



The Effect of *Tembang Dolanan* on Local Language Speaking Skills in Early Childhood

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Abstract: The declining use of local languages, particularly Javanese, among young children has raised concerns about the preservation of local language and cultural heritage. This study examined the effect of *tembang dolanan* (traditional Javanese children's songs) on local language speaking skills among children aged 5–6 years. It also highlights the role of traditional children's songs in supporting language development while preserving local cultural heritage. This study employed a quantitative one-group pretest–posttest pre-experimental design involving 16 children selected through purposive sampling. The intervention consisted of 16 learning sessions over a 4 week period using *tembang dolanan* (traditional Javanese children's songs). Children's mean speaking score increased from 22.31 (SD = 2.301) in the pre-test to 36.13 (SD = 1.258) in the post-test. A paired-samples *t*-test confirmed that the improvement was statistically significant, $t(15) = 24.161$, $p < .001$, indicating that *tembang dolanan* effectively enhanced children's local language speaking skills. Traditional children's songs can be integrated into early childhood learning as a culturally responsive strategy to support local language development and cultural preservation. This study provides empirical evidence that *tembang dolanan* is an effective culturally responsive strategy for improving local language speaking skills in early childhood education.

Keywords: *tembang dolanan*; local language speaking skills; early childhood education; cultural heritage; culturally responsive learning

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INTRODUCTION

Language development is one of the fundamental aspects of early childhood education because it enables children to communicate, express ideas, and build social relationships. Early language experiences also support cognitive development by helping children understand information and gradually develop more complex thinking skills (Wahidah & Latipah, 2021). Therefore, providing appropriate language stimulation during the early years is essential for promoting children's overall development. The first language, or mother tongue, plays a particularly important role because it is naturally acquired through daily interactions with family and the surrounding community (Mulyati et al., 2024). Beyond facilitating communication, the mother tongue also contributes to children's cognitive development, cultural identity, and sense of belonging (Ball, 2011). In early childhood, language acquisition develops through children's interactions with family, school, and the surrounding community. The mother tongue is generally acquired naturally through daily interactions, while local and national languages may be acquired

through broader social and educational environments. In multilingual environments, these languages may have different functions in children's daily lives, but their development is closely related to children's language exposure and frequency of use. In the Indonesian context, a local language may also function as a child's mother tongue when it is the primary language used within the family and community. Thus, the mother tongue, local language, and national language are interconnected through the linguistic environments in which children interact. The interaction among these linguistic environments influences children's language exposure and use. For children growing up in Javanese-speaking communities, regular exposure to Javanese at home, school, and in the community can support the development and maintenance of Javanese speaking skill (Krisnaningrum & Handayani, 2020 ; Wulandari et al., 2025).

Despite its importance, the use and mastery of local languages among young children face challenges as Indonesian and foreign languages become increasingly dominant in children's daily communication. Recent evidence from preschool children in Central Java indicates a shift from local languages toward Indonesian as the dominant language of everyday communication (Rahman et al., 2026). As a result, many children are more familiar with the national language than with their local language, raising concerns about the preservation of linguistic and cultural heritage. This condition is also relevant to Javanese, as children may have limited familiarity with Javanese and require consistent habituation and opportunities to use the language in daily interactions (Shari & Azizah, 2021 ; Ratnawati, 2024). Therefore, the development of Javanese speaking skills among young children cannot be assumed to occur naturally without sufficient exposure and meaningful opportunities for communication. In response to similar challenges, many multilingual countries have incorporated local culture into early childhood curricula to strengthen children's cultural identity and promote meaningful learning experiences (Shih, 2022). Such culturally responsive approaches integrate local stories, songs, games, and community experiences into classroom activities, enabling children to develop language skills while appreciating their cultural heritage (Shih, 2022). Likewise, in Indonesia, language development is recognized as one of the core domains of early childhood education. According to the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia No. 8 of 2024 concerning Content Standards for Early Childhood Education, language is included as one of the developmental aspects of early childhood.

Children's language development is also shaped by the quality of language stimulation they receive from their families, schools, and surrounding communities (Hamidah & Fauziah, 2024). This issue is particularly evident in the use of the Javanese language among children aged 5–6 years. Preliminary observations conducted at Idola Shiraathal Mustaqim Kindergarten showed that many children had difficulty using simple Javanese vocabulary accurately and understanding the meaning of commonly used words in daily communication. Most children preferred using Indonesian during classroom interactions. Preliminary classroom observations also indicated that Javanese was not routinely incorporated into classroom learning and that there were no specific activities designed to introduce Javanese in daily learning. Similar findings were reported by Ratnawati (2024), who found that young children's Javanese vocabulary remains limited. Similarly, Adawiah et al., 2024 reported that many children understand local languages only passively and rarely use them actively in everyday communication.

For children aged 5–6 years, Javanese speaking skills include the ability to use basic Javanese vocabulary correctly, use greetings and sentence structures appropriately according to *unggah-ungguh* in conversation, construct sentences using appropriate word order, use vocabulary in everyday contexts, express feelings in Javanese, respond to simple commands or stories delivered in Javanese, and retell or convey brief information orally (Otto, 2015; Faridy et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024; Montrul, 2023). One factor contributing to this situation is the limited availability of engaging and meaningful learning activities that introduce local languages in ways appropriate for young children. Speaking skills play an essential role in enabling children to communicate ideas, ask questions, and interact confidently with others (Sulistyawati & Amelia, 2021). In the context of the Javanese language, speaking also reflects important cultural values, including politeness and respect expressed through *unggah-ungguh basa* (Damayanti et al., 2022). Therefore, learning strategies that combine language development with cultural experiences are needed to encourage children to use local languages in meaningful contexts.

Traditional children's songs offer one potential approach to addressing this challenge. As part of Indonesia's cultural heritage, *tembang dolanan* integrates language, rhythm, play, and cultural values into enjoyable learning experiences. Previous studies have demonstrated that *tembang dolanan* can introduce local vocabulary in meaningful contexts while increasing children's interest in learning their local language (Khasanah et al., 2024). In addition, traditional songs contribute to cultural transmission by helping children recognize and appreciate local traditions from an early age (Suratiyah et al., 2024). These characteristics make *tembang dolanan* consistent with the principles of culturally responsive learning, which emphasizes connecting children's learning experiences with their cultural backgrounds.

The potential of *tembang dolanan* to support children's Javanese speaking skills can also be explained through the characteristics of early childhood language development. At the age of 5–6 years, children increasingly develop the ability to use vocabulary in meaningful communication, respond to questions, express ideas and feelings, and participate in simple conversations. These abilities develop through repeated exposure to language and opportunities to use language in social interactions. In this context, *tembang dolanan* provides children with repeated exposure to Javanese words and expressions through singing, listening, imitation, and verbal participation. The rhythmic and repetitive structure of songs can help children hear and reproduce language patterns, while singing activities provide opportunities to practice vocabulary and simple expressions orally. Furthermore, when *tembang dolanan* is followed by questions, conversations, games, or activities related to the meaning of the song, children are encouraged not only to memorize words but also to use them in meaningful communication. Thus, the learning process moves from listening and imitation toward active use of Javanese vocabulary and expressions.

This mechanism is relevant to the development of Javanese speaking skills in children aged 5–6 years because speaking development requires opportunities for children to listen to language models, imitate linguistic forms, and use vocabulary in increasingly meaningful interactions. Research involving children aged 5–6 years has shown that Javanese is used in children's interactions with parents, teachers, neighbours, and peers, demonstrating the importance of the social environment in supporting

children's Javanese language use (Krisnaningrum & Handayani, 2020). Therefore, *tembang dolanan* can function not merely as a cultural medium but as a stimulus that provides repeated and contextual opportunities for children to hear, reproduce, and use Javanese in oral communication. Previous research also indicates that *tembang dolanan* can support the habituation of Javanese language use among young children (Khasanah et al., 2024).

Despite these potential benefits, the existing evidence has not sufficiently established the causal effect of *tembang dolanan* on children's Javanese speaking skills. Previous studies have primarily examined the use of *tembang dolanan* in relation to language stimulation, language habituation, cultural preservation, or the introduction of local vocabulary (Khasanah et al., 2024; Suratiyah et al., 2024). Although these studies provide important evidence regarding the potential of *tembang dolanan*, they do not directly demonstrate whether structured *tembang dolanan* activities produce measurable improvements in children's Javanese speaking skills. In addition, limited attention has been given to the systematic alignment of the vocabulary and language activities contained in *tembang dolanan* with specific speaking-development indicators for children aged 5–6 years. Therefore, an experimental study is needed to examine whether the structured use of *tembang dolanan* can produce a measurable improvement in children's Javanese speaking skills.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the effect of *tembang dolanan* on the local language speaking skills of children aged 5–6 years. By employing an experimental approach and assessing children's speaking skills before and after the intervention, this study provides empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of *tembang dolanan* as a learning medium for Javanese speaking development. The findings contribute empirical evidence supporting the use of traditional children's songs as a culturally responsive learning strategy for promoting local language development while preserving cultural heritage in early childhood education.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design to examine the effect of *tembang dolanan* (traditional Javanese children's songs) on the local language speaking skills of children aged 5–6 years. This design enables the assessment of changes in children's speaking skills before and after the intervention without the inclusion of a control group (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015). The participants consisted of 16 children aged 5–6 years from Group B. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) being aged 5–6 years, (2) being enrolled in Group B, and (3) being able to participate in the complete sequence of research activities, including the pretest, intervention, and posttest. All selected participants completed both assessments.

The intervention consisted of 16 learning sessions conducted over 4 weeks, with 4 sessions implemented each week. Each session lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and integrated *tembang dolanan* into classroom learning activities. Children were introduced to Javanese vocabulary, expressions, and simple sentence patterns embedded in the song lyrics. Learning activities included listening to songs, singing together, repeating lyrics, answering oral questions, and using newly acquired vocabulary in simple conversations. The learning activities were progressively

structured, beginning with introducing simple Javanese vocabulary through songs, followed by guided repetition, comprehension activities, and opportunities to use the vocabulary in simple oral communication. This gradual progression was designed to support children's language acquisition through repeated and meaningful exposure. The intervention was delivered by the researcher following a standardized learning procedure to ensure consistency across all sessions.

Children's Javanese speaking skills were assessed through structured observations of their oral language performance. The assessment instrument consisted of 10 items, with each item rated on a four-point scale: 1 (BB/Not Yet Developed), 2 (MB/Beginning to Develop), 3 (BSH/Developing as Expected), and 4 (BSB/Developing Very Well). The possible total scores ranged from 10 to 40. The assessment indicators covered aspects of Javanese speaking skills, including vocabulary use, word pronunciation, responses in simple conversations, and the use of *unggah-ungguh basa* (Javanese politeness norms), in accordance with the instrument's assessment criteria.

Content validity was assessed through expert judgment before the instrument was tested further. Item validity was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation, while internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.262 to 0.755, and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.746. The validity of the items was determined based on the statistical criteria applied in the instrument testing.

Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the pretest and posttest scores. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to examine data normality, and a paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the pretest and posttest scores at a significance level of $p < .05$.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal before data collection. Parents or legal guardians were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study. Participation was voluntary, and participant confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the research data.

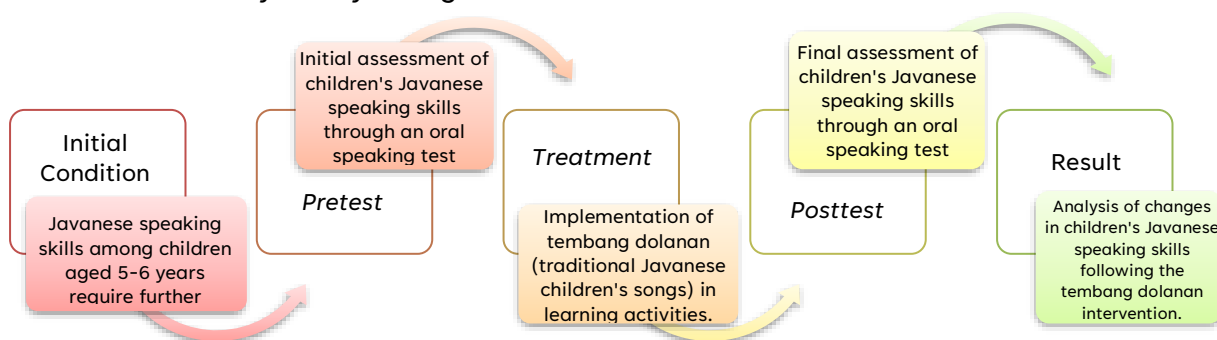


Figure 1. Research Procedure

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained in this study consisted of 16 children in the experimental group who were assessed on Javanese speaking skills using a series of oral tests given before and after treatment. The research subjects were selected using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, based on predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives. The sample consisted of children aged 5–6 years from Group B who met the study criteria and were ready to participate in the research

activities. The research data consisted of pre-test and post-test scores, including the range, minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation, which were analyzed using SPSS 31 for Windows and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of Pre-Test and Post-Test Data for Javanese Speaking Skills

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>						
	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Pretest	16	10	16	26	22.31	2,301
Posttest	16	4	34	38	36.13	1,258

Based on Table 1, the pretest results indicate that the children's Javanese speaking skills were still developing before the treatment. The scores ranged from 16 to 26, with a mean score of 22.31 and a standard deviation of 2.301. Considering that the assessment consisted of 10 indicators with a maximum score of 4 for each indicator, the maximum possible total score was 40. Thus, the pretest mean represented approximately 55.8% of the maximum possible score, indicating that the children had demonstrated some Javanese speaking abilities but had not yet consistently performed across the assessed indicators. The relatively wider score range also indicates differences in children's initial speaking abilities.

After the treatment, the posttest scores ranged from 34 to 38, with a mean of 36.13 and a standard deviation of 1.258. The posttest mean represented approximately 90.3% of the maximum possible score. This indicates that, after the treatment, the children generally demonstrated stronger and more consistent performance across the assessed Javanese speaking indicators. The smaller range and standard deviation also suggest that the children's posttest scores were more closely distributed around the mean than their pretest scores. Therefore, the descriptive statistics indicate not only an increase in the average speaking score but also a more consistent level of performance among the children after the treatment.

The details of the data from the normality test results that were carried out in this study are as follows:

Table 2. Normality Test Results

	<i>Shapiro-Wilk</i>		
	<i>Statistics</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig</i>
<i>Pretest</i>	0.907	16	0.105
<i>Posttest</i>	0.922	16	0.185

Table 2 shows the results of the *Shapiro-Wilks* test, the significance level of the normality test in this study is > 0.05 with a *pretest* value of 0.105 and a *posttest* value of 0.185. Based on the data from the normality test results, the *pretest* and *posttest* values in this study are above 0.05, so it is said to be normal, meeting the requirements of the normality test.

The paired-sample t-test was used to examine the difference between children's Javanese speaking skill scores before and after the treatment. In this study, the *paired sample t-test method* was used or the paired sample *t-test* type with the help of the

SPSS 31 for *Windows application*. The basis for decision making is if the significance value (p) < 0.05 then the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted meaning there is a significant influence of the use of *tembang dolanan* on the Javanese speaking skills of children aged 5-6 years.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results

Paired t-test					
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sgn. (2 tailed)
-13.813	2.287	0.572	-24.161	15	<0.001

Based on Table 3, the paired-sample t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores ($t(15) = -24.161$, $p < .001$). The mean score increased from 22.31 in the pretest to 36.13 in the posttest, with a mean increase of approximately 13.813 points. These results indicate that the use of *tembang dolanan* (traditional Javanese songs) was associated with an improvement in children's Javanese speaking skills.

Language learning in early childhood emphasizes children's ability to use language actively and contextually. In this study, *tembang dolanan* (traditional Javanese songs) is used as a medium that integrates musical elements, vocabulary, and sound repetition to support children's language production. *Tembang dolanan*'s characteristics lie in the use of diction tailored to children's level of understanding (Rachmawati et al., 2024), making the language easier to accept, understand, and remember. This makes it easier for children to recognize and use Javanese vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

The learning activities provided repeated opportunities for children to listen to, sing, and use Javanese vocabulary in play-based and contextualized activities, allowing the language encountered in the songs to be practiced through direct verbal interaction. This type of involvement may also encourage children's curiosity and interest in learning by creating a more meaningful and engaging learning experience. This is in line with Park et al. (2025) who stated that curiosity contributes significantly to children's learning experiences.

The improvement in children's Javanese speaking skills can be theoretically explained through the rhythmic, repetitive, and participatory characteristics of *tembang dolanan*. Rhythm provides a predictable structure that helps children follow and anticipate words or phrases, while repetition gives them repeated opportunities to hear and reproduce the same linguistic forms. Through repeated singing and verbal participation, children are exposed to vocabulary and pronunciation several times within a meaningful and enjoyable context. This process can support the transition from listening to active language production, as children gradually become more familiar with the sounds, meanings, and patterns of the words they hear. Song-based activities can therefore provide opportunities for children to practice vocabulary, pronunciation, and verbal expression through repeated oral production (Aini & Purnawati, 2025).

The musical characteristics of *tembang dolanan* may also support children's engagement in speaking activities. Rather than receiving vocabulary only through direct instruction, children encounter language through melody, rhythm, movement, and interaction. This creates opportunities for children to participate verbally while

maintaining attention to the learning activity. In the context of children aged 5–6 years, such repeated and contextualized language experiences are relevant to the development of increasingly extensive vocabulary and the use of simple sentences. Thus, the contribution of *tembang dolanan* to Javanese speaking skills can be understood not merely as the effect of singing itself, but as a learning process in which rhythm and repetition facilitate repeated exposure, imitation, and active use of language.

The observed changes were particularly evident in children's vocabulary use and their ability to use Javanese in simple communication contexts. Initially, children tended to rely on a limited range of frequently used expressions, such as "*ngopo*," "*yo*," "*sek*," "*mengko*," and "*saiki*." Following the learning activities, children began to use a wider range of vocabulary related to objects, animals, and body parts encountered in the songs and learning activities. They also began to incorporate some of these words into simple interactions. This pattern suggests that repeated exposure to vocabulary in meaningful contexts may have supported children's transition from recognizing words to using them in oral communication. This finding is consistent with Khasanah et al. (2024), who reported that *tembang dolanan* can support regional language vocabulary learning through contextualized language experiences.

This development is relevant to the speaking abilities expected to emerge during the 5–6-year-old period, when children's vocabulary becomes increasingly extensive and their use of simple sentences continues to develop (Masrura et al., 2024). In Javanese, pronunciation also involves distinctions between consonant sounds such as /d/ and /dh/ or /t/ and /th/, which may affect word meaning. Repeated opportunities to listen to and reproduce words through songs can provide children with opportunities to practice these phonological features in context. This is consistent with Bang & Ha (2024), who describe phonetic abilities as related to pronunciation accuracy and receptive vocabulary.

Based on the development of children aged 5–6 years, this condition is in accordance with the characteristics of children who are at the stage of mastering an increasingly broad vocabulary and the use of simple sentences that are beginning to develop (Masrura et al., 2024). Otto (2015) also explains that the ability to name vocabulary is related to phonetic and semantic aspects, namely the accuracy of sound pronunciation and understanding of word meaning. In the context of Javanese, the difference in consonant sounds such as /d/ and /dh/ or /t/ and /th/ is an important part in distinguishing word meaning, so that children's ability to pronounce these sounds shows increasingly good phonetic development. This is in line with the opinion of Bang & Ha (2024) who stated that phonetic abilities are related to pronunciation accuracy and receptive vocabulary.

However, the development was not uniform across all aspects of Javanese speaking skills. The use of Javanese politeness, construction of coherent sentences, and expression of feelings still required further development. Observations indicated that children continued to experience difficulty distinguishing between *ngoko* and *krama* and in adjusting their language use according to the person with whom they were communicating. Their sentence structures were also generally simple and sometimes inconsistent. These findings suggest that vocabulary and pronunciation may respond more directly to repeated exposure through songs, whereas pragmatic and syntactic abilities require more complex and sustained communication experiences.

Javanese politeness is closely related to social norms and the context of communication (Damayanti et al. 2022). Therefore, children need opportunities not only to hear appropriate expressions but also to practice selecting language according to different social situations. Otto (2015) similarly explains that pragmatic development is closely related to children's communication experiences. The findings therefore indicate that *tembang dolanan* can provide a useful context for introducing and practicing language, while more complex speaking abilities may require additional activities involving conversation, role play, and direct social interaction. This is also supported by Evanson et al. (2023) , who explain that language development occurs gradually, starting with phonology, then vocabulary, and finally, more complex syntactic structures.

In addition to developmental factors, the environment also plays a significant role in shaping children's speaking skills. Putri & Setyawan (2024) explain that interactions with parents, peers, and language habits in the school environment influence children's language use. In this study, regular exposure to Javanese during classroom activities may have helped children recognize language patterns and enrich their vocabulary. In addition to being a medium for language learning, *traditional Javanese songs* also contain character values such as politeness, cooperation, and respect, conveyed in a simple and enjoyable manner (Sari et al., 2020) . This makes *traditional Javanese songs* not only function as a means of language development but also as a medium for instilling cultural values. In line with this, Budiarto (2020) explains that Javanese culture upholds the values of politeness and respect in communication, although in early childhood, the internalization of these values is still in its early stages.

The findings have practical implications for early childhood language learning. For teachers, *tembang dolanan* can be incorporated not only as a singing activity but also as a stimulus for vocabulary practice, pronunciation, simple conversations, movement, and language-based games. The use of songs can be combined with objects, pictures, role play, and everyday classroom situations so that children have opportunities to use the vocabulary they hear in meaningful communication. For schools, the findings support the use of culturally relevant learning media as part of local language learning in early childhood. Parents can also reinforce children's language experiences by singing familiar *tembang dolanan* and encouraging children to use selected Javanese words in simple everyday interactions at home. However, this study still has several limitations. The integration of *traditional Javanese songs* with the learning themes has not been fully systematically structured. Furthermore, administering tests to early childhood presents challenges because children are easily distracted by their surroundings. Another limitation is the limited number of references specifically discussing Javanese speaking skill indicators in children aged 5–6 years. Based on this, further research could develop learning that is more integrated between media and themes, involving a broader range of subjects, and paying more attention to developing language skills in social contexts so that children are not only able to speak but also understand how to use it appropriately.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that children's Javanese speaking skills differed between the pretest and posttest conditions following the implementation of *tembang dolanan* at

Idola Shirathaal Mustaqiim Kindergarten. The mean score increased from 22.31 before the treatment to 36.13 after the treatment, while the paired-sample t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the two measurements ($t(15) = -24.161$, $p < .001$). The descriptive results also showed that posttest scores were more closely distributed, indicating more consistent performance among the children. The most visible development was found in vocabulary use and simple communication contexts, while pragmatic and syntactic aspects such as language politeness, sentence construction, and adaptation of language to social context still required further development. These findings suggest that *tembang dolanan*, through its rhythmic, repetitive, and participatory characteristics, can serve as a culturally relevant medium for supporting Javanese speaking activities in early childhood. Its use can be strengthened by combining singing with contextual conversation, role play, and other language-based activities.

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