

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Problem

English is one of the important skills in Vocational High School (SMK) students must master in order to face global competition, especially in the world of work which increasingly demands international communication competence. However, in practice, English language learning in SMK often faces obstacles due to the lack of relevance of teaching materials to the local context. Many English textbooks available feature generic or foreign culture-based content that is unfamiliar to students. As a result, students find it difficult to understand the material in depth, which in turn lowers their motivation to learn.

According to Tomlinson (2023), learning materials that are authentic and relevant to students' experiences and environment can increase their engagement and motivation in learning. However, English textbooks in Indonesia tend to underutilize the potential of local culture as part of learning. Muhammad et al., (2022) say many English textbooks in Indonesia often overlook the importance of local culture. This imbalance can lead to a superficial understanding of the target culture, making it difficult for students to apply what they learn to their own cultural context. The dominant use of foreign cultures in textbooks adds to the challenge of creating meaningful and contextualized learning, as students find it difficult to apply what they learn to their own cultural context.

Local culture, such as Nias culture, has great potential to be integrated in learning. Nias is known for its rich and unique traditions, language, arts and life values, which can be the basis for English textbook development. Sartika et al., (2024) state Local culture-based education fosters a deep sense of pride and appreciation for one's cultural heritage, also not only strengthen students' cultural identity but also improve their global competence, as they learn to understand local values while connecting them with international perspectives.

The integration of local cultural values into learning is also relevant to local wisdom, which according to Zakiyah & Tasikrara (2022) local wisdom is seen as a reservoir of intelligence and experiences unique to particular ethnic groups, providing solutions to problems and helping maintain cultural identity in the face of globalization. The implementation of these values in learning not only serves for cultural preservation, but also creates relevant learning experiences for students. Sarah et al., (2023) argue that integrating local potential education not only improves learning outcomes but also fosters life values among students. They highlight that contextualized learning helps students relate academic content to everyday experiences, making learning more relevant and impactful. Suryanti et al., (2020) also emphasize that local wisdom-based teaching materials can significantly improve students' literacy skills, teaching materials not only engage students but also align with cultural values, thus fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter and improving overall learning outcomes.

The importance of local culture-based learning is in line with various government policies, one of which is the Strengthening Character Education (PPK) program as stated in Presidential Regulation No. 87/2017. The Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Muhadjir Effendy, stated that PPK aims to integrate the learning environment of family, school and community through a broad-based curriculum that encourages contextual learning (Effendy, 2018). This program provides a foundation for developing textbooks that are relevant to student needs, support the preservation of local culture, and build student character according to local community values.

In addition, the development of textbooks must also refer to the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 8 of 2016 concerning books used by educational units. This regulation emphasizes that textbooks and non-textbooks must be in accordance with the values of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, and positive norms prevailing in society. This is relevant to the development of Nias culture-based textbooks, which can

integrate the noble values of local culture with learning objectives, while strengthening students' identity as part of the Indonesian nation.

Furthermore, the development of Nias culture-based teaching materials also supports learning outcomes in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum emphasized the importance of cultural comprehension in the educational environment. Creating instructional materials that incorporate indigenous knowledge in accordance with the curriculum's goal of developing students' cultural understanding also aligns with the mastery of 21st century skills, particularly in fostering communication and collaboration through culturally relevant content, encouraging critical thinking when engaging with diverse perspectives, and promoting creativity in expressing cultural identity. As a result, incorporating culture into educational materials not only helped to achieve national curriculum objectives, but also aided in the development of a generation that is more aware of its cultural legacy and equipped with essential skills for the modern era. The Merdeka Curriculum was a policy developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) to improve educational quality and increase learning flexibility. The curriculum was designed in compliance with Law Number 20 of 2003, Article 36, establishing the National Education System, with educational units, regional potential, and students as the foundation. The Merdeka Curriculum was implemented using the principles outlined in existing educational laws and regulations.

However, the reality found in schools today, particularly at SMK Negeri 1 O'o'u, shows that the English textbooks used are still dominated by official textbooks from the government. This book, although it has been designed to support the national curriculum, has not integrated local cultural values such as Nias culture, nor has it been optimized to strengthen students' 21st century skills. This is a challenge, considering that one of the objectives of the core competencies in the curriculum is to form students who not only understand science, but are also able to practice cultural values while applying critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration in real-life contexts.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of developing English textbooks that are culturally relevant, especially for vocational education. Handayani & Aprilliandari (2022), in their study entitled “Developing a Bangka Belitung Cultural-Based English Textbook for Tourism Vocational High School Students”, found that current teaching materials often lack local cultural content and mainly focus on lower-order thinking skills. This makes it harder for students to develop critical and creative thinking. Their research stresses the need for textbooks based on local culture to make learning more meaningful and relevant.

A similar study by Inderawati et al., (2021), entitled “Needs Analysis of Vocational High School Textbook to Local Culture Materials and the 21st Century Competencies”, focused on vocational students in Palembang. The findings showed that students need English materials that combine local culture and technology. The materials should also relate to their field of study to support contextual learning. However, this study focused more on analyzing students’ needs using both quantitative and qualitative methods, rather than producing an actual textbook. This makes it different from more recent studies that directly aim to develop teaching materials based on Nias culture.

In addition, Adlis et al., (2022) in a study entitled “Improving Students’ Reading Skills in Understanding English Texts Using Culture-Based Text Teaching Materials”, found that using culture-based materials can significantly improve students’ reading skills. The study also showed that such materials increase student engagement, participation, and learning outcomes. However, the focus was more on using existing materials rather than developing new ones.

When viewed in relation to the study entitled “Developing Nias Culture-Based English Textbook to Enrich 21st Century Skills for Vocational High School Students”, this research presents a distinctive contribution by integrating Nias culture rich with the values of gotong royong, local wisdom, and unique traditions into English teaching materials that are purposefully designed to enrich students’ 21st century skills. While previous research such

as “Developing a Bangka Belitung Cultural-Based English Textbook for Tourism Vocational High School Students” by Handayani & Aprilliandari (2022) and “Needs Analysis of Vocational High School Textbook to Local Culture Materials and the 21st Century Competencies” by Inderawati et al., (2021) underline the importance of local culture in English learning, the present study moves further by producing a complete and validated textbook product that directly incorporates authentic Nias cultural content into learning activities enriching critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Similarly, in relation to “Improving Students' Reading Skills in Understanding English Texts Using Culture-Based Text Teaching Materials” by Adlis et al., (2022), which demonstrated the benefits of existing local culture-based materials in enhancing reading skills, while the present research expands this benefit through the development of new instructional resources tailored for vocational high school contexts. This ensures that the materials not only meet curriculum requirements but also actively engage students in culturally meaningful and skill-oriented learning experiences. Through this approach, the textbook serves as both a language learning tool and a medium for cultivating essential competencies demanded by the modern world.

It can be concluded that the development of locally-based English textbooks plays an important role in creating relevant, contextual, and meaningful learning, especially in vocational high schools. The integration of authentic Nias cultural values ensures that the learning materials not only meet curriculum requirements but also actively engage students in culturally meaningful and 21st century skills-oriented learning experiences.

Jopalina et al., (2023) emphasize that teaching materials that incorporate local cultural elements are not only relevant to students' lives, but also provide opportunities for them to connect English learning with their own cultural context. This approach supports the development of students' broader competencies, including linguistic skills, cultural understanding, and local identity.

In addition, the theory from Akbar et al., (2023) strengthen the relevance of this research by highlighting the effectiveness of culture-based textbooks

in fostering higher-order thinking skills and creativity among students. It emphasizes that integrating cultural elements into educational materials can enhance students' engagement and motivation, leading to improved critical thinking and creative problem-solving abilities. The study highlights that when students relate their learning to their cultural context, they are more likely to develop deeper understanding and innovative thinking. This approach is seen as beneficial in cultivating skills necessary for success in the 21st century. This is in line with the learning needs in Vocational High Schools (SMK), which not only prepare students academically, but also practically and contextually according to the needs of the world of work and their environment.

Using this theoretical basis, this research makes a significant contribution in developing Nias culture-based textbooks that are not only a tool for English language learning, but also a means to preserve local culture, strengthen students' identity, and enrich 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creative, communicative and collaborative.

It can be concluded that it is important to develop Nias culture-based English textbooks. The researcher raises the research entitled “**Developing Nias Culture-Based English Textbook to Enrich 21st Century Skills for Vocational High School Students**” which can enrich the relevance of learning for vocational high school students. This textbook is expected to introduce students to the local culture of Nias while enrich their 21st century skills. In addition, this textbook is also a medium for cultural preservation that is integrated with learning so that it is more meaningful and relevant to students' lives.

1.2. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the identified problem background, the formulation of the problem in this research is as follows:

1. What is the process of developing Nias culture-based English textbooks for vocational high school students?
2. What is the quality of the developed textbooks in terms of feasible, practicality, and effectiveness?

1.3. Objective of the Problem

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. Developing Nias culture-based English textbooks that meet the needs and characteristics of vocational high school students.
2. Evaluating the quality of the developed textbooks in terms of feasible, practicality, and effectiveness.

1.4.Product Specifications

1.4.1.Product Specification - Old Version

The book entitled *SPLASH 1 SMK/MAK Grade X (K-MERDEKA)*, with product code 0054200200, was authored by Anik M. Indriastuti and published in 2022. It is designed based on the 2021 curriculum, featuring comprehensive learning objectives to support students' language development. Each chapter begins with a prologue summarizing the language functions and themes, followed by a brainstorming activity to introduce the topic. The book focuses on six core language skills: listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and visual representation. These skills are further enhanced through sections such as "For Your Information," which provides brief explanations of the topics, and "Grammar Corner," which offers additional grammar resources. To develop students' critical thinking abilities, activities are aligned with PISA standards under the "Critical Thinking Tasks" section. The book also emphasizes character-building through the "Pancasila Profile Development" feature. Each lesson is concluded with a summary, reflection for self-assessment, and evaluation tests. Additionally, mini projects encourage students to explore, interpret, and apply their learning creatively.

- **Target Users:** This book is specifically designed for Grade X vocational high school students (SMK/MAK) in Indonesia.
- **Product Format:** A printed textbook in A4 size, designed for classroom use with additional audio materials.
- **Method of Use:** The book is used as a primary resource for English language learning, guided by teachers during lessons. Students complete

various individual and group activities, including listening to audio files, writing exercises, speaking practices, and mini projects.



Picture 1.1 Cover (old version)

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Picture 1.2 Content (old version)

1.4.2. Product Specification - New Version

The book entitled “Developing Nias Culture-Based English Textbook to Enrich 21st Century Skills for Vocational High School Students” integrates the rich cultural heritage of Nias into English learning aligns with Beatriz Lopez Medina's evaluation model for CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) textbooks in several ways (Budiarsih, 2022). This linkage was made through the application of the CLIL 4C framework (Content, Cognition, Communication, and Culture) and additional criteria were collaborated by the researcher to suit the needs of the students. The book integrates the rich cultural heritage of Nias into English learning. It aims to develop students' 21st century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. The content is contextually designed to meet the needs of vocational high school students, equipping them for real-world challenges. The book consists of two units: narrative texts, which include fables, legends, epics, and other forms of local storytelling; and descriptive texts, which cover descriptions of places, people, traditional arts and crafts, festivals, and tourism destinations.

➤ Target Users

Teacher of English at SMK Negeri 1 O'o'u and Students in grades X at SMK Negeri 1 O'o'u, with a focus on developing Nias Culture-Based English Textbooks.

➤ Method of Use

Student Engagement: Students will actively participate in activities that promote critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration while teachers guide them to connect these skills with real-life applications.

➤ Product Format

Digital Format: The guide will be available in a digital format, accessible through online platforms ensuring easy access for teachers in various settings.

Printable Format: A printed version will be available for those who prefer hard copies or have limited access to digital resources, allowing for easy use in offline environments.



Picture 1.3 Cover (new version)

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C.	The Purpose and Social Function of Narrative Text
D.	Types of Narrative Text
E.	Generic Structure of Narrative Text
F.	Example of Narrative Text
➤	Activity 1 (Lets Ponder)
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➤	Summary of the Materials
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A.	Definition of Descriptive Text
B.	Language Features of Descriptive Text
C.	The Purpose and Social Function of Descriptive Text
D.	Types of Descriptive Text
E.	Generic Structure of Descriptive Text
F.	Example of Descriptive Text
➤	Activity 1 (Lets Ponder)
➤	Activity 2 (Confirm)
➤	Activity 3 (Take Notes)
➤	Activity 4 (Lets Discuss)
➤	Summary of the Materials
➤	Evaluation

Picture 1.4. Content (new version)

1.5.The Significances of the Research

1.5.3 Theoretically

This study can be used as a guideline to improve the methods of teaching and learning English.

1.5.4 Practically

- a. For the researcher, this study is meant gaining direct experience in developing teaching materials based on culture for the learning process.
- b. For the students, the outcomes of this research might boost students' motivation and interest in learning since instructional materials are made to be interesting, making students active and independent to sustain and preserve the culture.
- c. For the teachers, this study assists educators in creating lesson plans grounded in local knowledge, which facilitates learning and improves their understanding.
- d. For the readers, it inspires the readers to create and carry out additional researches.
- e. For Universitas Nias, this research contributes to the development of culturally relevant educational resources, strengthening the university's role in preserving local heritage and integrating it into academic programs.