



# Systematic Dilemmas in English Pronunciation Teaching in Rural Primary Schools in China: A Grounded Theory Study of Nanning

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**Abstract**— Constrained by multiple factors such as the examination-oriented education orientation, unbalanced distribution of educational resources, and limitations in teachers' professional capabilities, English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China has long been trapped in a development bottleneck. Taking 10 EFL teachers from rural primary schools in 5 counties of Nanning as the research objects, this study adopted a qualitative research method combining non-participatory classroom observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews and grounded theory to systematically explore the practical status quo, core problems and deep-seated dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. Through a three-level analysis process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding, the core category of systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools was extracted, and its closed-loop cycle mechanism formed by the mutual nesting and dynamic reinforcement of three secondary categories, teachers' development dilemmas, English pronunciation teaching dilemmas and educational ecology dilemmas, was revealed. Insufficient professional capabilities of teachers lead to inefficient teaching implementation, which further weakens the willingness of external environmental support and ultimately exacerbates the lag in teachers' development. The study found that the pronunciation classrooms of EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning generally present a rigid model of teacher-led plus mechanical drilling, and problems such as the lack of suprasegmental feature teaching, the scarcity of effective feedback mechanisms, and the insufficient response to the negative transfer of mother tongue among ethnic minority students are particularly prominent.



**Keywords**— rural primary schools; English pronunciation teaching; systematic dilemmas; grounded theory; EFL teachers

## I. INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation teaching in Chinese primary schools plays a crucial role in the early English learning of Chinese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners (Yang, 2022). It helps Chinese EFL learners establish an accurate English pronunciation foundation, improve their listening comprehension and oral expression abilities, and lay a solid foundation for learning other linguistic knowledge in English (Liu & Fang, 2022).

However, like many other regions in Asia, primary schools in China measure students' academic performance by examination scores. The main focus of English examinations in China is on vocabulary, grammar and reading. This leads to the lack of attention paid by Chinese EFL learners and EFL teachers in primary schools to English pronunciation teaching (Feng, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly prominent in rural areas of China. Therefore, when most EFL learners in rural primary schools in China learn English, they do not have

sufficient real English environment to learn correct pronunciation (Yang, 2022). EFL teachers in rural primary schools focus on English grammar and vocabulary phrases, and English pronunciation teaching is the weakest link in English teaching in rural primary schools, leading to a significant gap in English pronunciation teaching between rural and urban primary schools in China (Zhou, 2021). The prominent challenges faced by English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China urgently need to be solved (Yao, 2021).

In recent years, more and more researchers have begun to pay attention to issues related to English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China (Bao, 2019; Lou, 2019; Tian & Wang, 2022; Wu, 2019; Yang, 2022; Yao, 2021; Zhou, 2019; Zhou, 2021). However, current studies mainly examine the teaching methods and strategies chosen by EFL teachers (Ding, 2020; Guo, 2019), and lack a systematic analysis of the formation mechanism of dilemmas. In particular, there is a lack of special research on pronunciation teaching dilemmas in multi-ethnic rural areas such as Nanning, leading to the difficulty of existing research conclusions in adapting to the complex teaching situations of rural primary schools and failing to provide accurate theoretical support and practical guidance for solving dilemmas. These research gaps represent the need for a large amount of research data to solve the practical problems of the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China.

Based on the above research background and research gaps, this study takes rural primary schools in Nanning as the research context. As the capital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Nanning has many rural areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, with diverse dialects and a high proportion of left-behind children. The problems faced by English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, such as dialect interference, lack of resources and weak teaching staff, are typical and representative. Its research conclusions can provide reference for English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in ethnic minority areas in southern China. This study aims to systematically investigate the practical status quo of English pronunciation teaching by EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning, deeply analyze the core problems and deep-seated dilemmas they face, clarify the formation mechanism of the dilemmas, and ultimately provide targeted suggestions for improving the pronunciation teaching capabilities of EFL teachers in rural primary schools and optimizing pronunciation teaching practices.

To explore the deep-seated reasons for the difficulties and contradictions in English pronunciation teaching in

rural primary schools in China, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth investigation and analysis of EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching, and provide valuable insights and help for improving the actual effect of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China. To achieve this research goal, this study will be further divided into the following specific objectives: to comprehensively and in-depth investigate the current status of English pronunciation teaching by EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning, to analyze the problems existing in the pronunciation teaching of EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning, and to analyze the core problems and deep-seated dilemmas faced by EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning in the process of English pronunciation teaching.

In response to the predetermined research objectives outlined above, the researcher intends to investigate the following three research questions:

RQ1. What is the actual situation of EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in Nanning?

RQ2. What problems exist in their pronunciation teaching practices?

RQ3. What dilemmas do they face in the process of English pronunciation teaching?

Based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) and Topal's (2022) theoretical framework, this indicator system closely focuses on the three research questions, divides three core dimensions: EFL teachers' cognition, teaching environment and pronunciation teaching practice, and sets secondary dimensions and clear operational indicators under each dimension to ensure that the indicators are observable, measurable and applicable to research and analysis.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

To comprehensively and in-depth respond to the three core research questions proposed in this study and accurately analyze the systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, this study adopts an interpretive qualitative research design, focusing on the real scenarios, internal contradictions and deep-seated dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. Through triangulation of multi-source data, it reveals the interaction mechanism between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices, and provides empirical evidence for analyzing the deep-seated reasons for pronunciation teaching difficulties. Among them, the researcher conducted one pre-class interview and one post-class interview for each participating EFL teacher, totaling

2 interviews. Two classroom observations were conducted for each EFL teacher, with an interval of one year between them, aiming to capture the stability and dynamic changes of teachers' pronunciation teaching practices, avoid the contingency of a single observation, and ensure that the teachers' actual teaching situation and dilemmas can be comprehensively and truly reflected.

The research objects were selected by Maximum Variation Sampling. Ten EFL teachers were selected from rural primary schools in 5 counties of Nanning as the research objects. The sampling process fully considered the teachers' educational background and teaching years. Among them, 3 teachers had an English major background, and 7 teachers did not have an English major background. There were 3 teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience, 5 teachers with 5-15 years of teaching experience, and 2 teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experience. This study has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee, all participating EFL teachers have signed the informed consent form, and the interview data have been anonymized.

The interview outline adopted a semi-structured design, focusing on the three research questions, guided by the two theories, strictly corresponding to the two core dimensions of teachers' cognition of pronunciation teaching and pronunciation teaching practice and their subordinate operational indicators. It was divided into two parts: pre-class interview and post-class interview, both focusing on the core cognition, actual behaviors and practical dilemmas of teachers' pronunciation teaching, to ensure the pertinence and systematicness of the interview content. The S-CVI of the interview outline was 0.81, and each I-CVI was greater than 0.7. The pilot study showed that EFL teachers in rural primary schools recognized the validity and comprehensibility of the interview outline. The classroom observation outline adopted a structured observation design, focusing on non-participatory observation, strictly based on the two theoretical frameworks and the operational indicators of teachers' beliefs and practice dimensions, clarifying the observation dimensions, observation content and recording standards, to ensure that the observation process is operable and the observation results are quantifiable. The S-CVI of the observation outline was 0.81, each I-CVI was greater than 0.7, and the Cohen's Kappa coefficient was 0.72.

For the qualitative research data collected in this study, Grounded Theory will be adopted and analyzed using NVivo 15. The information involved in the interviews, such as teachers' educational background, teaching experience, cognition of pronunciation teaching, teaching methods and problems faced, will be comprehensively explored and converted into independent

concepts. Two coders conducted independent coding, the Kappa coefficient was 0.71, and the divergent parts were resolved through discussions by the research team.

In the coding process of this study, the newly added interview texts and classroom observation texts were continuously coded. After coding the interview data of 8 teachers and the observation data of 17 classes, no new concepts, categories or logical connections appeared in the newly added data. The 10 cases have fully covered all core categories and correlation mechanisms of teachers' experience, teaching cognition, educational ecology and teaching practices. The explanatory power of the core category, systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, has reached sufficiency. Therefore, this study believes that the data have reached saturation, and the coding process is completed.

### III. RESULTS

In the field of EFL education in rural primary schools, this study conducted in-depth research on pronunciation teaching practices, constructed a comprehensive and systematic analytical framework through three-level coding, and revealed many dilemmas and the underlying systematic problems existing in EFL pronunciation teaching practices in rural primary schools.

#### Teachers' Development Dilemmas

The researcher integrated initial concepts such as cognition of pronunciation teaching, self-efficacy, and pronunciation training, focusing on the dilemmas at the level of teachers' own cognition and abilities. Its logical chain is that due to pronunciation training, teaching experience, and educational background, teachers form a teacher-centered, examination-centered approach with insufficient pronunciation teaching, leading to inconsistencies between teaching beliefs and teaching practices, accompanied by low self-efficacy.

#### English Pronunciation Teaching Dilemmas

The researcher integrated initial concepts such as problems with teaching equipment, lack of teaching resources, insufficient teaching time, and insufficient pronunciation teaching, focusing on the dilemmas in the implementation process of pronunciation teaching. Its logical chain is that due to problems with teaching equipment, lack of teaching resources, insufficient teaching time, and poor pronunciation, teachers find it difficult to carry out suprasegmental teaching, emotional teaching, and pronunciation feedback, leading to insufficient pronunciation teaching, which is exacerbated by the heavy teaching tasks.

#### Educational Ecology Dilemmas

Integrating initial concepts such as characteristics of rural primary schools, characteristics of rural families, and rural primary school students, focusing on the constraints of the external system on pronunciation teaching. Its logical chain is that due to the large number of left-behind children and parents' inability to provide tutoring, there is

a structural disconnection in home-school cooperation. Coupled with the lack of English practice, a large number of ethnic minorities, and students' shyness, rural primary school students have a poor English foundation and do not pay attention to pronunciation.

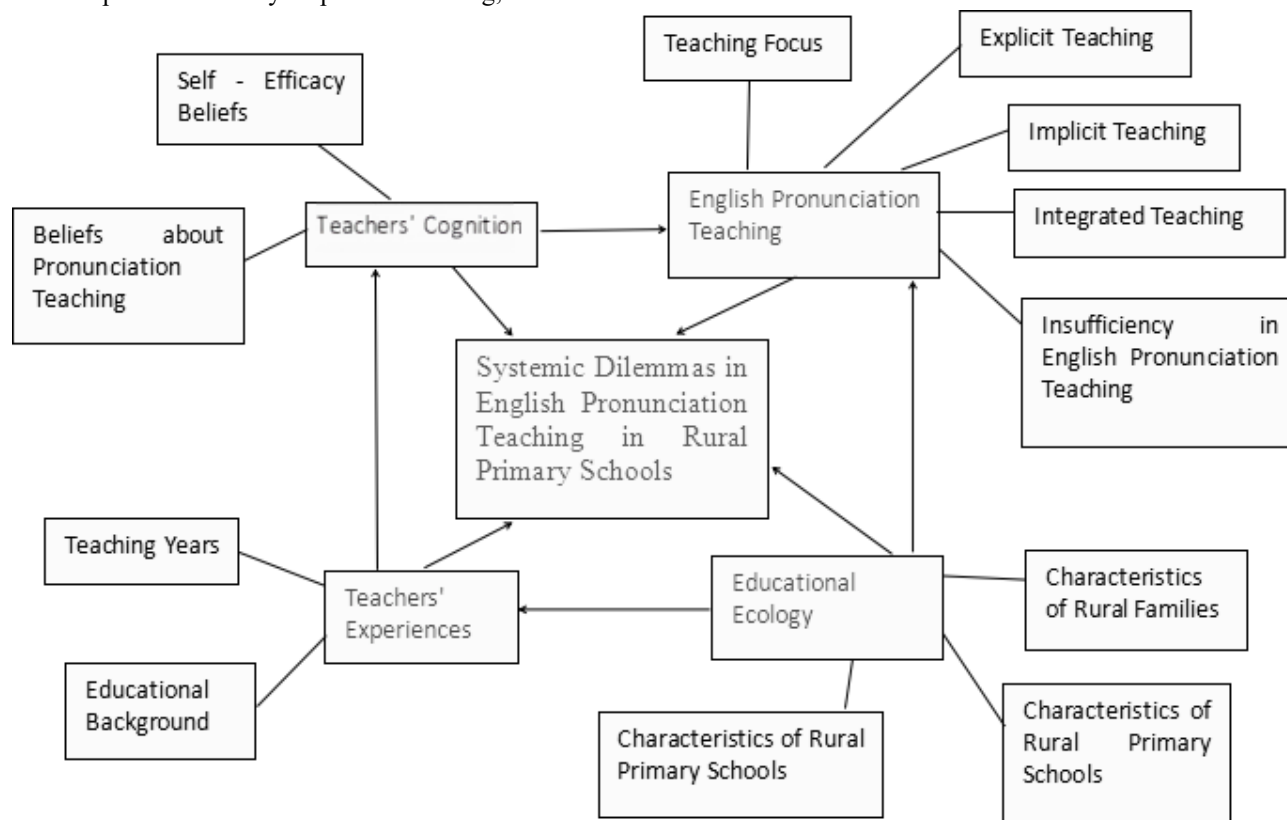


Fig.1 Grounded Theory Diagram of English Pronunciation Teaching in Rural Primary Schools

All secondary categories focus on various problems and obstacles existing in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, and these problems are not isolated but interrelated and mutually influential, forming an organic whole that cannot be summarized by a single secondary category or scattered concepts. Therefore, it is necessary to extract a core category that can cover all secondary categories and dominate all research information. The expression systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools can not only include the core connotation of all secondary categories but also reflect the correlation and integrity between various dilemmas. Its explanatory power has reached sufficiency, which meets the criteria for determining the core category of Grounded Theory, which is the core data support for determining this core category. As shown in Figure 1, by analyzing the correlation between the core category and the three secondary categories, this study constructs the following theoretical framework. The systematic dilemmas in EFL

pronunciation teaching practices in rural primary schools are the result of the interaction between teachers' development dilemmas, English pronunciation teaching dilemmas, and educational ecology dilemmas. Among them, teachers' development dilemmas directly restrict the solution of English pronunciation teaching dilemmas, and educational ecology dilemmas further exacerbate teachers' professional anxiety and the lack of teaching resources, forming a vicious circle of teachers' development, teaching practices and external ecology. In addition, problems such as insufficient pronunciation teaching in English pronunciation teaching dilemmas, in turn, strengthen the inconsistency between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices, making it more difficult to break through the systematic dilemmas.

Based on the theoretical framework formed by three-level coding, the research conclusions are as follows. The dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools are a complex symbiotic system. This system is composed of three core dimensions: the

disconnect between teachers' cognition and practice, the limitations of teachers' professional development, and the constraints of educational ecology. These three dimensions are nested with each other and dynamically strengthened, forming a vicious circle with path dependence. This is a systematic social system composed of the interaction between internal factors including teachers' experience, teachers' cognition, teaching content and methods and external environment including family, school, and countryside.

This system has the following characteristics. First, the various elements of the system are diverse. Systematic dilemmas involve multi-dimensional elements such as teachers' cognition and abilities, teaching resources and time, external environment and national culture, and each element includes specific sub-problems, reflecting the complexity of the dilemmas. Second, there is a strong correlation between the various elements of the system. Each element does not exist in isolation but influences each other and is mutually causal. Finally, the system is stubborn. Due to the strong correlation between elements forming a closed-loop cycle, improvements in a single dimension are difficult to break the dilemmas, leading to the system having strong stability and stubbornness, which has long restricted the improvement of the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools.

The following will analyze the three research questions of this study in detail.

RQ1. What is the actual situation of EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in Nanning?

Through the analysis of the classroom practices of English pronunciation teaching by rural EFL teachers in primary schools in ten cases, there are significant commonalities in the core model of their classroom practices, but differences in detailed methods, resource utilization and other aspects.

Teaching practices generally focus on teacher-led plus mechanical drilling. All cases show that the classroom is mainly driven by teachers' demonstrations and instructions, and students' main learning methods are follow-up reading, reading aloud and repeated drilling, lacking links for independent exploration or creative application of pronunciation knowledge. The teaching content focuses on phonemes and word pronunciation, and suprasegmental teaching is almost blank. The pronunciation teaching of all teachers focuses on letter pronunciation, word pronunciation and basic phonetic rules, and the teaching of suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress and liaison is generally lacking. Teaching resources and tools rely on textbooks and supporting audio,

lacking supplementary resources. The teaching resources of all EFL teachers are limited to textbooks and supporting audio, and almost no extracurricular materials are introduced. Teaching aids are generally single, mainly multimedia plus blackboard, and most classroom observation outlines mention that teaching aids are single, which is not conducive to showing the key points of pronunciation. Effective feedback is generally lacking, and emotional motivation is insufficient. All cases have the problem of no feedback or untimely feedback, and the emotional motivation for students is seriously insufficient.

The differential characteristics of classroom practices of English pronunciation teaching by rural EFL teachers are as follows:

In terms of the depth of pronunciation knowledge explanation, rural teachers with an English major educational background are more systematic. English major teachers will take the initiative to explain pronunciation rules, while non-English major teachers mostly stay at the surface of demonstrating pronunciation and students' follow-up reading, and rarely explain or demonstrate pronunciation rules.

In terms of the application of implicit teaching, some teachers try diversified forms. Teachers who try implicit teaching will infiltrate pronunciation learning through songs, games, animations, etc. Teachers without implicit teaching do not use forms such as songs and games, and teaching only relies on follow-up reading and reading aloud.

A few teachers try peer correction and group interaction. Individual participants encourage students to form English learning groups, listen to and read each other after class, correct pronunciation, assign group leaders to record mistakes, and supplement classroom drilling through peer interaction.

There are differences in orientation between the emphasis on exams and communication. Some EFL teachers take both exams and communication into account. They not only pay attention to exam contents such as word spelling and sentence pattern mastery but also emphasize students' oral communication. However, some EFL teachers focus on exams. Because exams do not directly test pronunciation skills, they compress the time for pronunciation teaching and focus on word spelling and grammar. Although some teachers emphasize communication, the communication content is mechanical and not combined with exams or actual needs.

In summary, the pronunciation teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools are highly consistent in core models such as teacher-led, mechanical drilling, single resources and lack of feedback, but there are certain

differentiations in the depth of pronunciation knowledge explanation, the application of implicit teaching, the attempt of group interaction, and the emphasis on exams and communication due to differences in teachers' professional backgrounds and teaching concepts.

RQ2. What problems exist in their pronunciation teaching practices?

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the English language teaching practices of EFL teachers in primary schools in ten cases, the core problems are concentrated in the dimensions of teaching model, content coverage, resource utilization, feedback mechanism, student adaptability and teachers' own abilities, as follows:

The pronunciation teaching model adopted by EFL teachers is rigid, and students' subjectivity is lacking. All cases present a rigid model of teacher-led plus mechanical drilling, and students are in a state of passive imitation for a long time. The classroom is centered on teachers' demonstrations and instructions, and students mainly learn through follow-up reading, reading aloud and repeated sentence patterns, lacking opportunities for independent questioning, exploring rules or creative application of language. Primary school students are in the concrete operational stage in Piaget's cognitive development theory, and their thinking relies on the support of concrete images. The understanding of abstract pronunciation rules such as tongue position and lip shape needs to be realized through intuitive experience and interactive operation (Piaget, 1976). Primary school students are in a developmental stage dominated by concrete image thinking, with a short attention span (about 20 to 30 minutes), strong curiosity, and dependence on multi-sensory experience and interactive participation. Their learning characteristics are that they need to stimulate interest through gamified activities, rely on concrete situations to understand knowledge, desire active participation rather than passive acceptance, and need immediate feedback to strengthen learning effects (Yu, & Zhang, 2021).

The content of English pronunciation teaching is one-sided, and the cultivation of language ability is incomplete. There is a structural defect in the pronunciation teaching in the cases, which only focuses on phonemes and word pronunciation, and completely ignores suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress and liaison. All cases indicate that suprasegmental teaching is almost blank, evaluated as extremely poor. The explanation of pronunciation rules is fragmented. Non-English major teachers mostly stay at the surface of demonstrating pronunciation—students' follow-up reading, and even English major teachers do not systematically cover the integrity of the pronunciation system. In rural education,

EFL teachers should emphasize English phonemes and pay attention to suprasegmental features at the same time. These phonemes are affected by the negative transfer of learners' mother tongue, and failure to master them will lead to misunderstandings in English communication. Teachers should also strengthen the teaching of suprasegmental features such as stress, intonation and pauses (Li, 2016). Therefore, in the context of increasingly frequent global communication, English pronunciation teaching should balance segmental and suprasegmental teaching. At the same time, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes that the ultimate goal of language learning is to effectively convey meaning, and suprasegmental features are key tools for semantic expression and emotional transmission in oral communication (Hymes, 2012).

The lack of EFL teachers' feedback and emotional mechanisms leads to limited students' learning motivation. All EFL teachers have the problem of no feedback or untimely feedback. Constructivism emphasizes that feedback is a cognitive scaffold built by teachers for students to help students bridge the gap between their current pronunciation level and potential development level (Chaiklin, 2003). In pronunciation learning, students' cognition of pronunciation rules is vague, and it is necessary to make implicit mistakes explicit through feedback to advance from mechanical imitation to understanding mastery. The lack of feedback in all cases directly leads to the fracture of students' cognitive scaffolds, further leading to students' cognition of pronunciation rules staying at the surface of imitation and unable to build deep logic. At the same time, EFL teachers in rural primary schools are seriously lacking in emotional education in English pronunciation teaching. They are lacking in encouragement and personalized support for students, especially for rural primary school EFL learners who have difficulty in pronunciation, lacking targeted motivation. The particularity of rural pronunciation teaching, such as the stronger emotional needs of left-behind students and more prominent learning challenges, determines that emotional teaching is not an additional item but a basic item. Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that learners' intrinsic motivation comes from the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci, & Ryan, 2012). The core of emotional teaching is to meet these needs through supportive interaction, transforming pronunciation learning from passive requirement to active participation. In rural pronunciation teaching, the role of emotional teaching in meeting needs is particularly crucial.

Insufficient adaptability to special student groups and weak teaching pertinence. Faced with the rural student

groups with a high proportion of ethnic minority students, greatly influenced by dialects, a large number of left-behind children, and weak family support, teachers have not designed response strategies for mother tongue pronunciation transfer, allowing students to mark word pronunciation in Chinese, forming Guangxi-style Chinglish. According to the mother tongue negative transfer theory in Second Language Acquisition, when there are differences in the phonetic systems between learners' mother tongue and the target language, active intervention through contrastive teaching is needed; otherwise, mother tongue habits will interfere with target language acquisition. The ethnic minority students mainly from the Zhuang nationality in the cases are facing such problems, but the teaching has not responded to them pertinently. Teachers have not designed tools such as contrast tables between Zhuang and English pronunciation, and only rely on the demonstration and follow-up reading model, leading students to replace English sounds with approximate mother tongue sounds, and mistakes are solidified with practice. Differentiated Instruction Theory emphasizes that teaching should design hierarchical goals and tasks according to students' abilities, backgrounds and needs (Pham, 2012). However, in the cases, teachers adopt unified teaching for students with weak foundations, left-behind children and ethnic minority students, failing to respond to their particularities.

Teachers' own abilities and development motivation are insufficient, restricting the quality of teaching. Due to the lack of systematic learning of phonetics and linguistics, non-English major teachers generally have problems such as inaccurate pronunciation and inability to analyze students' mistakes. Even English major teachers have limitations such as insufficient mastery of phonetics knowledge and barely qualified pronunciation, which affects the authority of demonstration. All cases mention that the school does not provide pronunciation training and lacks expert guidance, making it difficult for teachers to obtain systematic improvement opportunities. This ecological environment of innate insufficiency plus acquired lack of support makes the pronunciation ability of rural EFL teachers remain in a low-level solidified state for a long time. This problem seriously restricts the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. Krashen's Input Hypothesis points out that the core of Second Language Acquisition is comprehensible and high-quality input (Krashen, 1989). The pronunciation of EFL teachers in rural primary schools is the most direct and frequent source of pronunciation input for students. If teachers' own pronunciation is inaccurate, the input received by students is itself biased, which will directly lead to the solidification of incorrect interlanguage.

The imbalance between the time and task allocation of pronunciation teaching leads to insufficient teaching depth. All teachers are faced with the problems of tight classroom time for pronunciation teaching and heavy work tasks, leading to language teaching, especially pronunciation teaching, being compressed into fragmented links, making it impossible to carry out in-depth systematic training. Second Language Acquisition, especially English pronunciation, a skill that relies on muscle memory and rule transfer, requires continuous and coherent comprehensible input. Fragmented and intermittent input will destroy the cumulative internalization of pronunciation rules, and learners cannot integrate isolated pronunciation knowledge into systematic pronunciation ability in a short time. Due to heavy teaching tasks, all teachers compress pronunciation teaching into an incidental link of vocabulary teaching, lacking continuous and special pronunciation training time. This fragmentation leads to the disconnection of the pronunciation input received by students. The rules are forgotten before they are internalized, and finally, students can only mechanically imitate individual words and cannot flexibly use them in sentences. Due to the lack of time, teachers can only cover the most basic contents such as phonemes and word pronunciation, and the teaching of suprasegmental features is completely lacking, leading to students being able to read words but unable to speak coherent sentences.

RQ3. What dilemmas do they face in the process of English pronunciation teaching?

Combined with the core characteristics of the systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, due to their special geographical location, the dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools are more unique on the basis of commonalities, which can be specifically analyzed from two dimensions: the dilemmas of internal core elements and the constraints of external environment. Various dilemmas are intertwined and form a closed-loop cycle.

Internal elements are the core of the implementation of pronunciation teaching. The dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in this dimension directly lead to inefficient teaching and form negative interaction with the external environment.

At the level of EFL teachers, there are triple limitations: teachers' cognitive deviation, insufficient teaching ability, and lack of pronunciation training. The teachers' cognition of English pronunciation teaching by EFL teachers in rural primary schools is characterized by utilitarianism and marginalization. Most EFL teachers in rural primary schools, influenced by the examination-

oriented orientation, regard pronunciation teaching as a non-examination auxiliary content, only focusing on the teaching of individual phonemes required in textbooks, and ignoring suprasegmental features.

EFL teachers in rural primary schools also have the characteristics of insufficient English pronunciation and teaching ability. On the one hand, most EFL teachers in border rural primary schools are recruited locally, and some teachers have not received systematic phonetics training, and even have pronunciation deviations themselves, making it difficult to provide standardized demonstrations. On the other hand, teachers lack targeted teaching methods, only relying on the traditional model of follow-up reading and repetition, and cannot design teaching according to the characteristics of rural students.

At the level of English pronunciation teaching content and methods, there are dual constraints: being divorced from rural reality and inefficient use of resources. The content of English pronunciation teaching is completely divorced from students' lives and rural characteristics. The existing pronunciation content in textbooks is mostly based on urban life scenarios, which has nothing to do with the rural life scenarios that rural students come into contact with daily, making it difficult for students to understand the practical significance of English pronunciation learning. At the same time, teaching resources are scarce. Rural primary schools generally lack special resources for pronunciation teaching. Although schools are equipped with multimedia equipment, teachers sometimes leave the equipment idle due to insufficient operational capabilities.

Teaching time and teaching effect have a squeezed dilemma. The time for pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools is seriously squeezed. Most classrooms only use 5 to 10 minutes to explain pronunciation, mainly focusing on teachers' leading reading and students' follow-up reading, lacking time for practice and feedback. At the same time, because teachers cannot accurately judge students' pronunciation mistakes, error correction is mostly general correction, making it difficult for students to improve. Finally, a vicious circle is formed: short time for English pronunciation teaching leads to insufficient pronunciation practice, which leads to poor effect of English pronunciation teaching, and ultimately makes EFL teachers in rural primary schools more reluctant to invest time.

The external environment is the support system for primary school English pronunciation teaching. The particularity of rural primary schools makes the dilemmas in this dimension more difficult to break through, and further solidifies the limitations of internal elements.

At the family level, there is a dual disconnection of lack of support and cultural estrangement. First, the home-school cooperation system is seriously disconnected. The proportion of left-behind children in border rural primary schools is relatively large, and most guardians are grandparents who do not understand English and cannot assist in after-class pronunciation practice. Even if there are parents accompanying them, most parents do not understand English pronunciation at all due to the lack of English use scenarios in rural China, leading to the loss of classroom teaching effect of English pronunciation teaching after class. Third, rural families generally lack cognitive awareness of the cultural significance of English pronunciation, and even have the concept that learning English is useless. This attitude will directly affect the learning motivation of rural primary school students.

At the school level, there are constraints of insufficient resource inclination and deviation in management orientation. Rural primary schools have limited funds, and most resources are inclined to major subjects, with very little special investment in English pronunciation teaching. Some schools even do not include pronunciation teaching in the English teaching evaluation system, and only measure teachers' teaching effect by written test scores, leading to EFL teachers' lack of motivation to improve pronunciation teaching. The number of EFL teachers in rural primary schools is small, making it difficult to carry out special teaching and research on pronunciation teaching. Even if there is inter-school linkage, it is difficult to normalize due to long distance and inconvenient transportation. Teachers cannot solve specific problems in pronunciation teaching through peer mutual assistance, and can only maintain the traditional teaching model.

The above internal and external dilemmas are not isolated but form a negative closed loop, making it difficult for single improvement measures to take effect. The insufficient ability of EFL teachers in rural primary schools leads to traditional teaching methods, which leads to students' low interest in learning pronunciation, and then leads to poor pronunciation teaching effect. The poor teaching effect makes schools unwilling to invest in pronunciation teaching resources, and the lack of family support further weakens the effect of students' after-class practice, ultimately exacerbating the insufficient ability of teachers. At the same time, language negative transfer requires targeted pronunciation contrastive teaching, but the lack of teacher training makes it impossible to carry out such teaching, and regional development limitations make it difficult for training resources to reach rural primary schools. This strong correlation makes the dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural

primary schools stable, which has long restricted the improvement of teaching quality and needs to break the closed loop from the perspective of system reconstruction.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in Nanning generally adopts the teacher-led and mechanical drilling model. The classroom is mainly based on follow-up reading and reading aloud, and students lack opportunities for independent exploration. This practice is directly conflicting with the core proposition of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and mechanical drilling can only strengthen the memory of pronunciation forms but cannot achieve meaning transmission. At the same time, this model violates the Multimodal Teaching Theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In the cases, teachers only rely on listening to audio and follow-up reading, leading rural primary school students to replace English sounds with approximate mother tongue sounds because they cannot visualize the pronunciation movements of English phonemes, which confirms the view that a single input model will exacerbate mother tongue negative transfer (Li, 2016).

All teachers in this study have the problem of no feedback at all, neither correcting implicit mistakes such as insufficiently rounded vowels and misplaced stress nor tracking recurring problems. This violates Selinker's (2015) Interlanguage Theory; the lack of corrective feedback will lead to error fossilization. At the same time, the lack of feedback conflicts with Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. Because students cannot clarify the direction of improvement, they gradually lose learning motivation, forming a cycle of blind practice leading to error solidification. Many researchers hold a positive attitude towards corrective feedback in pronunciation teaching. They believe that corrective feedback on mistakes helps language learners improve their pronunciation. Long (1996) and Swain (1995) argue that feedback can help learners recognize the gap between their own interlanguage and the target language, thereby adjusting their output and improving the efficiency and effect of target language acquisition. Darcy (2018) also put forward similar suggestions, that is, corrective feedback is very necessary for learners in the process of learning a language, and corrective feedback can help learners notice the difference between their own incorrect pronunciation and the standard pronunciation. Cooper (2019) found that teachers hold different views on the content of corrective feedback, but in actual teaching, all participating teachers gave feedback to learners at the word level. Through a large number of literatures on corrective feedback, Saito (2021)

believes that research on corrective feedback teaching to promote the development of second language pronunciation is increasing rapidly, and both teachers and learners agree that providing corrective feedback is an important part of the development of English pronunciation teaching. Especially when problematic English pronunciation errors hinder the successful communication between both parties, corrective feedback becomes particularly important. O'Brien (2021) also found through literature research that corrective feedback can effectively improve pronunciation comprehensibility.

For the first time, this study takes rural primary schools in Nanning as samples, reveals the unique contradictions of examination-oriented orientation plus mother tongue negative transfer plus lack of teaching resources in primary school English pronunciation teaching in ethnic minority areas, makes up for the insufficient attention of existing research to rural contexts, expands the systematic view of pronunciation teaching, and incorporates teachers' cognition, teaching practices and rural ecology into a unified analytical framework, providing a new perspective for understanding the complexity of educational dilemmas, which echoes the sociocultural embeddedness theory advocated by The Douglas Fir Group (2016). This study refines the application of Second Language Acquisition Theory in the diverse rural environment, enhancing the situational adaptability of the theory. The findings of this study on the mother tongue negative transfer of ethnic minority students and the lack of after-class support for left-behind children supplement the Second Language Acquisition Theory. Odlin's (1989) Transfer Theory points out that differences between mother tongue and target language will lead to negative transfer, but this study further finds that in the multi-ethnic rural context, teachers' passive adaptation to negative transfer will exacerbate error solidification, which provides a new case for the performance of Transfer Theory in the context of lack of teacher intervention. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecosystem Theory emphasizes the impact of the outer environment on the classroom, while this study specifically reveals how the nested relationship of a large number of left-behind children in rural areas, disconnected home-school cooperation and insufficient classroom time weakens the continuity of pronunciation input, making the Ecosystem Theory more targeted in explaining the inefficiency of rural foreign language teaching.

In summary, the theoretical value of this study lies in enriching the application of Educational System Theory by constructing a systematic dilemma model, refining the performance of Second Language Acquisition Theory in multi-ethnic and left-behind children groups, and

providing empirical reference for the situational implementation of pronunciation teaching theory. These findings not only verify the universality of existing theories but also supplement their unique mechanisms in rural education scenarios, providing a localized theoretical perspective for subsequent research. At the same time, this study also provides a lot of enlightenment for the practice of pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. This study not only accurately identifies the specific dilemmas of rural pronunciation teaching but also provides solutions adapted to resource conditions, teachers' abilities and students' characteristics, avoiding the misunderstanding of directly applying urban experience, and providing an operable localized path for improving the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools.

## V. CONCLUSION

Through Grounded Theory analysis, this study draws the research conclusion that the dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools are a complex symbiotic system. This system is composed of three core dimensions: pronunciation teaching practice dilemmas, teachers' professional development dilemmas and educational ecology dilemmas. These three dimensions are nested with each other and dynamically strengthened, forming a vicious circle with path dependence. The revelation of this systematic dilemma provides a theoretical basis for solving the problems of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. It is necessary to carry out collaborative intervention from three dimensions: teachers' development, pronunciation teaching optimization and rural education ecology improvement, rather than repairing a single link.

At the same time, this study also has its own limitations. First, the research samples are only limited to rural primary schools in Nanning, not covering other regions such as rural areas in other provinces in China or other cities in Guangxi. The educational ecology of different regions will significantly affect teachers' behaviors, so the conclusions of this study are difficult to be directly generalized to other rural contexts, and the external validity is limited. Second, this study proposes that the dilemmas of rural pronunciation teaching are a system formed by the interaction of teachers' development, teaching practices and educational ecology, but it does not clarify the impact intensity of each element. In the future, quantitative research can be used to construct a system dynamics model. Convert the core elements in the qualitative conclusions into measurable variables. For example, teachers' development dilemmas can be quantified as the duration of pronunciation training and the

score of phonetics knowledge test. Educational ecology dilemmas can be quantified as the proportion of left-behind children and the score of parents' participation questionnaire. Teaching practice dilemmas can be quantified as the coverage rate of suprasegmental teaching. Structural equation modeling is used to model multi-dimensional data, test the significance of the hypothetical paths proposed in this study, such as the lack of teacher training leading to single teaching methods leading to insufficient resource utilization, calculate the standardized coefficients of each path, identify the key nodes in the system, and provide quantitative basis for targeted intervention.

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