

Lamin Dayak Kenyah Architecture as a Medium for English Language Instruction: A Cultural Approach

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of Lamin Dayak Kenyah architecture as a cultural medium in English language instruction. The research aims to promote contextual and culture-based learning by linking English teaching materials with local wisdom embedded in the traditional Lamin house. A qualitative descriptive method was employed in this study, involving 30 university students and five English lecturers from East Kalimantan. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis conducted with local cultural experts and English educators. The data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. The findings reveal that Lamin architecture, rich with symbolic meanings, social values, and traditional narratives, provides authentic contexts for developing students' linguistic and intercultural competence. Incorporating cultural artifacts such as Lamin into English instruction not only enhances students' engagement and comprehension but also fosters awareness of cultural identity and appreciation for indigenous heritage.

Keywords: Architecture, Culture, English Language Instruction, Lamin Dayak Kenyah.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Local wisdom is fast becoming a major issue in modern educational debates. This change is a reaction to Indonesia losing its national identity. Social, economic, and political changes have shaped people's mental state. Consequently, Indonesians, especially the younger generations, have grown apart from their national identity and cohesion. Increasingly influenced by foreign civilizations that sometimes conflict with national ideals, this results in a multidimensional catastrophe across many fields, including education. To address this issue, lecturers are seeking practical ways to shield the younger generation from the erosion of their national identity. One strategy is to include local wisdom principles inside the education system. In this context, learning a language through cultural barriers can be deemed as enhancing students' motivation, comprehension, and communication skills (Leech Morejon, 2025). This approach emphasizes the integration of local cultural elements in language learning as a medium to bridge linguistic and cultural understanding (Aristia et al., 2025).

East Kalimantan, as one of the provinces rich in Dayak Kenyah cultural heritage, holds various cultural values that can be raised as English learning media. Lamin Dayak Kenyah, a longhouse that is the center of social and cultural life of the Dayak Kenyah community, has complex symbolic values and social functions (Kanyan, 2022). Lamin architecture is not just a physical structure, but a reflection of the philosophy of life, social hierarchy, and oral traditions of the Dayak Kenyah community (Baharuddin, 2023). In line with Radja et al. (2024) found that a shift in the functions of Lamin houses, which has an impact on the meaning of space and the addition of functions, accompanied by the meaning of behaviour that maintains cultural aspects and encourages the economic sector.

The use of Lamin architecture as a medium for learning English can provide an authentic context that connects language with local culture, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful and relevant (Fitriani & Gunawan, 2024). Studies show that language learning that uses a local cultural context can increase student engagement and facilitate understanding of language concepts (Kim, 2020). However, research on the use of traditional architecture, especially Lamin Dayak Kenyah, as a medium for learning English is still very limited. Most studies still focus on conventional teaching methods without systematically integrating cultural elements (Ningsih et al., 2025). In fact, the integration of local culture is believed to be able to enrich learning materials and build cultural awareness of students, which ultimately improves their communicative competence (Díaz Guevara, 2025; Leech Morejon, 2025).

Based on these conditions, this study aims to explore and develop an English learning model grounded in a culturally oriented approach that uses Lamin Dayak Kenyah as an instructional medium. This approach is expected to enhance students' English proficiency while simultaneously strengthening their cultural identity and appreciation of local heritage. The novelty of this study lies in its explicit incorporation of Lamin Dayak Kenyah architectural values as a structured pedagogical context. This aspect has not been examined in previous research, particularly within the educational landscape of East Kalimantan. By transforming the symbolic, social, and narrative elements of the Lamin into meaningful learning resources, this study offers an empirical and practical contribution to advancing contextual and sustainable English learning in the region.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative case study method to explore how Lamin Dayak Kenyah architecture can be integrated into English language instruction through a cultural perspective. The participants consisted of approximately 30 university students and 5 English lecturers from East Kalimantan; all selected through purposive sampling based on their familiarity with local cultural contexts. Data collection methods included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of cultural artifacts such as Lamin carvings and photographs. These data informed the development of a four-week instructional module that incorporated traditional cultural themes into listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, with codes generated inductively from interview transcripts and field notes. Themes were triangulated across various data sources to enhance validity, and coding was conducted using NVivo to identify patterns related to learner identity, cultural engagement, and language skill development.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of survey and interview data collected from students in East Kalimantan reveals several significant findings regarding their needs and preferences in English language learning, grounded in local wisdom. The analysis shows that students have a high level of awareness of the importance of English, with more than 90% considering it essential for their academic and professional development. This finding emphasizes that English is not only a global communication tool but also a key to enhancing academic literacy and competitiveness in the international job market. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop high-quality English language learning curricula that are both relevant and contextually appropriate.

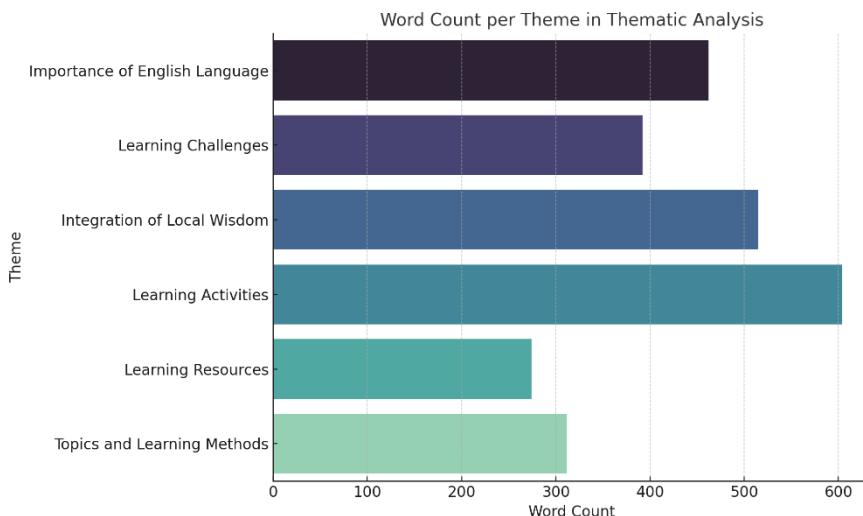


Figure 1. Word Count in Thematic Analysis

Based on Figure 1, the distribution of word counts across themes identified in the thematic analysis shows that “Learning Activities” emerged as the most extensively discussed theme, followed by “Integration of Local Wisdom,” indicating strong participant emphasis on learning experiences and the relevance of cultural values within the instructional context. Substantial attention was also given to the “Importance of English Language” and “Learning Challenges,” reflecting participants’ recognition of English proficiency as essential and their articulation of difficulties encountered in the learning process. In contrast, “Topics and Learning Methods” and “Learning Resources” recorded comparatively lower word counts, suggesting that while these aspects were acknowledged, they received less detailed elaboration. Overall, the figure highlights that participants predominantly focused on experiential and cultural dimensions of learning rather than procedural or resource-related considerations.

Despite widespread recognition of English’s importance, the thematic analysis indicates that students continue to face notable challenges in mastering the language, as reflected in the substantial word count for the “Learning Activities” theme. The main obstacles include teaching methods that do not align with their learning styles, limited learning materials, and a lack of supportive learning environments. This mirrors previous findings indicating that affective and environmental factors play a significant role in language acquisition. As a result, educators must tailor their teaching methods to meet students’ needs better.

Mulyadi in Alber et al. (2023) emphasized the inclusion of regional knowledge into English reading resources as a new perspective to strengthen the earlier ones. He contends that the problems Indonesia, now suffering a multidimensional crisis and a drop, face present a need for character education. Character education is the process of embedding personal values into a person’s personality such that they guide their conduct throughout life. In the context of teaching English as a second language, character education might be incorporated into English reading resources. Under these conditions, integrating local moral values into English teaching resources is a worthwhile strategy that lecturers can use within the character education framework. Several studies also emphasize that integrating local wisdom into language teaching enhances cultural awareness and builds students’ identities. For instance, Shaleha and Purbani (2019) explore how Indonesian local wisdom fosters character building by embedding cultural knowledge into language materials. The value of local wisdom lies in its ability to connect students to their cultural roots, which is increasingly crucial in a globalized world. By incorporating local narratives, such as folklore and traditional values, educators can bridge the gap between language learning and cultural identity (Gumartifa et al., 2025; Irwan et al., 2020; Tineh et al., 2023).

Additionally, students show significant interest in integrating local wisdom into English learning materials, especially in relation to local cultural aspects such as traditional architecture. The majority of students support

the inclusion of local cultural context in English language lessons, believing that it can enhance their intrinsic motivation to learn. This integration is seen as a way to enrich students' cultural literacy, enabling them to appreciate their local identity while also mastering global knowledge. In line with Tanjung et al. (2018) found that local wisdom-based materials are suitable for students at SMPN 1 Bilah Barat, as they meet the required educational standards. Tanjung developed English-language teaching materials focused on descriptive texts for seventh-grade students, incorporating local wisdom from Labuhanbatu. The study revealed that the materials met all the criteria for good teaching materials and received positive feedback from both lecturers and students. On the other hand, integrating local wisdom into language curricula has also shown potential to enhance character education. In Islamic educational settings, combining Islamic values with local wisdom provides students with a comprehensive framework for developing ethical, moral, and social responsibility. As some scholars note, textbooks that integrate Islamic values and local wisdom not only improve students' English proficiency but also encourage deeper connections to their cultural and religious identity (Darmayenti et al., 2021; Wisran et al., 2025).

Regarding learning methods, students strongly prefer interactive and applied activities, such as watching videos, participating in discussions, and writing descriptions and opinions. These activities reflect a student-centered approach, where students are more actively engaged in the learning process, making the material easier to comprehend. This aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of contextual and meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, methods that prioritize interaction and collaboration can significantly increase student involvement in the learning process. Yamin (2017), in his work "Integrating the Local Wisdom Values into the National Curriculum to Create Nationalism Strength," contends that local knowledge values like tolerance, cooperation, and the usage of conventional herbs are crucial components in preserving national unity amidst variety. Align to Laili (2017) discovered that the ultimate products, combining local knowledge and character education, could provide a solution to encourage local wisdom while also educating pupils on character. The national curriculum should include these values, so that classroom activities help instill the local ones in kids. In line with its surroundings, local knowledge within the curriculum should be tailored to each school's particular needs to help create a civilized country. In effect, local knowledge solves world problems and guarantees that local identity is preserved while also respecting national interests and educational goals (Mulyana, 2024).

However, there is a noticeable gap in preferences between students and lecturers regarding learning resources. Students prefer digital and visual-based learning resources, such as videos and online learning platforms (LMS), while lecturers tend to favor conventional resources like textbooks. This gap indicates the need for a blended learning approach that combines both digital and traditional media, creating a more holistic and adaptive learning experience for students. According to Fitrianto and Farisi (2025) and Irwan et al. (2020), the integration of local wisdom into English teaching should focus on fostering a deeper understanding of local culture through digital media, ensuring that the younger generation remains connected to their roots.

Finally, both students and lecturers agree that project-based and cooperative learning methods are the most effective. Project-based learning provides students with opportunities to engage in hands-on learning and tackle real-world problems, enriching their learning experience. Cooperative learning, on the other hand, helps students work in teams, develop communication skills, and build collective responsibility. These methods encourage students to be more active and creative in their learning, while also enhancing their ability to collaborate in real-world situations. In line with the findings of Ramanathan et al. (2025), this technique greatly enhanced learners' abilities in problem-solving, innovative thinking, and collaboration. Consequently, this hands-on method enhances students' problem-solving, creativity, and teamwork, enabling them to apply their knowledge to tackle societal issues they will encounter in their future professions.

As society evolves into the 5.0 era, the use of local wisdom in education becomes increasingly relevant. The digital age presents both challenges and opportunities for preserving cultural identity. In language education, this challenge can be addressed by adapting traditional teaching methods and materials to incorporate digital formats that engage students more interactively and contextually. Integrating local wisdom into digital resources enhances students' understanding of their cultural heritage while improving their language skills.

In general, the results of this study strengthen previous research that emphasizes the importance of integrating local wisdom into English language teaching, particularly in relation to character building, cultural identity, and students' communicative competence (Alber et al., 2023; Gumartifa et al., 2025; Irwan et al., 2020; Shaleha & Purbani, 2019). At the same time, this study offers a different and more specific contribution by positioning Lamin Dayak Kenyah architecture not merely as cultural content, but as a structured pedagogical medium that systematically shapes learning activities, materials, and assessment in an EFL classroom. While earlier studies have mostly focused on textual or general cultural elements, the present research expands the discussion by demonstrating how architectural symbols, spatial functions, and communal practices embedded in Lamin can be transformed into meaningful tasks that promote both linguistic skills and intercultural awareness. Thus, this article not only supports but also extends prior work on ELT grounded in local wisdom by providing an empirically grounded model rooted in the Dayak Kenyah community of East Kalimantan.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Lamin Dayak Kenyah architecture, rich with symbolic meanings, social values, and traditional narratives, provides an authentic context for developing students' linguistic and intercultural competence in English language instruction. Incorporating cultural artifacts such as the Lamin into English instruction not only enhances students' engagement and comprehension but also fosters awareness of cultural identity and appreciation for indigenous heritage. This culture-based teaching strategy effectively promotes contextual, culturally grounded learning by linking English teaching materials to the local wisdom embedded in the traditional Lamin house.

For further research, it is recommended to investigate the quantitative impact of this learning strategy on students' grades and standardized test scores, which would complement the existing qualitative findings. Additionally, future research could explore the adaptation and application of this cultural integration model using other local cultural elements from different regions. It could develop detailed teaching guides or modules to help English educators implement the Lamin Dayak Kenyah architecture-based approach more broadly and systematically.

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