



Problems of Nias Tribe Children in Understanding Indonesian Language Subjects

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Keywords:	Abstract
<i>Learning difficulties; Village of Nias; Indonesian Language; Problematic</i>	<i>This study aims to find out the problems of Nias tribal children in understanding Indonesian language subjects and to find out the teacher's efforts in providing solutions to Nias tribe children's problems in understanding Indonesian subjects in the material of Friends in Diversity grade II at SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang Kota Padangsidimpuan. The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive, data is collected using observation, interview and documentation techniques, in ensuring the validity of the data, source triangulation techniques and techniques are used, then analyzed by means of interactive analysis, namely data reduction models, data presentation models, and drawing conclusions model. The results of this study show that the main problems faced include language factors such as differences in dialect and pronunciation, basic literacy skills, especially in reading, and geographical constraints in the form of a considerable distance between home and school and the community environment. In dealing with these problems, teachers try to provide solutions through the application of lecture methods so that the delivery of material is easier to understand, and respect the identity and background of students without any difference in treatment. The results of this study affirm the importance of teachers' ability to manage diverse classrooms to create a conducive, effective, and supportive learning environment for all students.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Education is a systematic process that aims to develop human potential through teaching, training, and habituation (Shafiyyah, 2025). From the perspective of national development, education is not only oriented to knowledge transfer, but also to the formation of character, values, and adaptability to the socio-cultural dynamics of society (Laila et al., 2025). At the elementary school (SD) education level, education has an important role in forming the basis of literacy, critical thinking, and social understanding skills of children aged 7–12 years (Roussou et al., 2025). This phase is a crucial period in language acquisition and the formation of interpersonal



communication skills, so that the quality of language learning will have a direct influence on the cognitive and affective development of students.

One of the fundamental aspects of basic education in Indonesia is Indonesian language learning, which functions not only as a means of communication, but also as a medium for the formation of social values (Putro & Supriyono, 2025), such as tolerance and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity contained in Indonesian learning materials with the theme "Making Friends in Diversity". In addition, learning Indonesian at a more basic level also functions as a means of internalizing national values and strengthening national identity through contextual reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities (Hatima et al., 2025). Indonesian has a strategic position as the national language and the main language of instruction in the national education system (Astawan et al., 2025), as well as a vehicle to strengthen social integration in the midst of the nation's pluralism (Anum et al., 2025).

Language has a fundamental role in shaping mindsets, conveying ideas, and building a society's social and cultural identity (Sharma, 2025). In the context of nationality, Indonesian is a language of unity that reflects the struggle, nationalism, and state identity in Indonesia (Syamsi et al., 2025). As mandated in Indonesian Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas), mastery of the Indonesian language is a basic competency that every student must possess to support the success of learning across disciplines (Hidayat et al., 2025). More than just a means of communication, language also functions as a representation of cultural identity, a means of social integration processes, and an instrument of national unification in a multiethnic and multicultural context (Alisoy, 2025). Therefore, effective Indonesian language acquisition is a determining factor for the success of students in navigating social and academic life in the school environment and the wider community (Yulianto & Ansori, 2025).

The reality that occurs in the field shows that the use of Indonesian as the language of instruction is still a challenge for students from certain ethnic backgrounds, especially those whose mother tongue is not Indonesian. Differences in phonological, syntactic, and semantic systems between regional languages and Indonesian often hinder the process of understanding and communication in the classroom (Chhorn, 2025). In some multicultural areas, such as the city of Padangsidempuan, differences in language, culture, and socio-economic conditions also affect the learning process. At SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang, for example, students from the Nias tribe community often face difficulties in understanding Indonesian lessons, especially in the material "Making Friends in Diversity", which requires linguistic skills as well as contextual social understanding. This phenomenon indicates that Indonesian learning is not fully adaptive to the cultural and local language backgrounds of students. This condition shows that there is an urgent need to review the effectiveness of Indonesian language learning in the context of local cultural and linguistic diversity (Putri et al., 2025), so that the goals of national education can be achieved equally throughout Indonesia.

The Problem of The Study

The main problem in this study is related to the various difficulties faced by Nias students in understanding Indonesian subjects, especially in the material

"Making Friends in Diversity". These difficulties are not only linguistic, but also rooted in cognitive, affective, and contextual factors that interact with each other in the learning process. Linguistically, the differences between the mother tongue (Bahasa Nias) and Indonesian, both in terms of phonology, morphology, and syntax, cause students to often experience obstacles in pronunciation, vocabulary meaning, and understanding complex sentences (Jasemi & Gottardo, 2023). This difference in sound system (dialect) and grammatical structure has implications for the low ability of students to understand text messages and instructions delivered by teachers in the classroom (Almukhanbet et al., 2025).

In addition, the limitation of basic literacy skills, especially in the aspects of reading, comprehension and structured writing, is a significant factor that aggravates the difficulty of learning Indonesian (Aulia, 2025). Many students are not familiar with the use of Indonesian in academic contexts, so the process of decoding and interpreting texts becomes slower (Singgih et al., 2025). Geographical factors also play a role, where some students live in rural areas with limited access to learning resources and educational facilities (Erdem, 2020). The distance of residence away from school has an impact on their attendance levels and the intensity of their involvement in the process of learning activities thus affecting their language development (Khairani et al., 2025).

This condition has a direct impact on students' motivation and learning engagement, which tends to decrease when they find it difficult to understand the content of the lessons. In this context, the role of teachers becomes very crucial. The ability of teachers to manage culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classrooms determines the extent to which the learning process can take place effectively and inclusively (Cong-Lem, 2025). Teachers need to have intercultural pedagogical competence, adaptability to learning methods, and sensitivity to the linguistic background of students (Iskandar et al., 2025). Thus, the problems faced by Nias students in understanding Indonesian subjects are multidimensional, involving language, environment, and pedagogical aspects that need to be studied in depth.

Research's State of the Art

Various previous studies have highlighted the importance of teaching Indonesian for elementary school students in the context of a multicultural, plural, and nationalistic society. Indonesian learning is seen not only as a means of mastering language skills, but also as a medium for internalizing national values and strengthening social identity in the midst of cultural diversity (Barkah, 2024). The results of the study (Daeli et al., 2025) show that one of the main obstacles experienced by Nias tribal children is differences in language, culture, and social norms of the local community, so they face difficulties in the social adaptation process. The results of the study (Hasan et al., 2025) show that often the lack of students' ability to use Indonesian properly and correctly is an obstacle to communication between students, especially students who have different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. In fact, according to a study (Wulandari & Muhroji, 2025) that the use of regional languages in learning causes unilateral interaction among students during learning due to differences in ethnicity and language.

The findings mentioned above strengthen the understanding that a pedagogical approach that is adaptive to the social and linguistic background of students is an important factor in increasing the effectiveness of Indonesian learning in elementary schools. However, most previous research has focused on urban contexts or majority ethnic groups, while minority communities such as the Nias tribe in the Padangsidempuan region have not received much academic attention. In fact, their distinctive linguistic and socio-cultural characteristics can provide a new perspective on the dynamics of Indonesian learning in a multilingual and multicultural environment.

In addition, research on the Indonesian learning process in the material "Making Friends in Diversity" at the elementary school level is also still very limited. The material is essentially designed to instill social values, tolerance, and togetherness through language mastery and cross-cultural communication. However, in practice, many students from various backgrounds who are not native Indonesian speakers have difficulty in relating the content of the material to their own social and cultural experiences. This shows that there is a gap between the objectives of the curriculum and the reality of learning in the field. Therefore, an in-depth empirical study is needed to analyze the problems of Nias students in understanding Indonesian subjects, not only from the linguistic aspect, but also from the pedagogical and socio-cultural dimensions that shape their learning experience.

Novelty, Research Gap, & Objective

The novelty of this research lies in the focus of its study on the Nias Tribe community in Padangsidempuan City as a linguistic minority group that faces obstacles in understanding Indonesian at the elementary school level. Unlike previous studies that generally focused on urban contexts or majority ethnic groups, this study highlights the reality of Indonesian learning in multiethnic rural areas, where interlinguistic and intercultural interactions significantly affect the teaching and learning process. Thus, this study seeks to fill the empirical gap in the study of language education that examines the relationship between linguistic, socio-cultural, and pedagogical factors in language minority areas.

In addition, another novelty of this study lies in the emphasis on the role of teachers in managing culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classrooms. This research not only identifies the problems faced by Nias students in understanding Indonesian subject matter, but also explores pedagogical strategies and solutions applied by teachers in overcoming these obstacles. By combining linguistic and pedagogical approaches, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the interaction between teachers' abilities and the socio-cultural conditions of students contributes to the effectiveness of Indonesian learning in elementary schools. In particular, the main objectives of this study are to: *First*, analyze the problems faced by Nias tribal students in understanding Indonesian subjects in the material "Making Friends in Diversity" in grade II of SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang, Padangsidempuan City. *Second*, identify and describe the efforts made by teachers in providing solutions to the problems experienced by Nias tribal students in understanding the material.

The results of this research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of a more inclusive, contextual, and multicultural-based Indonesian learning model, as well as a practical contribution to improving teachers' competence in managing linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to be the basis for efforts to improve the quality of Indonesian language teaching in primary schools, especially in areas with heterogeneous socio-cultural characteristics.

METHOD

Type and Design

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. This approach aims to describe in depth the social and cultural reality of Nias students in understanding Indonesian subjects, especially in the material "Making Friends in Diversity" in grade II of SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang, Padangsidempuan City. The qualitative method was chosen because it is suitable for researching natural conditions without variable manipulation, with researchers acting as the main instruments of the research (Köhler et al., 2025). The ethnographic approach is used to understand the behavior, language, and social interaction patterns of Nias students in the context of learning. This research was carried out in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The process of conducting research is carried out as it is, there is no intervention or experimental treatment on the subject. All data is collected naturally and scientifically through observation, interviews, and documentation. This study did not involve clinical trials, so it did not require ethical approval.

Data and Data Sources

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. *First*, primary data was obtained directly from the results of observations and interviews with school principals, grade II teachers, and Nias tribal students at SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang. This data includes linguistic aspects, basic literacy skills (reading and writing), and social interaction in learning. *Second*, secondary data comes from school documents, academic records, scientific literature, and journals related to multicultural education and Indonesian language learning. The data used is qualitative and presented in the form of narratives, tables, and the results of interpretation of field findings.

Data Collection Technique

Data was collected using three main techniques, namely: *First*, moderate participatory observation, to observe students' behavior and learning process directly in the classroom. *Second*, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals, class teachers, and Nias tribal students to explore experiences, perceptions, and obstacles in understanding Indonesian material. Third, Documentation, used to obtain supporting data in the form of student lists, photos of learning activities, and school academic documents.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is carried out interactively by following the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages: *First*, Data reduction, which is the process of filtering, selecting, and simplifying relevant data to answer the focus of the

research. *Second*, the presentation of data, in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, and excerpts from interviews that describe the problems of Nias tribal students. *Third*, drawing conclusions and verification, which is the interpretation of data that has been analyzed in depth to find meanings and patterns related to research problems. The validity of the data was tested using the source triangulation technique and technique, which is carried out by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation from various sources to ensure the consistency and reliability of the information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the main findings of the research on learning difficulties faced by Nias students in understanding Indonesian subjects, especially in the material "Making Friends in Diversity" in grade II of SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang, Padangsidempuan City. The discussion was carried out by interpreting the results of the research based on previous findings and the theory of multicultural learning and language acquisition.

Problems of Nias Students in Understanding Indonesian Language Subjects

The results of the study show that students from the Nias ethnic group experience a number of obstacles that can be categorized into three main aspects, namely language, socio-cultural, and environmental/geographical. Each aspect is closely related and cumulatively affects the ability of students to understand and use Indonesian effectively in the school environment. The first problem has to do with language barriers. The main difficulties experienced by Nias tribal students lie in the phonology and pronunciation aspects. This is strongly influenced by the mother tongue (Bahasa Nias) causing linguistic interference in the pronunciation of Indonesian words. The Nias language has a different sound system and syllable structure than Indonesian, so students often experience phonetic errors, especially in double consonants and long vowels. This condition has an impact on oral comprehension and clarity of communication in the classroom.

This phenomenon is in line with findings (Sugiara et al., 2025) which state that differences in dialects and phonetic systems between regional languages and Indonesian can hinder the acquisition of a second language. This interference not only affects speech ability, but also has implications for listening ability, as learners tend to interpret meaning based on the sound structure of their native language. Thus, the linguistic barriers experienced by Nias students are a natural form of the language transition process, as described in the theory of second language acquisition by Stephen Krashen, where differences in language structure become an initial source of difficulties for non-native speakers (Almashy, 2025).

In addition to phonological constraints, the basic literacy skills of Nias students are still limited, especially in the aspects of reading, comprehension and writing. Most students show delays in recognizing letters, understanding simple texts, and writing sentences with the correct structure. This is due to the lack of use of Indonesian in the home environment, where daily interaction is still dominated by regional languages. These findings are consistent with the results of research (Yulita et al., 2025) which

revealed that students with regional language backgrounds tend to experience slower literacy development compared to native Indonesian speakers. Despite this, field data showed a gradual improvement in reading and writing skills through repetition activities, phonetic exercises, and intensive guidance from teachers and parents. This emphasizes the importance of supporting a consistent learning environment in the process of acquiring Indonesian as a second language.

Environmental and Geographical Constraints

Geographical aspects are also a significant factor that affects the learning process. Some students live in hilly areas such as Sibulutolang, with a considerable distance from school. Some students even have to walk up to two hours each day to reach school. This condition has an impact on the level of attendance, physical fatigue, learning motivation, and concentration during learning activities. This condition is in line with research (Komari et al., 2025) which shows that geographical factors and limited access to transportation are one of the main causes of educational inequality in rural areas of Indonesia. A less supportive physical environment also worsens students' ability to participate in learning optimally, especially in subjects that require high concentration such as Indonesian.

In addition to language and environmental factors, socio-cultural aspects also affect students' behavior and learning engagement. Although many Nias families have blended in with the local community, the process of cultural adaptation still affects the way students interact in the classroom. The results of observations show that some Nias students tend to be quieter, rarely interact, rarely ask questions, and listen more. This attitude is influenced by Nias cultural norms that emphasize respect for the authority of teachers, as well as insecurity in actively using Indonesian. However, as social interaction increases and collaborative learning methods are applied, students' confidence in speaking Indonesian begins to grow. These findings are in line with the presentation (Nasution & Fauzan, 2025) on the importance of a multicultural learning approach that pays attention to the cultural background of students to create an inclusive and participatory learning atmosphere.

Thus, based on the foregoing discussion, the overall findings of this study indicate that Nias students possess considerable potential to achieve proficiency in the Indonesian language. However, the pace and effectiveness of their language acquisition are strongly shaped by the dynamic interaction of linguistic factors (such as mother tongue interference), environmental conditions, and broader socio-cultural contexts. These constraints should not be understood as isolated variables; rather, they function as interconnected and mutually reinforcing elements within the complex system of language learning in a multilingual society. Ignoring one factor while addressing another may reduce the effectiveness of instructional interventions.

Accordingly, this study underscores the necessity for teachers to design and implement adaptive, contextual, and inclusive learning strategies that are responsive to students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. One promising approach is the application of communicative language teaching models that integrate local cultural values, daily experiences, and students' first language as a pedagogical bridge toward Indonesian. By situating language learning within meaningful social and cultural contexts familiar to students, Indonesian language acquisition can occur more

naturally, effectively, and sustainably. Such an approach not only enhances students' linguistic competence but also fosters cultural recognition and learner confidence, which are essential components of successful language education in multicultural classrooms

Teachers' Efforts in Providing Solutions to Nias Children's Problems in Diversity Materials

Teachers at SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang have implemented various adaptive pedagogical strategies to overcome learning difficulties experienced by Nias tribal students in understanding Indonesian subjects. These strategies are based on the principles of inclusive and multicultural education, which emphasizes equality, active participation, and respect for cultural diversity in the learning process. The application of a humanist and contextual approach is key in creating a conducive learning environment for students from different linguistic and social backgrounds.

One of the main strategies implemented by teachers is to strengthen language skills through repetitive and interactive methods. Teachers use a combination of lecture, question and answer, and guided reading and speaking exercises to help students improve their pronunciation and comprehension of the Indonesian language. The repetition of words and sentences is carried out consistently, accompanied by examples of correct pronunciation by the teacher, so that students are used to hearing and imitating the structure of Indonesian sounds without feeling pressured. This method is in accordance with the theory of behaviorism in language learning which emphasizes the importance of practice and *reinforcement* in forming language habits (Fuqaha & Zainollah, 2025). In addition, an interactive approach encourages learners to be more active in two-way communication, which according to Stephen Krashen is an effective comprehensible form of input for second language acquisition (Nguyen & Doan, 2025). Thus, this strategy not only helps learners overcome linguistic difficulties, but also increases confidence in communicating

Teachers also apply remedial learning for students who have low reading skills. This activity is carried out in small groups with an individualized approach to teaching, where the teacher adjusts the level of difficulty of the material to the students' abilities. This approach is supported by *peer learning activities*, which allow students who are more proficient to help their friends in reading and writing. This strategy is in line with the theory of *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) put forward by Vygotsky, which emphasizes the importance of *scaffolding* or temporary assistance from more competent people in the learning process (Hamid & Abbas, 2025). Through this activity, students not only improve their literacy skills, but also develop social skills and empathy in working together.

In addition to pedagogical strategies in the classroom, teachers also optimize the role of parents and communities in supporting the learning process. Teachers actively invite parents to accompany children to practice reading at home, especially for students who still have phonetic difficulties and text comprehension. Although most parents have a relatively low level of education, they show a high commitment to their child's education, which is a driving factor for the success of improving basic literacy skills. This collaborative approach is in line with Epstein's view of *school-family-community partnership*, where synergy between school and family can

strengthen students' learning outcomes (Hamid & Abbas, 2025). In the context of the Nias Tribe, community involvement also functions as a medium for internalizing cultural values that support children's discipline and work ethic in learning.

The results show that language learning in a multicultural context requires an adaptive strategy and considers the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the learners. These findings support the results of previous research on the importance of multicultural education and teacher empathy in creating an inclusive learning environment (Saputra et al., 2025). Teachers have an important role as a bridge between cultural diversity and students' academic success. By implementing flexible teaching methods, respecting students' identities, and collaborating with the community, teachers can create a more effective and humane learning process. In addition, the policy of building satellite schools in remote areas is a positive step to realize equitable education, although it still requires infrastructure and resource support from the government.

Further research is recommended to expand the scope of analysis by conducting comparative studies among various ethnic groups in the context of Indonesian language learning across other multicultural regions in Indonesia. Such comparative research is important to reveal how differences in linguistic backgrounds, local cultures, and social environments influence students' language acquisition processes, learning strategies, and attitudes toward the national language. By examining similarities and variations between regions, future studies can contribute to the development of more inclusive, culturally responsive, and context-sensitive Indonesian language learning models that accommodate the country's rich diversity.

In addition, further studies are encouraged to explore the use of digital technology as an alternative and innovative learning medium, particularly for students living in remote and underserved areas. Research in this area can focus on how digital platforms, mobile applications, and online or blended learning models help overcome linguistic limitations as well as geographical constraints. Investigating issues such as accessibility, digital literacy, infrastructure readiness, and teacher competence in using technology will provide valuable insights for policymakers and educators. Ultimately, this line of research can support the formulation of more equitable and sustainable language education policies that ensure all students, regardless of their location, have equal opportunities to develop Indonesian language proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the difficulties experienced by Nias students in understanding Indonesian language subjects, particularly in the material "Making Friends in Diversity" in grade II of SD Negeri 200508 Sihitang, Padangsidempuan City, are influenced by several interrelated factors. These include differences in mother tongue, limited basic literacy skills, as well as socio-cultural and geographical conditions. The use of Nias as students' first language leads to linguistic interference, which affects their abilities in reading, pronunciation, and comprehension of

Indonesian vocabulary. Furthermore, restricted access to educational facilities caused by distance and environmental constraints contributes to the slower pace of students' learning progress.

The findings also demonstrate that teachers play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Through the implementation of adaptive and inclusive instructional strategies—such as interactive lecturing, individualized guidance, and collaboration with parents and the local community—teachers are able to enhance students' motivation, participation, and Indonesian language proficiency. These results highlight the significance of adopting a multicultural approach in Indonesian language instruction at the elementary school level, particularly in contexts characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Overall, this study contributes to the development of more contextual, inclusive, and empathetic pedagogical practices in Indonesian primary education. Future research is recommended to broaden the scope of investigation by involving students from other ethnic backgrounds and to examine the potential of digital technology as an innovative tool to improve equity and effectiveness in Indonesian language learning, especially in remote and marginalized areas.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be constructed as a potential conflict of interest.

