willingness to participate despite their limitations. However, sustainable improvement requires stronger support from schools, educational stakeholders, and the wider community.

Therefore, the findings suggest that improving early literacy in rural ELT classrooms should involve more than providing teaching materials. It should also include teacher professional development, culturally responsive teaching practices, accessible literacy resources, parent education, and stronger collaboration among teachers, parents, schools, and educational stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that literacy development in rural ELT contexts is influenced by several interconnected factors rather than by classroom instruction alone. Students' literacy development is affected by limited learning resources, teachers' instructional capacity, parental involvement, and the learning environment available at home and in the community. These conditions indicate that improving literacy in rural areas requires approaches that respond directly to the realities experienced by students, teachers, and families.

The findings also highlight the importance of using learning resources and teaching strategies that are relevant to students' local contexts. Integrating local culture into literacy activities can make learning more meaningful because students can connect English learning with experiences, knowledge, and practices that are familiar to them. Similarly, innovative and engaging teaching strategies can provide students with greater opportunities to participate actively in literacy activities. However, these approaches require adequate teacher support, appropriate instructional resources, and continuous professional development.

Another important finding concerns the role of parents and the wider community. Support for literacy development should not be limited to the classroom. Stronger communication between teachers, parents, and community members can create a more supportive literacy environment and provide students with opportunities to practice their skills beyond school. Therefore, literacy development in rural ELT should be viewed as a shared responsibility involving schools, families, and communities.

Overall, this study emphasizes the need for context-sensitive literacy practices that combine teacher support, local resources, innovative pedagogy, and community participation. Future studies

should examine how these interventions can be implemented sustainably and investigate their long-term effects on students' literacy development in rural EFL settings.

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