

Exploring Junior High School Students' Needs for Developing Local Folklore-Based English Learning Materials

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Histori Naskah:

Submit: 2026-03-26
Accepted: 2026-04-08
Published: 2026-04-14



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Abstract:

This study aims to explore junior high school students' needs for the development of local folklore-based English learning materials. The study employed a descriptive research design using a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The participants were 25 eighth-grade students from a junior high school in Ternate. Data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students experienced difficulties in several English skills, particularly speaking, as well as challenges related to vocabulary and grammar. In addition, most students had limited experience in learning English through local folklore, although they were somewhat familiar with such stories. Despite this, students demonstrated positive attitudes toward folklore-based learning and expressed interest in using stories from their own cultural background. They also showed a preference for interactive learning activities such as storytelling, role-play, and group discussions. These findings indicate that local folklore has strong potential to support the development of meaningful and culturally relevant English learning materials. Such materials can enhance students' language development, motivation, and engagement. Therefore, incorporating students' needs into the development of folklore-based English learning materials is essential to ensure their effectiveness and relevance in the learning process.

Keywords: EFL; English Learning Materials; Local Folklore; Needs Analysis

Introduction

Integrating cultural content into English learning materials has become an increasingly important concern in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Language and culture are inherently interconnected, as language reflects the values, traditions, and social practices of a particular community. Incorporating cultural elements into English learning can create more meaningful learning experiences and help students connect language learning with their own cultural backgrounds. When learning materials are culturally relevant, students are more likely to develop higher levels of engagement and motivation (Widodo, 2021). In this sense, culture is not merely an additional component of language learning, but an integral aspect that shapes how language is understood and used in real-life contexts.

Furthermore, the integration of cultural content in language learning contributes to the development of intercultural communicative competence. Learners are expected not only to understand linguistic aspects

but also to interpret meaning within cultural contexts. This enables students to become more effective communicators who are aware of both their own culture and others. Therefore, incorporating local cultural elements into English learning materials can serve as a bridge between global language use and local identity, making learning more meaningful and relevant.

Despite the growing recognition of culture-based learning materials, empirical evidence indicates that English instructional resources in many schools still rely heavily on generalized and decontextualized content that does not reflect students' local environments. This condition often results in low student engagement and limited comprehension, as learners struggle to relate the material to their real-life experiences. In the context of Ternate, preliminary observations and existing practices suggest that English learning materials used in junior high schools predominantly depend on standardized textbooks with minimal integration of local cultural content. This indicates a gap between the theoretical importance of culturally relevant materials and their actual implementation in classrooms.

One potential cultural resource that can be integrated into English learning materials is local folklore, as it contains narratives, moral values, and cultural traditions closely related to the local context. As a form of narrative text, folklore also provides authentic and contextualized language input that can support the development of various language skills, particularly reading and speaking. Previous studies have highlighted the potential of folklore as a valuable resource in English language classrooms. (Suryani and Sari, 2022) found that the use of folklore in English learning materials can enhance students' engagement and interest in reading activities. Similarly, (Rahman, 2023) reported that integrating local folktales into English learning improved students' reading comprehension and vocabulary development. In addition, (Putri and Hidayat, 2024) revealed that culturally relevant narrative texts such as folklore can support students' understanding of narrative structures while strengthening their cultural awareness.

However, although these studies confirm the effectiveness of folklore-based materials, they primarily focus on the outcomes of implementation rather than the preliminary stage of material development, particularly the analysis of learners' needs. This indicates a significant research gap, as the success of instructional materials is highly dependent on how well they align with students' actual needs, preferences, and learning conditions. Needs analysis plays a crucial role in identifying students' learning preferences, difficulties, and expectations. According to (Nation and Macalister, 2020), needs analysis helps identify learners' necessities, lacks, and wants, which serve as the foundation for designing appropriate instructional materials. Therefore, understanding students' needs is essential to ensure that learning materials are relevant, effective, and aligned with learners' actual conditions.

Based on the gaps identified, it is evident that limited research has specifically examined students' needs in the development of local folklore-based English learning materials, particularly in the context of junior high schools. This lack of needs-based investigation may result in instructional materials that are culturally relevant in concept but not fully effective in practice.

Therefore, this study explicitly aims to investigate and analyze junior high school students' needs as a foundation for developing local folklore-based English learning materials. By identifying students' necessities, lacks, and wants, this study seeks to provide empirical insights that can inform the design of culturally relevant, engaging, and pedagogically appropriate English learning materials.

Literature Review

Recent developments in English Language Teaching (ELT) have increasingly emphasized the integration of cultural content as a fundamental component of language learning. Culture is no longer viewed as

supplementary, but as an essential dimension that shapes learners' communicative competence. A number of recent studies highlight that effective language learning involves not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to interpret and negotiate meaning across cultural contexts. This ability is conceptualized as intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for appropriate communication in diverse cultural settings.

In line with this perspective, contemporary ELT research stresses that language learning is inherently an intercultural process, as learners engage with multiple cultural identities and meanings in communication. A systematic review by Zhou et al. (2024) further confirms that strengthening ICC has become a key objective in English education, as it enables learners to communicate effectively in global contexts while maintaining awareness of cultural differences. Similarly, Liu (2024) found that integrating cultural content in ELT significantly enhances students' intercultural competence and overall learning outcomes, particularly when materials reflect learners' sociocultural realities.

Moreover, several studies indicate that culturally relevant materials, such as narrative texts and folklore, play a significant role in promoting intercultural understanding and learner engagement. A critical review by Heggernes (2021) shows that literary and narrative texts are widely used in ELT because they provide meaningful cultural contexts and facilitate deeper intercultural learning processes. Supporting this, Nurmaisyah (2025) highlights that the use of culturally embedded materials, including stories and local narratives, can enhance students' motivation, autonomy, and intercultural sensitivity. However, the study also reveals a persistent gap between theoretical awareness and classroom implementation due to limited resources and pedagogical guidance.

In the Indonesian context, research has also examined the representation of cultural content in English textbooks. Agustina and Kencana (2023) found that many textbooks still emphasize global or target cultures rather than local cultural content, which may limit students' ability to relate learning materials to their own experiences. This finding reinforces the importance of integrating local cultural resources, such as folklore, into English learning materials to create more contextualized and meaningful learning experiences.

Another important theoretical foundation in material development is needs analysis. Recent studies emphasize that needs analysis remains a crucial step in designing effective language learning materials. According to Richards (2021) and further supported by Dou et al. (2023), needs analysis involves identifying learners' current abilities, target needs, and learning preferences to ensure that instructional materials are relevant and effective. In the context of intercultural learning, needs analysis also helps identify students' intercultural competence needs, which are essential for designing culturally responsive materials.

Furthermore, systematic reviews in ELT confirm that although many studies have explored intercultural competence and cultural integration, there is still limited research focusing on learner-centered material development based on needs analysis. Permatasari (2023) notes that while the integration of ICC in ELT has been widely discussed, empirical studies that connect cultural content with students' specific learning needs are still relatively scarce. This indicates the necessity of research that bridges cultural content integration with needs-based instructional design.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, it can be concluded that integrating local cultural content—particularly folklore—into English learning materials, supported by a systematic needs analysis, is essential for developing meaningful, engaging, and contextually relevant language learning. Such integration not

only enhances linguistic competence but also strengthens students' intercultural awareness and cultural identity.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate students' needs related to the integration of local folklore in English learning materials. This study applied a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were obtained from closed-ended questionnaire items, while the qualitative data were collected from open-ended responses. According to John W. Creswell (2014), a mixed-method approach enables researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem by integrating both numerical data and participants' perspectives. Needs analysis is widely used in language education research to identify learners' preferences, learning difficulties, and expectations in the learning process (Nation & Macalister, 2020). Therefore, the findings of this study were intended to provide insights into students' needs for culturally relevant English learning materials.

The participants of this study were 25 eighth-grade students from a junior high school in Ternate. The participants were selected purposively because students at this level are commonly introduced to narrative texts in English learning. In addition, they were considered capable of expressing their learning preferences and experiences. Their responses were expected to provide valuable insights into learners' needs and perceptions regarding the integration of local folklore into English learning.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of 10 items. The questionnaire was developed based on the principles of needs analysis, including learners' necessities, lacks, and wants (Nation & Macalister, 2020). It was divided into four sections: (1) students' English learning preferences, (2) students' experiences with cultural or local content, (3) students' interest in folklore-based learning, and (4) students' learning challenges and material needs. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions generated quantitative data, while the open-ended questions provided qualitative data that allowed students to express their opinions and explanations in their own words.

Before being distributed, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure clarity and relevance of the items. Simple and clear language was used to ensure that all students could easily understand the questions. This step was important to improve the validity of the instrument and to ensure that the data collected accurately reflected students' responses.

The questionnaire was distributed directly to the students during the data collection process. Prior to completing the questionnaire, students were given clear instructions and were informed that their responses would be used only for research purposes. They were encouraged to answer each question honestly based on their own learning experiences. The researcher ensured that all students completed the questionnaire independently to maintain the authenticity of the data.

The data obtained from the closed-ended questions were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, particularly frequency and percentage, to identify patterns in students' responses. Meanwhile, the responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis. The qualitative analysis followed several systematic steps. First, all students' responses were read repeatedly to gain a general understanding of the data. Second, the researcher conducted initial coding (open coding) by identifying and labeling important words, phrases, or statements related to students' needs, preferences, and experiences. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories through axial coding, allowing the

researcher to identify relationships among the data. Finally, these categories were organized into key themes that represented recurring patterns in students' responses.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis, the researcher carefully reviewed the coding results and rechecked the data to maintain consistency between the responses and the identified themes. The use of systematic coding procedures helped ensure that the findings accurately reflected students' perspectives. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis provided a more comprehensive understanding of students' needs and preferences in English learning materials.

Results

Quantitative Data

It is important to note that in several items, students were allowed to select more than one response. Therefore, the total frequencies and percentages may exceed the total number of participants.

a. Students' English Learning Preferences

Students were asked to identify the English skill they found most challenging. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Most Challenging English Skill

Skill	Frequency	Percentage
Listening	4	19.0%
Speaking	11	52.4%
Reading	8	38.1%
Writing	7	33.3%
All skills	3	14.3%

As shown in Table 1, speaking was the most frequently reported challenge among students, followed by reading and writing. This finding indicates that productive skills, particularly speaking, remain a major difficulty for students.

Students were also asked about the English skill they wanted to improve. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. English Skills Students Want to Improve

Skill	Frequency	Percentage
Listening	1	4.8%
Speaking	8	38.1%
Reading	3	14.3%
Writing	3	14.3%
All skills	12	57.1%

As shown in Table 2, the majority of students expressed a desire to improve all English skills, while speaking remained a key priority.

Students' preferred learning activities are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Preferred Learning Activities

Activity	Frequency
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Reading	10
Role-play	7
Listening	7
Writing	7
Group discussion	5
Discussion & role-play	4

As shown in Table 3, reading was the most preferred activity. However, interactive activities such as role-play and group discussions were also widely favored, indicating that students are interested in both individual and participatory learning approaches.

b. Students' Experience with Local Folklore

Students' experience in learning English using local folklore is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' Experience in Learning English Using Local Folklore

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	47.6%
No	11	52.4%

As shown in Table 4, more than half of the students had never experienced learning English through local folklore in the classroom.

Students' familiarity with local folklore is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Students' Familiarity with Local Folklore

Level of Familiarity	Frequency	Percentage
Very familiar	3	14.3%
Somewhat familiar	10	47.6%
Not familiar	7	33.3%

As shown in Table 5, most students were somewhat familiar with local folklore, although a considerable number were not familiar at all.

c. Students' Perceptions of Folklore-Based Learning

Students' perceptions of folklore-based learning are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Students' Perceptions of Learning English through Folklore

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	85.7%
No	1	4.8%

The findings indicate that the majority of students believed that learning English through folklore would be more interesting.

Students' willingness to learn using local folklore is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Students' Willingness to Learn Using Local Folklore

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	71.4%
No	5	23.8%

The results show that most students were willing to learn English using stories from their own cultural background.

Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of folklore-based learning are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Perceived Effectiveness of Folklore-Based Learning

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2	9.5%
Maybe	17	81.0%
No	1	4.8%

As shown in Table 8, most students selected "maybe," indicating that although they are interested in folklore-based learning, they are still uncertain about its effectiveness.

d. Students' Learning Challenges

Students' challenges in learning English are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Students' Learning Challenges

Challenge	Frequency
Difficult vocabulary	11
Speaking	11
Grammar	10
Writing	4
Reading	3
Long texts	1

The findings show that vocabulary, speaking, and grammar are the most significant challenges faced by students.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data were obtained from students' responses to open-ended questions (Questions 5, 6, and 10), which aimed to explore students' experiences and preferences in more depth.

a. Students' Familiarity with Local Folklore

Students' responses indicated varying levels of familiarity with local folklore. Some students were able to mention specific stories, such as *Danau Tolire*, indicating that they had some exposure to local cultural narratives.

However, many students provided limited responses, suggesting that their understanding of folklore remains superficial. Several students also indicated that they had encountered folklore informally, such as through family or community, rather than through formal classroom learning.

b. Students' Needs for Learning Materials

Students' responses revealed a preference for engaging and meaningful learning materials. Many students expressed interest in story-based materials, particularly those related to their own culture.

In addition, students mentioned that interactive activities such as storytelling, role-play, and group discussions made learning more enjoyable. They also believed that using familiar stories could help them understand English more easily.

These findings suggest that integrating local folklore into English learning materials could address students' needs for both engagement and comprehension.

Discussion

Quantitative Data

a. Students' English Learning Preferences

The findings revealed that speaking was the most challenging skill for students, followed by reading and writing. Rather than merely indicating difficulty, this pattern suggests a structural issue commonly found in EFL contexts, where classroom practices tend to emphasize receptive skills over productive ones. Limited exposure to authentic communication and insufficient opportunities for speaking practice may contribute significantly to this imbalance. This finding is consistent with Afzaal et al. (2020), who reported that EFL learners often struggle with speaking due to anxiety and lack of communicative exposure. However, unlike Afzaal et al. (2020), who mainly attribute speaking difficulties to psychological factors, the present findings also imply a pedagogical gap, particularly in providing interactive and communicative learning environments.

In addition, most students expressed a desire to improve all English skills, indicating their awareness of the importance of comprehensive language competence. This aligns with Brown (2021), who emphasizes that language skills are interconnected and should be developed integratively. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between students' expectations and their actual difficulties suggests that current instructional practices may not yet fully support integrated skill development.

Furthermore, students' preference for both individual and interactive learning activities indicates the need for a balanced instructional approach. While reading remains dominant, the strong interest in role-play and group discussions highlights students' unmet need for communicative practice. This supports Marlina (2022), who found that interactive learning strategies enhance engagement. However, the present study extends Marlina's findings by showing that students not only benefit from interactive activities but actively demand them, suggesting that such approaches are still underutilized in practice.

b. Students' Experience with Local Folklore

The findings showed that more than half of the students had never experienced learning English through local folklore. This reflects a persistent gap between the theoretical emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy and its actual implementation in classrooms. While previous literature has strongly advocated for integrating local culture, the current findings suggest that such integration remains limited in practice.

Although students demonstrated some familiarity with local folklore, this knowledge was not acquired through formal education but rather through informal contexts. This supports Byram (2021), who argues that integrating local culture into language learning can strengthen intercultural competence. However, the present findings reveal a contradiction: while students possess cultural knowledge, the education system does not effectively utilize it as a learning resource. This indicates that the issue is not the absence of cultural content, but rather the lack of systematic integration into instructional materials.

c. Students' Perceptions of Folklore-Based Learning

The findings revealed that the majority of students believed that learning English through folklore would be more interesting and expressed willingness to engage with such materials. This indicates a strong positive disposition toward culturally relevant learning. However, students' uncertainty regarding its effectiveness ("maybe" responses) suggests a lack of experiential evidence rather than skepticism.

This partially supports Nunan (2020), who emphasizes that meaningful and contextualized materials enhance engagement and comprehension. However, unlike Nunan's assertion, the current findings indicate that perceived meaningfulness alone is insufficient; students require actual exposure to evaluate effectiveness. Similarly, Rahman (2023) found that integrating local stories improves comprehension and participation. In contrast, the present study reveals that without implementation, students remain uncertain about these benefits. Therefore, this study highlights an important gap between theoretical effectiveness and students' lived classroom experiences.

d. Students' Learning Challenges

The findings indicated that students faced significant challenges in vocabulary, speaking, and grammar. These difficulties are consistent with common EFL learning barriers; however, they also reveal deeper instructional issues. Vocabulary limitations, for instance, suggest that students may not be receiving sufficient contextualized input, while grammar difficulties may indicate an overemphasis on form-based instruction without meaningful application.

This supports Richards (2021), who states that language forms are better understood in meaningful contexts. However, the present findings extend this argument by showing that the lack of contextualization not only affects grammar comprehension but also impacts speaking ability and overall confidence. Thus, these challenges are interconnected and point to the need for integrated and context-based instructional materials, such as folklore-based narratives.

Qualitative Data

a. Students' Familiarity with Local Folklore

The qualitative findings revealed varying levels of familiarity with local folklore. While some students were able to mention specific stories such as *Danau Tolire*, many demonstrated only a superficial understanding. Importantly, this knowledge was primarily acquired through informal sources rather than formal education.

This finding reinforces the argument that cultural knowledge exists within learners' environments but is not effectively utilized in educational contexts. Unlike previous assumptions that students lack cultural awareness, the present study suggests that the issue lies in the disconnect between informal cultural exposure and formal learning. This strengthens the argument for integrating folklore into classroom instruction as a means of bridging this gap.

b. Students' Needs for Learning Materials

The qualitative findings showed that students prefer engaging, meaningful, and culturally relevant learning materials. Their preference for folklore-based content indicates that familiarity plays a significant role in enhancing comprehension and interest.

Students also expressed a strong preference for interactive activities such as storytelling, role-play, and group discussions. This supports Putri and Hidayat (2024), who found that culturally relevant narrative texts enhance engagement and cultural awareness. Similarly, Rahman (2023) emphasized the role of local folklore in providing meaningful learning contexts.

However, the present study goes further by demonstrating that students' needs are not limited to content relevance alone but also include the mode of instruction. In other words, culturally relevant materials must be supported by interactive pedagogical strategies to be fully effective. This highlights the importance of aligning content, pedagogy, and learners' needs in instructional design.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of understanding students' needs in developing English learning materials that are both meaningful and relevant. The findings reveal that students continue to face challenges in learning English, particularly in speaking, vocabulary, and grammar, indicating the need for materials that support both language development and learners' confidence.

The study also shows that although students are somewhat familiar with local folklore, its integration into English learning remains limited. This suggests that local cultural resources have not been fully utilized in classroom instruction. Nevertheless, students demonstrate positive attitudes toward folklore-based learning, as they perceive it to be more engaging and express willingness to learn through culturally relevant materials.

Furthermore, students show a clear preference for interactive learning activities such as storytelling, role-play, and group discussions, which are considered more engaging and effective in supporting their learning. These findings emphasize the need for instructional materials that are not only linguistically appropriate but also culturally meaningful and engaging.

Therefore, integrating local folklore into English learning materials offers a promising approach to address students' needs. It can provide contextualized language input, enhance motivation, and create more meaningful learning experiences, while also promoting students' cultural awareness.

However, this study is limited to a small number of participants in a specific context. Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger samples and to further examine the effectiveness of folklore-based learning materials through experimental or classroom-based studies.

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