

## Conference Paper

# When Local Goes Global: English Teachers as Cultivators of Local Culture in a Globalized Region

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## Abstract

With the wave of globalization, English has become a lingua franca in Asia. As such, English has been used between non-native speakers of English with diverse cultures. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language in which the majority of lessons are centered in introducing western cultures. However, there has been a shift in the teaching materials to incorporate local culture content. In the face of this development, this project seeks to discover a means to fulfill a new role of English teachers in Indonesia. Teachers can be cultivators of local culture content by following the process of a small-scale research and development project as the one presented in this paper. Teachers can help learners understand their own culture presented in English so that they can own their English and share the merits of their culture to the region. There are five steps in which teachers can cultivate local culture contents: (1) surveying learners' needs, (2) discovering the potentials of local culture in learner's surroundings, (3) designing extra reading materials based on the local culture content, (4) developing the materials attractively based on learners' needs, and (5) continuously revising the materials to accommodate more localities. By so doing, teachers can propagate their own professional development and prepare their learners for such a unique facet of globalization contemporarily happening in the region.

**Keywords:** local culture, reading, material development, globalized

## 1. Introduction

The spread of English as a global language has made it possible for communication to happen among Asians through this medium. It has been used as *Lingua Franca* between people whose native language is not English [5]. These people come from diverse cultural national backgrounds. The fact that English has become a language with more non-native speakers than its original native speaker earns a new place [15], such as that in English as Lingua Franca (ELF).

The questions of whose culture is to be taught along in the English Language Teaching (ELT) in Asia have drawn attention and discussion due to the nature that teaching a language is inseparable from teaching the culture. There are three mainstreams in the

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direction of culture-related ELT [2]: those agreeing to keep target-culture intact in ELT, those arguing that local culture be put in place of target culture, and those suggesting putting a balance of the target culture and local culture while providing a space for cross cultural awareness.

The last view seems to be the best option to cope with the issue. However, with regard to culture content in ELT, there have been many reactions especially in Indonesia. An example of this is an attempt to develop ELT materials which reflect ASEAN culture so as to raise cross-cultural awareness in learners' mind [16]. This project involved the researcher managing the development project and local teachers who actually designed and developed the materials. The product final form is rich with local culture. Apparently, as the researcher also admits, the teachers view cultural awareness as understanding learners' own culture and examining how English can be used in their own relevant context [16].

The previous example is not merely a project gone rogue. It is a reflection of what is currently happening, or rather, expected in Indonesia. A similar phenomenon can be seen from the direction of material development in the country. It indicates that developing ELT materials with local culture is expected these days as reflected in several content analyses conducted in the ELT textbooks used in Indonesia which have either shown the rise of local culture or a concern for the lack of it, e.g., [23, 28-30].

In connection with the phenomenon of seemingly local-culture victory, in the latest curriculum (K-2013) whose implementation is now pending and effective by 2019, ELT materials in the form of textbooks provided by the government include elements of national culture. Before the presence of these textbooks, teachers used to decide for themselves the most appropriate books to use by selecting from those available in the markets. Among these books, most had followed the tendency to provide both target- and home-/local-culture, albeit its lack of local cultural knowledge [29]. However, another study reveals that the many and diverse local cultures of the Indonesian people are not represented in balance [9], suggesting that this under-representation of learners' local culture might be detrimental to learning and that it demotivates learners [26].

Although ELT materials with target culture, or both target culture and home culture, are appropriate for Indonesian learners [13], there have been plenty of these types of materials whereas the current concerns seem to be the needs for more materials with local culture. The current direction is in-line with [17] suggestion on localities, his first-hand experience with materials developers [16], the Indonesian Government's emphasis on acknowledgement of learners' diverse individual and cultural background (Government Law Number 20 Year 2003; Government Law Number 19 Year 2005; Decree of Minister of Education and Culture Number 65 Year 2013), and the many analyses out of which concerns for the lack of materials with more local-culture contents are raised, e.g., [23, 28-30].

In response to these facts, the present study attempts to formulate the way how teachers can fill in the gap of ELT materials catering the need of learners for more local culture contents of their own. This means that teachers, along with learners, are expected to become the cultivators of their own local culture. In short, this article is a reflective work of a research and development project in pursuit of extra reading materials with local culture content for junior high school students.

## 2. Method

The purpose of this study is to develop extra reading materials with local culture for junior high school students using the steps of research and development design as proposed by [10, 33], consisting of: (1) survey for needs analysis, (2) product development, (3) validation by experts (continued with first revision), and (4) validation by try-out (continued with final revision).

Survey for teachers' and students' needs was conducted in SMP Negeri 5 Ngawen, Gunungkidul, Central Java, Indonesia, a state junior high school located in a remote area, selected to represent the needs of students with similar characteristics. The only English teacher in the school was interviewed to explore his perceptions on the integration of local culture in reading materials and his opinions about the urgency of the development of extra reading materials featuring local culture content. Meanwhile, questionnaires were distributed to 92 students to collect information related to students' learning experiences including students' reading habit, available reading materials, and reading strategies. These students were of grade seven, eight, and nine.

Referring to the information collected from the needs assessment, the product development in this study then involved three major stages: 1) Observation for traces of local culture in the immediate area, 2) Reading text development, which involves translating and adapting available written texts about the selected traced local culture, 3) Reading task development based on the prescribed basic competence and accepted learning sequence in the curriculum and 4) Making the printed product available which involves editing and compiling all the sections. The preliminary draft of the product was then validated in two ways: validation by experts (one expert in content and language and another expert in design) and validation by a small-scale try-out.

The expert in content and language was selected based on the following criteria: a qualified lecturer with a doctorate degree in TEFL, being experienced in teaching reading and having published at least one book related to the use of local culture in ELT; the expert in design was selected based on the experience in teaching media. The validation form by the experts was in the form of a four-scale Likert questionnaire supplemented with available space for open-ended feedback from the experts for the purpose of product improvement.

In the product try-out, six grade-eight students of SMP Negeri 5 Ngawen were chosen based on the teacher's recommendation; selection was made based on the students' expressive nature, diligence, and relatively higher achievement as compared to the other students. These students were asked to take the product home, read the reading texts, and do the exercises independently. They did all this in two weeks, during which they were also asked to produce eight diary entries, each corresponding to a lesson they had learned.

In addition, two lessons of the product were tried out with all the students in the class, treated as extracurricular activities in addition to the regular school hours. The extra reading materials were used by twenty students participating in the extracurricular activities accompanied by the English teacher. After a four-meeting try-out, the students and the teacher responded to questionnaires exploring the acceptability and practicality of the materials.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1. Teacher's and Students' Needs

Generally, the need-assessment survey indicates that the development of extra reading materials with local culture is deemed beneficial. The extra reading materials are expected to facilitate students' learning with familiar content which will help them internalize reading strategies more easily. Specifically, the teacher expresses that he continuously works on providing students with local culture content from the internet but finds it difficult to find appropriate texts. He feels that his effort can be helped with the presence of more reading materials. He feels the need to provide this kind of reading materials because he believes that the students' difficulty learning English may be due to their lack of motivation in reading. He thinks that unfamiliarity with the texts found in the books provided by the school appears to be one of the many possible reasons for this lack of motivation. In the teacher's opinion, if more familiar content is utilized, students can relate their experience to what is written in the text. Thus, they can perceive that the text is interesting while having their confidence boosted because they have essentially grasped the gist.

Overall, 57 (61%) students admit that they need reading materials about their local culture as learning source of English reading activity. As expected, 69 students (73%) like reading about their own culture in English, and 80 students (85%) about places familiar to their experience. Local culture content as reading materials is very welcomed by many students of grades eight and nine, but by few of the students in grade seven. Reading about familiar local culture content is preferable for most students in the school.

The majority of the students (82%) agree that they need more reading materials for independent learning at home, but still to be used with teacher's guidance (81%) and in extracurricular settings (55%). Meanwhile, a survey about their topic preferences shows that 74 students (79%) enjoy reading about tourism objects and places of interests, 51 (54%) like legends and folktales, 43 (46%) like personal recount, and 13 (14%) like historical figures. In other words, the most popular topics are tourism or places of interests, referring to more descriptive texts, followed by legends and folktales, referring to narrative texts, and by personal experiences, featuring recount texts. Historical figures (biographical recount) rank the lowest.

### 3.2. Product Development

Based on the information obtained in the needs-analysis stage, product development was conducted through these stages: 1) observing traces of local culture in the area, 2) translating and adapting available written texts about the selected traced local culture, 3) developing reading tasks based on prescribed basic competences and accepted learning sequences in the curriculum, and 4) making the printed product available which involves editing and compiling all the sections.

Observation for traces of local culture in the area involved physical observation to local cultural heritage sites acknowledged by the authority and available around the school in the area. The existing local cultural heritage includes *Gunung Gambar (Gambar Mountain)*, *Wonosadi Conservation Forest*, *Sadranan Annual Ceremony*, *Rinding Gumbeng Musical Arts*, *Cing-cing Nggoling Annual Ceremony*, and *Sokoliman Archeological Sites*. These sites were selected, not only because they are officially admitted as such by the formal authorities, but also because they represent the local culture knowledge, behavior, and artifacts [29].

The next step was developing the reading texts. Written information related to legends, folktales, ceremonies, and activities related to the cultural heritage was explored in the literature and online sources. Articles and web pages containing the information were mostly written in Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, these raw materials were compiled, translated into English, and then edited. At the end of this stage, there are eight reading materials: 1) Gunung Gambar (descriptive), 2) Hiking to Gunung Gambar (personal recount), 3) Raden Mas Said (biographical recount), 4) Ki Onggoloco and Ki Gadingmas (narrative), 5) Wonosadi Forest (descriptive), 6) Rinding Gumbeng (descriptive), 7) Yudopati (narrative), and 8) Camping in Karangmojo (personal recount).

Tasks were developed based on the basic competences in the existing curriculum and were put in SQ3R sequence [4]. This learning sequence was selected because it reflects the suggested scientific approach within the curriculum covering the stages of observing, questioning, associating, experimenting, and communicating [21]. The tasks

consist of pre-reading activities (*survey* and *question* of the SQ3R or *observing* and *questioning* of the scientific approach) involving matching pictures with vocabulary items and answering questions to activate background knowledge prior to reading the main text, main reading activities (*read* of the SQ3R), and post-reading activities (*recite* and *review* of the SQ3R and *associating*, *experimenting* and *communicating* of the scientific approach) which involve vocabulary and grammar exercises and unscrambling images based on the text and summarizing. Editing was conducted using computer software and involved setting the layout, choosing the font faces and sizes, and inserting the pictures. Selected pictures from the internet were inserted for the pre-reading activities while private collections and commissioned illustrations were for post-reading activities.

### 3.3. Product Validation

The results of product validation suggest that the topics are interesting and contextually relevant to the learners around the area. The tasks are very strong in terms of variety of questions they provide, assistance to help students develop awareness about synonyms and antonyms, offering awareness of words with similar meaning, and helping students recognize pronoun referents. The tasks have the potentials to make students learn distinguishing facts from opinions, inferring author's attitudes, and drawing moral lessons. Furthermore, the reading texts have no major issues. Based on the criteria which reflect the variable, the reading texts help students read intensively and extensively to the fullest extent. The same also applies regarding the potential of the product in enriching students' general knowledge about topics, as well as skills in presenting values and good manners. Most importantly, the product presents topics related to local culture and discusses local reality.

According to the expert in design, the design of the extra reading materials is very good. In terms of the attractiveness, the physical appearance of the product is regarded suitable for prospective target users. More specifically, apart from appropriateness, consistency and readability of the used font, the other aspects of the design, are of very-good category. The expert also suggests adding foreword and teacher's notes. The separate teacher's notes should contain answer key, tape script, and "How to use the book".

When used independently without teacher's involvement, the product shows overall an acceptable score categorized as very good with the mean of 3.25 of a four scale. Students' favorite activities are vocabulary exercises, in the form of matching pictures and pairing words. Two students, however, disliked the use of black and white pictures, which according to them are less motivating than colorful pictures. Furthermore, the students in the whole-class try out commented positively on the interesting choice of topics and use of attractive images. It is also reflected from the mean scores for the

cover, appearance, used font and images, which all prove students' positive responses. Overall, students think that the product is deemed "very good" (mean = 3.50) for whole-class use. The teacher of SMP Negeri 5 Ngawen also thinks that the extra-reading-materials student book is excellent (mean = 3.66). In addition, the use of attractive images and illustrations which match the texts is deemed a positive feature.

## 4. Discussion

Based on the exposition above, it can be said that this small-scale research and development project has reached its objective, namely to develop extra reading materials with local culture content for junior high school students. The results also show that the product is developed based on the needs of students and the teacher. In addition, the product has also been revised referring to the substantial and technical feedback both from experts and prospective users.

It is more likely for students to be interested when the texts contain local culture content because they can readily relate to familiar settings [31, 35]. In [34] admonishes that a good language teaching material should help the learners feel comfortable and develop their confidence. This is especially important for students who are introduced to a foreign language [27]. Moreover, one also needs to consider the educational goal of learning English, that is, using the language to communicate, even promote, the ideas and cultures of the learners to others [20].

The difficulties of students' reading seem to be rooted in this underlying premise of reading comprehension and its relationship with background knowledge. This is in line with several findings that background knowledge enhances reader's comprehension [1, 8, 12, 14], Octaberlina in Cahyono, 2013, [18]. Apart from its facilitative advantage, using local culture content in learning second language boosts students' motivation to read [6, 25] and their pride in using English to appreciate their own cultural identity [6].

In the future, teachers can work collaboratively to provide their own students with their own local culture and to include more localities as an initiative for cross-cultural awareness. By providing extra reading materials with local culture content, teachers can invite their students to appreciate and identify themselves with their own culture in the English Language [11] while making more learning materials available which caters to the need of current ELT direction.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

It can be concluded that by following the process of a small-scale research and development teachers can cultivate local culture contents in four practical steps: surveying learners' needs, discovering the potentials of the local culture in the surroundings,

(3) designing learning materials based on the local culture content, and developing the materials attractively based on the learners' needs. Familiar, interesting, and relevant topics decorated with novel presentation help learners get connected with the tasks more easily. The colorful images and engaging tasks presented at both before and after the reading texts seem to attract learners' attention and challenge them to read the texts. Such products can be used as either materials for extracurricular activities or those for independent study at home. By reading more texts, learners can be motivated to learn English and at the same time to learn how to read English more effectively.

English teachers in Indonesia are suggested to adapt the steps in their own teaching contexts to move further following the current direction in ELT. Teachers should be ready to develop their own materials which integrate local culture content in the hope to continuously revise the materials to accommodate more localities. By being a cultivator of local culture, teachers can propagate their own professional development and prepare their learners for such a unique facet of globalization contemporary of the region.

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