

11-5-2022

## Working Conditions of Indonesian Remote Elementary School Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study in Southern Papua

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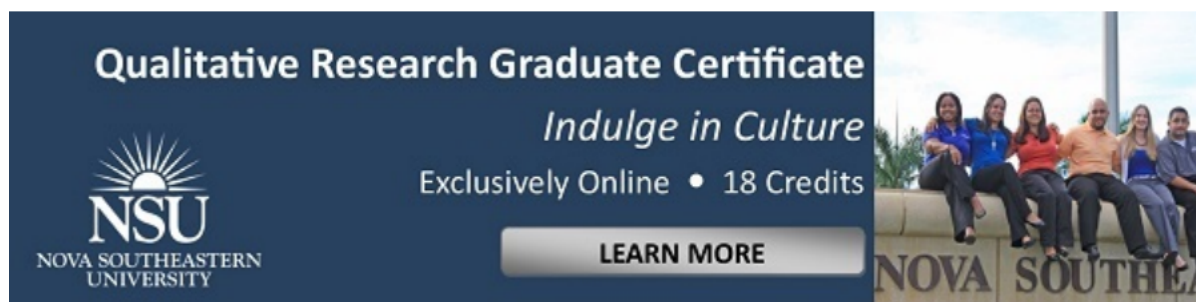
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### Recommended APA Citation

Werang, B. R., Wea, D., & Wolomasi, A. K. (2022). Working Conditions of Indonesian Remote Elementary School Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study in Southern Papua. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(11), 2446-2468. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5834>

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### Abstract

The quality of the teaching-learning process is determined not only by the qualifications and competence of teachers, but also by the school conditions in which they work. Teachers are clear about the working conditions that they need for them to be successful with students. A better working condition improves mood and concentration and provides an excellent working approach for teachers. This case study was intended to learn what working conditions teachers note as challenging while teaching in the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua. Seventeen teachers were willing to be interviewed to assist in answering the main inquiry question: "What are the most concerning aspects of working conditions that the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua have to deal with?" The study found four aspects of working conditions facing the remote elementary school teachers of Southern Papua, Indonesia, as the following: (a) school physical facilities and resources, (b) school principal, (c) salary and allowance, and (d) parents' support and involvement. From the results, we recommend the need for the regional government of Southern Papua, Indonesia, to create and maintain good conditions for teachers to remain teaching the youth of nations in a quality manner.

### Keywords

elementary school, teacher, working condition, qualitative case study

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### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the elementary school teachers who have participated actively in the study

## **Working Conditions of Indonesian Remote Elementary School Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study in Southern Papua**

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The quality of the teaching-learning process is determined not only by the qualifications and competence of teachers, but also by the school conditions in which they work. Teachers are clear about the working conditions that they need for them to be successful with students. A better working condition improves mood and concentration and provides an excellent working approach for teachers. This case study was intended to learn what working conditions teachers note as challenging while teaching in the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua. Seventeen teachers were willing to be interviewed to assist in answering the main inquiry question: “What are the most concerning aspects of working conditions that the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua have to deal with?” The study found four aspects of working conditions facing the remote elementary school teachers of Southern Papua, Indonesia, as the following: (a) school physical facilities and resources, (b) school principal, (c) salary and allowance, and (d) parents’ support and involvement. From the results, we recommend the need for the regional government of Southern Papua, Indonesia, to create and maintain good conditions for teachers to remain teaching the youth of nations in a quality manner.

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### **Introduction**

Teaching is a prestigious profession as there is no occupation more valuable to the state than that of a man or woman who educates the future generations of nations. Despite the widespread recognition of teachers' critical role in educating children and adolescents, the issue of whether teachers are satisfied with their working conditions is often ignored (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011; Liang & Akiba, 2017). “While the role of teachers’ work for student outcome is widely recognized, the question whether teachers are content with their working environment is often overlooked” (Toropova et al., 2021, p. 1). Teachers are certain of the conditions that must exist for them to be effective with their students (The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004). Good school conditions may reduce teachers’ stress and absenteeism, improve students’ attendance and achievement, and even help to alleviate many school problems (Werang et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2017; Wula et al., 2020; Wullur et al., 2020). Several current studies (Asaloei et al., 2020; Wea et al., 2020; Werang et al., 2017, 2019, 2021; Yunarti et al., 2020) contended that school conditions have a significant impact on elementary school teacher absenteeism and student capability in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Working conditions contribute considerably to health disparities within and across generations. Bascia and Rottmann (2011), in their endeavor to assess the school working environment, emphasized the significance of working circumstances for both school and

teacher performance, as well as students' learning prospects. Working conditions are mainly created by teachers' interactions with their school climate, which include both physical and psychological (Gerber et al., 1998). Ladd (2011) and Johnson et al. (2011), for instance, investigated the physical properties of teachers' working conditions such as school material properties and amenities, while other researchers (Croninger et al., 2007; Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009) examined more the qualifications and competences of one's coworkers as components of the teacher's working conditions that have the most influence on teachers' efficiency through peer learning.

The working conditions for a teaching profession might range from perfectly comfortable to extremely challenging and dangerous to teachers' lives and health. There are many aspects of working conditions to consider, including working hours (hours of work/rest periods/work schedules), compensation, and the physical/mental demands of the workplace (International Labor Organization, n/d). Shonje (2016) argued that teachers' working conditions encompass all existing conditions affecting teachers in schools, such as work hours, school physical facilities, legal obligations and rights, school culture, workload, and training. So far, little empirical evidence is available on teachers' working conditions in the remote elementary schools of Indonesia in general and Southern Papua in particular. Thus, this study sought to close the gap by examining the teachers' working conditions, inviting the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua as the participants.

This study focused on the working conditions of the remote elementary school teachers of Southern Papua, Indonesia, to address the regional calls (Werang et al., 2019) for increasing teacher attendance and students' capability in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Our research question was, "What are the most concerning aspects of working conditions that the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua have to deal with?" A qualitative case study was employed to answer this question.

## **Related Literature**

### **Defining Teachers' Working Conditions**

Working conditions are central to paid work and employment affiliations. There are many definitions of teachers' working conditions. Petersen (2018) defined teachers' working conditions as the context within which a teacher is supposed to perform his/her job. In the same vein, Sedarmayanti (2007) defined teachers' working conditions as conditions in which teachers do their work of teaching. Meanwhile Business Dictionary (2019) defined teachers' working conditions as the conditions in which a teacher or a group of teachers work, including but not limited to amenities, physical surroundings, level of safety or risk, organizational climate, workload, stress, and noise level. Nitisemito (1992) defined teachers' working conditions as factors, both internal and external, that may affect teachers' working spirits and result in a job that is completed quickly.

Teachers' working conditions refers to the teachers' working environment as well as aspects of the teachers' occupation terms and conditions (Eurwork, 2011). Working conditions denote any rights, obligations, or circumstances related to the conduct and actions of school principals and teachers as well within the scope of the work relationship, or in the school where the teaching is rendered (Law Insider, n/d). Based on this argument, teachers' working conditions can simply be defined as all the school aspects both concrete and transactional (e.g., compensation, workload, school amenities, and properties) and communal and transformative (e.g., collegial teamwork, support from the school principal, and local community ties) that influence teachers' happiness and firmness to endure teaching or quit the teaching profession.

## **The Importance of Good Working Conditions**

Good working conditions are a key motivator for teachers, especially those teachers assigned to remote and difficult locations. Positive working conditions are essential for increasing teachers' satisfaction and reducing turnover, as well as for developing a high-performing workforce (Orodho et al., 2013). A welcoming and helpful work atmosphere attracts teachers to the teaching career, motivates them to stay, and allows them to complete work excellently (Davidson, 2005).

Positive school conditions foster settings that enable teachers to operate effectively, maximizing their knowledge, skills, and competences, as well as available resources, to provide high-quality education (Shonje, 2016). Teachers and employers both benefit from favorable work environments in a variety of ways, including the following: (a) increased productivity, (b) increased morale, (c) increased growth, and (d) increased collegial collaboration (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021).

Malhan (2019) claimed that positive school conditions have numerous positive benefits for the welfare of teachers. Wea et al. (2020) agreed with Malhan's (2019) claim that pleasant school conditions encourage teachers to work harder, whereas poor school conditions cause tension and stress among teachers, who may then abandon the profession. In other words, teachers who enjoy their teaching profession and the areas they visit each day are likely to be more productive and make fewer errors, while poor working conditions might cause teachers to become demotivated and eventually quit.

## **Aspects of Teachers' Working Conditions**

Teachers' working conditions are comprised of many factors. Researchers (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005, 2011), seeking to grasp how to adjust students' learning by arranging teachers' working conditions, recognized the full array of the issues that outline teachers' working conditions, varying from the real and transactional (e.g., compensation, workload, and physical amenities) to the social and transformative issues (e.g., coworker teamwork and supports from the school principal).

Hirsch et al. (2006, pp. 11-12), from their survey, identified six working conditions that teachers may consider when deciding whether to remain teaching or to leave the teaching profession. They are the following: (a) time, (b) school facilities, (c) empowerment, (d) leadership, (e) professional development, and (f) mentoring and instruction. The National Center for Education Statistics (1996, pp. 1-21) has shown several working conditions as the following: (a) workload, (b) compensation, (d) teachers' participation in school decision making, (e) school safety, (f) student readiness to learn, and (g) respect for teachers.

In this study we only focus on the aspects of working conditions indicated by TELL Kentucky Survey (Tungate, 2013, p. 2). In the survey, seven aspects of working conditions were identified as significant in determining teachers' decisions to remain teaching or to leave: (a) time which refers to the time availability for planning, collaborating, providing direction, and eliminating impediments in order to optimize teaching time throughout the school day; (b) school physical amenities and properties which refer to the availability of school office, technology, and other school physical amenities for teachers; (c) the attachment and care of local community which refer to how the local community takes care of the school and is involved in the school activities; (d) controlling student behavior which refers to how school policy and personnel addresses student behavior issues; (e) teacher leadership which refers to how teachers participate actively in the school decisions that greatly impact both school and classroom practices; (f) school leadership which refers to how the school principal creates trusting, helpful circumstances and addresses teachers' needs; (g) professional growth which

refers to how the school provides teachers with education and training chances to improve their teaching quality; and (h) teaching practices and support which refer to how the school provides for teachers with the data and supports that enable them to improve teaching and learning.

In the context of Southern Papua, there is a single study that has specifically investigated teacher working conditions conducted by Wea et al. (2020). In their study, Wea et al. investigated the potential correlation between working conditions and the elementary school teachers' job performance. Using a quantitative-survey research design, the study revealed a positive and significant correlation between the surveyed variables. In addition, there is also another earlier study (Werang et al., 2017) which did not directly look at the teacher working conditions, but it could explain why we focused on the aspects of working conditions proposed by the TELL Kentucky Survey. Werang et al. (2017), in their study entitled *Factors Influencing Teacher Absenteeism in the Remote Elementary Schools of Indonesia: Empirical Proof from Southern Papua*, identified teacher working conditions as one of the contributing factors to the high levels of teacher absenteeism in the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua. Since this study is aimed at disclosing the most concerning aspects of working conditions that the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua must deal with, then the aspects of working conditions proposed by the TELL Kentucky Survey might be the most applicable for the Southern Papua context as some of its aspects are in line with those factors affecting teacher absenteeism found by Werang et al. (2017). By probing the research question of "What are the most concerning aspects of working conditions that the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua have to deal with?" We are encouraged to identify those aspects of working conditions that are of greatest concern and need to be addressed immediately.

### **The Role of Researchers**

All the researchers are Indonesian and are interested in research focused on school management, teacher behavior, students' engagement, learning strategy, and academic achievement. Basilius Redan Werang is a faculty member of educational science, Ganesha University of Education. He is the first author of this manuscript. He graduated with a doctorate in educational management from the State University of Malang, East Java, Indonesia. He has experience with research methods, including qualitative research methods in education. He served as the creator of original draft and manuscript corresponding author. By conducting interviews, he also assisted with data collection and analysis.

Donatus Wea is a director of Catholic College of Santo Yakobus, Merauke. He graduated with a doctorate in educational management from the State University of Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. He has experience with research methods, including qualitative research methods in education. He assisted with data collection and analysis.

Agustinus Kia Wolomasi is a lecturer at Catholic College of Santo Yakobus, Merauke. He holds a master's degree in the field of educational management from the University of Cendrawasih, Jayapura, Indonesia. He has experience with research methods, including qualitative research in education. He assisted with data collection and analysis.

### **Method**

#### **Study Site**

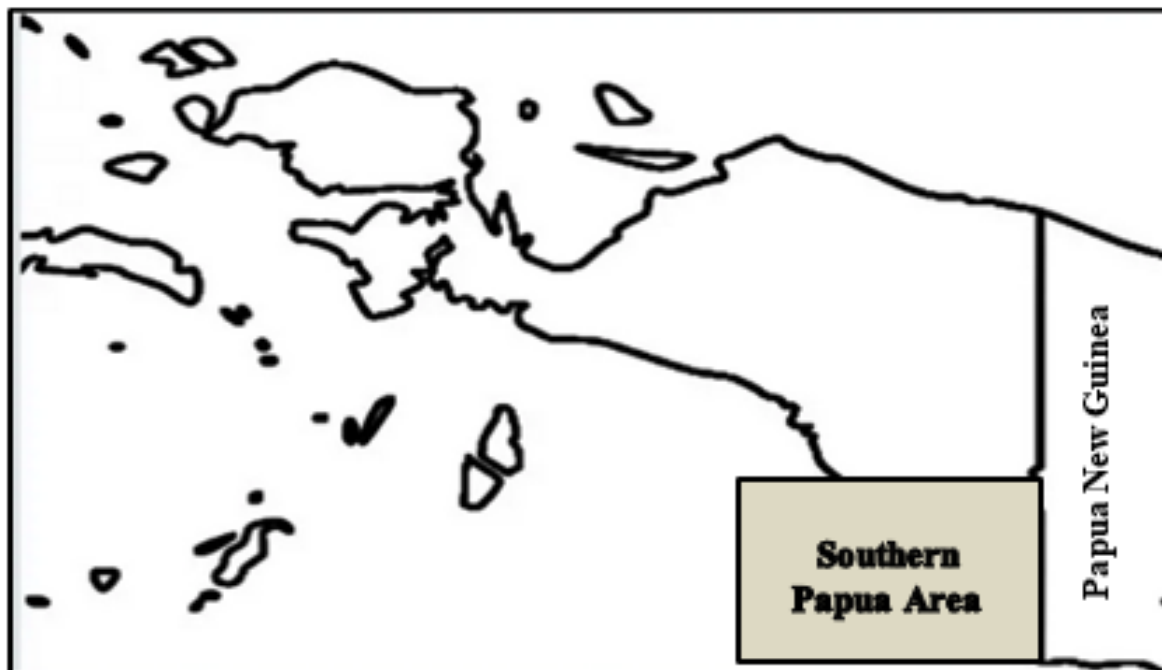
The site of this study is Southern Papua which is in Papua Province in the Eastern part of Indonesia. The Indonesian Government has classified the Papua Province in general as

remote and underdeveloped, with the Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.606, the lowest of all other provinces (Indonesian Central Statistics Agency, 2021). Because of this low HDI score, the Papua Province government has attempted to raise the score by granting a special allowance to remote primary school teachers.

Southern Papua is topographically located between 137<sup>0</sup>-141<sup>0</sup> East Longitude and 03<sup>0</sup>39'-09<sup>0</sup> South Longitude, with total area of 132,805.36 km<sup>2</sup> and the total population of 558,121. Geographically, Southern Papua area is characterized by extensive peat lands and swamps. Despite the benefits of peat lands and swamps in terms of sustaining and regulating the ecosystem's continuous processes, peat lands and swamps challenged the remarkable dedication and battling spirit of teachers teaching in remote schools of Southern Papua. Within this peat lands and swamps area 598 primary schools were built and 3,757 remote elementary school teachers were struggling to educate thousands of the nation's children to become literate and numerate.

**Figure 1**

*Southern Papua Area*



The latest Indonesian Education Curriculum (known as Kurikulum Merdeka) emphasizes the importance of literacy, numeracy, and character education from the early years of children's growth. Elementary school teachers in general, and remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua in particular, are called to align their instruction activities with the three objectives outlined in the curriculum. The challenging working conditions facing the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua have compelled us to investigate how they perceived their working conditions and how the working conditions affect their instructional work in aligning the curriculum's objectives.

## Study Design

This study, by its very nature, is a case study as it sought to provide a comprehensive description of a case to identify variables related to teachers' working conditions in the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua. A case study is a general study type that is used to

develop a comprehensive grasp of a multifaceted issue in its natural setting (Crowe et al., 2011; Sturman, 1997) or to evaluate the performance of work or progress in the development process (Leba et al., 2021).

According to Starman (2013, p. 31), a case study is used when a researcher wishes to analyze and describe in detail an individual, a group of individuals, a problem or a series of problems, a process, or a phenomenon. We used a case study approach for two reasons: (a) we desired to investigate a current happening in its natural setting, particularly when the distinction between phenomenon and context were blurred, and (b) we could use a variety of data sources to analyze a current happening in its natural setting (Leba et al., 2021; Werang & Leba, 2022). The case of this study was the working conditions of the elementary school teachers with the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua, Indonesia, as the context of the study.

## **Participants**

In this case study we solely focused on teachers working in the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua. We do believe they were able to give us a wealth of information regarding their working conditions, enabling us to gain as much knowledge as possible.

Due to the remoteness, we employed a convenience sampling technique to establish the number of participants. Convenience sampling, alternatively called accidental sampling, is a nonrandom sampling technique in which participants who meet specific conditions, such as ease of access, landscape proximity, and the willingness to participate, are included in the study (Etiken et al., 2016, p. 2). Convenience sampling involves selecting participants in ascending order of appearance based on their accessibility (Martinez-Mesa et al., 2016, p. 327). From this viewpoint, the sampling procedure concludes when the total numbers of participants and/or the time restrictions are reached.

For this study, participants were chosen based on their eagerness to actively engage in the study. The participants of this study included 17 remote elementary school teachers who were willing to be interviewed out of 50 elementary school teachers of Southern Papua who were conveniently invited to be involved in this study. They were 11 females and 6 males, aged 25 to 50 years old, with the teaching experience from 1 to 15 years.

## **Data Collection**

For this study, we used interviews to gather data as it is the most widespread procedure of data collecting in qualitative research (Sanjani, 2020). Besides, the qualitative interviews are more flexible and less structured so we could easily investigate issues that arose during the interview process beyond the scope of the question guide (Bryman, 2008).

In accordance with Moustakas' (1994) assumption about the sorts of interviews, in this study we employed topical inquiry and informal interviewing with a typical directed interview procedure. We asked participants to discuss and share their experience on the aspects of school conditions that may affect their lives both inside and outside the classroom. We conducted both general and specific interviews. During the general interview, we focused on participants' personal data such as gender, age, and teaching experience. Meanwhile, in the specific interview, we focused on participants' information regarding the aspects of school conditions facing the remote elementary school teachers about which they were most concerned. We settled the interview questions by modifying eight aspects of working conditions found by the TELL Kentucky Survey (Tungate, 2013, p. 2), such as school facilities and properties, local community participation and contribution, school principal leadership, salary and allowance, and teaching materials. Here are four examples of questions we asked: In your experience, what are the challenges that the elementary school teachers in Southern Papua face in terms of



working conditions? Would you like to share with us how much you get paid each month and how much you get reimbursed? Would you like to share with us how the school principal solves the problems that teachers in school must deal with? Would you like to share with us about parents' participation and contributions? Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 60 minutes in the participant's respective place. The entire process of interviews was conducted in the Indonesian language and recorded using a voice recorder device.

At the study site, we acted ethically to ensure that our presence did not disrupt the informants' lives and occupations. Throughout the interviews, we wished participants to feel at ease and willing to provide all the information we require in an open and truthful manner. To protect their rights, all research participants were asked to provide their personal consent to participate voluntarily in the study. We were the sole holders of all personal data. The study did not require institutional review board approval at the time of data collection as it is not a must in Indonesian context.

## Data Analysis

Through this case study, we endeavored to answer the question, "What are the most concerning aspects of working conditions that the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua have to deal with?" Qualitative data collection and analysis are coordinated through an iterative process (Hartley, 2004; Lester et al., 2020). As soon as the data collecting had begun, obtained data were immediately analyzed. Data for this study were qualitatively analyzed using a thematic analysis technique as it allowed us to justify, exhibit, or review data points to identify patterns (Rawat, 2021). We used thematic qualitative analysis for two reasons: (a) thematic analysis provides for us a helpful technique of investigating the perceptions of different research participants and highlighting the similarities and differences of those perceptions (Braun & Clark, 2006), and (b) thematic analysis provided a helpful technique of shortening the most important qualities of a big data set (King, 2004).

According to Yin (2003), early data analysis is a decisive step in the total understanding of case studies. Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed a variety of techniques that can be used in the early stages of case study analysis. We started data analysis with "data reduction" using the coding technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as it allowed for the data to be linked back to the research question (Atkinson, 2002). We coded the data using the "initial" and "pattern" coding proposed by Saldaña (2013). In the initial coding, we detected informants' utterances that pointed to concerning aspects of working conditions facing the remote elementary school teachers in Southern Papua, Indonesia. In the pattern coding, we ordered all data that had been coded initially into suitable themes, sub-themes, and components based on the research question. We did it manually using highlighters on hard copies of transcripts. The following are behavioral examples of what we did in the first phase.

**Table 1**

<u>Interviewer's Question</u>	<u>Informants' Responses</u>	<u>Initial Codes</u>
In your experience, what are the challenges that the elementary school teachers in Southern Papua face in term of working conditions?	The most challenges are <b>the school houses</b> . We have two houses here. Each house has two rooms. We are a group of eight, five men and three women. You may imagine how we share this house among us. <b>No electricity</b> is another aspect that may influence teachers' intention to heading for city area. We <b>were using solar cell</b> at	<b>Lack of school houses</b>  <b>No electricity</b>  <b>Using solar cell for lighting</b>

night, but it becomes a major issue during rainy season.

To deal with the electricity issue, we used candles at night for lighting.

Using candles for lighting

The school principal absenteeism. Since the school principal is absent from school for a long period of time, we do nothing. Besides, school principal seems not to have a clear vision of where the school will be brought to. Another problem we face is that lack of teaching facilities such as handbooks for students.

The school principal absenteeism

School principal does not have a clear vision about school

Lack of teaching materials

You know, our school houses are about to damage. We have informed this condition to the regional education administrators.

School houses are about to damage

We do hope the school principal will seriously think of it, but nothing is happen.

School principal seemed to be silent

Lack of school physical facilities such as school houses and electricity. Due to the lack of school houses, we come here to teach alternately.

No electricity

Lack of school houses

School physical facilities. Even though we have three school houses, that's not good at all as we are a group of 10, with four female teachers. There is absolutely no privacy.

Lack of school houses

Would you like to share with us how school principal deals with all problems facing the teachers?

I have an impression that the school principal does not have a clear vision of where this school is going to and how achieve that vision. School principal even has no ideas on how to both direct and assist teachers to solve the problem faced.

School principal has no vision of where the school is going to

School principal has no clear ideas to direct and assist teachers

School principal has no vision at all. He comes here twice a year only, at the beginning and at the end of semester. He has no clear ideas to direct and assist teachers.

School principals has no vision

School principal has no clear ideas to direct and assist teachers

Let us talk about school decision-making. Did you give any advice to the school principal?

School principal does not give teachers a platform to provide advice.

Teachers are not provided a platform to provide advice

We were even not involved in the school decision-making.

Teachers are not involved in the school decision-making

We do not have a school meeting, so we can't make a school decision together. School principal comes twice a year just to make sure that all the teaching learning process is going well.

There are no school meetings because the school principal comes to school twice a year only

Let us discuss something that is quite personal. Could you please tell us how much you were paid monthly?

My monthly salary and allowance are around IDR 7,500,000.

My monthly salary and allowance are around IDR 9,750,000.

Thank very much for informing us about your monthly salary and allowance. In your personal experience, is your monthly salary and allowance enough to meet your family need?

Comparing to my fellow teachers here, my monthly salary and allowance is quite generous. However, because I have to share it with my family in the city, it is insufficient for both of us.

Salaries and allowance is not enough to afford family monthly needs

It may be adequate for those who work in the city, but it is far from adequate for those of us who live in the remote area. The living costs in the remote are extremely high. Transportation costs are also extremely high due to the remoteness.

Salary and allowance are not enough to afford the cost of living in the remote area

Nothing is cheap in the remote area. To be honest, I've spent more than IDR 150,000 on a carton of noodles and a can of cooking oil. It is understandable that the remote elementary school teachers are unhappy with their salaries and allowance.

Salary and allowance is not enough due to that of nothing is cheap in the remote area

What about parents' involvement and contribution?

In remote area where education is undervalued we can't hope much. Parents even do not know that they are required to participate and contribute actively in their children's learning. For your information, when the school begins, parents simply come to school and inform teachers that they will be taking their children fishing in the river or harvesting sago in the forest.

Education is undervalued by parents

Parents even do not know that they have to involve and contribute actively

Parents bring their children fishing in the river or harvesting sago in the forest

Many times we educate parents about the importance of education for the future life of their children, but always the same. They let their children work with them.

Parents are not really aware of the importance of education for their children

Letting children work for income-generating

Student absent from school to work.

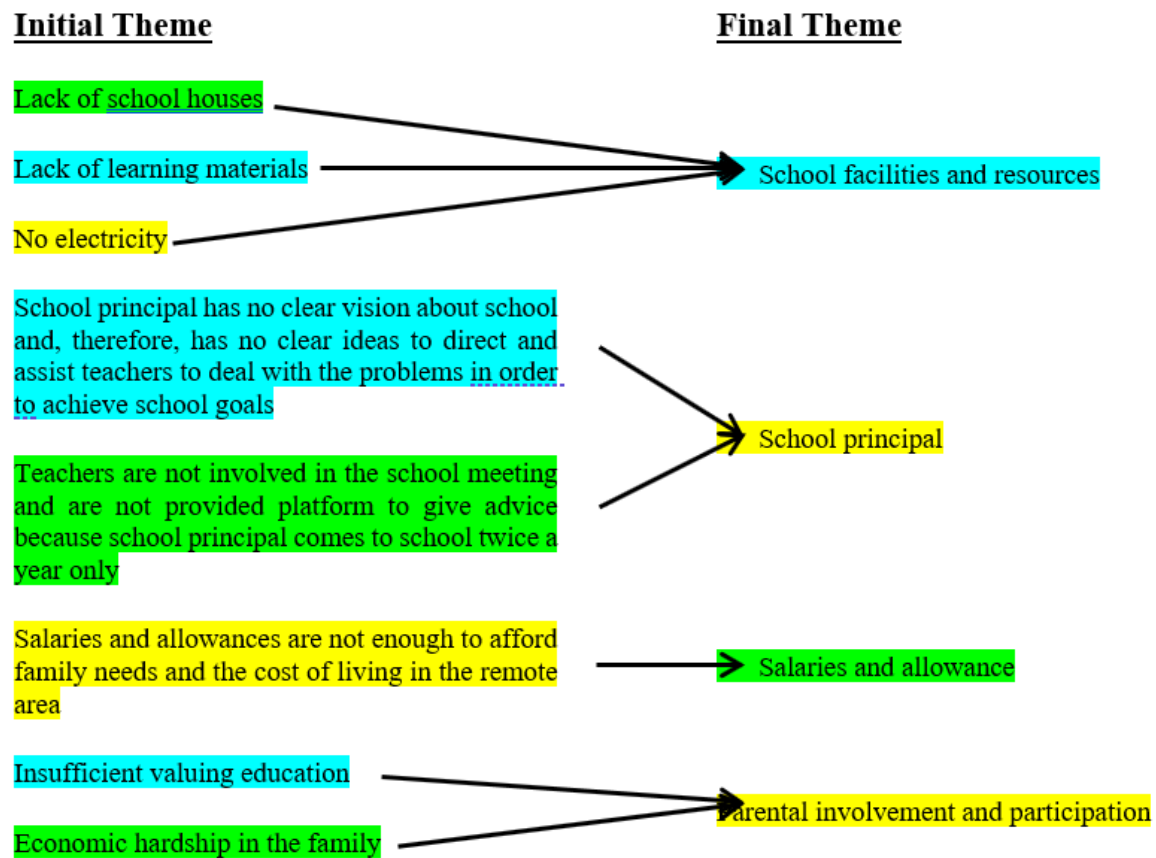
Students are absent from school for income generating

In the second phase, we systematized all the data that had been coded in the first phase into relevant categories and themes in line with the research question, and then focused to data displays. We went over each transcript, coding every chunk of text that looked related to the research question. As at the first cycle, we performed manually using highlighters on hard copies of transcripts. The following are some samples of what we did in the second phase.

Figure 2|



In the third phase, “conclusion drawing” and “verification,” we went to the process of reviewing and naming the themes that had been developed in the second phase. To ensure that the final names of themes were clear, we checked all the themes that had been generated in the previous phase and then verbalized the final name of each theme precisely to ensure that it was easily understandable.

**Figure 3**

### Trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness consisted of four essential elements, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Elo et al., 2014). Of four crucial components, credibility is considered as the most decisive elements. Triangulation and member checking are two methods of ascertaining credibility and providing trustworthiness. To ensure the credibility of obtained data, we used the informants' confirmation (Merriam & Tissdel, 2016) by allowing them to fix mistakes and challenging what they taught was wrong. In this study we used the member checking strategy (Creswell, 2007) to justify the research credibility by presenting the interview transcriptions to the participants and soliciting their feedback. The informants' feedback was that the transcripts displayed their views perfectly.

### Results

We determined four main themes. School principal was the first main theme to emerge, followed by school physical facilities and resources as the second main theme. The third main theme that emerged was salary and allowance, while the fourth and final main theme was community support and involvement. These four main themes are discussed narratively as the following.

## School Principal

The study found that almost all the school principals of remote elementary schools surveyed were not at school during the time of data collection. There are two sub-aspects of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to the school principal. The first is the principal's direction and support. When we were conversing about the school principal's direction and support, many participants, especially those who have been in the teaching profession for more than five years reported a perceived lack of direction and assistance from the school principal. The participants provided the following feedback.

- |                |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participant 12 | : | I have an impression that the school principal does not have a clear vision of where this school is going to and how to achieve that vision. As a result, the school principal appears to have no idea how to both direct and assist teachers in finding a clear solution to the problems faced.                                                                                                               |
| Participant 13 | : | The school principal, in my opinion, lacks vision because he has only visited this school twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of the semester. He comes here at the beginning of each semester to ensure that the school is open for students and that all of the teachers are present to teach. He returns at the end of the semester to supervise the exams and sign the students' transcripts. |
| Participant 14 | : | It's not only a question of the school principal's direction and support but, to be honest, I'm not sure where the school principal is at the moment. My school principal has been leaving for the city for a long period of time.                                                                                                                                                                             |

The second sub-aspect of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to school principal is the decision-making process. The majority of participants reported a sense of being isolated as the school principal did not provide a platform for teachers to provide advice and to discuss their problems. The study also found that all the participants felt they were never included in any school decision-making process, whether it was directly related to teachers or not. The participants referred to the school principal as the only decision-maker, especially when it came to the annual school's grant disbursed by the central government. Two of the participants provided the following information.

- |                |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participant 07 | : | We are not even given a chance to provide advice and to discuss the school problems that we have to deal with. We have to think and to struggle on our own to solve the school problems.                       |
| Participant 10 | : | So far, we have never been involved in the school decision-making. We often feel humiliated in matters related to school development plans. The school principal is the sole manager of annual school's grant. |

## School Physical Facilities and Resources

The study revealed at least four sub-aspects of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to school physical facilities and resources. The first is schoolhouses for teachers. When they were asked about the school housings, many participants reported an increased sense of disturbance when they have to share a schoolhouse with their colleagues. The following are the participants' comments related to the issue of school housings.

- Participant 08 : Even though we have three schoolhouses, that's not good at all as we are a group of 10, with four female teachers. There is absolutely no privacy.
- Participant 02 : I'm not sure. All I know is that some of my coworkers were often leaving the school simply in search of more appealing endeavors.

Besides, when they were asked how to deal with the issue of damaged school housings, they said that they could do nothing. One of the participants provided the following comments.

- Participant 01 : We don't have anything to do. We just informed regional education administrators about these conditions, but unfortunately, nothing has changed. Temporarily, we come here to teach alternately.

Though it was not clearly stated during the time of data collection, it was observed that remote elementary school teachers in some surveyed schools were converting one or more classrooms as teachers' residences. Teachers were converting these classes with the students' assistance. This action will, of course, diminish the number of classrooms available for teaching and learning activities. Besides, the majority of the participants reported that they leave their families in the central part of city mostly due to the lack of schoolhouses.

The second sub-aspect of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to school physical facilities and resources was school buildings. It was observed during the time of data collection that many school buildings have begun to deteriorate. It was also observed that many remote elementary schools lacked adequate restrooms and toilets. It was untenable that there were students suffering from stomachaches and diarrhea.

The third sub-aspect of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to school physical facilities and resources was no electricity facilities and internet access. Many participants reported that they were unable to do much at night due to a lack of electricity. When we were conversing about the electric power and how they handled nighttime lights, two participants offered the following information.

- Participant10 : At night, we usually use solar cells. During the rainy season, however, it becomes a major issue.
- Participant 15 : We use candles or lamps for lighting. The issue arises when our supply of candles and lamp oil runs out.

The fourth sub-aspect of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to school physical facilities and resources was books for teacher and students. It was discovered that none of the remote elementary schools surveyed had a school library. It was not surprising

that all the participants reported feeling as if they were the only source of learning for their students.

### **Salary and Allowance**

Salary and allowance were found to be one of the most vexing aspects of working conditions facing the remote elementary school teachers of Southern Papua, Indonesia. When we were conversing about the amount of salary and allowance, two participants provided the following feedback.

- Participant 17 : Actually, I'm embarrassed to tell you... But it's all right. My monthly salary and allowance are around IDR 9,750,000 (about \$697 USD).
- Participant 16 : My monthly salary and allowance are around IDR 7,500,000 (approximately \$525 USD)

When we were conversing further about whether or not the salary and benefits they received are sufficient to meet their daily needs, several participants provided the following information.

- Participant 11 : Not enough. Really not enough.
- Participant 16 : It may be adequate for those who work in cities, but it is far from adequate for those of us who live in remote areas. The cost of living in this remote area is extremely high. Transportation costs are also extremely high due to the remoteness.
- Participant 17 : Comparing to my fellow teachers here, my monthly salary and allowance is quite generous. However,...because I have to share it with my family in the city, it is insufficient for both of us.
- Participant 12 : Nothing is cheap in the remote area. To be honest, I've had to spend more than IDR 150,000 on a carton of noodles or a can of cooking oil on occasion. It's understandable that the remote elementary school teachers were unhappy with their salaries and allowances.
- Participant 13 : Due to the remoteness, my monthly salary and allowances, not matter how large, will insufficient to meet all of my daily needs. Since my wife and children live in the city, I must split my monthly and allowance with them.
- Participant 06 : It is difficult to live and work with disadvantaged students. Teachers are occasionally required to provide extra meals for students who do not have enough to eat at home. Teachers, you know, need more money for this.

### **Community Support and Involvement**



The term, community here refers to the parents. The study found two sub-aspects of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to community support and involvement, namely parental support and involvement in their children's education. It was surprising that during the time of data collection, we noticed so many school-age children fishing with their parents in the river, and then, on other occasions we also noticed so many children following their parents into the forest. We didn't know what was done there. When we asked the teachers we were met with the facts of we'd noticed; they laughed at first and then provided the following comments.

- Participant 08 : (laughing)...To be honest, what you've noticed is what my colleagues and I had to deal with. When the school starts, the parents simply show up and announce that they will be bringing their children along with them to fish in the river or to harvest sago in the forest.
- Participant 13 : Parents unconcerned about whether or not teacher allows it. They did what they have told whether it is legal or not.
- Participant 14 : I'm tired of telling them how important education is. There is no change. They are more likely to think about what they can eat today than what they can eat tomorrow.

The second aspect of remote elementary school teachers' working conditions related to community support and involvement was parental involvement. Parents have legal custody of their children, and it is understandable that teachers expect more from parents to be actively involved in their children's education. However, many participants reported a perceived lack of parents' involvement in school activities as well as children's education. Though it was not clearly expressed during the time of data collection, it was observed that parents tend to allow their children work for income-generating. Parents seem to put all the responsibility of their children's education on the teachers, regardless of what the teachers believe or how much burden the teachers bear.

## **Discussion**

Teachers are vital components of any modern society because they play a unique role in the lives of children during their formative years. In today's world, a teacher's role is quite multifaceted. Their job is to counsel students, help them learn how to use their knowledge and integrate it into their lives so they will become valuable members of society. The quality of teaching-learning process is not just determined by the teachers' qualification and competence, but also the school conditions in which they work (Leithwood, 2006). Leithwood argued that teacher working conditions may affect teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, engagement, morale, and even stress and burnout. As a result, teacher teaching commitment will be also affected. This study sought to learn about teachers' working conditions in the elementary schools of Southern Papua, Indonesia. The study revealed that the most concerning working conditions facing the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua was the school principal followed by school physical facilities, salaries, and community ties.

School principal leadership seemed to be one of the most crucial factors influencing school effectiveness as well as teaching and learning process. School principals serve as role models for teachers and students in their schools, particularly in activities related to the teaching-learning process. Research on school leadership have focused on overall support, trust, communication, and participation. Support from school principals has traditionally meant

administrators who back teachers up when it comes to student discipline, shield teachers from outside-the-classroom forces, and minimize non-teaching obligations and duties—all of which have been linked to new teachers' commitment to teaching (Berry et al., 2008, p. 14).

The rapid global change has led to the growing accountability pressures on school principals and sound leaders are guided by and convey a clear set of personal and educational standards (Day et al., 2001; Hallinger, 2001). To respond to the rapid global changes, Indonesian Education Minister Regulation No. 13 year 2007 on School/Madrasah Leader's Standards has established five minimum standards of skills that the school principal should have as the following: (a) managerial skills, (b) personal skills, (c) social skills, (d) entrepreneurial skills, and (e) supervision skills. In the Southern Papua context, it appears that these five minimum standards are not being applied as several current studies (Werang & Pure, 2017; Werang et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2019) reported that the local government tended to appoint school principals based on their political interest.

Despite the sustainable efforts of Indonesian government in creating various programs for improving school leaders' capability, the school principal was reported to frequently leave the school for an extended period. This demonstrates that the government improvement programs might be deemed to be ineffective as they fail to alter the negative behavior and impression of the school principals. From this viewpoint, successful remote elementary school teachers of Southern Papua recognize the significance of having a qualified school principal, both academically and morally. According to our participants, the school principals' failure in managing annual school grants, as well as leaving the school for an extended period of time, make it difficult for the elementary school principals in Southern Papua to establish and maintain better working conditions for teachers to remain teaching the future generations of nation.

Some academics believe that physical school facilities can help teachers teach more effectively (Berry et al., 2008). Werang et al. (2017, p. 237; 2019, p. 147) asserted that the physical construction limited the learning experience, and therefore, school physical facilities should be designed in such a way as to adapt the changes in learning patterns and methods. Kuuskorpi and González (2011) argued that school physical facilities and resources such as classrooms, offices, toilets, furniture, adequate teachers' and students' textbooks, sport fields, and attractive school grounds and equipment are an important part of teachers' working conditions. Furthermore, a quality elementary school is one that has facilities for an expanded curriculum that meets the needs of the community (Bowora, 2002). A good school organizes educational tours for children and caters to a wide range of skills and interests in games, sports, clubs, and cultural activities (Lippman, 2010).

Buckley et al. (2004) referred to the quality of school physical facilities and resources as major factors in determining whether teachers chose to remain teaching in their current position or to quit, whereas Werang et al. (2017) referred to inadequate school physical facilities and resources as the leading causes of teacher absenteeism in elementary schools in Southern, Papua, Indonesia. Our findings that successful elementary school teachers of Southern Papua recognize the importance of having adequate school physical facilities and resources to remain staying at schools for teaching the youth are in line with the other studies from the literature. Inadequate school physical facilities and resources in the remote area schools, as it was reported during the time of data collection, make it difficult for elementary school teachers in Southern Papua to remain teaching devotedly.

In most countries teachers are paid on a sliding scale. In the Indonesia context, when teachers join the Civil Servant (recognized as Pegawai Negeri Sipil), their salaries are not negotiable on an individual basis because all their conditions have already been defined (Kubberud et al., 1999). Even though “there is a little evidence to suggest that more highly paid teachers are systematically more effective” (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007, p. 80), some

researchers (e.g., Adediji & Olaniyan, 2011) continue to believe that increasing teachers' salaries and wages is the primary source of improving teachers working conditions. Many governments recognize this and are quick to point to the size of teachers' salaries in their total expenditure.

According to Adediji and Olaniyan (2011), adequate salary and allowance are what will ensure retention of most teachers in the rural and remote areas. Teachers' commitment to teaching and the quality of their teaching may suffer if they believe they are underpaid in comparison to other professions in the same area. As a result, qualified teachers tend to leave teaching when their pay is significantly lower than what they could earn from other jobs such as farming, raising livestock, and opening stalls to meet their basic families' needs (Werang & Pure, 2017; Werang et al., 2015, 2017, 2019). In line with the earlier studies' findings, our successful remote elementary school teachers recognize the significance of being paid sufficiently to meet their daily needs in remote area. The insufficient salary and allowance make it difficult for the elementary school teachers in Southern Papua to be more committed and dedicated. If these salary and allowance problems are not resolved immediately, it can become a crucial crisis that may impact on the difficulties of recruiting fresh graduate teachers to work in the remote areas.

Education is a social activity in which community serves as a facilitator and partner of the school (Sujatha, 2011). The important role of parents as primary educators for their children is undeniable. Various studies (Deviana, 2019; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kaukab, 2016; Rahman, 2001; Redding et al., 2004) have referred to parents' (community) involvement as a crucial factor affecting students' success and school conditions alike.

The involvement of parents (community) in the daily life of schools has the potential to improve the quality of education in elementary schools (Bray, 2000; Rose, 2003). In line with the above research findings, successful remote elementary school teachers of Southern Papua recognize the significance of establishing positive and harmonious relationships with the communities in which they work. The community's unawareness of education values for their children's future life, as well as their economic hardship, makes it difficult for the community to create and maintain better working conditions for teachers to teach the youth of nations in the remote elementary schools of Southern Papua.

Working conditions emerge as a strong predictor of teachers' stated intentions to stay or leave their schools, with the school principal emerging as the most important factor (Ladd, 2011). A pleasant working environment can provide teachers with comfort and security as they carry out their teaching duties and other responsibilities effectively and enthusiastically (Kuncoro & Dardiri, 2017). Secure and wealthy working conditions will motivate teachers to work harder and contribute more than is required, whereas insecure and poor working conditions may cause tension and stress among teachers, leading them to leave the teaching profession in search of more enjoyable work.

Addressing comfortable working conditions and fostering a sense of trust in schools are the most important aspects of school reform, and as a result, increased students' academic achievement. Despite the teachers' relative autonomy in making distinctive decisions, the study showed how teachers become less engaged and unproductive when they are unhappy with their working conditions. The more they are unhappy with their working conditions, the less they engage with the work of teaching. From this perspective, findings from this study may be worthwhile for the regional education authorities to prioritize efforts at creating and maintaining comfortable working conditions for teachers to teach diligently the youth of nations. To ensure that this recommendation comes true, it has been brought to our attention to discuss with the local authorities the possibility of incorporating these research findings into regional education policy and practice so that the teachers' need of having comfortable working conditions would be adequately addressed.

This study has some limitations with respect to the participants and the research area. This study only involved 17 interviewees; while regarding the research area, this study was only conducted within the area of Southern Papua, Indonesia. Therefore, future studies with a larger number of interviewees and a wider range of area will be enthusiastically encouraged.

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**Acknowledgement:** We would like to thank all the elementary school teachers who have participated actively in the study.

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#### Article Citation

Werang, B. R., Wea, D., & Wolomasi, A. K. (2022). Working conditions of Indonesian remote elementary school teachers: A qualitative case study in Southern Papua. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(11), 2446-2468. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5834>

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