

Leveraging local wisdom to enhance children's language development in elementary schools

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Abstract

Language skills are essential for children in processing both oral and written information. At the elementary school level, these skills are critical for shaping children's social communication and identity, influenced by cultural diversity. With the rise of information technology, teachers play a vital role in maximizing language development through effective strategies. This study explores how teachers at SD Muhammadiyah 2 Pendil Probolinggo implement contextual teaching and learning, incorporating local wisdom to enhance language skills. The research uses qualitative descriptive analysis, with interviews conducted with teachers at the school. The findings show that teachers engage students in learning both inside and outside the classroom, fostering effective verbal and written communication. The integration of local wisdom creates a learning experience rich in cultural value, promoting tolerance and broadening students' perspectives. This approach significantly improves language skills by making learning more relevant and connected to real-world contexts. The study highlights the importance of contextual teaching strategies in developing children's language abilities and emphasizes the role of teachers in creating meaningful, immersive learning experiences.

Keywords: Elementary school children; language ability; language development ; local wisdom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology and information presents a significant challenge in fostering individuals' ability to interact effectively with their environment and society. Consequently, language skills play a crucial role in shaping young individuals into proficient communicators (Rahimi, 2024). In learning activities, effective language use requires speakers to simultaneously engage in discussions while incorporating logical contributions from both content and language perspectives. In addition to enhancing pragmatic awareness as a means of strengthening pragmatic production, learners must formulate requests with careful attention to grammar and discourse. Research findings indicate that 50% of assessed students demonstrated "very good" language proficiency, while 24% were rated as "good." The remaining students exhibited moderate (17%), poor (8%), or non-performing (1%) language skills (Cunningham, 2017). In the United Kingdom, many children encounter difficulties in mastering spoken language due to speech and language-related challenges. Furthermore, a considerable number of students exhibit limited language proficiency, exacerbated by insufficient teacher awareness of the role of spoken language in learning. Strengthening the emphasis on spoken language in the classroom is essential, particularly in addressing students' specific linguistic needs. Reports indicate that 40% of elementary school children in the UK still struggle with language skills (Dockrell & Hurry, 2018).

Language proficiency issues persist in various countries. Research on Spanish narrative writing skills among 393 private school students highlights the ongoing difficulties in written language development (Guida et al., 2018). In Nigeria, language proficiency remains suboptimal due to educators' reluctance to teach poetry, often stemming from challenges related to comprehension, the complexity of poetic language, and examination requirements (Timothy & Obiekezie, 2019). Despite the importance of language skills in cognitive-communication development, linguistic abilities emerge from birth, as evidenced by infants' communicative interactions through vocalizations, crying, body movements, laughter, and facial expressions (El-Wahed et al., 2024; Sepúlveda & Resa, 2024). Additionally, environmental factors significantly influence emotional, behavioral, and linguistic development (Bonifacci et al., 2024; van Koert et al., 2023). In China, elementary school students require greater emphasis on learning to speak, read, and write, as well as mastering written language conventions, including letter recognition, pronunciation, and composition (Shi & Lee, 2025). A study involving 59 literacy students demonstrated that success in developing language skills is closely linked to the instructional methods employed by teachers (Bowcher & Zhang, 2020).

In Indonesia, language skills remain a significant challenge. According to a global literacy study conducted by Central Connecticut State University in March 2016, Indonesia ranked 60th out of 61 countries in reading interest and literacy, highlighting a concerning trend that requires urgent intervention. Low reading engagement among elementary school students is attributed to several factors, including a lack of self-awareness regarding the importance of reading, limited parental and educator encouragement, and restricted access to engaging books. Language proficiency difficulties among Indonesian children hinder their ability to formulate coherent, logical, and systematic expressions, affecting communication skills at the elementary school level. In Probolinggo City, nearly 80% of students struggle with effective verbal communication, limited vocabulary exploration, and over-reliance on familial language practices. Furthermore, motivation to seek new information remains low, as evidenced by students' poor performance in writing story texts and descriptive reports. Approximately 70% of student learning outcomes in language subjects fall below the minimum competency standards (KKM), underscoring the influence of environmental factors and learning experiences on language acquisition. Indonesian language instruction, particularly at the elementary level, should

incorporate environmental, cultural, and real-life contexts to reinforce language development and promote positive linguistic habits.

Efforts to address children's language difficulties remain insufficient, as many students continue to struggle with oral and written language proficiency. The implementation of effective Indonesian language learning models requires integration with local wisdom to enhance linguistic development. Traditional practices such as Jaran Bodak, an art form developed during the early independence period, serve as cultural tools for preserving heritage and instilling positive values in youth. Accompanied by traditional music, Jaran Bodak reinforces local identity while providing an alternative to negative societal influences. In Javanese tradition, Jaran symbolizes strength, resilience, and commitment to achieving life goals. Another cultural tradition, Pandalungan, represents the ethnic diversity of Probolinggo City, incorporating Javanese, Madurese, Arab, and Chinese influences. Historical accounts indicate that the Madurese community has contributed to the region's cultural identity since the royal and colonial periods, fostering tolerance and social cohesion (Wulansari et al., 2019).

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) is a pedagogical strategy that emphasizes active student engagement in connecting learning material to real-world experiences. Although contextual learning is not a new concept, its implementation in modern education can be traced back to Dewey (1916), who advocated for curriculum development based on students' interests and experiences (Makarti, 2016). Despite its potential benefits, the integration of contextual learning in Indonesian language education remains limited. National exam results indicate that many students still receive only adequate proficiency ratings in Indonesian language subjects. Additionally, teachers face challenges in developing diverse learning resources and fostering language acquisition beyond classroom instruction. To address these gaps, implementing the CTL model based on local wisdom can serve as an effective strategy for enhancing children's language skills.

1.1. Purpose of study

This study explores how teachers at SD Muhammadiyah 2 Pendil Probolinggo implement contextual teaching and learning, incorporating local wisdom to enhance language skills.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study uses a qualitative approach that uses data collection techniques by making observations in the Muhammadiyah Pendil Probolinggo elementary school environment by looking at the situations and conditions that exist in the field during the learning process, then by conducting interviews with first-grade teachers until the class is comfortable at the school seeing how the conditions of learning are carried out, how are the strategies used by educators in improving students' language skills by involving local wisdom in the area, then also seeing how the implementation of language skills in each learning process carried out by educators, then there is also using the documentation on learning activities in schools, and how the implementation of the learning process by emphasizing students' language skills at school so that students will use language that is by the context of information technology development without leave the culture in the area. (Turel, 2021).

2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were first to sixth-grade teachers at the Muhammadiyah Pendil Probolinggo Elementary school by giving interviews about how the strategies were carried out by teachers in overcoming

children's language skills without leaving the existing culture in the area and following the development of information and communication technology, this interview conducted for three months from January to March in the year two thousand and twenty-one, then besides that the researchers also exclusively looked at the limited condition of the school environment, and of course the educators at the Muhammadiyah Pendil Probolinggo elementary school did use a contextual teaching and learning approach based on existing local wisdom. as an effort made by educators in overcoming children's language skills and it has been going well and producing optimal results, of course with educators who always provide meaning in learning that will lead students in self-conceptualization in language.

2.2. Data collection tool

The research instruments used were interviews, observations, and documentation. of course, the interviews conducted were in-depth, so the information obtained in this study used interviews for three months ahead so that the reasons were valid. First, by asking questions related to how children's language skills are and how the implementation of language skills in schools, for example in the use of children's language skills at school every day both in the classroom and in the school environment during learning breaks without leaving the existence of a language culture that exists. In their area and also how educators can provide a learning approach to overcoming the language skills possessed by various students at school (Turel, 2021).

2.3. Analysis

Information obtained through semi-structured interviews was transcribed into written material for analysis. Thematic content analysis was applied to identify terminology and conceptual patterns emerging from the collected data. This process facilitated the categorization of participant responses based on research focus areas. Documentation software was utilized to store, code, and retrieve qualitative data, supporting systematic analysis (Rivas, 2021).

3. RESULTS

Researchers Observations made by researchers began with visits to Muhammadiyah Pendil Elementary School, followed by meetings with first to sixth-grade teachers. Several questions were asked regarding the condition of the school, the use of language within the school and student environment, and the approaches used by educators to enhance students' language skills. Subsequently, one-on-one interviews were conducted with educators from grades one to six over three months, observing the learning process within the school and examining existing local wisdom to assess beliefs and behaviors related to prosocial and aggressive language interactions among students, educators, peers, and the broader learning environment (Ward et al., 2020).

Interviews at Muhammadiyah Elementary School 2 Pendil Probolinggo with Mrs. Ika Lestari, S.Pd, the first-grade homeroom teacher, revealed that the learning system has been effectively implemented. Lessons consist of two sessions per meeting, conducted both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers actively engage students in discussions, making learning more meaningful while also fostering understanding, relevance, and personal appreciation. This approach enhances student motivation in language skill development. Coordination among teachers ensures continuous support for students with limited language proficiency, integrating them into the learning environment. Learning content is designed to be relevant to students' lives, encouraging connections between theoretical and practical knowledge. Language skill development is influenced by interaction with real-life experiences, communication with peers, and parental

support. Teachers apply authentic assessments by evaluating student attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Decisions regarding student learning outcomes are based on these components, with remedial sessions provided when necessary. Continuous curriculum adaptation and integration of technology consider local wisdom and cultural values, ensuring that language proficiency develops alongside advancements in information and communication technology without losing traditional cultural elements (Sokolova & Sokolov, 2020). The interconnectedness of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills further supports language acquisition (Stern et al., 2018).

Interviews with Mrs. Lirra Zanni, S.Pd, the second-grade teacher, indicated that the learning system is structured and optimally implemented. Lessons incorporate the surrounding environment as a central learning resource, making learning experiences more meaningful. Emphasis is placed on understanding, relevance, and student appreciation to foster motivation and engagement. Learning activities integrate real-life experiences, enhancing communication skills. Teachers assess language development by examining how students apply acquired knowledge across different contexts. A culturally responsive curriculum, authentic assessment practices, and standardized evaluations guide decision-making regarding student progress. Students requiring additional support receive remedial instruction to ensure equitable learning opportunities. Adjustments to the curriculum align with technological advancements while preserving cultural heritage. Early-grade students show a preference for nature-based learning activities, demonstrating enthusiasm in expressing ideas verbally and in writing. The integration of media and literacy enhances critical language skills, counteracting negative media influences and reinforcing cultural and environmental connections in language learning (Weninger et al., 2017).

Interviews with Mr. Adius Salam, S.Pd, the third-grade teacher, revealed that the school's learning system is maximized to support language development. Lessons include both classroom and outdoor sessions, fostering active student participation. Discussions enhance comprehension, motivation, and engagement with learning material. Parental involvement strengthens communication skills, providing additional support for language development. Teachers assess knowledge application across various contexts, encouraging critical thinking and high-order cognitive skills. The curriculum maintains cultural responsiveness while incorporating technological advancements. Authentic assessment practices evaluate student attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Learning experiences are refined through remedial instruction when necessary. Continuous improvement of curriculum and teaching methods ensures that language education remains relevant to both technological developments and local cultural traditions. The role of educators extends beyond the classroom, incorporating multimedia and internet resources to support language interaction skills in line with new literacy perspectives (Yamaç et al., 2020). Technology integration has demonstrated significant improvements in language proficiency and student satisfaction (Vázquez-Cano et al., 2020). Language education aligns with cultural behaviors and student backgrounds, further supporting holistic development (Gil, 2020).

Interviews with Mr. Sihaluddin, S.Pd, the fourth-grade teacher, emphasized that the school implements curriculum-aligned teaching strategies designed to engage students. Lessons include classroom and outdoor learning sessions, encouraging discussion-based learning. Teachers facilitate comprehension by connecting lesson content to students' real-life experiences. Language skills are continuously developed to align with technological advancements while maintaining cultural integrity. The assessment process evaluates students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills, guiding instructional decisions. Remedial instruction supports students requiring additional assistance, ensuring equitable learning opportunities. Continuous curriculum adjustments integrate cultural traditions and technological advancements, promoting language skills that balance cultural

tolerance with modern communication technologies. Social communication and language values are influenced by collective beliefs and cultural backgrounds, shaping language development through local wisdom (Wassler & Talarico, 2021). Consideration of ethnic and cultural diversity within the student body is integrated into academic learning (Arias et al., 2020).

Interviews with Mr. Ghazali, S.Pd, the fifth-grade teacher, highlighted the optimization of the school's learning system in alignment with the current curriculum. Lessons consist of classroom and outdoor sessions, with teachers coordinating strategies to address student strengths and weaknesses. Active student participation in discussions supports language development and comprehension. Learning experiences connect theoretical knowledge with practical application, fostering communication skills. Parental involvement enhances student learning, while teachers assess knowledge application in diverse contexts. The curriculum remains culturally responsive, incorporating standardized evaluation methods. Authentic assessments guide instructional decisions, ensuring student progress. When learning gaps are identified, remedial instruction strengthens student competencies. Curriculum adaptations consider local wisdom, technological advancements, and cultural traditions, ensuring that language education remains relevant. Teacher readiness encompasses a blend of attitudes, experiences, and contextual factors, shaping instructional approaches across different linguistic and cultural contexts (Scherer et al., 2021).

Interviews with Mr. Agus Santosa, S.Pd, the sixth-grade teacher, reinforced the structured implementation of curriculum-based learning strategies. Lessons incorporate class discussions and outdoor sessions, engaging students in interactive learning. Teachers emphasize comprehension, relevance, and student appreciation to enhance motivation and language skill development. Learning content connects theoretical knowledge with real-world experiences, fostering communication proficiency. Teachers assess student progress using authentic evaluations, considering attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Instructional decisions are guided by these assessments, ensuring students receive necessary support through remedial instruction when needed. Curriculum improvements align with technological advancements while preserving cultural heritage. Continuous adjustments in educational approaches foster language skills that integrate local traditions with modern communication technologies. Contextual Teaching and Learning methodologies encourage students to relate lesson content to real-world applications, enhancing comprehension and engagement (Suriyani et al., 2019). Language interaction strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in fostering student involvement and improving language proficiency (Higuera Romero, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

The language skills of students today require significant improvement through strategies and learning approaches that integrate local wisdom while adapting to advancements in information and communication technology. As the foundation for psychological regularity and language experimentation at higher levels of education, the development of language skills necessitates a structured process of gradual contextualization. This process involves designing transitions that align with the broader linguistic realities and contexts beyond psychological experimentation, incorporating effective teaching and learning procedures. A contextual teaching and learning approach combines best practices in education with reform-oriented strategies to enhance the relevance and functional application of learning for all students. This approach emphasizes higher-order thinking, interdisciplinary knowledge transfer, and the collection, analysis, and synthesis of information from diverse perspectives within social interactions, ensuring an effective contextual learning experience.

Learning is a key solution for addressing deficiencies in children's language skills, as it is grounded in real-life experiences within their environments, fostering intrinsic motivation to develop language competencies while preserving local culture and wisdom. Regardless of their mother tongue or school community, students maintain cultural identity through syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and graphophonic aspects of language. The development of language skills is also closely linked to media literacy, requiring educators to implement meaningful learning experiences that align with the digital media culture of youth while keeping pace with broader educational advancements. Digital technology has transformed education and language culture, particularly from primary to higher education, by introducing innovative learning methods that contribute to the acquisition of essential language skills for contemporary society.

The effectiveness of teaching strategies in language culture plays a central role in shaping social interactions and organizational development. A supportive educational culture, inspirational leadership, and trust have been identified as key factors in fostering language skills within schools and educational institutions. At the foundational level of education, students represent the future generation that will continue to compete in the academic field through language proficiency. Educators must implement learning approaches that integrate students' life experiences with their cultural backgrounds. The contextual teaching and learning approach applied at Muhammadiyah Pendil Probolinggo Elementary School, which incorporates local wisdom, has demonstrated effectiveness in improving children's language skills. Furthermore, this approach contributes to linguistic and socio-emotional development while addressing challenges associated with ethnic and cultural diversity. Ensuring the scientific verification of linguistic variations across different ethnic groups remains essential for advancing educational strategies that support diverse language competencies..

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Ethical Approval: The study adheres to the ethical guidelines for conducting research.

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