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URBAN–COASTAL INEQUALITIES IN INDONESIAN ENGLISH EDUCATION: POLICY, CAPITAL, AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

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Abstract

Access to English education in Indonesia depends on the institutional conditions through which learners obtain instruction, resources, and opportunities to use the language. Existing studies address national policy and rural schooling, but provide limited direct evidence of urban–coastal differences. This article examines how those bodies of research can inform an educational justice framework for underserved coastal and island communities. A qualitative integrative review combines purposively selected research, foundational theory, and an official policy update. Targeted source verification and an evidence update were conducted on 30 October 2026. The final reference set comprises 22 sources, with empirical findings distinguished from theoretical interpretations and proposed applications. The synthesis develops five connected dimensions: policy implementation, teacher capacity and support, material and digital access, meaningful language interaction, and motivation and aspirations. An island case provides directly relevant contextual evidence, while broader rural studies inform propositions whose transfer requires local verification. The proposed chain of inequality describes potentially reinforcing relationships rather than an established causal sequence. The article recommends needs-based support, sustained teacher development, accessible learning resources, and multilingual tasks connected to community knowledge. Comparative fieldwork is needed to test these propositions across different coastal settings. The contribution is a traceable framework for investigating educational opportunity, not an estimate of the size of an urban–coastal proficiency gap.

INTRODUCTION

English can widen access to further study, professional communication, and knowledge, but a place on the curriculum does not ensure an equivalent opportunity to learn. Indonesian scholarship identifies persistent concerns about teacher preparation, proficiency, and the relationship between national policy and classroom practice (Renandya et al., 2018; Zein et al., 2020). This article examines these concerns through the circumstances of underserved coastal and island communities. Its focus is the provision of meaningful learning opportunities rather than a presumption that coastal learners are less capable or less interested in

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education.

The categories require clarification. Urban and coastal are not mutually exclusive: a prosperous port city is both. Here, the comparison concerns relatively well-served urban schools and coastal or island schools facing constrained educational services. Coastal location alone is not an explanation of disadvantage. Transport, household resources, staffing, and opportunities for language use must be investigated separately. This distinction prevents an urban–coastal label from concealing differences among fishing settlements, small islands, tourism centres, and maritime cities.

Research on rural schooling supplies relevant but incomplete evidence. A South Sumatran case identifies limitations in facilities and professional development (Anggela et al., 2024), while a study in Ponorogo links English teaching challenges to curricular conditions and teacher preparation (Sekar Pramesty et al., 2022). Saiful and Triyono (2018) include a teacher working on Talaud Island alongside a teacher in mountainous Papua. Their study provides an island case, but its two participants cannot represent the diversity of Indonesian coasts. Rural findings therefore need contextual interpretation before they inform claims about maritime schooling.

The policy transition increases the relevance of this problem. In March 2026, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education reported preparations for compulsory primary-school English from the 2027/2028 academic year, including a phased teacher development programme (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2026). The announcement establishes the policy direction and planned support; it does not demonstrate equal readiness or completed implementation in coastal schools. The analytical question is how a common entitlement can become an effective learning opportunity under unequal local conditions.

Three questions guide the review: What constraints on English learning opportunities are documented in Indonesian education research? How can those constraints inform an explanatory framework for underserved coastal and island settings? Which institutional and pedagogical responses warrant local testing? The contribution lies in linking an explicit evidence boundary to a five-dimensional

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framework. National research, rural case studies, an island example, and theoretical arguments are connected without being treated as interchangeable evidence of a measured urban–coastal gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Justice and the Conversion of Resources

Sen's (1999) capability approach distinguishes resources from the substantive freedoms people can achieve with them. Applied here, the same textbook allocation may yield different opportunities when students differ in access to teachers, study time, transport, and suitable learning spaces. This is a normative lens for judging provision, not evidence about a particular coastal population. It directs evaluation towards whether students can participate in instruction and develop capacities they have reason to value.

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital and relates capital to social relationships and unequal accumulation. English competence, learning materials, and recognized qualifications can be interpreted through these categories. The present application proposes that institutional support influences how resources become usable linguistic competence. It does not assume that local cultural knowledge has less value than English or that proficiency automatically produces economic mobility. Schools may expand opportunity while remaining embedded in wider inequalities.

Teachers and Policy Implementation

Zein (2017) situates elementary English within changing policy and provision, while Renandya et al. (2018) emphasize the proficiency teachers need for effective classroom work. These contributions establish why curriculum reform and teacher development must be considered together. They do not establish a national ranking of urban and coastal teachers. The national review by Zein et al. (2020) further situates English education within Indonesia's diverse policy, ideological, and sociolinguistic circumstances.

Local studies make the implementation problem more concrete. Anggela et

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al. (2024) report one teacher's difficulties with resources, motivation, development opportunities, and parental support. Sekar Pramesty et al. (2022) examine rural primary teaching through observation and interview. Mariyam et al. (2025) investigate five teachers in rural West Nusa Tenggara. Together, these studies justify attention to working conditions and adaptation, but variation in location, school level, and sample size prevents a single nationwide inference.

Digital Participation and Meaningful Interaction

Digital access involves more than a nominal connection. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2019), studying the Netherlands, show why differences in devices, associated resources, and continuing costs deserve attention. Their findings supply a sensitizing distinction, not Indonesian coastal estimates. Falloon's (2020) teacher digital competency framework also places educational technology within broader pedagogical, professional, and ethical capabilities. A device distribution programme therefore requires evaluation of what teachers and learners can actually do with its resources.

Indonesian pandemic studies provide a separate empirical basis. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) examine online teaching through reflections from 16 teachers and follow-up interviews with five; Rinekso et al. (2021) include 25 secondary teachers from different geographical settings. Both identify challenges in technology-mediated instruction. Emergency remote teaching differs from ordinary classroom provision, however, so pandemic constraints cannot simply be assumed to describe every current coastal school.

For language learning, access becomes educationally meaningful through purposeful participation. Loewen and Sato (2018) review interaction in instructed second-language acquisition, supporting attention to opportunities for communication and feedback. Li's (2018) account of translanguaging provides a rationale for drawing on multilingual repertoires. These perspectives inform proposed classroom activities; they do not by themselves establish the effectiveness of any particular coastal intervention.

Motivation and the Limits of Deficit Explanations

Lamb's (2012) Indonesian study examines adolescents' motivation across

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urban and rural settings, showing why language aspirations deserve contextual investigation. His later review addresses the motivational dimension of teaching and the complexity of sustaining engagement (Lamb, 2017). In this article, motivation is treated as potentially shaped by instructional experience and perceived opportunities. Reports of low motivation should prompt inquiry into classroom and social conditions rather than an assumption that coastal communities undervalue education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative integrative literature review approach to develop an interpretive framework for educational justice in English education (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). This approach enabled the synthesis of empirical studies, literature reviews, foundational theories, and relevant policy documents. The review addressed three research questions concerning documented constraints in English education, their relevance to underserved coastal and island settings, and potential responses requiring further investigation. The unit of analysis was published claims and their supporting evidence. No primary data were collected through interviews, surveys, tests, or field observations.

Relevant literature was identified through targeted searches of journal and publisher websites, institutional repositories, and official government sources. Citation tracing and bibliographic verification were also conducted. The search strategy covered five thematic areas: English education and geographical contexts, policy and teacher support, digital and material provision, interaction and pedagogy, and motivation and educational justice. Studies published between 2016 and 2026 were prioritized, while foundational works were included based on their theoretical relevance.

Sources were selected based on their relevance to Indonesian English education, traceable publication details, and accessibility of evidence supporting the claims discussed. The final purposive corpus consisted of 22 references, comprising 19 journal articles, one scholarly book, one book chapter, and one official policy release. Of these, 19 sources (86.4%) were published between 2016

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and 2026. The corpus was purposively selected and was not intended to represent all publications on Indonesian English education.

Data extraction and synthesis were guided by five analytical dimensions: (1) policy implementation, (2) teacher capacity and support, (3) access to learning materials and digital resources, (4) meaningful language interaction, and (5) student motivation and aspirations. Each source was examined in terms of its research context, design, principal findings, supporting evidence, and limitations regarding its applicability to coastal and island settings. The synthesis involved extracting relevant claims, comparing empirical findings with theoretical perspectives and literature reviews, organizing the evidence into the five dimensions, and interpreting possible relationships among them to develop the proposed educational justice framework. Empirical findings were distinguished from theoretical interpretations and practical recommendations.

This review has several limitations. The purposive corpus was non-exhaustive, and direct empirical evidence from coastal and island settings was limited. Furthermore, the absence of a complete historical search log, record-level screening data, and independent duplicate screening limits the reproducibility of the review. Accordingly, the proposed framework should be considered an interpretive contribution that requires further empirical validation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Policy Entitlement and Local Capacity

The first dimension is the distance between a policy entitlement and the capacity to provide instruction. Daud (2024) identifies teacher shortages, limited resources, instructional time, and policy change among the issues facing primary English. This reinforces the relevance of readiness, although this article uses its qualitative themes rather than reproducing its reported review-study frequencies. Earlier policy analysis supplies historical context rather than a substitute for current school-level evidence (Zein, 2017).

The 2026 ministry release shows that teacher preparation is already part of the transition to compulsory primary English (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2026). The present synthesis proposes that implementation monitoring should

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distinguish announced training, participation, demonstrated classroom readiness, and sustained instructional provision. A school may satisfy an administrative requirement while struggling to maintain lessons. For coastal settings, transport and communication conditions should be measured as possible implementation constraints rather than assumed from location alone.

Teacher Capacity and Professional Support

The second dimension concerns the support through which teachers can sustain instruction. Anggela et al. (2024) describe one teacher's restricted development opportunities, while Sekar Pramesty et al. (2022) identify preparation and curriculum-related concerns in rural primary teaching. Mariyam et al. (2025) extend the geographical range of teacher accounts to West Nusa Tenggara. Their convergence supports further inquiry into working conditions, but does not establish how common each difficulty is or whether coastal teachers face greater difficulties than matched urban teachers.

An institutional response should combine language development, age-appropriate pedagogy, mentoring, and realistic access to professional learning. Universities and district education offices could coordinate school visits, lesson discussion, and reusable materials. Online mentoring may help where connectivity permits; otherwise, scheduled visits and offline exchanges may be more dependable. These are proposed responses to documented constraints, not interventions whose effectiveness has been established by this review. Teacher feedback and classroom observation would be needed to judge their value.

Material Resources and Usable Digital Access

The third dimension is the usability of material and digital resources. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) document obstacles encountered during the abrupt move online, and Rinekso et al. (2021) distinguish technical, teacher-related, and student-related challenges. These studies justify asking whether learning arrangements fit available resources. They do not support a claim that all rural or coastal students lack internet access, nor do they establish present-day differences after the emergency period.

The digital inequality perspective suggests examining device suitability, sharing arrangements, continuing costs, and the reliability of access, not just ownership (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2019). Teacher preparation must also address pedagogical judgement and responsible use rather than technical operation alone (Falloon, 2020). For a coastal school, a locally stored audio collection or printable reader may be a useful option when continuous streaming is unreliable. The appropriate choice requires an

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actual resource audit and learning evaluation.

Meaningful Interaction and Community Knowledge

The fourth dimension connects available instruction with opportunities to use English. Interaction research supports attention to communicative activity, feedback, and the conditions under which learners participate (Loewen & Sato, 2018). A well-equipped classroom may still offer little purposeful interaction, while teachers with modest resources may organize productive exchanges. Febriana et al. (2018) examine strategies used by teachers in disadvantaged Indonesian regions, reinforcing the importance of studying local adaptation rather than inferring classroom quality solely from school location.

Saiful and Triyono's (2018) cases also complicate an assumption that teacher-led explanation is necessarily inappropriate. Their participants describe the value of explicit support under constrained conditions. The implication is to combine understandable explanation with achievable interaction, not to prescribe an identical balance everywhere. In a proposed coastal task, learners could interview community members in a familiar language, prepare an English summary of local environmental knowledge, and explain it to classmates. Li (2018) offers a theoretical basis for using multilingual resources; the task itself requires local piloting.

Motivation and Credible Future Opportunities

The fifth dimension is the relationship between learning experience and aspiration. Lamb (2012) provides Indonesian urban–rural evidence for examining motivational differences in context, and Lamb (2017) shows why teachers' motivational work requires attention to learners' present concerns as well as future goals. Reports of low motivation in rural cases should therefore be interpreted cautiously. They may reflect difficult learning conditions, limited success, or perceived irrelevance, rather than a stable characteristic of a place or population.

Proposed responses include manageable speaking tasks, accessible feedback, encounters with alumni, and information about further study. Community priorities should shape examples: English may support higher education, environmental communication, maritime services, or local enterprise, but these possibilities must not be promised as guaranteed employment pathways. Evaluation should include what students themselves value and whether opportunities feel attainable. This approach connects aspirations to institutional responsibility without assigning schools sole responsibility for wider labour-market inequality.

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Novelty and a Proposed Chain of Inequality

Unlike an inventory of primary-English teaching difficulties such as Daud (2024), this framework relates provision to substantive opportunity, treats the five dimensions as potentially interdependent propositions, and specifies evidence needed for conditional transfer to island and coastal settings. The five dimensions form a proposed chain of inequality in the sense of connected constraints, not a fixed sequence. Policy demands may exceed capacity; unsupported teachers may have fewer opportunities to adapt materials; unsuitable resources may restrict interaction; and repeated difficulty may weaken engagement. Reverse relationships are also plausible: engaged learners may make greater use of limited resources, and effective teachers may mobilize community support. These links are analytical propositions assembled from heterogeneous evidence, not causal pathways estimated by the review.

The framework's contribution is to connect institutional provision with the conversion of resources into usable competence and recognized opportunity. It combines Sen's (1999) concern with substantive freedoms and Bourdieu's (1986) attention to accumulated capital. A school intervention may interrupt one constraint without changing all the others. Accordingly, the framework should guide questions about relationships and variation, rather than justify a composite ranking that labels coastal schools deficient before their conditions have been investigated.

Table 1. Proposed responses and indicators for local testing

Dimension	Proposed Response	Evidence To Collect
Policy implementation	Needs-based staffing and logistical support.	Lessons actually delivered; vacancies; continuity across terms.
Teacher support	Sustained mentoring and classroom-based development.	Observed instructional practice; participation and follow-up support.
Material and digital access	Resource audit; offline or low-bandwidth alternatives where needed.	Usable devices and materials; affordability; actual learning use.
Language interaction	Achievable tasks using community knowledge and multilingual resources.	Participation; task completion; opportunities for feedback and revision.
Motivation and aspirations	Visible study pathways, achievable goals, and learner consultation.	Student-valued goals; engagement over time; access to further opportunities.

Note. These are proposed indicators, not variables measured or validated in the present review.

Limitations and Research Priorities

The evidence base does not establish a national urban–coastal proficiency gap.

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Most local studies concern rural settings, and the island evidence represents a small number of teachers. National reviews, emergency online teaching studies, and international theoretical work address different questions. Limited access to some full texts also restricts appraisal. The purposive search, heterogeneous designs, and absence of independent screening mean that the synthesis cannot claim comprehensiveness, prevalence estimates, or a validated causal model.

Future fieldwork should compare schools across clearly defined coastal types and urban settings, while accounting for socioeconomic conditions, school level, staffing, and local language environments. Researchers should document instructional time, transport, resource use, classroom interaction, and students' own priorities. Repeated observation would help distinguish temporary disruption from persistent constraints. Pilots of mentoring, accessible materials, and community-based tasks should assess learning and participation over time, including cases where the proposed links fail. Such evidence can refine the framework rather than simply confirm it.

CONCLUSION

The review identifies five dimensions through which institutional conditions may shape access to English education: policy implementation, teacher support, material and digital access, meaningful interaction, and motivation and aspirations. Indonesian rural research supplies relevant evidence, and an island case makes part of the argument directly pertinent to maritime settings. The transfer of these findings to the diversity of underserved coastal communities remains conditional. The article therefore offers a framework for investigation rather than a measured account of national urban–coastal inequality.

Educational justice requires examining how resources become usable learning opportunities. The practical implication is to coordinate staffing, sustained professional support, appropriate materials, and multilingual participation around documented local needs. Compulsory primary English makes this coordination timely, but policy announcements alone cannot demonstrate equitable implementation. Comparative field research and evaluated local interventions are needed to establish which relationships matter, for whom, and under what conditions. The proposed framework is valuable insofar as it makes

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those relationships open to scrutiny and revision.

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