Exploring English Reading Challenges in Southwest Papua EFL Classrooms: The Role of Virtual Learning

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the obstacles students encounter during English reading instruction through virtual learning in Southwest Papua's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The study was conducted at UNIMUDA Sorong, utilizing both offline and online methods for data collection. The researcher recruited 20 participants through convenient sampling. Qualitative data was collected and analysed thematically, revealing that students perceive virtual learning as highly beneficial for improving their English reading skills. They find it user-friendly and hold a positive attitude towards its integration into learning. Consequently, it is asserted that students' favorable perceptions of virtual learning's value in enhancing EFL classrooms in Papua correspond to their adeptness in utilizing virtual learning for reading comprehension. The findings suggest that virtual learning can effectively support EFL instruction, highlighting its potential to overcome traditional learning barriers in this context. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for adequate technological infrastructure and continuous training for both students and teachers to maximize the benefits of virtual learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with a population of 260 million, ranks as the world's fourth most populous nation and holds a significant position in Southeast Asia's landscape. As a nation with a rich cultural heritage and a strategic geopolitical position, Indonesia has recognized the growing importance of English as a global language. The country's increasing emphasis on English, as highlighted by Usman (2019), reflects its evolving role in international relations, trade, and diplomacy. English is no longer seen merely as a foreign language but as a crucial tool for navigating the interconnected global economy. Kurniasih and Subyantoro (2020) further emphasize that while English was previously pursued primarily for academic and communicative purposes, the younger generation now seeks proficiency driven by new motivations and needs. This shift is attributed to the digital revolution, which has transformed how Indonesians interact with the global community through technology and media. The demand for English proficiency has extended to domains such as entrepreneurship, innovation, and digital content creation, aligning with Indonesia's economic aspirations for global competitiveness.

Moreover, the widespread integration of English into education policies and workforce development programs demonstrates the nation's commitment to equipping its citizens for success in a globalized world. As Indonesia continues to develop as a hub for international collaboration, the role of English is becoming more pronounced, reflecting the country's ambitions to strengthen its economic, cultural, and technological ties with the global community. This linguistic shift is an essential component of Indonesia's broader strategy for progress and modernization.

The emergence of technology-driven education, particularly virtual learning, has revolutionized teaching and learning methodologies. Dantes et al., (2019) underscore the establishment of computer-assisted and mobile-assisted language learning within educational paradigms. Online education, as emphasized Martin et al., (2020), prioritizes technology integration, instructional strategies, and student engagement for effective synchronous and asynchronous learning. Tosun, (2015) notes that online learning offers students autonomy in learning processes, fostering motivation and self-regulation. Miller and Edward, (2020) highlight how online resources complement traditional schooling, catering to diverse educational needs and facilitating remote learning.

In remote English teaching, a crucial focus is on reading comprehension, where readers extract meaning from texts. Dewi et al., (2020) define reading comprehension as understanding the message conveyed within texts, an intricate cognitive process according to (Elleman and Oslund, 2019). UNIMUDA Sorong, Southwest Papua, low reading comprehension levels among students have been observed, particularly evident during the challenges of distance learning exacerbated by the COVID-19

pandemic. Instructors face the task of engaging students effectively in virtual environments to enhance reading skills.

The term "challenge" refers to questioning an assertion or facing a situation that requires significant mental or physical effort to overcome, thereby testing one's abilities. As educators, lecturers are intimately involved in navigating the obstacles and difficulties encountered in the teaching process. Despite being often lauded as unsung heroes or engaging in noble work, the role of a lecturer is fraught with challenges. Research by Malaban and Echavez, (2018) conducted at a university in Mindanao, Philippines, identified various challenges in integrating technology-enhanced learning environments, particularly through Learning Management Systems (LMS). These challenges were thematically categorized into four dimensions: time management, curriculum constraints, student access and economic viability, and student workload and validity control. Similarly, a study Bolliger and Wasilik, (2009) revealed that instructors struggled with the reliability of technologies and needed to adopt more creative teaching approaches in online education. Additionally, Garrotte and Pettersson, (2007) emphasized the importance of academics equating their time and effort with the incentives they received.

According to Kizildag, (2009), challenges faced by English lecturers in teaching can be categorized into two main areas: institutional challenges and instructional challenges. Institutional challenges stem from the institution itself, including a lack of support in providing the necessary infrastructure and facilities for teaching English as a foreign language, as well as insufficient qualified and professional English lecturers. Instructional challenges revolve around creating effective learning environments hindered by issues such as improper instruction, which can lead to student frustration and disengagement.

Chang (2012) combined root cause analysis and Six Sigma methodologies to develop a framework for quality improvement using the Theory of Constraints (TOC). This management philosophy, developed by Eliyahu M. Goldratt in 1984, posits that every system has a limiting factor or constraint. The five basic steps of TOC involve identifying the system's constraints, exploiting them, subordinating everything else to those decisions, elevating the constraints, and ensuring that broken constraints are addressed promptly.

In addressing the challenges of utilizing technology in education, particularly highlighted in the present study's fifth research question, both technical and non-technical constraints are involved. These constraints encompass a range of issues, from technical difficulties with technology integration to broader institutional and instructional challenges in creating effective learning environments. By exploring these obstacles, the research findings can significantly advance our understanding of how to optimize virtual learning platforms. This study not only contributes to the

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scientific and technological body of knowledge by identifying key areas for improvement but also offers practical solutions that can enhance educational practices. Additionally, the findings have the potential to impact society by informing policy decisions and guiding the development of more inclusive and efficient educational technologies, ultimately benefiting students and educators alike.

RESEARCH METHOD

The current study adopts a qualitative research approach, characterized by several key features as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) in Banfield and Cayago-Gicain (2006). These features include a focus on naturalistic settings, reliance on descriptive data, consideration of processes, utilization of inductive data analysis methods, and interpretation of findings based on participants' perspectives. Qualitative research is chosen for its ability to thoroughly explore a problem or topic, leading to a nuanced and comprehensive understanding (Cresswell, 2014). This approach, in line with Yin (2015), allows for examining authentic contextual settings, providing valuable insights into social behaviors and thoughts while acknowledging diverse data sources.

The researcher employed a case study design to gather detailed information from the natural setting, aiming for depth and comprehensiveness. Case studies, as a qualitative research method, offer valuable insights into the behaviors of lecturers and students (Miniciello et al., 2008). Qualitative research captures individuals' meanings, definitions, and event descriptions, contrasting with quantitative research's focus on quantification and measurement.

Data collection encompassed virtual interviews, virtual participant observation, and document analysis, each undergoing distinct analytical approaches. Virtual observation data followed procedures outlined by Rossman and Rallis (2012) and Creswell and Cresswell (2018), including data organization, coding, description and theme generation, narrative utilization, and interpretation. Virtual interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Document analysis, guided by Bowen (2017) and Yin (2018), involved examining written or digital documents to extract empirical knowledge and meaning, utilizing content analysis techniques such as skimming, reading, and interpretation for data synthesis and categorization.

To ensure the data meets the criteria of trustworthiness, the study adheres to the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and data triangulation, incorporating multiple data sources and perspectives to validate findings. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail and detailed documentation of the research process. Confirmability was addressed through

reflexive journaling and peer debriefing to mitigate researcher bias. Transferability was enhanced by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of findings to other contexts.

Detailed insights into the data calibration and triangulation process were provided. Triangulation involved cross-verifying data from virtual interviews, participant observations, and document analyses to build a coherent and corroborated narrative. Clear and thorough data analysis ensured that the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences and perspectives, contributing to the study's overall trustworthiness and rigor.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the results of challenges faced during the Virtual Learning-based instructions in learning English reading in the Southwest Papua EFL Classroom

Technical Constraint

This section deals with the subheading level two which refers to the subheading level one in the previous section. The author is asked to write the page number on the footer of the first page and other pages in order to set a unique page number in the paper. Students encountered technical difficulties during virtual English reading instruction, including challenges accessing the Learning Management System (LMS), internet data issues, and limited phone storage. Through qualitative interviews, insights into these technical constraints within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom context were revealed.

One student, S4, faced obstacles accessing the LMS due to password and username issues during the initial meeting, highlighting a common technical hurdle hindering full participation in virtual learning activities. Similarly, S8 mentioned various technical problems such as credit depletion, network issues, and phone storage limitations while studying online. These issues can disrupt the learning process, affecting student engagement and performance in virtual English reading lessons.

These excerpts underscore how technical challenges such as access problems and connectivity issues can significantly impede effective learning in virtual environments. They affect students' ability to access learning materials, engage in discussions, and complete assignments, ultimately impacting their overall learning experience and outcomes in English reading instruction. Therefore, it is essential for educators and institutions to address these technical constraints and provide

adequate support and resources to ensure a seamless virtual learning experience for all students.

Delay in Responses

The absence of data regarding delayed responses in the interview with students on virtual English reading instruction in the EFL classroom suggests that this issue may not be prevalent or foremost in their learning experiences. However, this observation could also imply that students may not perceive delayed responses as a significant concern. Various factors such as the technical reliability of the learning platform, students' technological preparedness, or instructional methods chosen by educators could contribute to this perception.

Despite not being explicitly highlighted, it's crucial to recognize that delayed responses are common in virtual learning environments. They can stem from internet connectivity issues, technical limitations, or the time required to process information before responding appropriately. Therefore, educators and policymakers must acknowledge potential challenges like delayed responses and take proactive measures to address or mitigate them. This may involve providing robust technical support, equipping students with training to navigate learning platforms effectively, and fostering an inclusive learning environment tailored to diverse individual needs.

Network Availability

The main problem that students needed to deal with is the bad network and the limited internet data that they had. The paragraph excerpt from the interview provides qualitative insights into the challenges students face regarding network availability during virtual learning-based instruction in English reading in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Various students, including S1, S3, S5, S6, S7, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S17, S18, S19, and S20, highlight network-related issues as significant obstacles in their virtual learning experiences. These issues include running out of data credit, unstable or lagging Wi-Fi networks, poor internet connection, and difficulties with signal reception.

Students' express frustration and inconvenience caused by network-related problems, which sometimes result in missed classes, challenges in accessing online learning platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), or disruptions during lectures due to poor connectivity. Connected to the challenges students face on network availability during virtual learning, these excerpts highlight the critical role of a stable and reliable network in facilitating effective online learning experiences. The lack of network availability or poor network quality can significantly impact students' ability to participate in virtual classes, access learning materials, and engage with instructional content.

In addressing these challenges, lecturers and institutions need to consider strategies to improve network availability and reliability, such as providing technical support, offering alternative learning options for students facing network issues, and advocating for infrastructure improvements to enhance internet connectivity in the areas where students reside. Additionally, fostering awareness among students about optimizing their network settings, utilizing data-saving measures, and leveraging offline resources or asynchronous learning materials can help mitigate the impact of network-related challenges. Encouraging partnerships with telecommunication providers to offer affordable data packages for educational purposes can further support seamless virtual learning experiences.

Network Availability

The predominant challenge faced by students revolves around the inadequacy of network access and the limitations of their internet data. The provided paragraph excerpt from the interview offers qualitative insights into the hurdles students encounter concerning network availability during virtual English reading instruction in an EFL classroom.

Numerous students, notably S1, S3, S5, S6, S7, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S15, S17, S18, S19, and S20, underscore network-related issues as significant impediments in their virtual learning journeys. These issues encompass running out of data credit, encountering unstable or sluggish Wi-Fi networks, grappling with poor internet connectivity, and grappling with signal reception challenges. Students vocalize their frustration and inconvenience stemming from network-related dilemmas, which at times lead to missed classes, hurdles in accessing online learning platforms like Learning Management Systems (LMS), or disruptions during lectures due to subpar connectivity. Linked to the challenges students confront regarding network availability during virtual learning, these excerpts underscore the pivotal role of a dependable and robust network in facilitating effective online learning experiences. The absence of network availability or the presence of poor network quality can significantly impede students' capacity to engage in virtual classes, access learning materials, and interact with instructional content.

Addressing these challenges necessitates that educators and institutions devise strategies to enhance network availability and reliability. This may encompass providing technical support, offering alternative learning avenues for students contending with network issues, and advocating for infrastructure enhancements to bolster internet connectivity in the locales where students reside. Additionally, cultivating awareness among students about optimizing their network settings and employing data-saving measures can aid in alleviating the impact of network-related challenges on virtual learning experiences.

Device Issue

Students encountered various constraints related to device issues, including limited phone storage, errors, lagging, and even broken phones. The findings from the interviews offer qualitative insights into the difficulties students face concerning device issues during virtual learning-based English reading instruction in EFL classrooms. Highlighted by several students, including S2, S4, S5, S6, S16, and S20, device-related challenges emerge as significant hurdles in their virtual learning journeys. These challenges predominantly stem from issues with the memory capacity of their cellphones, errors or malfunctions in their devices, and the subsequent impact on their ability to actively participate in online lectures or access course materials. Students voiced their frustration and inconvenience caused by device-related obstacles, such as encountering memory capacity limitations, experiencing errors or malfunctions, and having to troubleshoot or reboot their devices during online lectures.

Linked to the challenges students face regarding device issues during virtual learning, these excerpts underscore the critical importance of having access to reliable and properly functioning devices for effective online learning experiences. Device issues can substantially impede students' capacity to interact with course materials, engage in virtual lectures, and complete assignments. To address these challenges, educators and institutions should contemplate strategies to assist students in managing device-related issues. This may involve offering guidance on optimizing device settings, troubleshooting common problems, and accessing technical support resources. Moreover, advocating for students' access to dependable devices and ensuring the presence of adequate technical support infrastructure can aid in alleviating the impact of device-related challenges on virtual learning experiences.

Non-Technical Constraint on Student Issue

In terms of non-technical issues, students encountered challenges ranging from confusion and difficulty accessing the Learning Management System (LMS) to personal struggles in adapting to new learning styles. The interview findings offer valuable qualitative insights into the non-technical constraints students faced during virtual learning-based English reading instruction in EFL classrooms.

Several students, including S3, S7, S8, and S9, highlighted non-technical challenges they confronted while adjusting to virtual learning environments. These challenges encompassed feelings of confusion, concern, and the need for assistance in comprehending learning materials or navigating the LMS. Students expressed initial apprehension and uncertainty about adapting to new learning methods such as Zoom and the LMS platform. They voiced feelings of confusion or concern regarding the learning process, particularly when encountering unfamiliar technology or learning platforms.

Linked to the challenges students encountered regarding non-technical constraints during virtual learning, these excerpts underscore the significance of providing adequate support and guidance to students during their transition to virtual learning environments. Students required assistance in navigating new technologies, grasping course materials, and adapting to different instructional methods.

To address these challenges, educators and institutions must devise strategies to support students in overcoming non-technical constraints. This may involve providing clear instructions and tutorials on using virtual learning platforms, offering opportunities for personalized assistance or tutoring, and cultivating a supportive learning environment that fosters collaboration and communication among students and instructors. Additionally, fostering a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere can help alleviate students' initial concerns and facilitate their adjustment to virtual learning environments.

The findings from the Southwest Papua EFL classroom highlight several critical technical and non-technical challenges that impede students' effective participation in virtual English reading instruction. Technical constraints such as LMS access issues, network availability, and device problems significantly affect students' ability to engage with learning materials and participate in virtual classes. Non-technical constraints, including difficulties in adapting to new learning methods and platforms, add an additional layer of complexity to students' virtual learning experiences.

Discussion

The challenges faced by students during virtual learning-based instruction in English reading in Southwest Papua EFL classrooms encompass both technical and non-technical constraints. These challenges resonate with previous research findings in the field of online education, highlighting the importance of addressing various obstacles to ensure a seamless virtual learning experience. One of the primary technical challenges involves accessing Learning Management Systems (LMS). Students encountered difficulties with passwords, usernames, and initial unfamiliarity with the system (S4, S7, S8). These issues are not unique to Southwest Papua; they have been identified in various contexts worldwide. Hutchison (2019) highlights similar challenges in navigating and using LMS platforms effectively. Providing clear instructions, tutorials, and technical support can help students overcome these barriers and improve their proficiency in using virtual learning platforms (Gillett-Swan, 2017).

The LMS-related issues, students also face technical challenges such as unstable internet connections and inadequate devices. These issues significantly hinder the virtual learning process (S9, S10). In regions like Southwest Papua, where

technological infrastructure may be underdeveloped, these challenges are even more pronounced. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to improve infrastructure and provide necessary resources to students. This aligns with Anderson (2018), who emphasizes the need for adequate infrastructure and increased digital literacy among students and educators.

Non-technical constraints such as lack of motivation, limited interaction with teachers, and difficulties in maintaining a structured learning environment at home also impact students' virtual learning experiences. The lack of face-to-face interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and decreased motivation, making it challenging for students to stay engaged. To mitigate these challenges, educators can employ strategies such as regular virtual check-ins, interactive assignments, and fostering a sense of community among students. The challenges faced by students in Southwest Papua during virtual learning-based instruction in English reading are multifaceted and resonate with broader issues in online education. Overcoming these obstacles requires a holistic approach, addressing both technical and non-technical constraints through improved infrastructure, technical support, and innovative pedagogical strategies. Collaborative efforts between the government, educational institutions, and communities are essential to ensure that all students have equal access to quality virtual learning experiences.

Network availability and network-related issues, such as poor internet connectivity or running out of data credit, were significant obstacles for students (S1, S5, S6, S10). These findings confirm research indicating that unreliable internet access can hinder students' participation and engagement in online classes (Aragon & Johnson, 2008). Implementing strategies to improve network infrastructure and offering alternative learning options for students facing connectivity issues are essential steps to address this challenge (Murphy et al., 2011). The impact of poor internet connectivity on students' learning experiences cannot be overstated. In regions like Southwest Papua, where the technological infrastructure is often underdeveloped, students frequently encounter disruptions in their online classes. These interruptions not only affect the continuity of lessons but also lead to frustration and decreased motivation among students. The inability to participate in real-time interactions with teachers and peers can result in a sense of isolation, further exacerbating the learning challenges faced by students.

Running out of data credit is another prevalent issue that hampers students' ability to engage in virtual learning. Many students in Southwest Papua come from low-income families, where purchasing sufficient data packages for online education may not always be feasible. This financial barrier restricts students' access to essential educational resources and limits their opportunities to participate fully in online classes. Consequently, these students are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who have reliable internet access. Addressing these challenges requires a

multifaceted approach. Improving network infrastructure is crucial to ensure that students have consistent and reliable internet access. This includes expanding broadband coverage to remote areas and providing affordable internet services. Governments and telecommunication companies play a pivotal role in this regard, and their collaboration is essential to bridge the digital divide. By investing in the necessary infrastructure, they can create an environment where all students have the opportunity to benefit from online education.

Infrastructure improvements, offering alternative learning options for students facing connectivity issues is vital. Schools and educational institutions can adopt a hybrid learning model, combining online and offline methods to cater to students with limited internet access. For instance, teachers can provide printed materials and offline assignments that students can complete at their own pace. Furthermore, recorded lectures and offline digital resources can be distributed to ensure that all students have access to the same educational content, regardless of their internet connectivity. Network availability and related issues pose significant challenges to students' participation in online education. The findings highlight the urgent need to improve network infrastructure and provide alternative learning options for students facing connectivity problems. By addressing these obstacles through a comprehensive and collaborative approach, we can create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students, ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital learning era.

Some students experienced confusion and uncertainty when adapting to new learning methods and technologies (S3, S9). This sense of disorientation is not unique to Southwest Papua but is a common challenge faced by students transitioning to virtual learning environments. Previous studies have highlighted that unfamiliarity with new learning platforms and technologies can lead to significant difficulties for students (Boling et al., 2012). As educational institutions increasingly adopt digital tools and methods, it becomes imperative to address these challenges to ensure a smooth transition for all learners. The process of adapting to new learning technologies can be particularly daunting for students who are not accustomed to online education. The shift from traditional classroom settings to virtual platforms often involves navigating new interfaces, understanding different modes of communication, and managing various digital tools. This can lead to feelings of confusion and frustration, which may hinder students' ability to engage effectively with the content. Boling et al. (2012) emphasize that such challenges necessitate robust support systems to help students acclimate to their new learning environments.

To mitigate these challenges, offering clear instructions and comprehensive tutorials is essential. Providing step-by-step guides on how to use learning

management systems and other digital tools can alleviate some of the confusion students experience. These resources should be designed to address common issues and frequently asked questions, ensuring that students can find the help they need promptly. Additionally, personalized assistance, such as one-on-one support sessions or virtual office hours, can be highly beneficial for students who require additional help in navigating new technologies.

Personalized assistance not only helps in resolving technical difficulties but also supports students in understanding the pedagogical aspects of virtual learning. By receiving tailored guidance, students can better grasp how to apply new learning methods to their studies, thereby enhancing their overall learning experience. Palloff (2013) suggests that such personalized support can significantly ease the transition process, helping students gain confidence and become more adept at using virtual learning platforms. Adapting to new learning methods and technologies presents a notable challenge for students, as evidenced by the confusion and uncertainty reported in the study (S3, S9). To address these challenges effectively, educational institutions must provide clear instructions, detailed tutorials, and personalized assistance. By implementing these supportive measures, educators can facilitate a smoother transition to virtual learning environments and help students overcome the hurdles associated with adopting new technologies.

The challenges identified in this study align closely with previous research on virtual learning in educational contexts. These challenges encompass both technical and non-technical constraints, each requiring targeted strategies to ensure effective learning experiences. Addressing technical issues such as access problems, network availability, and device limitations is critical for creating a functional virtual learning environment. This involves a comprehensive approach that includes providing robust technical support, improving infrastructure, and advocating for students' access to essential resources. For example, ensuring that all students have reliable internet access and functional devices is foundational to their ability to participate fully in online classes.

Improving infrastructure and support mechanisms is vital for overcoming technical barriers. This may involve expanding broadband coverage, offering subsidized internet services, and providing technical training for both students and educators. By addressing these infrastructure needs, educational institutions can mitigate issues related to connectivity and device availability, thereby enhancing the overall virtual learning experience. Additionally, technical support services should be readily available to assist students with troubleshooting and navigating technological challenges. On the other hand, non-technical constraints such as confusion and difficulties in adapting to new learning methods also need to be addressed. These challenges highlight the importance of creating a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable and confident navigating

virtual platforms. Providing clear instructions, detailed tutorials, and personalized guidance can help alleviate confusion and facilitate a smoother transition to virtual learning. Such support not only helps students become more proficient in using digital tools but also reduces feelings of frustration and isolation that may arise during the adaptation process.

Creating a supportive learning environment involves more than just technical assistance. It requires fostering a sense of community and connection among students and educators. Regular virtual check-ins, interactive assignments, and opportunities for peer collaboration can help students feel more engaged and supported. This holistic approach ensures that students receive both the technical and emotional support they need to thrive in a virtual learning setting. By addressing both technical and non-technical challenges, educators and institutions can enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of virtual learning experiences. Implementing these strategies helps ensure that all students have equitable access to high-quality education, regardless of their individual circumstances. Ultimately, a comprehensive approach to addressing these challenges contributes to a more effective and inclusive virtual learning environment for students in EFL classrooms.

The challenges encountered by students during virtual learning-based English reading instruction in Southwest Papua EFL classrooms encompass both technical and non-technical constraints. From difficulties accessing Learning Management Systems (LMS) to network connectivity issues and device-related obstacles, students faced a myriad of challenges that hindered their seamless engagement with online learning activities. Additionally, non-technical challenges such as confusion and uncertainty when adapting to new learning methods and technologies further compounded students' difficulties. These multifaceted challenges require a comprehensive understanding and targeted interventions to ensure students can benefit fully from virtual learning environments.

These findings resonate with previous research in the field of online education, highlighting the importance of addressing various obstacles to ensure a conducive virtual learning environment. Accessing LMS platforms proved to be a common technical hurdle. Many students encountered issues with passwords, usernames, and general unfamiliarity with the system. This emphasizes the need for clear instructions, comprehensive tutorials, and readily available technical support to enhance students' proficiency in using virtual learning platforms. Ensuring that students can navigate these systems smoothly is fundamental to their overall learning experience and engagement.

Moreover, network-related issues, such as unreliable internet connectivity, underscored the necessity of improving network infrastructure. Many students struggled with poor connectivity, which significantly disrupted their ability to

participate in live online classes and access digital resources. Improving network infrastructure in remote areas like Southwest Papua is crucial. This could involve expanding broadband coverage, ensuring stable and affordable internet access, and implementing alternative learning options for students facing persistent connectivity challenges. Such measures would help create a more reliable and accessible virtual learning environment for all students.

Device-related challenges, including limited phone storage and errors, also significantly impacted students' ability to engage in online lectures. Many students rely on mobile devices for their studies, and issues such as insufficient storage space and technical malfunctions can severely impede their learning process. Providing guidance on device optimization, offering troubleshooting support, and advocating for students' access to suitable devices are crucial strategies to mitigate these challenges. Schools and educational institutions could collaborate with technology providers to offer affordable or loaner devices to students in need, ensuring they have the necessary tools to participate fully in their education.

Furthermore, addressing non-technical constraints such as confusion and adaptation difficulties requires creating a supportive learning environment. Students often experience confusion and uncertainty when adapting to new learning methods and technologies, which can hinder their academic progress. Offering personalized assistance, such as one-on-one support sessions, virtual office hours, and mentoring programs, can help students navigate virtual learning environments effectively. Creating a community where students feel supported and understood is essential to fostering a positive and productive learning experience.

By acknowledging and addressing both technical and non-technical constraints, educators and institutions can enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of virtual learning experiences for students in EFL classrooms. Implementing comprehensive strategies to overcome these challenges, including providing technical support, improving infrastructure, and offering guidance and assistance, will contribute to creating a more equitable and supportive virtual learning environment for all students. Ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed in a virtual learning setting is a critical step toward achieving educational equity and excellence in the digital age.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study explored the challenges faced by students in Southwest Papua EFL classrooms while learning English reading skills and examined the role of virtual learning in addressing these challenges. The findings revealed that students in the region encounter significant difficulties in English reading comprehension, which include limited vocabulary, lack of exposure to authentic reading materials, and low

motivation. These challenges are further compounded by factors such as cultural and linguistic differences, which hinder their ability to fully engage with the reading process. Virtual learning platforms have emerged as a promising solution to these challenges. Through online tools and resources, students were able to access a broader range of materials, engage in interactive activities, and receive immediate feedback, which helped bridge the gap between their limited classroom experiences and the wealth of resources available in the digital world. The flexibility of virtual learning also allowed students to study at their own pace, fostering a more personalized and self-directed approach to learning.

However, despite these advantages, the study also highlighted some limitations in the virtual learning setup, including inadequate internet access and technical difficulties, which hindered full participation. Furthermore, the lack of teacher-student interaction in virtual environments posed a challenge in sustaining student motivation and providing necessary guidance for struggling learners. Overall, virtual learning has shown potential in improving the English reading experience for students in Southwest Papua, but it must be complemented by strategic efforts to address infrastructure challenges and ensure more interactive and supportive online learning environments. To enhance the effectiveness of virtual learning in Southwest Papua's EFL classrooms, it is recommended to invest in improving internet access and technological infrastructure. Teachers should also receive continuous training on integrating interactive digital tools into their teaching practices. Additionally, more efforts should be made to develop culturally relevant and engaging reading materials that cater to students' specific needs, fostering greater motivation and participation in online learning.

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