

Teacher Strategies for Overcoming Students' Difficulties in English Language Learning at MTs Al-Wasilah Lemo

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Received: 20 February 2025

Accepted: 6 April 2026

Published: 5 June 2026

Abstract

This study aims to identify students' difficulties in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), examine the reasons behind teachers' selection of teaching strategies, and explore how these strategies are implemented in the classroom. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data were gathered via classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with two English teachers and eighth-grade students at MTs Al-Wasilah Lemo. The results indicated that students encountered difficulties in five areas: cognitive, affective, linguistic, social, and environmental. The predominant challenges were identified in the cognitive and affective domains. To mitigate these issues, teachers employed three primary strategies: drills and repetition, pair work and group discussion, and role play. Drills and repetition facilitated enhancements in students' pronunciation and vocabulary retention, although they occasionally led to boredom. Pair work and group discussion promoted active engagement and peer learning, although some students remained passive. Role plays bolstered students' confidence and speaking skills by offering meaningful and engaging learning experiences. This study concludes that the integration of these strategies effectively assists students in surmounting their challenges in EFL learning. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to apply varied and student-centered strategies to create a supportive and effective learning environment.

Keywords: EFL learning, students' difficulties, teaching strategies, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Indonesian junior secondary schools is shaped by the interaction of linguistic, psychological, social, and environmental factors. English is formally taught as a school subject, yet most learners encounter the language mainly inside the classroom and have limited opportunities to use it for authentic communication beyond scheduled lessons. This condition makes the teacher's instructional role especially important. In an EFL classroom, teachers do not only transmit vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation rules; they also design learning experiences, manage classroom interaction, provide affective support, and create opportunities for students to practice English in meaningful ways. For this reason, the effectiveness of English learning depends strongly on the extent to which teachers are able to select strategies that correspond to students' actual difficulties, proficiency level, classroom culture, and available learning resources (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Students' difficulties in EFL learning are rarely caused by a single factor. They usually emerge from the combination of limited language input, insufficient vocabulary knowledge, low confidence, fear of mistakes, lack of peer interaction, and unsupportive learning environments. Brown (2007) explains that second and foreign language learning involves cognitive, affective,

linguistic, and sociocultural dimensions; therefore, students' failure to participate actively in class should not be interpreted merely as lack of ability. Nunan (2018) similarly emphasizes that EFL learners require repeated exposure, meaningful practice, comprehensible input, and supportive interaction in order to develop communicative competence. In junior secondary contexts, these needs become more complex because learners are still developing their self-concept, learning habits, and confidence in public classroom performance.

One of the most visible difficulties experienced by EFL learners is cognitive difficulty, particularly in remembering vocabulary and understanding English materials. Vocabulary is central to all language skills because students cannot comprehend texts, construct sentences, or participate in oral interaction without sufficient lexical resources. Nation (2013) argues that vocabulary learning requires repeated encounters with words, attention to meaning and form, and opportunities to retrieve and use words in different contexts. In classrooms where English input is limited, students may easily forget new vocabulary because words are learned as isolated items rather than as meaningful language resources. This problem is often intensified when teachers have limited time to recycle vocabulary across lessons or when students do not encounter English outside the classroom.

Linguistic difficulties are also common in EFL classrooms. Students may struggle with pronunciation, spelling, grammar, sentence construction, and the differences between English and their first language. These linguistic barriers influence both receptive and productive skills. Learners may understand a word when it is written but fail to pronounce it accurately; they may know individual vocabulary items but remain unable to combine them into acceptable sentences; or they may avoid speaking because they are uncertain about grammatical accuracy. Richards and Rodgers (2001) note that language teaching strategies should be aligned with the nature of the linguistic problem being addressed. Therefore, strategies used to improve pronunciation accuracy, such as modeling and repetition, may not be sufficient for developing communicative fluency unless they are combined with interactive practice.

Affective difficulties constitute another major barrier in EFL learning. Many students hesitate to speak English because they feel embarrassed, worry about being laughed at, or fear making pronunciation and grammar mistakes. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) describe foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Later studies also show that enjoyment, confidence, and anxiety are closely related to learners' willingness to communicate and classroom participation (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). In rural junior high school settings, recent evidence indicates that students' English anxiety is often connected to self-doubt, limited exposure, and fear of negative evaluation, whereas supportive teachers and positive classroom climates can increase enjoyment and willingness to participate (Listiani & Sutrisno, 2024).

Social and environmental factors further shape students' EFL learning experiences. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction, mediation, and support within the Zone of Proximal Development. In language learning, this means that students need interaction with teachers and peers to negotiate meaning, rehearse expressions, receive feedback, and gradually perform beyond what they could achieve individually. However, students in village-based or rural school contexts may have limited access to English-speaking environments, English clubs, digital learning resources, or extracurricular activities that can extend classroom learning. Studies on rural English instruction in Indonesia and other EFL settings have reported challenges such as inadequate facilities, limited exposure to

English, uneven access to resources, and the need for locally responsive teaching strategies (Herdiyanti et al., 2025; Mariyam et al., 2025; Supriadi, Patak, & Korompot, 2023).

In this context, teaching strategies become a key mechanism through which teachers help students overcome learning difficulties. A teaching strategy may be understood as a deliberate instructional plan or pattern of classroom action used to achieve learning objectives, organize interaction, and respond to learners' needs (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Effective strategies are not chosen randomly; they are selected because teachers identify specific barriers that prevent students from understanding, practicing, or using English. For example, when students have weak vocabulary retention, teachers may use repetition and recycling; when students lack confidence, teachers may use pair work before public performance; and when students need communicative practice, teachers may use role play or group discussion. Thus, the value of a teaching strategy depends not only on its theoretical strength but also on how it is adapted to classroom realities.

Drills and repetition remain relevant in EFL classrooms when they are used purposefully and not mechanically. Larsen-Freeman (2000) explains that drill-based activities can help learners internalize pronunciation patterns, grammatical forms, and language chunks through repeated practice. In beginner and lower-intermediate contexts, repetition can reduce cognitive load because learners do not need to produce language independently before they have developed sufficient familiarity with sounds and forms. For students who struggle to pronounce English words or remember vocabulary, teacher modeling followed by choral and individual repetition can provide an important foundation. Nevertheless, repetition may become monotonous if it is overused or disconnected from meaning. Therefore, drills should ideally be followed by communicative or contextualized activities that allow students to use repeated language forms for genuine classroom purposes.

Pair work and group discussion are also important because they create opportunities for peer interaction and collaborative learning. Johnson and Johnson (1994) argue that cooperative learning can promote positive interdependence, individual accountability, and interpersonal support when it is managed carefully. In EFL classrooms, pair and group activities can reduce the pressure of speaking in front of the whole class, encourage students to ask questions, and allow more active learners to support less confident peers. Such activities are consistent with sociocultural views of learning because students can co-construct understanding through interaction. However, collaborative learning is not automatically effective. Some students may remain passive, depend on dominant group members, or use their first language throughout the activity. Teachers therefore need to assign clear roles, monitor group interaction, and provide language scaffolds so that pair work and discussion become purposeful rather than merely procedural.

Role play provides another relevant strategy for addressing students' speaking difficulties, low confidence, and lack of communicative practice. Ur (1996) describes role play as an activity in which learners imagine themselves in particular situations and use language appropriate to those situations. This strategy gives students opportunities to practice expressions in simulated social contexts, such as greeting, asking for information, telling stories, or performing dialogues. Role play is particularly useful in EFL classrooms because it provides a bridge between controlled practice and spontaneous communication. Through assigned roles, students can speak as characters rather than as themselves, which may reduce embarrassment and support risk-taking. Communicative language teaching perspectives also emphasize that learners need meaningful language use, not only explanation of language forms (Littlewood, 1981). However, role play

requires adequate preparation, clear instructions, modeling, and supportive feedback so that shy students are not placed under excessive performance pressure.

Recent studies on EFL learning in rural or under-resourced settings highlight the need to examine teaching strategies as situated classroom practices rather than as isolated techniques. Mariyam, Pratiwi, and Meraj (2025) found that English teachers in Indonesian rural schools faced infrastructure limitations, connectivity problems, teacher resource constraints, and motivational issues, and responded through locally adaptive and inclusive pedagogical strategies. Herdiyanti, Putri, Farhana, and Eliwarti (2025), through a systematic review of rural EFL teaching, reported that lack of teaching resources and facilities, limited teacher training, and cultural adaptation problems were among the most frequent challenges, while effective strategies included culturally relevant materials, simplified teacher talk, community engagement, and selective use of technology. These studies are useful because they position EFL teaching as context-dependent. Nevertheless, they also suggest that more classroom-based qualitative evidence is needed to explain how teachers connect particular student difficulties with particular instructional strategies in everyday lessons.

The present study is situated at MTs Al-Wasilah Lemo, an Islamic junior secondary school where students learn English in a context of limited daily exposure to the target language. Preliminary classroom observations indicated that several students experienced difficulty understanding English materials, remembering vocabulary, pronouncing words, constructing sentences, and expressing ideas orally. Some students also showed low confidence, hesitation, and limited willingness to participate in English classroom activities. In response, teachers used several strategies, including drills and repetition, pair work and group discussion, and role play. These strategies appear pedagogically relevant, but their effectiveness cannot be assumed without understanding how they are selected, implemented, and connected to students' observed learning difficulties.

Although previous studies have discussed students' EFL learning difficulties, teaching strategies, rural school challenges, and affective barriers, there remains a specific gap in classroom-based research that links these dimensions in a single qualitative inquiry. Many studies focus mainly on identifying students' problems, while others evaluate particular strategies without explaining how teachers diagnose the difficulties that those strategies are intended to address. In addition, research on rural and religious school contexts often discusses institutional challenges at a broad level, such as facilities or teacher availability, but gives less attention to the micro-level pedagogical decisions made by teachers during actual classroom interaction. This gap is important because EFL learning difficulties are multidimensional, and teachers' strategies need to be understood in relation to the specific cognitive, linguistic, affective, social, and environmental barriers experienced by students.

Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by examining the relationship between students' EFL learning difficulties and teacher-selected classroom strategies in a real instructional context. Rather than treating teaching strategies as general methods, this study analyzes how drills and repetition, pair work and group discussion, and role play are used to respond to students' difficulties in vocabulary retention, pronunciation, comprehension, confidence, participation, and speaking performance. The novelty of the study lies in its contextual focus on an Islamic junior secondary school and its attempt to integrate students' difficulties, teachers' strategy selection, and classroom implementation within one qualitative descriptive framework.

Based on the background and research gap above, this study aims to identify the difficulties experienced by students in learning English as a Foreign Language, examine the reasons teachers

select particular strategies to address those difficulties, and describe how the strategies are implemented in classroom practice. The study is guided by the following research questions: What difficulties do students experience in learning English as a Foreign Language at MTs Al-Wasilah Lemo? What teaching strategies do teachers use to help students overcome those difficulties, and why are these strategies selected? How are the selected teaching strategies implemented in the classroom? By answering these questions, the study is expected to provide practical insights for English teachers who work in similar EFL contexts and theoretical insights into how teaching strategies operate as context-sensitive responses to multidimensional learning difficulties.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' learning difficulties in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and the teaching strategies used by teachers to overcome those difficulties. According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena related to behavior, perceptions, and actions through descriptive data in the form of words. Creswell (2009) also states that qualitative research focuses on understanding participants' perspectives and experiences in natural settings. The qualitative descriptive method was considered appropriate because this study aimed to describe classroom situations, students' learning difficulties, and teachers' strategies in a real educational context. The researcher used classroom observation and semi-structured interviews to collect the data.

Research Subject

The subjects of this research were two English teachers and eighth-grade students at MTs Al-Wasilah Lemo. The researcher observed two classes, namely Class VIII A, consisting of 15 students, and Class VIII B, consisting of 20 students. The English teachers were selected because they were directly involved in the teaching and learning process and were able to provide relevant information related to the research focus.

This study used purposive sampling, in which participants were selected intentionally based on their relevance to the objectives of the research.

This research was conducted during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year for approximately one month. The study took place at MTs Al-Wasilah Lemo, located in Kuajang Village, Binuang District, Polewali Mandar Regency, West Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument in collecting and analyzing the data. The instruments used in this study were observation and interview.

a. Observation

The researcher conducted four classroom observations, with two observations for each teacher. The observations were carried out using an observation checklist to identify the teaching strategies applied by the teachers and the students' learning difficulties during the learning process.

b. Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two English teachers to obtain in-depth information regarding the teaching strategies used in teaching English, the reasons for selecting the strategies, and how the strategies helped students overcome their learning difficulties.

Procedure of Collecting Data

The procedures of data collection in this study were as follows:

1. Preparing research administration and research instruments.
2. Designing observation checklists and interview questions.
3. Visiting the research site and obtaining permission from the school.
4. Conducting classroom observations and interviews.
5. Organizing and interpreting the collected data.
6. Analyzing the findings and presenting the results.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1992), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and simplified the data obtained from observations and interviews by focusing on information relevant to students' EFL learning difficulties and teacher strategies. Irrelevant or repetitive information was removed, while important statements and classroom events were categorized according to the research focus.

In the data display stage, the reduced data were organized into descriptive explanations and thematic categories. Students' difficulties were grouped into cognitive, linguistic, affective, social, and environmental aspects. Teacher strategies were categorized into drills and repetition, pair work and group discussion, and role play. The data were then presented in narrative form to show the relationship between students' difficulties and the strategies used by teachers to address them.

In the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the displayed data to answer the research questions. The researcher identified patterns across observation and interview data, compared teachers' explanations with classroom practices, and drew conclusions regarding how teaching strategies helped students overcome their difficulties in EFL learning. The conclusions were developed carefully based on repeated patterns found in the data rather than isolated statements.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process. Before collecting the data, the researcher obtained permission from the school and informed the participants about the purpose of the study. The teachers participated voluntarily and were informed that the data would be used only for academic purposes. The identities of the participants were protected by using teacher codes rather than real names. All information obtained from observations and interviews was treated confidentially and presented only in relation to the objectives of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Students' Difficulties in EFL Learning

The findings of this study revealed that students at MTS Al-Wasilah Lemo experienced various difficulties in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Based on classroom observations and interviews with Teacher S and Teacher A, the difficulties were categorized into five aspects: cognitive, linguistic, affective, social, and environmental aspects.

a. Cognitive Difficulties

The findings showed that students experienced difficulties in remembering vocabulary and understanding learning materials. Students often forgot newly learned words and required repeated explanations from the teacher.

Teacher S stated:

“Students have difficulty remembering vocabulary. They easily forget words and struggle to understand explanations unless repeated several times.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Similarly, Teacher A explained:

“Students encounter difficulties in pronouncing words due to the significant differences between their daily language and English.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

The observation data also showed that students frequently hesitated when responding to vocabulary-related activities and often required assistance from the teacher during pronunciation practice.

b. Linguistic Difficulties

The findings revealed that students experienced difficulties related to pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, grammar, and sentence construction.

Teacher S explained:

“Students struggle in pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and constructing sentences. These linguistic barriers hinder their performance in speaking and writing activities.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A also stated:

“Students experience challenges in constructing sentences due to their limited vocabulary mastery and insufficient understanding of morphological changes.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

Classroom observations showed that students often mispronounced English words and produced incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences during speaking and writing activities.

c. Affective Difficulties

The findings demonstrated that students experienced difficulties related to confidence, motivation, and anxiety during English learning activities.

Teacher S stated:

“Students often feel shy, afraid of making mistakes, and lack confidence when speaking English.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A added:

“Students have low learning interest because they think that English is not important since it is not part of their daily language.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025)

Observation data showed that several students avoided answering questions, spoke softly during speaking activities, and hesitated to participate actively in classroom discussions.

d. Social Difficulties

The findings indicated that students had limited opportunities to interact using English outside the classroom.

Teacher S explained:

“Students receive very little exposure to English outside the classroom. Their home and peer environments do not support English use.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Similarly, Teacher A stated:

“Students rarely use English outside the classroom because it is not their daily language.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025)

Based on classroom observations, students tended to use their first language during classroom interaction and group discussion activities.

e. Environmental Difficulties

The findings also revealed that environmental factors contributed to students’ difficulties in learning English.

Teacher S stated:

“There is no English club available, and the learning process tends to be less engaging.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A also explained:

“Students experience difficulties due to an unsupportive environment that does not encourage the use of English.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025)

Observation data showed that English was rarely used in the school environment outside formal classroom activities.

Table 1. Summary of Students’ Difficulties

Aspect	Students’ Difficulties
Cognitive	Difficulty remembering vocabulary and understanding explanations
Linguistic	Problems in pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, grammar, and sentence construction

Aspect	Students' Difficulties
Affective	Low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation
Social	Limited interaction and English exposure outside the classroom
Environmental	Unsupportive learning environment and limited facilities

2. Teacher Strategies to Overcome Students' Difficulties

The findings revealed that the teachers implemented three main strategies to address students' difficulties in learning English, namely drills and repetition, pair work and group discussion, and role play.

a. Drills and Repetition

The findings showed that drills and repetition were implemented to improve students' pronunciation and vocabulary mastery. Teacher S explained:

"This strategy helps students train their tongue to become familiar with English words and helps them memorize vocabulary through repetition." (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A stated:

"I always use drills and repetition when teaching new vocabulary so students can practice pronunciation repeatedly." (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

Observation data showed that the teacher wrote vocabulary on the board, modeled pronunciation, and asked students to repeat words several times individually and collectively. However, the findings also showed that some students became bored during repetitive activities. Teacher A explained:

"Students may feel tired and bored when they are required to repeat the same words or sentences continuously." (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

b. Pair Work and Group Discussion

The findings indicated that pair work and group discussion were implemented to encourage collaboration and student participation. Teacher S stated:

"When students work in groups, they discuss with their friends and it helps them understand the material." (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A explained:

"Grouping students helps fewer active students become more involved during the learning process." (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

Based on observation data, students worked collaboratively in completing assignments, discussing vocabulary, and sharing ideas with peers. However, some students still showed passive participation during discussions.

Teacher S stated:

“Some students are still not active during the discussion process.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

c. Role Play

The findings showed that role play was implemented to improve students’ confidence and speaking ability.

Teacher S explained:

“Role play helps students become more confident in speaking English and allows them to express themselves freely.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A added:

“Role play is used when students begin to feel bored because it allows them to practice English through enjoyable activities.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

Observation data indicated that students performed dialogues, pantomime activities, and storytelling performances in groups. Nevertheless, several students still appeared shy during classroom performances.

Teacher A stated:

“Some students still feel shy when performing in front of the class.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

Table 2. Summary of Teacher Strategies and Addressed Difficulties.

Strategy	Difficulties Addressed
Drills and Repetition	Pronunciation, vocabulary retention, and comprehension
Pair Work and Group Discussion	Classroom participation, comprehension, and peer interaction
Role Play	Speaking confidence, anxiety, pronunciation, and fluency

3. Implementation of Teacher Strategies

a. Implementation of Drills and Repetition

Based on classroom observations, drills and repetition were implemented systematically. The teacher introduced new vocabulary and sentences, modeled pronunciation, and asked students to repeat the words several times. Students were later assigned to memorize vocabulary and recite it in front of the class.

Teacher S stated:

“I write new vocabulary on the board, guide students to repeat the words, and later ask them to recite the vocabulary in front of the class.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Similarly, Teacher A explained:

“Vocabulary practice was conducted repeatedly to help students become more familiar with English pronunciation.” (Teacher S, Interview, 26/11/2025).

b. Implementation of Pair Work and Group Discussion

The findings showed that pair work and group discussion were implemented through collaborative classroom tasks.

Teacher S explained:

“Students work together to create invitations and discuss vocabulary with their group members.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A stated:

“Each group consists of active and less active students so they can help one another during discussions.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

Observation data showed that students interacted and exchanged ideas while completing group assignments.

c. Implementation of Role Play

Role play was implemented through pantomime, dialogues, and storytelling activities. Teacher S stated:

“Students perform pantomime while their classmates guess the actions.” (Teacher S, Interview, 20/11/2025).

Teacher A explained:

“Students choose folktales, practice together, and perform in front of the class.” (Teacher A, Interview, 26/11/2025).

Observation data showed that students practiced collaboratively before performing their assigned roles in front of the class.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that students at MTS Al-Wasilah Lemo experienced various difficulties in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), including cognitive, linguistic, affective, social, and environmental difficulties. These findings indicate that students' learning problems are not caused by a single factor, but rather by interconnected internal and external factors that influence the learning process.

From the cognitive aspect, students experienced difficulties in remembering vocabulary and understanding English materials. This finding may occur because students have limited exposure to English and insufficient opportunities to process language input repeatedly. According to Piaget's theory, learning depends on learners' cognitive ability to organize and process information. Students who are not familiar with English vocabulary tend to forget words more easily because the information is not stored effectively in long-term memory. This finding is consistent with previous studies that reported vocabulary retention as one of the major problems faced by EFL learners, particularly in environments with limited English exposure.

The findings also demonstrated that students faced linguistic difficulties related to pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, grammar, and sentence construction. These difficulties may occur because English language structures and pronunciation patterns are significantly different from students' first language. Richards and Schmidt explain that linguistic competence involves mastery of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Students who have limited vocabulary knowledge often experience difficulties constructing sentences and expressing ideas accurately. This finding supports previous studies showing that linguistic competence strongly influences students' speaking and writing performance in EFL classrooms.

From the affective aspect, students showed low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation in learning English. These findings suggest that emotional factors play an important role in students' participation during classroom activities. Brown explains that anxiety and self-confidence significantly affect second language acquisition. Students who are afraid of making mistakes tend to avoid speaking activities and classroom interaction. Similar findings were also reported in previous EFL studies, which found that speaking anxiety reduces students' willingness to communicate in English.

The social findings revealed that students had limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom. This condition may occur because English is not commonly used in students' daily communication. Vygotsky emphasizes that social interaction plays an important role in language learning and cognitive development. Without meaningful interaction and peer communication using English, students have fewer opportunities to develop fluency and confidence. This finding is similar to previous studies that found limited social exposure to English as a major obstacle in rural EFL learning contexts.

From the environmental aspect, the findings showed that students learned English in an environment with limited facilities and minimal language support. The absence of English clubs and limited use of English in the school environment reduced students' opportunities to practice the language meaningfully. This finding supports Brown's explanation that learning environments influence language acquisition. Students who rarely encounter English outside classroom instruction tend to experience slower language development. The findings further revealed that teachers implemented three strategies to address students' learning difficulties, namely drills and repetition, pair work and group discussion, and role play.

The use of drills and repetition was effective in improving students' pronunciation and vocabulary mastery. Repeated practice allowed students to become more familiar with English sounds and vocabulary patterns. This finding supports Larsen-Freeman's theory that drills help reinforce language habits and pronunciation accuracy. In addition, the findings are consistent with previous studies showing that repetition activities improve students' vocabulary retention and pronunciation fluency. However, unlike some previous studies that focused mainly on pronunciation improvement, the present study also found that excessive repetition may reduce students' motivation because students perceive repetitive activities as monotonous.

Pair work and group discussion were effective in encouraging classroom participation and collaborative learning. Students who experienced difficulties understanding materials individually were able to receive support from peers during discussions. This finding strongly aligns with Vygotsky's theory of social learning and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which explains that students can achieve better understanding through interaction and collaboration with others. Similar findings were reported in previous research indicating that collaborative learning increases student participation and comprehension. Nevertheless, the present study also revealed that some students remained passive during discussions, suggesting that group work requires careful classroom management and balanced grouping.

Role play was found to be effective in improving students' confidence and speaking fluency. Through role play, students practiced English in more meaningful and enjoyable situations, which reduced anxiety during speaking activities. This finding is consistent with communicative language teaching theories proposed by Ur and Harmer, which emphasize the importance of meaningful communication practice in language learning. Previous studies similarly found that role play increases students' speaking confidence and classroom engagement. However, the current study additionally found that giving students preparation time before performances significantly helped reduce anxiety and improve participation.

The findings of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study supports the perspective that EFL learning difficulties are multidimensional and influenced by cognitive, linguistic, affective, social, and environmental factors simultaneously. The findings also demonstrate that teaching strategies should be adapted to students' needs and classroom conditions rather than relying on a single teaching method.

Practically, the study suggests that English teachers should combine structured and interactive strategies in order to maintain students' motivation and engagement. Drills and repetition can strengthen students' linguistic competence, while collaborative and communicative activities such as group discussion and role play help improve students' confidence and participation. In addition, schools should provide more supportive English learning environments, such as English clubs or extracurricular programs, to increase students' exposure to English outside classroom instruction. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the study involved a limited number of participants from a single school context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the data were collected mainly through interviews and classroom observations, which may involve subjective interpretation. Third, the study focused only on three teaching strategies and did not investigate other possible strategies that may also contribute to students' EFL learning development.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger participant groups from different educational contexts and to apply additional data collection methods. Future studies may also examine the effectiveness of other teaching strategies or investigate the long-term impact of communicative and collaborative approaches on students' English proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated students' difficulties in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the strategies used by teachers to overcome those difficulties, and the implementation of the strategies at MTS Al-Wasilah Lemo. The findings revealed that students experienced difficulties related to cognitive, linguistic, affective, social, and environmental aspects. Students had problems in vocabulary retention, pronunciation, sentence construction, confidence, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom. To address these difficulties, teachers

implemented three main strategies: drills and repetition, pair work and group discussion, and role play. Drills and repetition helped students improve pronunciation and vocabulary mastery through repeated practice. Pair work and group discussion encouraged collaboration, peer support, and classroom participation, while role play increased students' confidence and speaking fluency through meaningful communication activities.

The findings contribute to EFL teaching and learning by highlighting the importance of combining structured, collaborative, and communicative teaching strategies to address different dimensions of students' learning difficulties. The study also emphasizes that affective support and interactive classroom environments are essential in improving students' engagement and confidence in learning English. However, the study was limited to one school context and involved a relatively small number of participants, which may limit the broader applicability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger samples, different educational settings, and additional teaching strategies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective approaches in EFL learning.

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