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Gamifying Heritage: The Bali Banjar Card Game as a Cultural Vocabulary and Speaking Medium

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 12 Dec 2025	English Club students at SMK TI Bali Global Denpasar the majority Balinese by birth demonstrated a critical gap in Balinese cultural vocabulary in English, reflecting a broader erosion of cultural literacy among Generation Z learners and underscoring the urgency of culturally grounded EFL intervention. This study investigates the implementation of the Bali Banjar card game as an instructional medium for improving English vocabulary acquisition, speaking motivation, and cultural identity awareness. The core problem is twofold: students' limited command of Balinese cultural vocabulary in English, and their diminishing engagement with local cultural heritage inseparable from their identity, character education (<i>pendidikan karakter</i>), and the preservation of Balinese local wisdom (<i>kearifan lokal</i>). This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology. Data were collected through classroom observation, pre- and post-game questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and were analysed using a narrative descriptive approach. Five key findings emerged: (1) a critical pre-game gap in Balinese cultural vocabulary, with most participants rating their knowledge as “low” or “very low”; (2) enhanced vocabulary acquisition through competitive card-matching gameplay and repeated contextualised encounters with target lexis; (3) cultural literacy development and identity affirmation, particularly through the Sacred Calendar & Time category, converting passive cultural experience into active linguistic knowledge; (4) increased speaking motivation and oral confidence, evidenced by grammatically varied, culturally embedded student output; and (5) a post-game shift in cultural responsibility, with students expressing heightened motivation to preserve Balinese heritage and aspirations to create English-language cultural content, including tourism videos and digital tour guide scripts. This study affirms that reclaiming cultural vocabulary is an act of
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identity, character formation, and local wisdom preservation for future generations.

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1. Introduction

Bali occupies a paradoxical position in the global cultural landscape: its economy depends on the international legibility of its living culture, yet its youngest generation — Generation Z — is demonstrably losing the vocabulary to represent that culture in English. This paradox is not merely an individual deficit; it is a systemic failure at the intersection of language education and cultural policy. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesian vocational schools presents a persistent challenge: motivating students to engage with vocabulary that is simultaneously linguistically demanding and culturally meaningful (Lamb, 2017). In Bali, this challenge reaches its most acute expression, as English functions not merely as a global lingua franca but as the critical professional tool for the tourism, hospitality, and creative industries that sustain the island's economy and global identity. Yet a preliminary observation, pre-game questionnaire, and interview conducted prior to this study at SMK TI Bali Global Denpasar revealed a deeply troubling phenomenon: the majority of English Club students — most of them Balinese by birth — demonstrated severely limited knowledge of Balinese cultural vocabulary in English. Foundational terms such as *canang sari*, *subak*, *pemangku*, *Nyepi*, and *Galungan* — elements of daily Balinese life — were largely unknown to students in an English-language context.

This finding reflects a broader pattern documented in the literature: Generation Z learners in Indonesia, despite living within culturally rich environments, increasingly experience cultural disconnection as a consequence of digital media saturation and globalised youth culture (Tobing et al., 2024; Wibawa & Indriani, 2020). For Balinese students, this disconnect carries particular significance. Bali's economy and global identity are inseparably linked to the vitality of its Hindu-Balinese cultural traditions, and young Balinese people who lack the vocabulary to articulate their own heritage in English are ill-equipped to participate in the cultural tourism economy or to fulfil their role as cultural ambassadors. Beyond economics, this cultural erosion poses a direct threat to the *kearifan lokal* (local wisdom) and *pendidikan karakter* (character education) agendas of Indonesian national education — agendas that identify cultural identity, heritage literacy, and community responsibility as core values (Kemendikbud, 2017).

In response to this dual challenge — EFL vocabulary acquisition and cultural literacy — this study introduces and evaluates the *Bali Banjar* card game: a purpose-designed 149-card educational game embedding Balinese cultural vocabulary within a competitive group-learning format. The game draws its conceptual framework from the *Banjar* system — Bali's traditional community unit — and positions students as new *Warga Banjar* (community members) who must master five pillars of Balinese cultural knowledge: Offerings & Rituals, Sacred Objects & Places, Sacred Figures & Performers, Community & Culture, and Sacred Calendar & Time. The game is facilitated by the researcher in the role of *Kelian Banjar* (village head), who opens each session with a dramatic cultural

welcome address. Following gameplay, students read their matched card pairs aloud and construct original English sentences using the target vocabulary, directly connecting vocabulary recognition with productive spoken English.

What distinguishes the Bali Banjar Card Game as a Cultural Vocabulary and Speaking Medium from prior gamification studies is its dual mandate: to function simultaneously as a language acquisition tool and as a vehicle for cultural reclamation. The game does not merely use Balinese content as a contextual backdrop; it positions Balinese cultural knowledge as the primary object of learning, making cultural literacy inseparable from linguistic competence. In this way, the gamification of heritage is not a peripheral innovation — it is a principled pedagogical response to a structural problem that existing EFL approaches have failed to adequately address. This integration is theoretically grounded in Nation's (2020) contextualised vocabulary acquisition, Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, Gay's (2018) Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and Ushioda and Dörnyei's (2021) L2 Motivational Self System.

This study is guided by two research questions. RQ1: How does the implementation of the Bali Banjar card game affect English vocabulary acquisition and speaking motivation among English Club students at SMK TI Bali Global Denpasar? RQ2: To what extent does the Bali Banjar card game strengthen students' Balinese cultural identity and motivate them to produce English-language cultural content — such as educational tourism videos and digital tour guide material — as a form of cultural preservation and character education? The findings contribute to three intersecting domains: gamification in EFL education, cultural heritage literacy among Generation Z learners in Bali, and culturally responsive vocabulary pedagogy applicable across Indonesia's diverse regional contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Vocabulary Acquisition in EFL Contexts

Vocabulary acquisition is widely regarded as a critical predictor of language proficiency, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency (Nation, 2020; Schmitt, 2019). In Indonesian EFL contexts, instruction has traditionally relied on rote memorisation and decontextualised word lists — approaches criticised for producing shallow, short-term retention without meaningful integration into language use (Cahyono & Widiati, 2015). Nation (2020) emphasises contextualised vocabulary learning, in which new words are encountered repeatedly across varied, meaningful contexts. This is closely aligned with incidental vocabulary learning — acquisition that occurs as a by-product of engagement with meaningful communicative activities (Hulstijn, 2020; Drajati et al., 2023). Webb and Nation (2017) further argue that vocabulary learning is most durable when it occurs across multiple modalities and is revisited in varied, meaningful contexts over time — a principle directly applicable to game-based instructional design. Similarly, Teng (2020) demonstrates that multimodal encounters with vocabulary, combining visual, auditory, and interactive input, significantly enhance both retention and recall. Susanto (2017) reinforces this view in the Indonesian EFL context, noting that vocabulary instruction

remains most effective when embedded within communicative tasks that connect new words to students' lived experiences. Game-based learning environments are particularly well suited to this model, providing repeated, contextualised encounters with target lexis within an inherently motivating communicative framework (Mayer, 2019; Ling & Aziz, 2022).

2.2 Gamification and Game-Based Language Learning

Gamification — the application of game design elements in non-game contexts — has been consistently associated with increased student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes in EFL education (Deterding et al., 2011; Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). Flores (2015) established an early foundation for this field, demonstrating that gamified learning environments foster greater intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement than conventional instruction. More recently, Dehghanzadeh et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review confirming that gamification consistently supports second language learning across diverse contexts, particularly in developing vocabulary and speaking confidence. Card games in particular have been recognised as effective vocabulary learning tools due to their accessibility and capacity to generate authentic communicative interaction (Lin et al., 2018; Yacob & Yunus, 2019). Bakhsh (2016) found that card game activities produced significant improvements in vocabulary retention and motivation compared to conventional instruction, while Lee and Hammer (2011) linked card game mechanics to increased student talk time and more frequent target vocabulary use. Jie et al. (2023) further demonstrate, in an Indonesian EFL context, that gamification significantly increases student engagement and willingness to speak in English — findings that directly parallel the design intentions of the Bali Banjar card game. The Bali Banjar card game builds on these precedents by embedding Balinese cultural content within the game structure, requiring students to process vocabulary simultaneously at the receptive (matching) and productive (sentence construction) levels.

2.3 Speaking Motivation and the Affective Filter

Speaking is consistently identified by Indonesian EFL learners as both the most important and most anxiety-inducing language skill (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006; Subekti, 2018). Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that anxiety raises a cognitive barrier to language acquisition, while low-stakes, playful environments lower this filter and encourage risk-taking in language use. Complementing this, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) demonstrate that foreign language enjoyment — a positive emotional state distinct from the mere absence of anxiety — is a powerful independent predictor of willingness to communicate and oral output. Game-based speaking activities are particularly effective at generating both reduced anxiety and heightened enjoyment (Reinders & Wattana, 2015). When students engage with content that is personally meaningful and culturally relevant, intrinsic motivation to communicate is further enhanced (Lamb, 2017). Syafiq et al. (2021) corroborate this in an Indonesian context, finding that learners produce significantly more spontaneous oral output when speaking

activities are anchored in content that connects to their personal and cultural identities. Ushioda and Dörnyei's (2021) L2 Motivational Self System further demonstrates that learners who can vividly imagine themselves as future English-speaking cultural professionals invest significantly more deeply in language learning.

2.4 Cultural Literacy, *Kearifan Lokal*, and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Cultural literacy — the ability to understand, appreciate, and articulate one's own cultural heritage — is a critical component of 21st-century education (UNESCO, 2021). For Balinese Generation Z students, the rapid penetration of digital media and globalised youth culture has accelerated the erosion of formal cultural vocabulary and heritage engagement (Tobing et al., 2024; Wibawa & Indriani, 2020). Culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015) offers a framework for addressing this gap by positioning students' cultural backgrounds as cognitive assets — scaffolds that reduce the cognitive load of new learning — rather than irrelevant background. When EFL instruction incorporates culturally familiar content, students experience greater motivation, stronger identity affirmation, and more durable learning outcomes (Paris & Alim, 2017).

These principles directly support Indonesia's *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK — Character Education Strengthening) agenda (Kemendikbud, 2017; Zuriyah, 2019), which identifies cultural identity, national pride, and respect for *kearifan lokal* as core character values to be cultivated through education. Balinese cultural knowledge — encompassing ritual practice, sacred vocabulary, community ethics, and the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy — constitutes one of Indonesia's richest repositories of *kearifan lokal*. When Generation Z students lack this knowledge, they are not merely linguistically impoverished; they are culturally disarmed. Widodo et al. (2018) argue that ELT materials across Southeast Asia must be grounded in the moral and cultural values of local communities if they are to produce learners who are both linguistically competent and culturally rooted. Sulistiyo et al. (2020) demonstrate that character education can be enacted effectively through EFL teaching in Indonesian schools when cultural content is deliberately embedded into instructional design — a finding that directly validates the pedagogical philosophy underlying the Bali Banjar card game. Lestari (2020) further confirms that local wisdom-based learning strengthens student character and cultural responsibility in ways that conventional curriculum approaches cannot achieve, underscoring the educational imperative of integrating *kearifan lokal* into EFL instruction as a matter of both cultural and educational urgency.

2.5 Digital Content Creation and Tourism English

The growing demand for English-language cultural content in Indonesia's digital economy has created new imperatives for EFL education in Bali. English-speaking tour guides, cultural content creators, and social media educators are increasingly sought after in Bali's tourism sector (Suardana & Pitanatri, 2021). Research demonstrates that vocational high school students who are exposed to tourism-related English vocabulary

and communicative tasks show significantly higher motivation to pursue English proficiency as a professional goal (Khatimah & Maolida, 2021). Fitria (2025) further demonstrate that integrating cultural values into English language teaching in Indonesian vocational schools produces learners who are not only more motivated but also more confident in using English as a vehicle for cultural expression — a finding that aligns directly with the aspirations documented in this study. Learners who see a clear pathway between their language skills and their economic and creative futures invest more deeply in language learning (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2021; Lamb, 2017).

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design (Sugiyono, 2020; Moleong, 2021), grounded in the interpretive paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is a purely qualitative study: it does not employ statistical tests, numerical scoring, or quantitative measurement. Instead, it seeks to understand the meanings, experiences, and processes through which students engage with the Bali Banjar game — phenomena best explored through rich, contextual description (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All data — including Likert-scale questionnaire responses — are treated as qualitative evidence of participants' perceptions and are reported descriptively in narrative form to illustrate patterns in student experience, not to produce statistical inference.

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SMK TI Bali Global Denpasar, a vocational high school specialising in information technology, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia. Participants were students enrolled in the school's English Club — a voluntary extracurricular programme attended by students from various grade levels. Purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was employed, selecting participants on the basis of English Club enrolment and willingness to participate. Students were organised into three to four competing teams of two to three members each, named after Balinese mythological figures: Team Barong, Team Rangda, Team Celuluk, and Team Leak. The majority of participants were Balinese by ethnicity.

3.3 The Bali Banjar Card Game as Instructional Medium

The Bali Banjar card game (149 cards total) served as both the instructional medium and primary research instrument. The game consists of three card types distributed across five Balinese cultural categories:

- White Cards (20): Category reference cards — 5 categories × 4 copies each. One set placed in the centre of the table; each team receives their own set as scoring zones.
- Red Cards (50): Balinese cultural vocabulary terms in English (10 per category), each with a *Kepeng Bolong* coin point value on the reverse. Seven cards dealt to each team at the start; remainder form the central draw pile.

- Black Cards (50): English definitions and cultural descriptions matching each Red Card (10 per category), drawn one per turn from the central pile.
- Special Action Cards (5, embedded in Red Cards): +1 Card $\times 2$, Stop $\times 2$, Reverse $\times 1$.

The five categories are: (1) Offerings & Rituals — *canang sari, ngaben, melasti, tirta, melukat*; (2) Sacred Objects & Places — *pura, kris, poleng, besakih, tanah lot*; (3) Sacred Figures & Performers — *barong, rangda, kecak, pemangku, kerauhan*; (4) Community & Culture — *banjar, gotong royong, subak, adat, tri hita karana*; (5) Sacred Calendar & Time — *nyepi, galungan, kuningan, saraswati, kajeng kliwon*.



Figure 1. the Bali Banjar Cards

The researcher facilitated as *Kelian Banjar* (Game Master), delivering a dramatic in-role welcome address — the *Warga Banjar* announcement — positioning students as new community members who must master Balinese cultural knowledge to belong. Gameplay proceeded with teams drawing Black Cards, matching them to Red Cards in hand, and placing matched pairs beneath the correct White Card category in their scoring zone. The game ended when one team completed all five categories or a time limit was reached, with winning determined by total Kepeng Bolong coin value from matched Red Cards. Following gameplay, each team read matched pairs aloud and constructed original English sentences using their target vocabulary, bridging receptive vocabulary recognition with productive oral language use.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Four instruments were employed, consistent with the triangulation principle (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

- a. Observation: Structured and unstructured classroom observation using a checklist documenting student engagement, participation, vocabulary use, team interaction, and oral behaviour. Field notes were supported by audio-visual documentation.
- b. Questionnaire: Pre- and post-game questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale and open-ended items, measuring students' Balinese cultural vocabulary

knowledge in English, attitudes toward cultural heritage learning, speaking confidence, and motivation to produce English-language cultural content. Pre-game data established baselines; post-game data measured change.

- c. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews in two phases — pre-game (to assess baseline knowledge and heritage attitudes) and post-game (to explore perceived impact on vocabulary, cultural identity, speaking confidence, and content creation aspirations). Conducted in Indonesian and English, audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated.
- d. Document Analysis: Student-produced English sentences from the post-game speaking activity, collected and analysed alongside video recordings of oral delivery, providing direct evidence of vocabulary acquisition, linguistic creativity, and cultural knowledge integration.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a narrative descriptive approach (Miles et al., 2020; Sugiyono, 2020) through three iterative stages: (i) data condensation — raw observation notes, questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, and document samples were reduced and organised into thematic categories; (ii) data display — emergent themes represented in narrative form; and (iii) conclusion drawing and verification — interpretive claims tested against the full dataset and cross-checked through member checking. Five primary themes emerged: pre-game cultural vocabulary gap; vocabulary acquisition through gameplay; cultural literacy and identity affirmation; speaking motivation and confidence; and kearifan lokal reclamation and cultural content creation aspirations.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through four criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): credibility (triangulation of data sources, member checking); transferability (thick description of context and participants); dependability (audit trail of data collection and analysis decisions); and confirmability (reflexive journaling and peer debriefing).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Pre-Game Assessment: A Critical Cultural Vocabulary Gap

Pre-game questionnaire data indicated that mostly of participants rated their knowledge of Balinese cultural vocabulary in English as “very low” or “low.” Interview data confirmed this starkly: when asked to name Balinese cultural terms in English, students could identify only globally prominent terms such as *Barong*, *Kecak*, and *temple* (used generically for *Pura*). Terms encountered routinely in daily life — *canang sari*, *subak*, *pemangku*, *melasti*, and *kerauhan* — were largely unknown in an English-language context. The Sacred Calendar & Time category proved most revealing: despite observing *Nyepi*, *Galungan*, *Purnama*, and *Kajeng Kliwon* throughout their lives, virtually none of the students could articulate their meaning in English.

One student stated: *I know what canang sari is. I see it every day. But I did not know how to explain it in English. I did not even know there was an English explanation for it.* Critically, fewer than 40% of students expressed a personal sense of responsibility for Balinese cultural preservation before the game. This pre-game data confirms the urgency of culturally grounded EFL intervention (Tobing et al., 2024; Wibawa & Indriani, 2020) and establishes the foundational problem this study addresses.

Table 1. Pre-Game Self-Assessment of Balinese Cultural Vocabulary Knowledge in English

Cultural Category	Very Low	Low	Very Low + Low (Total)
Offerings & Rituals (<i>canang sari, ngaben, melasti, tirta, melukat</i>)	21 participants	9 participants	30 out of 36
Sacred Objects & Places (<i>pura, kris, poleng, besakih, tanah lot</i>)	15 participants	12 participants	27 out of 36
Sacred Figures & Performers (<i>barong, rangda, kecak, pemangku, kerauhan</i>)	12 participants	12 participants	24 out of 36
Community & Culture (<i>banjar, gotong royong, subak, adat, tri hita karana</i>)	18 participants	12 participants	30 out of 36
Sacred Calendar & Time (<i>nyepi, galungan, kuningan, saraswati, kajeng kliwon</i>)	24 participants	9 participants	33 out of 36

Note. Data derived from pre-game open-ended questionnaire responses ($n = 36$ participants). Figures reflect the number of participants who self-rated their English-language knowledge of terms within each category as “very low” or “low.”

4.2 Theme 1: Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition Through Gameplay

Classroom observations documented a marked increase in student engagement with target vocabulary across all five categories during gameplay. Students spontaneously read Red and Black Cards aloud, consulted teammates about unfamiliar terms, and debated the correct categorical placement of matched pairs — behaviours consistent with deep lexical encoding and long-term retention (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Schmitt, 2019). The competitive matching mechanic generated repeated, contextualised encounters with target lexis consistent with Nation's (2020) principles of effective vocabulary instruction.

Post-game interviews confirmed this subjective experience: *Before the game, I did not know what Padmasana or Aling-aling meant in English. Now I know and I will not forget because we had to compete to find the match.* Another student added: *The game made me curious. When I drew a Black Card I had not seen before, I really wanted to know which Red Card it belonged to. That made me read it very carefully.* These responses align with Bakhsh (2016) and Mayer (2019), who identify curiosity, competition, and contextualised repetition as the primary mechanisms through which game-based learning promotes vocabulary retention.

4.3 Theme 2: Cultural Literacy Development and Identity Affirmation

One of the most significant findings was the depth of cultural awakening that accompanied vocabulary acquisition. Post-game interviews revealed that students did not

merely learn new words — they encountered, for the first time in an English-language context, cultural concepts central to their identity as Balinese Hindus. Multiple students cited the *Kelian Banjar* welcome address as the game's most memorable moment: *The Kelian Banjar said that if we do not know these things, we will walk as strangers in our own Banjar. That hit me. I am Balinese. I should know these words.*

This response illustrates the affective dimension of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015): when students' cultural identity is explicitly engaged, emotional investment amplifies both motivation and retention. The Sacred Calendar & Time category proved especially transformative. Students who participate in *Nyepi*, *Galungan*, and *Kajeng Kliwon* every year of their lives had never articulated these events in English. One student reflected: *I have celebrated Nyepi every year since I was born. But today is the first time I have ever explained it in English. I feel proud — and also a little ashamed that it took a card game to teach me this.* This observation encapsulates the category's transformative potential: it converts passive cultural experience into active linguistic knowledge, and passive identity into expressed cultural pride.

4.4 Theme 3: Speaking Motivation and Confidence

The post-game speaking activity provided direct evidence of the game's impact on oral English production. Students who described themselves as typically reluctant to speak reported a marked shift in confidence: *When we played the game, I forgot I was speaking English. I was just excited to win. And then when we had to make sentences, it felt easier because I already knew the words from the game.* Another observed: *I spoke more English today in one hour than in the whole semester — and I did not feel scared because everyone was doing it together.* These responses confirm Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis: the playful, low-stakes game context lowered the affective barrier to spontaneous oral production (Reinders & Wattana, 2015).

Document analysis of student-produced sentences revealed grammatically varied, culturally embedded output. Students produced descriptive statements (*Canang sari is a small offering made from palm leaves that Balinese women make every day.*), definitional explanations (*Subak is the traditional irrigation system that Balinese farmers use to share water fairly.*), and elaborated cultural explanations (*Nyepi is the Balinese Day of Silence. The whole island goes quiet for 24 hours — no lights, no cars, no noise. It is the most unique New Year in the world.*). This last example illustrates the kind of culturally embedded, personally meaningful language production that the game uniquely generates.

4.5 Theme 4: Aspirations for English-Language Cultural Content Creation

Perhaps the most significant long-term finding was the spontaneous emergence, in post-game interviews, of student aspirations for English-language Balinese cultural content creation. Students independently articulated plans for digital cultural content including educational tourism videos, social media posts, and tour guide scripts in English. Representative responses included: *I want to make a YouTube video in English explaining what Ngaben is — there are not many good explanations in English by*

Balinese people.; If I can explain Barong and Rangda in English, I can be a tour guide at cultural performances. That is a real job in Bali.; and: I want to make TikTok content about Balinese culture in English because most of it is made by foreigners, not by us.

These aspirations reflect Lamb's (2017) ideal L2 self theory: motivation is most powerfully driven by a vivid image of one's future self as a competent English-language speaker in personally meaningful domains. They also align with the vocational orientation of SMK TI Bali Global Denpasar and the economic realities of Bali's cultural tourism industry (Suardana & Pitanatri, 2021).

4.6 Theme 5: Kearifan Lokal, Pendidikan Karakter, and Cultural Reclamation

Post-game open-ended questionnaire responses revealed a profound shift in students' sense of cultural responsibility. When asked to reflect on their experience, the large majority of participants expressed that learning about Balinese culture in English made them want to know more about their own heritage, and that Balinese students bear a responsibility to learn, preserve, and promote Balinese culture — a view held by far fewer students before the game. These responses reflect a qualitative transformation in cultural ownership: the game converted passive cultural exposure into active cultural agency. These figures have direct implications for Indonesia's *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK) agenda (Kemendikbud, 2017; Zuriah, 2019), which identifies cultural identity and respect for *kearifan lokal* as core character values. Balinese cultural knowledge — ritual vocabulary, community ethics, sacred calendar, and the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy — constitutes one of Indonesia's richest repositories of *kearifan lokal*. When Generation Z students lack this knowledge, they are not merely linguistically impoverished — they are culturally disarmed.

The Bali Banjar game demonstrates that cultural reclamation and language learning are not competing objectives but mutually reinforcing ones. One student powerfully articulated the study's core finding: *I am Balinese. I should be the one teaching the world about Bali — not waiting for foreigners to explain my own culture. After this game, I feel like I actually can.*

This study carries significant implications at three levels. Theoretically, it extends Nation's (2020) contextualised vocabulary acquisition framework into a culturally grounded game-based context, demonstrating that vocabulary retention is deepened when learners encounter target lexis within a structure that is personally and culturally meaningful. It also contributes empirical support to Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis by showing that a competitive yet emotionally safe game environment substantially lowers speaking anxiety among EFL learners who typically describe themselves as reluctant oral communicators. Practically, the Bali Banjar card game offers EFL teachers in Bali and across Indonesia a replicable, low-cost instructional model that simultaneously addresses two urgent educational goals: English vocabulary development and cultural heritage literacy. For curriculum designers and policymakers, this study demonstrates that the *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK) agenda can be meaningfully integrated into EFL instruction without sacrificing linguistic rigour. At the societal level,

the game's capacity to inspire students to create English-language cultural content — as future tour guides, YouTube educators, and social media ambassadors — directly supports Bali's cultural tourism economy and positions young Balinese learners as active agents of heritage preservation rather than passive recipients of cultural erosion.

This study has several theoretical and practical limitations that should be acknowledged. Theoretically, the findings are grounded exclusively in qualitative data: while this is appropriate for the interpretive aims of the study, it means that claims about vocabulary acquisition are based on self-reported perceptions and observable classroom behaviour rather than formally measured linguistic gain. The study does not include a delayed post-test to assess long-term vocabulary retention, which limits conclusions about the durability of the learning effects observed. Practically, the study was conducted with a small, purposively selected group of English Club participants at a single vocational school in Denpasar — a context that may not be representative of all Balinese schools, non-Balinese student populations, or formal classroom settings where participation is compulsory rather than voluntary. The extracurricular, voluntary nature of the English Club may mean that participants were already more motivated and culturally engaged than the average EFL student, potentially amplifying the observed effects. Additionally, the researcher's dual role as facilitator (Kelian Banjar) and data collector introduces a degree of positionality that, while addressed through reflexive journaling and member checking, may have influenced how participants expressed their responses. Future research should address these limitations through delayed retention testing, larger and more diverse participant samples, and comparative studies across different cultural and regional contexts within Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study has demonstrated that the Bali Banjar card game is a powerful and multi-dimensional educational medium for English Club students at SMK TI Bali Global Denpasar. Through classroom observation, questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and post-game document analysis, five principal findings were documented: (i) a critical pre-game gap in Balinese cultural vocabulary in English; (ii) significantly enhanced vocabulary acquisition through competitive matching gameplay; (iii) cultural literacy development and Balinese identity affirmation — particularly through the Sacred Calendar & Time category; (iv) markedly increased speaking motivation and oral English confidence; and (v) a post-game strengthening of students' sense of cultural responsibility and aspirations for English-language Balinese cultural content creation.

Balinese Generation Z students — born into one of the world's most celebrated cultural traditions — are at risk of becoming strangers to their own heritage. Digital globalisation has produced a generation that navigates social media with ease but cannot explain in English what *canang sari*, *subak*, *ngaben*, *Nyepi*, or *Galungan* truly mean. The Bali Banjar game addresses this rupture by making Balinese culture interesting, engaging, and personally empowering in English — demonstrating that *kearifan lokal* and EFL instruction are not competing educational priorities but mutually reinforcing ones.

For EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers in Bali and across Indonesia, the implications are clear: culturally grounded, game-based EFL instruction is an educational imperative — one that simultaneously develops English language competence, cultural pride, speaking confidence, and the character values of heritage stewardship and community responsibility enshrined in Indonesia's *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* agenda. It is the kind of education that Balinese Generation Z students deserve: education that honours where they come from and prepares them to carry their culture confidently into the future — in Indonesian, in Balinese, and in English.

Future research should investigate long-term vocabulary retention through delayed post-tests, explore the game's effectiveness with broader student populations and non-Balinese students, and track whether students' digital content creation aspirations are realised over time. Comparative studies across Indonesia's diverse cultural regions would further illuminate the potential of this game-based, culturally responsive EFL model as a national pedagogical approach.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

Authors' contribution

Conceptualization, research design, and development of the Bali Banjar card game were conducted by the author. Data collection was carried out through classroom observation, questionnaire administration, interviews, and document analysis. The author also facilitated the gameplay activities, conducted data analysis using a narrative descriptive approach, interpreted the findings, and prepared the manuscript. The author reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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