

# Bringing Indonesian Local Wisdom Into the English Class

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**Abstract**— Learning a foreign language may influence the learners' awareness on local culture. Learning a foreign language is learning its culture. They probably copy or even think that foreign culture is better than theirs. It can threaten their native culture awareness. It is necessary to insert materials with local culture in teaching activities. In Indonesia, it is in line with the Indonesian National Education System and 2013 national curriculum. The writer tries to find Indonesian local wisdoms that can be used as the material. This is a library research in which the writer collects and compares information from articles and thesis on Indonesian local wisdom in teaching English found in journals. Next the writer finds texts, pictures, and videos with Indonesian local wisdom content in internet to be integrated in teaching English. The writer proposes several materials with local wisdom contents such as whale hunting in Lamalera, *Pranata Mangsa* (seasonal rule) in Javanese tradition, rice plantation system in Bali (*Terasering*), Saman Dance from Aceh. There are some activities can be applied with those materials, like; storytelling, discussion, grammar, identifying value, debating, genre-based text (procedure, descriptive). Using local wisdom also can develop four language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

**Keywords**— *local wisdom, foreign language, English materials*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Think globally act locally, we are probably familiar with this slogan. It is introduced firstly by a Scottish town planner and a social activist namely Patrick Geddes (Burhan,2012). The appearance of this slogan is due to the impact of the globalization era. This simple but meaningful slogan can give a deep impression for society. This slogan wants people to think globally or worldwide without forgetting the local values such as culture where they come from and live in.

This slogan was introduced by Patrick Geddes in an environmental field. However, this slogan is also corresponding to the learning foreign language such as English as an international language. Dealing with this situation, this slogan means that even though language learners can speak and write English very well, they should not forget their local culture.

Remembering its role as an international language, it is necessary to master English in this global and digitalized era where there is no border for time and place. English is used everywhere, every time and every field. Even more, nowadays with AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) in South East Asia, the importance of mastering English is getting more important.

As one of ASEAN members, the Indonesian government has prepared some efforts and one of them is introducing the society with a foreign language like English as an international language. English is introduced to young learners such as in elementary school. Hopefully, they can master English well because they have already learned it since at a young age. Besides, the government emphasizes the teaching and learning English in school to develop the learners' communicative skills.

Learning foreign languages such as English will involve the learning of the target language cultures which are sometimes different or even are contrary to those of the native language. Septy (2016) mentions that during the learning process of a certain target language, there can be positive and negative effects on the learner's traits. In the case of English language teaching in Indonesia, the learners will also learn about the culture of English speaking countries with their western cultures such as America and England. The learners are probably influenced by western cultures and even they will copy them. Even worse, nowadays, many of us think that western cultures are better than our own culture. The learners will be very proud if they act and think like western. A language teacher should be able to guide their learners in learning target culture so that they can filter and select the cultural value that will give them positive influence and they will not lose their own cultural identity. So that's why, probably it is necessary to include some local wisdom from native language culture in teaching and learning a foreign language such as English.

Local wisdom refers to the identity of a certain culture enabling the society's members to grasp as well as to screen culture identity belongs to other nations Kaltsum (as cited in Mulyani and Soetopo, 2016). Local wisdom as one of the cultural heritages is handed down from one generation to the

next generation of a certain society. Indonesia is known as an archipelago country so that it is known for its diversity of tribes, languages, ethnicity, folklore, custom, and tradition. Those contribute to the richness of local wisdom as well. Besides, the inserting of local wisdom in language teaching and learning aims at introducing local wisdom to the learners, conserving the local wisdom as well as respecting the local wisdom.

There have been several researches and articles discussing about the use of Indonesian local wisdom as a part of culture in teaching English. Mulyati and Soetopo (2016) inserting local culture in teaching reading comprehension especially narrative text for the eight year students by creating digital comic with local culture content. Prasetyo (2016) argues that using folklore gives many benefits such as to preserve and appreciate Indonesian culture, to help the learners to get cultural acquisition, to build learners' characters with its positive values. So it is necessary to include folklores in an EFL text book used in the class.

Septy (2016) explains how to cope with local wisdom based material in teaching English to combine both the learners' linguistic competence and character. Septy finds some character value and norms from certain local wisdom then instilling it into the material used in the class. Septy further applies the local wisdom based materials into an attractive ICT based media. Fitriani explains the importance of inserting local wisdom in English language teaching and also she uses Indonesian traditional game to embed the local wisdom in the class.

Albanti and Madkur (2018) write that it is very essential to insert local wisdom based material in teaching English. They further explain about classroom activities and process of teaching linguistics skill in the class. Rifa'i (2019) proposes how to choose appropriate text or materials so that it can be used in the class. There are four parameters in doing so such as kind of local wisdom, type of courses, type of students, and certain factors related to the material itself. He however, does not explain kind of local wisdom that can be used as materials in the class.

Most of the research and articles show the importance of local wisdom based materials in teaching English. They provide how to create material with local culture and local wisdom content. Some of them have used local wisdom such as folklore, traditional game and comic with local culture content in teaching English. So far the writer has not found the article or research done to find the Indonesian local wisdom that can be used as the material for teaching English. The writer concerns on finding local wisdom in Indonesia that can be used to teach English. This article aims at finding Indonesian local wisdom that can be applied as materials in teaching English in the class.

To do so, first thing first, the writer begins by discussing what local wisdom is. Farmers in Javanese society have a certain rule telling them when the right time to start their farm or to harvest their crops is. This rule is known as *Pranata Mangsa* (*Aturan Musim* or Seasonal Rule) that consists of

information about season changes happened every year. The changing can be observed from animal behavior, plant growing, and natural situation. This rule suggests the farmer when to harvest their rice as the main crops and when to plant *palawija* as the second crop. The replacement of rice to *palawija* in the field is due to the balance of nature itself. Such kinds of rules do not only belong to Javanese society but also to other societies in Indonesia such as *Papan Katika* in Dayak, *Parlahan* in Batak, and *Wariga* in Bali. Meanwhile, Dutch farmers got their wheat crop when they hear the rustling sound of the wind in the wheat fields in summertime. Based on the experience told by their old generation, the loose seed of the wheat rattle in the cup can be heard in the wind, and when it happens it means harvest time.

Those phenomena can be classified as local wisdom. Local wisdom is closely related to the culture of certain societies since local wisdom is a part of the culture. In line Kaltsum (as cited in Mulyani and Soetopo, 2016) mentions that local wisdom consists of norms, characteristics, and culture that are adjusted by certain communities in a long period. It is handed down from one generation to the next generation. Meanwhile, Haba (as cited in Marnelly, 2017) also mentions that numerous cultures which have been recognized, believed, and acknowledged to be an essential part in strengthening certain society refer to local wisdom. Further, Asmin (as cited in Sehe, Tola, Kamarudin and Hamsa, 2016) states that local wisdom points to entities becoming the regional distinctive features in several aspects such as economy, culture, information technology, communication, ecology, etc. of a certain community.

Local wisdom is knowledge and tradition based on experience. Mungmachon (2012) describes that experience and truth from society can create local wisdom. This experience has lasted for the long term so that it becomes knowledge that belongs to a certain society. So that's why local wisdom is said to be passed on from generation to generation. For example, is *Pranata Mangsa* in Javanese farmers. At first, it could be only the experiences of observing nature changing. However, these experiences happen over and over, so the society accepts it as the truth and knowledge which are then told through generations. Local wisdom includes folktales, proverbs, songs, traditional games, etc. Further, Ife (as cited in Marnelly, 2017) classifies local wisdom into local knowledge (season change, flora, fauna, geographical situation), local value (values or policies that must be agreed and obeyed by the member of the society), local skill (the skill to survive in certain society such as hunting, gathering, harvesting, etc.), local resources (how to use the local resources such as forest, garden, water, agricultural land, and housing), mechanism of local decision making (how to decide something).

Local wisdom is a matter of value belongs to a certain community. Local wisdom consists of policies or guidelines and life perfectives belong to a certain group of people (Albantani and Madkur, 2018). Furthermore, Septy (2016) defines that local wisdom is traditional values from social and natural environment grown up from generation to generation so that it has expanded into philosophical attention and

understanding of the society. As a part of life viewpoint, local wisdom helps to organize and promote a better socio-cultural system in a certain community. Local wisdom can be a filter of other cultures because it can help the member of the society to assimilate or absorb the foreign culture that can influence their local culture.

Learning a language means learning its culture as well. Littlejohn (as cited in Fitriani) states that language teachers teaching their learners more than language skills themselves. They also teach cultural costumes, values, ways of thinking, feeling as well as acting. Learning how to communicate with a new language means learning how to behave in a new culture too (Giyatmi, 2019). The teachers should insert cultural material of the target language in their class to support language learning. For example, the teacher can expose the learners to authentic materials which include the real condition of the society where the target language is spoken so that the learners can use the language appropriately just like the native speakers do. However, authentic materials used sometimes do not suit local culture so that's why it can cause problems.

Meanwhile, there can be positive and negative effects on learners' characters when they learning a target language. The learners may take the target language culture into their way of life and thinking. This can result in some conflicts with their local culture which are different from that of the target culture (Septy, 2016). The worst thing is when the culture of the target language gets more attention within the language teaching so that it can take the place of the native culture. Even this can make an opinion that the target language culture is better than their own culture and in the long shot, it can threaten the native culture. It can destroy the national identity itself.

The problem can be solved by bringing local culture as the life viewpoint into the language learning materials in the class. It means learning a language by using local wisdom in their class activity. As cited from Ayatrohaedi, (as cited in Marnelly, 2017) local wisdom is to prevent the effects of foreign culture, to harmonize the elements of foreign culture inside the original or native culture. Local wisdom can help the learners to absorb and filter the target culture that does not match with their native culture. The using of local wisdom can also train learners to respect and proud of their own culture.

A language teacher should be wise in introducing target language culture and local culture at once. Introducing target language cultures does not mean to let the learners take all the culture of the target language entirely so that it will not overcome the native culture. The teachers must help the learners to filter those cultures by giving them materials with local culture as an encounter. Also, the teachers should give English activity including local wisdom in the class. Fitriani claims that the language teachers need to raise local culture including local wisdom in their learning activities. It is due to maintaining the learners' appreciation of their local culture.

English is still a foreign language in Indonesia so it is not used as a means of communication. It, however, is the most important foreign language learned and taught in Indonesia. It appears in one of the lessons in school. As a foreign language,

English is only used as language instruction in certain education levels to support the ability to use the foreign language of learners (Law Number 20 of 2003 Chapter VII article 33 about language instruction).

English teaching in Indonesia started from the Dutch colonialization, however, it stopped temporarily in Japanese colonialization. Then after the Indonesian Independence, English was considered as the first foreign language taught in secondary school (SMP and SMA). Indonesian has experienced several changes in dealing with the application of teaching the English curriculum. The changes are influenced by economic and political conditions. Nuen (2018) mentions that the curriculum for teaching English used in Indonesia are 1953 curriculum, 1962 curriculum, 1968 curriculum, 1975 curriculum, 1984 curriculum, 1994 curriculum for junior high school (SMP) and 1950 curriculum, 1962 curriculum, 1968 curriculum, 1975 curriculum, 1984 curriculum, 1994 curriculum for senior high school (SMU).

Meanwhile Sundayana mentions that the development of curriculum for English teaching can be classified into five periods such as 1975 curriculum, 1986 curriculum, 1994 curriculum, 2004 curriculum, and KTSP. Reswari (2018) states that there are several changing in Indonesian curricula dealing with teaching English, for instance, 1945's grammar translation-based curriculum, 1958's audio-lingual based curriculum, 1975's revised audio-lingual-based curriculum, 1984's structure-based communicative curriculum, 1994's meaning-based communicative curriculum, 2004's competency-based curriculum.

Sundayana mentions that the 1975 curriculum uses the audiolingual approach. This method adopted on the behaviorist views saying that language is habit involving stimulus, response, and reinforcement. The aim of English teaching-learning based on this curriculum is the learners can master some language elements such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and structure of the target language so that they can master English like foreigners. Still from Sundayana, it is stated that the 1986 and 1994 curricula use the communicative approach. This approach aims at developing the learners' communicative competence based not only on grammar knowledge but also on the use of language on communication.

Meanwhile, the 2004 curriculum and KTSP curriculum use a genre-based communicative approach and literacy approach (Sundayana). 2004 curriculum is also known as Competency-Based Curriculum or KBK (*Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi*). This curriculum also uses a communicative approach. KBK aims at developing the learners' communicative competence by consolidating the four language skills such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Masduqi,). In 2006, Indonesia applied a new curriculum which was the further development of 2004 curriculum. It is known as 2006 curriculum or *Kurikulum Satuan Pendidikan* (KTSP) or School-Based Curriculum. KTSP curriculum as quoted from (Reswari, 2018) is a set of an operational curriculum elements which is compiled and implemented by each educational unit to provide wide authority and scope to schools to undertake and develop organizational variations in education in accordance with the

circumstances, potential, and needs of the region, as well as the condition of learners. Nowadays, Indonesia applies the 2013 curriculum. The 2013 curriculum is applying a scientific approach as its basic learning approach and has three aspects of assessment such as knowledge aspects, skill aspects, and attitude or behavior ones.

Teaching English is teaching its culture at once, however, the teachers should concern with their learners' local culture as their nation identity. The teachers, of course, do not want their learners to know the foreign culture better than their own culture just for the sake of foreign language competency. When foreign culture overtakes its local culture, the loss of national identity will probably be the worst consequence

Mulyani and Soetopo (2016) claim learners' culture should be considered in teaching English in Indonesia. Indonesian culture can be one of the essential elements during the English teaching and learning process. Furthermore, English is still a foreign language in Indonesia so it will be wise if the learners learn not only the foreign language but also the local culture. Royani (as cited in Mulyani and Soetopo, 2016) adds that the use of authentic material in teaching English does not always match with the Indonesian culture so to encounter it, inserting material about local culture during the class activity is a wise way. Further Kristiawan (as cited in Mulyani and Soetopo, 2016) explains that inserting local culture into English teaching materials helps develop the learners' linguistic and social proficiency. Besides, the use of local culture can make the teaching meaningful. Inserting local culture is to embed the local wisdom, as a life viewpoint, to the English learners in Indonesia (Fitriani).

Adding local wisdom is in line with the Indonesian National Educational System. National education functions to develop the ability and to build nation character as well as dignified nation civilization. It means that the nation character building becomes one of the concerns in the Indonesian national educational system. It is also in line with the current 2013 curriculum which mentions that there must be the relation between teaching English and the learners' closest environment so that the learners can use English in a meaningful way (Mulyani and Soetopo, 2016). It can be done by inserting local wisdom into the class activities during the process of teaching and learning English in the classroom. Giving English material with local wisdom content can be very effective since it is very close to the environment of the learners. They can learn the material easily because they share the same background knowledge.

## II. METHOD

This is a library research gathering information from a number of literatures to complete the article. The literatures used in the research are thesis and articles based on research found in journals. The writer gathers some research and studies that are closely related to the local that are closely related to the local wisdom in teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia. The articles gathered discuss the importance and the role of local wisdom in teaching English. Besides, the articles also explain how to apply certain local

wisdom in teaching English in Indonesia. The writer compares them to find the similarities and dissimilarities among them. Besides, the writer also collects information from website, and You Tube channel to gain examples of texts and videos with local wisdom content to provide some examples of local wisdom based materials.

## III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Having read the related article discussing local wisdom significant in teaching foreign language, the writers proposes some materials with local wisdom content to apply in the class. Local wisdom consists of local knowledge, local value, local skill, local resources, and local decision making. Here the writer tries to propose several local wisdoms for teaching English in the class;

### 1) *Introducing Local Skill*

Local skill belongs to local wisdom. Local skill is skill to survive in society such as hunting, gathering, harvesting. There is a unique hunting tradition in Indonesia to be exact is in Lamalera, one region in West Nusa Tenggara. It is known as whale hunting. The teacher can use this local wisdom to create several class activities. There are some scenarios that can be applied in the class. First, the teacher may give the learners an English text about Whale Hunting such as found in <https://www.indonesia.travel/gb/en/destinations/bali-nusa-tenggara/flores/the-whale-hunt-of-lamalera>. The teacher can ask the learners' opinion about that tradition. Besides, the teacher can provide some topics dealing with hunting whale tradition have a group discussion. The teacher can give guidance questions such as is whale hunting still relevant today? What are the positive and negative effects of whale hunting? Second, after reading the text, the teacher and the learners can discuss to find the value from whale hunting. Hopefully, the learners can learn something good for their character building from the whale hunting tradition. Third, the teacher can play a documentary video about whale hunting from YouTube then the teacher asks the learners to find the procedure of whale hunting. After discussing it, then the learners have to write a procedure text about whale hunting. Those activities and materials can be used to teach speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

### 2) *Introducing Local Knowledge*

Local knowledge is knowledge belongs to certain societies such as season change, flora, fauna, geographical situation. In Javanese society, there is a local knowledge about season change known as *pranata mangsa* or *aturan musim* or seasonal rule. It is the cycle of season changes happened every year. *Pranata mangsa* tells the farmer when is the time to plant their plants such as rice. The teacher can use *pranata mangsa* to teach English in the class. First, the teacher can use *pranata mangsa* to teach Simple Present Tense. The teacher has to find a picture of *pranata mangsa*. For example, is found in <https://jakarta45.wordpress.com/2012/12/30/25389/>. The teacher asks the learners some questions dealing with *pranata mangsa* using simple present tense such as How many seasons are there in Javanese *pranata mangsa*?, When does dry season start? How long does the transition season (*pancaroba*) last?

etc. Second, the teacher asks the learners to describe the situation based on the picture of *pranata mangsa*. Third, the learners and the teacher may have a discussion about *pranata mangsa* in today's situation, is *pranata mangsa* still relevant nowadays? Those activities is good for teaching grammar, speaking, and writing.

### 3. *Introducing Local Resources*

Local resource deals with how to use local resources such as forest, garden, water, agricultural land, and housing. Indonesia is an agricultural country in which most of its people are farmers. So that's why there are many agricultural lands in Indonesia and its people are familiar with agriculture. In Bali, there is a unique technique of rice plantation system named Terrace (*Terasering*) and its irrigation system called *subak*. Terrace (*terasering*) is the method of planting by creating terraces and *subak* is water irrigation management of paddy (rice). The teacher can do some activities in the class to introduce them. First, the teacher gives the learners English text about the Balinese rice field, then the learners have to find the value from the text. The example of the text can be found on the internet such as <https://www.chasinglandscapes.com/rice-fields-bali/>. Second, the teacher may give the learners several pictures of the Balinese rice field with terrace then ask them to describe those pictures. There are several pictures of the Balinese rice field on the internet such as <https://www.thingstodoinbali.com/blog/bali-tourist-attractions-rice-fields/>.

### 4. *Introducing Local Dance*

The teacher can introduce local wisdom through traditional dance. Indonesia has many traditional dances. One of them which is very popular is Saman Dance (The Dance of Thousand Hands). The teacher can apply some class activities to introduce this dance. First, the teacher gives the texts about Saman Dance in English such as found in <https://factsofindonesia.com/saman-dance>. Then the teacher and learners discuss the text to find the value that can be learned from the dance. Second, the teacher gives the student a video of Saman Dance tutorial. Then the teacher asks the learners to write a procedure text based on the dance tutorial. Third, the teacher asks the learners to perform or demonstrate the dance in the class.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Bringing local wisdom in the class can be a filter to the influence of foreign culture in the learners' behavior and characters when they learn a foreign language such as English. It can sharpen the learners' awareness of their own culture. In Indonesia, inserting local wisdom as a part of the culture is in line with the Indonesian national education system and 2013 Curriculum. Several Indonesian local wisdoms can be applied in the English lesson through materials such as a traditional game, traditional song, traditional dance, folklore, local traditional skill, local knowledge, local resources, etc. The English teachers can create several activities by using that local wisdom. For examples are storytelling, discussion, identifying moral values, genre-based text (procedure and descriptive), describing, and art performance (dance). That local wisdom can be used to develop the learners' language skills such as

listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Hopefully, bringing local wisdom in the class can strengthen the learners' awareness and pride in their local culture.

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