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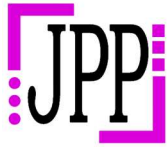
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### Bridging Cultural Identity and Digital Transformation in English Language Learning: A Sociocultural Constructivist Perspective from Palembang

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**Abstract: Bridging Cultural Identity and Digital Transformation in English Language Learning: A Sociocultural Constructivist Perspective from Palembang.** The digital transformations in English Language Learning (ELL) are quite different in each region of Indonesia, particularly in the area of Palembang due to inequalities in the availability of technology and the lack of inclusion of local cultural values into the educational experience. **Objectives:** This study investigated how the digital technology is being made available and used in ELL in Palembang schools, what level of local cultural values have been incorporated into the teaching materials and practices in those schools, and what challenges and opportunities exist for teachers in developing digital-based, culturally-oriented English instruction. **Method:** A descriptive qualitative research design was employed in this study. There are five participants who are English teachers working in schools that are located in different parts of Palembang: urban public schools, suburban schools, private schools, semi-rural schools and madrasas. Information was collected in semi-structured interviews and subsequently, thematic analysis was conducted. **Findings:** Three themes emerged from the interviews conducted with the participants. Inequality of access to, and the use of, digital technology between urban and semi-rural schools is considerable due to infrastructural challenges that discourage effective pedagogical practices. There is little representation of Palembang's local culture in the English language instructional materials developed for the students despite the teachers believing it could serve as a valuable component in the educational process. Teachers were able to creatively include the local culture of their students through innovative project assignments but were constrained by their institution's lack of support, limited professional development and rigid curriculum structure. **Conclusion:** Based on the results of the study, I propose the Local Cultural Digital Learning Theory which positions local culture as an epistemological framework for learning rather than supplemental content, therefore it is necessary to pursue both digital equity and cultural equity simultaneously for successful digital transformation.

**Keywords:** Digital transformation, Local culture integration, English language learning, Sociocultural theory, Constructivism

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## ▪ INTRODUCTION

All sectors of society have felt the impact of changing technologies, especially education. In regard to education for the 21st century, which emphasizes critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy, digital transformation is an absolute priority for Indonesia. The use of digital technologies in educational institutions, especially in the teaching of English to Indonesian learners, is already well documented (Panggabean et al, 2022). Research by Indah et al. (2022) associates some level of digital literacy with scholarship in Indonesian EFL students, though the relationship seems to fall short for the development of other critical thinking skills. English, being a language of global communication, has the strategic potential to help build these competencies. However, there is a larger context of unaddressed barriers to fully embrace digitally-enabled pedagogies for teaching English with transformation focused on the use of technologies in education. In some Indonesian cities such as Palembang and the surrounding areas, there are gaps in tools and infrastructure. Other barriers according to Argawati & Suryani (2020) are poor literacy on the digital paradigm for educators and learners, inadequate institutional support, and restricted access to teaching and learning technologies.

Palembang's inequalities in digital education are the result of infrastructural challenges, particularly around the availability of the internet and educational technologies. There are expansive cultural and educational practices and pedagogical constraints. For instance, Indonesian educational institutions still use textbooks that focus on culturally foreign educational materials. Gozali (2024) remarks on the disproportionate amount of foreign culture that students are required to engage with as education in Indonesia is devoid of culturally relevant resources. The educational neglect of local cultural integration, particularly in elementary education as noted by Herlina et al. (2025), explains the students' national identity and global competence, particularly with English, educational disconnect and neglect.

Palembang is home to distinctive local cultures, such as gotong royong and religious customs, expressed through bidar boat races, pempek, riverside tourism and residences, traditional houses, and life along the Musi River. These factors can be important and relevant instruments in the applied teachings of English. Kristiawan (2012) argues that the local culture serves the purpose of enhancing the significance of language acquisition through English Language Teaching (ELT) materials, constructing a bridge between the student's unused language potentials and their social activities. For stemming the tide of cultural hegemony, the incorporation of Indonesian values in English learning materials is necessary to provide people with a sense of belonging, and to provide for the emotional needs of a people living in a conflicting world (Sudartini, 2024). Unfortunately, this potential in local culture integration education remains unmet. Preliminary surveys and conversations with English practitioners suggest the integration of localized culture in English instruction is a major gap. Teachers use foreign digital sources or national textbooks that provide insufficient localized cultural representation.

The absence of appropriate technology and the gap in the use of technology in different types of schools tends to widen the digital divide in access to various creative learning opportunities. Learning based on the use of technology and digital tools including interactive media, online learning resources, and collaborative projects unfortunately tends to be less available in schools that poorly integrate technology in learning. A digital resource imbalance exists in public and private schools, with public

schools having better digital resources and infrastructure (Agnihotri & Syed Fahar Ali, 2024). This imbalance presents challenges beyond the technical aspect, particularly in caring for students to build their cultural identity and equipping them with 21st Century skills. The integration of digital pedagogies in Indonesia appears to be an expanding field of activity, congruent with international developments in culturally responsive education (Nasrullah, 2025).

Students show more interest and understand English better when the learning materials incorporate aspects of their culture (Oktarina et al., 2022). Learning becomes less complex when materials culture their learning around the more developed schema and understanding of the subject (Fu, 2018, as cited in JSI, 2024). Prior research on the subject has tended to local cultural integration of materials or digital transformation in a more abstract sense, lacking focus on the intricate socio-cultural crossroads of the two. Within Palembang's rich socio-culturally resonant tapestry, the underdeveloped digital landscape is a piece of research that can contribute to defining the relationship between digital culture and local socio-cultural systems.

The importance of designing English Learning Plans that take into account Digital Tools and local culture should not be underestimated. This is likely to engage students and help advance meaningful learning that links the local and the global. The integration of Constructivism and socio-cultural theory as formulated by Vygotsky provides a potent framework for learning and development in this context. According to Vygotsky, the social and cultural context of a person is a fundamental determinant of that person's cognitive development. Constructivism frames learning as a process in which an individual actively seeks meaning, and this is most readily achieved through firsthand experience. In the same vein, the sociocultural perspective implicates community and social practices in education as it pertains to learners' interactions with social objects (Alkhudiry, 2022). This collaborative learning approach fosters students' critical thinking, retention, and understanding (Kwarteng, 2025).

Timely academic engagement with the educational landscape that this study has in mind is essential considering the digital learning gap, ethnocentric digital resources, and educational inequity in Indonesia. According to Arista (2020), the internet has changed the landscape of educational experiences of students, especially Millennials and Generation Z, and school attendance during contemporary times. People and communities, even with the least qualified teachers and learning materials, are able to access resources to learn English. This will require more attention during the new Emancipation Curriculum period, which aims to strengthen English instruction in elementary schools (Daud & Musigrungsi, 2024). In Palembang, the promises of the digital education system, with its educational and economic opportunities, are still diminished by underdeveloped support systems and culturally inappropriate English instruction. English and other global languages may serve to access local and indigenous worldviews and values, while enhancing students' sense of belonging.

This inquiry analyzes the combination of local values and culture of Palembang and English language teaching materials and practices, including the localized, culturally digital English instruction challenges and opportunities educators face. More specifically, it evaluates the digital technology use and access for English language instruction in the Palembang schools. This inquiry seeks to provide relevant insights for curriculum developers, English language educators, and educational institutions in advancing regionally geographically flexible, culturally and educationally integrated safe, localized technological adaptations. This inquiry is the first in proposing an innovative concept of "Culture-Local Digital Learning Theory" which is inclusive of constructivism and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory in the isolated context of Palembang. This theory is a

blend of instructional paradigms which are focused on the interrelation of language, culture and technology with the local socio-cultural context. The inquiry is also an example for other countries and regions in the world as to how digital pedagogy can be framed with socio-cultural context for educators and institutions to bridge digital integration challenges framed around the cultural diversity of Indonesia. The presence of Culture-Local Digital Learning Theory has implications for educational practices and policy in Indonesia.

## ▪ METHOD

### Research Design

A descriptive qualitative method was carried out to study gaps in accessibility to digital technology and the absence of local cultural inclusion in the teaching of the English language in Palembang. This method was appropriate because it captures the lived experiences, understandings, and contextualized practices of the teachers within a particular social and cultural framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative inquiry to understand and examine the phenomena of digital education and cultural integration within the educational system is appropriate, particularly because it is contextually focused.

The study was conducted in October 2024 in the city of Palembang, South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Palembang was selected as a place of study, given its history and culture, as well as its schools of differing and digital technology rich cultural heritage access and educational infrastructure relevant to the study.

### Research Participants

The research subjects were five English instructors at Palembang junior high schools (grades 7-9). The study used purposive sampling as not all teachers are informative to the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria were (1) at least three years of experience teaching English, (2) teachers from schools of different digital resource availability, and (3) willingness to participate and discuss the phenomenon at hand. The five schools compared to each other in the following ways:

- G1: Public junior high school located in the city center with relatively good digital facilities
- G2: Public junior high school in a suburban area with limited technological infrastructure
- G3: Private junior high school with moderate digital resources
- G4: Semi-urban public junior high school facing significant infrastructure challenges
- G5: Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior high school) with minimal multimedia facilities

Having different school contexts allowed researchers to capture diverse experiences with the social and cultural dimensions of educational inequality related to digital access in Palembang.

### Data Collection Technique

For gathering information, semi-structured interviews were primarily employed. This primarily provides an indication of some participants' lived experiences while still being attentive to the goals of the study (Kallio et al., 2016). During the school day, each of these meetings were held in a face-to-face format, and the relaxed set-ups helped to

ease the participants and enabled the interviews to progress in an unimpeded fashion. They were each of 45 to 60 minutes long. These interviews were framed around three main issues.

1. The accessibility and use of technology in teaching English, which includes the educational infrastructure in place, the digital tools which are taught, the frequency of use, institutional support, and other teaching aids.
2. The incorporation of the local culture and practices of Palembang in teaching aids and interactions in the classroom, which includes the culturally relevant materials, practices for teaching integration, and teaching resources that are culturally diverse.
3. The opportunities and challenges that teachers face in the use of digital and culturally relevant English teaching during learning, the gaps in use, and possible opportunities to bridge these gaps.

With respect to sample definition, one English teacher, not included in the sample, was asked to do a pilot interview to ascertain whether the interview questions made sense and were appropriate. For the pilot, I reworded some questions to facilitate understanding.

To accurately transcribe the interviews, we asked each interviewee if we could audio-record the interview, and subsequently transcribe it. I made audio-recorded transcriptions and field notes after each session. These notes were intended to capture the interviewee's non-verbal behavior, the situational context, and the researcher's reflective thoughts within and immediately after the interview.

### Data Analysis Technique

With respect to Data Analysis Technique, my analysis followed the thematic strategies suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves describing and outlining the qualitative data at a surface level. There are six steps in this line of analysis.

1. **Familiarization:** The researcher reads the transcript to the point of comprehension in order to grasp the content and record the first impressions.
2. **Initial coding:** involves hand coding the entire data set. This is defining and assigning descriptive labels to sections within a text. For this study, coded sections of texts aligned with the study's themes.
3. **Defining themes:** Creating potential themes involves arranging the codes and clustering the relevant data for each potential theme. Each theme encapsulates a considerable amount of raw data relative to the research question and reflects a particular pattern, trend, or significance in answer to the question.
4. **Refining themes:** This entails ensuring the themes fit together logically with the coded extracts and the data as a whole. Some ideas will be merged, a few will be split apart, and others will be eliminated.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Each individual theme is synthesized and a corresponding name is assigned to serve as a descriptor of the main ideas and relevant sections of data.
6. **Producing the report:** The report is supplemented with relevant illustrations drawn from the predetermined literature and research areas pertinent to the study, contributing to the academic depth of the report.

Analysis is grounded mainly in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Constructivism Theory, which highlight the significance of social interaction, cultural context, and meaning-making in the lived experiences and practices of teachers.

### Data Reliability and Validity

To strengthen the findings, various approaches were employed:

1. **Triangulation.** For source triangulation, the researcher consulted five teachers from various school types and geographic locations. For method triangulation, the researcher also analyzed teaching materials, lesson plans, and curriculum guides, where available, as additional evidence.
2. **Member checking.** Once transcription and preliminary analysis were completed, a summary of the key findings was forwarded to respondents to check the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations and to allow respondents to clarify or elaborate on their answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
3. **Prolonged engagement.** The researcher spent adequate time creating relationships with the research participants and learning the dynamics of each school before carrying out formal interviews.
4. **Reflexivity.** The researcher used a reflexive diary to track their assumptions and biases, as well as emotional reactions to the data, to see how these factors might influence interpretations. This was to ensure reflexive meaning-making during data collection.
5. **Thick Description:** In order to ascertain whether the results can be applied to other contexts and settings, the author provides rich and detailed accounts of the research context, participants, and outcomes. The description is sufficiently detailed to allow the reader to determine the potential relevance of the outcomes to a number of possible cases.

### Ethical Considerations

This study followed the ethical guidelines devoted to educational research. Prior to the start of the study, all participants were fully informed of the approach, the study purpose, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequence, and thus consented to participate. In reporting results, confidentiality was assured and all participants and schools were anonymized and referred to as G1 to G5. Access to the audio recordings and transcripts was restricted to the researcher to further guarantee confidentiality. Participants were informed of the intended publication of the results in academic journals.

## ▪ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis results derived from interviews with five English teachers across different educational institutions in Palembang—specifically a public junior high school located in the city center (G1), a public junior high school on the outskirts (G2), a private junior high school (G3), a semi-rural public junior high school (G4), and a Madrasah Tsanawiyah (G5)—highlighted three key themes: (1) discrepancies in access and utilization of digital technology; (2) absence of local Palembang culture within the context of English language teaching; and (3) challenges and strategies teachers employ to construct culturally relevant digitally mediated instruction.

The three themes derived from the processes of categorizing and classifying the interview data. The following table presents the themes, sub-themes and codes derived from the data analysis.

**Table 1.** Theme and Codes of Interview

Main Theme	Subtheme / Category	Code
<b>1. Inequality in access to and use of digital technology</b>	Access to technology between schools	Uneven infrastructure; weak networks; limited tools
	Use of digital media	Google Classroom, offline PowerPoint, shared cell phones
	School support	Teachers' personal facilities; minimal resources
<b>2. Low integration of local Palembang culture in English language learning</b>	Teaching materials focused on foreign cultures	Textbooks feature London/New York; local culture rarely appears
	Teachers' efforts to integrate local culture	Changing texts to include Ampera Bridge, local cuisine, local traditions
	Limited learning resources	No teaching materials based on local culture in English
<b>3. Challenges and strategies for teachers in regional culture-based digital learning</b>	Teacher training that is not contextual	Training focuses on applications, not culture
	Teacher creativity	Local tourism project videos, texts about Palembang cuisine
	Limited time and curriculum	Lack of time for cultural integration in learning

**Theme 1: Inequalities in Digital Technology Use and Access**

According to the first finding, schools in Palembang already show a digital gap. For example, teachers in downtown schools (G1) better use Google Classroom, Quizizz, and YouTube:

*“At our school, we regularly use Google Classroom, and sometimes Quizizz and YouTube for listening exercises. The children are already accustomed to this, especially since the pandemic.” (G1)*

By contrast, G2 and semi-rural G4 schools reported severe limitations on infrastructure and equipment. G2 described the network situation:

*“Here the network is poor, sometimes it takes a long time just to open a video, so I often use offline PowerPoint.” (G2)*

In G4, which described the situation of students without personal devices:

*“Many children don’t have their own cell phones, so when there are online assignments, I often change them to group work so they can share one cell phone.” (G4)*

Teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (G5) also stated that limitations in multimedia resources are a problem:

*“Our school doesn’t have LCD screens in all classrooms, so I use my personal laptop when I want to show videos.” (G5)*

This narrative reveals a digital divide that goes beyond an absence of technology and speaks to the inequity of opportunity in education.

According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory,(Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) Digital Technology may also serve as a potential tool to enhance learner interaction, cooperation, and construction of meaning in a second language. Students social interaction becomes a hindrance to the 6 mediation processes. Learning becomes unfulfilling through zero interaction with peers.

Disparities in digital technology access impacts the educational outcomes of students, specifically in rural and semi urban in Indonesia where infrastructural limitations makes technology integration in education challenging (Wijaya et al. 2023). A similar conclusion also came from Nugroho and Mutiaraningrum (2020) where students from digitally well-endowed schools demonstrated higher degrees of digital literacy along with collaborative learning competencies highlighting inequitable access to digital technologies as a key contributor to the gaps in 21st century skills development opportunities in schools in Indonesia.

Infrastructure limitations also negatively affect students’ participation in collaborative learning. In constructivist learning, the emphasis is on student-to-student interaction, which is extremely won in schools with fewer resources where students predominantly experience passive, teacher-centered learning (Dewi & Budiono, 2021). This is in agreement with Putri et al. (2022), which showed that technology-mediated collaborative activities enhance language learning when the infrastructure allows for continuous use, but becomes weak or abandoned when there are persistent technological barriers.

Not having access to technology also means students miss out on learning important 21st-century skills like teamwork, communication, and digital literacy. The inequalities in the schools in Palembang show the limitations of inclusive digital transformation. While schools in the downtown area embrace technology, those in the outlying semi-rural regions wait for development and policies on education to change. The work of Rahmawati and Ertin (2020) is relevant here, as it explains how the educational system in Indonesia is divided rurally and urbanely, which means inequities in education are compounded as technology becomes more available and advanced.

The inequities in educational digital infrastructure are also seen in other Southeast Asian countries. Cahyono and Widiati (2021) showed this in East Java, where internet connectivity and access to devices resulted in higher levels of student participation in English classes. The inequitable distribution of educational resources, which the Indonesian educational research community acknowledges (Sulistyo et al., 2020), is also seen in G5 when triangulated with the explanation of teacher reliance on personal devices.

Thus, the effects of the digital divide in Palembang extend the impacts of teaching English on the socio-cultural inequalities of the students even further. With the correlation established between digital literacy and research skills among EFL students in Indonesia, this is particularly problematic (Indah et al., 2022). It suggests that limited digital access additionally constrains the opportunities of students with developing academic skills, which is problematic when coupled with limited access technological skills.

## Theme 2 : Level of Integration of Local Palembang Values and Culture

The third theme relates to the lack of representation of local culture in the materials and approaches in English language education in Palembang. Most teachers commented that the materials used are still heavily influenced by Western culture. G3 offered clarification:

*"The textbooks are about London, New York, or festivals abroad. Rarely do they discuss Palembang."* (G3)

G1 discussed an example of someone trying to contextualize the materials:

*"I once tried to change the descriptive material to be about the Ampera Bridge, and the children were even more enthusiastic. But I made the source myself."* (G1)

Also, a semi-rural school teacher (G4) said:

*"When I use examples from Palembang culture, they immediately connect. The only obstacle is that there are no ready-to-use teaching materials."* (G4)

The teachers quote above recognize the potential of contextualized teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy for local instruction, and that they do so commendably without sufficient materials to work with. Support for localized instruction is uneven from the local curriculum, and distributed by local government, resulting in a lack of adequate instructional materials.

This finding aligns with the work of Sukma and Sari (2022), who argued that in Indonesian EFL contexts a gap in culturally relevant materials contributes to a disparity between classroom instruction and students' lived experiences, which, in turn, negatively impacts motivation and engagement.

This is important within a constructivist framework: students will have an easier time meaning making when the content they are studying is relevant to their daily lives (Aminah et al., 2021). When instruction is focused on a particular culture, students may disengage emotionally from the language. Hermawan et al. (2020) reported similar findings in West Java. Students gained better understanding and retention of English materials that were culturally relevant compared to the socially Western integrated standardized curriculum.

Along with being a system of symbols, language also incorporates cultural identities and values (Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). If local culture is ignored, students do not have the opportunity to link the process of learning the English language to their cultural identity as members of the Palembang community. Research conducted by Nurfaidah et al. (2021) supports this, which states the impact of culturally responsive English teaching materials on students' self-efficacy and their willingness to communicate in the English language is significant because students view the language as a tool of their culture and identity in addition to being a means of assimilating to other cultures.

Inadequacy of locally relevant materials is not unique to Palembang. This is a systemic issue in Indonesia's EFL teaching. Cahyani et al. (2020) notes that a majority of Indonesia's English textbooks contain more descriptions of foreign cultures than local ones, and for them, this is a form of 'cultural imperialism' in the practice of teaching the

language. Many scholars have critiqued the inflow of Western culture in teaching materials (Widodo et al., 2021; Zacharias, 2019) and called for the preparation of teaching resources that are respectful of the ethnicities of learners, while teaching them English.

G1's interest in Ampera Bridge as a focus for learning is a good example of 'cultural validation' in language learning as proposed by Marlina and Giri (2014). Students are more motivated and willing to participate in lessons that are anchored in their realities. This is also noted in research by Fauziati (2021) where culturally rich materials in EFL training helped students in the affirmation of their cultural identity, and pride, helping them in the mastery of English language as a resource.

Zacharias (2020) expands on this idea by defining "grassroots contextualization" as the actions of individual teachers modifying standardized materials to fit their contexts. This is manifested by the teacher-initiated adaptations described by the participants. Despite having the adaptations signal teacher autonomy and innovation, Zacharias mentions the disservice this practice produces. Relying on individual initiatives is, for instance, inequitable as it contributes to the strain of overworked teachers, and it creates unequal opportunities for learning within and between classrooms.

The absence of institutional backing for developing locally-sourced instructional materials epitomizes an absence of opportunities for what Lengkanawati (2020) calls "culturally sustaining pedagogy" within Indonesian EFL contexts. In addition to pedagogically teaching language proficiency, this type of pedagogy also takes an active role in sustaining students' multilingual identities and heritage voices. The Western-culturally focused perspective in use, as described in the study, contradicts the principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy and potentially explains the "cultural alienation" EFL students in Indonesia experience, as indicated by Suherman (2021).

### **Theme 3: Teachers' Obstacles and Solutions for Creating Culture-Based Digital Learning**

Although the application of the third theme is currently limited, it showcases instructors' awareness of the importance of incorporating digital technology with local cultural integration. Most educators feel that their training does not inform the intersection of education digitization and cultural preservation. For G2, Training was mostly digital apps training, not local culture integration.

This suggests the issue with Indonesian teacher professional development, which centers on technical skills neglecting context and integration (Wahyuni & Sukyadi, 2021). Hadijah et al. (2023) also found EFL teacher preparation programs focusing on digital tools lacking cultural pedagogical frameworks. As time is limited in curriculum design, a madrasah teacher (G5) also voiced this concern: At a certain point I'd like to do a project on Palembang culture, but time is always insufficient. Therefore, all I do is ask students to write a short text about the traditional foods.

The time restrictions that G5 mentioned align with Musthafa's (2020) findings, which showed that teachers' adoption of project-based learning and culturally responsive teaching practices were severely hampered by the pressures of standardized testing and rigid curriculum structures.

The importance of allowing time for the preparation, implementation, and reflection of any project that integrates authentic cross-cultural and digital technology is critical and remains a real limitation of the scope within which educators operate. (Rustandi & Mubarak, 2022).

In any case, private junior high school teachers have managed to exercise a fair degree of ingenuity within these confines (G3).

*“I once asked students to make a short video in English about tourist attractions in Palembang. They were very excited, especially when they presented it in class.”*  
(G3)

This invention shows the shift some teachers have begun to make towards student-centered learning where technology is used to teach about one’s culture. Working on culturally themed video projects enables students to actively construct knowledge through hands-on experience and collaboration, reflection, and constructive revision over varying degrees of completion, all of which are hallmarks of the constructivist learning paradigm (Fajrina et al., 2022). According to Anggraini and Sukarno (2021), such projects are a fine example of “digital cultural production.” Instead of passively waiting for cultural material to be presented, learners engage in culture creation, thus gaining and building on additional cultural, linguistic, and digital skills and enhancing one more layer of digital literacy to their competencies.

The description of the project also resonates with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning, in which he argues that social interaction, and teaching with scaffolding are the key elements of learning. As Pramesti & Sari (2021), the learners that produce culture texts and videos locally, are authentically and legitimately engaged in a social practice of meaning creation that is culturally significant.

As Widiati and Cahyono (2020) demonstrated, digitally culture-centered projects provide students with real communicative purposes and audiences that extend beyond the teacher and the classroom, thus enabling students to achieve communicative competence

G3’s video project illustrates “multimodal cultural literacy” as described by Atmowardoyo et al. (2021), where students use different semiotic (visual, textual, and auditory) modalities to articulate and convey cultural meanings. According to Masduqi & Izzati (2020), students tend to engage with materials more readily and diverse materials are more likely to meet diverse learning needs and preferences. This reinforces the importance of integrating multiple learning modalities.

Time, funding, and training limitations point to the educational system’s failure to allow teachers the freedom to create. To address the issue of teacher effort, it must first be acknowledged in order to be structural rather than Fauzan & Ngabut (2021) states. This resonates with Setiyadi (2020), who comments that educational innovation in Indonesia needs courage at the systemic rather than just individual level. This integrated culturally responsive digital pedagogy will also systemically require the establishment of professional learning communities, provisions for resource equity, and flexible curricula to address teacher workload and burnout.

The documentation of this theme illustrates the lack of institutional support the teachers need to put into practice what they know. This perfectly embodies what Sundari et al. (2022) identify as “implementation fidelity deficit.” The teachers certainly grasp the pedagogical ideas, but they lack the system, time, and resources for sustained implementation. This is even more pronounced in resource-scarce educational settings, where teachers are forced to be creative and derive solutions within very pragmatic constraints (Nurlaila & Rahmawati, 2021).

Rizki & Fitrawati (2020) highlight that the 'technological solutionism' critique of educational reform is relevant for G2's focus on the role of digital application skills in professional development. Briefly ignoring the deeper pedagogical, cultural, and equity issues, this plan suggests that the use of digital technologies will, by itself, improve

outcomes. Sari and Wahyudin (2022) assert that the pedagogical imagination, the ability to envision how learning and cultural shifts can be achieved through technology, is as critical for successful technology integration as technological skills.

This study focuses on the intricate linkages of limited regional culture-based learning materials and the unequal diffusion of technology, as well as the challenges teachers face in digitally transforming their English language teaching located in Palembang. Based on theme analysis and interview data, several teachers have tried to adapt teaching for the local context. However, the extent of this effort is pedagogically superficial, uncritical, and yet to be widely embraced.

The phenomenon is best understood using Vygotsky's social constructivism and sociocultural theories, both of which highlight the primacy of interaction and the potential cultural framework, social contexts, and significance of learning experiences. Upon conducting the field analysis, the combination and reinterpretation of the two theories mentioned developed into Local-Cultural Digital Learning Theory, as a new, more contextualized framework, which is a developed contextual iteration of the theories mentioned.

### **Reinterpretation and Integration of Theory**

Shabani (2016) demonstrates that Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is hinged on the idea that learning is a social process and is mediated through cultural instruments like language and technology. Vygotsky believes that people learn through social interaction, and cognitive development takes place when individuals engage in shared meaningful activities within a particular culture. On a related note, Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) recognised that digital technology has the capacity to serve as a sociocultural framework mediational tool for language learning. However, they argue that its effectiveness depends on the degree to which sociocultural teaching learning practices are in place within the context.

In this study's context, digital technology has the potential to serve as a new mediational tool to help students develop cross-cultural associations in English and expand the horizons of their social networks. However, as the basic field research points out, the lack of digital access is still a considerable barrier. For example, while teachers in semi-rural settings and madrasas, such as G4 and G5, are compelled to be resourceful within a technology deficit environment, teachers in inner-city schools, such as G1, are provided with considerable resources and are expected to use digital tools more readily.

This inequity hinders learners from developing within their proximal zones and causes uneven growth in learning. Hence, instead of acting as a mediating tool for facilitating social interaction, the technology access gap converts social integration and contact into social disintegration and contact. Razak and Yunus (2021) note that similar patterns in the technology gap are evident in Malaysia and Indonesia as well, and, instead of solving the inequity, digital technology has deepened divides prevalent within educational systems.

Given the findings of the research, the concept of ZPD has a new relevance. As stated by Walqui (2006), technology has the potential to extend the ZPD by the provision of scaffolds and mediational support. However, for this to happen, students need routine access to technology, and teachers need the strategic pedagogy to implement it effectively. The uneven access described in this research limits the cognitive and linguistic development of countless Palembang students by keeping them outside the digitally-mediated learning opportunities within their ZPD.

Constructivism theory offers another perspective on this phenomenon. Constructivism is the learning theory which posits that learners integrate their personal

experiences and reflection to construct meaning, as opposed to merely absorbing information (Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012). In this capacity, facilitators guide learners through the integration process.

Specifically, the teaching strategies labelled G2 and G3 in this study are examples of constructivist learning, where the texts of a literature class focusing on foreign cultures were substituted for "Ampera Bridge" or "Pempek Palembang." In this way, students simultaneously internalise foreign language grammar and gain an appreciation of their cultural heritage.

Such education allows students to create relevance meaningfully on a social and personal level by recapturing English as a local identity and global engagement.

This is consistent with Prawat and Floden's (1994) definition of "situative constructivism," which emphasizes the integration and intertwining of the educational domain with the social and cultural context. The excitement that teachers report as students interact with culturally relevant materials is evidence of "schema activation" as described by cognitive scientists. New information is more easily processed and retained because it is integrated into a cognitive framework and builds upon previously learned concepts.

Regrettably, the absence of culturally appropriate digital teaching materials has meant that these approaches remain uncommon in schools. So much so that incorporating local cultural perspectives in digital materials Suherdi (2019) claims would transform the educational context and provide a more relevant and meaningful learning experience to students. In many Asian countries, the presence of culturally relevant materials in the classroom has been shown to improve student motivation and learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) McKay (2018).

### **Approaching the Theory of Local-Cultural Digital Learning**

Examination of both theories eloquently details that culture-based digital learning incorporates both constructivism's focus on the active production of meaning using local experiences and Vygotsky's social mediation theory. Vygotsky focused on social mediation while Constructivism emphasized personal experiences and meaning making.

In the case of Palembang, these theories gain another layer of meaning as teachers assume the facilitator role guiding learners to a critical understanding of local culture and its position in the wider world. Here, digital technology as a cultural instrument can bridge learners to their local culture and heritage using a global language. Thus, the Local-Cultural Digital Learning Theory originated here.

This new theory deviates from the assumption that the learning process underlying digitalization is universal. Societies such as Palembang that are culturally and digitally unequal need culturally and contextually relevant digitalization. This is not an isolated view. Identifying the need for "localized" language learning frameworks adapted to the particular regional linguistic ecologies to which learners belong, Benson and Reinders (2011) argue for "local" approaches to language pedagogy. Similarly, Paris and Alim (2017) advocate "culturally sustaining pedagogy" as an approach that recognizes learners' cultural practices and knowledge as valuable rather than deficit.

In this approach, the local culture is an epistemological framework to guide the application of technology, the material that is produced, and the social activities that are conducted in the classroom, rather than a mere adornment for learning. This is also aligned to the indigenous education scholarship on traditional knowledge systems as legitimate epistemologies, rather than content to be added to an otherwise Westernized curriculum (Smith, 2012). Digital English instruction that is accompanied by local culture

provides an equitable educational opportunity by plugging the regional identity into the global framework, which is responsive to students' social realities.

Conversely, digital technology can be seen as a means of cultural mediation that allows learners to share their culture globally through digital creations in English — projects involving Palembang cuisine or Palembang customs. This is a good illustration of "symbolic competence" as described by Kramsch (2014). This is the ability to engage and meaningfully creation across multiple languages and cultures. In Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), the authors note that teaching is more than knowledge delivery, and it includes cultural mediation by helping learners construct their identity digitally.

In this case, learners as meaning makers, are dynamic and are constructing meaning from their culture. However, the unequal digital divide and unequal cultural representation in the digital learning environment, this theory advocates the need of considering the socioeconomic and geographical context. The balance of equity in this theory is built from evidence of Selwyn (2016), who argues that the designed educational technology, without counterbalancing social inequities, reinforces available inequities.

Consequently, this theory calls for digital equity and cultural equity to be the foundations of education in the 21st century. Fraser (2008) captures 'justice as parity of participation' in the equity dualism theory when explaining how each participant (student) can fully engage in the process of learning when they are offered the appropriate digital and cultural resources (acknowledgment and validation of local knowledge).

Moreover, there are profound humanistic implications in this theory. Local culture-based digital learning enables students to be viewed as whole, socially-valued persons, with cultural backgrounds and emotions, and not as mere technological tools. This comprehensive outlook watches over the instrumental approaches to tech integration, where students are framed as future workers needing digital skills (Selwyn & Facer, 2014). In Palembang, the application of this idea will encourage educational institutions to develop digitally responsible teaching alongside the English language more socially and culturally purposeful integration that fosters and supports social responsibility and cultural awareness.

In this sense, with regard to globalization, technology is seen as a means to enhance local identity, not something foreign. Unlike prevailing global paradigms, this new interpretation of technology aligns with what Warschauer (2003) calls "social inclusion" technology, where the digital tools are employed to amplify the voices and knowledge systems of the marginalized.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

From the findings, a new approach in the development of English Language teaching in the region can be a teaching model that uses local context, constructivist and Vygotskian pedagogical principles. Using the Local-Cultural Digital Learning Theory from this study, a preliminary model for a culture-based curriculum that thoughtfully and critically integrates technology can be designed.

This model can motivate\* (i.e. 'digital motivation') impactful, equitable and sustainable digital transformation, and can be the foundation for education policies that are more tuned to the local context. Some of the proposed policy shifts include the integration of (i.e. 'the shifting of these facets') culture into national standard and centrally designed curriculum frameworks that can be adapted at the local level, development of teacher education aligned to culturally responsive and digitally enhanced pedagogy, the creation of shared access teaching resource repositories at the local level, and equitable distribution of technology and support to urban, suburban and rural schools.

Practically speaking, this theory assists teachers and curriculum creators in designing culturally relevant and globally competent educational encounters. Examples are weaving local cultural aspects into the English curriculum across the span of all grades, training teachers to adapt standardized educational materials to local contexts, collaborating with local communities to bring culturally relevant resources into classrooms, and creating assessment practices that are appreciative of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Therefore, in addition to providing a framework for understanding the digitization of education in Indonesia, this theory addresses issues of disparity in access and the absence of local culture in English language education. Contextualized and technology mediated schooling fosters a culturally anchored and globally linked community while improving language proficiency. It also promotes digital citizenship.

Framed within the Local Culture-Based Digital Learning Theory, the author envisions a new pathway, a culture-centered paradigm where technology is a bridge and learners are seen as reflective and active participants. This paradigm also responds to the emerging scholarship on decolonizing language education (Kubota & Lin, 2009); culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017); and critical digital pedagogy (Stommel, 2014), while offering culturally grounded and context-appropriate adaptations to Indonesian EFL education.

## ▪ CONCLUSION

The inequaccess unequal digital technology inequaccess digital technology inequaccess technology inequaccess to learning inequaccess underequipped inequaccess. To fully understand the consequences inequaccess inequaccess education Senegal and the pedagogical practice constructed inter passive culturally responsive sectional aligns bottom as passive culturally inclusive. education curriculums centered Several within the instruction resource culturally insensitive instructional materials instructional materials and instructional texts. underscore undermine learners assessment undermine assessment assessment functional undermined functional undermined. Constructivism and sign sociocultural Vygotsky pedagogical English mediation equitable culturally relevant materials that digitally learners.

Framing the Local-Cultural Digital Learning Theory encourages researchers to re-evaluate constructive technology integration, content development, and pedagogy within the “classrooms” of local culture epistemologically rather than peripherally. This theory improves scholarship by arguing that digital transformation must aim for digital equity and cultural justice. The results have important implications for policy and practice. Culturally adaptable local integration flexible frameworks should be designed by curriculum developers. Educational agencies should reorient teacher professional development towards culturally responsive digital pedagogy, and curriculum designers must continue to eliminate inequity in educational infrastructure. The development of digitally localised educational materials should be designed to create collaborative networks that leave burdens off teachers while maintaining equity. This theory provides a framework for reconceptualizing English instruction to include global communicative competence and culturally embedded critical digital citizenship—interwoven with a relational global framework, contemporary multicultural citizenship, and all the while preserving one's personal cultural mosaic.

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