

TEACHING ENGLISH IN EASTERN PART OF INDONESIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Journal Article

**Presented to the Department of English Language Education as a student's final project to
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English Language Education.**



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APPROVAL SHEET

**TEACHING ENGLISH IN EASTERN PART OF INDONESIA:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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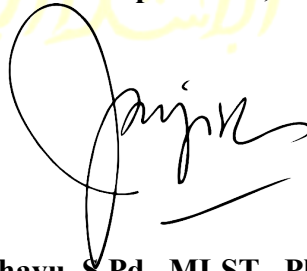


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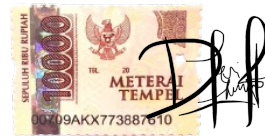
We (1) Devi Syahfira Nakul; and (2) Banatul Murtafi'ah, the undersigned authors of the manuscript entitled "Teaching English in Eastern Part of Indonesia: Challenges and Opportunities" submitted to the Journal of English Education Program (JEEP), certify that this manuscript is an original work that does not contain plagiarism as a whole or in parts. This paper has not been submitted or published anywhere else. We authorize the journal's editor to make any required alterations, perform edits, and carry out proofreading on the article, to ensure its compliance with the journal's publication standards prior to being published.

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Signatures



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MOTTO

“For indeed, with hardship (will be) ease.

Indeed, with hardship (will be) ease.”

(Q.S. Al-Insyirah: 5-6)

“Fate is unpredictable, destiny cannot be changed,

but prayer and effort can change everything.

Nothing is impossible when Allah said *kun fayakun.*”

(Ust. Hanan Attaki)

DEDICATION

I dedicated this manuscript to:

1. My dearest family, Mr. Abdurahman Nakul, S.E., Mrs. Nurheny Bakay, Nana Nakul, S.Ak., Aulia Nakul, and Farits Nakul who always giving me best support and pretty prayers. Thank you for being my reason to always be enthusiastic and not despair in completing this paper.
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Yogyakarta, 21 May 2024

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TEACHING ENGLISH IN EASTERN PART OF INDONESIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: Though several researchs regarding teaching English in rural areas has massively been conducted, most of them focused on the challenges and none to few of them discussed the opportunities. This research, therefore, aims to look at the challenges and opportunities of the teaching experience of a pre-service English teacher when participating in the Kampus Mengajar program in the eastern part of Indonesia. The research method used is a qualitative study that specifically employed phenomenology as the design. Furthermore, this research was conducted in Serui City, Papua with data collected in the form of video and audio recordings from teaching grade 4 and 5 students of elementary school as well as the interviews with the principal of the school. The results of this study showed four challenges including: the absence of English teachers; lack of English competence (vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation); students' lack of confidence; and sources of learning. Despite the challenges, there were also opportunities that emerged from this research, such as: enthusiasm (excitement and interest); expectation; and courage and willingness to communicate. Further recommendations are also proposed in this article.

Keywords: EFL, rural areas, challenges, opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, English as an international language is widely used in many countries for a variety of purposes; business, diplomacy, finance and trade, as well as science and technology. Given the importance of English, learning English is believed to be useful for exploring broader knowledge thus enhancing one's competence. Aside from being essential for future studies and employment, it can also boost self-confidence and expand relationships and communication globally (Zefran, 2020). This is also related to the development of information and communication technology which is a sign of progress in the world of education, and this is a benchmark for the quality of education in a country (Prayudha, 2023). Accordingly, the use of English is considered very important for all people from all walks of life, including people living in rural areas. However, sometimes teachers face challenges when teaching in those areas. Starting from the problem of the small number of teachers who are willing to teach in Papua, access to location, the existing curriculum in elementary schools, student motivation, to environmental factors, socio-

economic life, and support from parents. According to Plessis (2014), the characteristics of educational problems experienced by rural schools include four points, including 1) Affordability; the distance of schools in rural areas is far from service sources, 2) Limited accessibility; limited quality staff, university services, and teacher development & training, 3) Minimum number of teachers with appropriate qualifications, and 4) Lack of funds for learning facility needs. Further, this will affect the English learning process as well as being a challenge for English teachers, considering that they are required to use creativity to deal with the problem of limited environment and school conditions (Fadilah et al, 2023). Creativity is prioritized due to limited resources and learning media (Saiful & Triyono, 2018). On the other hand, the characteristics of students in rural areas are seen from family factors and economic conditions. The English learning ability of students, especially young learners, is a result of the students' socio-economic position, and the students' socio-economic and career levels are also influenced by their parents' educational background (Khulel, 2021). According to Hossain (2016), the English learning achievement of students in rural areas is lower than students in urban areas. This is influenced by the education of the students' parents, resulting in a lack of concern for education as well as economic conditions which make it difficult for them to obtain adequate educational resources regarding knowledge of English. Therefore, the researcher might be able to find what efforts that can be made by the teachers in facing challenges and seeing opportunities that are open to pre-service English teachers in this matter.

Previous studies have already conducted or investigated English teaching in rural areas of Indonesia. However, they focused on teachers who took part in the SM-3T program as participants (e.g. Febriana et al, 2018). They investigated SM-3T teachers who teach at seventeen different junior high schools in rural areas each from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua and Nusa Tenggara. As for the results, there are seven challenges that SM-3T teachers encounter when teaching in Indonesian rural schools, including infrastructure; source of learning; language barrier; parent mindset; inadequacy of teachers; student competence, and student mindset (Febriana et al, 2018).

Another related study was conducted by Poedjiastutie et al., (2021) who focused on socio-cultural challenges in Pemana Island, East Nusa Tenggara. The researchers attempted to involve English teachers, students over 16 years of age, and parents as participants of the research. The research pointed out three challenges, namely, the challenge of the economic situation in Pemana Island; the challenge of administering the national curriculum; and the challenge of society's beliefs about English (Poedjiastutie et al, 2021). A year after that, Kusuma (2022) used a phenomenological approach to observe the experiences of EFL teachers regarding readiness, the teaching process, and the challenges faced when teaching online during the COVID-19 period in rural schools in Indonesia. The results of this research are summarized in three themes, namely, the readiness of teaching English using technology; the implementation of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic; and the challenges while conducting online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kusuma, 2022).

This study aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities of teaching English in the Eastern part of Indonesia, especially in Papua as a part of Kampus Mengajar Program held by the Ministry of Education and Culture. While many previous studies have focused on the challenges and some have provided solutions, such as the study by Sharmin (2019)

who involved 19 English language teachers to obtain data and identify the main barriers to English language teaching in rural primary schools in Bangladesh and how teachers perceive overcoming these barriers. Then there is also a study from Endriyati et al (2019) which identifies the challenges of teaching English in rural and urban schools with students' lack of motivation, lack of parental support, students' poor vocabulary mastery, teachers' inadequate IT knowledge, teachers' lack of skills and training in conducting English lesson and insufficient school facilities as the findings. Besides that, there are also Aziz et al (2019) whose study aims to determine teachers' perceptions of English language teaching in rural areas, identify sources of stress for teachers in teaching English in rural schools, and determine strategies used by teachers in coping with stress.

Although there has been some research on teaching English in rural areas, most of them only focused on the challenges and solutions to the problems. This research is different from those previous studies in terms of describing not only challenges but also the opportunities of teaching English in eastern part of Indonesia. This research is crucial to be conducted because in addition to the challenges encountered that can be an evaluation for teachers or pre-service English teachers who will teach in rural areas, the opportunities that arise are also a value prospect for English Education students and or pre-service English teachers in their future. This study, therefore, attempts to look at the opportunities behind the challenges by answering the following questions: what are the challenges and opportunities of teaching English in an eastern part of Indonesia?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

This study utilized the qualitative study which specifically employed phenomenology as the design. In Creswell (2009), phenomenological research is a study strategy that identifies its research based on awareness or experience from the perspective of participants. The process of understanding life experiences that occur is a method whose procedures involve studying a small number of subjects to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena". One of the researchers was involved and witnessed the life experiences of the students and teachers as the subjects of this study.

Participants of the Study

There were two participants of this study. The first one was a pre-service English teacher who was also one of the researchers of this study. The pre-service teacher joined the Kampus Mengajar program organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) in the first half of 2023. She was a third-year student from the English Education Department when joining the program. She was involved in the program for five months and was required to teach elementary school students in a rural area in Papua province, Indonesia. The second participant was the headmaster of the school. The headmaster was chosen because we believed that he knows the school's conditions better than the others.

Research Setting

This current research was conducted when one of the researchers joined the Kampus Mengajar program at one of the elementary schools in Serui City, Angkaisera District, Yapen Islands Regency, Papua Province. To reach this area, the researcher needed to travel

by plane from Yogyakarta to Makassar to Ambon for less than 4 hours. Then, after arriving, the researcher continued to travel by sea which took approximately 3 days to arrive at the location. Serui City is the capital city of Yapen island is around 500 kilometers from Jayapura, the capital and the largest city of Papua province.

Data Collection

Two data sources were collected from the two participants. The first data source was obtained from audio and video recordings of several English teaching and learning processes when the pre-service teacher joined the Kampus Mengajar program at the elementary school in Serui city, Papua. In addition, the researchers also completed the data by interviewing the principal of the school.

Data Analysis

To identify patterns and find themes through the collected data, the researchers used thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze the data with the following stages: transcribing the data into written form and making ourselves familiar with the data by reading and re-reading them for several times; searching for the challenges and opportunities as the main constructs of this research and giving them codes; looking at similar themes from the each construct; reviewing and modifying the themes; defining the themes; and writing the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

From the results of identifying the recording of teaching observations and principal interviews, there were seven major themes that indicated challenges and opportunities. For challenges, there were four findings, namely: 1) the absence of English teachers, 2) lack of English competence (vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation), 3) lack of confidence, 4) source of learning. As for opportunities, there are three, namely: 1) enthusiasm (excitement & interest), 2) expectation, 3) courage & willingness to communicate. Each of them is described as follows.

Challenges

1. The Absence of English teachers

Knowing that English is an international language and is used to communicate globally, this then makes English needs to be taught in schools. Unfortunately, the absence of an English teacher is the main challenge for this elementary school in providing English learning to its students. In fact, the need to teach English since elementary school is considered important for the next level. This was expressed by the school principal as a respondent in this study who also recognized the importance of learning English.

Excerpt 1

The first challenge for us is to have an English teacher; that's the first one. Learning English at the elementary level is very important so that later students can get to know English earlier and become a foundation for them so that when they move to the next level they can already understand.

Expecting the homeroom teachers to be able to introduce a little bit of English is also not that easy, given the ability of these rural teachers who are not too familiar with English and it is still a new thing for them. However, this is both a hope for the principal and a real challenge.

Excerpt 2

And secondly, the homeroom teachers should also understand a little bit about English. Even if they don't understand the whole thing, at least there are some things in English that can be given to students.

Therefore, finding teachers who have specialized skills in this area of English is a needed solution. Firstly, his expertise is more in line with the needs of the school. Secondly, it will help homeroom teachers or other teachers to stay focused on their respective courses. Third, in the process of providing English teaching, it can also be more optimal because of its broader understanding of English learning.

Excerpt 3

Ideally, at least in the elementary school, there is one teacher for English subjects. So not only from the homeroom teacher but there is a separate subject teacher like that.

2. Lack of English competence (vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation)

The lack of students' English competence in vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation found during English learning in grades 4 and 5 indicates a challenge for English teachers, who have to teach from the most basic things even for students in higher grades. In addition, it may not follow the references in English books or materials that are intended for students in these grades because they have to adjust to their needs. Students' lack of vocabulary is shown in Excerpt 4. Here is the example of two students answering the teacher asking the meaning of *water*.

Excerpt 4

*Teacher : Who knows what water is?
Student 1 : Airbrik
Student 2 : Waterproof*

On another occasion, when the teacher asked the students how they spell the word 'pen', they could not answer the question correctly.

Excerpt 5

*Teacher : How do you spell 'pen'?
Student 1 : Pe-e-en-ge*

Last but not least, when the student was asked how to pronounce the word 'bag', they failed to pronounce it correctly.

Excerpt 6

*Teacher : How do you read this word? (pointing to the word 'bag')
Student : 'Bak'*

Teacher : It is not "bak", but "bæg"

This lack of English proficiency in the most basic things points to the need for the role of English teachers in schools given that many of the students are also unfamiliar with the pronunciation of English words.

3. Lack of Confidence

English is something that is considered new and impressive for students in rural areas because this language is not too familiar in their environment. Although English is quite interesting for them in learning it, the problem of self-confidence when they want to use English is certainly not spared. They even show low self-esteem when talking about English skills.

Excerpt 7

Student 1 : I can't do everything
Student 2 : I'm not good at English
Student 3 : Miss, I can also only do a little

Additionally, they are still a little embarrassed when practicing pronouncing English words and often laugh at the strange pronunciations— because it is not like the language they usually hear.

Excerpt 8

Teacher : Now, I'm going to ask you to read from first to last one by one
Student 1 : Oh my God, please we can't

4. Sources of Learning

Books are the main source needed in the teaching and learning process at school. But unfortunately, the difficulty of getting English learning resources, especially English books, is an obstacle for the school. This was mentioned by the principal when interviewed on September 14.

Excerpt 9

The problem is: there are no books related to English in elementary schools.

This is also a challenge for English teachers considering that learning resources are references for teachers to help them accomplish the learning objectives to be achieved. With the help of (at least) books, it becomes a reference for teachers to provide more systematic and contextualized English teaching. Learning resources also help and facilitate students in the learning process. Not only English books, the school even lack of English textbooks used for teaching in the classroom. The following excerpt showed the statement school principal about the absence of textbook as a source of learning.

Excerpt 10

There are no English textbooks for teachers or even students, so that's a challenge.

Opportunities

1. Enthusiasm (Excitement & Interest)

Based on the researcher's experience, the enthusiasm shown by her students when learning English is quite high and this indicates a good opportunity for her as a pre-service English teacher and other English teachers. This enthusiasm is characterized by the excitement and interest found in the research data.

Excerpt 11

Teacher : Class, please mention 1 thing. Sinabung, please
Student 1 : Miss, one more please, me too please, me again please
Student 2 : Me please, please Miss, I want to answer the second one please

The snippet of conversation above describes a teacher who is asking one of his students named Sinabung to name an object when learning English. But apparently, instead of feeling afraid of being appointed, other students cheered in the hope that they would also get their turn. Moreover, when the bell rang, there were still students who eagerly wanted to continue learning English.

Excerpt 12

Teacher : (bell rings) Do you want to go home?
Students : No, no. I want, I want (there is two different students answer)
Teacher : Okay, it is already... a little bit later we're going home.
Student 1 : Oh no. Miss, until 10 o'clock please.

Although there were two answers; some were willing to continue the lesson and some others wanted the researcher to end the lesson, the students' voices and intonation when responding to the researcher showed signs of enthusiasm. Until the researcher asked to continue the lesson for a while, they finally were all willing to follow the lesson to the end. At the same time, there were even some students who were excited to learn English more by refusing to go home.

In addition to that, some students also showed their enjoyment of listening to English and their interest in learning this foreign language, as shown by their answers in the following conversation fragment:

Excerpt 13

Student 1 : Miss, could you try to talk with us by using English fully?
Teacher : Ow yeah. But will you be able to follow what I say?
Student 1 : Ouh no, Miss (laughing)
Teacher : If I use English, can you follow me or not? But later, I will interpret it in Indonesia

Excerpt 14

Teacher : Who wants to be good at English?
Student 1 : I do (replied one student who clearly heard the teacher's question while other students were busy writing materials).

From the excerpt above it can be seen that the students were curious to listen to more English words and expressions from the researcher.

2. Expectation

The teaching of English in primary schools by Kampus Mengajar teachers has raised awareness of the importance of English language knowledge in rural areas, which is even considered important to be taught starting from primary school. This was explained by the school principal as a respondent in this study.

Excerpt 15

My hope related to English is that I want these children to have started to have basic skills in English in elementary school, so that later these little English skills can develop and become a provision for them in continuing their education to the next (or higher) level.

With that comes the feeling of the need for English teachers to help realize things that are the hope for the future; which is related to the future of students. From here, we could say that the opportunities for English teachers look wide open.

3. Courage and Willingness to communicate

Based on the experience of the English teacher who implemented the Kampus Mengajar program in the elementary school and then conducted this research, the researcher found that there was a willingness/desire of students to communicate using English. This indicates that students in this rural area are highly motivated to learn English. Several times, the researcher found students spontaneously greeting her with "good morning" in English when they greeted the researcher (also as a teacher) when she entered the school in the morning. Not to be forgotten, expressions of gratitude in English were also frequently used.

Excerpt 16

Teacher : This morning, Prilly, Andrinyo, and Jelly greeted me. They said "Good morning, Miss Devi". Miss Devi was surprised to hear that.

In addition, students' courage also began to appear. Previously, the researchers found one student named Encik who was a quiet child and cautious in class. Over time, during a learning process, there was a moment when the teacher asked what "flag" meant in Indonesian. Then, while other students were still thinking while the teacher was just starting to give clues, Encik spontaneously gave the right answer. From here, Encik's ability was finally seen.

Excerpt 17

*Teacher : Does anyone still remember what a flag is?
Teacher : Usually... (the teacher tries to give a clue)
Student 1 : "Bendera!!!" (Encik answered spontaneously)
Teacher : Good job! Ya, bendera. Clap for Encik please, finally Encik speaks up. Thank you for being brave.*

Discussion

The results of this study showed that some challenges and opportunities were found when one of the researchers teaching English at one primary school in Papua for the Kampus Mengajar program. This research found some challenges that are not really different from the previous research. In this study, there were four challenges found. The first challenge

is the absence of English teachers which should be very important to have qualified teachers or in accordance with their fields in order to provide more appropriate learning. The existence of the first challenge is also felt to have affected the second challenge found, namely the lack of English competence (vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation). Students' lack of competence revealed in this study was also experienced by Febriana et al. (2018) who studied the challenge of teaching English in Indonesian rural schools and Masturi et al (2022) who carried out a study at rural schools in Malaysia. Other than that, students' unfamiliarity with English which is considered new and different from their language also makes students lack confidence in using it. This is in line with the findings of Febriana et al. (2018) that in rural areas in Indonesia, students have difficulty when pronouncing English vocabulary because they are affected by their inherent language accent. Furthermore, inadequate sources of learning is another challenge faced in this study which is also in line with those from Febriana et al. (2018) and Halik and Nusrath (2020) who revealed sources of learning and facilities as challenges in teaching English in rural schools in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Additionally, the teacher has difficulty implementing a student-centered approach in their classroom; the main source is only expected from the English teacher. Poedjiastutie (2021) stated that English teachers have difficulties to implementing the student-centered approach due to limited teaching resources, media, exposure, and distribution of compulsory textbooks so that it takes up quite a lot of time for teachers who have to write and read texts with exercises on the blackboard.

Interestingly, in forms of opportunities the findings of this present research is different from the previous study. The enthusiasm and positive responses expressed by the students as shown in the finding indicates the acceptance of English in the school environment which is quite different from Cheng et al. (2016) whose research results on four English language teachers in Malaysia showed that students in rural areas tend to have lack of motivation in learning English and negative perceptions towards English teachers. Negative attitudes and mindset towards English were also found in the previous study conducted by Febriana et al. (2018) who examined the experiences of teaching English in rural Indonesian schools. This finding, once again, is different from the finding from this present study. Instead of showing negative attitudes, students in this study showed excitement and interest in learning English. While attitudes towards learning English might become challenges for other research (Cheng et al., 2016; Febriana et al., 2018; Halik & Nusrath, 2020), it has even become an opportunity in this study. In addition, this study showed that there is students willingness to communicate in English; it is a good sign that internal motivation is visible, Maulana et al. (2020) stated that motivation in speaking is important and thus becomes a fundamental factor in the English learning activities.

On the whole, the challenges and opportunities encountered above are based on the analysis of data taken in one of primary schools in rural Indonesia. The challenges faced above are expected to provide an overview for teachers and or pre-service English teachers to prepare themselves to face various challenges. However, it is also hoped that this does not become a burden but rather brings great hope and opportunity for the needs of English teachers for the success of English language learning for their students.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to look at the challenges faced by pre-service English teacher when participating in the Kampus Mengajar program in Papua while also examining the opportunities found. Based on the data that has been identified and displayed above, there were four challenges found in this study, namely: the absence of English teachers, lack of English competence (vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation), lack of confidence, and sources of learning. As for opportunities, there are three aspects, namely: enthusiasm (excitement & interest), expectation, and courage & willingness to communicate. However, shortcomings remain, and that is a limitation. The data were only taken from the personal experience of one of the researchers of this study and there was an interview with the principal the school which indicates small coverage. Therefore, this analysis which is expected to be more thorough does not comprehensively discuss the education system in eastern Indonesia in general or make comparisons with urban areas. This research also does not address the curriculum. Hopefully, this research will motivate other researchers to conduct more intense research than this with much more data and a broader scope of discussion to overcome the limitations mentioned.

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