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Controversies in Implementing English as a Second Language Policy in Papua: Perspectives of English Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The language Policy of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Papua was established by the Special Autonomy Law in 2021. This is pivotal in educational practices in a multilingual context. Despite this, significant concerns remain, especially about teachers' involvement and the execution of the regulation. The gap policy arises from the previous studies highlighting the policy intention and classroom practices. This study aims to explore the gaps in the policy due to three main themes, namely communication gaps, structural and professional support, and socio-cultural tensions and language ideologies. A qualitative study was conducted by applying in-depth interviews with 6 teachers from several regencies in West Papua and Southwest Papua Province. Thematic analysis exposed three main challenges: (1) policy communication gaps; (2) limited structural and professional support; (3) socio-cultural tensions and language ideologies. This study shows that the success of ESL policy depends on the provincial government's engagement, sustained teacher training, and culturally sensitive curriculum to local wisdom. Ultimately, this research contributes to the discourse of language policy in multilingual contexts, emphasizing the respect for local values and adjusting to the multilingual context, like Papua.

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Introduction

The implementation of ESL policy in Papua has become a crucial issue for education stakeholders. Despite the formal recognition of English as a second language under the Papuan Special Autonomy Law of 2001, its practical execution faces significant challenges [1], [2]. One of the key problems is the lack of communication from local authorities and state policymakers, which has left educators, particularly English teachers, unprepared to adopt and work through their interpretations of national policy [3], [4]. This issue is compounded by insufficient government support, inadequate teacher training, and limited resources, all of which hinder effective policy implementation. These barriers carry both theoretical and practical significance, as they not only represent academic concerns but also threaten Papua's efforts to enhance human capital development and global competitiveness, making this issue urgent both practically and academically.

Previous research on ESL policy implementation has largely focused on the structural elements of language planning, such as government roles in curriculum development and the socio-cultural factors influencing language acquisition [5], [6], [7]. However, these studies often overlook the practical experiences of teachers, who are key actors in policy implementation[8], [9]. In regions like Papua, where socio-economic challenges are profound, teachers face unique difficulties. It was mentioned that the prevailing conversations in educational environments often support a monolingual perspective, which may obstruct the implementation of multilingual education policies [7]. Veliz and Chen [5] conclude that teachers encounter considerable obstacles in curriculum adaptation for diverse learners, primarily due to the lack of relevant language teaching qualifications and relying on personal and life experiences rather than upon research-informed pedagogical knowledge of how languages are taught and learned. Moreover, Xu et al. [6] reveal that language policy plays a vital role in promoting cultural and educational exchanges and facilitating the modernization processes. They also pointed out that unaddressed structural and cultural barriers, compounded by a lack of support and inadequate recognition of multilingualism, are challenges similar to those in Papua. Insufficient resources, minimal institutional support, and the failure to acknowledge the region's multilingual realities significantly hinder the effective implementation of ESL policy. Existing literature has not adequately explored how communication gaps, a lack of structural support, and local cultural factors affect teachers' preparedness to implement the ESL policy. This gap in the literature highlights the need for more targeted research that considers the practical realities of teachers in under-resourced regions like Papua.

This study aims to address these gaps by focusing on the perspectives of English teachers in Papua. By adopting a bottom-up approach, it investigates how inadequate communication, poor curriculum design, and insufficient professional development affect teachers' ability to implement the ESL policy [10], [11]. The research will explore the specific barriers faced by educators and how they navigate these challenges in a resource-limited context. Through this approach, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the disconnect between policy formulation and classroom practice to provide actionable recommendations for improving policy implementation. Although studies on ESL policy implementation in multilingual settings are abundant, little attention has been given to how Papuan teachers, operating under Indonesia's Special Autonomy Law, interpret and enact such policies. This study distinguishes itself by foregrounding the lived experiences of Papuan English teachers, revealing how language policy interacts with postcolonial realities, Indigenous identities, and systemic marginalization. By bringing Papuan voices into academic discourse, this research fills an empirical gap and challenges dominant assumptions in multilingual education and postcolonial sociolinguistics regarding the universality of policy design and implementation.

The central argument of this study is that the lack of systemic support—such as insufficient teacher training, resource limitations, and a lack of policy socialization—serves as the primary barrier to the successful implementation of the ESL policy in Papua [6]. By analyzing the narratives of English teachers, the objective of this study is to analyze English teachers' perspectives on the systemic, structural, and cultural challenges encountered during the implementation of the ESL policy in Papua under the Special Autonomy framework.

Literature Review

The implementation of ESL policies is influenced by several interconnected factors, particularly teacher preparedness, resource availability, and government involvement [12], [13], [14], [15]. Effective teacher training has been identified as a fundamental component of successful educational policies, as well-prepared educators are better equipped to implement language programs in diverse and multilingual environments [14], [15], [16]. Teacher preparedness not only enhances classroom practices but also contributes significantly to student language acquisition. Additionally, the availability of educational resources plays a vital role in creating supportive language learning environments. Studies by Newbury et al. [13] and Wafa [17] conclude that without adequate teaching materials and technological support, teachers face significant challenges in delivering effective language instruction. Moreover, governmental engagement is a crucial element in the success of ESL policy implementation, particularly in multilingual regions. Mukminin et al. [18] highlight that government efforts in policy socialization and support directly influence the success of ESL initiatives. Therefore,

when teacher training, resources, and government support are misaligned, ESL policies are less likely to succeed, particularly in under-resourced regions.

Several studies have specifically explored the role of government in shaping ESL policy outcomes, particularly in terms of how top-down approaches influence the success of language programs. In many regions, the implementation of ESL policies depends largely on how well government frameworks are communicated and enacted at the school level. Freire et al. [12] emphasizes the importance of policy socialization, particularly in developing regions where poor dissemination of policy objectives creates gaps between policy design and actual implementation. When governments fail to actively engage with schools and provide the necessary resources and guidance, educational reforms often encounter resistance or fail to take root [12], [19]. This lack of support undermines the efforts of schools and teachers to promote language acquisition, especially in regions with limited infrastructure and educational resources. These findings underscore the importance of sustained governmental involvement to ensure successful ESL policy integration, particularly in regions like Papua.

Teacher training is another critical factor in the effective implementation of ESL policies, especially in multilingual and resource-limited settings. Zondi and Mbatha [20] highlight that teacher preparedness significantly influences how language instruction is delivered in the classroom. Well-trained educators are more adept at navigating the complexities of language teaching in diverse environments and are better positioned to implement policies effectively, leading to improved student outcomes. However, access to professional development opportunities remains uneven, particularly in underprivileged areas. Yuan et al. [21] point out that many teachers in such regions face difficulties in acquiring the necessary skills to meet the demands of ESL policies due to a lack of ongoing training programs. This gap in professional development opportunities contributes to inconsistent policy implementation across schools, further complicating efforts to enhance ESL education. Therefore, strengthening teacher training programs is essential for bridging the gap between policy formulation and practical classroom application.

The availability of resources, such as textbooks, technological tools, and other learning materials, is a critical component in supporting ESL education. Numerous studies have shown a strong correlation between resource availability and positive student outcomes in language learning environments. For example, schools that have sufficient teaching materials and modern technology show significantly better student performance in language acquisition compared to schools with limited resources [22], [23]. However, resource shortages remain a persistent issue in underprivileged regions such as Papua [24], [25]. Yulia and Amirudin [24] emphasize that the lack of essential educational materials in these areas severely impedes the

implementation of ESL policies, as teachers struggle to provide comprehensive instruction without adequate support. This disparity in resource allocation exacerbates educational inequalities, making it increasingly difficult for ESL programs to succeed in marginalized communities.

Despite the substantial body of research on ESL policy implementation, there remains a notable gap in studies that focus on the perspectives of teachers, particularly those working in under-resourced regions like Papua. Much of the existing literature emphasizes government policy frameworks and the provision of resources, but relatively few studies explore how these factors intersect with the daily experiences of educators tasked with implementing the policies [3], [17], [26]. Understanding the lived experiences of teachers is crucial, as they are the key actors responsible for translating policy into practice. Without insights into the challenges and strategies that teachers employ in unique socio-cultural contexts, policy evaluations remain incomplete. Recognizing teachers' perspectives can uncover the practical barriers they face and the local adaptations they make to navigate these challenges, which is essential for developing more effective and contextually appropriate policy solutions [27], [28], [29].

This study seeks to address the aforementioned gaps in the literature by focusing on the voices of English teachers in Papua. By examining how these educators experience and respond to systemic challenges, such as inadequate training and scarce resources, this research offers a more grounded understanding of the realities that shape ESL policy implementation in under-resourced contexts. Through this qualitative approach, the study aims to provide valuable insights into how teachers navigate obstacles and adapt their teaching practices to fit their specific educational environments. This aligns with Shieh[30], proposing actionable strategies to better align future policy reforms with teachers' needs and realities in resource-constrained environments. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform and language policy by proposing more effective, context-sensitive solutions for ESL policy implementation.

Materials and Methods

A. Respondents

The study focused on six English teachers in four different districts located in West Papua Province and Southwest Papua Province who were involved in the implementation of ESL policy. Participants were purposefully selected based on their experience in teaching English and their involvement in ESL policy enactment. The teachers included both senior and junior staff with a wide range of experience in the education sector. The participants' teaching backgrounds varied, with some having more than ten years of experience and others recently entering the profession. By incorporating these diverse perspectives, the study aimed to

capture a comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with ESL policy implementation.

Table 1. Teachers' Profile

Participant	District	Experience (years)	School Level	Training on ESL Policy
T1	Manokwari	12	Senior High School	No
T2	Sorong City	8	Junior High School	No
T3	Sorong City	5	Vocational High School	No
T4	Sorong Regency	10	Senior High School	No
T5	Sorong Regency	3	Junior High School	No
T6	Sorong Regency	7	Senior High School	No

B. Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method for data collection. A set of open-ended questions was designed to explore the teachers' perceptions and experiences in implementing the ESL policy. These questions aimed to cover topics such as teacher preparedness, the availability of educational resources, and governmental support. Prompts were used to allow participants to elaborate on key issues as they arose during the interviews. For example, participants were asked, "What specific challenges have you faced in implementing the ESL policy in your school?" Follow-up questions and clarifications were introduced based on individual responses to gain a deeper insight into their experiences. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

C. Procedures

The interviews were conducted over six months, either in person or remotely via online platforms, depending on the availability and preferences of the respondents. Before the interview process, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained to ensure ethical research practices. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in the interview process, where pre-determined questions guided the discussion. The interviews were conducted by the research team, which included both experienced researchers and research assistants trained in qualitative methods. To maintain confidentiality, all interviews were anonymized during transcription, with identifying details such as participant names and school names removed.

The sample size of six participants was determined based on the principle of qualitative saturation, where additional interviews were unlikely to yield new themes or insights. Given the study's focus on in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences within a specific socio-

cultural context, this number was deemed sufficient to capture a diverse range of perspectives while maintaining analytical depth.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process involved recording and transcribing all interviews for analysis. Transcriptions were conducted using Otter.ai and reviewed manually by the research team to ensure accuracy. In addition to interviews, field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual factors that may inform the interpretation of the data. Data were collected from six teachers, with each interview tailored to explore individual experiences and challenges within the broader context of ESL policy implementation. By collecting data from diverse participants, the study ensured that a range of perspectives was captured, offering a nuanced understanding of the research problem.

A reflexive thematic analysis approach was employed to analyze the data, following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework. This method involved familiarizing the research team with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to identify initial codes and patterns. A combination of inductive and deductive coding was used, where the research team first generated themes directly from the data while also considering predetermined categories related to teacher preparedness, resource availability, and governmental support. After the initial coding phase, the codes were refined and grouped into broader themes that encapsulated the critical issues raised by participants. For example, several teachers highlighted the lack of adequate teaching materials, categorized under "resource constraints." Once consensus was reached among the team members, these themes were used to construct a comprehensive narrative on the challenges of ESL policy implementation. This iterative process allowed the researchers to develop a deep, multifaceted understanding of the data.

Results

The findings from the interviews conducted with English teachers in Papua revealed three major themes related to the implementation of ESL policy. These themes underscore the challenges encountered at both the structural and cultural levels, highlighting the need for more robust support mechanisms, more transparent communication, and consideration of local contexts.

A. Theme 1: Policy Communication Gaps

Several teachers expressed frustration regarding the insufficient dissemination and unclear policy implementation guidance. Teachers noted the lack of effort from local government agencies, particularly the education department, to adequately communicate and support the policy's execution. As one teacher pointed out,

> "There are no efforts from the local government regarding this policy" (T1),

> "There is no action from the education department regarding the implementation of this regulation" (T4).

Teachers consistently reported that no communication or guidance had been provided by local authorities to facilitate the policy's rollout. This has led to confusion and uncertainty among teachers, who are unsure how to integrate the policy into their instructional practices. The absence of structured communication between schools and local governments is perceived as a significant barrier to effective policy implementation.

Three distinct patterns emerge from the data. First, there is a pervasive lack of communication between the government and schools regarding the policy. Second, the absence of structured guidance has resulted in teachers being left without the necessary tools to integrate the policy into their classrooms. Third, the lack of engagement by local authorities highlights broader systemic challenges, including potential resource constraints or insufficient prioritization of language education reforms. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the critical role of government support in successful policy implementation.

B. Theme 2: Limited Structural and Professional Support

Teachers also highlighted the absence of structural support in curriculum design and professional development. Several reported that the existing curriculum fails to meet the needs of their students, while others indicated that they had not received any formal training on teaching English as a second language.

> "The teaching materials do not meet the needs of the students" (T2).

> "I have never received any training related to teaching English as a second language" (T3).

The lack of alignment between the curriculum and local student needs was a recurring concern. Teachers also pointed to the absence of targeted professional development, leaving them unprepared to implement the policy effectively. This lack of structural support severely limits their ability to adapt teaching practices to the demands of the new policy.

Four key patterns emerge from the data. First, the curriculum is perceived as inadequate for local contexts, disconnected from the realities that teachers and students face. Second, the absence of continuous professional development has left teachers ill-equipped to manage the complexities of teaching English as a second language. Third, this lack of structural support contributes to a sense of frustration and disengagement among educators. Finally, without appropriate resources or training, the likelihood of the policy's success remains minimal. These findings underscore the importance of institutional support in facilitating effective policy adoption, as highlighted by numerous studies on educational reform.

C. Socio-cultural Tensions and Language Ideologies

The interviews revealed significant concerns regarding the cultural implications of the policy. Teachers feared that the promotion of English might undermine the use of local languages, potentially eroding Indigenous cultural identities.

> "English is only used in schools. Outside, local languages are more commonly spoken" (T1).

> "There has been no socialization about this policy; the community is not aware of it" (T6).

Teachers expressed concerns that introducing English as a second language could lead to the marginalization of local languages, as these remain dominant in most non-school contexts. The lack of socialization around the policy has contributed to the community's limited awareness and engagement, raising fears that its implementation might inadvertently contribute to cultural dislocation.

Three distinct trends can be observed. First, there is an apparent disconnect between the policy's objectives and the cultural realities of the communities it is implementing. Second, the perceived threat to local languages reflects a broader concern about the cultural impact of language policies. Third, the community's lack of involvement in the policy's design and implementation has exacerbated resistance. This aligns with broader discussions in the literature on language policy, which caution against the imposition of external language standards without considering local linguistic and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, several teachers articulated a perceived language hierarchy that privileges English over local Papuan languages within formal education spaces. As one participant noted,

> "Unlike English, our local language does not have its curriculum. English gets special treatment both from the central government and in the regions" (T5)

> "We now have only elderly people who are still fluent in the local language, but young children and young people no longer speak the language, even though they still understand what is being talked about". (T1)

This implicit stratification reflects broader ideologies stemming from colonial and postcolonial narratives, positioning English as a tool for modernity and marginalizing Indigenous linguistic identities. Such perceptions inevitably shape both teacher and student attitudes toward ESL policy implementation, often creating internal tensions between aspirations for global integration and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Table 2 provides a summary of the key themes and issues identified in the study. The first theme highlights the gaps in policy communication, with participants noting the lack of government communication, the absence of policy dissemination, and confusion among teachers about implementation. The second theme focuses on the limited structural and professional support available, including misalignment of the curriculum with local needs, the absence of formal ESL training for teachers, and a general sense of unpreparedness. The third

theme addresses socio-cultural tensions and language ideologies, revealing concerns about cultural and linguistic erosion, the dominance of English over local languages, and the lack of community awareness regarding the policy.

Table 2. Summary of Key Themes and Issues

Theme	Key Issues Identified	Representative Quotes
Theme 1: Policy Communication Gaps	• Lack of government communication • Absence of policy dissemination • Confusion among teachers regarding implementation	"There are no efforts from the local government regarding this policy." (T1) "There is no action from the education department regarding the implementation of this regulation." (T4)
Theme 2: Limited Structural and Professional Support	• Curriculum not aligned to local needs • No formal ESL training for teachers • Teachers feel unprepared and unsupported	"The teaching materials do not meet the needs of the students." (T2) "I have never received any training related to teaching English as a second language." (T3)
Theme 3: Socio-cultural Tensions and Language Ideologies	• Fear of cultural and linguistic erosion • Perceived hierarchy privileging English over local languages • Lack of community socialization about the policy	"English is only used in schools. Outside, local languages are more commonly spoken." (T1) "Unlike English, our local language does not have its curriculum." (T5)

Discussion

This study sought to explore the perspectives of English teachers in Papua regarding the implementation of the policy designating English as a second language. The findings revealed several barriers to the policy's practical implementation, including a lack of communication from local authorities, inadequate structural support in terms of curriculum and teacher training, and deep-seated concerns about the policy's potential impact on local languages and cultural identities. Teachers reported confusion and frustration stemming from these issues, which have hindered their ability to integrate the policy into their classrooms effectively.

Collectively, the findings address the central research question concerning the systemic, structural, and cultural barriers faced by teachers in implementing the ESL policy. Specifically, Theme 1 (Policy Communication Gaps) highlights the systemic weaknesses in government-school coordination, Theme 2 (Limited Structural and Professional Support) reveals institutional deficiencies in preparing and equipping teachers, and Theme 3 (Socio-cultural Tensions and Language Ideologies) underscores cultural challenges arising from local

language preservation concerns. Each of them provides insight into the multifaceted nature of policy implementation failures in multilingual, under-resourced contexts.

The study's findings highlight the central role of communication and structural support in policy implementation. The absence of clear guidance and socialization efforts from local authorities has contributed to teachers' difficulties in interpreting and applying the policy. Furthermore, the lack of targeted professional development and curriculum adjustments has exacerbated these challenges, as teachers are left without the necessary tools to meet the demands of the new policy. These barriers suggest that the relationship between government, schools, and local communities must be strengthened to ensure successful policy adoption.

These findings indicate that the policy's success hinges not only on educational reforms but also on its ability to balance cultural sensitivities. Language policies, particularly in regions with strong indigenous cultures, must consider the broader socio-cultural impacts. In the case of Papua, the introduction of English as a second language has been met with resistance due to fears that it may displace local languages and cultural practices. Thus, the policy must be implemented with care, ensuring that it enhances rather than diminishes the cultural heritage of the region.

Comparative analysis with other multilingual regions further contextualizes the findings. Similar challenges have been documented in places such as the Philippines, Northern Cheyenne Nation, and Timor Leste, where second language education initiatives have often conflicted with strong indigenous language identities [31]. In contrast, regions such as South Africa have attempted to mitigate these tensions through bilingual models that honor both indigenous and national languages. Similarly, in Colombia, despite policy frameworks recognizing native languages, bilingual initiatives largely prioritized Spanish and English, sidelining local languages due to weak implementation and limited community involvement [32]. Moreover, the results align with previous research on educational reform, which has consistently emphasized the importance of government support and teacher training in policy implementation [33], [34], [35]. Yet, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting the unique cultural challenges faced in Papua, where concerns about the erosion of local languages and identities are more pronounced. This differs from other contexts where language policy is implemented primarily as an educational reform, without significant cultural resistance[34]. This comparison highlights the pitfalls of culturally detached reforms, which this study addresses through its novel focus on the intersection of language policy and cultural preservation.

The study's implications are clear: policies that are implemented without sufficient communication, structural support, or cultural sensitivity are likely to face significant challenges. In this case, the lack of teacher preparation, inadequate curriculum design, and

fears about cultural erosion have hindered the policy's effectiveness. These findings suggest that future policy efforts must prioritize local engagement, ensuring that all stakeholders are adequately informed and equipped to adapt to the new educational landscape.

Several actionable steps are recommended to improve the implementation of the ESL policy in PapuaTo improve the implementation of the ESL policy in Papua, several actionable steps are recommended. First, regular, context-sensitive teacher training programs by the provincial government should be introduced to equip educators with the skills necessary to teach English effectively. Second, the curriculum should be revised to better reflect local needs and contexts. Third, comprehensive community engagement and socialization efforts must be prioritized to foster greater understanding and acceptance of the policy. These steps are crucial in ensuring that the policy not only achieves its educational goals but also respects and preserves the cultural identities of the local population.

Conclusion

This study reveals crucial insights into the significant challenges faced in implementing ESL policy in Papua, particularly in terms of communication, structural support, and cultural sensitivity. One of the most important lessons is the necessity of a more integrated and contextualized approach to educational policy implementation. Effective communication between the government, schools, and local communities is essential to the success of such policies. Failure to accommodate local needs and the absence of proper socialization efforts can lead to resistance and, ultimately, the failure of the policy.

The strength of this research lies in its substantial contribution to the academic discourse, particularly by deepening our understanding of the dynamics involved in implementing language education policies in culturally diverse regions like Papua. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on educational reform without considering cultural impact, this research emphasizes the importance of incorporating cultural considerations into language policy design. Furthermore, it highlights the critical role of curriculum contextualization, where teaching materials and methods must be tailored to local needs to enhance learning outcomes. This research opens a new avenue of discussion on the importance of language policies that not only target educational goals but also respect cultural sensitivities and social realities, ensuring more effective and contextually relevant implementation.

Limitations and Suggestions

However, this study has certain limitations, primarily in the data collection methods, which were restricted to interviews with teachers. As a result, the perspectives of other key stakeholders, such as government officials, community members, and students, are not fully

represented. Future research involving a more comprehensive analysis with participation from a wider range of stakeholders will provide a deeper and more complete understanding of the challenges and potential solutions in implementing the ESL policy in Papua. In summary, the findings from this study highlight critical challenges in the implementation of the ESL policy in Papua, including the lack of policy socialization, insufficient structural support, and significant cultural concerns. Addressing these issues will require a more coordinated effort from government agencies, schools, and local communities. By strengthening communication channels, providing professional development for teachers, and involving local stakeholders in the policy-making process, the ESL policy can be better aligned with both educational and cultural goals in Papua.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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