

DEVELOPING THE ROOTS-ELT MODEL FOR TEACHING ENGLISH IN REMOTE PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CONTEXT-RESPONSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR 3T SETTINGS IN NORTH TORAJA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English in remote and resource-constrained primary schools requires a model that is pedagogically simple, culturally meaningful, and resilient when digital infrastructure is limited. This conceptual development study proposes the ROOTS-ELT model for primary-school English teaching in 3T-type settings in North Toraja, Indonesia. The study used a design-oriented synthesis of recent research on teaching English to young learners, rural English education, culturally responsive pedagogy, low-resource instruction, and current Indonesian primary-school English policy. The synthesis identified five interrelated design requirements: familiar cultural content, comprehensible oral input, low-tech multimodal resources, structured peer interaction, and continuous recycling with performance-based assessment. These requirements were translated into five instructional stages represented by ROOTS: Relate to local experience, Offer comprehensible input, Organize collaborative practice, Task learners with meaningful communication, and Spiral review and assessment. The model positions Toraja culture and everyday village life as learning resources while maintaining a clear English-language objective. It treats technology as optional support rather than a prerequisite and allows strategic use of Indonesian and local languages as scaffolding. Because this article develops a conceptual framework rather than reporting a classroom intervention, the model requires empirical validation through teacher review, pilot teaching, learner performance measures, and iterative revision in selected remote primary schools in North Toraja.

Keywords: *English for young learners, 3T education, rural primary schools, local culture, North Toraja*

INTRODUCTION

English education at the primary level in Indonesia is entering an important transition. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has announced that English will become a compulsory subject in primary schools, madrasah ibtidaiyah, and equivalent institutions beginning in the 2027/2028 academic year. The policy creates an opportunity to strengthen early communicative competence, but it also intensifies an existing question of educational equity: how can primary schools with limited specialist teachers, learning materials, connectivity, and exposure to English provide instruction that is meaningful and achievable? This question is particularly important for remote and underserved school communities, where technology-heavy teaching models may not match everyday classroom conditions.

In this article, the term 3T refers to educational contexts associated with *terdepan*, *terluar*, and *tertinggal* and is used as a pedagogical descriptor for remoteness, limited access, infrastructure constraints, and educational disadvantage. It is not used to claim that every part of North Toraja Regency currently carries a single formal administrative 3T designation. North Toraja is culturally rich and geographically varied. Its learners live within communities where family life, agriculture, markets, traditional architecture, local landscapes, crafts, food, and tourism can provide familiar content for beginning English. Familiar content is especially valuable when learners have little routine exposure to English outside school.

Research on rural English education in Indonesia indicates that teachers may face limited learning resources, uneven connectivity, insufficient professional support, restricted

exposure to English, and differences in learners' motivation and prior knowledge (Harlina et al., 2020; Kusuma, 2022; Laila et al., 2023). Teachers respond by adapting materials, using games, cooperative learning, familiar daily-life topics, limited digital tools, and locally available resources (Astriyani et al., 2025; Febriana et al., 2018). These findings suggest that a useful model for remote primary schools should not assume ideal infrastructure; it should make pedagogical quality possible with simple resources and strong teacher mediation.

Teaching English to young learners adds further complexity. Primary learners benefit from concrete experiences, visual support, repetition, movement, routines, games, and short communicative tasks rather than lengthy grammatical explanations. Indonesian studies have found that interactive games and structured media can improve motivation and achievement in primary English learning (Ratminingsih et al., 2018), while rural TEYL studies report challenges related to teacher confidence, resources, proficiency, and age-appropriate materials (Khulel & Wibowo, 2021; Laila et al., 2023). A rural model therefore needs to simplify instructional decision-making: what to teach, how to model it, how learners practice it, and how learning is checked.

Cultural relevance is equally important. Ratri et al. (2025) demonstrate the value of developing primary English content around local culture in the Indonesian context, while rural teachers also report using local culture and daily life as contextual resources (Astriyani et al., 2025). For North Toraja, learners can use English to describe familiar objects, places, routines, and non-sensitive cultural features. Cultural integration, however, should remain pedagogically purposeful and ethically responsible; sacred or restricted cultural knowledge should not be simplified into classroom exercises without appropriate community guidance.

The literature provides important pieces of the solution, but a practical gap remains. Existing studies often discuss rural challenges, teacher strategies, technology use, or local-culture materials separately. Fewer studies combine them into a repeatable classroom sequence for remote primary-school English. This study therefore asks: (1) What contextual and pedagogical requirements should inform an English teaching model for remote primary schools in North Toraja? (2) What instructional stages can translate those requirements into a practical classroom sequence? and (3) How can local context, multilingual scaffolding, and low-resource media be integrated without weakening the English-language objective? The study develops the ROOTS-ELT model, whose novelty lies in integrating local cultural grounding, comprehensible oral modeling, low-tech resilience, collaborative communication, and spiral assessment within one instructional cycle.

The policy transition gives particular urgency to equity. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has confirmed that English will become a compulsory subject in Indonesian primary schools from the 2027/2028 academic year, after a transition period in which schools may offer it according to readiness. The same policy framework recognizes that teacher preparation is central to implementation, and the PKGSD-MBI program is designed to improve both teachers' English proficiency and their pedagogical capacity. This national direction is important for North Toraja because a uniform curricular expectation can produce uneven classroom experiences when schools differ in teacher availability, transport access, learning materials, internet connectivity, and opportunities for learners to encounter English outside school. A useful instructional model for 3T-oriented contexts must therefore translate national expectations into routines that can function under unequal local conditions rather than assume the infrastructure of urban schools (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025, 2026).

North Toraja provides a particularly relevant setting for such work. The regency includes urbanizing centers as well as dispersed communities connected through mountainous terrain and varied transport access. BPS-Statistics Indonesia's annual regional publication

documents the broad social, educational, and infrastructural characteristics of the regency, indicating why school conditions should not be treated as homogeneous (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Toraja Utara, 2025). In this article, the 3T label is therefore used analytically rather than administratively: it refers to primary-school situations characterized by remoteness, limited educational resources, constrained professional support, or restricted access to English-rich environments. The model is not intended to classify all schools in North Toraja as officially designated 3T schools. Instead, it focuses on the pedagogical conditions that many remote or resource-constrained schools may share and that require context-responsive teaching decisions.

A strong basis for contextualization already exists in North Toraja. Tandikombong, Tandi Arrang, and Tulaktondok (2024) investigated local-wisdom topics needed in English materials for elementary-school learners in four North Toraja schools. Their study involved 67 fourth-grade students and four English teachers and identified topics such as tourism objects, thanksgiving, funeral ceremonies, traditional food and drink, clothing, social values, folklore, arts, and fairy tales as relevant content for local English materials. This evidence is important because it moves the argument for cultural integration beyond a general appeal to 'local culture.' It shows concrete domains that learners and teachers can recognize and potentially discuss in age-appropriate ways. For a teaching model, however, the challenge is to convert such topics into a sequence of language objectives, interaction patterns, and assessment practices rather than merely place local pictures or vocabulary lists in a worksheet.

The pedagogical value of familiar content lies in the cognitive and communicative support it provides. Young learners can more readily describe people, objects, routines, food, places, and community events when they already possess conceptual knowledge of those topics. Familiarity reduces the burden of simultaneously learning an unfamiliar idea and unfamiliar English. It also makes it easier for teachers to elicit prior knowledge through realia, drawings, photographs, gestures, short stories, or oral questions before introducing English forms. Ratri et al. (2025) similarly argue that local culture can be systematically integrated into a young-learner English syllabus to support language development while maintaining learners' cultural identity. Thus, culture in the proposed model is not an ornamental theme; it functions as a scaffold that supports comprehension, participation, identity, and purposeful communication.

Despite the growing literature on rural ELT, young-learner pedagogy, and local culture, three gaps remain. First, rural studies commonly describe challenges and teacher strategies but do not always convert those findings into a repeatable lesson architecture. Second, culturally responsive studies often concentrate on syllabus or materials development, while the moment-to-moment classroom process of moving from local knowledge to English communication receives less explicit modeling. Third, models that presume stable technology, specialist English teachers, or extensive printed materials may be difficult to sustain in resource-constrained primary schools. The present study addresses these gaps through one guiding question: What context-responsive instructional model can organize English teaching for young learners in remote and resource-constrained primary-school settings in North Toraja? Two supporting questions concern the design principles required by the context and the classroom procedures through which those principles can be implemented. The novelty of ROOTS-ELT lies in combining local-cultural activation, comprehensible input, collaborative rehearsal, meaningful communication, and spiral assessment in one low-resource lesson cycle.

METHOD

This study employed a design-oriented conceptual development approach. Rather than testing an intervention with human participants, it synthesized research and policy evidence to formulate an instructional model that can later be validated in classrooms. The design corpus

was purposively selected to represent five areas: English for young learners in Indonesia, rural or remote English teaching, local-culture integration, low-resource or technology-constrained instruction, and contemporary Indonesian policy concerning primary-school English. Priority was given to peer-reviewed studies published within the last ten years, supplemented by official education-policy and regional statistical sources where contextual information was needed.

The synthesis followed three analytical steps. First, the selected literature was coded for recurring constraints and enabling conditions, including teacher expertise, learner exposure, resources, infrastructure, cultural familiarity, interaction patterns, motivation, and assessment. Second, the codes were reorganized into design requirements. Third, each requirement was translated into an observable instructional action and ordered into a five-stage teaching cycle. The stages were refined for mnemonic clarity as ROOTS: Relate, Offer, Organize, Task, and Spiral.

The proposed model was evaluated conceptually against four criteria: contextual fit, pedagogical coherence, feasibility, and assessability. Contextual fit examined whether the model could use local North Toraja content without expensive materials. Pedagogical coherence examined progression from meaning and input to guided practice and purposeful output. Feasibility considered whether lessons could function with a board, paper, pictures, real objects, and optional offline digital resources. Assessability examined whether learning could be checked through short performances, teacher observation, and learner products. No human-subject data are reported; empirical validation is proposed as the next stage.

Source Selection and Analytical Scope

The conceptual development used purposive source selection rather than a statistical meta-analysis. Sources were chosen because they informed at least one of five design domains: (1) English teaching in rural or remote Indonesian schools; (2) teaching English to young learners; (3) communicative and interaction-oriented pedagogy; (4) integration of local culture or local wisdom into English materials; and (5) current policy for primary-school English in Indonesia. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles from the last ten years, especially Indonesian studies that reported classroom challenges, teacher practices, learner needs, or material development. Selected policy documents and regional statistical publications were included to establish the current implementation context. Earlier sources were retained only when they represented frequently used foundations for understanding rural teaching strategies or young-learner pedagogy.

Design Synthesis Procedure

The synthesis was conducted through a design translation procedure. Findings and recommendations from the selected literature were first condensed into problem statements, such as 'learners have limited English exposure,' 'teachers require feasible routines,' 'materials are often culturally distant,' or 'technology cannot be assumed.' Each problem statement was then translated into a pedagogical requirement. For example, limited exposure generated the requirement for repeated comprehensible teacher input; culturally distant materials generated the requirement to activate familiar local knowledge; and limited resources generated the requirement for low-tech default materials. The requirements were compared for overlap and organized into a sequence that reflects the temporal flow of a primary English lesson: activation, input, rehearsal, communicative use, and review. The acronym ROOTS was developed after the sequence had been conceptually established, not as a mnemonic imposed before the analysis.

Conceptual Evaluation and Ethical Position

The resulting model was subjected to an internal conceptual evaluation using contextual fit, pedagogical coherence, feasibility, assessability, and cultural responsibility as criteria. Contextual fit asked whether the sequence addresses constraints repeatedly documented in rural ELT. Pedagogical coherence examined whether each stage prepares learners for the next stage rather than functioning as an isolated activity. Feasibility focused on time, materials, teacher language demand, and classroom management. Assessability required visible learner performance at multiple points in the cycle. Cultural responsibility required that local practices be represented respectfully, accurately, and at an age-appropriate level. Because no new human-participant data were collected for this conceptual article, no claims are made about causal effects, statistical improvement, or student preference. These questions are reserved for the empirical validation phase of the model.

RESULTS

Contextual Design Requirements

The synthesis generated five design requirements. First, content should begin with familiar experience. Young learners have more conceptual resources for speaking when the topic is already known; the linguistic challenge should therefore not be combined unnecessarily with an unfamiliar content challenge. Local places, family routines, food, animals, weather, school activities, village environments, and carefully selected Toraja cultural objects can serve as entry points.

Second, instruction should prioritize comprehensible oral input before demanding independent production. In low-exposure environments, the teacher may be one of the learner's main sources of English. Short model sentences, clear pronunciation, gestures, pictures, realia, repetition, and choral-to-individual practice can make input accessible. Reading and writing remain important, but written forms should be attached to meanings learners have already heard and used.

Third, materials should be low-tech by default and digitally extendable rather than digitally dependent. Rural English research shows that connectivity and access can be uneven (Kusuma, 2022; Taopan et al., 2026). The core lesson should therefore function with picture cards, locally collected objects, mini-posters, word strips, the board, and learner drawings. When devices are available, the same lesson can be enriched with audio, video, or offline applications.

Fourth, learner talk must be structured rather than merely requested. Asking beginning learners to speak without preparation can produce silence or dependence on the most confident students. The model therefore requires pair or group rehearsal, sentence frames, role assignment, information gaps, and repeated opportunities to use the same language for slightly different purposes. This principle is consistent with cooperative and interactive strategies reported in rural English teaching (Astriyani et al., 2025; Febriana et al., 2018).

Fifth, assessment should be continuous, brief, and performance-oriented. Teachers can listen for target words and patterns during pair work, use simple checklists, collect drawings with captions, conduct mini-presentations, and end lessons with one-sentence exit performances. The same language should then be recycled in later lessons because repeated retrieval is especially important when learners have little English exposure outside the classroom.

Table 1. Contextual design requirements for English teaching in remote primary schools

Design requirement	Classroom implication	Low-resource example
Familiar cultural context	Begin from concepts learners already know before introducing new English forms.	Family, school, rice fields, local food, markets, Tongkonan as an architectural object, weather, village places.
Comprehensible oral input	Model short language with gesture, visuals, repetition, and clear pronunciation.	Teacher points to a real object or picture and models 'This is ... / It has ... / I can see ...'.
Low-tech resilience	Plan a lesson that works without internet; add digital media only when available.	Board, picture cards, realia, paper mini-books, locally recorded audio used offline.
Structured interaction	Move from choral response to pair rehearsal, group task, and short individual performance.	Information-gap cards, role-play, pair descriptions, gallery walk.
Spiral assessment	Observe performance, give immediate feedback, and recycle target language across lessons.	Teacher checklist, exit sentence, picture caption, mini-presentation, retrieval game.

Design Principles Underpinning ROOTS-ELT

The contextual requirements can be expressed through four cross-cutting design principles. The first is contextual familiarity. New English is introduced through content that learners can recognize from their immediate environment, family life, school routines, local landscapes, community occupations, food, arts, stories, or culturally appropriate traditions. Familiarity does not mean that every lesson must be about Toraja culture; rather, it means that the teacher intentionally controls conceptual difficulty so that language learning remains the primary new challenge. Once learners can use a target pattern with familiar content, the same language can be extended toward national and global topics. This local-to-global progression prevents cultural integration from becoming isolation and positions English as a resource for explaining one's own world to wider audiences.

The second principle is supported oral participation. In many low-exposure contexts, independent speaking is difficult when learners have not heard, rehearsed, and manipulated the target language. ROOTS-ELT therefore treats teacher modeling, choral response, gesture, echoing, substitution, and pair rehearsal as preparation for communication rather than as ends in themselves. The sequence moves from high support to lower support. A learner may first repeat 'This is a traditional house,' then substitute 'church,' 'school,' or 'rice field,' then ask a peer 'What is this?', and finally produce a short description of a chosen picture. This progression preserves accuracy support while creating a clear route toward learner agency.

The third principle is resource resilience. A core learning objective must be achievable even when electricity, projectors, printers, or internet access are unavailable. The teacher can use the board, locally collected objects, handmade picture cards, learner drawings, folded paper, and spoken prompts. When digital infrastructure is reliable, the same sequence can be enriched with audio, video, digital flashcards, or recorded speaking tasks. This 'low-tech core,

high-tech extension' principle is different from rejecting technology. It treats technology as an amplifier rather than a prerequisite and is consistent with rural studies showing that teachers often combine improvised materials with whatever limited digital tools are available (Kusuma, 2022; Astriyani et al., 2025).

The fourth principle is visible learning through small performances. Young learners need frequent success experiences, while teachers need manageable evidence of progress. ROOTS-ELT therefore uses brief observable products: pointing to the correct picture, responding to a question, completing a pair exchange, labeling a drawing, reading a two-line description, or recording a short oral message when technology permits. Each performance is deliberately small enough to occur during ordinary lessons. Over several cycles, these performances can accumulate into a portfolio that shows growth in vocabulary, comprehensibility, interaction, and confidence without requiring a high-stakes test after every unit.

Table 2. Cross-cutting design principles of ROOTS-ELT

Principle	Pedagogical meaning	Low-resource evidence
Contextual familiarity	Begin with known concepts and move toward wider contexts.	Learner can connect English words or patterns to familiar objects, places, routines, or stories.
Supported oral participation	Move from modeling and rehearsal to purposeful learner talk.	Learners use a target pattern first with support and then with reduced prompts.
Resource resilience	Make the core lesson independent of continuous digital access.	Objective remains achievable with board work, realia, drawings, cards, and peer interaction.
Visible small performances	Collect frequent, manageable evidence of what learners can do.	Teacher observes short oral, written, or interactional performances during the lesson.

The ROOTS-ELT Instructional Model

The five requirements were operationalized as the ROOTS-ELT model. ROOTS is a repeatable lesson cycle rather than a rigid script. A complete cycle can occur in one lesson or extend across several meetings, depending on learner age, class size, and language complexity. Teachers may return to an earlier stage whenever learners need additional support.

R - Relate to local experience. The lesson begins by activating what learners already know through a picture, object, drawing, short story, question, or local situation. The purpose is to create a shared meaning base for English. Strategic use of Indonesian or a local language is acceptable when it helps learners connect prior knowledge to the new task. The teacher then narrows the topic to a small language objective, such as naming five objects, using 'This is...', describing color and size, or asking 'Where is...?'.

O - Offer comprehensible input. The teacher provides short, accurate, repeated English that learners can understand from context. Input may include teacher talk, a chant, a picture-supported mini-dialogue, or a three-to-six-sentence story. Gesture, pointing, drawing, realia, facial expression, and board work make meaning visible. Learners listen, identify, and repeat selected chunks before being asked to produce independently.

O - Organize collaborative practice. Learners rehearse the target language in a supported format. Sentence frames, substitution tables, word banks, picture cards, and peer roles reduce cognitive load. Practice moves from whole-class response to pairs and small groups. In larger classes, the teacher can assign speakers, helpers, card holders, and reporters so participation is distributed.

T - Task learners with meaningful communication. Learners use the target language to accomplish a small purpose: describe a place, identify a hidden picture, ask a classmate for information, label a local object, present a mini-poster, compare pictures, give simple directions, or tell a short sequence. The task creates a reason to listen and respond. Accuracy is supported, but the immediate priority is successful communication.

S - Spiral review and assessment. The teacher closes the cycle by checking what learners can do and planning how the same language will reappear. Assessment may involve a two-sentence presentation, pair exchange, matching task, oral exit ticket, labeled drawing, or three-item checklist. Key language is recycled in later units with new local topics so that vocabulary and patterns are revisited rather than treated as finished after one lesson.

Table 3. Operational stages of the ROOTS-ELT model

Stage	Teacher action	Learner action	Evidence of learning
R - Relate	Activate familiar experience and state a small language goal.	Observe, recall, name, predict, connect prior knowledge.	Learners understand the topic and communicative purpose.
O - Offer	Model concise English with gesture, visuals, realia, repetition, and optional audio.	Listen, point, match, repeat selectively, notice forms.	Learners show comprehension and reproduce key words/phrases.
O - Organize	Provide frames, word banks, pair roles, and guided rehearsal.	Practice with peers, substitute words, ask and answer.	Most learners participate in repeated supported use.
T - Task	Set an information gap, description, mini-project, role-play, or presentation.	Use English to complete a communicative outcome.	Learners produce target language with decreasing support.
S - Spiral	Assess briefly, give feedback, and schedule recycling.	Perform, self-check, revise, and recall in later lessons.	Checklist, oral exit ticket, learner product, later retrieval.

Language Progression within the ROOTS Cycle

ROOTS-ELT organizes language demand across three levels: recognition, supported production, and purposeful production. Recognition occurs mainly during Relate and Offer, when learners listen, point, match, notice, and connect words with meanings. Supported production becomes dominant during Organize, where learners repeat, substitute, complete frames, or practice patterned exchanges. Purposeful production becomes visible during Task, when learners use English to obtain information, identify something, describe a local object,

compare two pictures, or present a small product. Spiral Review then recycles the same language in a new but related context. This progression is useful for young learners because it avoids the false choice between form-focused practice and communication: controlled practice is retained, but it is explicitly positioned as preparation for a communicative outcome.

Multilingual scaffolding is also sequenced rather than left accidental. Local Toraja languages and Indonesian may be used during *Relate* to activate knowledge, during *Offer* to clarify a key concept, or during *Organize* to ensure that learners understand task rules. The proportion of English should then increase as learners move toward *Task*. This creates a functional division of labor among languages: familiar languages support meaning and inclusion, while English remains the target for the final communicative performance. The model therefore rejects both unrestricted translation and unrealistic English-only expectations. The teacher's decision is guided by one question: Does the use of another language help learners return to purposeful English use more successfully?

Illustrative Classroom Application

An illustrative Grade 4 or Grade 5 lesson can use the theme 'My Village and Its Buildings.' The language objective is to identify familiar places and produce simple descriptions using 'This is...', 'There is/are...', 'It has...', and selected adjectives. In *Relate*, the teacher displays two or three familiar photographs or drawings, such as a school, church, house, rice field, market, or Tongkonan presented as a cultural and architectural object. Learners first identify the places using the language they know, and the teacher then states the English goal.

During *Offer*, the teacher models a short description: 'This is a Tongkonan. It has a large roof. It is made of wood. There are carvings on the wall.' Only level-appropriate language is selected. In *Organize*, pairs receive picture cards and a small word bank. Learner A describes a picture while Learner B identifies it, then they exchange roles. During *Task*, groups create a mini-poster called 'Places in Our Village' and each learner contributes at least one spoken sentence. During *Spiral*, the teacher uses a simple checklist: identifies the place, uses the target frame, and speaks intelligibly enough to be understood. The vocabulary later reappears in lessons on directions or tourism.

The model permits careful multilingual scaffolding. Indonesian or a local Toraja language may be used briefly to activate background knowledge, clarify a task, or prevent cultural misunderstanding, but the teacher should visibly return to the English target. Multilingual support functions as a bridge rather than a replacement for English practice.

A Three-Lesson Thematic Sequence

The same unit can be extended across three short lessons to demonstrate spiral design. Lesson 1 may focus on identifying familiar places and producing 'This is a ...'. Lesson 2 reactivates the same nouns but adds location language such as 'It is near ...' or 'It is far from ...'. Lesson 3 requires learners to combine the language in a mini map task: one learner describes the position of a place while a partner points, draws, or moves a card. The repeated nouns lower memory demand, while the communicative function becomes gradually more complex. In this way, progression is created not by replacing all previous content with new content, but by keeping a stable language base and adding one manageable challenge at a time.

Table 4. Example three-lesson ROOTS-ELT sequence for the theme My Village

Lesson	Language focus	ROOTS task outcome	Suggested materials
1. Places around us	This is a ...; familiar place nouns	Identify and name local places from pictures/drawings.	Board drawings, picture cards, learner sketches
2. Where is it?	It is near/far from ...; review place nouns	Ask and answer about the location of familiar places.	Simple hand-drawn map, reusable word cards
3. My mini map	Combined naming + location language	Describe a mini map so a partner can point, place, or draw.	Notebook map, paper labels, optional phone recording

Teacher Support and Implementation Conditions

ROOTS-ELT is deliberately compatible with generalist primary teachers. Teachers do not need advanced technology, but they need a small bank of reliable classroom English, accurate pronunciation models, simple routines, and confidence in organizing pair and group work. Professional development should therefore address both language proficiency and the ability to teach a narrow objective through child-friendly activities, local content, and formative assessment.

Implementation should begin with modest language targets. The model recommends depth over breadth: fewer words with more encounters, and fewer sentence patterns with more communicative reuse. A basic lesson kit can include hand-drawn or printed cards, markers, reusable word strips, local photographs, a small speaker when available, and teacher-made mini-books. Schools with stronger digital access can add offline audio, short videos, or interactive games, but these should enhance rather than determine lesson design.

Cultural selection requires professional judgment. Local culture should not be decoration added to an unchanged worksheet; it should provide a meaningful context for communication. Teachers should choose content that is age-appropriate, publicly shareable, and respectful. Everyday architecture, food, landscape, crafts, family activities, and non-sensitive community practices are generally more suitable for primary English tasks than ritual knowledge with sacred, restricted, or contested meanings.

Assessment within ROOTS-ELT

Assessment is integrated across the cycle rather than postponed until the end of a unit. During Relate, the teacher informally checks conceptual readiness by observing whether learners can recognize the theme. During Offer, quick response techniques such as pointing, choosing, or acting provide evidence of comprehension. During Organize, the teacher listens for use of the target words and patterns while moving among pairs. The Task stage produces the clearest performance evidence because learners must use English for a small communicative purpose. Spiral Review then identifies which words or patterns should be recycled. This arrangement makes assessment instructionally useful: evidence is collected in time to influence the next activity or lesson.

For practicality, teachers can use a four-criterion checklist rather than a complex analytic rubric in every lesson. The criteria are meaning, target language use, comprehensibility, and participation. Meaning asks whether the learner conveys the intended message. Target language use asks whether the expected words or sentence pattern are attempted. Comprehensibility concerns whether a listener can understand the learner with

reasonable support; it does not demand native-like pronunciation. Participation concerns the learner's willingness and ability to complete the interactional role. Each criterion can be marked as emerging, developing, or achieved. Periodically, a more detailed speaking or writing rubric can be used for portfolio tasks.

Implementation at Different Resource Levels

ROOTS-ELT can be implemented at three resource levels without changing its instructional logic. At the basic level, the teacher uses voice, board, realia, locally available objects, and learner notebooks. At the enhanced print level, teachers add reusable cards, worksheets, mini books, maps, or teacher-made posters. At the digital extension level, audio, short videos, digital pictures, voice recording, or messaging applications can provide additional input and audience. The model deliberately avoids presenting the digital level as pedagogically superior. A well-managed basic lesson with repeated input and meaningful pair interaction may be more effective than a technology-rich lesson in which learners remain passive.

Conditions for Future Empirical Validation

The conceptual model generates testable propositions for future research. First, lessons using the complete ROOTS sequence should produce more learner speaking opportunities than lessons dominated by explanation and copying. Second, culturally familiar prompts should reduce idea-generation difficulty and increase the amount of relevant learner language compared with unfamiliar prompts of similar linguistic complexity. Third, spiral recycling should improve retention of high-frequency words and patterns across units. Fourth, the low-tech core should produce more consistent implementation across schools with uneven connectivity. These propositions require classroom observation, learner-performance data, teacher interviews, and implementation-fidelity measures before any effectiveness claim can be made.

Table 5. Suggested formative assessment indicators for ROOTS-ELT

Indicator	Emerging	Developing	Achieved
Meaning	Message is unclear without substantial teacher help.	Main message is partly clear with prompts.	Main message is clear for the task.
Target language	Uses little of the target language.	Uses some target words/patterns with support.	Uses the expected words/patterns appropriately.
Comprehensibility	Listener frequently cannot understand.	Generally understandable with repetition or support.	Understandable for the intended classroom audience.
Participation	Needs repeated prompting to take a role.	Participates with reminders or peer support.	Completes the assigned interactional role actively.

DISCUSSION

The ROOTS-ELT model responds to a central tension in rural English education: learners need access to a global language, but effective teaching must begin from local realities. The model does not treat remoteness as a deficit located in children or communities. Instead,

it treats infrastructural constraints as a design condition and local knowledge as a pedagogical resource. This orientation aligns with studies showing that rural teachers adapt pedagogy through familiar content, cooperation, games, and resourceful use of limited media (Astriyani et al., 2025; Febriana et al., 2018). It also addresses challenges reported in Indonesian rural primary English, where materials, teacher preparedness, and learner exposure remain recurring concerns (Laila et al., 2023).

The first contribution of ROOTS-ELT is the systematic placement of cultural familiarity at the beginning of the teaching cycle. Ratri et al. (2025) show that local culture can support primary English syllabus development while sustaining learners' cultural identity. ROOTS-ELT extends this principle from syllabus content to classroom procedure. Culture is not merely what the lesson is about; it becomes a cognitive scaffold that reduces the conceptual distance between the learner and the English task. Describing a familiar place allows beginning learners to devote more attention to vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence formation because the underlying concept is already known.

The second contribution is its oral-first but literacy-connected progression. Young learners in low-exposure settings need comprehensible input and opportunities to rehearse before independent performance. Interactive and multimodal approaches have been associated with motivation and achievement in TEYL (Ratminingsih et al., 2018). ROOTS-ELT therefore uses visible meaning, teacher modeling, gesture, and repetition before pair interaction and a communicative task. Reading and writing can still be introduced through word cards, captions, substitution tables, and mini-books, but written forms are attached to spoken meanings rather than presented in isolation.

The third contribution is resource resilience. Rural studies indicate that technology access is uneven and that teachers often improvise around infrastructure constraints (Kusuma, 2022; Taopan et al., 2026). ROOTS-ELT makes the offline lesson the pedagogical core. This avoids an equity problem in which the quality of instruction collapses when the internet is unavailable. The model is not anti-technology: digital resources can strengthen pronunciation models, visual engagement, and practice when access is dependable. Technology is simply treated as an extension layer rather than a prerequisite.

The fourth contribution concerns interaction and assessment. Rural English teaching often involves limited exposure and uneven learner confidence (Astriyani et al., 2025; Harlina et al., 2020). Increasing exposure cannot be achieved only by asking the teacher to speak more; learners need many small turns. The Organize and Task stages structure peer talk through sentence frames and purposeful outcomes, while Spiral assessment turns observation into planning for later recycling. A teacher can note which learners can identify vocabulary, use a frame, or speak intelligibly, then deliberately revisit those items in a later context.

The model also has implications for teacher preparation as Indonesia moves toward compulsory primary English. A stable instructional sequence can reduce planning complexity for teachers who are still developing English-teaching expertise. Professional learning can therefore be organized around microteaching of ROOTS stages, development of local low-cost materials, classroom English, pronunciation support, and moderation of simple performance checklists. In remote contexts, mentoring networks and offline resource sharing may be as important as one-time workshops.

Nevertheless, the present model should not be interpreted as empirically validated. Conceptual coherence is only the first stage of development. The next phase should involve expert review by TEYL specialists, local teachers, curriculum experts, and individuals knowledgeable about Toraja culture. A small pilot should examine lesson feasibility, learner engagement, teacher workload, and clarity of the stages. Subsequent research can compare

learner speaking or vocabulary performance before and after implementation and document how teachers adapt the model across different remote school settings.

ROOTS-ELT as a Bridge between Culture and Communication

The model extends culture-based English education by specifying what happens after a culturally familiar topic has been selected. A syllabus may identify Tongkonan, local food, tourism, arts, or folklore as relevant content, but the presence of those topics alone does not guarantee communicative learning. ROOTS-ELT adds procedural logic: familiar knowledge is activated, English input is made comprehensible, learners rehearse in socially supported ways, and the lesson culminates in a purposeful task. This distinction between content localization and pedagogical localization is important. Content localization changes what learners talk about; pedagogical localization also changes how the teacher organizes access, interaction, resources, and assessment in response to the local teaching environment.

The model also reframes local culture as something learners can communicate outward, not only something they receive from the teacher. In a Relate stage, learners may contribute knowledge about a place, object, food, story, or community practice. During Task, they use English to represent a small part of that knowledge to classmates or, where appropriate, to a wider audience through posters or recordings. This orientation gives English an additive function: learners are not asked to replace local ways of knowing with imported textbook contexts; they gain another linguistic resource for describing and comparing their world. Such a position is consistent with the identity-preserving rationale of local-culture syllabi for Indonesian young learners (Ratri et al., 2025) and with North Toraja evidence showing strong interest in locally grounded English topics (Tandikombong et al., 2024).

Feasibility for Generalist Primary Teachers

A central implementation question is who will teach primary English. Current national teacher-development efforts explicitly include classroom teachers without English-education backgrounds, which means that instructional guidance must be usable by generalists as well as specialists (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2026). ROOTS-ELT responds by minimizing the amount of technical terminology teachers must remember. The five-stage sequence answers practical planning questions: What familiar experience will open the lesson? What English will learners hear? How will they rehearse it? What will they use it to do? How will I check and recycle it? These questions can function as a planning template even when the teacher's own proficiency is still developing.

Nevertheless, simplification of procedure should not be confused with low expectations for teacher development. Teachers still need accurate classroom English, basic pronunciation support, the ability to select age-appropriate language, and strategies for managing pair and group interaction. They also need sensitivity when choosing cultural content. Professional development for ROOTS-ELT should therefore combine language upgrading with lesson rehearsal. Instead of training teachers only through lectures about methods, workshops can model a ROOTS cycle, allow teachers to experience it as learners, and then require them to adapt the cycle to a local theme. Peer feedback can focus on the clarity of input, amount of learner talk, feasibility of materials, and alignment between the task and the language objective.

Multilingualism, Participation, and Learner Confidence

Participation also requires attention to classroom affect. Rural studies frequently report limited exposure, vocabulary difficulty, low confidence, or lack of interest as barriers to English learning (Harlina et al., 2020; Astriyani et al., 2025). ROOTS-ELT addresses these barriers structurally rather than by relying only on encouragement. Learners speak first in

predictable formats, with visual or peer support, before being asked for more independent production. Pair and small-group rehearsal can distribute speaking opportunities more evenly than whole-class questioning. Familiar topics reduce the burden of inventing content, and short performance targets make success visible. These design features do not eliminate anxiety, but they create conditions in which participation is more achievable for beginning learners.

Policy and Research Implications

Future research should proceed in stages. A formative validation study could first involve English-education experts, primary teachers, and Toraja cultural informants who rate the model for clarity, feasibility, language appropriateness, and cultural responsibility. A small classroom pilot could then examine lesson duration, teacher adherence, learner participation, and the usability of assessment indicators. After revision, a quasi-experimental or mixed-method study could compare learning outcomes across several schools while documenting implementation conditions. Important outcomes would include vocabulary retention, speaking performance, willingness to participate, perceived relevance, and teacher workload. Such research would allow ROOTS-ELT to evolve from a conceptually grounded proposal into an empirically tested model.

CONCLUSION

This article proposes ROOTS-ELT as a context-responsive model for teaching English in remote primary-school settings in North Toraja. The model consists of five stages: Relate to local experience, Offer comprehensible input, Organize collaborative practice, Task learners with meaningful communication, and Spiral review and assessment. Its central proposition is that equitable English teaching in 3T-type contexts should not depend on sophisticated technology or culturally distant materials. Effective instruction can instead be built from familiar content, clear teacher modeling, low-cost multimodal resources, structured peer interaction, meaningful tasks, and repeated performance-based assessment.

The model contributes a practical synthesis of rural English education, TEYL pedagogy, local-culture integration, and low-resource instructional design. Its main limitation is that it remains conceptual and has not yet been tested with teachers and pupils in selected North Toraja primary schools. Future studies should conduct school-level needs analysis, expert validation, iterative lesson trials, teacher usability studies, and pre/post assessment of learner outcomes. If validated, ROOTS-ELT may provide a practical framework for strengthening primary English readiness in remote communities as Indonesia moves toward compulsory English in the 2027/2028 academic year.

For practice, the model recommends that teachers begin with a small number of locally meaningful themes and repeatedly apply the five-stage cycle until the routine becomes manageable for both teacher and learners. For school leaders, the priority is to support joint planning, material sharing, and teacher language development rather than require technology-intensive innovation. For researchers, the immediate next step is systematic validation in North Toraja primary schools representing different degrees of remoteness and resource availability. Such validation should examine not only test scores but also learner talk, participation, cultural relevance, implementation fidelity, and teacher workload. Through this staged process, ROOTS-ELT can be refined as a locally grounded contribution to equitable primary English education in Indonesia.

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