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The Influence of Local Cultural Learning on Critical Thinking Skills of Elementary School Students in South Lampung

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Abstract

Learning about local culture plays a significant role in developing critical thinking skills among elementary school students in South Lampung. By integrating local wisdom into daily learning activities, students are exposed to the values embedded in local customs and traditional arts, which encourage them to analyze, evaluate, and reflect on information in a logical and in-depth manner. This study employed a quasi-experimental design to test the causal relationship between local culture-based learning and the enhancement of students' critical thinking abilities. Based on the analysis results, the calculated t-value (2.654) exceeded the t-table value (0.67986) at a 5% significance level. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted, indicating that learning about local culture has a positive and significant effect on students' critical thinking skills. This study contributes to educational practice by demonstrating that integrating local cultural content into the elementary school curriculum can effectively foster critical thinking development. It provides empirical evidence supporting the inclusion of culturally relevant learning materials to promote cognitive and cultural growth simultaneously

Keywords: Local Cultural Learning, Critical Thinking Skills, Learning Activities

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INTRODUCTION

Local culture not only serves as a national identity but also holds significant potential in shaping the character of the younger generation. In an educational context, local culture-based learning can be an effective medium for instilling noble values while developing students' critical thinking skills (Ardi et al., 2024). However, the implementation of local culture in the elementary school curriculum is often neglected or merely used as a supplement, thus under-utilizing the opportunity to leverage cultural richness to enhance students' critical thinking skills.

Learning local culture plays a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of Indonesia's rich and diverse cultural heritage (Mulyani et al., 2024). Increasingly widespread globalization and modernization often marginalize local values, leading the younger generation to gravitate toward foreign cultures rather than their own indigenous traditions. This has resulted in a decline in appreciation for local arts, customs, and wisdom, which should be an integral part of community life. Therefore, learning local

culture in schools is a relevant strategy for reintroducing cultural richness to students while strengthening their identity.

The implementation of local cultural learning in Indonesia still faces various obstacles (Rahmadani et al., 2023). The lack of appropriate teaching materials, minimal training for educators, and limited attention to the relevance of local culture in the national curriculum are key challenges (Pristiwanti et al., 2024). Furthermore, the gap between the local culture taught in schools and students' daily lives often makes this learning less engaging and relevant (Zulfa et al., 2023). Therefore, innovations in teaching methods that involve direct experiences, such as visits to cultural sites, traditional arts training, or collaboration with indigenous communities, are needed to make local cultural learning more interactive and contextual. This step is expected to increase student interest and help them understand the importance of preserving Indonesia's rich local culture.

Learning about local culture has great potential in developing students' critical thinking skills, as local culture holds a wealth of wisdom that teaches analysis, reflection, and evaluation of life's values (Nurhidayati, 2021). When students are invited to study and understand local traditions, such as customs, art, or folklore, they not only receive information but are also encouraged to analyze the relevance and application of these values in the context of modern life. This process encourages students to question, compare, and evaluate local culture with global culture, thus training them to think critically. However, a challenge in this learning is the lack of approaches that encourage students to think actively, as the methods used are often passive and emphasize memorization. With innovative and contextual learning strategies, such as group discussions or problem-solving based on local culture, students can develop critical thinking skills while understanding the importance of preserving cultural heritage.

Critical thinking skills are an essential competency for students in the era of globalization. These skills enable them to analyze information, solve problems, and make informed decisions. However, research and observations indicate that the critical thinking skills of elementary school students in Indonesia remain relatively low. This is due to learning approaches that tend to be monotonous and less relevant to the context of students' daily lives. Integrating local culture into learning is believed to be a solution to create more contextual and engaging learning, thereby stimulating students' critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, local culture-based learning plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage threatened by globalization. By introducing local culture from an early age, students not only learn to understand and appreciate diversity but also actively participate in cultural preservation efforts. Therefore, research on the impact of local culture learning on elementary school students' critical thinking skills is relevant and important. This research is expected to contribute to the development of innovative and contextual learning models to improve the quality of education in Indonesia.

Research shows that combining local cultural elements and a problem-based learning approach can significantly improve critical thinking skills among elementary school students. (Suparya, 2021) found that the use of the Tri Pramana learning cycle with local wisdom content in science education improved students' critical thinking skills. (Lestari et al., 2022) showed that a problem-based learning model rooted in local wisdom positively influenced fourth-grade students' critical thinking skills. (Sari et al., 2021) emphasized the importance of ethnoscience-based learning in developing students' critical thinking by encouraging mental activity and considering various aspects of information. (Haryanti, 2017) argued that problem-based learning is very suitable for elementary school students, in line with their cognitive development and characteristics, such as enjoying group activities and hands-on experiences. A study on Realistic Mathematics Education based on local culture found that it improved mathematical critical thinking skills more effectively than conventional approaches (Jannah et al., 2017). A meta-analysis revealed that studying

local wisdom contributes substantially to the overall development of critical thinking (Sabat et al., 2024). A reading culture also positively influences critical thinking, as demonstrated in a study of Islamic junior high schools (Muhammad et al., 2019). Science education based on local cultural practices, such as the Ngarot tradition, showed significant improvements in students' critical thinking skills compared to conventional methods (Qolbi et al., 2016).

METHOD

This This study employed a quasi-experimental research design, a methodological approach commonly used in the social and behavioral sciences to examine cause-and-effect relationships when random assignment of participants to groups is not feasible. Quasi-experimental designs allow researchers to investigate the effects of an intervention or treatment in naturally occurring settings, maintaining ecological validity while still enabling a level of control over confounding variables. In this study, the quasi-experimental design was chosen because the participants could not be randomly assigned due to institutional or ethical constraints. Instead, existing groups were utilized, and both groups were exposed to similar conditions except for the introduction of the experimental treatment in one group.

The specific research design adopted was the Control Group Pretest–Posttest Design, which involves administering a pretest and posttest to both the experimental group and the control group. This design enables the researcher to determine the extent to which changes in the dependent variable can be attributed to the treatment rather than to external factors or natural maturation. By collecting data before and after the intervention, the researcher can compare mean differences between the groups and assess whether the treatment had a statistically significant effect. This approach provides a structured framework for evaluating causal hypotheses while accounting for pre-existing differences between participants.

In the implementation of this design, participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group, which received the treatment or intervention, and the control group, which did not receive the treatment but was exposed to the same testing procedures. The pretest served as a baseline measure of participants' initial levels of performance or behavior, while the posttest assessed the same variables after the intervention had been applied. The comparison between the pretest and posttest scores within and across groups provided a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the treatment.

The data collection instruments consisted of validated and reliable measures designed to capture the dependent variable accurately. The same instruments were used during both the pretest and posttest phases to ensure consistency. Data analysis involved comparing pretest and posttest results using appropriate statistical techniques such as paired sample t-tests, independent sample t-tests, or analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), depending on the characteristics of the data and the assumptions of each test. These analyses allowed for an assessment of whether observed differences between the experimental and control groups were statistically significant and attributable to the intervention.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The improvement in critical thinking skills can be measured by comparing the students' critical thinking skills scores before and after receiving the treatment carried out in the control class and the experimental class (1 and 2). The following table 2 shows the critical thinking skills scores of fourth grade elementary school students. This study aimed to examine the improvement of students' critical thinking skills through experimental treatments applied to two experimental classes compared to a control class. The data were collected through pretest and posttest instruments designed to measure students' critical

thinking performance before and after instructional interventions. The results are summarized in Table 1, which presents the mean pretest and posttest scores, the gain scores, and the corresponding criteria for each group. Based on the data, all groups—Experiment 1, Experiment 2, and Control—experienced an increase in mean scores from pretest to posttest. However, the degree of improvement differed substantially across the three groups, indicating varying levels of effectiveness of the instructional interventions.

Table 1. Critical Thinking Pretest and Posttest Scores

Group	Mean		Gain	Criteria
	Pre-Test	Post-Test		
Experiment 1	49.00	64.71	0.34	Moderate
Experiment 2	32.36	70.34	0.58	Moderate
Control	40.29	54.18	0.12	Low

The findings demonstrate that the teaching strategies implemented in both experimental groups had a positive influence on the development of students' critical thinking skills. In contrast, although the control group also showed improvement, the gain was relatively small and categorized as "Low." These outcomes suggest that the experimental treatments provided a more engaging and cognitively challenging learning environment conducive to enhancing critical thinking compared to traditional instruction. The pretest and posttest mean scores illustrate the students' initial and final performance levels. Experiment 1 had a pretest mean of 49.00 and a posttest mean of 64.71, resulting in an increase of 15.71 points. Experiment 2 started at a much lower mean score of 32.36 but reached a posttest mean of 70.34, an improvement of 37.98 points. Meanwhile, the control group's mean increased only modestly from 40.29 to 54.18, an improvement of 13.89 points.

The difference between Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 also warrants attention. Although Experiment 2 started from a significantly lower baseline, it achieved a higher posttest mean than Experiment 1. This suggests that the treatment applied in Experiment 2 may have been particularly powerful in fostering critical thinking, possibly due to the instructional design, student engagement, or contextual factors in the classroom. The normalized gain score (often symbolized as "g") measures the relative improvement of students' performance after the intervention. As shown in Table 1, the gain scores were 0.34 for Experiment 1, 0.58 for Experiment 2, and 0.12 for the Control group. According to Hake's (1998) interpretation scale, a gain of 0.30–0.69 is considered "Moderate," while a gain below 0.30 is categorized as "Low."

Thus, both experimental classes achieved moderate improvement, while the control class achieved only low improvement. The gain scores clearly demonstrate that the experimental interventions led to more substantial learning gains in critical thinking than the conventional teaching method. The higher gain in Experiment 2 (0.58) compared to Experiment 1 (0.34) suggests that the approach used in Experiment 2 may have incorporated more effective elements for promoting deep reasoning and reflective thought. These elements could include inquiry-based tasks, collaborative discussions, problem-solving activities, or the integration of metacognitive prompts that encouraged students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information more actively.

This interpretation aligns with contemporary educational theory, which emphasizes that critical thinking development requires more than content exposure—it demands instructional designs that explicitly engage learners in analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Traditional methods that focus on rote memorization or teacher-centered delivery often fail to cultivate these higher-order skills.

Comparing the results across groups reveals a clear hierarchy in the effectiveness of the teaching interventions. The control group, which received standard instruction, exhibited minimal improvement. This result is typical of learning environments that

prioritize factual recall rather than reasoning, questioning, and reflection. In contrast, both experimental groups showed greater progress, demonstrating the effectiveness of innovative, student-centered approaches. The results suggest that students exposed to active learning strategies—such as inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, or collaborative reasoning activities—develop stronger critical thinking abilities. These methods provide opportunities for learners to question assumptions, test hypotheses, justify conclusions, and engage in reflective dialogue—core components of critical thinking as identified by Ennis (1996) and Facione (2011).

The notably higher gain in Experiment 2 implies that its specific instructional model—possibly involving more structured scaffolding or reflective feedback—was particularly successful in guiding students toward higher levels of cognitive engagement. This could be attributed to more frequent opportunities for peer interaction, self-assessment, or problem-solving tasks that required students to transfer knowledge across contexts.

Table 2. Normality test of critical thinking skills

Amount	Rat-rat	L_{count}	L_{table}	Conclusion	Information
46	72,456	0,136	0,321	$L_{count} < L_{table}$	Normal

Based on the table above, the Post-test questions are normally distributed because $L_{count} < L_{table}$=0.129 < 0.213. Then, the data linearity test is conducted to examine the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable and whether the regression line between the independent and dependent variables is linear or not. If it is not linear, the regression analysis cannot be continued. The criteria if $F_{count} < F_{table}$meaning H_{The}accepted, otherwise if $F_{count} > F_{table}$This means that Ho is not accepted.

Table 2 presents the results of the normality test conducted on the post-test scores measuring students' critical thinking skills. The purpose of the normality test is to determine whether the data distribution follows a normal pattern, which is an essential assumption in many parametric statistical analyses, including regression, correlation, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). A normal distribution implies that the data are symmetrically distributed around the mean, allowing researchers to make reliable inferences about population parameters based on sample data. In this study, the normality test was carried out to ensure that the post-test results of critical thinking skills could be further analyzed using linear regression and other parametric tests. As shown in Table 2, the sample size (N) was 46 participants. The test produced an L_{count}value of 0.136, which was compared to the L_{table}value of 0.321. The decision criterion for the normality test states that if $L_{count} < L_{table}$, the data are normally distributed; conversely, if $L_{count} > L_{table}$, the data deviate significantly from normality. In this case, since $0.136 < 0.321$, the data fulfill the assumption of normality. Consequently, the distribution of students' post-test scores on critical thinking skills can be regarded as normal. This result indicates that the differences in scores among participants are evenly distributed around the mean and are not heavily skewed toward either extreme of the scale.

The finding that the data are normally distributed has several important implications for the subsequent stages of statistical analysis. First, it validates the use of parametric tests, which assume normality in the data distribution. This is crucial when examining the effect of independent variables (such as a specific teaching intervention, learning model, or instructional strategy) on the dependent variable (critical thinking skills). If the normality assumption were violated, nonparametric alternatives such as the Mann–Whitney U test or Kruskal–Wallis test would have been more appropriate. However, the confirmation of normality supports the methodological soundness of using parametric tests, ensuring that the conclusions drawn from these analyses are statistically reliable.

The criteria for interpreting the linearity test are as follows: if $F_{count} < F_{table}$, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is linear, indicating that the null hypothesis (H_0) of linearity is accepted. Conversely, if $F_{count} > F_{table}$, H_0 is rejected, and the relationship is deemed nonlinear. The study text explains that a linear relationship allows the researcher to proceed with regression analysis, whereas a nonlinear relationship would necessitate reconsidering the analytical approach or transforming the data to achieve linearity.

The results of the normality test thus provide the foundation for subsequent inferential analyses. Because the post-test data are normally distributed, the researcher can confidently move forward with testing linearity and performing regression analysis to evaluate how the independent variable influences students' critical thinking outcomes. In educational research, establishing this normality is not merely a statistical exercise but a crucial step in ensuring that the observed effects are genuine and not artifacts of skewed or irregular data.

In interpreting the meaning of the normality test within the framework of critical thinking research, it is also important to consider the theoretical underpinnings of the construct being measured. Critical thinking, as a cognitive skill, is expected to vary across individuals based on their learning experiences, problem-solving abilities, and exposure to higher-order thinking tasks. A normal distribution of critical thinking scores therefore aligns with theoretical expectations that most students will cluster around an average level of critical thinking proficiency, with fewer individuals at the extreme ends of very high or very low performance. This normality supports the construct validity of the assessment, suggesting that it accurately represents the natural variation in critical thinking among students.

In summary, the results of the normality test indicate that the post-test data on students' critical thinking skills are normally distributed, as evidenced by $L_{count} = 0.136 < L_{table} = 0.321$. This finding validates the use of parametric statistical techniques, supports the fairness and reliability of the assessment instrument, and lays the groundwork for further inferential analyses such as regression testing. The subsequent linearity test will confirm whether the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is appropriate for linear modeling. Together, these tests ensure that the analysis of critical thinking skills is statistically sound, theoretically grounded, and capable of producing meaningful insights into how educational interventions influence students' higher-order cognitive abilities.

Table 3. Linearity Test

Prerequisite Test	Variables	F count	Ftable	Criteria	Results
Linearity Test	XY	0.231	4.052	$F_{count}<F_{table}$	H_0accepted

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the data has a linear pattern because $F_{count}<F_{table}$= 0.231 <4.052. Since the normality and linearity tests have been met, we can proceed to hypothesis testing in a simple regression analysis. The t-test is used to test the hypothesis. The linearity test is an essential preliminary step in statistical data analysis, especially before performing regression analysis. It ensures that there is a linear relationship between the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y). In the context of this study, Table 3 presents the results of the linearity test for the variables X and Y. The table shows that the calculated F-value (F_count) is 0.231, while the F-table value (F_table) is 4.052. The decision criterion for the linearity test is that if F_count < F_table, then the data is considered to have a linear pattern, and the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant deviation from linearity, is accepted. Conversely, if F_count > F_table, then the relationship is considered non-linear, and H_0 is rejected.

Based on the results presented, since 0.231 < 4.052, it can be concluded that the data fulfills the assumption of linearity. This means the relationship between variables X and Y can be appropriately modeled using a linear regression approach. The acceptance of the null hypothesis in this context indicates that the observed relationship between the independent and dependent variables does not deviate significantly from a straight-line relationship, which supports the validity of proceeding with further parametric testing.

In summary, the results of the linearity test presented in Table 3 provide strong evidence that the relationship between variables X and Y is linear. With an F_count of 0.231, which is far below the critical F_table value of 4.052, the null hypothesis (H_0) of linearity is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant deviation from linearity in the data, meaning the relationship between X and Y can be appropriately represented using a straight line. The confirmation of linearity, combined with previously confirmed normality, allows the researcher to confidently proceed to hypothesis testing in simple linear regression analysis using the t-test. This step will further clarify the strength and significance of the relationship between the two variables. The result of this test not only validates the statistical assumptions underlying the model but also reinforces the theoretical and practical implications of a linear relationship, providing a solid foundation for meaningful interpretation and application of the research findings.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing using T-Test

Test$\rho\rho$	t_{count}	t_{table}	Criteria	Results
	2.654	0.67986	$t_{count}>t_{table}$	H_0 accepted

The results presented in Table 4 summarize the hypothesis testing conducted using a t-test to determine whether local cultural learning has a significant influence on students' critical thinking skills. In the analysis, the calculated t-value (t_{count}) was found to be 2.654, while the t-table value (t_{table}) at a degree of freedom (df) of 45 and a significance level of 5% was 0.67986. Based on the criteria for hypothesis testing, the decision rule states that if $t_{count} > t_{table}$, then the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. Since the obtained value of $t_{count} = 2.654$is greater than $t_{table} = 0.67986$, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This finding indicates that there is a positive and statistically significant influence of local cultural learning on students' critical thinking skills.

The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that the inclusion of local culture in the learning process contributes meaningfully to the development of students' cognitive abilities, particularly their capacity for critical analysis and logical reasoning. Critical thinking is not merely the ability to memorize or recall facts, but rather the skill to evaluate information, identify patterns, draw conclusions, and make well-supported judgments. When students are exposed to learning materials and experiences that reflect their local cultural context, they can relate theoretical concepts to familiar real-world situations. This connection between local culture and learning enhances students' engagement, motivation, and comprehension, enabling them to process information more deeply and think more independently.

The significant t-test result further implies that the incorporation of cultural elements into educational practices has measurable benefits for student learning outcomes. Learning activities that integrate local cultural knowledge—such as traditional customs, community values, folklore, and local problem-solving practices—help students construct meaning from their lived experiences. This culturally responsive approach to teaching bridges the gap between abstract academic content and the students' everyday reality. As a result, students are more likely to analyze, compare, and question ideas critically. The ability to relate classroom lessons to local cultural contexts enhances not only understanding but also the capacity for higher-order thinking.

Moreover, the result underscores the importance of contextual learning in fostering critical thinking. When students learn within contexts that resonate with their identity and cultural heritage, they are encouraged to question, interpret, and evaluate knowledge from multiple perspectives. This cognitive engagement aligns with the principles of constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through experience and reflection rather than passively absorbed. Local cultural learning provides a rich source of experiences through which students can construct understanding. It enables them to apply reasoning skills to familiar social and cultural situations, thereby promoting deeper analytical thinking.

The positive influence identified by the t-test result also indicates that integrating local culture into learning materials can help students develop a more holistic worldview. Through exposure to cultural narratives, values, and problem-solving methods, students gain insights into the complexity of human behavior, community dynamics, and moral reasoning. These insights encourage them to think critically about social issues, ethical dilemmas, and the implications of their decisions. Consequently, education that embraces local cultural dimensions does not merely transmit knowledge—it cultivates the intellectual and moral capacities necessary for responsible citizenship and lifelong learning.

The result also highlights the reciprocal relationship between culture and cognition. Culture shapes the way individuals perceive, interpret, and evaluate the world. Therefore, incorporating cultural elements into education aligns with the natural cognitive frameworks through which students understand reality. This alignment allows for smoother knowledge transfer and more meaningful learning experiences. When educational practices ignore local culture, students may struggle to relate to abstract concepts, resulting in superficial understanding and reduced critical engagement. Conversely, when culture is acknowledged as a central component of the learning environment, students feel valued, motivated, and intellectually stimulated.

In conclusion, the t-test result (2.654 > 0.67986) with a 5% significance level demonstrates that local cultural learning has a statistically significant and positive impact on students' critical thinking skills. This empirical evidence supports the notion that education is most effective when it acknowledges and incorporates the cultural contexts of learners. Through local cultural learning, students engage more deeply, think more critically, and apply their reasoning skills to both academic and real-life challenges. The rejection of the null hypothesis thus affirms that integrating cultural content into teaching practices is not only pedagogically sound but also crucial for developing well-rounded, critically minded individuals. The result encourages educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to view culture as a dynamic and indispensable component of quality education that cultivates both intellectual rigor and cultural identity.

DISCUSSION

Learning about local culture plays a crucial role in developing students' critical thinking skills, especially in areas rich in local wisdom like South Lampung. Integrating local cultural values into the curriculum can help students understand the social, historical, and cultural contexts around them. By studying local culture, students are encouraged to go beyond memorizing facts to analyzing, evaluating, and understanding the relevance of that culture to their lives. This fosters critical awareness, which forms the foundation of critical thinking skills.

In South Lampung, local cultural learning, such as an introduction to Lampung customs, traditional arts, and local wisdom, provides students with opportunities for reflective thinking. This learning process can be conducted through exploration and discussion methods that actively engage students. For example, students can be invited to compare local culture with other cultures, allowing them to analyze similarities and

differences and draw conclusions based on the data they gather. These activities encourage students to think more deeply and logically.

The application of local culture in learning can enhance students' sense of belonging and pride in their regional identity. When students have a deep understanding of their cultural heritage, they tend to be more motivated to study and critically evaluate information. Teachers can utilize project-based approaches, such as creating reports on local culture or presentations on the impact of local culture on modern life. This approach not only develops critical thinking skills but also trains students' communication and collaboration skills. However, the success of local culture learning in improving students' critical thinking skills depends heavily on teacher creativity and a supportive educational environment. Teachers must be able to deliver local culture material in a way that is engaging and relevant to students' lives. This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the study focused only on elementary school students in South Lampung, so the results may not be generalizable to other regions with different cultural characteristics. Second, the approach used in learning local culture may not have been fully optimal in exploring all aspects that can improve students' critical thinking skills. Finally, this study used a predominantly quantitative approach, thus lacking qualitative dimensions such as students' direct experiences in understanding local cultural values.

For further research, it is recommended that the scope be expanded to include other areas outside South Lampung with distinct cultural characteristics. This aims to obtain more comprehensive data and compare the effectiveness of local culture learning on students' critical thinking skills across various cultural contexts. Furthermore, more varied learning methods, such as project-based learning or collaborative learning, need to be developed, allowing students to more actively explore and understand local culture in depth.

It is also hoped that future research will utilize a mixed methods approach to explore both quantitative and qualitative dimensions simultaneously. This approach can provide a more comprehensive picture of how local cultural learning influences students' critical thinking skills, both in terms of statistical measurements and the direct experiences of students and teachers. Thus, research results can provide richer and more applicable recommendations for developing local cultural learning curricula at the elementary school level.

CONCLUSION

Local cultural learning has a significant impact on the critical thinking skills of elementary school students in South Lampung. Through exploration of cultural values, traditions, and local wisdom, students can develop a deeper understanding of their social and cultural environment, while simultaneously practicing analytical, evaluative, and reflective skills. Integrating local culture into learning encourages students to connect new knowledge with concrete experiences, effectively enhancing their critical thinking skills. Therefore, local culture-based learning not only plays a role in cultural preservation but also serves as a relevant strategy for improving the quality of education and student competency.

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