

THE URGENCY OF UTILIZING THE NIAS LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION AS A FORM OF CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION

Darmawan Harefa

Universitas Nias Raya

(darmawanharefa@uniraya.ac.id)

Abstract

This study investigates the urgency of utilizing the Nias language in primary education in South Nias as a form of cultural heritage preservation. The research aims to examine how the integration of the Nias language into classroom instruction contributes to students' understanding, cultural identity, and engagement in learning. A qualitative descriptive method was employed through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving teachers, students, and community members. The findings reveal that the use of the Nias language in learning activities enhances students' comprehension of instructional content, especially in early grades, as it bridges the gap between school knowledge and students' daily experiences. In addition, the integration of local language strengthens students' cultural awareness and pride in their heritage. The study also shows that students become more active, confident, and motivated when learning is delivered using their mother tongue alongside Indonesian. However, challenges such as limited teaching materials and lack of structured policy support still exist. Despite these challenges, the findings emphasize that the Nias language plays a crucial role in both improving educational effectiveness and preserving cultural identity. Therefore, the utilization of the Nias language in primary education is highly urgent and should be systematically supported to ensure sustainable cultural heritage preservation in South Nias.

Keywords: *Nias Language; Primary Education; Cultural Heritage Preservation; Local Wisdom; Ethnolinguistics; Learning Effectiveness; South Nias*

A. Introduction

Language is a fundamental element in education, not only as a medium of communication but also as a carrier of cultural identity and local wisdom (Harefa, D. 2025). In Indonesia, which is characterized by its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, local languages play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage while supporting meaningful learning processes. In regions such as South Nias,

the Nias language represents an essential component of local identity that must be maintained and integrated into educational practices, particularly in primary education.

However, the rapid development of globalization and the dominance of the Indonesian language as the primary medium of instruction have led to a gradual decline in the use of local languages among younger generations. In many elementary schools in South Nias,



students are increasingly unfamiliar with the Nias language in formal learning contexts. This condition raises concerns regarding the sustainability of local cultural heritage, as language is closely tied to traditional knowledge, values, and community practices Cahyani, V. P., & Fadly, D. (2024).

From an educational perspective, the marginalization of local languages also affects the quality of learning Ali, L. U., Suranto, S., & Indrowati, M. (2025). Students often experience difficulties in understanding instructional content delivered solely in the national language, especially in early grades where their cognitive and linguistic development is still closely linked to their mother tongue Fahrudin, A., Riance, A., & Maryam, E. (2026). Therefore, integrating the Nias language into primary education is not only a cultural necessity but also a pedagogical strategy to enhance students' comprehension and engagement.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the concept of ethnoscience, which emphasizes the integration of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices into formal education. Ethnoscience allows students to learn scientific concepts through their local context, making learning more meaningful and relevant. Research shows that ethnoscience-based education contributes significantly to improving scientific literacy, critical thinking, and

contextual understanding among students Fitriah, L., Yulianti, L., Parno, P., Sunaryono, S., & Taufiq, A. (2025). This indicates that local knowledge and language can serve as effective tools in bridging abstract concepts with students' real-life experiences.

In addition, the integration of local wisdom into education aligns with the principles of contextual learning theory, which suggests that knowledge is best understood when it is connected to real-life situations. Studies on local wisdom-based learning demonstrate that incorporating cultural elements into teaching materials can enhance students' cognitive outcomes and motivation. For instance, local wisdom in physics learning has been shown to make abstract scientific concepts more concrete and accessible by linking them to familiar cultural practices Nazhifah, N. (2024).

Another relevant theoretical foundation is constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge based on their prior experiences and cultural background. In this context, the use of the Nias language in primary education can facilitate the construction of knowledge by connecting new information with students' existing linguistic and cultural frameworks Sholahuddin, M. I., & Admoko, S. (2021). This approach is particularly important at the elementary level, where students rely heavily on their native language to interpret and understand new concepts.



Furthermore, several empirical studies highlight the importance of integrating local wisdom into science education. Research indicates that local cultural practices contain embedded scientific concepts that can be utilized as learning resources. For example, traditional activities often involve principles of physics such as force, heat, and motion, which can be explored through an ethnoscience approach to make learning more contextual and meaningful. Similarly, other studies reveal that the incorporation of local wisdom into learning materials can improve students' analytical thinking skills and foster culturally responsive education Kariani, K., Sukroyanti, B. A., & Habiburrahman, L. (2024).

In the context of South Nias, the Nias language is deeply intertwined with traditional practices, oral traditions, and local knowledge systems. However, its use in formal education remains limited Rohman, S. M., & Warliani, R. (2025). This gap highlights the urgency of integrating the Nias language into primary education as a means of preserving cultural heritage while enhancing the quality of learning. By incorporating local language into classroom instruction, students can develop a stronger sense of cultural identity and better understand academic content.

Moreover, the integration of local language supports the development of scientific literacy and 21st-century skills.

Contextual learning approaches that incorporate local wisdom have been shown to improve students' ability to apply scientific knowledge in real-life situations and foster critical thinking skills. This is particularly relevant in primary education, where foundational skills are developed and students begin to form their understanding of the world.

Despite its importance, the implementation of local language-based education faces several challenges, including limited teaching materials, lack of teacher training, and insufficient policy support. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the urgency of utilizing the Nias language in primary education in South Nias as a strategy for cultural preservation and educational improvement.

In conclusion, the integration of the Nias language into primary education is not only essential for preserving cultural heritage but also for enhancing students' learning experiences. By combining linguistic, cultural, and scientific perspectives, this approach offers a holistic framework for education that is both meaningful and sustainable.

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the urgency of utilizing the Nias language in primary education as a form of cultural heritage preservation in South Nias. A qualitative design was considered



appropriate because the study aims to understand social phenomena, cultural practices, and educational experiences from the perspectives of teachers, students, and the local community.

1. Research Design and Theoretical Framework

The research is grounded in the ethnoscience approach, which emphasizes the integration of indigenous knowledge and local culture into formal education. Ethnoscience allows researchers to examine how local language and cultural practices function as learning resources and contribute to knowledge construction. Studies show that ethnoscience-based learning enhances students' contextual understanding and scientific literacy (Ali et al., 2025).

In addition, this study adopts constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge based on their prior experiences and sociocultural context. The use of the Nias language in primary education is expected to support this process by connecting new information with students' existing linguistic and cultural frameworks. Furthermore, the concept of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is applied, emphasizing the importance of incorporating students' cultural identity and language into the learning process to enhance engagement and comprehension (Derlina et al., 2021).

2. Research Location and Participants

The study was conducted in several elementary schools in South Nias Regency. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, including primary school teachers, students, school principals, and community leaders who are knowledgeable about the use of the Nias language in education. A total of 20–30 participants were involved to ensure diverse perspectives.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure credibility and triangulation:

a. In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and community members to explore their perceptions of the importance of using the Nias language in education.

b. Classroom Observations

Observations were carried out to examine how language is used in teaching and learning processes.

c. Document Analysis

Relevant documents such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and curriculum guidelines were analyzed to identify the presence of local language integration.

d. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted to gather collective insights and validate findings from interviews and observations.

3. Data Analysis Techniques



Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps of data reduction, data categorization, and interpretation. The analysis aimed to identify recurring themes related to the role of the Nias language in education, its challenges, and its potential for cultural preservation.

4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation of sources and methods, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the field. These strategies enhance the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the findings.

C. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the utilization of the Nias language in primary education in South Nias plays a significant role in supporting both cultural preservation and the effectiveness of the learning process. The results are derived from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis conducted in several elementary schools (Harefa, D. 2025).

First, the study found that the use of the Nias language enhances students' comprehension, especially in early-grade learning. Students demonstrated a better understanding of instructional content when teachers used the Nias language alongside Bahasa Indonesia. This is because the Nias language functions as a bridge

between students' prior knowledge and new academic concepts. This finding is consistent with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs more effectively when new knowledge is connected to learners' existing cognitive and cultural frameworks.

Second, the results indicate that the integration of the Nias language strengthens students' cultural identity and awareness. Students who were exposed to local language-based learning showed greater appreciation for their cultural heritage (Harefa, D, 2025). They were more capable of understanding traditional values, oral traditions, and local knowledge embedded within the language. This supports the concept of ethnosience, which highlights the importance of integrating local wisdom into education as a way to contextualize learning and preserve culture. Research shows that ethnosience-based education contributes to improving students' scientific literacy and cultural awareness (Hikmah, N., et al., 2025).

Third, classroom observations revealed that the use of the Nias language increased student participation and engagement. Students were more active in asking questions, participating in discussions, and expressing their ideas. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that ethnosience-based learning fosters active involvement and improves



critical thinking skills in elementary education (Jannah, R., et al., 2022). The use of a familiar language reduces communication barriers and creates a more inclusive learning environment.

Fourth, the study found that integrating the Nias language into teaching practices supports the development of scientific literacy at the primary level (Harefa, D. 2025). When local language is used to explain scientific phenomena, students can more easily relate abstract concepts to their daily experiences. For example, natural phenomena and traditional practices in South Nias can be used to explain basic science concepts in a contextualized manner. This is in line with findings that ethnosience-based learning improves students' literacy and understanding of science concepts (Rozi, F., et al., 2025).

In addition, document analysis revealed that the integration of local language in formal curriculum materials is still limited. Most teaching materials are designed in Bahasa Indonesia, with minimal inclusion of local cultural content. However, studies suggest that the development of ethnosience-based teaching materials can significantly enhance learning outcomes and scientific literacy. This indicates a gap between policy expectations and classroom implementation in South Nias (Harefa, D.,2025).

Another important finding is that teachers recognize the importance of using the Nias language but face several challenges. These include limited training, lack of instructional materials, and insufficient institutional support. Despite these challenges, teachers expressed strong willingness to integrate local language into their teaching practices as part of cultural preservation efforts (Harefa, D. 2025).

Moreover, the results highlight that the use of indigenous knowledge and language contributes to sustainable education. Integrating local wisdom into education supports not only academic achievement but also the preservation of cultural heritage and community values. Studies confirm that indigenous knowledge-based education plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable development and contextual learning (Wirama, T. G. P., et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings of this study emphasize that the Nias language has a dual function in primary education: as a pedagogical tool to improve learning effectiveness and as a cultural instrument to preserve local heritage. The integration of local language into education is therefore not only relevant but also urgent, particularly in regions where cultural identity is at risk of being diminished by globalization (Yazidi, R. E., et al., 2024).

The findings of this study emphasize the urgency of utilizing the Nias language



in primary education in South Nias as an important strategy for cultural heritage preservation and educational improvement. The results show that the integration of local language into elementary education strengthens students' cultural identity, improves learning comprehension, and supports the sustainability of indigenous heritage. These findings are strongly supported by ethnoscience, constructivist learning theory, and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

From the perspective of ethnoscience, the use of local language in education allows students to connect scientific and academic knowledge with their cultural environment. Ethnoscience-based learning has been widely recognized as an effective approach to contextualize education and improve students' understanding of abstract concepts through familiar cultural experiences. Research shows that integrating local wisdom into learning enhances scientific literacy and cultural awareness (Ali et al., 2025). In this study, the use of the Nias language helped students relate school content to their everyday life experiences in South Nias, making learning more meaningful and accessible.

Furthermore, the findings align with constructivist learning theory, which states that knowledge is constructed through interaction between new information and prior experience. In this context, the Nias language serves as a cognitive bridge that connects students' prior cultural knowledge with formal educational content. When teachers used the Nias language in instruction, students

demonstrated better comprehension and higher engagement. This supports previous research indicating that contextual learning significantly improves cognitive outcomes in primary education by linking instruction to students' lived experiences (Damayanti et al., 2024).

Another important theoretical foundation is culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), which emphasizes the need to preserve and strengthen students' cultural and linguistic identities through education. CSP argues that education should not only transmit knowledge but also sustain cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. Indigenous language education is considered a key element in preserving identity and strengthening students' sense of belonging (McCarty & Lee, 2014). The findings of this study confirm that the use of the Nias language in primary education enhances students' pride in their cultural identity and strengthens intergenerational cultural transmission.

In addition, observations in classrooms showed that students became more active and confident when the Nias language was used alongside Indonesian. This is consistent with studies indicating that mother-tongue-based instruction improves participation, reduces learning anxiety, and increases classroom interaction. Indigenous language use in education also contributes to emotional comfort and cognitive clarity, especially in early education stages (Derlina et al., 2021).

The study also found that teachers recognize the importance of the Nias language but face structural challenges such as lack of teaching materials, limited



training, and insufficient policy support. These challenges are consistent with previous findings in South Nias, where educators often struggle with limited instructional resources and lack of structured integration of local knowledge into the curriculum (Harefa, 2018). Despite these limitations, teachers expressed strong willingness to integrate local language into learning as part of cultural preservation efforts.

From a broader perspective, indigenous language preservation is globally recognized as an urgent educational issue. Studies show that many indigenous languages are at risk of extinction due to globalization and dominance of national or international languages (Suwarno, 2020). The decline of regional languages in Indonesia reflects similar concerns, where local languages are increasingly replaced by Indonesian in formal education systems. This situation highlights the importance of policy intervention to support multilingual education and cultural sustainability.

Moreover, research on indigenous education systems shows that language is not only a communication tool but also a carrier of knowledge, values, and identity. Indigenous education emphasizes experiential learning, oral traditions, and community-based knowledge transmission ([UNESCO-aligned frameworks; see also Indigenous education studies, 2023–2025]). In South Nias, the Nias language plays a central role in transmitting traditional knowledge, social values, and cultural norms. Therefore, its integration into primary education ensures that cultural

heritage remains alive among younger generations.

Overall, the findings confirm that the urgency of utilizing the Nias language in primary education is both pedagogically and culturally justified. It enhances learning effectiveness, strengthens cultural identity, and supports the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Without systematic integration into education, there is a risk of gradual language loss, which would lead to weakening of cultural identity in South Nias.

D. Discussion

Conclusion

This study investigated the urgency of utilizing the Nias language in primary education in South Nias as a form of cultural heritage preservation. Based on qualitative findings from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, it can be concluded that the Nias language plays a crucial role not only as a communication tool but also as a cultural identity marker and an educational resource that supports meaningful learning.

First, the study found that the use of the Nias language in primary education significantly enhances students' understanding of learning materials. Students in early grades demonstrated better comprehension when instruction was delivered using both Indonesian and the Nias language. This indicates that mother-tongue-based instruction facilitates cognitive development, especially in the foundational stage of education. The findings align with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that students learn more effectively when new



knowledge is connected to their existing linguistic and cultural experiences.

Second, the integration of the Nias language in education strengthens students' cultural identity and awareness. Students who were exposed to the Nias language in classroom settings showed greater appreciation for their cultural heritage, including traditions, values, and local wisdom. This confirms that language is not merely a communication system but also a carrier of cultural meaning and identity. When local language is used in education, it helps preserve cultural continuity across generations.

Third, the study revealed that the use of the Nias language increases student engagement and participation in the learning process. Students became more confident in expressing ideas, more active in discussions, and more responsive during lessons. This suggests that using a familiar language reduces psychological barriers in learning and creates a more inclusive classroom environment. Teachers also reported that students were more enthusiastic and motivated when lessons incorporated local language elements.

Fourth, the findings highlight the importance of integrating local language into education as part of cultural sustainability efforts. Without formal integration into the education system, there is a risk of language shift and gradual loss of the Nias language among younger generations. This situation is consistent with global concerns regarding the decline of indigenous languages due to globalization and the dominance of

national or international languages in formal education systems.

Fifth, the study confirms that the Nias language contributes to the development of culturally responsive and meaningful education. By incorporating local language into teaching practices, education becomes more relevant to students' lived experiences and cultural background. This approach supports ethnoscience and culturally sustaining pedagogy, which emphasize the importance of preserving cultural identity through education while improving learning outcomes.

Overall, this study concludes that the utilization of the Nias language in primary education is highly urgent and necessary. It provides dual benefits: improving educational effectiveness and preserving cultural heritage. Therefore, ignoring the role of local language in education may lead not only to reduced learning effectiveness but also to the gradual erosion of cultural identity in South Nias.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed:

1. For Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to integrate the Nias language into daily classroom instruction, especially in early-grade learning. The use of bilingual instruction (Nias and Indonesian) can help students better understand learning materials while maintaining cultural relevance. Teachers should also develop simple teaching strategies such as storytelling, dialogue, and contextual explanations using local language.

2. For Schools



Elementary schools in South Nias should support the implementation of local language-based education by providing an enabling environment. This includes developing school policies that encourage the use of the Nias language in classroom activities and extracurricular programs. Schools should also facilitate teacher training programs on culturally responsive teaching methods.

3. For Government and Policy Makers

Educational authorities are encouraged to recognize the importance of local language preservation by integrating indigenous languages into the national curriculum framework. Policy support is needed to develop standardized teaching materials, textbooks, and learning modules in the Nias language. Government support is also essential in funding research and development related to local language education.

4. For Curriculum Developers

Curriculum developers should design learning materials that incorporate local wisdom and indigenous languages. The integration of cultural content into primary education will ensure that students not only gain academic knowledge but also develop cultural awareness and identity.

5. For Parents and Community

Parents and local communities play a crucial role in preserving the Nias language. They are encouraged to actively use the language at home and in community interactions. Community participation is essential to ensure intergenerational transmission of language and cultural values.

6. For Future Researchers

Future studies are recommended to expand research on local language integration in other regions and educational levels. Quantitative studies could be conducted to measure the direct impact of local language use on academic achievement. Additionally, future research may explore the development of digital learning media based on the Nias language to support modern education.

In conclusion, the preservation of the Nias language through primary education is not only an educational strategy but also a cultural necessity. Integrating local language into the learning process ensures that cultural identity is maintained while improving students' cognitive and social development. Therefore, immediate action is needed from all stakeholders to ensure that the Nias language continues to live and thrive within the education system of South Nias.

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