



## Rural EFL Teacher's Challenges in Improving Students' Higher Order Thinking Skills

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### Abstract

This research aims to explore the rural EFL teacher's challenges in improving students' higher order thinking skills. The participant of this research was one English teacher who teach in the Junior High School in Gaung district. By using qualitative approach, the researchers collected the data employs non-participant observation in the teaching and learning process, interviewed the English teacher, and took documents by collecting the lesson plan. The result of this research showed that the challenges in teaching higher-order thinking skills in the rural area are the teacher's knowledge and ability to teaching for HOTS is still low, passive students, students' low English proficiency, the limitation of the school facility, and lack of sources. Based on the finding above, this research recommends to the school to give a facility or train the teachers about how to teach the students' higher-order thinking skills based on the demand of 2013 Curriculum. Besides that, the development of HOTS in the rural area is not easy for the teachers because of all those challenges. So, the headmaster or the education authorities should find the solution to make all the students in the rural area can reach the expectation of the Higher Order Thinking based on 2013 curriculum.

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the ongoing issues in education research is whether students can learn to think critically on their own or if the skill must be systematically taught as part of the 2013 curriculum. According to Khoiriah et al., (2018), the development of HOTS can train students accustome to think as Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Besides that, HOTS promotes students to use their knowledge and skills in new settings, to use new information and "manipulate" it to find plausible

solutions to new problems, and to store and implement real-world solutions. It also an important role in applying, connecting, or manipulating the prior knowledge to solve the problem. HOTS is important to help the students discuss and understand new issues.

HOTS is the ability to get and elaborate the information in the learning process. It helps the students apply knowledge and skills in a new context by using new information and "manipulate" information to reach possible answers to the situations and enable students to store

information and implement to the real-world situation (Ramos, et al., 2013 in Khoiriah et al, 2018).

High order thinking skills (HOTS) is active when someone faces unfamiliar problems, uncertainties, questions or dilemmas. Thinking as HOTS is solving the problems by multiple solutions (creative problem-solving), considerable mental energy directed toward problem solving, subtle less than obvious decision about strategies, transferable some criteria to the problem-solving process, problems that do not provide a clear starting point, some degree metacognition and self-awareness, development and application of new theories onto sets of facts and problems (Mainali, 2012).

According to Bloom (1956) and then revised by Anderson (2005) the level of thinking skills divided into three levels of thinking, the Lower Order Thinking Skill (remembering), Middle Order Thinking Skills (understanding and applying), and Higher Order Thinking Skills (analyzing, evaluating, and understanding).

Based on the Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia no. 32 of 2013, there are eight National Education Standards set by the government, namely content standards, process standards, graduate competency standards, teacher and education staff standards, facilities and infrastructure standards, management standards, financing standards, and education assessment standards. From the eight national education standards, the most relevant standards for higher-order thinking skills based on the learning process and assessment are graduate

competency standards, content standards, process standards, and educational assessment (Helmawati, 2019).

The importance of mastering higher-order thinking skills contained in several points of the High School Graduate Competency Standards. The expected points are that students can build and apply, and show information or knowledge logically, critically, creatively, and innovatively in decision making; and demonstrate the ability to analyze and solve complex problems (Ministry of Education Regulation No. 23 of 2006). Then content standards, process standards, and educational assessments are made based on these graduate competency standards. Then content standards, process standards, and educational assessment standards are made based on these graduate competency standards.

Since HOTS has become a part of the 2013 Curriculum, the teacher has to improve the students' higher-order thinking skills. This regulation should be applied throughout Indonesia, including in rural areas, but it is not easy to be taught in a rural area because of some factors, such as teacher's knowledge, creativity, school condition, and some other things. Therefore, it is really challenging for the teacher in rural area to improve students' HOTS. That is why, the further information about it needs to be explored.

Hance, there is no standard national definition of rural. The definition of rural depends on a person's experience about the place (Hart et al., 2005).

However, in Indonesia, the definition of rural areas has been stipulated in Law Number 7 of 1983 concerning

Income Tax as amended by Law Number 7 of 1991. In this Law, it is stated that rural areas are areas that have economic potential in the form of sources. natural resources in agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism, and industry, but the state of available economic infrastructure and facilities is still limited so that to convert the available economic potential into real economic strength, investors need to build at their own expense the infrastructure and facilities they need, such as roads, ports, electricity, telecommunications, water, employee housing, health services, schools, places of worship, markets and other social needs, which require large costs. This is the basis for the researchers to say that Teluk Kabung Village, Gaung District, Inhil, Riau is one of the areas classified as a rural area.

Retnawati et al (2018) described teachers' knowledge about higher-order thinking skills. The researchers take 27 mathematics teachers from the state and private Junior High Schools across 7 provinces in Indonesia. The result of this research shows that teachers' knowledge about HOTS, their ability to improve students' HOTS, solve HOTS based problems and measure students' HOTS is still low.

Based on the data from PISA reported by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development in 2012, Indonesia students are at the rank of 64 from 65 countries for the ability to think as HOTS. It means the Indonesian students need something to improve their thinking ability (Arafah, et al 2021; Fenanlampir, et al 2019).

Based on the findings above, the teachers take an important part in developing students higher-order thinking skills. Moreover, in a rural area, the students need to be taught carefully to have HOTS. Therefore, the teachers' challenges in improving students higher order thinking in a rural area becoming an interesting issue to be discussed, because the teachers' teaching and learning process and the challenges faced by the teacher can influence the developing of the students higher-order thinking skills. Besides, the location of the school will also influence the process of developing students' higher-order thinking skills.

## METHOD

The researchers used the qualitative approach to describe the rural EFL teacher's challenges in improving students' higher order thinking skills. This research taken in one of the villages in Gaung district, it calls Teluk Kabung. The participant of the research was one English teacher in a junior high school who teaches in a small village in Gaung district. There is only one English teacher in this district, thus, there was only one available sample used in this research.

The researchers collected the data from the non-participant observation, one on one or individual interview, and collected the lesson plan made by the English teacher. This data analyzed with the steps of transcribing, coding, categorizing, interpreting, and validating the finding by using the triangulation based on the types of data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation and the interview that the researchers did in this school, the challenges that the teacher face in the process of the development of students' higher-order thinking skills in rural area are the teacher's knowledge and ability to develop HOTS is still low, passive students, Students' low English proficiency, the limitation of the school facility, and lack of sources. To solve this problem of sources, the teacher use internet to collect the informations and teaching materials. Then the teacher asked the students to always check their dictionary to find the English words and explain the materials by using mother tongue to solve students' problem in vocabulary. The teacher also ask the students to listen to English songs to make them familiar with this language.

Teaching English in rural area with the developing of students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) as the goals of 2013 curriculum is not easy as in urban area. Shikalepo (2020) who did the research about the challenges facing by the teacher to teach in the rural school, found that taching was defined by the effort to cope with a lack of fundamental teaching resources, being overburdened with teaching and administrative chores, school underfunding, and low teacher wages. Furthermore, most teachers lacked the ability to improvise instructional and teaching materials in the absence of adequate resources, making teaching unproductive. Then, in Indonesian context, Febriana et al., (2018) found that the teachers who have taught in rural Inonesian schools have experienced

several challenges dealing with infrastructure, source of learning, language barrier, parent mindset, inadequacy of teachers, student competences, and students mindset.

To develop the higher-order thinking skills is a kind of cognitive development. As Piaget (1964) stated that the development of someone's skills influenced by:

1. Maturation, the process was be continue day after day;
2. The intellegence of a human was be influenced by environment where they live;
3. The social transmission of human, it includes the linguistic transition, education, culture, etc.
4. Equiliberatuin of the emotional balances.

To develop the students' high order thinking skill, the teacher need a time and it can not come instantly. The activity should be come regulary to make the students familiar to explore their idea in the classroom, but in rural area the teacher can not do it because the high order thinking is a kind of something new in rural school.

The finding of this research related to the research about the developing of students higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) from Retnawati et al., (2018). They stated that the teacher knowledge about HOTS and their ability to improve students' HOTS is still low and the students' thinking skills also in the low level. The result of Retnawati et al., also quite close to the finding of this research because the teacher applied the steps to develop students' hots but she do not

really know about HOTS itself and it causes students' thinking ability is still low.

The second reason why the teacher hard to develop the students' higher-order thinking skills in the rural area is because the students have lack of sources. Since the students have lack of sources, they become passive in the teaching and learning process. So, the teacher just lead the class and she have to tell all of the informations to the student and can not develop the higher-order thinking skills.

The third reason is about the social transmission of human, it includes the linguistic transition, education, culture, etc (Piaget, 1964). The students are too familiar with their mother tongue and they are not familiar with English. The students have lack vocabulary and the ability to arrange the sentences. This problem makes the students feel anxiety to tell their idea in English class.

The fourth problem is in the school facility or as Piaget said is the environment of teaching and learning. The rural school can not use the technology in teaching and learning process to catch the students' attention in learning English. Then another reason why the teacher can not develop the students' higher-order thinking skills is the teaching strategy that the reseracher used in the classroom. The teacher use the group discussion in English class, but the students still passive and do not show their higher-order thinking skills.

According to the finding of the research by Pramesty et al., (2022) teacher challenges in teaching English in the rural area belongs to the learning English in remote areas was constrained by the status

of English as a local content that created less supportive conditions for teachers to teach English, the teacher competencies, the learning curriculum, and the social economic status of parents that affect the students' motivation to learn.

Other research talked about the rural teacher challenges in teaching in the rural area stated that teacher in this area faced the challenges dealing with the infrastructure, source of learning, language barrier, parent mindset, inadequacy of teachers, students' competence, and students' mindset (Febriana, et al., 2018).

Related to all of those research and challenges in developing students' HOTS in the rural area, this research has similiar finding. Based on the result of the research, the students do not reach the exptation to show higher-order thinking skills. For example, the students can conclude the learning materials which is they are in the evaluating skills, but the students only give the general points of the material itself. For the teacher side, the challenges is about the understanding of the community also the students about the importance of English, lack of facility, and the teacher's knowledge about HOTS itself. Meanwhile the students in rural school are too passive to explore their idea in English class.

The second challenges is about the students' motivation to learn English. The researchers found that most of the students just do not participate to any activity in English class. The third problem is that the students are not familiar with English. The students get the difficulies to recognize

the English vocabulary and arranging the English sentences.

## CONCLUSION

As a rural teacher with all of the limitations in teaching English, the teacher find the challenges to develop the students' high order thinking skill. The challenges in developing students' higher-order thinking skills in the rural area including the teacher's knowledge and ability about HOTS is still low, passive students, the limitation of the school facility, lack of sources, and lack of English. Finally, the teacher back to the low order thinking style in teaching English.

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