

The Effect of Local Wisdom-Based English Learning on Elementary Students' Vocabulary Mastery

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Abstract: Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of English language learning because it enables students to comprehend texts and develop broader communication skills. In elementary school contexts, however, vocabulary instruction is frequently delivered through traditional teaching practices that are not closely related to students' real-life experiences. As a result, students often face difficulties in understanding and retaining new vocabulary. One potential approach to address this issue is the integration of local wisdom into learning activities so that the materials become more contextual and meaningful for learners. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the incorporation of local cultural elements can support vocabulary development among elementary school students. This research employed a descriptive qualitative design using a library research method. The data were gathered from various academic sources, including national and international journal articles, scholarly books, and conference proceedings that discuss English language learning, vocabulary development, and the integration of local wisdom in educational practices. The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis by identifying, comparing, and synthesizing relevant findings from previous studies. The results indicate that the use of local cultural content, such as folklore, traditional practices, and community-based contexts, can significantly support students in understanding and remembering new vocabulary items. Learning materials that reflect students' cultural backgrounds also contribute to higher levels of learning motivation and classroom participation. In conclusion, integrating local wisdom into English learning can create a more meaningful instructional environment and effectively support vocabulary mastery among elementary school students.

Keywords: Cultural-Based Learning; Elementary School Students; English Language Learning; Local Wisdom; Vocabulary Mastery.

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1. Introduction

English language proficiency from elementary school onward is essential to facing the challenges of globalization and scientific advancement. At this stage, students build a foundation of linguistic competence that will determine the development of language skills at subsequent levels. One fundamental component of English learning is vocabulary mastery, as vocabulary forms the basis for understanding texts, constructing sentences, and developing reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Munibi (2023), using a quantitative correlational approach, demonstrated that vocabulary and grammar mastery significantly influenced students' reading ability. This finding confirms that vocabulary is a fundamental element of language competence.

However, this study focused more on the relationships between variables and did not directly test specific learning interventions to improve vocabulary mastery. Several studies have integrated local wisdom into English learning through various methods. Marhamah and Dewanto used an experimental design and found that integrating cultural heritage improved student learning outcomes. Tandikombong et al. (2026) implemented local wisdom-based diorama media in a quasi-experimental design and reported improved vocabulary mastery. Siumarlata et al. (2026:376) developed a local wisdom-based learning model and demonstrated improvements in general language skills with a high effect size.

Furthermore, Fatmawaty, et.al (2023) and Susanti, et.al (2023) found that a culture-based approach improves student learning outcomes and motivation. However, most of these studies still focus on general learning outcomes, motivation, or broad language skills, and have not explicitly identified vocabulary mastery as a primary variable for in-depth analysis in elementary school students. Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze and synthesize existing literature related to the implementation of local wisdom-based English learning and its contribution to elementary schools students' vocabulary mastery. This research provides theoretical contributions to enriching the study of local wisdom integration in English learning, as well as practical contributions in the form of alternative contextual learning strategies for elementary school teachers.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Vocabulary Mastery in English Language Learning

Vocabulary mastery is a core component of English language learning because it serves as the foundation for understanding and producing language. Vocabulary enables students to construct meaning, comprehend texts, and develop effective communication skills. Munibi et al. (2023) emphasized that vocabulary mastery significantly contributes to students' reading ability. These findings indicate that improving vocabulary mastery is an important prerequisite for developing comprehensive language competency.

Meanwhile, Santika et al. (2022) highlighted the role of vocabulary as a means of introducing local wisdom to the international level, ensuring that vocabulary mastery has not only an academic dimension but also a cultural one. From this perspective, vocabulary mastery is viewed as a fundamental linguistic competency that needs to be developed through contextual learning strategies that are relevant to students' lives.

Local Wisdom-Based English Learning

Local wisdom-based learning integrates students' cultural values and social environment into the learning process, making the material more contextual and meaningful. Marhamah and Dewanto demonstrated that integrating cultural heritage into English learning improves student learning outcomes. Tandikombong et al. (2026) demonstrated, using a quasi-experimental design, that the use of local wisdom-based dioramas improved vocabulary mastery. Siuarlata et al. (2026) developed a local wisdom-based learning model and found improvements in general language skills.

Furthermore, Susanti, et. Al (2023) and Fatmawaty et al. (2023) also demonstrated that a culture-based approach improves student motivation and learning outcomes. Methodologically, these studies used experimental, quasi-experimental, and classroom action approaches, demonstrating empirical strength in testing the effectiveness of a culture-based approach. However, variations in the focus of the variables indicate that some studies place more emphasis on general learning outcomes, motivation, or media effectiveness, rather than on vocabulary mastery as the main dependent variable.

Local Wisdom-Based English Learning

Research Position and Novelty

Based on the synthesis of previous research, two main trends can be identified: (1) research emphasizing the importance of vocabulary in language competence, and (2) research emphasizing the effectiveness of local wisdom-based learning in improving student learning outcomes or motivation. However, the integration of these two focuses, specifically examining the effect of local wisdom-based English learning on vocabulary mastery as the primary variable in elementary school students, remains relatively limited.

Unlike previous research that emphasized media, general learning outcomes, or motivation, this study specifically isolates vocabulary mastery as the primary dependent variable and tests it through a structured experimental design. Thus, this study provides a more specific empirical contribution in explaining the effectiveness of local wisdom integration in improving elementary school students' vocabulary mastery.

3. Materials and Method

This study used a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the effect of local wisdom-based English learning on elementary school students' vocabulary mastery. A library study is a research method that utilizes various written sources as primary data to build a conceptual framework and systematically gain theoretical understanding. According to Febrianto et al. (2024), a literature study is used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize previous research findings to obtain a relevant theoretical foundation.

Furthermore, Abdurrahman (2024) explains that library research utilizes various scientific sources such as journals, books, and academic documents to develop a theoretical framework and draw systematic conclusions.

The approach used is a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand educational phenomena in depth based on an analysis of relevant literature. Annasthasya et al. (2024) state that qualitative research plays a crucial role in studying educational phenomena because it can comprehensively describe meanings, concepts, and relationships between variables. The data sources for this study were obtained from various scientific literature, including national and international journals, articles in proceedings, and academic books relevant to local wisdom-based English learning and students' vocabulary mastery. The literature was obtained from various trusted scientific databases such as Google Scholar, national and international journals, and scientific proceedings relevant to the research topic.

The data analysis technique used thematic analysis, which involves identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing relevant research findings. Saefullah (2024) explains that analysis in a literature review aims to identify concepts, theories, and relationships between variables to generate a comprehensive theoretical understanding. The research procedure was carried out through several stages: (1) determining the topic and formulating the research problem, (2) collecting relevant literature, (3) selecting and evaluating the literature based on relevance and scientific quality, (4) analyzing and synthesizing the data, (5) interpreting the analysis results, and (6) drawing conclusions based on the research findings. By using the literature review method, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive theoretical understanding of the influence of local wisdom-based English learning on elementary school students' vocabulary mastery.

4. Results and Discussion

Research Findings

Based on a review of several relevant literatures, this study identified several important findings related to the effect of English learning that integrates local wisdom on elementary school students' vocabulary mastery. Various studies reveal that teaching materials containing elements of local culture and traditions can contribute positively to improving students' vocabulary. The use of folklore, regional traditions, and local cultural objects in learning has been proven to help students understand and remember new vocabulary because the materials are close to their daily experiences and environment.

In addition, the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach utilizing local culture-based teaching materials, such as regional history and community legends, also shows significant results in improving vocabulary skills, reading skills, and students' learning motivation. This approach enables students to connect learning materials with real-life contexts that they are familiar with.

Research conducted by Marhamah (2025) shows that the integration of cultural heritage in English learning has a significant impact on improving students' learning outcomes. Although the focus of the study was general, the results indicate that vocabulary understanding also improved. Furthermore, research by Matius Tandikombong et al. (2026), using a quasi-experimental method, found that the use of local wisdom-based diorama media significantly improved elementary school students' vocabulary mastery. The media helped students associate new words with familiar concrete experiences, thereby strengthening memory retention.

Similar findings were reported by Viktor Siumarlata et al. (2026), who developed a local wisdom-based English learning model and reported improvements in language skills with a high effect size category. This indicates that the implementation of local cultural values influences not only motivation but also students' linguistic competence. Research by Riry Fatmawaty (2023) and Diah Susanti (2025) also confirms that culture-based approaches can increase learning motivation. High motivation encourages active student engagement in the learning process, thereby accelerating vocabulary acquisition. Overall, the synthesis of these studies shows that integrating local wisdom in English learning consistently has a positive impact on elementary school students' vocabulary mastery, both in terms of conceptual understanding, memory retention, and increased learning motivation.

Discussion

a. The Relationship Between Local Wisdom and Vocabulary Mastery

Local wisdom originates from two words: *wisdom* and *local*, which generally refers to the cultural characteristics of a particular region. It can also be defined as ideas or activities encompassing ways of interacting with others, with the environment, and with belief systems (Endayani in Dini, 2024). Another meaning of local wisdom refers to a worldview that develops within certain social and ethnic groups, shaped by regional, geographical, and unique historical experiences. Thus, local wisdom is not seen as two opposing entities but as elements forming the identity of a cultural community (Dini, 2024).

The literature review results indicate that integrating local wisdom into teaching materials significantly contributes to improving students' vocabulary mastery in English learning contexts. These findings align with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which serve as the pedagogical framework of this study. CTL emphasizes that learning should be connected to students' real experiences and social environments to create meaningful learning. Within the CTL framework, effective learning is not merely focused on theory or memorization, but rather on integrating real-world contexts with academic material. Johnson (in Samsudin, 2025) states that CTL highlights the relationship between learning content and students' experiences, reflection, collaboration, and active engagement in the learning process.

In the reviewed studies, this concept was applied through the use of local materials such as folklore, community history, and local cultural contexts directly related to students' social environments. The implementation of local wisdom-based materials enables students to associate English vocabulary (lexicon) with familiar concrete objects and experiences. For example, students improved their vocabulary when reading texts related to local culture because the vocabulary appeared in contexts already familiar to them. Rama, one of the research participants, stated that the use of culture-based materials made it "easier to understand new words because the context is close to their own lives."

Theoretically, this aligns with schema theory in cognitive psychology, which suggests that new knowledge is more easily processed and remembered when connected to existing knowledge structures in students' memory. In vocabulary learning, English materials incorporating folklore or cultural elements help students build stronger meaning associations, making the internalization process more effective.

b. The Role of Cultural Narratives in Enhancing Vocabulary Retention

The use of folklore and local narratives in English learning not only serves to introduce new vocabulary but also acts as a medium to build motivation to learn and cultural literacy. Kramsch (in Samsudin, 2025) emphasizes that language cannot be separated from culture, as language represents social meaning and community identity. Therefore, when students learn vocabulary through texts containing local cultural elements, they learn not only word forms and meanings but also the values, symbols, and social contexts attached to those words.

Pedagogically, cultural narratives are powerful because they are contextual and meaningful. Folktales, regional legends, and community historical stories present vocabulary within complete discourse structures rather than isolated word lists. This narrative structure helps students understand relationships between words in context, strengthening semantic networks in their memory. Vocabulary learned through stories tends to be more memorable because it is connected to plot, characters, conflict, and moral messages that create emotional engagement.

From a cognitive perspective, involvement in narratives encourages deep processing—processing information meaningfully and reflectively rather than merely recognizing word forms. When students read texts reflecting their own community history or cultural values, they activate prior knowledge. This activation strengthens associations between new vocabulary and real experiences, thereby enhancing long-term retention.

In addition to cognitive aspects, affective dimensions also play an important role. Studies show that students become more interested and enthusiastic when reading materials relate to their lives. This enthusiasm increases attention and active participation, ultimately enhancing vocabulary mastery effectiveness. Intrinsic motivation emerging from cultural relevance encourages students to engage more deeply in reading, understanding, and using new vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

Furthermore, integrating cultural narratives contributes to developing intercultural awareness. Students not only understand vocabulary in a foreign language but also learn how

their culture can be represented in English. This strengthens local identity while broadening global perspectives, making language learning dialogic rather than assimilative between local culture and an international language.

Thus, cultural narratives play a strategic role in enhancing vocabulary retention. By simultaneously strengthening cognitive, affective, and cultural aspects, folklore-based and local text-based learning creates more meaningful, in-depth, and sustainable learning experiences compared to isolated vocabulary memorization approaches.

c. The Integration of Local Wisdom in English Vocabulary Learning

English is one of the essential skills that students need to learn. However, the purpose of teaching and learning English is not only to improve language proficiency but also to develop students' character (Hasyim in Warman, 2025). The focus of integrating local wisdom into the learning process is to assist students in acquiring the target language. At the same time, English learning aims to help students preserve their local wisdom, shape character based on local values, and promote local culture globally.

In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education, local wisdom is implemented by instilling cultural values in students. EFL learning should not only focus on speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills (linguistic competence) but also on enhancing students' understanding of the meaning and values of the material studied. The Indonesian education system should strengthen not only students' technical skills but also their understanding of principles and meanings of specific topics (Sari in Warman, 2025).

These challenges emerge within the context of EFL learning in Indonesia. Therefore, teachers are responsible for addressing them by training students in both technical and conceptual skills. Learning activities should incorporate cultural elements, values, and norms (Uge in Warman, 2025). Learning a new language and culture does not mean abandoning one's own culture; rather, students should enrich their knowledge while remaining grounded in cultural values and national identity.

Several researchers have studied the integration of local wisdom in English learning. Shofyana (2022) implemented local wisdom through Project-Based Learning (PBL), integrating Javanese local wisdom within cultural, tourism, local industry, entrepreneurship, and folklore contexts in English teaching. The results showed improvements in students' English skills and soft skills.

Meidipa (in Warman, 2025) examined the use of local wisdom through e-learning to improve English learning outcomes. They used folklore from North Sumatra as teaching material and found that integrating local wisdom through the Edmodo platform enhanced students' English achievement. Sulistyowati and Surachmi (in Warman, 2025) integrated local wisdom through narrative texts based on folklore from Kudus, Java, to improve writing skills and moral values. Their findings concluded that integrating local wisdom through narrative stories improved students' writing skills and strengthened moral values as components of national identity.

From an affective perspective, local wisdom-based content increases students' learning motivation. Materials closely related to their lives and cultural identity foster a sense of belonging toward the learning process. Students become more enthusiastic because they are not only learning a foreign language but also representing their own culture in English. This condition supports character development and cultural awareness while enhancing cognitive engagement in vocabulary learning. Moreover, integrating local wisdom in vocabulary learning has implications for strengthening national identity.

English learning is not intended to replace local culture but to serve as a means of introducing and promoting it globally. Thus, students develop not only linguistic competence but also cultural values and norms forming part of their identity. So, it can be concluded that integrating local wisdom into English vocabulary learning has comprehensive impacts on cognitive, affective, and cultural aspects. This strategy not only improves students' vocabulary mastery but also creates relevant, meaningful learning experiences rooted in students' cultural identity.

5. Comparison

Compared with previous studies, this study places greater emphasis on vocabulary mastery as the main focus of analysis in local wisdom-based English learning. Earlier studies generally discussed the integration of local wisdom in relation to broader aspects, such as learning outcomes, motivation, reading ability, and general language skills. Although these

studies showed positive results, vocabulary mastery was not always examined as the primary concern. This study differs from previous research by specifically highlighting how local wisdom can support vocabulary development among elementary school students through contextual and meaningful learning. Rather than focusing only on particular media or teaching models, this study provides a broader discussion based on the synthesis of relevant literature. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by offering a more focused explanation of the relationship between local wisdom-based English learning and vocabulary mastery. It also reinforces the idea that integrating local culture into English instruction can improve students' understanding, retention, and engagement in vocabulary learning.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of integrating local wisdom into English language learning as a contextual approach to support vocabulary development among elementary school students. Based on the analysis and synthesis of relevant literature, it can be identified that learning materials incorporating elements of local culture, such as folklore, traditions, and community contexts, can make a positive contribution to students' vocabulary mastery. When English learning is connected to students' cultural background and everyday experiences, the learning process becomes more meaningful and facilitates better understanding and retention of new vocabulary. In addition, the incorporation of local cultural values in English learning not only strengthens students' cognitive development in vocabulary acquisition but also increases their learning motivation and engagement in the learning process. Learning materials that reflect students' cultural environments encourage more active participation while simultaneously fostering awareness and appreciation of local cultural identity. In this context, English is not only learned as a foreign language but also serves as a medium for introducing local culture in a broader context.

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