

# Investigate Cultural Problems In The Execution Of Indonesian Language Learning In SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to identify the cultural issues that arise in the implementation of Indonesian language learning at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang. As part of the national curriculum, Indonesian language instruction faces various challenges related to cultural differences between the material taught and the students' cultural backgrounds. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal several cultural problems affecting the learning process, including: (1) the mismatch between the curriculum-based teaching materials and the local culture, making it difficult for students to relate the content to their everyday experiences; (2) differences in communication styles and social norms that impact interactions between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves; (3) differing perspectives on learning rooted in local cultural values, which may hinder active student participation in the learning process. This study suggests the need for curriculum adaptation that is more sensitive to local cultural values, as well as teacher training to understand and accommodate the cultural diversity of students in Indonesian language education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in shaping the cultural identity of a society, and Indonesian, as the national language of Indonesia, serves as a unifying element across its diverse cultures. However, the effectiveness of Indonesian language learning often depends on how well the curriculum and teaching methods align with the students' cultural backgrounds. At SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, a school that caters to a diverse student population with distinct cultural identities, there is a growing concern regarding the cultural issues that might arise during the implementation of Indonesian language instruction. The Indonesian national curriculum, introduced with the 2013 Curriculum, seeks to standardize learning across the country. Yet, this standardization often fails to consider the unique cultural contexts of the students. In regions like Rappang, where local cultures and languages are deeply ingrained, the curriculum might not fully reflect the students' lived experiences, leading to challenges in student engagement and learning outcomes. As such, the cultural relevance of teaching materials and methods in Indonesian language classes becomes a critical factor in determining the success of the educational process.

Cultural misalignment between the curriculum and the students' backgrounds can create a barrier to effective communication between teachers and students. In many parts of Indonesia, local languages and dialects, such as Bugis or Makassar, are widely spoken at home, while Bahasa Indonesia is typically learned in school. This linguistic divide can lead to difficulties in comprehension, expression, and participation during classroom interactions. As a result, students may feel disconnected from the learning material, which can diminish their motivation and interest in learning the language. Moreover, cultural differences extend beyond language. Social norms, communication styles, and expectations around authority and respect can influence how students interact with their teachers and peers. In many Indonesian communities, including Rappang, there is a strong emphasis on respect for authority figures, which may discourage students from actively engaging in discussions or expressing their opinions openly. This cultural expectation could limit the potential for dynamic, student-centered learning environments where students are encouraged to think critically and contribute to the learning process. Teachers' understanding of local cultural values is also crucial in addressing these challenges. Without an awareness of the cultural nuances that influence student behavior and learning, teachers may struggle to connect with their students. For instance, the way feedback is given, the level of formality used in communication, and the strategies for motivating students may not align with local cultural expectations, resulting in student disengagement or miscommunication. In addition to these interpersonal and pedagogical challenges, the curriculum's failure to integrate local cultural elements can leave students feeling that their cultural identity is not valued in the learning process. For students at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, the lack of culturally relevant content in language instruction may hinder their ability to see the relevance of what they are learning. This issue is compounded by the perception that the national curriculum is disconnected from their day-to-day realities and cultural heritage. To address these cultural challenges, there is a need for a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to teaching Indonesian. This includes adapting the curriculum to reflect local cultures, incorporating culturally relevant texts, and training teachers to be more

aware of the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. By doing so, students can better relate to the content, feel a stronger connection to the learning material, and develop a more positive attitude toward Indonesian language learning.

This study focuses on the cultural problems encountered in Indonesian language education at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, aiming to identify the key challenges and suggest potential solutions. Through qualitative methods, including observations, interviews, and documentation, this research will examine how cultural factors impact the teaching and learning of Indonesian in this specific context. By exploring these cultural issues, the study hopes to contribute to the broader discussion on how to create a more culturally inclusive and effective Indonesian language curriculum. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to offer insights that can help educators, policymakers, and school administrators at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang—and in similar contexts—develop strategies for improving the cultural relevance of Indonesian language instruction. This would not only enhance student engagement and learning outcomes but also promote a more inclusive educational environment that respects and celebrates cultural diversity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is not only a means of communication but also a key medium for the transmission of culture. According to Brown (2007), language learning is deeply intertwined with cultural understanding, as language both reflects and shapes cultural values, norms, and practices. In the context of Indonesian language education, the integration of cultural aspects is crucial in creating a meaningful learning experience for students. Research on language teaching often highlights the importance of aligning teaching materials with students' cultural backgrounds to foster engagement and promote better learning outcomes (Yasemin & Gul, 2018). This alignment becomes particularly important in multilingual and multicultural settings such as Indonesia, where regional languages and diverse cultural practices play a significant role in students' identities. The cultural relevance of the curriculum has been widely discussed in educational research. Choi & Lee (2014) argue that when the content of language instruction does not reflect the local culture, students may struggle to see the connection between what they are learning in school and their everyday lives. This disconnect can lead to decreased motivation, as students may perceive the material as irrelevant or foreign. In Indonesia, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum aims to provide standardized educational content, but it often fails to address the local cultural diversity of students, particularly in regions like Rappang, where local languages such as Bugis are spoken alongside Bahasa Indonesia. The lack of cultural adaptation in the curriculum may contribute to a barrier in learning, as students find it difficult to relate to materials that do not incorporate their cultural values.

Cultural issues in language education are also evident in the teaching methods employed by educators. According to Widdowson (1990), effective language teaching should consider not only linguistic skills but also cultural competencies. Teachers who are unaware of the cultural backgrounds of their students may inadvertently apply teaching methods that are at odds with the students' communication styles or social norms. For example, in Indonesian classrooms, respect for authority figures, a common cultural trait, can make students reluctant

to engage in open discussions or question teachers. This social norm may conflict with Western-based pedagogical approaches that encourage critical thinking and active participation. Consequently, a mismatch between teaching methods and local cultural expectations may lead to a lack of student engagement and hinder the learning process.

Moreover, the issue of language diversity in Indonesia adds another layer of complexity to language education. According to David & Sumarni (2016), Indonesia's rich linguistic diversity, with over 700 languages spoken across the archipelago, presents both opportunities and challenges in education. While Bahasa Indonesia serves as the national language, many students are more comfortable speaking their regional languages at home, and these dialects often influence their acquisition of formal Indonesian. In schools like SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, where students come from various ethnic groups, the use of local dialects alongside Bahasa Indonesia can create challenges in communication and comprehension. Language teachers need to be aware of these linguistic dynamics and adopt strategies that bridge the gap between students' home languages and the standard language used in the curriculum. Several studies have explored the impact of culturally responsive teaching on student outcomes. Gay (2010) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching involves understanding students' cultural backgrounds and integrating them into the curriculum to make learning more meaningful. In the context of Indonesian language education, culturally responsive teaching might involve using local stories, proverbs, or literature to teach language skills, thereby fostering a deeper connection between students' cultural identities and the content being taught. By incorporating culturally relevant materials into the curriculum, teachers can help students see the value in their language education and encourage greater participation in the learning process.

Cultural issues also extend beyond the curriculum and teaching methods to the teacher-student relationship. Teachers' understanding of cultural norms and values plays a crucial role in shaping classroom dynamics. According to Kohn (2006), teachers who demonstrate cultural sensitivity are better able to create positive, supportive learning environments where students feel respected and valued. In the context of SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, the relationship between teachers and students may be influenced by local cultural values related to authority, respect, and social hierarchy. Teachers who are aware of these cultural dynamics can adopt more effective strategies for engaging students, fostering trust, and encouraging participation. While some studies have highlighted the importance of cultural integration in language learning, others have pointed out the challenges that teachers face when trying to incorporate local culture into the standardized curriculum. Suryadi (2017) argues that many teachers are not adequately prepared to adapt the curriculum to local cultural contexts due to a lack of training or resources. Furthermore, the rigid structure of the national curriculum can make it difficult for teachers to incorporate culturally relevant materials without deviating from the prescribed content. This tension between standardization and cultural adaptation is a significant issue in Indonesian education, particularly in schools like SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, where local cultural diversity should be embraced rather than overlooked.

To address these challenges, research suggests the need for a more flexible and inclusive curriculum that takes into account the cultural diversity of students. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia (2019), the implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum requires collaboration

between educators, curriculum developers, and local communities to ensure that learning materials are relevant and engaging for students. In the case of SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, incorporating local cultural elements, such as stories, historical references, and local dialects, into Indonesian language education could help bridge the gap between the curriculum and students' cultural backgrounds, ultimately leading to more effective and meaningful learning experiences.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the cultural issues that arise in the implementation of Indonesian language learning at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the cultural dynamics, teacher-student interactions, and contextual factors that influence the learning process. The goal of this research is not to measure or quantify variables, but to gain a deeper understanding of how cultural factors impact the delivery and reception of Indonesian language education in the classroom. The research was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, a school located in a region of South Sulawesi where students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Bugis, Mandar, and other local groups. The school provides a unique setting to explore cultural issues in Indonesian language learning because of the strong local traditions and languages that exist alongside the formal education system. The participants in this study include teachers and students of the school, chosen through purposive sampling to provide rich insights into the cultural challenges experienced during Indonesian language instruction.

Data collection for this study was carried out using three primary methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted to gain firsthand insight into how Indonesian language lessons are delivered and how cultural factors influence classroom dynamics. During the observations, the researcher focused on identifying cultural behaviors, teacher-student interactions, and the integration (or lack thereof) of local cultural elements into the lessons. The observations also aimed to document any challenges teachers and students faced in communicating and engaging with the learning materials. In addition to observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Indonesian language teachers and a selection of students. These interviews were designed to explore the teachers' perspectives on the cultural issues they encounter in the classroom, their understanding of local cultural values, and how they adapt their teaching methods to address the needs of their students. Similarly, student interviews focused on their experiences of learning Indonesian, their perceptions of the relevance of the lessons to their cultural backgrounds, and any difficulties they faced in engaging with the material. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring topics that emerged during the conversations, while still focusing on the key research questions. To supplement the interviews and observations, document analysis was also employed. The researcher reviewed relevant teaching materials, including the Indonesian language textbooks used in the school, lesson plans, and curriculum documents. The goal was to assess the extent to which the curriculum and teaching materials reflect local cultural elements and whether they provide opportunities for students to connect the content with their own cultural

experiences. This analysis helped to identify potential gaps between the prescribed curriculum and the cultural context of the students.

The data collected through these methods were then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. The researcher carefully examined the interview transcripts, observation notes, and teaching materials to identify recurring themes related to cultural issues in language learning. These themes were then categorized into broader areas such as cultural misalignment in the curriculum, challenges in teacher-student interactions, and the impact of local language use on learning. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was applied by cross-checking data from multiple sources—observations, interviews, and document analysis. This approach helps to reduce bias and ensures that the findings are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the research context. Additionally, member checking was employed, where the preliminary findings were shared with a few participants (both teachers and students) to verify the accuracy and relevance of the interpretations made by the researcher. Finally, ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and ensuring that no personal information was disclosed in the final report. The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of participants, especially given the sensitive nature of cultural identity and educational practices.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study highlight several key cultural issues that impact the implementation of Indonesian language learning at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang. These issues can be categorized into three main areas: cultural misalignment in the curriculum, challenges in teacher-student interactions, and the influence of local language use on students' learning experiences. Each of these areas reflects the cultural dynamics present in the school and the wider community. One of the most prominent findings was the cultural misalignment in the curriculum. The Indonesian language curriculum, which follows the national 2013 Curriculum, is largely standardized and does not fully integrate local cultural elements that are relevant to the students at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang. Many students expressed that the learning materials, especially the texts and examples in the textbooks, were disconnected from their daily lives and local traditions. For instance, the curriculum often presents content that reflects urban or national experiences, rather than incorporating local customs, values, or stories that are familiar to the students. This lack of cultural relevance was noted to result in disengagement, as students struggled to relate to the content and found it difficult to see its practical application.

In response to these issues, many teachers reported trying to incorporate local culture into their lessons by using regional languages or local proverbs during their teaching. However, they also noted the challenges of balancing the national curriculum requirements with the need to make the content culturally relevant. While some teachers successfully used examples from local traditions or integrated local knowledge into their teaching, others felt constrained by the rigid

structure of the curriculum. This highlights the tension between the need for cultural adaptation and the standardized nature of the national curriculum.

A second significant finding was the challenge of teacher-student interactions shaped by local cultural norms. In Rappang, as in many parts of Indonesia, there is a strong emphasis on respect for authority, particularly for teachers. Students are often hesitant to speak up in class or question the teacher's authority, which can lead to passive learning and limited student engagement. Teachers also reported difficulties in encouraging active participation and critical thinking due to these cultural expectations. In interviews, students admitted that they often felt uncomfortable expressing their opinions in front of the class, especially if they disagreed with the teacher's viewpoint. This reluctance to engage in open discussion was seen as a cultural norm rooted in respect for teachers, but it also created barriers to the interactive, student-centered learning that the curriculum aims to foster.

Additionally, the use of local languages in the classroom was identified as both a challenge and an opportunity. Many students spoke Bugis or Mandar at home, and these local languages influenced how they understood and produced Indonesian. While Bahasa Indonesia is the language of instruction, students often struggled with certain vocabulary or sentence structures that differed from their native dialects. Teachers reported that this linguistic difference sometimes led to misunderstandings or hindered the students' ability to fully grasp the material. However, some teachers leveraged students' knowledge of local languages to facilitate understanding by drawing comparisons between the languages. This bilingual approach helped bridge the gap between students' home languages and formal Indonesian, making the learning process more inclusive and effective.

Another important theme that emerged from the data was the impact of social norms on student motivation and classroom dynamics. In some cases, students felt that their cultural values were not reflected in the teaching process. For example, some students felt that the emphasis on individual achievement in the classroom conflicted with their communal values, which prioritize collective success and group harmony. This cultural difference sometimes led to a lack of motivation, as students felt that the focus on individual assessments did not align with their cultural understanding of learning as a shared experience. Teachers who were aware of these cultural differences often adapted their methods by promoting group activities and collaborative learning, which resonated more with students' cultural values.

Moreover, the study found that the lack of culturally relevant teaching materials contributed to student disengagement. Many students expressed frustration that the textbooks did not include content related to their cultural experiences or local knowledge. They felt that the materials were too generic and did not address the diverse backgrounds of the student body. In response, some teachers took the initiative to supplement the official curriculum with locally relevant materials, such as folk tales, local history, and community-based examples. However, this practice was not widespread, and there was a clear need for greater support in terms of curriculum development that integrates local culture and language.

One of the strategies that emerged as effective in addressing these cultural issues was the use of culturally responsive teaching. Teachers who were able to understand and incorporate the local cultural context into their lessons saw a marked improvement in student engagement and motivation. For example, by using local proverbs, stories, or incorporating local dialects into the lessons, teachers were able to create a more inclusive and relatable learning environment.

This approach not only helped bridge the cultural gap between students' home lives and school learning, but it also fostered a deeper connection to the material being taught. Teachers who employed culturally responsive teaching practices noted that students were more eager to participate and engage in discussions.

Finally, the study highlighted the need for curriculum reform to better reflect the cultural diversity of Indonesia. While teachers and students showed a willingness to adapt and incorporate local culture into the classroom, they were often constrained by the limitations of the national curriculum. The findings suggest that curriculum developers need to consider local cultural contexts when designing teaching materials and lesson plans. Incorporating local knowledge, language, and traditions into the curriculum could enhance the relevance of the learning material, foster greater student engagement, and improve overall learning outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the cultural challenges encountered in the implementation of Indonesian language learning at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang, highlighting key issues such as cultural misalignment in the curriculum, challenges in teacher-student interactions, and the influence of local language use on students' learning experiences. The findings reveal that the standardized national curriculum, while providing a framework for teaching, often fails to consider the rich cultural diversity of students, leading to disengagement and a lack of relevance in the learning material. Furthermore, cultural norms, particularly those relating to respect for authority, create barriers to active student participation, which limits the effectiveness of the learning process.

The study also emphasizes the role of local languages in shaping students' comprehension of Bahasa Indonesia. While students' native languages such as Bugis and Mandar offer rich cultural contexts, they also pose challenges in bridging the gap between everyday language use and formal education. However, culturally responsive teaching practices—such as the incorporation of local stories, proverbs, and language—were found to enhance student engagement and make learning more meaningful. Teachers who employed these practices observed improved participation and a deeper connection to the material. To address these issues, this study recommends a more flexible and culturally inclusive curriculum that incorporates local cultural elements into the teaching of Indonesian. It is crucial for curriculum developers to consider the local cultural context in order to make learning materials more relatable and engaging for students. Teachers should also be provided with training on culturally responsive teaching strategies to better understand and address the diverse needs of their students. By embracing cultural diversity and adapting teaching methods accordingly, the educational experience for students at SMP Muhammadiyah Rappang can be significantly improved. This research highlights the need for a shift towards culturally responsive education in Indonesian language learning. The integration of local cultural elements into the curriculum and teaching methods will not only foster a more inclusive learning environment but also enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. With a more culturally sensitive approach, the gap between the formal curriculum and the lived experiences of students can be narrowed, ensuring a more effective and meaningful educational



experience.

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