Ethnographic Exploration of the Utilization of Contextual Approaches in Learning Indonesian Vocabulary in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

The problem in this study is how to utilize the contextual approach in learning Indonesian vocabulary at SDN 1 Sengkang, which is explored in depth using ethnographic methods. The focus of the study is to explore the practice of context-based vocabulary learning carried out by teachers and students, and how this approach is applied to improve students' understanding and involvement in the teaching and learning process. This study uses an ethnographic approach with participatory observation and in-depth interviews to explore the practice of context-based vocabulary learning and local culture in elementary schools. Data were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis and triangulation to ensure validity, so that the results describe in depth the dynamics and meaning of contextual and authentic learning. The results show that the ethnopedagogical approach and cultural classes are effective in integrating local culture in elementary school vocabulary learning. This approach enriches vocabulary while strengthening students' cultural identity and character through real experiences and social interactions. Local sources and traditional media increase students' motivation and understanding. The role of teachers, training, and inclusive policies are essential for the sustainability and success of relevant and culturally rooted learning. This study contributes to the development of vocabulary learning methods that effectively integrate local culture through ethnopedagogical approaches and cultural classes. These findings reinforce the importance of real-life experiences and social interactions in language learning, while also highlighting the strategic role of local sources, traditional media, and teacher support and inclusive policies. This contribution opens up opportunities for more contextual, meaningful and sustainable education.

INTRODUCTION

Elementary school education plays an important role as a foundation in the formation of children's character, knowledge, and basic skills. Strengthening education at this level is very important to develop children's potential to become quality human resources who are able to compete in the future (Aminah et al., 2022). However, in learning Indonesian, especially vocabulary mastery, it is often considered less interesting because the learning method is monotonous and does not relate the material to the context of students' daily lives (Mumpuni & Supriyanto, 2020). In fact, vocabulary mastery is very crucial to help students express themselves, understand texts, and improve overall literacy skills (Sari et al., 2021). A contextual approach to vocabulary learning is an effective solution because it relates the material to real situations experienced by students every day, so that the

vocabulary learned is more meaningful and relevant to them (Warsah et al., 2020). Therefore, strengthening basic education must prioritize innovative and relevant learning methods so that children can obtain knowledge and positive values from an early age, which play an important role as an investment for the future of the nation (Rachmadyanti, 2017).

Based on various previous studies, the use of local culture and the surrounding environment is an important element in the contextual approach, as expressed by Santosa (2016). Local culture rich in traditions, customs, and values provides a meaningful learning context for students, while deepening their understanding of cultural heritage and self-identity (Muhsyanur, 2020). The Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach links learning materials to real situations in students' lives, encouraging them to connect the knowledge gained with everyday applications (Solissa et al., 2023). CTL emphasizes the active involvement of students in building knowledge through relevant and meaningful experiences (Khaefiatunnisa, 2016). In this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator who guides students to find the meaning of their learning experiences and connects them to previous knowledge (Sapitri et al., 2023). Thus, real-life experiential learning, collaboration, problem solving, and knowledge transfer are the main characteristics of this approach, so that students not only understand the theory, but are also able to apply it in everyday life effectively and meaningfully.

This study aims to examine the application of a contextual approach that utilizes local culture in Indonesian vocabulary learning in elementary schools. Through ethnographic methods, this study will observe in depth the vocabulary learning practices carried out by teachers, as well as how they integrate local cultural elements into the learning process. The main objective of this study is to understand how local culture can be an effective and relevant learning resource for students. The benefits of this study lie in providing new insights into the integration of local culture in vocabulary learning, as well as identifying best practices and obstacles faced by teachers. The results of the study are expected to provide strategic recommendations for the development of a curriculum and vocabulary learning methods that are more meaningful and appropriate to the local context, thereby improving the quality of Indonesian language learning at the elementary school level.

Based on the objectives and benefits of the study exploring the application of a contextual approach by utilizing local culture in learning Indonesian vocabulary in elementary schools, the hypothesis of this study is that the use of a contextual approach that integrates local cultural elements significantly improves students' vocabulary understanding and mastery. This approach is believed to make learning more relevant and meaningful, thus encouraging students' active involvement in the learning process. In addition, the integration of local culture is expected to help students relate subject matter to real experiences in everyday life, which ultimately increases their motivation and learning outcomes. This hypothesis also assumes that teachers who successfully implement this approach will be able to overcome various vocabulary learning challenges, thus providing a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning of Indonesian in elementary schools. Thus, this study tests the effectiveness of a contextual approach based on local culture as an innovative and contextual vocabulary learning strategy.

METHOD

This study employs an ethnographic approach to explore how the contextual approach is utilized in teaching Indonesian vocabulary in elementary schools. Permana and Rohmah (2024) highlight that the ethnographic approach was chosen because it provides researchers with a comprehensive understanding of learning practices within their natural school context. According to Adhikari (2023), this approach allows for a deeper exploration of learning methods that occur organically in real-life settings, offering valuable insights into how learning unfolds in practice. The naturalistic approach used in this study emphasizes the surrounding environment as a primary learning resource, enabling students to learn directly from their experiences. Lane et al. (2020) emphasize the significance of environment-based learning, arguing that it helps strengthen students' understanding by connecting new knowledge to tangible, real-world experiences. This approach not

only allows students to memorize vocabulary, but also encourages them to associate new words with the daily experiences they encounter, making the learning process more relevant and meaningful.

In the data collection process, the researchers employed two primary methods: participant observation and in-depth interviews. Levine et al. (1980) argue that participatory observation allows researchers to immerse themselves directly in the classroom learning process, enabling them to observe the interactions between teachers and students, as well as to document the learning strategies used by teachers in integrating local cultural elements into vocabulary instruction. This active involvement enables researchers to capture the dynamics of learning more comprehensively and authentically. Furthermore, researchers observed students' responses and participation during lessons to better understand how the contextual approach influences their engagement and understanding. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers to gain insight into their perspectives, experiences, and the challenges they face when implementing a culture-based contextual approach (Aydin, 2023). Additionally, interviews with students were carried out to explore their perceptions of the learning process and its effects on their motivation and mastery of vocabulary.

Data analysis in this study was conducted qualitatively using the thematic analysis method. Naeem et al. (2023) emphasize that thematic analysis involves coding data from observations and interviews, identifying key themes, and interpreting the findings in depth. To ensure the validity and reliability of the results, the study incorporated data triangulation by comparing results from multiple sources, such as observation notes, interview transcripts, and other relevant documents, as suggested by Carter et al. (2014). This triangulation approach is designed to minimize bias and enhance the validity of the data. As a result, the analysis not only describes surface-level occurrences but also uncovers deeper meanings related to vocabulary learning practices based on contextual approaches and local culture. Thematic analysis allows researchers to systematically and structurally capture various aspects of complex and diverse learning experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the educational process.

The results of the study will be presented in the form of a rich and in-depth narrative, which describes the practices of local culture-based vocabulary learning in elementary schools. The findings will describe how teachers integrate local cultural values and elements into vocabulary materials so that learning becomes more contextual and meaningful for students. In addition, the narrative will also describe the challenges faced by teachers and students in the process and how they overcome them. The implications of this study are expected to provide important contributions to the development of more effective, relevant, and contextual education. These findings can also be the basis for recommendations for improving the curriculum and strategies for learning Indonesian at the elementary school level, especially in utilizing local culture as a rich and authentic learning resource.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
Utilization of Folk Tales and Traditional Media in Vocabulary Learning

In the process of learning Indonesian vocabulary in elementary schools, teachers utilize folk tales, legends, and fairy tales originating from local cultures as the main strategy. This approach not only introduces new vocabulary related to local culture and values, but also helps students understand their cultural heritage more deeply. In addition, teachers also involve traditional learning media such as games, regional songs, and handicrafts to activate student participation in learning.

Table 1. Utilization of Folk Tales in Learning

Aspect	Description	Example	Benefits for Students
Learning Strategy	Utilizing folklore, legends, and fairy tales from local cultures for vocabulary learning	Folk tales "Timun Emas", "Bawang Merah Bawang Putih"	Introduce new vocabulary related to local culture and values
Use of Learning Media	In addition to stories, traditional games, regional songs, and handicrafts are also used	Traditional games, regional songs	Enable students to learn vocabulary related to game rules and equipment

| Learning Objectives | Learning new vocabulary and understanding cultural heritage and moral values from folklore | Story characters, setting, moral values | Enhance cultural appreciation and understanding of vocabulary context |
| Student Involvement | Students are actively involved through various learning media and traditional activities | Active participation in traditional games | Strengthen vocabulary understanding through direct experience |

The findings indicate that folktales like "Timun Emas" and "Bawang Merah Bawang Putih" are effective tools for introducing vocabulary related to characters, settings, and moral values. These stories help students engage with vocabulary that is meaningful and connected to cultural narratives. The integration of traditional media in the learning process enhances students' experiences by providing context for the words they are learning. This approach allows students to relate new vocabulary to activities they are familiar with, such as traditional games, and the associated rules and tools. The active participation of students in these activities plays a significant role in reinforcing their understanding of the vocabulary. Through concrete experiences and cultural immersion, students are able to deepen their grasp of language in a more meaningful and engaging way. This approach also promotes a connection between language learning and cultural heritage, enriching students' overall learning experience.

This strategy not only promotes contextual and meaningful vocabulary learning but also nurtures an appreciation for local culture, which is crucial for preserving local identity and wisdom. However, the success of this approach largely depends on teachers' creativity in presenting materials and linking vocabulary to students' real-life contexts. Teachers must find ways to make the learning process relatable and engaging by incorporating elements of local culture. Therefore, it is essential to provide proper training and support to teachers to enhance their ability to effectively utilize folklore and traditional media in vocabulary instruction. With adequate resources and guidance, teachers can better optimize the learning process, ensuring that students connect language to both their personal experiences and cultural heritage.

Utilization of Cultural Classes in Vocabulary Learning

To understand how a local culture-based contextual approach is applied in vocabulary learning, this study identified various strategies and practices of teachers in elementary schools. One important innovation found was the implementation of cultural classes involving local resource persons. In addition, observations showed a positive response from students to learning based on experience and real contexts. However, this approach is not free from several challenges, such as limited teaching materials and cultural diversity in the classroom. Nevertheless, teachers showed creativity and adaptation in developing learning strategies that were relevant to the local context. These findings overall indicate the importance of utilizing local culture in creating more lively and meaningful learning.

Table 2. Utilization of Cultural Classes in Local Culture-Based Learning

Aspects of Findings	Description of Findings	Impact/Implications
"Cultural Class" Strategy	Teachers present local resource persons (craftsmen, traditional figures, artists) to introduce local culture directly.	Students acquire new vocabulary that is relevant and meaningful in their cultural context.
Student Responses	Students are more enthusiastic and motivated because learning feels close to their lives.	Increase students' active participation and retention of the vocabulary taught.
Vocabulary Contextualization	Vocabulary is not taught separately, but is connected to the values, traditions, and customs of the local community.	Encourage deeper and more integrative understanding of language and culture.
Cultural Diversity Challenges	Classes with students from different cultural backgrounds require teachers to be selective and inclusive in choosing local cultural materials.	Risk of less relevant material for some students if not adapted fairly.
Teacher Solutions	Inviting students to participate in collecting folklore, cultural objects, and inviting	Increase student collaboration and ownership of the learning process.

	resource persons from the surrounding community.	
Contribution to Education	Strengthening the importance of local culture as a rich learning resource in teaching Indonesian vocabulary.	Support education that is more contextual, meaningful, and rooted in students' local identities.
Further Research Recommendations	Further exploration is needed to develop a contextual vocabulary learning model that can be applied across levels of education.	Provide a basis for the development of innovative curricula and methods based on local culture in a broad manner.

The findings emphasize that integrating local culture into vocabulary learning not only enriches teaching materials but also deepens students' connections to their cultural identities. By incorporating cultural classes and involving local resource persons, educators can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-life experiences, thus making learning more contextual and relevant. These resources allow students to see the practical applications of their lessons in the context of their own culture, making learning more meaningful. However, challenges such as the availability of limited teaching materials and the diverse cultural backgrounds of students must be addressed. Without careful attention, these factors could lead to exclusion or misunderstandings. Teachers play a vital role in navigating these challenges, ensuring that learning is inclusive and reflective of the students' experiences. Their ability to creatively adapt teaching materials to the local context is essential for the success of this approach.

The success of incorporating local culture into vocabulary learning heavily relies on systemic support, teacher training, and educational policies that support local contexts and cultural diversity. Proper training equips teachers with the necessary skills to integrate cultural elements effectively and sustainably into their teaching. Educational institutions must provide teachers with continuous support, guidance, and resources to ensure that cultural integration is consistently implemented. Furthermore, educational policies must prioritize cultural diversity and inclusivity to enable schools to foster an environment where all students feel valued and understood. By embracing these elements, the ethnopedagogical approach becomes a powerful tool in creating an educational experience that is not only academically enriching but also deeply connected to students' lives and cultural heritage. Ultimately, this approach fosters a more engaging, inclusive, and culturally aware learning environment, contributing to a well-rounded, empathetic, and globally aware student body.

Discussion
Ethnopedagogical Approach in Vocabulary Learning in Elementary Schools

In the context of learning Indonesian vocabulary in elementary schools, the ethnopedagogical approach has been recognized as an effective means of integrating local culture into the learning process. Rahmawati et al. (2020) highlight that this approach makes culture a living and relevant resource for learning. Ethnopedagogy, as defined by Selasih and Sudarsana (2018), is an educational strategy grounded in local wisdom and cultural values, serving as a foundation for meaningful and contextual learning. According to Mulyanti and Fasya (2024), teachers often use folklore, legends, and traditional fairy tales not only as reading material but also as a way to introduce new vocabulary that is closely connected to students' social and cultural lives. Markey et al. (2023) further emphasize that the vocabulary learned through these narratives is easier to understand because it is embedded in a familiar cultural context. This approach enriches the learning experience, enabling students to recognize and appreciate their cultural heritage. Therefore, the ethnopedagogical approach not only facilitates language learning but also plays a crucial role in strengthening students' cultural identity and character development from an early age.

Through narratives such as Timun Emas and Bawang Merah Bawang Putih, students are introduced to vocabulary that not only includes general terms but also reflects the characters' traits, the setting, and the moral values within the story. Suma et al. (2024) argue that vocabulary like "giant," "kindness," or "hard work" becomes part of a contextual and meaningful learning process. This approach aligns with Singh and Espinoza-Herold's (2014) perspective, which emphasizes that culture-based learning strengthens students' cultural identities while making learning materials more

relevant to their everyday lives. Schmitt (2007) further suggests that vocabulary is not just a collection of words but is deeply embedded in the social structures and values that shape students' understanding of the world around them. By linking language learning to cultural experiences that students are already familiar with, as Hoff (2006) notes, this approach makes learning more engaging and relevant, fostering a deeper connection to the content.

Vocabulary learning in elementary schools extends beyond the use of folk tales and incorporates traditional media such as folk games, regional songs, and handicrafts. Rizka et al. (2024) suggest that these media provide a valuable opportunity for students to learn vocabulary through direct and contextual experiences. For instance, when students participate in traditional games, they learn terms related to the rules of the game, equipment names, and expressions used spontaneously in social interactions. Abdulrahaman et al. (2020) argue that this approach enhances vocabulary learning by integrating it with active, real-world practices. This method aligns with Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, which emphasizes that learning is profoundly shaped by social interactions and the cultural environment (Bin-Hady, 2023). By engaging in these culture-based activities, students build language understanding not only through memorization but also through meaningful, hands-on experience. According to Martin-Alguacil et al. (2024), this makes the learning process more dynamic, relevant, and closely tied to students' everyday social experiences.

Active participation in various activities based on local culture is at the heart of the ethnopedagogical approach, which emphasizes using culture as the primary foundation for learning while respecting students' backgrounds and identities. Masrukhi et al. (2024) highlight that when students perceive the material they are studying as directly related to their environment, daily life, and experiences, their motivation to learn increases and their understanding of vocabulary deepens. According to Felder and Brent (2005), this involvement makes learning feel more personal and meaningful to students. However, the success of this approach largely depends on the teacher's role in designing and presenting materials that are culturally relevant to the students' context (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Teachers must be creative in selecting stories, games, and activities that are not only engaging but also inclusive and representative of the cultural diversity within the classroom (Manganello & Baldacci, 2024). By doing so, the ethnopedagogical approach can be effectively implemented in vocabulary learning, fostering an enriched and relevant educational experience.

The ethnopedagogical approach not only offers contextual and meaningful vocabulary learning but also plays a significant role in preserving local culture and shaping students' character. This approach helps instill strong cultural values and identities in students. As argues, education grounded in local culture can enhance national identity and strengthen social integrity among students, a view supported by Sakti et al. (2024). The use of culture as a learning resource, therefore, goes beyond language acquisition; it also serves as an effort to preserve and promote local wisdom, as noted by Pamenang (2021). To achieve the best outcomes, it is essential to provide adequate support, including comprehensive training and facilitation from educational institutions for teachers (Kim et al., 2019). Such support ensures that teachers can effectively and sustainably integrate cultural elements into vocabulary learning, allowing the ethnopedagogical approach to be implemented consistently, leading to long-term positive impacts on students and society.

In conclusion, the ethnopedagogical approach is highly effective in enhancing vocabulary learning in elementary schools by integrating local culture into the educational process. This approach not only fosters contextual and meaningful language acquisition but also strengthens students' cultural identities and character development. By using local resources such as folklore, traditional games, and regional songs, students connect vocabulary with their everyday lives and cultural experiences, making learning more engaging and relevant. Additionally, the active involvement of students in culturally-based activities enriches their understanding of vocabulary and builds stronger social and cultural connections. The success of this approach depends largely on the creativity and cultural relevance of the materials presented by teachers, supported by comprehensive training and institutional facilitation. As and others emphasize, this approach also plays a crucial role in preserving

local wisdom, enhancing national identity, and fostering social cohesion, thereby contributing to a more meaningful and inclusive learning experience for students.

Cultural Class as a Means of Contextualizing Local Culture-Based Vocabulary

Integrating local cultural elements into vocabulary learning has been shown to significantly enhance students' engagement and understanding. According to Romrome and Ena (2022), cultural classes serve as an effective strategy for contextual learning, allowing students to connect academic theories with real-life experiences. These classes often feature speakers from local communities, such as craftsmen and traditional figures, which help bridge the gap between theory and practice (Miqawati et al., 2024). Zamiri and Esmaeili (2024) further argue that meaningful learning occurs when the material is closely tied to students' daily lives, making it easier for them to grasp and retain knowledge. Studies by Le et al. (2017) and Mebert et al. (2020) support this, highlighting that students become more motivated and enthusiastic when learning is rooted in their own culture, as it brings the material to life and enhances memory retention.

The approach of vocabulary learning through cultural classes goes beyond teaching words in isolation; it connects them to the values, traditions, and customs embedded within local communities (Vu & Peters, 2021). This aligns with Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, which stresses the importance of linking new knowledge to students' existing knowledge, making it easier for them to understand and retain. However, challenges emerge due to the cultural diversity present in classrooms. Alam and Mohanty (2023) argue that teachers must be more selective and inclusive when choosing materials to ensure that all students feel the content is relevant and not marginalizing any particular group. The differences in cultural backgrounds can influence students' comprehension and participation in learning, making it crucial for educators to carefully consider how cultural diversity is addressed in the classroom.

To address challenges in cultural classes, teachers actively engage students by involving them in activities such as collecting folklore, cultural objects, and inviting local community speakers (Szelei et al., 2019). This method encourages collaboration among students and fosters a sense of ownership over their learning process. Erbil's (2020) theory of social learning aligns with this approach, emphasizing the importance of social interaction and the cultural environment in students' cognitive development. According to Erbil, students learn more effectively when they actively participate in their learning experiences rather than remaining passive recipients of information. By connecting vocabulary to real-life experiences, students not only engage with the content but also relate it to their own cultural context. This active involvement helps them understand the material better and enhances retention, making the learning process more meaningful and relevant to their daily lives.

Cultural classes are an effective medium for vocabulary learning, as they integrate local culture into the curriculum, making learning materials not only richer but also reinforcing students' cultural identity (Sihombing et al., 2022; Awe et al., 2024). For this method to be implemented effectively, support from various stakeholders is crucial, particularly through ongoing teacher training and educational policies that consider cultural diversity and local contexts (Hajisoteriou et al., 2018). With such support, the cultural class approach can evolve into a learning model that is both relevant and meaningful, deeply rooted in students' lives (Kim, 2020). Additionally, this approach fosters inclusive and sustainable education, promoting awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity among students, and creating an environment where all learners feel valued and respected.

In conclusion, cultural classes are a powerful tool for vocabulary learning by integrating local cultural elements, making the learning process more engaging, relevant, and meaningful. By linking academic content with real-life experiences, students are better able to understand and retain knowledge. This approach fosters collaboration among students, encourages ownership of their learning, and strengthens their cultural identity. However, challenges related to cultural diversity in classrooms require teachers to be inclusive and sensitive to the backgrounds of all students. Support from various stakeholders, such as ongoing teacher training and educational policies that consider

cultural diversity, is crucial for the success of this approach. With the right support, cultural classes can evolve into a sustainable and effective learning model that promotes inclusivity and respect for cultural diversity, while enhancing students' cognitive and social development.

CONCLUSION

The ethnopedagogical approach and the application of cultural classes in vocabulary learning in elementary schools have proven to be effective in integrating local culture as a contextual and meaningful learning resource. This approach not only enriches students' vocabulary, but also strengthens their cultural identity and character through real experiences and social interactions that are relevant to everyday life. Local sources and traditional media are important bridges in connecting learning theory with students' cultural contexts, so that their motivation and understanding increase. Despite facing the challenges of cultural diversity, the role of teachers is crucial in choosing inclusive and interesting materials. Support for teacher training and education policies that support cultural diversity and local contexts are needed to optimize the implementation of these two approaches. Thus, local culture-based vocabulary learning can run sustainably, creating a lively, relevant, and inclusive learning process, while supporting cultural preservation and strengthening students' characters.

The theoretical implications of the ethnopedagogical and cultural class approaches in vocabulary learning emphasize the importance of local cultural integration as a contextual foundation in the theory of meaningful learning and social constructivism. This approach strengthens the understanding that effective learning does not only rely on linguistic mastery of language, but also needs to link materials to cultural values and students' social experiences, as explained by Ausubel and Vygotsky. In practice, the implementation of this approach requires teachers to develop creativity in selecting and packaging learning materials that are inclusive and relevant to students' cultural diversity. In addition, ongoing training and support for educational policies that support cultural diversity are key factors so that this approach can be implemented optimally and sustainably. Thus, local culture-based vocabulary learning can enrich the learning experience while strengthening students' identities and characters holistically.

Further research recommendations should focus on developing a local culture-based vocabulary learning model that is more adaptive to cultural diversity in the classroom, as well as exploring the effectiveness of using digital technology as a supporting medium for cultural classes. Research can also expand the scope to higher levels of education to see the application of ethnopedagogy more broadly. The limitations of this study lie in the scope which is still limited to elementary schools and focuses on certain local cultures, so the results may be less representative of cultural diversity in a wider area. In addition, the variables of teacher influence and different supporting facilities in each school can affect the consistency of the implementation of this approach. Therefore, more in-depth and comprehensive research is needed to obtain a more holistic and applicable picture.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

MS Conceptualization of the study, development of the methodology, data collection through participant observation and in-depth interviews, data analysis, drafting and revising the manuscript, and finalizing the manuscript for publication. The author is responsible for the entire research process and the drafting of this articles.

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