Sustaining Indigenous Knowledge Through English Writing: A Local Wisdom-Based Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Approach Among Madurese EFL Learners

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Abstract. Writing instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts in Indonesia often relies on generic, culturally distant topics that disconnect learners from their own communities. This study explores how integrating Madurese local wisdom into Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) expository writing tasks is perceived by learners as functioning not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a mechanism for sustaining indigenous knowledge. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight English Language Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Madura and open-ended responses from twenty-five student respondents (including the eight interview participants) who had completed local wisdom-based writing tasks covering traditions such as *ter-ater, jung-rojhung*, and *bhubu'en*. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal five interrelated themes: English writing as a vehicle for cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission; a shift in learner identity from linguistic "guest" to cultural ambassador; enriched content, organization, and clarity in expository writing; heightened motivation and engagement driven by cultural relevance; and challenges in negotiating untranslatable cultural concepts. The study argues that, based on participants' reported experiences and perceptions, local wisdom-based TBLT writing appears to serve a dual function: strengthening learners' expository writing proficiency while, in learners' own accounts, positioning English as a tool for documenting and disseminating indigenous knowledge to global audiences. Implications for EFL writing pedagogy and community-based cultural sustainability are discussed.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), EFL Writing, Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Identity.

1 Introduction

Writing is one of the most demanding productive skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, requiring learners to generate, organize, and communicate ideas in a language that is not their own [1], [2].

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In many Indonesian higher education contexts, expository writing tasks are often centered on generic or foreign topics, leaving little room for learners to draw on the cultural knowledge they already possess [3], [4]. This practice risks producing writing that is linguistically correct but experientially distant, while overlooking a rich pedagogical resource: learners' own indigenous and local cultural knowledge.

Madura, an island region in East Java, Indonesia, is home to a dense repertoire of local wisdom embedded in everyday communal life, including *ter-ater* (ritual food-sharing), *jung-rojhung* (mutual cooperation), *bhubu'en* (social investment), and various life-cycle and communal traditions. Much of this knowledge is transmitted orally across generations rather than documented in written form, which places it at risk of gradual erosion as younger generations become increasingly oriented toward globalized, digitally mediated forms of culture. This concern for safeguarding orally transmitted knowledge echoes a longer intellectual tradition in Nusantara, in which scholars committed local wisdom to writing to ensure its survival across generations and geographies. Sheik Yūsuf al-Makassari, whose scholarly legacy continues to be traced and transmitted centuries after his lifetime, exemplifies how written documentation has long served Nusantara communities as a vehicle for preserving indigenous knowledge beyond oral memory [5].

This study responds to that risk by examining what happens when Madurese EFL learners are asked to write expository essays in English about their own local wisdom within a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework. Beyond its pedagogical value for writing instruction, this practice raises a broader question relevant to the subtheme of indigenous knowledge, local wisdom, and sustainable communities: can English academic writing, typically associated with globalized academic norms, become a vehicle for sustaining indigenous knowledge and strengthening community cultural identity?

1.1 Local Wisdom and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT positions meaningful, real-world tasks, rather than isolated grammar practice, as the central unit of instruction, requiring learners to use language purposefully to accomplish a communicative goal [6], [7]. When the content of a writing task is grounded in learners' lived cultural experience, TBLT principles align naturally with content-based and culturally responsive pedagogy: learners activate existing schemata, which in turn support idea generation, content elaboration, and text organization [8], [9], [10].

In the present study, students were assigned expository writing tasks requiring them to describe, explain, and analyze local wisdom practices in their own communities. Because the topics were already familiar, students reported being able to draw on real examples and lived experience rather than searching for unfamiliar reference material, a pattern consistent with the broader literature on schema activation in second language (L2) writing.

1.2 Identity, Investment, and Decolonial Perspectives in EFL Writing

Beyond linguistic performance, writing about one's own culture engages learners' sense of identity. Norton's construct of investment suggests that learners are more willing to engage in language-learning tasks when those tasks recognize and build upon their identities, histories, and desired future selves [11], [12].

When a writing task treats a learner's cultural background as valuable content rather than something to be set aside, it can strengthen learners' willingness to invest effort in producing meaningful text. This aligns with a decolonial perspective on English Language Teaching (ELT), which reframes English not as a language that requires learners to adopt a foreign cultural voice, but as a tool through which learners can represent, rather than replace, their own identities [11], [13], [14].

Several participants in this study described this shift explicitly, moving from describing themselves as outsiders or 'guests' in the English language to seeing themselves as cultural ambassadors capable of representing their community to an international audience.

1.3 Research Gap and Objectives

Existing research on TBLT and local-wisdom-integrated writing instruction has predominantly examined linguistic outcomes such as accuracy, fluency, or writing quality [15], [16], [17]. Comparatively little attention has been paid to how learners subjectively experience such tasks as a mechanism for sustaining indigenous knowledge, that is, how writing in English about local wisdom is perceived by learners not only as a language exercise but as an act of cultural documentation and transmission.

This study addresses that gap by asking: (1) How do Madurese EFL learners make sense of their experience integrating local wisdom into TBLT-based expository writing tasks? (2) What themes emerge regarding the role of English writing in sustaining and promoting Madurese local wisdom? (3) What challenges do learners encounter in negotiating local cultural concepts within English academic writing? By answering these questions, this study contributes theoretically by extending the investment construct to the domain of indigenous knowledge sustainability and practically by offering pedagogical recommendations for local-wisdom-based EFL writing instruction.

2 Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design [18] using thematic analysis [19]. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aims to understand the meaning, not the magnitude, of learners' experiences, an aim better served by rich, descriptive data than by quantitative measurement of differences or effects.

2.2 Participants and Context

Participants were English Education students at UIN Madura, the majority self-identifying as Madurese. All participants had completed an expository writing task within a TBLT framework, in which they were asked to explore a local wisdom practice from their own community. Eight students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews based on their direct experience completing the local-wisdom-based writing task.

Open-ended responses were collected from all twenty-five questionnaire respondents, including the eight interview participants, through a written questionnaire and served as supplementary data for triangulation. Given the relative homogeneity of the participant group, this sample size is consistent with evidence that thematic saturation in qualitative interview studies is typically achieved within 6–12 interviews [20], and it was further strengthened by triangulation with the larger questionnaire sample. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

2.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews explored participants' overall experience with local-wisdom-based writing tasks, the extent to which the tasks allowed them to express personal voice and cultural background, the tasks' effect on confidence and motivation, what participants learned about their own culture, their views on English writing as a tool for promoting local culture, and how the tasks shaped their identity and cultural awareness as English learners.

The open-ended questionnaire items covered comparable areas, including participants' overall impressions, specific ways the tasks improved their writing, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement.

2.4 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed using a six-phase thematic analysis procedure [21]: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analysis. Themes were developed inductively from the data and subsequently interpreted in relation to the theoretical perspectives discussed in Section 1.2.

2.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed using the credibility and confirmability criteria established by Lincoln and Guba [22]. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation between interview data and open-ended questionnaire responses. Confirmability was supported by anchoring each theme in direct quotations from participants, allowing the analytic claims to be traced back to the original data.

3 Result and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the five themes (Sections 3.1–3.5) with one illustrative interview (P) and questionnaire (Q) quotation each, reflecting the triangulation described in Section 2.5.

Table 1. Summary of themes and illustrative quotations from interview and questionnaire data.

No.	Illustrative Quotation	Source
3.1	"It is golden heritage that we have to bring through generation."	P7
	"Cultural revitalization through literacy... I help preserve this knowledge so that it is not lost and can be accessed by future generations or the global community."	Q17
3.2	"a guest" in the English language → "completely flipped" → "a cultural ambassador"	P8
	"...not just as a student learning to write, but as a cultural communicator or a knowledge steward... my cultural heritage is no longer separate from my academic output."	Q3
3.3	"I was not afraid to fail because I already knew the information from my own life. So I could write better on this kind of topic."	P3
	"...helped enrich my content, improve paragraph organization, and increase the clarity of my writing."	Q1
3.4	"...motivates me… because this topic is something that I experience by myself."	P4
	"...feels less like 'completing a task' and more like 'sharing a valuable story,' which provides a much stronger drive to put in the necessary effort and detail."	Q3
3.5	"it's hard for me to put my identity in my writing... put my word in Madurese without translating. That's all I can do because this is English."	P6
	"...had to rely heavily on interviews with community elders or my family, and then wrestle with how to reference 'Personal Communication' within an academic-style essay formally."	Q3

Note. P = interview participant code; Q = open-ended questionnaire respondent code.

3.1 English Writing as a Vehicle for Cultural Preservation and Intergenerational Transmission

The most consistent theme across both interviews and open-ended responses was participants' framing of English writing as an act of cultural preservation. One interview participant (P8) explained that writing in English about local wisdom "not only spreads awareness but also helps preserve it, because once something is documented and shared widely, it becomes harder to forget," adding that this is "how we can keep our local wisdom alive for the next generation." Another interview participant (P7) expressed a similar sense of responsibility, describing local wisdom as a "golden heritage that we

have to bring through the generations." This was echoed in the open-ended questionnaire data: one respondent (Q17) described the most significant impact of the task as "cultural revitalization through literacy," explaining that "by writing local wisdom in English, I help preserve this knowledge so that it is not lost and can be accessed by future generations or the global community." A third interview participant (P2) reflected that the activities left her feeling "a stronger responsibility to keep our culture alive and to share it with others."

These accounts suggest that participants did not experience the writing task merely as a language exercise, but as a meaningful act of documentation. Because much of Madurese local wisdom is transmitted orally, converting it into a written, English-language text was perceived by several participants as a way of protecting it from being forgotten. This perception resonates with the sub-theme concern for sustainable communities and the intergenerational continuity of indigenous knowledge; however, as a qualitative case study, the present findings reflect participants' reported experiences and perceptions rather than demonstrated evidence of actual cultural preservation or community-level outcomes.

3.2 From "Guest" to "Cultural Ambassador": Identity Repositioning in English Writing

Several participants described a shift in how they positioned themselves in relation to the English language. One interview participant (P8) explained that before engaging in local-wisdom-based writing, she felt like "a guest" in the English language, but that writing about her own experience with *ter-ater tajhin sora* "completely flipped" that dynamic, giving her a stronger sense of ownership over her writing. She described herself afterward not simply as an English learner but as "a cultural ambassador," representing her community to an international audience. A questionnaire respondent (Q3) described a similar repositioning in more explicitly professional terms, writing that the tasks led her to view herself "not just as a student learning to write, but as a cultural communicator or a knowledge steward," adding that her "cultural heritage is no longer separate from my academic output." A related shift was echoed by another interview participant (P2), who said the activities made her feel more confident "not only as an English learner but also as a Madurese person."

This repositioning reflects Norton's investment construct [11]: when a task recognizes and rewards a learner's cultural identity, learners appear more willing to invest effort and see themselves as legitimate producers of meaning in the target language, rather than as imitators of a foreign voice.

3.3 Enriched Content, Clarity, and Organization in Expository Writing

Consistent with the schema-activation rationale underlying TBLT, several participants reported that familiarity with their topic made the writing process noticeably easier. One interview participant (P4) explained that because the topic was based on personal experience, "I already got the point I want to talk or discuss about in my writing." An-

other interview participant (P3) similarly noted, "I was not afraid to fail because I already know the information from my own life. So I could write better on this kind of topic." This pattern was corroborated extensively in the open-ended questionnaire data: one respondent (Q1) reported that local wisdom "helped enrich my content, improve paragraph organization, and increase the clarity of my writing," while another (Q7) explained that it helped her "arrange ideas logically from general explanations to specific examples." Participants also credited local wisdom topics such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and *ter-ater* with giving them familiar, concrete material to draw on, reducing the need to search for unfamiliar content.

3.4 Motivation and Engagement Driven by Cultural Relevance

Participants frequently contrasted local-wisdom-based writing tasks with earlier, more generic writing assignments. One interview participant (P8) explained that the activity "transformed my learning from a passive academic exercise into a meaningful mission," while another interview participant (P4) noted that the topic "motivates me… because this topic is something that I experience by myself." A questionnaire respondent (Q3) expressed a closely related sentiment, writing that the task "feels less like 'completing a task' and more like 'sharing a valuable story,' which provides a much stronger drive to put in the necessary effort and detail." Other participants similarly reported feeling more motivated to complete their writing carefully because the topic was personally significant.

3.5 Negotiating the Untranslatable: Linguistic and Epistemic Challenges

Despite these largely positive experiences, participants consistently reported one recurring challenge: translating local cultural concepts into English. One interview participant (P8) noted that terms such as *ter-ater tajhin sora* and *jung-rojhung* "do not have direct English equivalents," requiring her to explain these concepts descriptively rather than translate them directly. A questionnaire respondent (Q3) described a related but distinct difficulty tied to citation convention: because much local wisdom exists only as oral tradition, she "had to rely heavily on interviews with community elders or my family, and then wrestle with how to formally reference 'Personal Communication' within an academic-style essay," an epistemic tension between oral knowledge sources and the citation conventions of written academic English. Another interview participant (P6) described an even more fundamental struggle with this untranslatability, explaining that for certain Madurese terms, "it's hard for me to put my identity in my writing… [so I] put my word in Madurese without translating. That's all I can do because this is English."

A related tension surfaced for one participant (P6), who described feeling proud of most aspects of his culture but noted there was "some culture I don't proud[of], to express." This suggests that local-wisdom-based writing tasks, while motivating, also carry a degree of representational responsibility that instructors should anticipate and support.

3.6 Cross-Cutting Discussion

Taken together, these five themes indicate that local-wisdom-based TBLT writing operates on two levels simultaneously. Pedagogically, it functions as a content-based strategy that improves expository writing through schema activation, consistent with established TBLT principles [16], [23], [24].

Beyond pedagogy, participants' accounts suggest that they experienced the task as a form of cultural sustainability practice: learners repeatedly framed their English writing as documentation that could outlive individual memory and reach audiences, both local and international, who would otherwise have no access to Madurese local wisdom. These are participants' own perceptions of the task's significance rather than independently verified evidence of actual reach or long-term preservation.

These findings extend the investment construct beyond language-identity alignment toward a specifically indigenous-knowledge-sustaining function, suggesting that culturally grounded EFL writing tasks can simultaneously serve language development goals and community-level goals of cultural preservation [4], [25], [26].

Practically, the challenges identified in Section 3.5 point to concrete pedagogical needs: a glossary or "cultural translation toolkit" for untranslatable local terms, structured guidance on referencing oral or community sources, and pre-writing discussion sessions that allow students to process cultural material collaboratively before writing individually [27], [28].

4 Conclusion

This study examined how Madurese EFL learners experienced local-wisdom-based TBLT expository writing tasks. Findings show that participants perceived such tasks as strengthening their writing performance through familiar, content-rich topics, as an act of cultural preservation that repositioned them from language 'guests' to cultural ambassadors, and as surfacing genuine challenges in translating untranslatable cultural concepts into English.

These findings contribute to the sub-theme of Indigenous knowledge, local wisdom, and sustainable communities by illustrating, through participants' own reported experiences, a classroom-level mechanism through which English writing instruction may support the documentation and intergenerational transmission of local knowledge, rather than displacing it. As the study did not directly measure community-level or long-term outcomes, this contribution should be understood as evidence of participants' perceptions rather than demonstrated impact. The study is limited by its qualitative, single-context design and modest participant number, and its findings are not intended to be generalized beyond the Madurese EFL context studied.

Future research could examine local-wisdom-based writing pedagogy longitudinally, across different cultural communities, or in relation to its long-term contribution to community-level cultural preservation.

Disclosure of Interests. The author declares that she has no competing interests relevant to the content of this article.

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