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The Development of Reading Materials Based on Local Wisdom and Socio-Cultural Contexts for English Education Students in Indonesia and Southeast Asia

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Abstract: The challenges faced by English Education students in comprehending academic texts highlight a gap between the reading skills expected in higher education and students' actual literacy competencies. To address this issue, this study aimed to develop and evaluate English reading materials that integrate local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts from Indonesia and Southeast Asia to support students' reading literacy development. The study employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach adapted from the Graves model, covering needs analysis, material design, expert validation, and effectiveness testing. Data were gathered through questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, expert validation sheets, and reading comprehension tests. Participants included 22 students in a limited trial and 46 third-semester students in the main field test at the University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. The developed materials received a high validation score. The statistical analysis also indicated a significant relationship between using the materials and students' reading comprehension performance. In addition, incorporating local wisdom and socio-cultural themes gave students opportunities to connect English texts to familiar cultural experiences, potentially supporting their cultural awareness and engagement in learning. These findings suggest that culturally responsive reading materials offer a promising approach to contextualized English instruction in higher education. The study contributes a practical model for developing reading materials that connect language learning with local and regional cultural contexts, with potential relevance for English language education across Southeast Asia.

Keywords: *english language education; local wisdom; reading literacy; socio-cultural*

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INTRODUCTION

Within the national education system, English is regarded as a crucial asset for enhancing students' global competitiveness, academic literacy, and workforce readiness. As an international language widely used in science, technology, and cross-border communication, English provides students with access to knowledge and enables them to participate in global academic discourse (Muhartoyo & Aryusmar, 2022; Mehta et al., 2021). Ideally, English instruction at every level, from primary school to higher education, is progressive and continuous, ensuring students develop comprehensive communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Aydoğan and Akbarov, 2014; Barboza et al., 2022; Yunus et al., 2020). Through this process, students learn English not merely as a linguistic system, but also as a means to understand diverse cultural perspectives and global knowledge.

At the elementary level, English learning is meant to lay the groundwork for language literacy and spark students' interest in learning foreign languages. In secondary school, students are expected to start understanding academic texts, think critically, and use English to access knowledge and information (Halbach, 2022; Shelton & Wexler, 2022). At the university level, especially in English Language Education programs, students are expected to reach a more advanced level of academic literacy. This includes reading and analyzing complex texts related to academic discourse, professional settings, and socio-cultural issues. These expectations are increasingly emphasized in current higher education policies such as Independent Learning–Independent Campus and Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which center on measurable learning outcomes, student-centered learning, and graduates who can compete globally (Joseph et al., 2024; Kumaravel et al., 2024; Wilbraham et al., 2024).

Although many studies have developed English reading materials based on local wisdom, most existing research has been conducted in primary and secondary school settings. These studies mainly focus on boosting students' reading motivation, cultural awareness, and basic reading comprehension. Earlier work also tends to treat local wisdom as cultural content added to materials rather than a pedagogical framework for building higher-order academic literacy skills. As a result, little is known about how local wisdom-based reading materials

can help university students, especially those in English Language Education programs, read critically, interpret texts analytically, think reflectively, and engage with academic discourse.

In addition, previous studies have largely focused on incorporating folklore, local traditions, and indigenous narratives into learning materials. While these efforts are valuable in preserving cultural heritage, they have not always addressed how local cultural knowledge can be meaningfully connected to the demands of contemporary higher education, particularly in developing global competence, academic literacy, and professional readiness. This gap highlights the need to better connect culturally responsive pedagogy to the broader goals of English language education in an increasingly interconnected world. Another limitation is that many studies developing local wisdom-based learning materials have paid limited attention to aligning their instructional designs with current higher education frameworks, including Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and student-centered learning. Consequently, it remains unclear how culturally grounded reading materials can be designed and implemented to preserve local cultural relevance while also achieving measurable learning outcomes and strengthening students' literacy competencies for global engagement. Closing this gap is important for developing English reading materials that reflect students' cultural backgrounds and prepare them to participate more confidently in academic and professional contexts.

To address these gaps, this study aims to develop English reading materials for students in an English Language Education program, grounded in local wisdom. Rather than treating local wisdom simply as a way to represent cultural traditions, this study explores its potential as a meaningful learning resource that can help students develop academic literacy, engage critically with texts, and connect their learning to the cultural and social contexts they encounter in everyday life. The materials integrate culturally responsive pedagogy with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and contemporary approaches to literacy-oriented English instruction. Through this integration, the study demonstrates how locally grounded content can remain relevant to students' cultural experiences while supporting clearly defined learning outcomes and broader academic competencies. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the development of English reading materials that bridge local cultural knowledge and the demands of higher education, offering both theoretical insights into culturally responsive materials development and practical guidance for English language teaching.

Despite the growing emphasis on academic literacy in English language education, many students still struggle to understand complex English texts, particularly those that require higher-order thinking and the ability to interpret meaning within specific contexts (Kaur, 2013; Oktavianti et al., 2026). These challenges may be partly attributed to the limited availability of reading materials that connect English language learning with students' socio-cultural backgrounds and everyday experiences. In many cases, teaching materials rely on generalized or predominantly Western-oriented contexts that may not fully reflect the cultural realities of students in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia (Muslim, 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). When students encounter texts that feel distant from their own experiences, connecting new information to their existing knowledge becomes more challenging. This situation highlights the importance of developing reading materials that bridge global English learning objectives with locally meaningful contexts, enabling students to engage more deeply with texts while strengthening their comprehension and critical thinking skills.

Bringing local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts into English learning materials offers a meaningful way to connect language learning with students' everyday experiences. Local wisdom encompasses the values, traditions, and practices that shape how people live and interact within their communities, while socio-cultural contexts help learners understand how language is used to communicate meaning in real-life situations (Marra, 2014; Sulkipani et al., 2023). When these elements are incorporated into reading materials, students can draw on what they already know about their own culture to make sense of new ideas and unfamiliar texts. This connection can make reading more meaningful while also encouraging students to appreciate their cultural heritage and develop a stronger sense of identity as they learn English. In culturally diverse regions such as Indonesia and Southeast Asia, this approach matters because it keeps English learning connected to students' local realities without losing sight of the broader communication and literacy skills they need to engage with the wider world.

Despite these efforts, reading literacy remains a challenge in Indonesia. Results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have consistently highlighted the difficulties Indonesian students face in developing reading literacy compared with students in many other participating countries. These challenges raise concerns about students' ability to understand complex texts, interpret information, and engage critically with written content, including materials encountered in English language learning (Khine et al., 2024). The problem goes beyond recognizing vocabulary or understanding sentence structures. Students also need to identify key arguments, interpret implied meanings, and connect text information to the social and cultural contexts in which it is produced and understood (Castillo & Castañeda, 2023; Olifant & Boakye, 2022). These difficulties point to the need for English reading instruction that moves beyond basic comprehension and gives students more opportunities to develop critical thinking and interpret texts in meaningful contexts. One factor that may contribute to these challenges is the limited availability of reading materials that connect English language

learning with students' own cultural backgrounds and everyday experiences. In higher education, some English learning resources continue to draw heavily on global or Western-oriented contexts that may feel distant from the realities students encounter in their local communities (Dziuba et al., 2025). When a text's topics and examples are unfamiliar, students may struggle to connect new information to what they already know, making it harder to engage with the text and build meaningful understanding. This highlights the importance of developing reading materials that are not only linguistically appropriate but also culturally relevant to learners. In diverse societies such as Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia, incorporating local wisdom and socio-cultural experiences into English reading materials can make learning more relevant to students' lives while supporting reading comprehension, critical engagement, and cultural awareness.

Although culturally responsive teaching has received increasing attention in language education, research specifically examining the development of local wisdom-based reading materials for students in English Language Education programs remains relatively limited. Previous studies have explored authentic materials, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and culturally responsive pedagogy to support language learning, but they often discuss and implement these approaches separately (Egorova, 2021; Gabdullina et al., 2024). As a result, a more systematic approach is still needed to design reading materials that integrate local cultural knowledge, students' socio-cultural experiences, and the learning objectives of English language education. Another concern is that much of the existing literature describes the potential or relevance of culturally grounded learning rather than empirically examining its outcomes. Consequently, further research is needed to understand how to develop and evaluate locally relevant reading materials, particularly their contribution to students' reading comprehension, critical engagement with texts, and broader literacy development.

These gaps point to the need for research that goes beyond discussing the importance of local wisdom in English language learning and examines how it can be translated into meaningful, contextually relevant reading materials. In a culturally diverse country such as Indonesia, and across Southeast Asia more broadly, such materials need to reflect learners' socio-cultural experiences while supporting the development of academic literacy. By connecting reading content with familiar cultural contexts, these materials may encourage students to engage more actively with texts, develop a deeper appreciation of their cultural heritage, and interpret textual meaning more critically. Building on this perspective, the present study aims to develop and evaluate English reading materials grounded in local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts for students in English Language Education programs. Through this process, the study seeks to provide empirical insights into developing culturally responsive reading materials and their potential contribution to more meaningful English language learning in higher education. The development of previous research and the gap addressed by the present study are illustrated in the following figure.

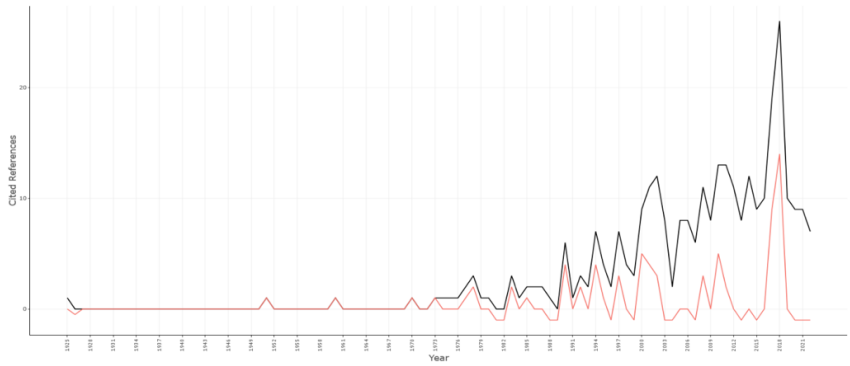


Figure 1. Reference Spectroscopy

Developing reading materials that draw on local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts offers a meaningful way to support the development of academic literacy among English Education students. When reading materials reflect contexts students can relate to, they give students more opportunities to connect new information to their existing knowledge, engage critically with texts, and explore how language interacts with culture and society (Sarwari & Kakar, 2023). This approach also aligns with contemporary perspectives on language education, which emphasize culturally responsive teaching and learning that connect classroom activities to learners' social and cultural experiences. Building on these perspectives, the present study aims to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of English reading materials grounded in local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts for students in English Language Education programs. With a particular focus on Indonesia and its broader Southeast Asian context, the study seeks to explore how culturally relevant reading materials can support meaningful language learning while strengthening students' academic skills (Ferdiansyah et al., 2023; Liao & Huang, 2022; Pathomchaiwat & Thongrin, 2024, 2025; Rattanawong & Thongrin, 2023; Ruday, 2018).

Similar challenges also appear in higher education, where students are expected to engage with increasingly complex academic and professional texts. Internal survey findings and competency assessment

results suggest that many students still struggle to interpret these texts analytically (Kaur, 2013). Rather than examining arguments, connecting ideas across a text, or evaluating the information presented, students often rely on more basic reading strategies, such as identifying literal meanings and locating main ideas. Although these strategies are useful, they may not be sufficient for the deeper analysis, synthesis, and critical reflection required in academic settings (Allen & McNamara, 2020; Jamrus, 2023). This situation points to a gap between the literacy skills expected of university students and the reading abilities they demonstrate in practice. Closing this gap requires learning materials that go beyond basic comprehension exercises and give students meaningful opportunities to interpret texts, examine ideas critically, and connect textual information to relevant social and cultural contexts (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025; Andrianatos, 2019; Muhria et al., 2025).

Taken together, these challenges reveal a gap between the reading skills students are expected to develop and the abilities they demonstrate in practice. At the elementary and secondary levels, English instruction may place considerable emphasis on vocabulary memorization and answering questions, leaving students with fewer opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills and interpret language in meaningful contexts (Dorgham & Obiad, 2025; Miedijensky et al., 2021). These challenges can continue into higher education, where English Education students are expected to engage with more demanding academic and professional texts. At this stage, difficulties may include understanding specialized vocabulary, selecting effective reading strategies, and connecting global content to their own socio-cultural experiences (Mustafa et al., 2022; Shen, 2013). However, critically reading and interpreting information in context is essential for students preparing to become English teachers, researchers, translators, or professionals in fields such as tourism and international business (Pérez-Márquez et al., 2009; Spirovska, 2022). These expectations grow even more significant as higher education institutions are increasingly called upon to prepare graduates to meet workplace demands and participate meaningfully in an interconnected global society (Lunn, 2008). This situation underscores the need for English learning materials that move beyond basic language exercises and help students develop the critical, contextual, and transferable reading skills required for their future academic and professional roles.

Previous studies have explored a range of approaches to improving students' English reading skills, reflecting the growing interest in making reading instruction more engaging and effective (Singh, 2019). These approaches include project-based learning, flipped classrooms, digital learning tools such as augmented reality and webtoons, strategies for developing critical reading, and the use of local cultural contexts in learning materials (Czok et al., 2023). Other research has also highlighted the value of connecting learning activities to meaningful, familiar contexts to encourage student engagement with texts and support reading comprehension (Krause et al., 2016). Despite these developments, less attention has been given to the systematic development of English reading materials that reflect workplace situations and address students' future professional needs (Foster, 2017; Main et al., 2020). Much existing research focuses on instructional strategies or learning media, leaving room to investigate how comprehensive reading materials can be designed, developed, and empirically evaluated to connect language learning with the demands of professional practice (Fiorella & Mayer, 2015). This gap highlights the importance of developing reading materials that help students strengthen their reading skills while preparing them to use English in authentic academic and workplace contexts.

English therefore gives students opportunities to encounter different perspectives, understand diverse experiences, and engage with the broader world through both explicit messages and meanings shaped by social and cultural contexts (Can et al., 2020). Epistemologically, learning to read in English is an active process of constructing meaning. Students must draw on their existing knowledge (Wei, 2025), apply appropriate reading strategies, and critically examine new information to develop a deeper understanding of a text (Herr & Matta, 2025; Orakcı et al., 2021). As Hattan (2024) suggests, effective reading involves more than recognizing words or identifying information; it also requires readers to connect what they already know with new ideas and evaluate the information presented. From an axiological perspective, English education also carries important cultural and ethical values, including openness, respect for differences, and an appreciation of diverse ways of life. These values are particularly relevant in preparing students to participate thoughtfully in an increasingly interconnected world (Shaniga & Ilankumaran, 2024). Taken together, these philosophical perspectives suggest that English reading materials should do more than deliver information or teach language skills. They should also encourage critical reflection, foster cultural understanding, and connect learning with students' individual experiences and wider social needs (Xiao et al., 2025).

Based on the preceding review, this study was initiated to address the gap between expected learning outcomes and the actual conditions of English reading instruction, particularly among students in English Language Education programs. Recent studies indicate that reading instruction in higher education often lacks contextual relevance to learners' socio-cultural environments and professional needs, which limits comprehension and meaningful engagement (Pathomchaiwat & Thongrin, 2025). Moreover, limited integration of local culture in teaching materials reduces students' ability to connect texts to their prior knowledge and cultural identity, weakening reading performance and motivation (Miqawati et al., 2024). In response, this research develops a Workplace Context-Based Reading Teaching Material Model that integrates authentic

professional demands with local cultural values as a bridge to meaning-making. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive development framework: 1) integrating academic and workplace contexts to enhance authenticity and relevance in reading materials; 2) positioning local culture as a central source of meaning construction, aligning with culturally responsive pedagogy; and 3) producing an empirically validated instructional model to improve reading competence significantly. Prior research confirms that culturally contextualized materials not only improve reading comprehension but also foster cultural awareness and identity reflection in EFL learning (Tantri & Santosa, 2024). Therefore, this model is expected to produce innovative teaching materials and provide systematic guidance for curriculum developers and education practitioners.

This study aims to develop workplace context-based English reading materials and evaluate their effectiveness in improving students' reading competence in an English Language Education program. Specifically, it seeks to 1) identify students' needs for reading materials that reflect their academic and future professional contexts; 2) design and develop materials that respond to these needs; and 3) examine the extent to which the developed materials contribute to improvements in students' reading competence. The findings are expected to provide insights into how professionally relevant reading materials can strengthen students' literacy and inform efforts to make English language teaching in higher education more contextual, culturally responsive, and closely connected to the demands of the workplace (Fatiha, 2025). This study recognizes that reading materials for English Language Education students should reflect the realities of their academic experiences and future professional roles rather than rely solely on generic content. When reading texts connect to students' cultural backgrounds and professional aspirations, learning becomes more meaningful because students can better relate what they read to familiar experiences and the competencies they need to develop (Mystakidis, 2021; Obonyo, 2023). Accordingly, this study focuses on developing an integrated approach to reading material design that brings together academic literacy, cultural awareness, and professional relevance. Through this approach, the study aims to support the development of future English language educators who can read critically, reflect on diverse perspectives, and confidently apply their knowledge in educational and broader professional contexts.

METHODS

This research employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach by adapting Kathleen Graves' instructional material development model (Graves, 2008; Prasetia, 2022). The model was selected because it offers a systematic and flexible framework for developing learning materials based on learners' needs and contextual learning environments. The research procedure consisted of four major stages: 1) needs analysis; 2) formulation of learning objectives; 3) design and development of teaching materials; and 4) product validation and effectiveness testing. These stages were adapted to field conditions without changing the essential principles of the original development model. The first stage involved a needs analysis conducted through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires distributed to students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU). The analysis explored students' demographic characteristics, English proficiency levels, reading difficulties, professional learning needs, and expectations regarding innovative reading materials. The findings indicated that students struggled to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, interpret complex sentence structures, and comprehend academic texts in professional contexts.

Furthermore, students expressed a need for culturally relevant, contextually meaningful reading materials. These findings served as the foundation for designing the Reading for Professional Context teaching materials. The second stage focused on formulating instructional objectives based on the needs-analysis results and the learning outcomes outlined in the study program curriculum. The general objective was to improve students' reading skills in professional and academic contexts. Specifically, the materials aimed to enhance students' mastery of professional vocabulary, comprehension of complex sentence structures, ability to identify main ideas and supporting details, and critical reading skills for interpreting English texts (Niswa et al., 2023).

The third stage involved designing and developing the teaching materials. The developed product consisted of professional, context-based reading materials that integrated elements of local wisdom and humor to increase students' engagement and motivation to learn. The materials were designed using communicative language, concise paragraph structures, contextual reading passages, reflective activities, and comprehension exercises. The initial draft was subsequently validated by six experts consisting of two content experts, two instructional material experts, and two language experts. Validation was conducted using a five-point Likert scale instrument evaluating content relevance, presentation, design, readability, and linguistic appropriateness. The team revised the product based on the experts' feedback until it was considered valid and feasible for implementation (Leite et al., 2018; Zamanzadeh et al., 2015).

The fourth stage consisted of product trials and effectiveness testing. The preliminary trial involved 22 students selected through purposive sampling to evaluate material clarity, readability, language comprehensibility, and visual attractiveness. After revision, the effectiveness test was conducted using a one-group pretest–posttest design involving 46 third-semester students of the English Language Education Study

Program at UMSU. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because third-semester students had already completed foundational reading courses and were considered academically suitable for evaluating advanced reading materials in professional contexts. In the effectiveness stage, students completed a reading comprehension pretest before using the developed materials and a posttest after the instructional intervention.

Data were collected through expert validation sheets, student response questionnaires, and reading comprehension tests. Qualitative data obtained from expert comments and student feedback were analyzed descriptively to improve the product design (Flinders & Eisner, 1994). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Prior to conducting the regression analysis, several parametric assumptions were tested, including normality of residuals using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, linearity using linearity analysis, and homoscedasticity using scatterplot analysis. The results indicated that all assumptions were satisfactorily met, allowing the use of simple linear regression. The regression analysis showed a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the developed Reading for Professional Context teaching materials had a positive and significant effect on students' reading skills. If the assumptions had not been fulfilled, non-parametric alternatives would have been considered to ensure the robustness of the findings. Overall, the research procedure was conducted systematically from needs identification to effectiveness testing, ensuring that the developed teaching materials were not only academically valid but also practically applicable and empirically effective in improving students' reading skills in professional English learning contexts (Danielson et al., 2024; Dingle et al., 2011).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The needs analysis revealed that third-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara experience considerable challenges in developing their English reading skills. The results indicate that most students (90%) struggle to understand academic English vocabulary, while 75% report difficulty comprehending complex sentence structures, particularly in analytical and argumentative texts. The initial assessment of students' reading abilities further shows that many students remain at relatively low proficiency levels: 36.36% are categorized as "sufficient," 31.81% fall into the "poor" category, and only a small proportion achieve the "good" category. These findings suggest that previous reading instruction has not yet optimally developed students' reading comprehension competence. Based on the needs analysis results, we developed contextual reading materials by integrating elements of local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts relevant to students' learning environment in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The reading texts were designed to reflect themes related to local cultural values, social traditions, community practices, and regional socio-cultural issues that are familiar to students. Each learning unit was systematically structured to include learning objectives, a contextual introduction related to local cultural themes, the main reading text, comprehension exercises, vocabulary development activities, and reflective learning tasks that encourage students to connect textual content with socio-cultural realities.

The developed materials were subsequently validated by six experts consisting of two subject-matter experts, two teaching material design experts, and two language experts. The validation process used a Likert scale instrument ranging from 1 to 5 and covered four main aspects: content feasibility, language use, presentation, and graphical design. Overall, the validation yielded an average score of 4.25, which falls into the "very good" category. In detail, content feasibility received a high score because the materials were relevant to students' learning needs and aligned with the course learning outcomes. The presentation was systematic and communicative, with a clear instructional structure and a coherent learning flow. The linguistic aspect obtained a very good score on cohesion and coherence indicators (score 5), although the use of idiomatic expressions received a moderate score (3), indicating the need for minor revisions. Meanwhile, the graphical aspect was visually appealing and supported text readability. Based on expert recommendations, the team made several revisions, including simplifying certain idiomatic expressions, adding contextual examples related to local culture, and refining exercise instructions to improve clarity and usability.

Table 1. Summary of Expert Validation Results

Validation Aspect	Average Score	Category	Brief Description
Content Feasibility	4.40	Very Good	The materials were relevant to students' needs and aligned with the course learning outcomes.
Language Use	4.10	Good	Cohesion and coherence were strong, although several idiomatic expressions required simplification.
Presentation	4.30	Very Good	The instructional structure and learning flow were systematic and communicative.
Graphical Design	4.20	Very Good	The visual appearance supported readability and student engagement.
Overall Average	4.25	Very Good	The developed materials were considered feasible and appropriate for implementation.

The validation results in Table 1 indicate that the developed contextual reading materials achieved an overall average score of 4.25, categorized as "very good." Among the evaluated aspects, content feasibility received the highest score because it strongly aligned with students' learning needs and course objectives. The presentation and graphical aspects also received positive feedback because the materials provided a clear instructional flow and a visually supportive layout. Although the language aspect scored well, experts suggested simplifying several idiomatic expressions and improving contextual examples to enhance clarity and accessibility for students. Furthermore, the needs analysis revealed that 90% of students strongly demanded innovative, contextual reading materials relevant to their socio-cultural environment. Students also expected learning resources that are more communicative, less monotonous, and better able to connect English learning with local cultural values and community life. These findings underline the importance of integrating local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts into English reading materials in order to enhance students' engagement and comprehension.

Overall, the reading materials in this study were developed in four stages adapted from the Graves development model: needs analysis, goal setting, product design and development, and effectiveness testing. The needs analysis stage confirmed that most third-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, who are predominantly 19 years old, still demonstrate reading ability levels categorized as sufficient (36.36%) and poor (31.81%). Additionally, most students reported difficulty with vocabulary comprehension (90%) and understanding complex sentence structures (75%). These findings provided a strong empirical basis for designing reading materials that integrate local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts in order to improve students' reading literacy and cultural awareness.

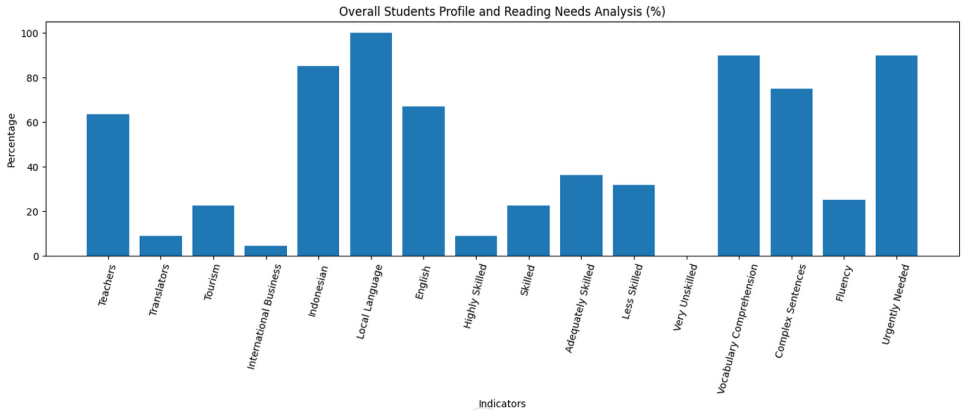


Figure 2. The Result of Research

Based on these findings, the researchers developed teaching materials containing professional texts linked to local North Sumatra culture and presented with humorous elements to increase learning engagement. The developed product was then validated by six experts: two content experts, two teaching materials experts, and two language experts. The validation results showed that the teaching materials obtained an average score of 4.25, qualifying as "very good." In terms of language, indicators such as paragraph cohesion and coherence and text structure received a score of 5, while idiom use received a score of 3 and was recommended for improvement. A limited trial with 22 students showed a very positive response, with an average score of 4.35, categorized as "very good." Students found the teaching materials relevant to their needs, easy to understand, visually appealing, and helpful for understanding professional texts in context. The effectiveness test using linear regression analysis shows that the teaching materials significantly influence students' reading skills. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.789 indicates a strong relationship between using the teaching materials and improved reading skills. The R-squared value of 0.622 indicates that 62.2% of the variation in students' reading abilities is explained by these teaching materials. The ANOVA test shows an F value of 47.374 with a significance of 0.001 (<0.05), indicating that the regression model is statistically significant. The beta coefficient of 0.789 also indicates a strong positive influence on improving reading skills.

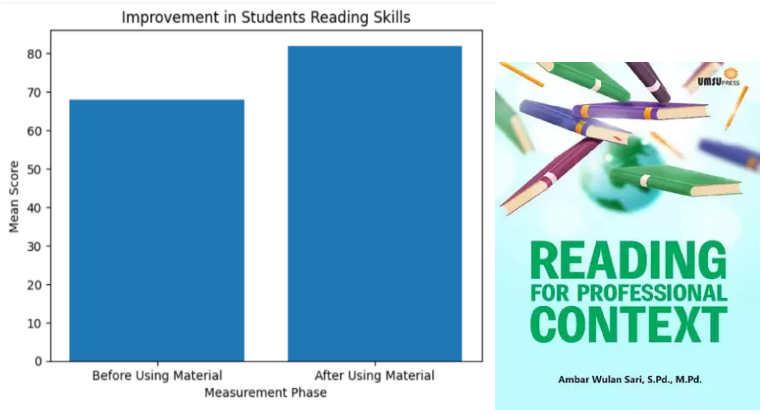


Figure 3. The Result of Data Research

The findings reinforce the importance of developing student-centered learning materials for English reading. Students' difficulties with vocabulary and complex sentence structures indicate that previous learning materials were not fully contextualized or relevant to their experiences. Integrating professional contexts and local culture into learning materials has been shown to improve students' cognitive engagement with the texts they read. This aligns with research showing that integrating local culture into reading instruction can improve students' comprehension and motivation (Azizah et al., 2021; Hadianto et al., 2022). Pedagogically, the developed teaching materials meet the principles of relevance, meaningfulness, and active student engagement. The text's humorous elements create a more relaxed, enjoyable learning environment, reducing reading anxiety and increasing students' attention to the content. This supports findings that using humor in foreign language learning can increase students' cognitive and affective engagement (Neff & Dewaele, 2023). The linear regression results, which showed a 62.2% contribution to reading skill improvement, indicate that the teaching materials substantially improved students' ability to understand professional texts. A significance value of 0.001 confirms that this influence was not a coincidence but had a strong empirical basis. Thus, the development approach, based on needs analysis and expert validation, proved effective in producing learning products with real impact.

From a theoretical perspective, this study's findings reinforce the constructivist view of language learning, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful, contextualized experiences. Integrating local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts into reading materials helps students connect new linguistic input to their existing cultural knowledge, enhancing comprehension (Miqawati et al., 2024). Such contextualization promotes deeper understanding, as learners engage with texts not only at the linguistic level but also within relevant social and cultural frameworks, in line with culturally responsive approaches in language education (Kartini et al., 2025). Furthermore, previous studies highlight that contextualized, locally grounded materials significantly improve reading strategies and learner engagement in EFL contexts (Pathomchaiwat & Thongrin, 2024; Rattanawong & Thongrin, 2023). Empirical findings from the needs analysis show that English Education students still face significant challenges in reading comprehension. About 90% of students reported difficulty understanding academic vocabulary, while 75% struggled to interpret complex sentence structures, particularly in analytical and argumentative texts. These findings underscore the urgent need to develop contextualized, culturally relevant reading materials to better support students' academic literacy and professional competence.

These findings confirm that reading literacy remains a critical challenge in higher education English language learning. Previous studies have similarly reported that limited vocabulary mastery and lack of exposure to contextualized reading materials often hinder the development of higher-order reading comprehension skills (Castillo & Castañeda, 2023; Olifant & Boakye, 2022). As a result, students frequently struggle not only with literal comprehension but also with interpreting implicit meanings, evaluating arguments, and connecting textual information with broader contexts. Another key finding highlights the need for contextualized learning resources. Many English teaching materials used in higher education are still dominated by Western-oriented texts that are not always relevant to students' cultural backgrounds in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. This mismatch may reduce students' engagement with reading activities because they find it difficult to relate the content to their daily experiences. In contrast, reading materials that incorporate local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts provide a more meaningful learning environment by linking language learning with students' lived realities. When texts reflect familiar cultural themes, traditions, and community practices, students tend to engage more actively with the content, which ultimately enhances reading comprehension and motivation.

The expert validation results provide further support for the quality of the developed reading materials. With an average score of 4.25, categorized as "very good," the materials received positive evaluations for content relevance, language accuracy, instructional presentation, and visual design. These findings suggest the

materials align well with the intended learning objectives and meet the assessed quality criteria. They also indicate that incorporating local cultural elements into English reading materials can align with academic standards while offering students more familiar, meaningful contexts. In this way, local culture serves not merely as an additional feature of the materials but as a resource that can help connect language learning with students' everyday experiences. The needs analysis further highlights students' expectations regarding the learning resources they use. About 90% of students preferred learning materials that are more innovative, contextual, and communicative rather than repetitive or monotonous. They also emphasized the importance of connecting English learning with local cultural values and the social realities of their communities. These responses suggest that students value learning resources that reflect their experiences while providing opportunities to use English in meaningful contexts. The findings are consistent with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which recognize learners' cultural backgrounds and prior experiences as important resources for making sense of new knowledge. Taken together, the expert validation and needs analysis provide a rationale for developing English reading materials that combine academic quality with cultural relevance and respond more closely to students' learning needs.

The findings of this study are clearer when viewed in the broader context of English language education in Southeast Asia. Research across the region has increasingly highlighted the value of connecting English learning with students' cultural backgrounds and everyday experiences. Studies conducted in Malaysia, for instance, suggest that reading materials incorporating local narratives and community experiences can help learners interpret texts more meaningfully by connecting new information with what they already know about their social and cultural environments. Similar approaches have been explored in Thailand and the Philippines, where contextualized English instruction has been associated with greater classroom engagement, more active participation, and reduced anxiety when working with English-language texts. Taken together, these findings suggest that local culture need not be treated as an obstacle to English acquisition. Instead, it can serve as a valuable resource for helping students construct meaning and engage more confidently with texts. This study extends this discussion by placing Indonesian cultural knowledge in dialogue with broader Southeast Asian socio-cultural themes. Rather than limiting reading materials to a single local context, this approach gives students opportunities to explore both their immediate cultural surroundings and the broader regional perspectives that shape contemporary social life. This orientation may help learners develop English literacy while becoming more aware of the cultural similarities and differences that shape communication across communities. It also connects culturally responsive teaching to the broader goals of English language education, including critical reading and intercultural understanding.

Second, the findings carry important implications for English language curriculum policy, particularly in higher education and teacher education programs in Indonesia. Current English instruction in many universities still relies heavily on imported textbooks that predominantly reflect Western socio-cultural contexts. While these materials expose students to global perspectives, they may not always align with students' linguistic proficiency, cultural experiences, or cognitive readiness. The findings suggest that curriculum developers should adopt a more balanced approach by integrating local wisdom, national identity, and regional socio-cultural issues into English learning materials. Such integration aligns with contemporary curriculum orientations that emphasize contextual learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the development of global competence rooted in local identity. For teacher education institutions, the study also implies the need to strengthen prospective teachers' competencies in developing contextualized instructional materials. English teachers should not merely use commercially available textbooks, but also act as adaptive curriculum designers who can modify learning resources to match students' cultural backgrounds and educational needs. Therefore, curriculum policy should provide institutional support for locally developed teaching materials, lecturer training, and collaborative material development initiatives. Another challenge relates to balancing local cultural content with global English exposure. An excessive emphasis on local contexts may unintentionally limit students' opportunities to engage with diverse international discourses that are also important for academic English learning. Therefore, contextualized materials should serve as a pedagogical bridge rather than replace global content. Teachers and curriculum developers must balance local relevance with international perspectives.

The development process adopted in this study, based on the Graves instructional design model, also demonstrates the importance of systematic material development. Through needs analysis, goal formulation, material development, and evaluation, the resulting teaching materials align with students' learning needs and course outcomes. This structured approach ensures that the developed materials are pedagogically sound, culturally relevant, and empirically validated. This study's findings contribute to the growing discourse on contextual English language education in multicultural societies. Integrating local wisdom and socio-cultural contexts into reading materials not only enhances students' reading literacy but also promotes cultural awareness and critical thinking. In culturally diverse regions such as Indonesia and Southeast Asia, contextualized English learning materials play an important role in bridging local cultural identity with global communication competencies.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion was that developing the Reading for Professional Context teaching materials significantly improved students' reading skills in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. The teaching materials developed using the Graves model received excellent assessments from material experts, linguists, and design experts, and positive responses from student users. Statistically, the linear regression test showed a positive and significant influence on improving reading skills, with a contribution of 62.2% (R^2 = 0.622) and a significance level of 0.001. This success was supported by teaching materials designed in a professional context, integrating local culture, using humor to increase learning motivation, and adapted to students' needs, cognitive levels, and difficulties, especially in mastering vocabulary and complex sentence structures. Thus, this study confirms that developing teaching materials that are contextual, innovative, and relevant to students' cultural environment effectively improves reading skills in a professional context.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language refinement, grammar correction, and improvements in academic writing clarity and coherence. The author also used Scopus AI to help identify and update relevant scholarly literature and references related to the research topic. Following the use of these tools, the author reviewed, verified, and edited the generated content and reference information as necessary. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, interpretation, and final content of the publication.

CONFLICTING INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Ambar Wulan Sari contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. Muhammad Arifin contributed to the research methodology, validation, resource provision, and critical revision of the manuscript. Tengku Winona Emelia contributed to the investigation, data curation, validation, and review and editing of the manuscript. Selamat Husni Hasibuan contributed to supervision, project administration, and review and editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for their respective contributions.

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