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Analysis of the Capacity of the Regional Government of Mahakam Ulu Regency in Realizing Environmentally Sound Education in Border Areas or 3T (Disadvantaged, Frontier, Outermost)

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ABSTRACT

Environmental-oriented education is essential for achieving sustainable development, yet its implementation in Indonesia's disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions remains constrained. This study examines the capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government to promote environmental-oriented education using Morgan's (2006) organizational capacity framework, which includes management systems, organizational structure, human resources, external relations and networks, and institutional culture. A descriptive qualitative approach was applied through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis, with data analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that local government capacity remains inadequate across all dimensions. Major challenges include the absence of local regulations on environmental education, weak planning and budgeting mechanisms, limited educator competencies, insufficient cross-sectoral collaboration, and the weak institutionalization of sustainability values. The lack of a local regulatory framework emerged as the key factor affecting overall organizational capacity. Despite these constraints, Mahakam Ulu has significant potential to strengthen environmental-oriented education by integrating Dayak local wisdom, particularly the *Tana' Ulen* conservation tradition, into educational practices. Strengthening local regulations, human resource capacity, collaborative governance, and local wisdom integration is therefore essential to advancing sustainable education in 3T and border regions.

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1. INTRODUCTION (10 PT)

Environmentally sound education is one of the important instruments in realizing sustainable development and increasing public awareness of environmental conservation (Karmana, 2026). However, its implementation in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas still faces various obstacles. Based on the Decree of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration Number 79 of 2019, Mahakam Ulu Regency is included in the category of disadvantaged areas that have limited access to infrastructure and public services. Geographically, Mahakam Ulu has an area of around 15,315 km² with a population of only about 35,000 people spread across five sub-districts, so the distribution of education services is a challenge in itself (BPS Mahakam Ulu Regency, 2024). In addition, data from the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that some schools in the 3T area still face limited learning facilities, internet access, and adequate educators. This condition has the potential to hinder the implementation of environmentally sound education, even though Mahakam Ulu has a wealth of natural resources in the form of tropical forest areas and biodiversity which are very important to be used as a contextual learning resource for students.

The study of environmentally sound education has developed quite widely in recent decades. Various studies show that environmental education is able to improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of caring for the environment through the integration of curriculum and school programs such as Adiwiyata (Hadinoto et al., 2026). Another study found that a local potential-based approach can strengthen the effectiveness of environmental education because it is closer to people's daily life experiences (Alaudin & Nurjanah, 2024). In the 3T area, several studies have

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highlighted more issues of access to education, gaps in facilities, and the distribution of educators (Rifa'i, 2025). However, research that specifically examines the capacity of local governments to translate environmentally sound education policies into implementation at the local level is still very limited. Thus, aspects of governance and the institutional capacity of local governments in supporting environmental education have not received much attention in the previous literature.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government in implementing environmentally sound education through the translation of national policies into programs and activities at the regional level. In particular, this study examines the institutional capacity of local governments based on the dimensions of the management system, organizational structure, human resources, external relations, and institutional culture as stated by Peter Morgan (2006). The analysis of these five dimensions is expected to be able to explain the factors that support and hinder the implementation of environmentally sound education in border areas and disadvantaged areas.

This research is important because the success of environmentally sound education does not only depend on schools and curriculum, but also on the capacity of local governments as the main implementers of education decentralization policies. In 3T areas such as Mahakam Ulu, limited human resources, infrastructure, and coordination between organizations can affect the effectiveness of environmental education policy implementation. In addition, until now there is still little research that links the issue of environmentally sound education with the institutional capacity of local governments in Indonesia's border areas. Therefore, this research not only contributes to filling the literature gap on environmental education governance, but also provides relevant policy recommendations to strengthen the implementation of environmentally sound education in Mahakam Ulu and other 3T areas to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 13 (Handling Climate Change).

Previous studies have shown that environmentally friendly education has an important role in building ecological awareness, shaping environmentally friendly behaviors, and supporting the achievement of sustainable development goals. Environmentally sound education not only focuses on the transfer of knowledge regarding environmental issues, but also aims to instill values, attitudes, and skills that encourage individuals to actively participate in environmental conservation efforts. In the context of sustainable development, educational institutions are expected to be able to integrate environmental perspectives into curriculum, learning processes, and school culture. However, the success of the implementation of environmentally sound education is not only determined by the capacity of the education unit, but also by the support of policies, resources, and governance provided by the local government.

From the perspective of governance, the capacity of local governments is a very decisive factor in the implementation of various development programs, including environmentally sound education. Morgan (2006) explained that organizational capacity includes various interrelated dimensions, namely management systems, organizational structures, human resources, external and network relationships, and institutional culture. These dimensions affect the organization's ability to formulate policies, allocate resources, build coordination between stakeholders, and achieve predetermined development goals. Therefore, the analysis of local government capacity is important to understand the factors that support and hinder the implementation of environmentally sound education, especially in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas that still face various institutional limitations, resources, and infrastructure.

Government capacity is a concept that describes the ability of public organizations to formulate policies, manage resources, implement programs, and adapt to changes in the strategic environment to achieve development goals (Giffari & Sukarno, 2020). Organizational capacity is determined not only by the availability of resources, but also by the institutional ability to manage and utilize those resources effectively (Nuraisyah & Haryono, 2023). In the context of local government, capacity is an important factor that determines the success of the implementation of public policies, including in the implementation of environmentally sound education in border areas and new autonomous regions (DOB) (Pratama et al., 2025).

This study uses the organizational capacity framework developed by Morgan (2006) as the basis for the analysis. Morgan identifies five key dimensions of organizational capacity, namely management systems, organizational structures, human resources, external and network relationships, and institutional culture (Dehghani et al., 2015). Management systems are concerned with the process of planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating programs. The organizational structure reflects the division of duties, authority, and coordination mechanisms (Nurmaya Riri, 2025). Human resources include the number, competence, and commitment of the apparatus. External relationships and networks show the organization's ability to build partnerships with various stakeholders, while institutional culture is related to the organization's values, norms, and ability to adapt and innovate (Comedy & Ferianto, 2023).

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In addition to Morgan's framework, this study also refers to the views of Grindle (1997) and Elahi (2009) to strengthen the understanding of government capacity. Grindle emphasized that government capacity is influenced by the institutional, political, bureaucratic, and public accountability factors that shape the effectiveness of policy implementation (Ilato, 2017). Meanwhile, Elahi highlighted the importance of the organization's ability to adapt to change and develop innovation in the face of limited resources (Nugroho, 2024). Both perspectives are relevant to explain the challenges faced by local governments in 3T and DOB areas which generally have limited human resources, infrastructure, and institutional support.

Environmentally sound education is an educational process that aims to instill knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes that support environmental conservation (Nugroho, 2024). According to Tilbury (2011) and UNESCO (2014), environmental education is part of the *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD) which emphasizes contextual, participatory, and sustainable development-oriented learning. Through this approach, students not only understand environmental issues, but are also able to play an active role in maintaining and managing the environment in accordance with local conditions faced by the community.

In the Indonesian context, environmentally sound education is supported by various policies, such as Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Law Number 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management, and the Adiwiyata Program which encourages the formation of environmentally cultured schools. The implementation of environmental education is also part of the national development agenda that emphasizes the importance of contextual education, especially in the 3T region. However, the success of its implementation is greatly influenced by the capacity of local governments to provide adequate policies, resources, facilities, and institutional support.

Based on previous theories and research, this study analyzes the capacity of local governments in realizing environmentally sound education using five indicators of organizational capacity from Morgan (2006), namely management systems, organizational structure, human resources, external relations and networks, and institutional culture. The five indicators are used to assess the extent to which local governments are able to support the implementation of environmental education through policies, coordination, resource management, partnerships, and institutional innovation. Thus, this framework is expected to explain the relationship between local government capacity and the successful implementation of environmentally sound education in Mahakam Ulu Regency as a border area and a new autonomous region.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Regional Government in realizing environmentally sound education. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand in depth the processes, dynamics, and factors that affect the implementation of environmental education policies in the social and institutional context of the region. The research was carried out in Mahakam Ulu Regency, East Kalimantan Province, which is a new autonomous region (DOB) and includes the disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions. The focus of the research is directed at the capacity of local governments in integrating environmental education, which is analyzed based on the dimensions of organizational capacity according to Morgan (2006), namely management systems, organizational structures, human resources, external relations and networks, and institutional culture.

The research informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques by considering their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the formulation and implementation of education and environmental policies. The informants consist of the Head of the Education and Culture Office, the Head of the Environment Office, school principals, teachers, community leaders, and regional planning staff who understand local development policies. The criteria for selecting informants include having authority or involvement in the implementation of education and environmental policies, having adequate work experience, and representing regional conditions with different levels of accessibility, both in the sub-district center and in rural areas.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentation studies. Interviews are used to obtain information about local government perceptions, experiences, and strategies in developing environmentally sound education. Observations are carried out to directly observe the implementation of learning activities and environmental programs in schools. Meanwhile, the documentation study was carried out by examining various relevant documents, such as the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), regional regulations, curriculum documents, Adiwiyata Program reports, and other education and environmental policy documents.

The data obtained were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which included three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. At the data reduction stage,

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information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation was selected and grouped based on the research theme (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2016). Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of a matrix and thematic narrative that refers to the five dimensions of organizational capacity according to Morgan (2006). The final stage is carried out by drawing and verifying conclusions to obtain an overview of the capacity of local governments in supporting the implementation of environmentally sound education.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, the study applied the triangulation technique of sources and methods by comparing information obtained from various informants as well as the results of observation and documentation. The research also pays attention to the ethical principles of research, namely obtaining *informed consent*, maintaining the confidentiality of the informant's identity, giving the informant the right to stop participation at any time, and ensuring that all data obtained is used only for academic purposes. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive picture of the capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Regional Government in realizing environmentally sound education in border areas and new autonomous regions.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results of the study show that the capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government in realizing environmentally sound education still faces various institutional limitations. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis, it was found that until 2025 local governments do not have a special regulation regulating the integration of environmental education in the regional education system. This condition causes the implementation of environmental education in schools to be sporadic and depends on the initiative of each school and teachers.

The absence of these regulations also has an impact on the weak policy direction and coordination between institutions in the development of environmentally sound education. Without a clear legal basis, relevant regional apparatus, such as the Education Office, the Environment Office, and schools, do not yet have integrated guidelines in planning, implementing, and evaluating environmental education programs. As a result, the allocation of resources, the preparation of work programs, and the capacity development of educators have not been carried out systematically and continuously. This condition shows that the regulatory aspect not only serves as a regulatory instrument, but also as an important foundation in building the institutional capacity of local governments to support the effective implementation of environmentally sound education.

This condition shows that the regulatory aspect not only serves as a regulatory instrument, but also as an important foundation in building the institutional capacity of local governments to support the effective implementation of environmentally sound education. An informant from the Education Office explained that until now there has been no official local government policy that specifically regulates environmental education, so that schools carry out various environmental activities based on their respective abilities and initiatives (Interview with Education Office Officials, May 14, 2025).

The absence of regional regulations has an impact on the weak planning and budgeting system for environmental education programs. Based on the review of the 2020–2025 Mahakam Ulu Regency RPJMD document, no specially formulated environmental education program was found. The budget allocation that supports environmental education is also still very limited so that it has not been able to support the implementation of the program optimally. The findings of the study based on the five dimensions of organizational capacity Morgan (2006) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Analysis of the Capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government in Realizing Environmentally Sound Education

Morgan Capacity Dimensions (2006)	Field Findings	Celebratory/Supporting Factors	Implications
Management System	There is no planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation of environmental education that is integrated in regional planning documents.	There is no Perda/Perbup and budget limitations.	The program runs sporadically and uncontinuously.
Organizational Structure	There is no special unit or field that handles environmental education.	Cross-sector coordination has not been optimal.	The implementation of the program depends on the initiative of the individual or the school.

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Human Resources	Most teachers have never participated in environmental education training.	Limited training and competency development.	Environmental learning is not yet contextual and innovative.
External Relations and Networking	Cooperation with indigenous communities and NGOs is still informal.	There is no formal collaboration forum yet.	The potential for external support has not been utilized to the fullest.
Institutional Culture	Environmental education has not yet become a priority for regional development.	Low institutional commitment to environmental issues.	The value of sustainability has not been internalized in the organization.

Source: Processed from the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis (2025).

Table 1 shows that most of the dimensions of organizational capacity are still in suboptimal conditions. The most prominent weaknesses are seen in the management system, organizational structure, and human resources. In terms of human resources, most teachers have never received special training on environmental education. This condition causes environmental learning carried out in schools to still refer to the materials available in textbooks and has not made much use of contextual approaches that are in accordance with the characteristics of the local environment. An elementary school teacher said that so far there has never been any special training on environmental education organized by the local government, so teachers rely on learning resources available in the curriculum and textbooks (Interview with Elementary School Teachers, May 12, 2025).

In addition, coordination between the Education Office, the Environment Office, schools, and other stakeholders is still limited. There is no coordination forum that routinely discusses the development of environmental education. Nevertheless, the research found potential that can support the implementation of environmental education, especially through the use of local wisdom of the Dayak community. The practice of preserving customary forests such as *Tana' Ulen* has been used by several schools as a contextual learning resource to introduce conservation values to students.

The findings of the study also show that the limited capacity of local governments is influenced by the geographical characteristics of Mahakam Ulu Regency as a border area and a 3T area. The relatively long distance between sub-districts, limited access to transportation, and uneven infrastructure conditions are challenges in the implementation of the overall environmental education program. This condition has an impact on the limited frequency of mentoring, monitoring, and training that can be provided to schools, especially those in remote areas. As a result, the implementation of environmentally sound education tends to be uneven and highly depends on the capacity and commitment of each educational unit.

In addition to geographical factors, the research found that the issue of environmentally sound education has not been a top priority in the regional development agenda. This can be seen from the limited integration of environmental issues in sectoral planning documents and education programs implemented by local governments. Although there is attention to environmental conservation efforts through various natural resource management policies, the linkage between the environmental agenda and the education sector has not been optimally built. This condition shows the need to increase institutional commitment so that environmentally sound education is not only seen as an additional activity in schools, but as an integral part of the sustainable development strategy in Mahakam Ulu Regency.

Thus, the results of the study show that the main challenge in the implementation of environmentally sound education in Mahakam Ulu Regency is not only related to limited resources, but also to the lack of institutional capacity of local governments in integrating environmental issues into the education system in a planned and sustainable manner. The results of the study show that the capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government in realizing environmentally sound education is still not optimal in all dimensions of organizational capacity stated by Morgan (2006). These findings indicate that the implementation of environmentally sound education is not only influenced by the existence of national policies, but also by the ability of local governments to translate these policies into regulations, programs, and practices that are appropriate to the local context. Although Indonesia already has a strong legal foundation through Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and Law No. 32 of 2009 concerning Environmental Protection and Management, implementation at the regional level still faces various institutional obstacles.

In the management system dimension, the study found that environmentally sound education has not been systematically integrated into regional development planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation. According to

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Morgan (2006), the management system is the main foundation that determines the effectiveness of the organization in achieving the goals that have been set. The absence of regional regulations has caused environmental education to not have received priority in the development planning process and resource allocation. These findings are in line with the research of Siregar et al. (2023) which shows that weak program planning and management systems are one of the main obstacles to strengthening the capacity of local governments in the new autonomous regions and 3T regions. Thus, the existence of regional regulations is an important instrument to ensure the sustainability of environmental education programs.

From the aspect of organizational structure, the research shows that there is no work unit or coordination mechanism that is specifically responsible for the development of environmentally sound education. This condition causes the implementation of the program to still be sectoral and has not been well coordinated between the Education Office, the Environment Office, schools, and other stakeholders. The findings support the view of Grindle (1997) who asserts that the effectiveness of public policy implementation is greatly influenced by institutional capacity and a clear bureaucratic structure. Without a clear division of roles and responsibilities, policies tend to run partially and rely on individual initiatives, making it difficult to achieve sustainable goals.

In the human resource dimension, the study found that teachers' competence in implementing environmental education is still limited due to the lack of training and assistance provided by local governments. In Morgan's (2006) perspective, human resources are a central element in organizational capacity building because the quality of policy implementation is highly dependent on the ability of the actors who carry it out. These findings are in line with research by Rahmawati et al. (2022) which shows that limited educators and low access to training are the main challenges in the implementation of environmental education in remote areas. Therefore, increasing the capacity of teachers through continuous training and the development of teaching materials based on local potential is an urgent need.

In the dimension of external relations and networks, research shows that cooperation between local governments, schools, indigenous communities, and civil society organizations is still informal and has not been integrated into regional policies. In fact, Morgan (2006) emphasized that the ability to build networks and partnerships is an important part of organizational capacity because it allows the exchange of resources, knowledge, and support in program implementation. These findings are also in line with the research of Wulandari and Pratama (2022) which emphasizes the importance of cross-sector collaboration in strengthening the capacity of border areas. With more formal and sustainable partnerships, local governments can leverage the support of indigenous communities and civil society organizations to expand the implementation of environmental education.

The institutional cultural dimension shows that environmentally sound education has not yet become a value that is internalized in the local government system. The low attention to environmental issues in regional planning documents shows that the value of sustainability has not been part of the organizational culture. However, the research found potential that comes from the local wisdom of the Dayak community, such as the practice of Tana' Ulen which teaches the principles of forest conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. In Elahi's (2009) perspective, the ability of an organization to adapt and utilize local potential is one of the important indicators of institutional capacity. Therefore, the integration of local wisdom into environmental education curricula and programs can be an effective strategy to strengthen institutional culture while increasing the relevance of learning to the social and ecological conditions of local communities.

The findings of this study also contribute to the development of organizational capacity studies in the context of the implementation of environmental education policies in 3T areas. Most previous research has focused more on aspects of curriculum, student behavior, or the role of schools in environmental education, while aspects of local government institutional capacity have received relatively little attention. The results of the study show that the success of environmentally sound education cannot be separated from the ability of local governments to create a supportive institutional environment through regulation, planning, coordination, and strengthening of resources. Thus, this study expands the application of Morgan's (2006) organizational capacity framework to the environmental education sector, especially in the context of border areas and 3T areas that have different geographical and institutional characteristics compared to urban areas.

In addition, the results of the study indicate that the local government capacity building approach needs to be carried out gradually and sustainably by taking into account the local conditions of Mahakam Ulu. Capacity building does not only focus on administrative and technical aspects, but also on efforts to build political commitment and collective awareness on the importance of environmentally sound education as part of the regional development agenda. In the long term, the success of strengthening capacity is expected to be able to encourage the formation of an education system that not only improves the quality of human resources, but also strengthens the ecological awareness of the community. Thus, environmentally sound education can be a strategic instrument in supporting environmental preservation and sustainable development in Mahakam Ulu Regency.

Overall, this study shows that the main challenge in the implementation of environmentally sound education in Mahakam Ulu Regency is not solely due to geographical limitations as a 3T area, but also to the lack of optimal institutional capacity of local governments. The absence of regional regulations is the root of problems that affect other aspects, such as budget allocation, human resource development, coordination between organizations, and internalization of sustainability values. This finding strengthens Morgan's (2006) argument that organizational capacity is multidimensional and interrelated, so the strengthening of one dimension must be followed by the strengthening of the other. Therefore, efforts to realize environmentally sound education in Mahakam Ulu require a comprehensive approach through the preparation of regional regulations, improving the competence of apparatus and educators, strengthening collaborative networks, and utilizing local wisdom as a source of sustainable learning.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the capacity of the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government in realizing environmentally sound education is still not optimal when viewed based on the five dimensions of organizational capacity according to Morgan (2006), namely management system, organizational structure, human resources, external relations and networks, and institutional culture. These limitations can be seen from the absence of regional regulations that specifically regulate environmental education, weak planning and budgeting systems, limited competence of educators, and lack of optimal coordination between agencies and stakeholders. This condition causes the implementation of environmentally sound education in schools to still take place sporadically and has not been systematically integrated into regional development policies.

The study also found that the absence of local regulations is the most influential factor in the low capacity of local governments. The absence of a legal umbrella has resulted in budget allocation, human resource development, and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms not running effectively. This finding corroborates the view of Morgan (2006) that organizational capacity is multidimensional and interrelated, so weaknesses in one dimension can affect other dimensions. In addition, the results of the research support the perspectives of Grindle (1997) and Elahi (2009) who emphasize the importance of institutions, governance, and organizational adaptability in supporting the successful implementation of public policies.

Despite facing various limitations, Mahakam Ulu Regency has the potential to be an important capital in the development of environmentally sound education, especially through the use of local wisdom of the Dayak community, such as *the practice of Tana' Ulen*, as well as the support of indigenous communities and civil society organizations. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of local governments needs to be directed towards the preparation of regional regulations that support environmental education, improving the competence of educators, strengthening collaborative networks between actors, and integrating local wisdom values into the learning process. These efforts are expected to support the realization of sustainable environmental education and in accordance with the characteristics of border areas and new autonomous regions such as Mahakam Ulu Regency.

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