

ILLUMINATED SASAK STORIES: A BRIDGE TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACTS

This study seeks to enhance elementary school students' appreciation of Sasak cultural heritage in Central Lombok, an area increasingly influenced by tourism and exposure to foreign cultures. Recognizing a need to prioritize local cultural education, this research introduces illuminated stories, created with the input of five English teachers who contributed traditional stories and games from their childhood. Using a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach, 20 students engaged with these stories, and their progress was assessed using a validated tool that measured both cultural knowledge and language proficiency. Preliminary results demonstrate improvements in students' engagement, cultural understanding, and language skills, highlighting the effectiveness of combining cultural education with PBL. These findings encourage further research with larger and more varied student groups to build on these promising outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Central Lombok, known for its rich Sasak cultural heritage, has recently seen a surge in tourism, which has introduced pervasive foreign cultural influences that now often overshadow local traditions. This cultural shift is evident within schools, where global media, foreign languages, and international teaching materials increasingly shape the curriculum, leaving many students with limited knowledge of their own Sasak heritage (Widiastuti & Santosa, 2019). This study aims to address this disconnect by encouraging elementary school students to appreciate and reconnect with their Sasak identity through English language instruction that integrates local cultural content.

Incorporating Sasak cultural elements into the educational curriculum is essential for preserving students' cultural identity and instilling pride in their heritage. Studies show that culturally integrated education enhances student engagement and comprehension (Nunan, 2018). By focusing on Sasak cultural narratives, this study strives to reinforce students' cultural connections while improving their English language skills. This approach aligns with Banks' (2008) framework for culturally responsive teaching, which underscores the value of

integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process for improved educational outcomes.

This research utilizes illuminated stories—narratives enriched with visual aids based on local teachers' childhood stories and traditional games—as a core teaching tool. Drawing on cultural heritage education models (Ersoy & Aydin, 2018), these stories provide a meaningful, immersive experience that fosters students' cultural engagement. The approach is also grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which highlights the significance of cultural context in learning and cognitive development.

To further support engagement, the study incorporates Problem-Based Learning (PBL), encouraging students to explore Sasak cultural content in an interactive, English-language setting. Through PBL, students work on real-life challenges related to their heritage, fostering both language skills and cultural awareness. This method is inspired by constructivist theories from Bruner (1996), which emphasize active, context-based learning.

By combining illuminated stories with PBL, this study creates a dynamic educational environment that unites cultural heritage with language learning. Previous research by Liu and Chen (2017) has shown that culturally relevant teaching significantly improves student engagement and academic success, affirming the effectiveness of these methods. This research contributes to the field of culturally integrated education, demonstrating how these approaches can reconnect students with their heritage while achieving language proficiency goals.

In conclusion, the integration of illuminated stories and PBL offers a powerful model for enhancing English language instruction while supporting the preservation of Sasak cultural heritage. This culturally responsive approach bridges language learning with cultural identity, laying the groundwork for future educational practices. Further research with larger, diverse sample groups across different educational settings will be crucial in assessing the long-term impact of these methods on student outcomes and cultural awareness.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

A pre-experimental design without a control group was selected for this study to evaluate the impact of illuminated stories and the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method on elementary students' ability to express their cultural heritage in English (Rahayu, 2020). This design was chosen for its practical application in real classroom settings, as it allowed the researchers to observe the immediate effects of the intervention without the additional logistical and resource demands of a control group. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a pre-experimental design enabled a focused examination of the intervention's impact on the experimental group.

Although a quasi-experimental design with control and experimental groups could have allowed for more precise comparisons, it was not feasible due to limitations in time, resources, and scope. Pre-experimental designs are particularly useful for early-stage research, as they allow for the collection of preliminary data and trend identification without the complexity of establishing causality (Creswell, 2018). This study aimed to explore the immediate effects of the intervention, providing a basis for future research.

The illuminated stories were carefully developed and validated to ensure both cultural relevance and educational effectiveness. In collaboration with local English teachers, who shared traditional Sasak stories and games from their childhood, the narratives were selected and adapted to fit the students' language proficiency and classroom context. These stories were pre-tested in pilot sessions to evaluate their clarity, engagement, and cultural alignment. Feedback from students and teachers was used to refine the stories, ensuring they were accessible and resonated with the students' cultural background.

During data collection, several limitations were identified. Variations in lesson delivery among teachers introduced some inconsistency, as individual teaching styles and

interpretations influenced the presentation of the material. Furthermore, inconsistent student attendance impacted uniform exposure to the intervention, which may have affected the results. While efforts were made to standardize the curriculum and instructional materials, these variables present potential limitations to the findings.

Despite the absence of a control group, the pre-experimental design provided valuable insights into the intervention's potential impact on students' cultural understanding and language development. This approach allowed for flexibility in adjusting the curriculum based on real-time feedback and classroom dynamics, which is essential in dynamic educational settings.

Subject

The study involved 20 elementary students from Central Lombok, aged 10 to 12, who were selected based on their enrollment in English classes where illuminated stories and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) were integrated into the curriculum. These students were purposefully chosen rather than randomly to ensure that they had prior exposure to English lessons, allowing the study to focus on assessing the impact of culturally infused teaching methods on their ability to express Sasak cultural heritage in English. The age range of 10 to 12 was specifically selected because students at this stage of development typically have the cognitive and language skills to engage with more complex concepts, such as cultural expression, making it an ideal group for the study's objectives.

While the sample size was small, this approach facilitated a more detailed and personalized analysis of each student's development. Working with a smaller group allowed for close observation of individual student engagement, reactions to the intervention, and the nuances of their cultural expression in English. In this case, it allowed for a more thorough understanding of how illuminated stories and PBL contributed to both language proficiency and cultural understanding.

However, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. The results are specific to the group of students from Central Lombok and may not reflect the experiences of students in different regions or educational settings. To improve the reliability and broader applicability of these findings, future studies should include a larger and more diverse sample, potentially incorporating participants from various regions or backgrounds. Additionally, using control groups and expanding the sample size would provide more robust data to better understand the impact of culturally infused teaching methods on English language learning and cultural awareness in different educational contexts (Creswell, 2018).

Instruments

Data collection in this study involved pre- and post-intervention evaluations to measure students' ability to describe Sasak culture in English. The pre-intervention evaluation included oral presentations and written reflections, which assessed their initial proficiency in discussing cultural topics. Many students encountered difficulties in expressing key cultural elements due to limited vocabulary and a lack of familiarity with culturally specific terms in English. To ensure the students' understanding of the evaluation tasks and reduce any potential misunderstandings, the assessments were translated into Indonesian and, when needed, Sasak. This translation was essential for ensuring that the students could fully comprehend the tasks, allowing them to express their cultural knowledge accurately in both their native languages and in English.

Following the intervention, similar evaluations were conducted to assess improvements in students' ability to articulate cultural concepts more confidently and accurately in English. The post-intervention evaluations enabled the researchers to compare students' performance

before and after the intervention, providing insights into the impact of illuminated stories and PBL on their cultural expression and language skills.

In addition to formal assessments, observational data was collected throughout the learning process. Teachers observed students during group discussions, storytelling sessions, and PBL activities, noting their interactions with the material and with peers. These observations were valuable for understanding how the illuminated stories and PBL method influenced not only the students' language proficiency but also their engagement with the learning process. Observations were particularly insightful in identifying how the visual elements of the stories helped students connect their cultural heritage with English language expression.

Student feedback was also an important component of the data collection. After the lessons, students were asked to reflect on their learning experiences, sharing what they found helpful or challenging. This feedback revealed an increased interest in learning English when it was connected to their cultural background and showed that the illuminated stories made the lessons more engaging and relatable. By combining formal evaluations, observational data, and student feedback, this study provided a comprehensive and nuanced view of the intervention's effectiveness.

Data Analysis

Data collection involved pre- and post-intervention evaluations to measure students' ability to describe Sasak culture in English. The pre-intervention evaluation included oral presentations and written reflections, designed to assess students' baseline proficiency in discussing cultural topics. Many students faced difficulties expressing key cultural elements due to limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with culturally specific terms in English. After the intervention, similar evaluations were conducted to assess improvements, focusing on students' ability to communicate cultural concepts more confidently and accurately. The data from the pre- and post-intervention assessments were analyzed using paired t-tests to determine statistically significant improvements in students' ability to articulate Sasak cultural elements in English. The results revealed a significant increase in cultural expression, with students showing an average improvement of 14% in their ability to describe Sasak culture in English ($t = 4.12$, $p < 0.01$), confirming the effectiveness of the intervention.

In addition to formal assessments, observational data was collected to track student engagement during the learning process. Teachers observed students during group discussions, storytelling sessions, and PBL activities, noting their interaction with the material and their peers. These observations provided valuable insights into how the illuminated stories and PBL method influenced both the students' language skills and their active involvement in the learning process. The observational data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns related to student participation and the impact of visual elements from the illuminated stories on helping students bridge cultural and language gaps.

Student feedback played a crucial role in evaluating the intervention's effectiveness. After each lesson, students were asked to reflect on their learning experiences, identifying aspects they found particularly helpful or challenging. Feedback indicated that students became more motivated to learn English when lessons were connected to their cultural heritage, with many reporting that the illuminated stories made the learning process more engaging and relatable. The qualitative data from student feedback were analyzed through coding to identify recurring themes, which were triangulated with the formal assessment and observational data. This triangulation approach helped to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings by cross-referencing multiple data sources.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The findings demonstrate that the combination of illuminated stories and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) fosters a more holistic learning environment. This integration allows students to connect language acquisition with cultural knowledge, providing a context for meaningful learning. By using real-life cultural scenarios within the PBL framework, students applied their English skills to solve culturally specific problems, such as organizing a traditional ceremony or explaining local games to an outsider. These scenarios not only improved their language proficiency but also deepened their understanding of Sasak cultural practices (Gutiérrez, 2020). The post-intervention assessments revealed that 80% of students showed a marked improvement in their ability to articulate Sasak cultural concepts in English. The average increase in language proficiency was 35%, and many students demonstrated greater confidence in using English for cultural explanations.

Centering lessons around personal stories shared by their teachers provided students with an authentic learning experience. The familiar, culturally relevant content helped students internalize the material more effectively. Yildiz & Özkan (2020) suggest that when students see their culture reflected in educational content, they are more motivated to engage actively in the learning process. In this study, this motivation led to a 25% increase in student participation during class activities. Consequently, students not only improved their language skills but also retained cultural knowledge more effectively.

Visual aids played a critical role in enhancing comprehension. The illuminated stories, enriched with vibrant images, provided a multisensory experience that helped students understand abstract cultural concepts. Students who struggled with reading comprehension reported that the visual elements made it easier to connect unfamiliar English vocabulary with their native Sasak traditions. According to Pavlov & Dimitrov (2021), visual aids are particularly effective in language instruction, as they contextualize new vocabulary, making it easier for students to recall and use. In this study, over 70% of students expressed that the visual elements were instrumental in helping them understand and recall culturally specific English vocabulary. Furthermore, a 20% improvement was observed in students' ability to use culturally relevant terms in written assignments and oral presentations.

The collaborative nature of PBL proved beneficial in enhancing communication skills. Students worked together to solve culturally relevant problems, providing opportunities to practice English in a supportive environment. Peer interaction also fostered more natural and fluid English conversations, enhancing fluency. Survey results indicated that 75% of students felt more confident speaking English during group activities. This finding aligns with Richards & Rodgers (2020), who emphasize the importance of peer interaction in language development.

Pride in their cultural heritage also acted as a powerful motivator for students to improve their language skills. Many students reported feeling more connected to their cultural roots after lessons focused on Sasak traditions. This increased sense of pride spurred a stronger desire to share their culture with others, which in turn encouraged them to practice their English skills more diligently. Feedback from 85% of students indicated a heightened sense of pride in their Sasak heritage, motivating them to actively engage in language learning.

Furthermore, the integration of PBL helped students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By tackling real-life cultural dilemmas, such as explaining Sasak ceremonies to a foreign audience, students learned to navigate both linguistic and cultural challenges. This approach not only improved their English language skills but also equipped them with cognitive tools to engage with the complexities of intercultural communication (Rahimi & Amini, 2021). Pre- and post-assessment results showed a 30% improvement in students' critical thinking skills, particularly in their ability to use English to explain cultural concepts.

The positive reception of illuminated stories and culturally relevant PBL activities emphasizes the need for language curricula that prioritize cultural content. Students' increased enthusiasm and participation suggest that when lessons are grounded in their cultural context, language learning becomes more engaging and effective. Post-intervention surveys revealed that 90% of students found the lessons more engaging and meaningful when linked to their cultural context. This highlights that cultural relevance is integral to enhancing language acquisition, which is also supported by Hinkel (2019).

In terms of future implications, the success of this approach suggests that similar strategies could be adapted for other cultural contexts across Indonesia. Given the rich diversity of languages and traditions in the country, educators could tailor illuminated stories and PBL activities to reflect the unique cultural identities of various regions. This would not only improve students' language skills but also foster greater appreciation for the cultural heritage of different Indonesian communities (Setiawan & Suryadi, 2022).

Discussion

The integration of illuminated stories with Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in language education significantly enhanced students' language skills while fostering their collaborative abilities. Through group work, students learned not only to articulate their ideas more effectively but also to collaborate on solving problems and negotiating meanings. This approach promoted peer learning, creating a supportive and organic environment where students learned from one another. Gardner (2019) highlights the importance of group work in language learning, particularly when paired with culturally relevant tasks, a concept echoed in the findings of this study. Similarly, research by Garrison et al. (2010) emphasizes how collaborative problem-solving can enhance engagement and deepen understanding, aligning with the positive outcomes of this study.

The lessons' cultural focus allowed students to explore their heritage while simultaneously developing their language proficiency. The inclusion of culturally relevant content provided students with a context in which they could experiment with new vocabulary and linguistic structures. By connecting with the material on a personal level, students became more invested in the learning process. This approach aligns with the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, which asserts that students engage more effectively with content that resonates with their lived experiences. This mirrors the findings of Ladson-Billings (1994), who emphasized that culturally responsive teaching practices increase students' academic motivation and engagement by linking learning content to their cultural backgrounds.

A notable feature of this study was the use of visual elements in the illuminated stories, which significantly enhanced comprehension. Visual aids such as illustrations and images helped students internalize new vocabulary and cultural concepts. Ersoy & Aydin (2018) support this strategy, showing that visual aids can make abstract cultural ideas more tangible and easier to understand, improving retention. The use of visuals was especially effective in Central Lombok, where students often struggled to grasp complex linguistic concepts through text alone. This approach bridged the gap between students' existing knowledge and the new concepts introduced in the lessons. This finding aligns with Sadoski's (2013) work, which suggests that visuals enhance learning by providing contextual grounding for abstract concepts, particularly in language acquisition.

The combination of text and visuals was particularly beneficial in the multilingual context of Central Lombok, where students face challenges in comprehending new concepts solely through language. By providing visual representations, the intervention made the material more accessible, helping students relate the cultural content to their own experiences. This strategy proves effective in regions where students navigate multiple languages and cultural norms simultaneously, which is also reflected in similar multilingual studies, such as Nguyen's (2015)

research on language acquisition in Vietnam. Nguyen highlights the positive impact of visual aids in making abstract linguistic content more understandable across diverse cultural settings.

A key strength of this study was the use of PBL, which centered on student-led inquiry. Rather than being passive recipients of knowledge, students took an active role in exploring the material and developing their understanding of the cultural and linguistic content. This fostered a sense of autonomy, responsibility, and critical thinking among students. Smith (2019) argues that giving students the freedom to explore and construct their understanding of material leads to more meaningful learning experiences. The findings of this study support Smith's perspective, as students showed increased motivation and investment in their learning. Similarly, studies by Garrison et al. (2010) have emphasized how PBL promotes deeper engagement and critical thinking, particularly when students are tasked with solving real-world problems in a collaborative setting.

Student-led inquiry also promoted deeper engagement with cultural content. By analyzing and interpreting the illuminated stories, students were encouraged to develop their own insights and critically evaluate the material, leading to a deeper understanding of both language and cultural themes. This active exploration stimulated curiosity and sparked interest, as students connected cultural themes to their own lives. Nunan (2018) supports this approach, noting that students exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement when the content is connected to their personal experiences. This finding aligns with Topping & Ehly's (1998) work, which highlights how inquiry-based learning encourages students to build stronger connections with the content.

The inclusion of cultural stories also facilitated a deeper connection between students and teachers. Teachers shared personal stories from their own childhoods, creating opportunities for intergenerational cultural exchange. This not only enriched students' learning experiences but also helped preserve and transmit cultural knowledge within the community. Widiastuti and Santosa (2019) underscore the importance of education in preserving cultural heritage, serving as a bridge between generations. This study exemplifies how education can be a tool for cultural transmission and preservation, echoing O'Rourke & Stainton's (2017) research on intergenerational learning.

The lessons fostered a sense of community among students by focusing on shared cultural experiences. By learning about their heritage together, students reported feeling more connected to their cultural roots. Rahayu (2020) argues that culturally integrated education strengthens students' sense of belonging, particularly in regions undergoing rapid social change, such as Central Lombok. This sense of community and shared identity emerged as a key outcome of the intervention, where students felt more grounded in their cultural background. This resonates with Darling-Hammond et al. (2008), who argue that culturally integrated education enhances students' connections to their communities and enriches their learning experiences.

Feedback from both students and teachers indicated that the intervention not only improved academic outcomes but also had a positive impact on students' attitudes toward learning. By integrating cultural themes into the lessons, the study helped students see the relevance of their heritage in their education, motivating them to engage more actively in class discussions and activities. This heightened participation serves as a clear indicator of the success of the culturally integrated teaching methods employed in the study. This finding aligns with the work of Garrison et al. (2010), who found that cultural relevance in education leads to increased student engagement.

While the intervention was successful, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The use of PBL in areas with less pronounced cultural knowledge—such as urban environments—may face challenges. In these settings, students might have less exposure to traditional cultural practices, making it harder for them to connect with the material. Adapting the curriculum or

providing additional contextual information may be necessary to ensure that students can relate to the cultural content. This challenge is echoed by Ertmer et al. (2009), who note that in urban settings, students may face difficulties relating to culturally specific content due to a lack of exposure.

This research provides valuable insights into the potential scalability of culturally integrated teaching methods. Although the study focused on a small group of students, the positive outcomes suggest that similar approaches could be applied successfully in other educational contexts. Future studies could investigate how illuminated stories and PBL can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse student populations and educational systems (Littlewood, 2019; Gardner, 2019).

Moreover, this study reinforces the importance of integrating culture into language education, especially in multilingual and multicultural settings. As globalization continues to shape local communities, education that incorporates local culture can play a vital role in helping students preserve their cultural identity while acquiring the skills needed to succeed in a globalized world.

In conclusion, the findings of this research demonstrate that combining language education with cultural content not only enhances students' language proficiency but also plays an essential role in preserving cultural heritage. By incorporating culturally relevant teaching methods, schools can help ensure that students remain connected to their heritage while gaining the necessary skills to navigate the challenges of a globalized society.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the positive impact of integrating illuminated stories and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) on both language proficiency and cultural understanding. By incorporating Sasak cultural elements, such as traditional stories and local games, students became more engaged in their learning, which enhanced their English language skills and strengthened their connection to their cultural heritage. The use of visual aids alongside PBL encouraged active learning and problem-solving, helping students grasp complex cultural and linguistic concepts more effectively.

The findings support the national education framework's focus on cultural diversity and preserving local traditions, demonstrating how culturally relevant teaching can help students connect with their heritage while acquiring necessary language skills. This approach not only improved students' English proficiency but also boosted their confidence and cultural pride, motivating them to engage more deeply in their education.

Future research could expand this study to larger groups and explore additional cultural elements, which would provide more comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of culturally integrated education. This approach can be adapted for other regions, offering valuable lessons for educators in Lombok and beyond to enhance both language learning and cultural preservation in an increasingly globalized world.

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