

## Integrating Contextual Learning and Digital Media to Boost English Language Skills

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### Abstract

This study examines the impact of utilizing local tourist sites as a contextual medium to enhance English language learning through student-created promotional videos produced in a vlogger style. Conducted with 34 senior high school students from MAN 1 Aceh Tengah, Indonesia, this research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from pre- and post-test English proficiency scores and qualitative insights from student and teacher interviews. The quantitative data analysis involved paired sample t-tests, revealing a significant improvement in students' English proficiency, with post-test scores showing an average increase of 11.5 points compared to pre-test scores ( $p < 0.001$ ). The qualitative thematic analysis highlighted several critical outcomes: students experienced greater motivation, enjoyment, and increased self-confidence in using English due to authentic interactions during visits to tourist sites. Additionally, the project fostered essential 21st-century skills such as collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy, enhancing overall student engagement and language acquisition. Teachers also expressed positive perceptions, noting the method's effectiveness in connecting theoretical learning to real-world contexts. These findings suggest that integrating local, culturally relevant contexts and student-driven digital media projects can effectively bridge the gap between classroom-based learning and practical language application. This study provides valuable insights and practical implications for educators seeking innovative, engaging methods to improve English proficiency, especially within contexts similar to the Indonesian educational landscape.

**Keywords:** Contextual Learning; English Language Teaching; Language Proficiency; Place-Based Education; Vlogging.

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and remains a key academic subject from elementary through senior high school. However, English language instruction has traditionally focused on grammatical rules, vocabulary memorization, and textbook exercises, which is often at the expense of

practical, real-life language use (Yusyac et al., 2021). As a result, students frequently exhibit limited communicative competence and struggle to transfer classroom knowledge into authentic contexts. This has become a persistent issue in Indonesian EFL education, especially in rural or less-privileged areas, where English

is rarely encountered outside school. Many learners are able to pass written exams but experience anxiety or hesitation when asked to speak English spontaneously, a challenge that hampers their readiness for global interaction or workplace communication.

The limitations of traditional pedagogy call for more innovative and engaging approaches to English language learning, including methods, which connect theoretical learning with real-world application. One such promising approach is Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), an educational model rooted in constructivist principles, which emphasizes the importance of learning through meaningful experiences. CTL enables students to acquire and apply knowledge by relating content to their personal lives, cultural surroundings, and social environments (Rahman & Ekkayokkaya, 2024). In this model, learning is most effective when it is relevant, situated, and authentically connected to learners' daily experiences.

Recent research affirms the effectiveness of CTL across various language skills. For instance, Pratama and Sumardi (2022) reported improvements in reading comprehension when local content was used to contextualize English texts. Similarly, Yusyac et al. (2021) found that CTL significantly enhanced speaking skills among Indonesian students, attributing the gains to students' increased engagement and reduced anxiety when using English in familiar, meaningful contexts. These studies confirm that when learners are immersed in real-life or culturally resonant settings, they not only absorb language more effectively but also develop greater confidence and motivation.

A specific application of CTL that has gained traction is place-based education, which encourages the integration of local geographical, historical, or cultural features into the curriculum. This approach allows students to explore their community, environment, or heritage while learning academic subjects (Jaramillo & Malagon, 2019). In the context of EFL, place-based learning provides students with tangible

subjects to describe, narrate, or discuss in English. It fosters emotional investment and cultural pride while encouraging authentic language use. Local tourist sites represent rich linguistic and cultural resources. These locations allow students to practice English in real settings, for instance, describing places, interacting with guides, or simulating the role of a tour narrator. In turn, this helps shift English from being a "foreign" school subject to a living, communicative tool.

Complementing CTL and place-based learning, digital media, especially student-created content, offers another powerful vehicle for language development. Over the past decade, digital tools such as video blogs (vlogs), podcasts, and multimedia storytelling have become increasingly integrated into educational settings (Hassan, 2023). Among these, vlogging, a form of video blogging where individuals record and share spoken narratives, has emerged as a particularly effective tool for enhancing speaking fluency, self-confidence, and digital literacy. According to Andiappan et al. (2022), students who participated in vlogging projects demonstrated substantial improvements in speaking performance and classroom engagement. The format requires students to plan, rehearse, record, and reflect on their language use, thereby reinforcing both accuracy and fluency.

Student perceptions further support this trend. In a study by Fitria (2022), learners reported that vlogging assignments made them feel more comfortable using English due to the casual, non-judgmental environment. The ability to rehearse, redo takes and reflect on their recordings allowed them to experiment with language without the fear of public error. Moreover, students described a heightened sense of agency and ownership over their learning, as they were able to shape the content and presentation style of their projects. When combined with group collaboration, vlogging can also foster peer learning, social support, and creative problem-solving. These are essential 21st-century skills that align with

Indonesia's evolving educational priorities.

The integration of contextual learning and digital media also reflects broader educational transformations in Indonesia, as highlighted by recent research. (Kamarullah, Fadhilah, et al., 2024) demonstrate that technology-driven strategies, such as AI writing tools and blended learning, can significantly improve access and engagement in rural education. This is particularly relevant to EFL contexts where limited exposure to English requires innovative solutions. Likewise, Kamarullah, Hasrina, et al. (2024) provide a bibliometric analysis of inclusive English teaching, underscoring the importance of adaptable, context-sensitive pedagogies that meet diverse learner needs. This is one of Indonesian Ministry of Education encourage in classroom, known as differentiated teaching learning (Muksalmina et al., 2024). In terms of policy support, Kamarullah, Istiarsyah, et al. (2024) examine the role of the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) in shaping teacher workload and professional capacity, showing that systemic backing is essential for sustaining innovative approaches. Additionally, Kamarullah, Sarinauli, et al. (2024) explore the pedagogical use of AI writing tools, illustrating how technology can enable more creative, learner-centered activities while reducing teacher burden. These insights align closely with the demands of project-based and media-integrated learning.

Despite this growing body of literature, few studies have explored the integration of contextual learning and vlogging within local tourism settings, particularly in the Indonesian high school environment. This gap is especially significant considering the Merdeka Belajar (emancipated learning) initiative, which encourages schools and teachers to innovate, localize, and personalize their curriculum. Rural and semi-urban areas, such as Central Aceh, are rich in cultural and ecological heritage that remains underutilized in education. Empowering students to explore these sites, document them in English, and share their

experiences through digital platforms presents a promising, holistic learning model.

Integrating vlogger-style video creation with field-based English instruction offers several pedagogical advantages. First, it situates language use in authentic contexts, allowing learners to describe their surroundings in real time. Second, it promotes project-based learning, where students collaborate, plan, and create a product that has a clear audience and purpose. Third, it encourages reflective practice, as learners must critically assess their own language use during the editing process. Fourth, it develops multimodal literacy, combining language skills with visual, auditory, and technical proficiencies. Finally, the method fosters intrinsic motivation by blending creativity, cultural pride, and digital relevance, which is a combination that resonates strongly with today's learners.

From a theoretical perspective, the current study aligns with situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 29-33), which posits that knowledge is most effectively acquired when it is embedded within the context in which it is to be applied. Rather than treating language learning as abstract rule memorization, this approach places learners in meaningful situations where language use is both purposeful and necessary. The integration of task-based learning (Willis, 1996, p. 38) is also evident, as students engage in complex tasks (e.g., creating promotional videos) that naturally elicit language production and negotiation of meaning.

Within this framework, the present study aims to fill an important empirical gap by investigating the combined use of tourist site visits and vlogging projects to enhance English proficiency in a real-world, Indonesian EFL classroom. Specifically, the study is guided by two research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference in students' English proficiency before and after utilizing tourist sites as contextual learning media through the creation of vlogger-style promotional videos?

2. How do students and teachers perceive the use of tourist sites combined with vlogger-style video creation as a method to improve English language skills?

By addressing these questions through a mixed-methods design, the study seeks to contribute to the evolving discourse on localized, digital, and student-centered learning. It offers not only empirical evidence but also practical insights for educators aiming to innovate within the constraints of the national curriculum. Moreover, it emphasizes the potential of leveraging Indonesia's cultural and natural wealth as a linguistic resource, transforming classrooms into gateways to community, identity, and global citizenship.

### Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative strands to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of combining contextual learning at tourist sites with vlogger-style video production. Mixed-methods designs allow researchers to capture both measurable changes in student performance and the nuanced experiences underlying those changes, providing a more holistic understanding of intervention outcomes (Creswell & Clark, 2017, p. 68; Ivankova et al., 2006).

The quantitative component followed a one-group pre-test/post-test design to measure changes in students' English proficiency after the intervention. This design was chosen because it provides a straightforward way to assess within-group improvement over time, particularly in small-scale educational settings where control groups may not be feasible (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews designed to explain and contextualize the quantitative results, aligning with an explanatory sequential design.

The research took place at MAN 1 Aceh Tengah, a public senior high school located in Takengon, Central Aceh, Indonesia. This school was purposively selected for three

reasons:

1. It has a track record of academic achievement in English language competitions.
2. Its location near prominent tourist sites offers authentic learning contexts aligned with the study's objectives.
3. The school leadership and teachers demonstrated a readiness to adopt innovative pedagogical approaches (Kamarullah, Sarinauli, et al., 2024).

A total of 34 second-year students (aged 16–17) participated in the study. All participants spoke Indonesian as their first language, with several also speaking Gayo, the local ethnic language, at home. Gender distribution was approximately 40% male and 60% female. Students were classified as having intermediate English proficiency, based on teacher assessment and previous test performance.

To ensure ethical compliance, the study followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018, p. 5) guidelines. Permission was obtained from the school principal, and informed consent was collected from both students and their parents. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured that their grades would not be affected by their involvement.

### Instructional Intervention

The intervention lasted four weeks, integrated into the school's regular English program. As presented in Table 1, students participated in contextual learning activities at local tourist sites and then produced promotional vlogs in English. This design was grounded in the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) (Johnson, 2002, pp. 1-2), which emphasizes connecting academic material to real-life contexts, and Project-Based Learning (PBL) (Thomas, 2000, p. 2), which encourages active, collaborative problem-solving through extended tasks.

Students worked in small groups (3–4 members) with mixed ability levels to

encourage peer learning. Language instruction was provided just-in-time, meaning that teachers addressed language needs as they arose during the production process. Researchers documented levels of student engagement during both site visits and production stages (Kamarullah, Fadhilah, et al., 2024).

Table 1. Intervention Procedures

| Stage            | Description                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preparation      | Teacher introduced English travel vlogs; reviewed tourism-related vocabulary and speaking strategies; trained students in basic filming techniques.    |
| Site Visits      | Two weekend trips to tourist sites around Takengon (e.g., Lake Lut Tawar). Students gathered notes, interviewed locals, and filmed on location.        |
| Video Production | Groups edited 5–7-minute videos in school labs and at home, adding English narration or subtitles. Teacher provided targeted feedback on language use. |
| Presentation     | Groups presented videos to peers in class and via a private YouTube channel; peer Q&A sessions conducted in English.                                   |

**Data Collection: Quantitative data**

English proficiency was assessed using pre- and post-tests collaboratively designed by the class teacher and researchers. As detailed in Table 2, the test focused on productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening and reading) within tourism-related contexts, ensuring alignment with the intervention content and Communicative Language Teaching principles (Richards & Rodgers, 2015, pp. 152-153).

Table 2. Summary of Quantitative Instruments

| Skill Area        | Task Description                                                     | Scoring Criteria                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Speaking          | Oral description of a tourist place (pre/post with parallel prompts) | Fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, content |
| Writing           | Short descriptive paragraph about a tourist site                     | Content, organization, vocabulary, grammar  |
| Listening/Reading | Comprehension tasks using tourism-related materials                  | Accuracy of responses                       |

Speaking and writing were rated using rubrics on a 0–100 scale, with the same teacher scoring all performances to ensure consistency

and inter-rater reliability.

**Data Collection: Qualitative data**

To complement the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted after the post-test. Five students selected to represent high, medium, and low achievers, and two English teachers also participated. The interviews explored participants’ perceptions of the integrated approach, its benefits, and challenges (Patton, 2023, pp. 257-258).

Table 3. Demographic Information of Interviewees

| Participant Code | Role    | Gender | Achievement Level* | Age (Years) |
|------------------|---------|--------|--------------------|-------------|
| S1               | Student | Male   | High               | 17          |
| S2               | Student | Female | High               | 17          |
| S3               | Student | Female | Medium             | 16          |
| S4               | Student | Male   | Medium             | 16          |
| S5               | Student | Female | Low                | 16          |
| T1               | Teacher | Female | –                  | 35          |
| T2               | Teacher | Male   | –                  | 38          |

\*Achievement Level based on combined pre-test score and teacher assessment.

**Data Analysis: Quantitative analysis**

The paired-sample t-test was used to compare pre-test and post-test scores, preceded by assumption checks:

1. Normality: Shapiro–Wilk test (pre-test  $p = 0.797$ ; post-test  $p = 0.811$ ; both  $> 0.05$ ).
2. Homogeneity: Levene’s test ( $p = 0.614$ ; not significant).

As assumptions were met, the paired t-test was conducted at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The magnitude of the effect was measured using Cohen’s  $d$  (Cohen, 2013, p. 21) to quantify practical significance beyond statistical results.

**Data Analysis: Qualitative analysis**

Interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Transcripts were open-coded, with codes organized into subthemes and refined into five overarching themes as follows.

1. Authentic learning and enjoyment

2. Confidence and speaking skills
3. Motivation and engagement
4. Creativity and collaboration
5. Challenges

To ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 290-291), member checking was conducted with participants, and data triangulation was achieved by comparing interview responses with classroom observations and quantitative results. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the statistical outcomes to produce a well-rounded interpretation.

## Result and Discussion

### *Quantitative results: Pre-test vs. post-test performance*

The quantitative strand examined whether students' English proficiency improved following the contextual learning and vlogger-style project. The descriptive statistics (Table 4) indicate a clear upward shift: the mean score of pre-tests was  $M = 66.26$  ( $SD = 4.49$ ), increasing to  $M = 77.76$  ( $SD = 4.92$ ) on the post-test. This reflects an average gain of 11.50 points.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

|           | Mean  | SD   | N  |
|-----------|-------|------|----|
| Pre-test  | 66.26 | 4.49 | 34 |
| Post-test | 77.76 | 4.92 | 34 |

A visual comparison (Figure 1) shows consistent improvement across all students, with score gains ranging from +9 to +12 points. This uniformity reflects the high level of engagement reported during the intervention.

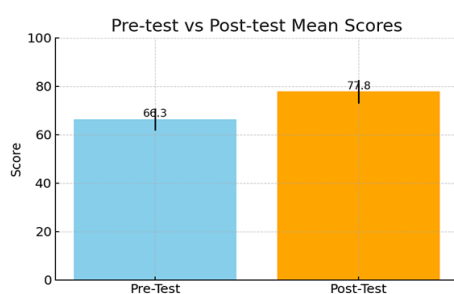


Figure 1. Pre-test vs. Post-test mean scores with standard deviation error bars

A paired-samples t-test confirmed that this improvement is statistically significant. The t-test yielded  $t(33) = -85.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed). In other words, the probability that such a large mean difference (approximately 11.5 points) occurred by chance is effectively zero ( $p = 0.000$  to three decimal places). We therefore reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): there was a significant difference in students' English proficiency before and after the intervention. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference was approximately  $-11.78$  to  $-11.22$  (on the pre-test minus post-test score scale), indicating we can be 95% confident that the true average improvement falls in that narrow range. The extremely high t-value and tight confidence interval reflect not only the substantial gain but also the low variability in improvement across students – essentially, all students improved by a similar amount. Indeed, the standard deviation of the difference scores was only 0.79, showing a very consistent positive effect for every participant.

Additionally, assumptions for the t-test were satisfied: as noted in the Methods, both the pre- and post-test score distributions did not deviate significantly from normal (Shapiro-Wilk  $p > 0.79$ ). The difference scores themselves also appeared approximately normal upon inspection of Q-Q plots (the data points fell close to the diagonal). Homogeneity of variance was less of a concern in a paired design (since each student serves as their own control), but even when comparing pre and post variances, Levene's test indicated no significant difference ( $p = 0.614$ ). Thus, the significant t-test result is robust.

In terms of effect size, the improvement corresponds to a Cohen's  $d$  (paired) of about 3.0 or higher (a rough calculation yields  $d \approx 11.5/3.8$  if using pre-test SD, or even larger if using difference SD). This is an exceptionally large effect, indicating that the intervention had a profound impact on students' performance. Such a large effect size is uncommon in educational interventions, and it suggests

that the contextual, vlogging-based learning experience was highly effective in boosting the measured English skills in a short time. While it is important to interpret this magnitude with caution (as it may partially reflect the specificity of the test to the learned content), the statistical evidence strongly supports the conclusion that students' English language ability improved significantly as a result of the project.

In summary, the quantitative findings provide a clear answer to Research Question 1: yes, there was a significant improvement in English proficiency after utilizing tourist sites and vlogger-style video projects as a learning medium. Every student benefited from the approach to some degree, with remarkably uniform gains. This indicates not only statistical significance but also practical significance – students moved closer to being able to use English effectively in context, as reflected in their test performances.

### ***Qualitative results: Interview responses and emerging themes***

To address Research Question 2, we analyzed student and teacher perceptions of the learning approach through interview data. The thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed several key themes highlighting the significance and impact of using local tourist sites with vlogging for English learning:

#### ***Authenticity and Engagement***

Students overwhelmingly reported that learning English at an actual tourist site made the experience 'interesting', 'enjoyable', and 'real'. They found that using English in a natural setting – outside the four walls of the classroom – was refreshing and motivating. One student enthusiastically described how visiting the tourist site made the learning more interesting and real, adding that she forgot she was 'studying' because she was immersed in the environment. This sentiment is captured in Student 1's comment:

Student 1 (S1): "I really enjoyed making

the promotional video because it helped me practice speaking English naturally. Visiting the tourist site made the learning more interesting and real."

This quote illustrates that the student was highly engaged; the contextual learning didn't feel like rote work but rather a fun, meaningful activity. The authenticity of the setting provided opportunities to use English in context (e.g., pointing out objects, describing scenery on the spot) which kept students actively involved. Teachers echoed this observation. Teacher 1, who accompanied the trips, noted:

Teacher 1 (T1): "Using tourist sites as learning media helps students connect language learning with real life. It motivates them and makes lessons more meaningful."

This aligns with the student feedback, reinforcing that the authenticity of context was a powerful stimulus. The teacher saw firsthand that students were excited and that they perceived a purpose to their English use (e.g., to communicate information about their town's attractions), which is a core advantage of contextual learning.

#### ***Confidence and Reduced Anxiety***

Another prominent theme was a boost in students' confidence to use English, especially in speaking. Many students admitted that initially they felt nervous about speaking English outside the classroom or on camera. However, the process of creating the vlog – which was done in a supportive group setting and an enjoyable format – helped them overcome this fear. S2 explained how the project changed her attitude:

S2: "At first, I was nervous to speak English outside the classroom, but creating the video gave me confidence because I used English in a fun way."

This statement shows a clear growth in self-confidence. The student attributes her newfound confidence to the fun aspect of the video project, suggesting that the enjoyment factor lowered her affective filter (her fear of making mistakes). By repeatedly practicing

her lines and perhaps seeing herself succeed on video, she became more comfortable with speaking. Students often mentioned that because they could record multiple takes, they felt less pressure about perfection in any single moment; this trial-and-error learning built their confidence. After the project, several students reported that they would feel more at ease speaking in English – if, for example, a tourist actually approached them – a significant change from before.

#### *Skill Development and Learning Outcome*

Students and teachers noted improvements not only in test scores (as quantified previously) but in practical language skills. Students felt their vocabulary related to describing places had increased and that they could speak more fluently about certain topics. One student mentioned that because she had to talk continuously in the video, she ‘got used to thinking in English for describing things.’ Teachers observed improvements in students’ pronunciation and intonation when speaking. The English department head (T2) commented on how the project reinforced communication skills:

T2: “The vlogger-style video project encourages creativity and collaboration among students, while also improving their English communication skills.”

This points to multiple skill domains: linguistic (communication skills), cognitive (creativity in presenting content), and social (collaboration in group work). Students indeed reported that working in teams to make the video helped them learn from each other – for instance, they would correct each other’s English sentences and jointly figure out how to express certain ideas. This peer learning was an added benefit. Additionally, students enjoyed the creative freedom: they could choose how to introduce their site, add personal flairs or jokes in English, and decide on visuals, which made the learning feel personal and thus more memorable.

#### *Collaboration and 21st-Century Skills*

As hinted by T2, the project fostered teamwork and creative thinking. Students had to divide roles (e.g., who will speak about which part of the site, who will handle the camera) and help each other during filming. They also engaged in problem-solving, such as how to make their video entertaining or how to handle mistakes during recording. Many students enjoyed this collaborative aspect; one student noted that ‘we learned how to work together and it was fun to create something as a team.’ The development of such soft skills, while not the primary goal of language learning, was a valuable byproduct. It aligns with broader educational goals of preparing students with 21st-century skills like communication, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy. In the interviews, students took pride in having produced a tangible product (the video) through joint effort. Some even said they’d like to do similar projects in other subjects because ‘you learn a lot more than from just reading a book.’

#### *Challenges and Suggestions*

Though generally positive, interviews did surface a few challenges. A couple of students mentioned that speaking spontaneously in front of a camera was initially intimidating – “I was afraid I’d mess up and it would be recorded,” one said. This was mitigated by allowing retakes, but it points to initial performance anxiety. Another challenge was technical: not all groups had high-quality equipment. They mainly used smartphones; one group struggled with wind noise in their audio when filming outdoors, which frustrated them. They solved it by finding a quieter spot to record narration. Time management was also a learning curve; editing took longer than expected for some, leading them to comment that more time or a workshop on video editing would be helpful in the future. Despite these hurdles, every student managed to complete the project, and most regarded the difficulties as lessons learned (“now I know how to speak

louder against the wind,” one laughed).

Overall, the qualitative findings support and enrich the quantitative results. Students not only improved their scores, but they also gained confidence and found new enjoyment in learning English. They attributed their improvement to the method itself – practicing in an authentic context and doing a creative project – rather than to rote study. Both students and teachers perceived the contextual vlogging approach as highly effective and innovative. As a concise illustration, one of the teachers summarized the outcome:

T1: “This approach connected language learning with real-life situations and fostered better engagement and outcomes”

In conclusion, the interview data suggest that the integration of tourist site visits and vlogger-style video creation was well-received by students and teachers. It made the learning process more vibrant and directly addressed the usual pain points (like speaking anxiety and lack of context) in the English classroom. The positive qualitative feedback, coupled with the significant quantitative gains, builds a strong case for the efficacy of this contextual, project-based learning method. In the following section, we discuss these findings in light of existing literature and consider their implications.

The results of this study provide compelling evidence that using local tourist sites as a contextual learning medium, combined with vlogger-style video projects, can significantly enhance students’ English language learning. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings align with and extend insights from prior research, offering several points of discussion regarding why and how this approach was effective, its significance in the Indonesian context, and considerations for future practice.

### ***Effectiveness of contextual learning***

The significant gain in post-test scores ( $M=77.76$ ) compared to pre-test scores

( $M=66.26$ ), with an average improvement of 11.5 points ( $p < .0001$ ), resonates strongly with the principles of CTL (Johnson, 2002, p. 2) and corroborates earlier studies that applied contextual approaches. In our study, students essentially learned English by using it in a real context (the tourist sites) rather than just learning about it abstractly. This is a textbook illustration of the CTL notion that students learn better when they can experience what they are learning, not just know it (Rahman & Ekkayokkaya, 2024; Yusyac et al., 2021). The authentic environment likely provided rich contextual cues that made vocabulary and expressions more memorable – for instance, describing the actual lake or monument they were seeing would reinforce those English terms in a way that rote memorization in class might not. The findings here echo Yusyac et al. (2021)’s results, where a contextual approach led to improvements in speaking skills. However, our approach went a step further by physically taking students to the context (field learning) and thus perhaps created an even more powerful learning experience. The uniformity of improvement across all students (as evidenced by the very small variance in gains) suggests that contextual learning benefited both high achievers and lower achievers; everyone found something concrete to latch onto at the tourist sites that helped their language development.

From a theoretical standpoint, this underscores the value of situated learning – the idea that knowledge is best acquired and more readily applied when learned in the same context in which it will be used (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). By situating English practice in tourist interactions, students could more easily transfer their classroom knowledge to practical use. This likely reduced the common problem where Indonesian students can answer grammar questions on paper but falter when asked to speak; the contextual method gave practice in applying language, thus bridging declarative and procedural knowledge. T1’s observation that the method

‘connects language learning with real life’ and makes it ‘more meaningful’ aligns with CTL literature, which frequently emphasizes meaning making through context (Yusyac et al., 2021) and contextualized tasks in inclusive classrooms for improving participation and retention (Kamarullah, Sarinauli, et al., 2024). The literature review noted Rahman and Ekkayokkaya’s (2024) study where CTL improved writing because topics were tied to students’ experiences.

Besides, this study extends prior work by demonstrating that physical immersion in the context, rather than simulated activities, can lead to uniform improvement across proficiency levels. The minimal variance in score gains suggests that both high- and low-achieving students benefited, corroborating Patton’s (2023, pp. 257-258) assertion that real-world tasks support differentiated engagement.

Thus, our findings generalize this benefit to speaking and integrated skills, specifically when students talked about their local world, their performance and understanding improved. Essentially, the study at hand validates that contextualization is not just an abstract ideal; it has tangible effects on learning outcomes.

### ***Role of vlogger-style video projects***

The incorporation of a vlogging project was another critical factor in the success of the intervention. The project introduced several elements known to enhance language learning: increased speaking practice time, opportunities for self-reflection (students watched and edited their own speech), and a high level of student agency. The statistically significant improvement mirrors result from Andiappan et al. (2022), where a vlogging project led to higher speaking test scores in a similar age group. One reason for such improvements is likely the repetition and rehearsal that video-making entails, where students often practiced their lines multiple times to get a good take. This repetitive practice can lead to greater fluency and accuracy, effectively functioning

like intensive speaking drills, but in a far more engaging format. S2’s testimony that making the video was ‘a fun way’ to use English and it ‘gave her confidence’ highlights how the project transformed practice into play. In line with Fitria (2022), when students perceive a task as fun, their affective barriers drop, and they tend to be willing to speak more and worry less about mistakes. This not only boosts immediate performance but can lead to lasting confidence gains, as seen in our participants who expressed readiness to speak English in real settings after the project.

Motivation is a pivotal factor in language learning success, and this approach appears to have highly motivated students. The novelty of creating a vlog likely tapped into intrinsic motivation; students were excited to create something of their own and to possibly showcase it. Moreover, knowing that their video would have an audience (their classmates, teachers, possibly family or local community via YouTube) added a sense of purpose. This aligns with the concept of audience effect in language learning, where having a real or perceived audience can improve performance and effort. The systematic review by Hassan (2023) noted that both students and teachers have positive attitudes towards vlogging in education, and our study’s qualitative data strongly confirms this for the secondary school EFL context. The interview with the teachers praised the method for enhancing creativity and collaboration, which suggests that teachers saw value beyond language gains. The digital literacy also becomes additional benefits here, where its competency is strongly emphasized in Indonesia’s Merdeka Belajar policy as a must 21st-century competency (Kamarullah, Fadhilah, et al., 2024). The educators here saw holistic student development, which can be very motivating for educators to continue such methods. In other words, the approach not only motivated students, but also impressed teachers, which bodes well for sustainability of this innovation in the curriculum.

***Synergy between context and media***

It is worth noting that while contextual learning and vlogging are each beneficial on their own, their combination in this study likely produced a synergistic effect. The local tourist sites provided content and inspiration for the videos, and the video project provided a vehicle for engaging deeply with that content. If we had only done the tourist visits without the video project, students might have enjoyed the trip but perhaps not reflected as much or practiced speaking extensively (some might have just passively listened to a guide). Conversely, had we done a video project without a novel context (say, making videos in the classroom about generic topics), it might not have been as exciting or authentic. By intertwining the two, we ensured that students were active at the tourist sites (because they had a mission to film) and that their videos were grounded in a tangible reality (which made the content richer and more meaningful). This synergy is evident in S1's remark, where she explicitly connects enjoyment, practice, and the real context. In the literature, this could be viewed through the lens of task-based language teaching; we gave students a complex task (making a vlog) that naturally required language use and provided a real-world context to facilitate that task. Task-based learning research (e.g., Willis, 1996, pp. 47-52) indicates that well-designed tasks lead to increased language production and learning, especially when tasks are authentic and have a clear outcome, both of which were true in our case.

***Implications for EFL teaching in Indonesia***

The success of this approach carries important implications for EFL teaching in Indonesia, especially for secondary education. First, it demonstrates that even within the constraints of school (and a national curriculum), there is room for creative methodologies that go beyond textbooks and teacher-centric methods. The approach aligns well with Indonesia's current educational direction, which encourages Merdeka Belajar,

giving teachers flexibility to innovate and contextualize learning. By using local cultural and geographic assets, teachers can design lessons that fulfill curriculum goals (e.g., descriptive text, speaking competence) in ways that are far more engaging than rote learning. Our study specifically shows that doing so not only engages students but measurably improves their English skills.

Second, incorporating digital projects like vlogs addresses multiple needs: the need for integrating technology in education, the need to improve students' communicative competence, and the need to foster skills like creativity and collaboration. Indonesia has been pushing for improved digital literacy in students; a project like this naturally weaves digital literacy into language learning. Students learned basic filming and editing skills that are increasingly relevant today while practicing English. It is a more efficient and holistic use of instructional time compared to teaching those skills separately. Moreover, given the rise of tourism in many Indonesian regions, the approach is contextually relevant; students see a direct connection between learning English and potentially using it in the local tourism industry or to promote their culture. This can be especially motivating in areas where tourism is a key part of the economy, where students realize English is not just a school subject, but a tool that could empower them to participate in their community's development (e.g., as guides, entrepreneurs, or simply hospitable locals). In Central Aceh, for instance, being able to present Takengon in English could eventually attract more visitors or at least make students proud ambassadors of their heritage. This aligns with findings by Pratama and Sumardi (2022) that using local content can make learning more successful; we would add it also makes learning more purposeful.

***Challenges and limitations***

While the results are overwhelmingly positive, it is important to consider the challenges and limitations. The qualitative

data did mention some challenges such as technical issues and initial student anxiety. These are fairly typical when introducing a new method. With more experience and possibly better resources (e.g., external microphones, more time for editing training), these issues can be mitigated. Another consideration is that our sample was relatively small (one class of 34 students) and specific to a single school and region. The fact that they were high-achieving students might mean they were particularly primed to take advantage of this intervention (they might be more self-motivated or have better baseline English). Future research should explore how this approach works with average or below-average students, or in schools with fewer resources. We suspect that the method would still be beneficial, but the magnitude of improvement might differ. Moreover, since there was no control group in our design, one could argue that some of the improvements could be due to general maturity or test familiarity. We tried to minimize that by using a near-identical pre/post format and short interval, but nonetheless, the one-group design means we must be cautious about attributing all gains solely to the intervention. However, given the size of the effect and the short timeframe, it is unlikely that external factors explain it as typical learning progress over a month without intervention would not yield such jumps.

## Conclusion

This research contributes to the literature and practice of English language teaching in several ways. Firstly, it provides empirical evidence from a mixed-methods study in an Indonesian high school context that combining place-based learning with video projects yields significant improvements in language outcomes. While previous studies have separately shown the benefits of contextual learning, local content, or vlogging, this study integrates all three, reflecting a novel pedagogical design. The findings suggest a synergistic effect: the local context gave rich

content for the vlog, and the vlog task in turn made students interact deeply with the local context, resulting in high engagement and learning. Secondly, the study highlights how utilizing local tourist sites for education can instill pride and a sense of ownership in students. They effectively became young ambassadors of their culture and region, using English to showcase it. This adds a dimension of intercultural learning and identity affirmation to language education, an area not often quantified in test scores but important for holistic education. Thirdly, the research aligns with Indonesia's educational reform goals (such as strengthening character education and 21st-century skills) by showing a practical method to achieve them within the English curriculum. The approach can serve as a model for schools across Indonesia (especially those in areas with distinctive local attractions) and indeed for EFL contexts in other countries that making language learning contextual and student-centered is a priority.

Based on the results, English teachers and curriculum developers should consider incorporating contextual projects like this into their programs. Even if organizing field visits is challenging, teachers can start small, to illustrate, by having students make English videos about school facilities or local neighborhoods as a class project. Key components to retain would be student choice, real-world audience (even if just peers), and links to real places or community topics. Schools could collaborate with local tourism boards or cultural centers to facilitate student projects, mutually benefiting education and community promotion. It's also recommended that teachers be given professional development on guiding project-based learning and basic video production skills, as these can greatly enhance the execution of such projects.

While the outcomes are positive, this study was limited to one class in one school. Future research could expand the sample and include control groups to further validate the effectiveness of the approach. Longitudinal

studies could examine whether the gains in proficiency and confidence are sustained over time. It would also be valuable to explore how this approach can be adapted for other language skills (e.g., reading or listening – perhaps creating audio podcasts as an analog for listening) or for different proficiency levels (would beginner students benefit similarly, or do they need some base proficiency first?). Additionally, researchers might investigate the impact on students' communicative competence more deeply. For instance, does interacting at tourist sites improve pragmatic skills like initiating conversations or adapting language to different audiences?

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