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Exploring the Challenges Encountered by English Teacher in Primary School in Thailand Adellia Hawaningrum Yuliafasyah 1), Vidya Mandarani 2) 1) Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Indonesia

2) Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, Indonesia \*Email Penulis Korespondensi: HYPERLINK "mailto:vmandarani@umsida.ac.id" vmandarani@ umsida.ac.id

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Abstract. English has been a mandatory subject in schools for decades. Teachers play a big role in the teaching process, yet they encounter numerous obstacles that prevent an effective language instruction. This research adopted a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to investigate the challenges faced by English teacher in Thai primary school. The findings demonstrated that students were unfamiliar with English due to insufficient outside exposure, which led to disinterest and lack of motivation, generally caused by passive learning methodologies. Teachers were also constrained by limited class time, insufficient digital media access, and challenges adjusting textbook information to make it relevant and interactive. Furthermore, classroom conditions, class sizes, made it difficult to keep student attention and control. These findings deepen the understanding of English instruction challenges faced by the English teacher, offering insights to enhance teacher support and overall English education quality.

Keywords - Challenges, teacher's challenges, teaching English

# 1. I. Introduction

Teaching is an activity that creates a behavioral change in an individual. According to Brown, teaching is defined as showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge, causing to know or understand [1]. In typical terms, teaching is the act of delivering instructions to students in a classroom setting. Teaching and learning are interconnected. Teaching and learning process occurs when there is an interaction between teachers and students. Teachers can serve as facilitators and instructors during the instruction process. The teacher's role as an educator is more than just delivering material or teachings in class; they must also motivate students [2]. To ensure that the teaching process is running effectively, both teachers and students should be engaged in the activity. However, while teaching a language, particularly English, not only teachers must acquire the four English skills (listening, writing, speaking and reading), but also teachers learn about the strategies and approaches of language teaching. It is done to determine the best approach to make sure the students are competent with the subject. Therefore, teachers must be capable of developing every aspect related to the teaching and learning processes in the classroom.

Teaching English at early age is important. Promoting children's language development at a young age is crucial considering that it goes rapidly during their golden age. Young learners are children aged five to twelve who are studying a foreign or second language for the first six or seven years of formal education, typically in primary or elementary school institutions [3]. The ideal age to learn a foreign language is during those ages. As stated by Ball and Feiman, children who start learning a language in primary school are more likely to achieve higher levels of proficiency compared to those who start in secondary school [4]. Teaching English to young learners is essential due to the language's role as the most spoken language globally. People are learning English to compete globally and teach English to children from an early age. To ensure students to comprehend English, it is important to use specific activities during the lesson. For example, students can imitate the teacher's words through speaking activities. Young learners acquire a new language by doing. According to the imitation theory, developed by B.F Skinner, children learn language by listening to and copying the language around them. As soon as children trained their mouth muscles and sounds, they begin to mimic what their closest adults say. If their surroundings are supportive, young learners can pick up a language well and easily [5]. That is why the teacher's teaching method has an important effect on the students' achievements.

Considering the importance of teaching English to young learners, there are significant challenges, particularly in places where the English language serves a limited purpose. Many students may not find English interesting or relevant to their lives. This lack of motivation can be linked to several causes, including cultural differences and lack of exposure to English language outside of the classroom. When students do not understand the value of studying English, their enthusiasm to participate and learn decreases. Students are less motivated to learn English because they may believe there is no point in learning the language. Study by Pertiwi explained that many students tend to lack enthusiasm to learn English and have little prior knowledge of English, making it difficult for them to understand new concepts [6]. To address the issue, teachers may find or develop relevant and entertaining materials that relate to students' lives and interests. This could include integrating current issues, common culture, or real-life experiences that students can relate to, which will increase their enthusiasm to learn. Several previous researches have been done related to challenges faced by English teachers in Thailand. Study by Assalihee & Donsuk explored in the southern province of Thailand, identifying issues such as limited awareness of the importance of

English proficiency, fragmented ELT policies, poor integration with real-life contexts, inconsistent textbooks, and impractical classroom arrangements [7]. Study by Kaosayapandhu discussed that many teachers in rural schools lack the necessary training to teach English as a foreign language [8]. This lack of professional growth may make it more difficult for them to teach students effectively and significantly. Another study conducted in Thailand by Tipprachaban discovered that despite of several government initiatives and educational reforms that focus on increasing English proficiency among Thais, the results have been unsatisfactory [9]. Thai English proficiency is still among the lowest globally, showing that the programs have not been effective enough.

Based on the pre-observation, English instruction in Prik Municipality primary school in Songkhla province, Thailand, focused on teacher-centered approach, the teacher is considered to be the main source of the lesson and authority [10]. Teacher-centered setting may be less engaging which can lead to stagnant comprehension in students [11]. One of the main issues in is the learners' linguistic diversity. This diversity can bring challenges for both students and teachers. For example, Thai students, whose first language is extremely has different sound or grammatical rules than English have more difficulty with pronunciation, sentence, or understanding particular linguistic concepts. Aside from that, the teachers mostly depended on textbooks as their major teaching resource, focusing courses around listening and repeating tasks. Students repeat dialogues and sentence structures with memorizing and mimicking. While this method teaches students vocabulary and pronunciation, it offers few opportunities for interaction, creativity, or deeper understanding [12]. Furthermore, some students appeared distracted and uninterested in the lessons, which could be linked to a lack of dynamic teaching approaches and relevant resources. This can lead to a loss of student motivation and participation, both of which are necessary for effective learning since engaged students are more likely to do well academically [13]. These views illustrate limitations in English language instruction in Prik Municipality primary school in Songkhla, Thailand.

By addressing the particular difficulties faced by English teachers in Prik Municipality primary school, Sadao District, Songkhla Province, Thailand-a setting that has not gotten much attention in prior research-this research makes a new contribution to the area of English language teaching. While previous research frequently concentrates on issues pertaining to students or more general educational reforms, this study takes a different approach by focusing on personal experiences, challenges, and solutions of teachers in the school. This study aims to identify the specific difficulties faced by English teachers in Prik Municipality primary school in Songkhla, Thailand and explore the efforts made to address these challenges. The research is guided by two main questions:

- 1. (1) What challenges do English teacher face in Prik Municipality primary school?
- 2. (2) What is the teacher's efforts to overcome these challenges?

#### 1. II. METHOD

#### Research Design

The authors employed a qualitative research with descriptive design. Descriptive design is meant to describe what is frequently seen, usual, or already present in a population [14]. Using non-numerical data, qualitative research seeks to provide deeper understandings of human behavior and social processes [15]. The authors chose a qualitative research to gain deep understanding into teachers' experiences, perspectives, and strategies for overcoming the challenges.

1

# Research Site and Participant

The setting of the research was in Prik Municipality primary school, Prik subdistrict, Sadao District, Songkhla Province, Thailand. The participant of this research was an English teacher at Prik Municipality primary school. In this research, one English teacher was chosen in this research. The authors chose the participant based on characteristics such as, experience in teaching English, currently teaching English in a primary school, credibility and knowledge. This research aimed to gather data from English teacher who are directly involved in teaching in primary school. The participant was best positioned to provide meaningful and in-depth insights into the challenges they face, making purposive sampling an appropriate method for identifying and selecting participants with the required expertise and relevance.

### Data Collection

In collecting the data, researchers conducted a classroom observation for a month to collect information during the teaching and learning activity.

Observation occurs when a researcher makes field notes on the behavior and activities of the participants at the research location. In these field notes, the researchers document activities at the research location in an unstructured or semi-structured manner (using prior questions posed by the inquirer) [16]. By doing an observation, the researchers fully experienced the learning activity from the beginning to the end of the lesson.

1. Observation Checklist

No. Observation Aspects Based on Yes/No Notes

- 1. Does the teacher appear to struggle with maintaining student motivation and engagement? Based on Curran's Humanistic Approach. The teacher acts as a facilitator and counselor, guiding students through the learning process and addressing their individual needs [17].
- 2. Does the teacher struggle to implement interactive activities, leading to minimal student-to-student talk time? Based on Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. Teacher emphasizes the crucial role of social interaction and culture in cognitive development [18].
- 3. Does the teacher struggle to provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback to students? Based on Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. Teacher provides support and guidance to help students learn new concepts and skills [18].
- 4. Does the teacher struggle to connect lesson materials and activities to students' real-world needs or interests? Based on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Teacher provides meaningful, real-world tasks [19].
- 5. Does the teacher struggle to clearly communicate the lesson's learning objectives or the purpose of activities to students? Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Teacher provides clear and concise instructions on what students need to do [19].
- 6. Does the teacher struggle to establish a safe, supportive, or low-anxiety classroom environment? Based on Curran's Humanistic Approaches. Teacher creates a supportive environment, such as fostering trust, empathy among students and between students and teachers [17].
- 7. Does the teacher rarely or never incorporate authentic English materials (real-life texts, audio, and video) into lessons? Based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Teacher uses real-world materials like newspaper articles, brochures, or videos helps learners engage with the language in meaningful contexts [19].
- 8. Does the teacher struggle to adapt activities or provide varied support for students with different learning styles or proficiency levels? Based on

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. Teacher as a guide to bridge the gap between what students can <u>do independently and</u> what they can achieve with guidance [18].

- 9. Does the teacher primarily lecture or dominate the classroom discussion, rather than serving as a facilitator who facilitates student discovery? Based on Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. Teacher provides support and guidance to help students learn new concepts and skills [18].
- 10. Does teacher struggle with classroom management, resulting in ongoing disruptions and disorganization? Based on Curran's Humanistic Approaches. Teacher create a supportive environment: Such as fostering trust, empathy among students and between students and teachers [17].

Furthermore, the researchers also collected the data by giving an open-ended questionnaire to the participant. The questionnaire was adapted from Meggi Lestari [20]. The original questions were created to analyze English teachers' problems at the high school level. For this research, the questionnaire was modified to focus on certain challenges that English teacher face in Prik Municipality primary school. The authors used open-ended question as the main data collection tool. The participant was asked through open-ended questions to identify the factors related to the difficulty in teaching English. The questions were designed to explore areas, such as: the main challenges in teaching English, factors contributing to the challenges, and suggestions or strategies to overcome the challenges.

# 2. Open-ended Questionnaire

No. Question Respond

- 1. Based on your teaching experience, what are the main difficulties you face in teaching English to primary school students?
- 2. What about teaching English do you find most frustrating, and why?
- 3. What factors make teaching English challenging in your school environment?
- 4. Can you describe any negative experiences you had while teaching English?
- 5. What ongoing problems in teaching English do you often think about solving, and why?
- 6. What challenges do you experience when using the English teaching materials?
- 7. How would you describe the size of your classes, and how does it impact your teaching?
- 8. What challenges do you encounter when teaching English in classrooms with a large number of students?
- 9. How would you describe your students' motivation in learning English, and how does it affect your teaching?

#### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the result of the classroom observation and the questionnaire. The authors' first step was read the collected responses to understand the data. The next step was analyzing based on theories and data which was the result from the open-ended questions, and the final step was writing the conclusion. The object that is written was the participant's respond to the open-ended questions. In this study, trustworthiness was employed to validate the data through member checks. Creswell defines member checking as asking one or more participants in the study to verify the correctness of the account's information [16]. This evaluation involves presenting the results to the participants and questioning them (in writing or through interviews) about the study's correctness.

# 2. III. Findings & amp; Discussion

The results have been collected through questionnaires that were given to participant. Participant is an English teacher at Prik primary school. According to the participants' responses, the teacher's obstacles in teaching English are related to students, textbook materials, and equipment. The researchers will break it down in depth.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 1

Question Respond

1. Based on your teaching experience, what are the main difficulties you face in teaching English to primary school students? "Not enough exposure of English outside classroom. Students are not familiar with the language."

According to the participant's respond, there is lack of exposure to the English language outside the classroom. Besides that, students are not familiar with the language since English is considered as a foreign language in Thailand. English is rarely spoken outside of the classroom. Study by Ali discussed that students may struggle to speak English if they have few opportunities to practice in real-life settings [21]. Students' language ability improves as they get more exposure to English outside of the classroom, such as through media, technology, and the home environment. Classroom instruction frequently focuses on written exercises or individual assignments, offering little chance for spoken interactions. The teacher's strategy for this so that students become accustomed to English language is teacher provides pictures around the class and school area with English vocabulary to make students more familiar with the language. There are pictures of simple vocabulary such as, greetings, days of the week, name of the rooms, colors, hobbies, and more.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 2

Question Respond

2. What about teaching English do you find most frustrating, and why? "Students lost their enthusiasm when learning. It can affect other students too."

According to the participant's respond, there is lack of students' enthusiasm when learning. Disengaged students are more likely to disrupt class, talking with other students in their native language, or simply ignore the lesson, making classroom management more difficult. Teacher must continuously find new ways to refocus students' attention and keep the classroom productive. According to Agrifina, a solid learning motivation in students demonstrate interest, focus, dedication, as well as and readiness in learning activities, resulting in positive learning outcomes [22]. Motivation has direct impact on the effectiveness and success of English language learning. One of the teacher's efforts to handle disengaged students or when the class started to feel a little dull, teacher starts to do a simple ice-breaking. Simple and brief ice-breaking such as "clap one, clap two".

Question Respond

3. What factors make teaching English challenging in your school environment?

"Limited time in learning English lesson."

According to the participant's statement, there is limited time in learning English in their school environment. In school, English lessons are scheduled for 60-90 minutes per week. Teacher often feel pressured to teach a wide range of topics in a limited number of classroom hours. Teachers must go on to the next materials whether the students have mastered the previous topic or not.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 4

Question Respond

4. Can you describe any negative experiences you had while teaching English? "It takes some time to use or to access facility like audio visual. So if we don't prepare it, we don't know if the facility is working or not."

According to the participant's respond, there is difficulty in using multimedia facility. Related to multimedia implementation, teacher needs to well-prepared the facility such as computer and LCD for audio-visual media. Teacher also needs some help from other teacher to prepare the computer room which takes some times. When teacher could not use the computer room, teacher will only use paper-based materials or handmade visual media. For example, teacher prepares cut-outs paper for students. Teacher will ask students to do activities such as sticking the cut-outs paper on students' books. Another example is teacher uses handmade visual media, such as cardboard clock. It is used for teaching "telling time". Though these examples are creative, using multimedia materials in English classrooms can considerably improve the learning experience, particularly for young students.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 5

Question Respond

5. What ongoing problems in teaching English do you often think about solving, and why? "Trying to make the lesson related to daily life. It might be easier for students to understand if the lesson is about what is around us."

According to the participant's respond, trying to make the lesson to fit in daily life is one of the ongoing problems in teaching English. Materials are essential for supporting students in learning English, which range from textbooks to real-life objects. For example, there was a time when teacher taught the English lesson while Mother's Day and Teacher's Day occurring. Teacher created their own materials related to Mother's Day & Eacher's Day, even though it is not align with the current topics in the textbooks. This effort is done in order to educate students about the actual situation in real life.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 6

Question Respond

6. What challenges do you experience when using the English teaching materials? "The materials in students book need more pictures and interactive activity. So I have to spend some time to adapt to the material so it can be easy for students."

According to the participant's respond, they spent more time in adapting the textbook materials. Textbook content is crucial for teaching language skills. Teachers must choose the right textbook to achieve what they want to achieve. The textbook that the teacher used is mostly show pictures of verbs and nouns, and below the pictures will be the English words. The task is mostly about listen and repeat. The teacher will say the words and the students will repeat what the teacher said, and then the teacher will ask about the translation of the words in their first language. Therefore, it is necessary to include additional possibilities for group work, conversations, and communicative practice.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 7

Question Respond

7. How would you describe the size of your classes, and how does it impact your teaching? "No more than 30 students in each class. But I sometimes, it is hard to maintain students attention. Some students may be noisy, and will distract classroom activity."

According to the participant's responds, the size and the condition of the class influenced the learning process. Noisy environment would distract the learning activity. Teacher's approach to handle students who like to talk to their friends while the learning process is still going on is by pointing out the student and asking the student to read the materials or answer a question about the materials. Also, throughout the learning process, teacher will walk around the class so that teacher could see the whole students.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 8

Question Respond

8. What challenges do you encounter when teaching English in classrooms with a large number of students? "Try to keep students attention to the lesson."

According to the participant's respond, trying to keep the students' attention to the lesson is one of the challenges in teaching with large number of students. Teacher tends to raise their voices when students start to lose interest or being loud when the learning process still occurring. This approach is going to bring the students' attention back to the lesson and teach the other students the manner to focus on the lesson.

Table SEQ Table \\* ARABIC 9

Question Respond

9. How would you describe your students' motivation in learning English, <u>and how does</u> it affect your teaching? "It is different from every students. Students like to do interactive activity, or maybe games. Some students understand the lesson quickly, and some of them do not. So I have to do different ways of teaching to make it exciting."

According to the participant's respond, there are different kinds of students' motivation in learning English. There are students who understand the lesson faster than the others. Some teaching approaches may have prioritized repetitive learning and passively gaining knowledge of information over active

participation. One of the teacher's efforts to make the lesson interactive and to gain students participation in class is by giving rewards. Teacher will give students reward such as pencil, pen, eraser, for those who participate actively in class. According to Schultz, as cited from Murayama, rewards have the ability to stimulate happy emotions. In simple terms, rewards keep people coming back for more and make people feel good about themselves [23].

#### Discussions

Based on the findings above, that <u>teaching\_English</u> as a foreign language in a primary school faces <u>a\_numerous challenges</u>. The first <u>is\_lack</u> of exposure of English language. Learning English can be quite a task for some students, especially if their first language is very different. This persistent struggle with foreign rules and sounds might lead to the misunderstandings that English is "difficult," causing students to lose interest and disengage from classes. For example, research done by Kilag discovered that increasing exposure to English language activities at home, such as book reading and storytelling, had a significant impact on children's language development [24].

Second is lack of students' motivation in English lesson. Motivation gives the desire to begin the actions in order to achieve the goals. Students' motivation is important in pushing students to take action, such as learning English, and is influenced by both their characteristics and the environment around them [25]. When students enjoy the learning experience, they are more likely to be personally motivated. Fun activities can improve engagement and motivation to participate further.

Third is limited time in English lesson. When a large number of students are struggling with basic concepts and motivation, it becomes difficult to keep up with the syllabus without falling behind. This condition made the teachers feel rushed to cover the topic. Teachers must go on to the next materials whether the students have mastered the previous topic or not.

Fourth is the use of multimedia. Integrating multimedia makes learning more interesting and less boring by appealing to different senses and accommodating different learning styles [26]. Adding audio-visual aspects to language schools can enhance vocabulary development. As stated by Regina, exposure to visual and audio improves memory retention when learning English vocabulary [27].

Fifth is making the materials in line with daily life. While teachers frequently have access to textbooks, these are general and may not fulfill specific needs, causing teachers to consider making their own materials.

Sixth is adapting the textbook materials. Many textbooks have a relatively limited amount of interactive exercises and activities, which may hinder student interest. Textbook design, which involves including illustrations, arrangements, typography, and color, is crucial for engaging students [28].

Seventh is a class condition. Larger classes tend to be harder to maintain, especially for students who sit at the back of the class. It will be more challenging for teacher to control since it is hard to see what happen at the back of the class. Study by Khatimah discussed that a good classroom learning environment ensures that students feel comfortable and motivated during learning activities [29]. Conducive environment ensures these interactions lead to positive behavioral changes.

The last is students may be conditioned to listen and take notes rather than speaking up. If the classroom is extremely teacher-centered, students may not feel comfortable or empowered to contribute verbally. Study by Mojgan discussed that the implementation of interactive teaching methods, such as role-playing, and games, motivates students to actively participate in the learning process [30]. These types of activities may give positive impact on both teacher and the students by making learning more pleasurable and memorable.

### IV. Conclusion

1. This research discussed about challenges experienced by English teacher in Prik Municipality primary school in Songkhla, Thailand, including students' unfamiliarity with the language, a lack of students' motivation, limited class time, ineffective digital media facility, issues adapting the materials, and classroom condition. The study discovered that students' limited exposure to English outside of the classroom contributes significantly to their lack of familiarity with the language, making simple concepts difficult and leading to lack of interest. Furthermore, a lack of interest among students, which is frequently caused by teaching methods that favor passive learning over active engagement, has an impact on classroom management and learning effectiveness.

2.

- 3. Teacher also faces time constraints, since limited weekly English courses require them to cover subject without ensuring students' mastery. Aside from that, technological inefficiencies, such as in preparing audiovisual facilities might take some times; require teachers to rely on paper-based materials, which may limit engaging learning experiences. Furthermore, the textbooks content, with a limited of interactive activities, so that teacher has to customize the materials in order to meet the needs and the goals of the students. Finally, class condition makes it harder for teachers to retain focus and control. Addressing these multifaceted challenges is crucial for improving the quality of English language education and fostering greater students' proficiency. This study focused specifically on Prik Municipality primary school in Songkhla Province, Thailand. Future research could broaden the scope to include more primary schools across different provinces or regions in Thailand to determine if similar challenges are exist throughout the country.

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