

**Improving Regional Language Comprehension among Eighth-Grade
Students at Telkom Junior High School Makassar**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to improve students' understanding of the Makassar local language among eighth-grade students at SMP Telkom Makassar. The research employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. The participants consisted of seven Grade VIII classes involving 183 students. The research instrument was a multiple-choice test administered before and after the instructional intervention. Data were analyzed descriptively and using normalized gain (g) based on Hake's formula. The results show that the average pre-test scores ranged from 35.58 to 43.27 and increased to 62.24–83.52 in the post-test. The g -Hake analysis indicates that six classes achieved a medium improvement category ($g = 0.342$ – 0.557), while one class reached a high category ($g = 0.734$), with an overall weighted g of 0.513. These findings indicate that Makassar language instruction is effective in improving students' understanding and has potential to strengthen linguistic competence and preserve local culture in schools.

Keywords: Local Language Learning; Language; Learning Outcomes; Normalized Gain; Junior High School

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the fundamental elements in the formation of a nation's culture and identity. Through language, social values, local knowledge, and cultural heritage can be transmitted from one generation to the next. Indonesia, as an archipelagic country, possesses extremely rich cultural diversity, reflected in the existence of hundreds of ethnic groups and regional languages spread across the archipelago. Indonesia has more than 300 ethnic groups and over 700 regional languages, making it one of the countries with the highest levels of cultural diversity. This diversity is not merely a demographic fact but also serves as social and cultural capital that strengthens national identity (Sugianto, 2023). In line with this, it has been stated that "linguistic and cultural diversity in Indonesia is a great blessing" that must be preserved through education and character-building values (Peter & Simatupang, 2022).

Along with the development of time and social dynamics, the use of regional languages among the younger generation shows a worrying trend. Many young speakers are gradually abandoning regional languages in their daily interactions. Kusumawati (2024) reports that regional languages are increasingly eroded due to the dominance of national and foreign languages and the declining appreciation of mother tongues among youth. Aulia et al. (2023) also found a decrease in regional language use in social interactions, especially in cultural literacy contexts. Nurhidayat (2025) further explains that many adolescents perceive regional languages as old-fashioned, preferring Indonesian or foreign languages instead. Globalization and modernization accelerate this language shift, causing regional languages to appear less frequently in public and peer communication.

In South Sulawesi, Bugis and Makassar function as major regional languages with strong cultural and social roles. However, despite their continued use, there are signs of declining intensity and formality among younger generations, especially students. Educational institutions therefore hold a strategic role in preventing further language shift by strengthening regional language competence and awareness. Preliminary observations at Telkom Junior High School Makassar reveal that although Makassar language is taught as a local content subject, many students are not able to use it fluently. Regional languages are rarely practiced at home, and students often perceive the subject as difficult and less engaging compared to other subjects. Some students also lack sufficient exposure during elementary education. These conditions indicate a gap between curriculum goals and classroom realities, highlighting the need for more effective, contextual, and engaging learning approaches.

Based on this situation, this study aims to improve students' understanding of the Makassar language through learning strategies that emphasize active participation and cultural relevance. The findings are expected to contribute to the development

of more effective regional language instruction and strengthen students' cultural identity in the face of globalization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have documented the dynamics of regional language use in South Sulawesi. Fadli and Fitrahwahyudi (2019) found that Bugis and Makassar coexist geographically in Maros Regency, with varying dominance across districts. Kaharuddin et al. (2024) reported lexical shifts in Bugis due to the influence of national and foreign languages in digital communication. Mustary et al. (2018) observed frequent code-mixing and code-switching in Makassar usage within school settings, indicating reduced use of pure forms in formal education. Rahim et al. (2025) also revealed generational differences, where younger speakers prefer Indonesian in public spaces while older generations maintain Makassar in family interactions. These findings suggest that although regional languages remain active, their functional strength among youth is weakening.

Formal education plays a crucial role in preserving regional languages. Saleh et al. (2023) demonstrated that integrating local culture into Indonesian language instruction enhances students' cultural understanding and regional identity. Saleh et al. (2024) further showed that interactive digital media using Lontara script improves engagement and conceptual understanding. Agung et al. (2022) found that multimedia-based multilingual learning models increase motivation and support the revitalization of endangered regional languages. These studies confirm that instructional design strongly influences students' language attitudes and competence.

The relevance of culturally contextual learning has also been supported by several studies. Gultom et al. (2025) reported that regional language use in schools creates a more comfortable learning environment and increases student participation. Alaudin and Nurjanah (2024) found that local wisdom-based learning models improve motivation and comprehension. Saputra (2025) emphasized that integrating local values strengthens students' positive attitudes toward regional languages and connects linguistic learning with social identity. Apriyani et al. (2022) further confirmed that folklore-based contextual learning fosters positive attitudes and deeper understanding. Overall, previous research highlights the importance of interactive, contextual, and culturally grounded learning strategies in maintaining regional language vitality. However, limited studies specifically focus on classroom implementation in junior high school contexts in Makassar with direct intervention models. This gap supports the need for the present study to explore practical strategies that improve students' Makassar language comprehension while reinforcing cultural identity.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental method, specifically a pre-experimental design in the form of a one-group pretest–posttest design. This design was selected to measure changes in students' understanding of regional languages after the implementation of a learning intervention without involving a control group. Such a design is commonly used in educational research to directly assess the effectiveness of instructional treatment within a single group of participants (Kurnianto et al., 2024). The study was conducted at Telkom Junior High School Makassar. The research subjects were eighth-grade students consisting of seven classes, namely VIII A, VIII B, VIII C, VIII F, VIII G, VIII H, and VIII I, with a total of approximately 183 students. The selection of eighth-grade students was based on pedagogical considerations. Seventh-grade students are still in the transition phase from elementary to junior high school, while ninth-grade students are focused on final examination preparation, which may divide their learning attention. Therefore, eighth-grade students were considered the most appropriate participants. The research was carried out from October 6 to October 24, 2025.

Instrument and Procedure

The research instrument was an objective test consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions designed to measure students' understanding of the Makassar regional language. Each item was assigned a weight of 5 points, resulting in a maximum score of 100. The test was administered twice: a pre-test to measure students' initial ability and a post-test to assess students' understanding after the learning intervention. The learning intervention consisted of instructional explanations of regional language materials covering linguistic aspects and the reinforcement of local cultural values relevant to students' daily lives (Triastuti et al., 2024). The research procedure began with preliminary observations of regional language learning implementation at the school, followed by brief interviews with the regional language teacher to obtain an overview of students' initial understanding. Subsequently, the pre-test was administered to students in each class. The researcher then conducted the learning activities according to the planned instructional design. After all instructional materials had been delivered, students were given a post-test with questions equivalent in form and difficulty level to those used in the pre-test. Only data from students who completed both the pre-test and post-test were included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive quantitative methods. The analysis included calculating the mean scores and standard deviations of pre-test and post-test results for each class. To measure improvement in students' understanding proportionally, normalized gain (g) analysis based on Hake's formula was applied. Normalized gain represents the ratio between the difference between post-test and pre-test scores and the difference between the maximum possible score and the pre-

test score (Widhowati et al., 2022). The normalized gain was calculated using the following formula:

$$g = \frac{(Post - Pre)}{(100 - Pre)}$$

where *Pre* and *Post* represent the mean scores before and after the intervention on a scale of 0–100. The interpretation of *g* values followed Hake's classification: $g < 0.3$ (low), $0.3 \leq g < 0.7$ (moderate), and $g \geq 0.7$ (high) (Hake, 1998). This method was selected because it controls for differences in initial ability and provides a relative measure of learning effectiveness across groups.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the pre-test and post-test analyses across the seven eighth-grade classes at Telkom Junior High School Makassar indicate an improvement in students' understanding of the regional language following the implementation of the learning intervention. Descriptively, the mean pre-test scores ranged from 35.58 to 43.27, indicating that students' initial proficiency levels were generally low to moderate. After the instructional intervention, the mean post-test scores increased substantially, ranging from 62.24 to 83.52. The calculation of normalized gain (*g*) based on Hake's formula revealed that six classes achieved a moderate level of improvement, with *g* values ranging from 0.342 to 0.541, while one class—Class VIII H—reached a high level of improvement with a *g* value of 0.734. Overall, the weighted normalized gain value was 0.513, indicating that the implemented regional language instruction demonstrated moderate effectiveness according to Hake's classification.

These normalized gain values not only represent an improvement in learning outcomes but also illustrate the proportion of learning potential successfully achieved by students. The dominance of the moderate improvement category suggests that most students were able to utilize more than half of their available learning potential. In other words, although the learning intervention did not fully maximize achievement, it produced a meaningful instructional impact. This finding aligns with the nature of regional language learning, which typically requires a relatively extended period for students to adapt to vocabulary, grammatical structures, and the associated cultural contexts.

The predominance of moderate improvement across six classes—VIII A ($g = 0.541$), VIII B ($g = 0.557$), VIII C ($g = 0.538$), VIII F ($g = 0.375$), VIII G ($g = 0.375$), and VIII I ($g = 0.342$)—can be attributed to several factors. First, variations in students' initial abilities, as reflected in differing pre-test scores, influenced the pace and depth of content mastery. Second, the relatively short duration of the instructional intervention—less than one month—limited opportunities for repeated reinforcement of the material. Third, classroom dynamics, including student motivation, participation levels, and responsiveness to instructional methods, also

affected learning outcomes. This pattern indicates that moderate improvement is a realistic outcome within the context of short-term instructional interventions.

Class VIII H demonstrated the most notable achievement, with a normalized gain value of 0.734, placing it in the high improvement category. This value indicates that more than 70% of students' potential learning gains were realized through the implemented instruction. This improvement is also reflected in the class's mean post-test score of 83.52, the highest among all classes. These results suggest that the learning process in this class was particularly effective, both in terms of instructional delivery and student engagement. A conducive classroom environment, high learning motivation, and the possible application of contextual learning strategies likely contributed to this outcome.

Conversely, Class VIII I ($g = 0.342$) and Classes VIII F and VIII G (each with $g = 0.375$) demonstrated gains at the lower threshold of the moderate category. Nevertheless, these values still indicate that the learning intervention had a positive effect on students' understanding. The relatively lower gain values compared to other classes may be attributed to factors such as heterogeneity in students' initial abilities, inconsistencies in attendance between the pre-test and post-test, and varying levels of active participation during the learning process. Additionally, the mean post-test scores in these classes, which ranged from 62.24 to 62.70, indicate that students' understanding improved, although it had not yet reached an optimal level.

When examined in terms of the mean score differences between pre-test and post-test, all classes showed substantial improvement. For instance, Class VIII A experienced a mean increase of 41.92 points (from 35.58 to 77.50), while Class VIII H showed an increase of 45.37 points (from 38.15 to 83.52). These improvements indicate that regional language instruction had not only statistical significance but also pedagogical relevance, as it successfully shifted students' comprehension levels from low to moderate or high within a relatively short period. The number of students who demonstrated improved scores further supports this finding. In most classes, nearly all students showed improvement, with Classes VIII B and VIII H recording improvement among all students. This suggests that the instructional intervention was not only effective for a small subset of students but produced a relatively even impact across learners. This finding is particularly important in the context of regional language instruction, which is often perceived by students as difficult and less engaging.

The findings of this study confirm that regional language instruction can yield positive outcomes when it is systematically designed and implemented. Although students attend a modern school environment where Indonesian and foreign languages are more frequently used, the data indicate that regional languages can still be effectively understood and learned. The moderate-to-high Hake normalized gain values suggest that regional languages remain relevant subjects with strong potential to enhance students' linguistic competence as well as their cultural

awareness. These results also imply that the effectiveness of regional language instruction can be further optimized. Classes with lower moderate gain values indicate the need for strengthened instructional strategies, such as increasing oral activities, utilizing audiovisual media, or integrating local historical and cultural elements. With more varied and sustained instructional approaches, students' comprehension levels are expected to reach the high category more evenly across classes.

The role of teachers in regional language instruction is a critical factor in determining learning success. Teachers serve not only as content deliverers but also as facilitators who create a supportive and engaging learning environment. In this study, the provision of direct explanations following the pre-test allowed students to identify their initial weaknesses and gain more focused understanding, as reflected in the improved post-test scores across nearly all classes. In addition to teacher roles, the school environment also influenced students' improvement in regional language comprehension. As a modern institution, Telkom Junior High School Makassar serves students with diverse language backgrounds, many of whom are more accustomed to using Indonesian or foreign languages in daily life. While this condition presents challenges for regional language instruction, the findings demonstrate that with appropriate instructional approaches, regional languages can still be effectively learned even when they are not intensively used in students' home environments.

These findings further emphasize the importance of regional language instruction as part of efforts to preserve local culture. The low pre-test scores indicate limited initial proficiency, which may reflect declining use of regional languages in daily life. Consequently, schools play a strategic role in fostering renewed awareness and competence in regional languages among younger generations. The improved post-test results demonstrate that schools can serve as effective spaces for sustaining regional languages. Differences in improvement levels across classes suggest that regional language instruction must be adapted to students' characteristics. While some classes showed substantial gains, others demonstrated more moderate improvement, underscoring that no single instructional strategy is equally effective for all learner groups. Therefore, instructional innovation and methodological variation are necessary to ensure optimal learning outcomes for all students.

The use of multiple-choice tests as research instruments in this study proved effective in quantitatively measuring improvements in students' understanding. This instrument enabled objective comparisons between students' initial and final abilities, while score conversion to a 0–100 scale facilitated data analysis and interpretation. Overall, the data provide a clear depiction of the effectiveness of the implemented regional language instruction. In summary, the findings indicate that well-planned and systematically implemented regional language learning can significantly improve students' comprehension. The moderate-to-high Hake normalized gain values demonstrate that the instruction promoted conceptual understanding rather than mere repetition of material. This serves as evidence that

regional languages remain relevant subjects to be taught in schools, including modern educational settings facing the challenges of globalization. Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that regional language instruction plays a vital role in enhancing students' linguistic competence as well as their cultural awareness. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for schools and educators in continuing to develop innovative and contextualized regional language instruction. In this way, regional languages can be understood not merely as formal school subjects, but as integral components of students' cultural identity that must be preserved and sustained.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion presented, it can be concluded that the Makassar regional language instruction implemented for eighth-grade students at Telkom Junior High School Makassar was able to significantly improve students' understanding. This improvement is evident from the comparison between pre-test and post-test scores across all classes involved in the study, where the mean post-test scores showed a substantial increase compared to students' initial abilities. The normalized gain (g) analysis indicated that six out of seven classes achieved a moderate level of improvement, while one class reached a high improvement category. The overall weighted Hake normalized gain value, which falls within the moderate category, suggests that the instructional intervention effectively utilized students' potential for improvement. These findings demonstrate that regional language learning, even when implemented over a relatively short period, can produce meaningful pedagogical impacts. The results further confirm that regional language instruction remains relevant and can be effectively applied in modern school settings characterized by diverse language backgrounds. Through structured and contextualized learning approaches, students not only improved their linguistic understanding but also developed greater awareness of the local cultural values embedded in the regional language. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that regional language instruction in schools continue to be developed through the implementation of more varied and sustainable teaching methods. The use of audiovisual media, practice-based language activities, and the contextual integration of local cultural elements may serve as effective alternatives to enhance learning effectiveness and to promote more evenly distributed high-level learning gains. For future researchers, it is recommended to employ research designs that include control groups or longer intervention durations in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of regional language instruction. Additionally, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches is suggested to allow deeper exploration of students' attitudes, motivation, and perceptions toward regional language learning.

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