

Integrating Local Culture in English Language Teaching: Enhancing authentic materials and cultural awareness

Alfi Hidayatu Miqawati¹, Fitri Wijayanti², Aisah Intan Purnamasari³

^{1, 2, 3}*Department of Language, Communication, and Tourism
Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia*

*Corresponding email: alfi_hidayatu@polije.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to discuss one of the local cultures in the form of dance and its integration in English language learning in an effort to preserve the local culture and promote students' cultural awareness. The research design deployed was descriptive qualitative. Two art practitioners served as the subjects of the study and the data were obtained through an interview process. The data were analyzed using four steps data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In addition, library study was also used to understand and study theories from various literature or sources related to the study. The findings showed that Lahbako Dance tells the story of the tobacco processing process starting from harvesting to packaging. In its development, the dance is modified because of the need for innovation and adaptation to developments and promoting its sustainability. In language teaching, its success depends on the use of teaching materials that accurately reflect authentic language use and cultural settings. Lahbako Dance can be inserted into the teaching and learning activities as an authentic material that can promote students' language skills, motivation, and cultural awareness. By doing so, local culture can also be well-preserved. Further studies related to the developments of other authentic materials are suggested.

Keywords: *cultural awareness, ELT, local culture, material development*

1. Introduction

Culture is a way of life that is developed and shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation. Hawkins (2012) states that culture is something complex and includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, customs and other abilities and habits that humans have as part of society. Culture is also defined as the view of life of a group of people in the form of behavior, beliefs, values and symbols that they receive unconsciously, all of which are passed on through the communication process from one generation to the next (Alo, 2002).

Indonesian culture is very diverse. One of the varieties of Indonesian culture was born from the city of Jember. The Jember community itself consists of Madurese and

Javanese people. *Pandhalungan* emerged as a result of acculturation between Madurese and Javanese people (Prayogi, 2022). Apart from that, Jember Regency is one of the largest and best tobacco producing areas in Indonesia. Jember also received the nickname 'tobacco city'. Jember tobacco farmers have unique and distinctive habits in planting, processing tobacco up to the packaging process by wearing costumes and clothing that show their activities. This became an inspiration for artists to turn it into a tobacco processing dance called "Lahbako Dance". This dance is one of the traditional dances in Jember.

Indonesian culture must be maintained so that these values do not fade. The essence and function of cultural values is to maintain our self-esteem and the self-respect of our own nation. Currently, people are accustomed to foreign culture until it is mixed with Indonesian culture. Thus, regional culture that has been fortified by national culture is also influenced by foreign culture. From this, various efforts need to be made to preserve culture. One of them is the integration of local culture into English language learning.

In English language teaching (ELT), the relationship with local culture is pivotal for building meaningful and successful learning experiences. Amalgamating some aspects of local cultures in ELT assists students to connect with the language on a deeper level. In line with this idea, Yahya et al. (2017) mention that the teacher should begin with the familiar. In this situation, English is an unfamiliar thing for the students, especially with western cultural baggage. Therefore, working with well-known topics and familiar contexts in the form of local culture will aid effectively in the teaching and learning process. This local-based content enables the students to effectively engage with their learning, maintain continuous motivation, obtain adequate text comprehension and proudly reflect their society (Hiba et al., 2022).

Making effective use of well-known local resources is essential to helping the students engage in teaching and learning activities. Following this concept, Kirkpatrick (2007) conducted research on developing culturally appropriate ELT materials for Indonesian tertiary students, which were modified by local Indonesian teachers and writers. He suggests that instead of providing students with information about the culture of native speakers, the curriculum should insert information about the cultures and people of the ASEAN and Asian regions. Furthermore, he mentions that the students' ability to communicate in English about topics significant to them and their own local cultures is equally crucial. By integrating the local cultures, customs, traditions, and language into the teaching and learning process, teachers can facilitate students in enhancing cultural awareness and nurturing a sense of belonging to their own local culture.

This article aimed to discuss the Lahbako dance so that people can know and preserve the culture that was originated from Jember. In addition, this article also discussed how to preserve local culture in the form of the Lahbako Dance through English Language Teaching.

2. Method

The design used in this study is descriptive qualitative. The data were in the form of descriptive data that explains the history and development in Jember, namely the Lahbako Dance, the meaning and values contained in each movement, and the efforts made by relevant agencies and the community to preserve the dance. Two art practitioners served as the subjects of the study and the data were obtained through an interview process. The data were analyzed using the steps of Miles and Huberman (1994), namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In addition, library study was also used to understand and study theories from various literature or sources related to the study. The examples of the sources include books, journals and research that has already been carried out related to the topic of the study.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Lahbako Dance

Lahbako Dance tells the story of the tobacco processing process starting from harvesting to packaging. The dancers are women. Starting from the first movement, there is a depiction of women walking towards the tobacco plantation. They are depicted with beautiful alacrity. After arriving at the garden, the leaf picking activity is carried out which is expressed in the second movement, starting from the bottom up so as not to damage the robustness of the tobacco plant. When the leaves have been placed in baskets, the women are depicted walking towards the warehouse. When they arrive at the warehouse, they make movements like people doing doormats as a sign of a dirty and muddy garden. Cleaning their feet on this mat is their first step when they want to enter the warehouse.

In its development, the Lahbako Dance currently has two versions, namely the original version and a modified version. Each version has its own characteristics. The modified version is actually the same as version A, but some tempos are adjusted without changing the historical content and philosophy of the dance itself. This modified version of the Lahbako dance is called Lahbako Na-oust. Na-oust is a type of tobacco, where this type of tobacco is usually harvested in August and is one of Jember's superior products which is often exported to Europe. The new version was created because of the need for innovation and adaptation to developments and demands of the times so that the Lahbako dance remains sustainable. This is based on the responsibility of an artist to discover something new without changing his philosophy.

3.2. Integration of Local Culture in ELT

Some studies have shown that the insertion of local culture in ELT has a positive impact since it fosters the quality of the teaching and learning process. Nomnian (2013) conducted a study exploring Thai cultural aspects in six English language textbooks used at a secondary level. It reveals that Thai culture encompasses five cultural aspects, which

are: (1) products (rice, *sepak takraw*, *tuk-tuk*); (2) practices (cooking, eating, and Thai boxing); (3) persons (Siamese king, Vanessa-Mae); (4) perspectives (Thai people, traffic congestion, food, weather, and Thai language); and (5) places (tourist sites, for example, Phi Phi island, Phuket, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Lopburi). This range of local cultural material offers valuable contributions to the design of culturally appropriate English textbooks for teachers and students. Additionally, it has important implications for textbook developers and Thai English teachers who want to respect the diversity of cultures represented in and outside of English language textbooks, as well as preserve Thai students' cultural identities and values, which can help them to be global and regional citizens. This aligns with the findings of a study conducted by Nambiar et al. (2018). The findings reveal that the integration of local culture into language learning materials can increase the students' cultural awareness, self-confidence, and ability to communicate.

Beyond fostering the students' positive attitudes, integrating local culture also enhances their engagement during the teaching and learning process. Intani (2012) highlighted that in classroom activities, the students' responses show a high level of participation. Every student appreciated learning activities and was keen to participate in them. They also listened to the teachers' explanation and demonstrated a good understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, Rahman et al. (2022) also conducted a study on integrating local culture into teaching speaking. It stimulates the students to be more productive when speaking since they feel comfortable to speak. To conclude, the integration of local cultures in ELT does not only enrich language learning but also ultimately enhances language proficiency and intercultural communication skills.

Successful language instruction depends on the utilization of teaching materials that accurately reflect authentic language use and cultural settings. This authentic material facilitates students' opportunities to apply their language abilities to social practices. Nunan (1999) in Park (2024) believes that the exposure of authentic material in classroom instruction is very beneficial because of the rich language input. Practical language skills and cultural understanding are very applicable to real-life communication, and therefore, they can enhance their intercultural competence. With this mind, incorporating local culture into ELT fosters the students' understanding and appreciation of their own culture (Kristiawan, 2017). To ensure students have access to engaging and valuable educational materials, English teachers must have a deeper understanding of the qualities that effective EFL resources should possess. Selecting the proper instructional materials is quite difficult, yet very essential for both teachers and students. This is very essential to confirm that authentic materials support learning by matching students' proficiency level and preventing situation which may lead to frustration during their employment (Park, 2024). In conclusion, the effective integration of authentic teaching materials involving local culture not only enriches language instruction but also empowers students with practical language skills for effective communication in a broader context.

Drawing on insights from Harizaj and Hajrulla (2018), the teachers can navigate and select materials that enhance the cultural learning experience within the ELT contexts. There are several points that could be applied as guidelines for good sources. The first, it should teach students how to learn effectively. The second, it acts as a resource for ideas and activities for instruction. The next point is providing teachers with rationales for teaching approaches. The last point, it should be engaging and interactive to maintain student motivation. To conclude, these ideas serve as valuable navigation in selecting materials that enrich local cultural experiences. By adhering to these guidelines, the teacher is required to inspire creativity in teaching learning process.

According to Robert (2012), the teacher must take into account several aspects in selecting authentic materials. Those are: (1) relevance and interest, (2) cultural appropriateness, (3) linguistics and cognitive demands of the text, (4) practical considerations. By emphasizing on these aspects, the teacher can foster the effectiveness and engagement of the teaching practices.

In ELT context, the teaching goal is often about bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-life language application. To reach this, the English teachers need to design authentic task which equip students with the activity of exploring local culture and applying the language in real context. When crafting task to engage students in authentic language experience, Mishan (2005) in Losada, Insuasty, and Osorio (2017) proposes six guidelines on task authenticity:

1. Reflect the main communication goal of the original text;
2. Suit the context of the original text;
3. Elicit response or active engagement with the original text;
4. Approximate real-life situations;
5. Activate students' current understanding of the target language and culture;
6. Involve meaningful communication among students.

Through the integration of these comprehensive guidelines, the teachers can effectively facilitate students to apply language skills in the real-life context, foster deeper cultural awareness and meaningful communication among students in ELT context.

3.3. Lahbako Dance as a Local-based Material

Local-based material in language learning involves designing materials that emphasize on topics that are relevant to the students' local context. By incorporating familiar themes from their own local cultures, this set of materials aims to boost comprehension and aid students in retaining and recalling information (Kusuma, 2016). Furthermore, Kusuma (2016) pinpoints that Balinese culture (for example, traditional clothes, traditional foods and drinks, animals which exist in Bali, part of the body and public places) can be inserted through reading activities. Additionally, these activities broaden the students' perspective on the world around them and also strengthen their minds. It also becomes an important way to activate their prior knowledge.

One of the familiar local cultures that can be inserted into the teaching and learning activities is traditional dances from Jember (under the umbrella of *Pandhalungan* culture). Integrating local culture as one of the authentic materials can significantly enhance students' motivation and language skills. A study has shown that the insertion of local culture in teaching and learning materials increases the students' reading and listening abilities (Hiba et al., 2022). Every movement in the traditional dances of *Lahbako* implies deep meaning and carries a specific philosophy and value. This source of information can be taken as a source of language intake to activate the students' prior knowledge. By utilizing local traditional dances as authentic materials, teachers can create a more engaging and culturally relevant learning environment, fostering students' communicative competence and overall language proficiency (Rosyida, 2019).

4. Conclusion

Local cultural awareness needs to be built so that the existing national culture remains sustainable. This article describes and explores one of the local cultures in the form of dance in Jember, namely the Lahbako Dance and the potential for integrating local culture in ELT so that learning can be meaningful and successful. Integrating local culture into learning in the form of teaching materials can help students internalize local cultural values and increase their understanding. Apart from that, the teaching and learning process can be more optimal because the material is authentic. This study is still limited in explaining one local culture and how it is generally integrated in ELT. The implication of the results of this study is that the younger generation is increasingly familiar with local culture and there are variations in choosing ELT teaching materials.

References

- Alo, Liliweri. (2002). *Makna Budaya dalam Komunikasi Antar Budaya*. Yogyakarta: LKIS
- Harizaj, M., & Hajrulla, V. (2018). Selecting and Developing Teaching/Learning Materials in EFL classes. *Annals of Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines*, 59-66.
- Hawkins, P. (2012). *Creating a Coaching Culture: Developing a Coaching Strategy for Your Organization*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Hiba, Ahmed, Kareem, Aljanabi., Ahmed, Johari, Bin, Sihes., Ansam, Yaroub, Khyoon., Saad, M, Al-Hasani. (2022). Local-Based Content to Improve EFL Students' English Achievement: A Systematic Review. *International journal of academic research in business & social sciences*, 12(8) doi: 10.6007/ijarbss/v12-i8/14606
- Intani,E.N.(2012).Developing modified Indonesian children song lyrics to teach vocabulary to elementary school third graders. *English Education Journal*, 2(2).<https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/eej/article/view/680>

- Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). Teaching English across cultures. What do English language teachers need to know how to teach English. *EA Journal* 23(2): 20–36.
- Kristiawan, D. (2017). Situating Local Culture In Elt Material Design In The Indonesian EFL Context. *The English teacher*, 41, 12.
- Kusuma, I Putu Indra. (2016). Developing Reading Material for Elementary Students in Tourism Area by Inserting Local Culture. *JEELS*. 3. 10.30762/jeels.v3i1.176.
- Losada, C.A., Insuasty, E.A., & Osorio, M.F. (2017). The Impact of Authentic Materials and Tasks on Students' Communicative Competence at a Colombian Language School. *Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 19, 89-104.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.
- Nambiar, R., Hashim, R.S., & Yasin, R.M. (2018). Impact of Integrating Local Culture into Language Materials on Communicative Ability of Malaysian Lower Secondary Learners. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*
- Nomnian, S. (2013). Thai Cultural Aspects in English Language Textbooks in a Thai Secondary School. *Humanities and social sciences*, 6, 13-30.
- Park, E. (2024). Using Teacher-Made Authentic Materials For Efl Vocational High School Students' Career-Related Vocabulary Learning. *Issues in Language Studies*.
- Prayogi, B. (2022). Genealogi Masyarakat Madura dan Jawa: Studi Budaya Pedhalungan Di Kabupaten Jember. *Habitus: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosiologi, & Antropologi*, 6(2), 145-163.
- Rahman, Abdul & Mada Ali, Syahban & Badriah,. (2022). Integrating Of Local Culture-Based Instruction In Teaching Speaking Classroom At The Third Semester Students Of Universitas Tomakaka Mamuju. *Inspiring: English Education Journal*. 5. 64-72. 10.35905/inspiring.v5i1.2728.
- Robert, Rachael. (2012). Tips on selecting effective authentic reading materials. <https://elt-resourceful.com/2012/03/26/tips-on-selecting-effective-authentic-reading-materials/>, accessed on Mei, 2024
- Rosyida, Ekawati. (2019). The Use of Authentic Materials to Advance Students' Communicative Competences in EFL Class. 13(1):23-34. doi: 10.21107/PROSODI.V13I1.5347
- Yahya, Zawiah & Ibrahim, Noraini & Ramli, Rashila & Md Yusof, Noraini & Othman, Zarina. (2017). Your Language My Culture (YLMC): Developing a Local-Culture ELT Matrix for Schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. *Kajian Malaysia*. 35. 39-66. 10.21315/km2017.35.2.3.