

Article

Challenges and Coping Strategies of Malaysian Untrained EFL Orang Asli Preschool Teachers

Nur `Ainin Sofiya Rosman & Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh*

School of Languages, Literacies & Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: manjeet@usm.my

Received: 24 June 2025

Accepted: 10 August 2025

Abstract: This study addresses the pressing challenges faced by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in rural Perak, Malaysia, as they deliver English as a foreign language in resource-constrained educational settings. The primary objective is to explore the key barriers these teachers encounter and the coping strategies they employ to navigate such challenges, thereby gaining a more profound insight into their instructional realities. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through semi-structured focus group discussions involving twelve untrained teachers from five Orang Asli preschools. The analysis reveals that limited English proficiency, absence of formal pedagogical training, insufficient teaching materials and infrastructure, as well as sociocultural resistance within the community, constitute significant impediments to effective English language instruction. Despite these multifaceted obstacles, the teachers demonstrate commendable resilience and agency by actively engaging in peer collaboration, forming informal support networks, and creatively improvising with available resources to facilitate early language learning. These adaptive strategies illuminate their ability to respond pragmatically to systemic educational inequities and acute resource limitations. The findings underscore an urgent need for culturally responsive professional development programmes, context-specific and culturally relevant teaching materials, and comprehensive systemic support services co-designed with Orang Asli communities. By foregrounding the lived experiences and voices of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers, this research advances understanding of Indigenous educational equity and offers practical, actionable recommendations for educational policy and practice aimed at reducing long-standing disparities within Indigenous communities.

Keywords: Challenges; coping strategies; English language instruction; Orang Asli; preschool education; untrained teachers

Introduction

English language proficiency is increasingly recognised as a vital skill in Malaysia, facilitating access to higher education, employment opportunities, and participation in the global economy (Aziz & Abdullah, 2019). However, indigenous communities such as the Orang Asli face distinct challenges in acquiring English as a foreign language due to historical marginalisation, socioeconomic disadvantages, and cultural discontinuities with mainstream education (Idrus et al., 2023; Sawalludin et al., 2020). Early childhood education, particularly at the preschool level, is critical for foundational language acquisition, yet many Orang Asli preschools are staffed by untrained teachers drawn from the local community. These teachers, while culturally proximate, often lack formal training in early childhood pedagogy and EFL instruction, which may compromise the quality of English language education delivered.

The key problem this study addresses is the inadequate preparation and support for untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in delivering effective English language instruction, which may adversely impact children's language learning outcomes. Previous studies have explored Orang Asli preschool teachers' beliefs and general teaching practices (Gill, 2014), but there remains a scarcity of research focusing specifically on the challenges these untrained teachers face in teaching English as a foreign language and the coping strategies they adopt. Understanding these lived experiences is essential to inform targeted interventions that support teacher development and improve instructional quality for Orang Asli children. To bridge this gap, this study investigates the perceived challenges and coping mechanisms of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in rural Perak, Malaysia. It is guided by the following research question: What are the perceived challenges and coping strategies of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in teaching English as a foreign language in rural Perak?

Literature Review

The Orang Asli, the indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia, have historically been marginalised within the national education system, resulting in persistent disparities in educational access, attainment, and quality (Idrus et al., 2023; Sawalludin et al., 2020). Orang Asli children are often the first in their families to attend formal schooling, navigating a complex interplay of poverty, geographic isolation, and cultural discontinuity. These challenges are compounded by a national curriculum delivered primarily in Malay and English, which frequently overlooks the linguistic and cultural realities of Orang Asli communities, thereby complicating efforts toward English language acquisition (Mohd Noor, 2012).

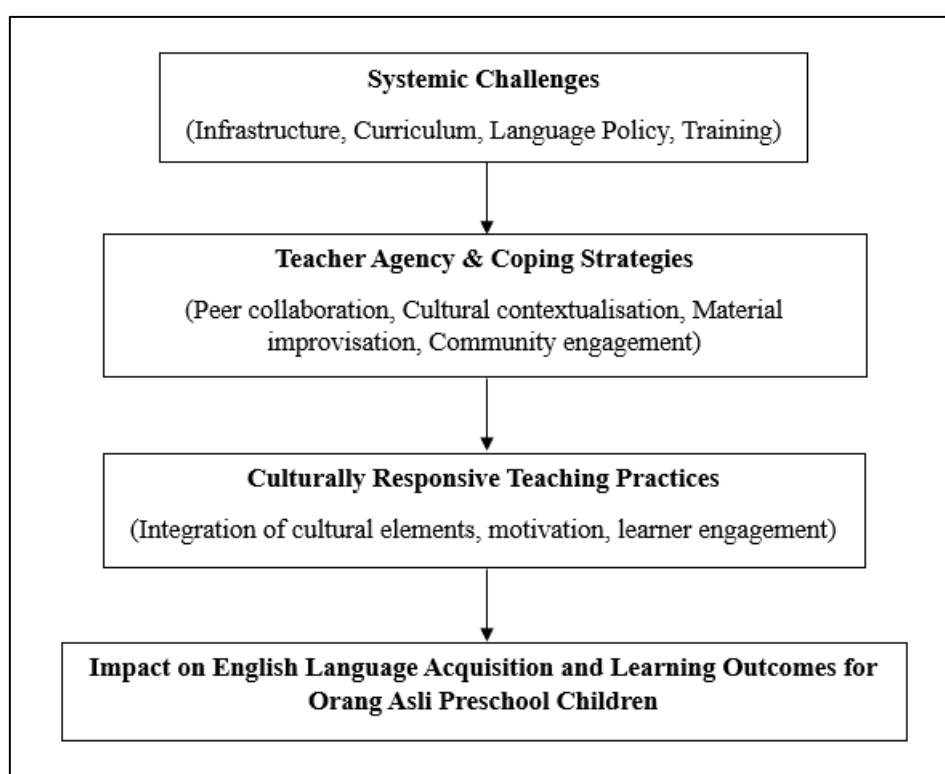


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of factors influencing English language education among untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers

Within indigenous and rural contexts, English language education is fraught with challenges. Teachers struggle with inadequate infrastructure, limited teaching materials, and insufficient professional development opportunities (Aziz & Abdullah, 2019; Gopining & Mohamad, 2024). For untrained teachers, these challenges are worsened by limited English proficiency and lack of exposure to effective EFL teaching methodologies, often resulting in reliance on rote learning and translation rather than communicative and interactive pedagogies critical for early language acquisition (Gill, 2014; Sekar Pramesty et al., 2022).

To clarify the complex and interconnected factors influencing English language education among Orang Asli preschool teachers, a conceptual framework was developed (see Figure 1). This framework highlights the interplay of systemic challenges, teacher agency, and culturally responsive practices as core elements shaping instructional experiences.

Despite these systemic constraints, teachers in demoted settings exhibit agency and resilience. Coping strategies documented in the literature include peer collaboration, contextualising teaching content with local cultural elements, improvising teaching materials, and engaging parents and community leaders to foster support (Bakar et al., 2021; Mohd Salim et al., 2020). Importantly, the integration of culturally responsive teaching practices has been shown to enhance engagement and motivation among Orang Asli learners (Mohd Noor et al., 2023). However, the sustainability and effectiveness of these strategies depend on systemic and policy-level support.

Given these ongoing challenges, there remains a critical need for research that clarifies the specific experiences and adaptive practices of untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers to inform contextually relevant professional development and policy interventions. This study contributes to this discourse by centring the voices of untrained teachers in rural Perak, highlighting their challenges and coping strategies in delivering English as a foreign language instruction.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences of Malaysian untrained EFL Orang Asli preschool teachers delivering English language instruction in rural Perak. This approach is suitable for gaining in-depth, contextualised understanding of complex phenomena within real-life educational settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). This design enables capturing nuanced perspectives regarding the challenges encountered and coping strategies employed by the participants.

12 untrained teachers from five remote Orang Asli preschools were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in teaching English to children aged four to six without formal training. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had direct, relevant experience to provide rich, information-dense data aligned with the study's objectives. This sampling method is appropriate for qualitative research aiming to explore specific lived experiences (Etikan et al., 2016).

Data were collected exclusively through semi-structured focus group discussions (FGDs), chosen for their effectiveness in eliciting collective views and facilitating interactive dialogue among participants, which enriches the data with diverse perspectives and deeper insights (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Md Zamin et al., 2022). Three separate FGDs were conducted, each comprising four teachers drawn from two different preschools, to promote comfort and openness. The teachers were among familiar colleagues from their own schools, encouraging more candid and detailed discussions. Additionally, smaller group sizes fostered greater participation from all members, prevented dominance by certain individuals, and facilitated more productive management of the discussion. All discussions were conducted in Bahasa Melayu, which is the participants' preferred language, to encourage open and authentic discussion about their experiences, perceived challenges, and coping mechanisms in teaching English as a foreign language. Each FGD session lasted approximately 60 to 120 minutes, allowing sufficient time for in-depth discussion and participant engagement. All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English. Translation accuracy was verified by bilingual university experts.

Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify, analyse, and report patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were imported into NVivo software to facilitate data management and coding. An inductive coding approach was adopted, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data without imposing predetermined categories. Codes were repetitively refined through constant comparison to enhance analytical rigour and reliability.

1. Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, all participants were orally briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and their roles. Written informed consent was obtained from the untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers who

voluntarily agreed to participate, with full assurance of their right to decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants were informed about the purpose of recording the FGDs and given explicit consent for audio recording. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained by withholding personal identities and the names of preschools, and pseudonyms were used in all reports to protect participant privacy. To enhance transparency and trustworthiness, member checking was conducted whereby participants were allowed to review and validate the transcribed data, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented. Additionally, participants were provided with an overview of the discussion topics beforehand to facilitate informed engagement.

The Findings

1. Key Challenges Faced by Untrained Orang Asli Preschool Teachers in English Instruction

The analysis revealed four major categories of challenges faced by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in delivering English instruction, each reflecting distinct yet interrelated barriers within their teaching context.

Limited English Proficiency and Confidence

A prominent challenge identified among untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers is their limited proficiency in English, which significantly undermines their confidence and shapes their instructional practices. The teachers' self-reported lack of fluency and comfort with English often leads to a reliance on basic vocabulary, avoidance of complex grammatical structures, and a tendency to revert to Malay or their mother tongue during classroom interactions. This limitation not only restricts the linguistic input available to students but also affects the teachers' willingness to engage in more interactive or communicative teaching methods.

For instance, one teacher candidly remarked on the comparative ease of teaching in Malay and the difficulties posed by English:

"There are many challenges, many in English. Because if it's in Malay, it's a little easier for us to talk with these preschool students, right? But if... If in English, it is really difficult."

(T9, Teacher, 39 years old, FGD 3)

Another teacher described the emotional impact of this linguistic barrier, noting:

"It's true that if you follow your heart, you want to speak English all the time, all the learning time. But sometimes we don't feel okay, too. Immediately silent."

(T11, Teacher, 41 years old, FGD 3)

These illustrate a recurring pattern: Teachers consistently recognise their limited English proficiency, which leads them to restrict English use in the classroom, reducing students' exposure to authentic language crucial for early acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2022). This issue is common among indigenous and rural Malaysian teachers, who often treat English as a third language after their mother tongue and Malay, intensifying feelings of inadequacy and constraining teaching methods (Behak et al., 2020; Gill & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Limited English proficiency affects both teacher self-efficacy and the quality of English instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Renganathan, 2021). Moreover, their reluctance aligns with studies identifying teacher anxiety and low confidence as significant barriers in non-native contexts (Ab Aziz et al., 2021; Gannoun & Deris, 2023). These challenges are especially pronounced in Indigenous settings with scarce linguistic and professional support, underscoring the urgent need for targeted, context-sensitive professional development to enhance both English proficiency and pedagogical confidence, thereby empowering untrained teachers to deliver more effective English instruction to Orang Asli preschoolers.

Lack of Formal Pedagogical Training

A pervasive challenge faced by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers is the absence of formal pedagogical training in both early childhood education and English language instruction. The data reveal that none of the participants possessed professional qualifications or systematic preparation for teaching young children, particularly in the context of English as a second or third language. This lack of formal training has profound implications for classroom practice, as teachers reported feeling uncertain about lesson planning, classroom management, and the assessment of language development. As a result, instructional approaches were often limited to rote memorisation, translation, and repetitive drills, rather than employing interactive, play-based, or communicative methods that are recognised as effective for early language learning (Gill, 2014; Lightbown & Spada, 2022).

For example, one teacher reflected on her initial lack of preparation and the transformative impact of external training:

“Because before coming to the training, right, we had no experience of what to do at all, what to teach our students in the village. After we go to the training, we learn things that we have not yet learn, to teach our students.”

(T5, Teacher, 37 years old, FGD 2)

Another teacher highlighted the infrequency of such training opportunities and the pressing need for support:

“The training rarely. We don’t usually have the training to teach... A year..rarely...” ... “If there are people who want to help... important too. Because right, language... I speak really, this English language is really... really necessary.”

(T10, Teacher, 40 years old, FGD 3)

These narratives are consistent with research indicating that untrained and rural teachers frequently lack access to sustained professional development, leaving them to rely on personal motivation and informal learning (Behak et al., 2020; Shan & Abdul Aziz, 2022). The absence of structured pedagogical knowledge constrains teachers’ ability to deliver engaging and developmentally appropriate English instruction (Hlabisa et al., 2023), which is especially critical for young learners in linguistically diverse settings (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Lightbown & Spada, 2022). Teachers in this study recognised the importance of self-motivation and continuous self-improvement to compensate for their lack of formal training.

One teacher articulated the need for self-driven learning:

“For me, aa if we have motivation in ourselves... Aa first, if we have the heart to help... Want our students to succeed... The teacher should, people say... improve communication skills, read a lot, watch videos that can help us teach... Ways to give simple conversational instructions, where the students aa they can understand, and the teacher is comfortable with what she wants to say.”

(T1, Teacher, 43 years old, FGD 1)

While such self-initiated strategies are commendable, the literature underscores that effective early childhood English instruction requires specialised pedagogical knowledge, including the understanding of language acquisition, child development, and culturally responsive practices (Lightbown & Spada, 2022; Renganathan, 2021). The lack of formal training not only undermines teachers’ confidence and instructional quality but may also perpetuate educational inequities for Orang Asli children, who are already at risk of marginalisation within the national education system (Behak et al., 2020; Sawalludin et al., 2020). Furthermore, the teachers’ accounts of infrequent and basic training, which is often limited to lesson planning or general classroom management, highlight the need for more comprehensive, sustained, and contextually

relevant professional development. As Renganathan (2021) and Shan and Abdul Aziz (2022) argue, ongoing and targeted teacher education is essential for equipping teachers with the skills and confidence to implement effective English language instruction, particularly in underserved and Indigenous communities.

Inadequate Teaching Materials and Infrastructure

The findings reveal significant resource constraints that critically impede English language instruction in Orang Asli preschools. Teachers reported a pervasive scarcity of age-appropriate and culturally relevant materials, with classrooms typically equipped only with outdated textbooks, minimal visual aids, and no digital resources. Compounding this, unreliable electricity and internet connectivity further restricted access to modern teaching tools, forcing educators to rely on improvised solutions.

A teacher explained:

"We don't have like reference aa looking for info on the internet... Limited. There is no line and so on... Every day... we have to think of the appropriate method aa depending on our environment. That's a challenge."

(T1, Teacher, 43 years old, FGD 1)

This reflects teachers' adaptability but underscores how infrastructural gaps hinder pedagogical innovation. The lack of internet access prevents the utilisation of digital teaching aids (e.g., videos, interactive content), which are crucial for engaging young learners (Aziz & Abdullah, 2019). This aligns with research in rural Malaysian schools, where 92% of teachers reported inadequate ICT facilities as a primary barrier to effective language instruction (Donald & Hashim, 2025; Dunstan & Ismail, 2024).

Another teacher noted:

"We did not, not extra. Because the thing we know... Follow the book." ... "Yes... Only follow the book, what is in the book" ... "Before, we do a lesson plan. There's something else we should discuss. Like sharing. Because sometimes, our class is not the same, students are not the same... we cannot use the same book. Not suitable..."

(T11, Teacher, 41 years old, FGD 3)

This emphasises how standardised textbooks fail to accommodate diverse classroom needs. When materials lack cultural relevance or flexibility, teachers cannot address varying student abilities or contextual realities (Carrete-Marín & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2022; Gopining & Mohamad, 2024). Studies confirm that rural educators often work with outdated, "one-size-fits-all" materials, limiting differentiated instruction and student engagement (Carrete-Marín & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2022; Renganathan, 2016). These findings collectively demonstrate that material and infrastructural inadequacies fundamentally constrain pedagogical effectiveness. Teachers' resilience in adapting to these limitations is evident, but systemic solutions such as context-specific resource development and infrastructure investment are urgently needed to support sustainable English language education in Orang Asli communities.

Sociocultural Resistance and Community Perceptions

Teachers also faced sociocultural resistance from parents and community members who questioned the value of English language education. Concerns were raised that learning English might undermine children's native language proficiency and cultural identity. This resistance is sometimes manifested as limited parental involvement and reluctance to support school activities.

One teacher noted:

"Because we are in this village... when just mention it... 'You don't need English'... Rarely used... There are no people who want to talk."

(T1, Teacher, 43 years old, FGD 1)

This reflects the marginalisation of English within the community's daily life, limiting opportunities for both teachers and students to practice the language. Such limited exposure impedes language acquisition, as supported by Damavandi and Roshdi (2013) and Shahidi et al. (2018), who emphasised that language learning is hindered in environments where the target language is rarely used. The same teacher shared:

"Because our surroundings didn't understand... People say, don't know that thing... so the interest to learn more, we feel challenging."

(T1, Teacher, 43 years old, FGD 1)

This highlights the psychological impact of negative community attitudes on motivation, aligning with Dweck's (2006) mindset theory, which posits that beliefs about one's abilities influence learning engagement and achievement. Addressing this sociocultural resistance is essential for fostering a supportive environment conducive to English language learning. Summary of themes and subthemes of the key challenges faced by the untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in English instruction can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Summary of themes and subthemes of key challenges faced by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in English instruction

Theme	Subthemes
Limited English Proficiency and Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited fluency and discomfort with English - Reliance on Malay/mother tongue - Reduced use of interactive teaching methods
Lack of Formal Pedagogical Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of professional qualifications - Reliance on rote learning and drills - Infrequent training opportunities
Inadequate Teaching Materials and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scarcity of age-appropriate, culturally relevant materials - Lack of digital resources due to poor infrastructure
Sociocultural Resistance and Community Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parental and community scepticism toward English - Concerns over native language and identity preservation

2. Coping Strategies Employed by Untrained Orang Asli Preschool Teachers in English Instruction

The analysis identified two principal coping strategies that untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers employ to navigate the challenges of delivering English instruction in resource-limited rural contexts. These strategies reflect teachers' resilience, agency, and adaptability as they strive to support effective language learning for their students despite systemic and material constraints.

Peer Collaboration and Informal Support Networks

Untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers reported relying heavily on their colleagues for emotional support, sharing of materials, and collaborative lesson planning. Informal peer mentoring played a crucial role in building confidence and providing practical solutions to common challenges. Teachers described regular meetings, both formal and informal, where they discussed what worked in the classroom and brainstormed strategies for difficult topics. Teachers highlighted the importance of peer support, both for sharing ideas and for emotional encouragement. A teacher shared:

"It's training self. Because there are more experienced ones, like T1. She is very experienced, and the teachers that our trainer taught... The ones we don't have confidence in, we begin to have confidence in. In different situations."

(T7, Teacher, 32 years old, FGD 2)

Another teacher explained:

“And the best part of the training, some of the other volunteers came. Other volunteers come and give us support and ideas in the lesson. And there are also teachers who come to teach us, like that. We feel proud. Even though we didn't go anywhere, we also met a teacher who is already a master's in teaching, to give ideas.”

(T6, Teacher, 27 years old, FGD 2)

A teacher claimed:

“...we do a lesson plan. There's something else we should discuss. Like sharing. Because sometimes, our class is not the same, students are not the same...”

(T11, Teacher, 41 years old, FGD 3)

Peer collaboration, including learning from more experienced teachers and trainers during workshops, is a key mechanism for building confidence and pedagogical knowledge among untrained teachers. These statements underscore the value of peer and volunteer support during training sessions, which not only provides practical teaching ideas but also boosts teachers' morale and sense of professional belonging.

Improvisation with Available Resources

The findings reveal that untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers frequently rely on improvisation to deliver English instruction effectively despite limited teaching materials and resources. This improvisation manifests through the creative use of storytelling, singing, simple instructions, and visual aids, which serve to engage young learners and facilitate language acquisition in resource-constrained environments.

One teacher described how storytelling and singing in English are integrated into lessons to capture children's interest and embed language learning in enjoyable activities:

“...then telling stories, singing, storytelling techniques in English, and singing in English... and teaching English subjects... and if the teachers are creative, they can insert it when they give... instructions in class, a simple instruction...”

(T1, Teacher, 43 years old, FGD 1)

Similarly, another teacher emphasised the use of singing and simple words supported by pictures to stimulate interest and comprehension:

“I use singing first. So that they are interested. In singing. After that, simple words, simple letters, pictures...”

(T7, Teacher, 32 years old, FGD 2)

A further statement succinctly captures the pragmatic acceptance of limitations and the commitment to teach within available means:

“We teach what we can only.”

(T12, Teacher, 44 years old, FGD 3)

These accounts demonstrate how untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers creatively adapt their instructional methods to local realities despite limited training and resources. Such improvisation, common in marginalised and rural settings, helps overcome material and infrastructural constraints through culturally meaningful activities like songs, stories, and visuals (Bakar et al., 2021; Gopining & Mohamad, 2024). Recognised as a vital pedagogical skill, improvisation enhances early language learning by promoting engagement, comprehension, and retention through multisensory experiences (Kirkland & Sutch, 2017; Gonzalez-Mena, 2019). Using simple, repetitive, and enjoyable activities also reduces anxiety and fosters

positive attitudes in emergent bilingual learners (Cummins, 2017). The teachers' acceptance of their limitations and proactive adaptation exemplify teacher agency critical for sustaining instruction in challenging contexts, empowering them to tailor meaningful learning experiences (Mohd Salim et al., 2020). The summary of themes and subthemes of the teachers' coping strategies can be found in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Summary of themes and subthemes of the coping strategies employed by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in English instruction

Theme	Subthemes
Peer Collaboration and Informal Support Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional and professional support among peers - Sharing of teaching materials and lesson plans - Learning from more experienced teachers and volunteers
Improvisation with Available Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative use of storytelling and singing - Use of simple language and visual aids - Pragmatic acceptance and adaptation to resource limits

Discussion

This study illuminates the complex challenges faced by untrained Orang Asli preschool teachers in rural Perak as they endeavour to deliver English as a foreign language (EFL). Consistent with prior Malaysian research (Aziz & Abdullah, 2019; Gill, 2014), limited English proficiency and lack of formal pedagogical training undermine teacher confidence and hinder child-centred teaching essential for early language acquisition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Similar challenges appear globally in indigenous and rural contexts. For example, Australian Aboriginal teachers face language barriers and insufficient training that limit effective instruction (Lohoar et al., 2014). Studies in other rural indigenous settings emphasise the need for culturally responsive teacher education and resources adapted to community contexts (Adams & Farnsworth, 2020). In Mexico, bilingual programs collaborating with indigenous communities enhance learner engagement and cultural preservation (Hamel, 2017).

The scarcity of culturally relevant teaching materials and inadequate infrastructure further compound these challenges. Teachers' reliance on self-created resources reflects systemic neglect of Indigenous education needs. Research from New Zealand highlights that integrating Māori cultural values into early childhood education supports learner motivation and positive identity development (The Education Hub, 2022). These parallels reinforce the urgent need for culturally responsive materials worldwide. Sociocultural resistance within Orang Asli communities reflects concerns that English education might erode native languages and cultural identity. This underscores the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems into pedagogy (Mohd Noor et al., 2023). Similar tensions exist in Alaska Native and Sámi communities, where language revitalisation efforts rely on community-centred, collaborative teaching approaches (Guerrettaz & Engman, 2023).

Despite these barriers, teachers demonstrate resilience and agency through collaboration, resource improvisation, and culturally adapted teaching, echoing findings from rural Malaysian preschool educators (Bakar et al., 2021; Masturi et al., 2022). However, individual agency alone cannot overcome structural inequities. The findings highlight the urgent need for systemic interventions such as ongoing professional development, culturally relevant materials, and inclusive policies co-designed with Indigenous communities (Gopining & Mohamad, 2024; Idrus et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study provides an insightful account of the challenges and coping strategies of untrained Malaysian Orang Asli preschool teachers delivering English instruction in rural Perak. It highlights the complex linguistic, pedagogical, material, and sociocultural barriers constraining effective teaching, alongside teachers' resilience and creativity. While community-based efforts are vital, systemic change is essential to address educational inequities in Orang Asli communities.

By centring untrained teachers' voices, the research underscores the urgent need for culturally responsive and context-specific interventions. Priority should be given to tailored professional development, development of culturally relevant teaching materials through collaboration with Orang Asli stakeholders, and inclusive engagement with parents and community leaders to support sustainable language education.

A decisive policy overhaul is required to ensure flexible and locally responsive teacher recruitment, training, and support systems, thereby guaranteeing equitable access to quality early childhood education for Orang Asli children and other marginalised groups.

Acknowledgement: The authors would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education for the funding of this research via the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) with Project Code: FRGS/1/2021/SSI01/USM/02/1.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Ab Aziz, A. A., Said, N., Pudín, C. S., & Kamlun, K. (2021). Teachers' sense of self-efficacy: A study of English teachers in Malaysian Rural Schools. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling*, 6(43), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.35631/ijepc.643001>
- Adams, R., & Farnsworth, M. (2020). Culturally responsive teacher education for rural and Native Communities. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 22(2), 84–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2020.1741367>
- Aziz, N. A., & Abdullah, N. (2019). Challenges in English language teaching in rural Malaysian schools: A review. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 7(2), 45–52. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.7n.2p.45>
- Bakar, N. A., Subramaniam, G., & Ghazali, N. H. (2021). Peer collaboration as a coping strategy among rural teachers in Malaysia. *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*, 10(1), 23–40.
- Behak, F. P., Saad, N. S. M., Darmi, R., & Selamat, S. (2020). Kisah wira tidak di dendang: Cabaran dan usaha guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris di sebuah sekolah kebangsaan Orang Asli di Malaysia [Stories of unsung heroes: Challenges and efforts of English language teachers at an indigenous school in Malaysia]. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Melayu*, 10(2), 1–18.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Carrete-Marín, N., & Domingo-Peñafiel, L. (2022). Textbooks and teaching materials in rural schools: A systematic review. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 12(2), 67–94. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1288>
- Cummins, J. (2017). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Damavandi, M., & Roshdi, M. (2013). The effects of limited language exposure on English language acquisition. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 4(3), 1–8.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/effective-teacher-professional-development-report>
- Donald, K. H., & Hashim, H. (2025). Exploring digital education: Experiential insights of ESL teachers in rural Malaysian schools. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(3), 936–951. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2025.903sedu0067>
- Dunstan, T. F., & Ismail, H. H. (2024). Using ICT-based interventions to boost Malaysian Young Rural Learners' interest and motivation in reading English materials: A literature review. *International Journal*

- of *Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v13-i1/20135>
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Gannoun, H., & Deris, F. D. (2023). Teaching anxiety in foreign language classroom: A review of literature. *Arab World English Journal*, 14(1), 379–393. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no1.24>
- Gill, S. K. (2014). *Language policy challenges in multi-ethnic Malaysia*. Springer.
- Gill, S. K., & Kirkpatrick, A. (2013). English in Asian and European higher education. In *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes* (pp. 91–108). Routledge.
- Gonzalez-Mena, J. (2019). *Foundations of early childhood education: Teaching children in a diverse society* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Gopining, E. F., & Mohamad, M. (2024). Exploring educational realities: Challenges and English teacher needs in rural primary schools. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v13-i3/22893>
- Guerrettaz, A., & Engman, M. (2023). Indigenous Language Revitalization. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-559>.
- Hamel, R. E. (2017). Bilingual education for indigenous communities in Mexico. *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 395–406). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02258-1_30
- Hlabisa, S. N., Mhlono, H. R., & Govender, S. (2023). Exploring teachers' views on the pedagogy of writing skills in English first additional language. *E-Bangi Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 20(3). <https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2023.2003.11>
- Idrus, F., Hussin, M. E., & Gulca, M. (2023). The integration of cultural elements in the English language classrooms: A case study of selected Orang Asli schools in Pahang, Malaysia. *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)*, 8(1), 26–45. <https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol8iss1pp26-45>
- Kirkland, D. E., & Sutch, D. (2017). Improvisation and teacher agency in under-resourced classrooms. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 43(2), 167–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2017.1289333>
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2022). *How languages are learned* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Lohoar, S., Butera, N., & Kennedy, E. (2014). Strengths of Australian Aboriginal Cultural Practices in Family Life and Child Rearing (CFCA Paper No. 25). Australian Institute of Family Studies. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/strengths-australian-aboriginal-cultural-practices-fam>
- Masturi, S. Z., Kosnin, A. B. M., & Zainudin, N. F. (2022). The barriers in teaching English skills encountered by Malaysian rural-area preschool teachers: A preliminary study. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(2), 4696–4703.
- Md Zamin, A. A., Mohammad Lotfie, M., & Mohamed Salleh, R. T. A. (2022). Challenges in Teaching English to Preschoolers: A Case Study in Malaysian Schools. *Al-Risalah: Journal of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (ARJIHS)*, 6(1), 38–61. <https://doi.org/10.31436/alrisalah.v6i1.375>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mohd Noor, M. A. (2012). Advancing the Orang Asli through Malaysia's clusters of Excellence Policy. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 1(2), 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.14425/00.45.76>

- Mohd Noor, M. A., Ismail, S., & Masami, F. (2023). Integrating cultural elements in English language teaching: A case study of Orang Asli schools in Pahang, Malaysia. *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)*, 8(1), 26-45. <https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol8iss1pp26-45>
- Mohd Salim, M. S., Mohd Adnan, A. H., Mohamad Shah, D. S., Mohd Tahir, M. H., & Yusof, A. M. (2020). The Orang Asli in Malaysian formal education: Orang Asli Teachers' sentiments and observations. *International Journal of Humanities Technology and Civilization*, 5(1), 57-64. <https://doi.org/10.15282/ijhtc.v5i1.4819>
- Renganathan, S. (2016). *Language Policy and Practice in Malaysia: Exploring Modernity and Multilingualism*. Routledge.
- Renganathan, S. (2021). English language education in rural schools in Malaysia: A systematic review of Research. *Educational Review*, 75(4), 787-804. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1931041>
- Sawalludin, A. F., Jia Min, C. L., & Mohd Ishar, M. I. (2020). The struggle of Orang Asli in education: Quality of Education. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 5(1), 46-51. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v5i1.346>
- Sekar Pramesty, N., Maghfiroh, A., & Atiek Mustikawati, D. (2022). Teachers' challenges in teaching English to young learners in rural area. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(4), 5283-5292. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v14i4.1517>
- Shahidi, A. H., Nor Shaid, N. A., Yusop, M. S., & Maros, M. (2018). Fenomena sosiobudaya Orang Asli Kanaq dalam penguasaan bahasa Melayu: Satu tinjauan awal. *e-Bangi: Jurnal Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan*, 15(5), 145-156. <https://journalarticle.ukm.my/20837/1/29288-89864-1-SM.pdf>
- Shan, L. W., & Abdul Aziz, A. (2022). A Systematic Review of Teaching English in Rural Settings: Challenges and Solutions. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 12(6), 1956 – 1977. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v12-i6/14233>
- The Education Hub. (2022). How to support Māori children with culturally responsive teaching. https://theeducationhub.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/How-to-support-Ma%CC%84ori-children-with-culturally-responsive-teaching_revise.pdf
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2013). *Qualitative research methods in social sciences* (9th ed.). Seçkin Publishing.