



English Learning and Resilience in a Coastal Community: A Culturally Grounded Approach in Bajo Lawele, Buton Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study examines an English language learning intervention for coastal children in Bajo Lawele, Buton Regency, Indonesia, by integrating resilience principles, culturally grounded learning, and community participation. The study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design involving 32 Bajo children aged 9–12 years. The intervention was conducted in six sessions over three weeks using storytelling with maritime themes, vocabulary games related to coastal life, and role-play based on children's everyday experiences. Data were collected through an English proficiency test covering vocabulary, listening, and speaking micro-tasks, a resilience scale adapted from Grotberg's framework (I Have, I Am, and I Can), classroom observations, and informal parent interviews. The findings showed positive changes in both English proficiency and learning resilience after the intervention. Vocabulary scores increased from 45.6 to 72.3, listening comprehension from 48.1 to 70.4, and speaking from 41.3 to 68.9, with the highest gain in speaking (66.8%). Improvements were also found in all resilience dimensions, especially I Can, which increased from 52.9 to 82.4 (55.7%). These findings suggest that culturally grounded and resilience-informed English learning may support language development and learner engagement among coastal children while preserving local cultural values.

Keywords: *Coastal Children; Culturally Grounded Learning; Community Participation; English Language Learning; Resilience.*

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INTRODUCTION

Coastal communities frequently experience unequal access to educational resources, including opportunities to learn foreign languages such as English. This condition is particularly relevant in settings where educational infrastructure, instructional materials, and digital access remain limited, making it more difficult for children to benefit from meaningful language learning experiences (Agung et al., 2025; Singh, 2024; Nurteteng et al., 2024). In the Bajo Lawele community of Buton Regency,

children grow up in a socio-cultural environment shaped by maritime livelihoods, mobility, and strong local traditions. Such conditions influence not only their daily experiences but also the ways they engage with learning. In this context, English is important not merely as a school subject, but also as a means of expanding future opportunities for communication, social inclusion, and economic participation in broader contexts, including tourism and intercultural interaction (Lescano et al., 2023).

Despite its importance, English learning among coastal children in Bajo Lawele may be constrained by limited contextualized materials, insufficiently adaptive instructional practices, and the weak integration of family and community support into the learning process. In low-access or resource-constrained settings, conventional teaching often fails to connect learning content with students' lived realities, which may reduce motivation and engagement (Dewanti & Shofwan, 2025; Dohinog et al., 2025; Zahara, 2025). For this reason, English learning for children in such communities should be designed in ways that are socially meaningful, culturally relevant, and responsive to their everyday environment. Studies on culturally responsive pedagogy and local wisdom in English materials suggest that learning becomes more meaningful when it reflects learners' cultural identities and community experiences (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017; Prayudha, 2023). In addition, the involvement of families and communities has been widely recognized as an important factor in supporting student achievement beyond the classroom (Best & Dunlap, 2012; Milenia et al., 2025).

In response to these challenges, resilience has become an important concept for understanding how children adapt to learning difficulties, sustain motivation, and continue participating in educational processes despite constraints. Resilience is often understood as a child's capacity to respond positively to adversity through the support of personal, social, and environmental resources (Masten, 2001; Grotberg, 1996). In educational settings, resilience is not only an individual trait but also a socially shaped capacity strengthened by family support, cultural belonging, and community networks (Dwiningrum, 2017; Dwiningrum et al., 2017). Within English language learning, recent studies have shown that resilience is associated with stronger motivation, better engagement, and improved language performance, including speaking achievement and persistence in challenging learning situations (Hidayah & Morganna, 2022; Liu et al., 2024; Aprianto & Sutarman, 2025; Asrobi et al., 2025). This suggests that resilience may play a central role in helping coastal children remain confident and committed when learning English under limited conditions.

However, although previous studies have discussed resilience, contextual learning, community support, and culturally responsive pedagogy, limited attention has been given to how these elements are integrated into English language learning interventions for coastal children, particularly within the Bajo community context. Much of the existing literature focuses on rural education, general EFL learners, or broader discussions of resilience without specifically examining how culturally grounded and resilience-informed strategies may support English development among children in coastal communities (Nurteteng et al., 2024; Singh, 2024; Sriwichai, 2025). This indicates a need for a more context-specific study that connects English learning with resilience, local wisdom, and community participation in a setting where educational access and cultural identity are equally important.

Based on this gap, the present study examines an English learning intervention that incorporates resilience principles and the socio-cultural background of coastal children in Bajo Lawele, Buton Regency. More specifically, the study explores how

contextual learning activities, adaptive materials, and community participation support children's engagement and learning development. It also investigates the extent to which such an intervention is associated with improvements in children's English competence and learning resilience. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of English learning practices that are culturally grounded, context-sensitive, and more sustainable for coastal children, while still respecting and preserving local values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resilience is commonly understood as the capacity of individuals to adapt positively when facing adversity, challenge, or social vulnerability. Rather than viewing resilience as a rare personal trait, Masten (2001) describes it as *ordinary magic*, emphasizing that resilience develops through adaptive systems that grow within supportive environments. In educational contexts, resilience refers to learners' ability to maintain motivation, cope with obstacles, and remain engaged in learning despite difficult circumstances (Shi & Zhang, 2025). This perspective suggests that resilience is highly relevant in contexts where children face limited access to educational resources and unstable learning conditions.

In marginalized or coastal communities, resilience is shaped not only by individual capacity but also by the social and cultural environment in which children grow. Dwiningrum (2017) argues that community resilience is influenced by social cohesion, cultural capital, and collective participation, especially in settings where traditional values remain strong. When families, community leaders, and local institutions are actively involved in children's education, they help create a sense of belonging, security, and empowerment. This view is particularly relevant to children in Bajo Lawele, whose learning experiences are closely connected to indigenous knowledge, intergenerational relationships, and maritime cultural traditions.

A similar perspective is advanced by Dwiningrum et al. (2017), who emphasize the importance of social capital in building educational resilience in vulnerable communities. Bonding social capital strengthens emotional support, shared values, and collective identity, which may encourage children to persist in learning. This argument is consistent with Grotberg's (1996) resilience framework, which highlights three interrelated dimensions: I Have (external support), I Am (inner strengths), and I Can (social and interpersonal competence). Together, these dimensions provide a useful framework for understanding how children's resilience develops through both personal and environmental resources.

In the field of English language learning, resilience has increasingly been recognized as an important factor influencing learners' motivation, persistence, and academic performance. Liu et al. (2024) show that resilience mediates the relationship between learning difficulties and academic achievement, while Hidayah and Morganna (2022) report that resilient learners are more capable of coping with challenges in language learning. Similar findings are reported by Aprianto and Sutarman (2025), who found that resilience is associated with stronger speaking performance, and by Asrobi et al. (2025), who argue that resilience helps EFL learners sustain effort when language learning becomes difficult. These studies indicate that resilience is not only a psychological resource but also a pedagogical concern in language education, particularly in settings where learners face multiple structural and contextual barriers.

Beyond resilience, culturally responsive learning also plays an important role in improving the relevance and effectiveness of English instruction. Pirbhai-Illich et al. (2017) argue that learning becomes more meaningful when it reflects learners' identities, experiences, and cultural realities. In the context of English teaching, Prayudha (2023) similarly notes that integrating local wisdom into English materials can increase engagement and make learning more relatable to students. For coastal children in Bajo Lawele, this means that English learning should not be separated from their social and cultural world. Learning activities based on storytelling, maritime livelihoods, and everyday coastal experiences may help children connect new language knowledge with familiar meanings, while also affirming their cultural identity.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that effective English learning for coastal children should be understood through the intersection of resilience, social capital, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Resilience helps explain how children adapt to challenges; social capital highlights the role of family and community support; and culturally responsive pedagogy ensures that learning remains relevant to children's lived experiences. Therefore, this study is grounded in the assumption that English learning interventions will be more meaningful and sustainable when they strengthen children's adaptive capacity, draw on community support, and reflect the cultural context of the Bajo community.

METHOD

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design to examine changes in children's English proficiency and learning resilience following a culturally grounded learning intervention. As no control group was included, the findings are interpreted as showing improvement after the intervention rather than strong causal effectiveness.

The study was conducted in Bajo Lawele, Buton Regency, involving 32 coastal children aged 9-12 years from the Bajo community who participated in local learning activities. The intervention consisted of six sessions over three weeks, with two sessions per week. Each session applied culturally contextualized strategies, including storytelling with maritime themes, vocabulary games related to fishing and coastal life, and role-play based on children's daily interactions. Family members and local community leaders were involved in selected sessions to strengthen social support and cultural relevance.

Data were collected using three instruments: (1) an English proficiency test covering vocabulary, listening, and speaking micro-tasks; (2) a resilience scale for young learners adapted from Grotberg (1996), focusing on the dimensions of I Have, I Am, and I Can; and (3) an observation checklist documenting children's engagement, persistence, and emotional regulation during learning activities. In addition, informal interviews with parents were conducted after the intervention to support the interpretation of the findings.

Data collection was carried out in three stages: pretest, intervention and observation, and posttest. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviation, and percentage gain, to identify changes in English proficiency and resilience before and after the intervention. Qualitative data from observations and parent interviews were analyzed through thematic categorization to enrich the interpretation of the quantitative results.

RESULTS

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study, focusing on changes in children’s English proficiency and learning resilience after the intervention. Table 1 shows the pretest and posttest scores of English proficiency, while Table 2 summarizes changes in learning resilience across the three measured dimensions.

Improvement in English Proficiency

The pretest–posttest results show improvements across all measured components of English proficiency, including vocabulary, listening comprehension, and speaking micro-tasks. As presented in Table 1, vocabulary scores increased from a mean of 45.6 in the pretest to 72.3 in the posttest, representing a gain of 58.5%. Listening comprehension also improved, rising from 48.1 to 70.4, with a gain of 46.3%. Among the three components, speaking micro-tasks showed the highest increase, with mean scores rising from 41.3 to 68.9, equivalent to a gain of 66.8%.

These findings indicate that the participants demonstrated positive changes in their English proficiency after the intervention, with the greatest improvement found in speaking performance.

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Scores of English Proficiency

Indicator	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain (%)
Vocabulary	45.6	72.3	58.5%
Listening Comprehension	48.1	70.4	46.3%
Speaking Micro-Tasks	41.3	68.9	66.8%

Enhancement of Learning Resilience

The results also show improvements across all three dimensions of learning resilience, namely I Have, I Am, and I Can. As shown in Table 2, the I Have dimension, which reflects external support, increased from 56.2 to 78.5, with a gain of 39.6%. The I Am dimension, associated with self-belief and motivation, rose from 54.7 to 80.1, representing a gain of 46.4%. The I Can dimension, which reflects problem solving and adaptive capacity, showed the highest increase, rising from 52.9 to 82.4, equivalent to a gain of 55.7%.

These findings show that the participants experienced positive changes not only in English learning outcomes but also in indicators of learning resilience following the intervention.

Table 2. Pretest and Posttest Scores of Learning Resilience

Indicator	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain (%)
I Have (external support)	56.2	78.5	39.6%
I Am (self-belief and motivation)	54.7	80.1	46.4%
I Can (problem solving and adaptation)	52.9	82.4	55.7%

Qualitative Findings from Observation and Parent Interviews

The qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and informal parent interviews support the quantitative findings. During the intervention sessions, children

were observed to participate more actively in learning activities, respond more confidently to classroom tasks, and show greater persistence when encountering unfamiliar English expressions. Parents also reported positive changes in children's interest and willingness to engage in English learning activities at home.

Overall, both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate positive developments in children's English proficiency and learning resilience after the intervention.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the English learning intervention was associated with positive changes in both English proficiency and learning resilience among coastal children in Bajo Lawele. These findings suggest that English instruction may become more meaningful when it is closely connected to children's socio-cultural environment and supported by learning conditions that strengthen both participation and confidence. The improvement in children's English proficiency suggests that culturally grounded learning activities may have helped make language input more accessible and engaging. The use of maritime vocabulary, local stories, and role-play activities related to daily coastal life appears to have enabled children to connect unfamiliar English expressions with familiar experiences. This finding is consistent with the view that culturally responsive pedagogy enhances learning by linking instruction to learners' identities, backgrounds, and lived realities (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017). Similarly, Prayudha (2023) argues that the inclusion of local wisdom in English materials can make learning more relatable and meaningful for students.

Among the English components measured in this study, speaking showed the highest level of improvement. One possible explanation is that culturally familiar content may have reduced children's hesitation and encouraged them to participate more actively in oral tasks. This interpretation is in line with Aprianto and Sutarman (2025), who found that resilience and learning engagement are closely related to speaking performance, particularly when learners feel more prepared and supported in the learning process. In this sense, the intervention may have helped create a learning environment in which children were more willing to communicate in English. The qualitative findings also support this interpretation, as children were observed to become more active, more confident, and more persistent during learning activities. When the content reflected their daily life, they seemed more comfortable engaging with English and responding to classroom tasks.

The improvement across the three resilience dimensions—I Have, I Am, and I Can—further indicates that the intervention was associated not only with language development but also with positive changes in children's learning attitudes and adaptive capacity. This supports Masten's (2001) view of resilience as ordinary magic, namely a developmental process that grows through meaningful support systems in everyday life. It also aligns with Grotberg's (1996) framework, which emphasizes that children's resilience is shaped by the interaction between external support, inner strength, and social competence. The strongest gain in the I Can dimension is particularly important because it suggests that the learning activities may have helped children develop greater confidence in responding to tasks, solving simple problems, and adapting to new language experiences. Group storytelling, collaborative activities, and contextual

communication tasks may have provided opportunities for children to practice persistence and participation in a safe and familiar setting. This interpretation is consistent with previous studies showing that resilience contributes to stronger motivation, persistence, and language learning performance (Hidayah & Morganna, 2022; Liu et al., 2024; Asrobi et al., 2025).

Another important aspect of the findings is the role of social support in shaping children's learning experience. The increase in the I Have dimension suggests that children perceived stronger external support during the intervention. This is significant because children in coastal and marginalized communities often rely heavily on family, community, and local relationships as sources of motivation and security in learning. This finding can be understood through the perspective of social capital. Dwiningrum et al. (2017) emphasize that educational resilience in vulnerable communities is strengthened by bonding social capital, including trust, shared values, and close interpersonal support. In the context of Bajo Lawele, the involvement of parents, elders, and community leaders may have reduced the distance between school-like learning activities and children's everyday social world. Rather than positioning English as something foreign and disconnected from local life, the intervention appears to have placed learning within a familiar and supportive cultural environment. This also supports the broader view that family and community engagement plays an important role in student learning beyond the classroom (Best & Dunlap, 2012).

The qualitative findings further suggest that local culture functioned as an important learning resource throughout the intervention. Children appeared more confident and expressive when discussing familiar topics such as fishing activities, boats, the sea, and everyday coastal practices. This indicates that cultural familiarity may have helped them participate more comfortably in English learning activities. In this sense, local identity should not be seen as separate from language education, but as a meaningful pedagogical resource. When children are invited to learn through contexts they already know, language learning may become less intimidating and more personally relevant. Such an approach is consistent with community-based educational perspectives that view culture, identity, and participation as important foundations for sustainable learning (Dwiningrum, 2017; Purbhai-Illich et al., 2017). The intervention, therefore, may be understood not only as an effort to improve children's English competence, but also as a way of affirming cultural belonging within the learning process.

These findings have practical implications for English education in coastal and other underserved communities. They suggest that textbook-centered and decontextualized approaches may be less responsive to the learning needs of children whose educational experiences are shaped by local culture and limited access to resources. In contrast, learning models that combine contextual materials, family and community participation, and resilience-building strategies may offer a more supportive path for language development. At the same time, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Since this study used a one-group pretest-posttest design without a comparison group, the observed improvements cannot be attributed solely to the intervention with full causal certainty. Nevertheless, the study provides preliminary evidence that culturally grounded and resilience-informed English learning may support both language development and learner engagement among coastal children.

Further studies involving comparison groups, larger samples, and longer intervention periods are needed to strengthen this line of inquiry.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that culturally grounded English language learning interventions are effective in improving both the linguistic competence and learning resilience of coastal children in Bajo Lawele, Buton Regency. The intervention not only elevated children's vocabulary, listening, and speaking abilities, but also strengthened their adaptive capacities as reflected in the increased scores of the *I Have*, *I Am*, and *I Can* dimensions of resilience. These improvements indicate that learning becomes more meaningful and sustainable when instructional approaches incorporate cultural identity, local experiences, and community involvement.

The findings highlight that the active participation of families and traditional leaders provides essential emotional and social support that enhances children's confidence and persistence in learning. This confirms that community-based education plays an important role in shaping learning resilience, especially in marginalized and culturally unique environments such as the Bajo community.

Furthermore, contextual learning strategies rooted in maritime culture successfully fostered engagement, reduced anxiety, and increased willingness to communicate in English. Such approaches reinforce children's cultural pride while simultaneously equipping them with new language competencies, demonstrating that cultural relevance is a powerful pedagogical tool.

Overall, the effectiveness of the intervention underscores the importance of integrating local wisdom, social capital, and resilience-building frameworks into foreign language instruction for coastal communities. Future programs are encouraged to involve broader community elements and incorporate long-term monitoring to sustain the positive impact on children's learning outcomes and personal development.

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