

Folklore in EFL: The Local Wisdom Implementation of Indonesian Curriculum

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This article attempts to present an independent argument with regard to the importance of using local folklore in EFL. As it is clearly mentioned in the 2013 curriculum (K-13) and the following curriculum, National Curriculum, applying local wisdom is a cardinal aspect to be involved in the teaching-learning processes. Applying local wisdom is also believed to be one of strives to conserve and appreciate Indonesian cultural heritage and some cultural heritage that may not have been exposed before. Yet, it seems that using local folklore in EFL still lacks serious attention. In general, providing folklore is not only beneficial to keep the cultural heritage but also advantageous to, among others, help EFL students study English, help them gain cultural acquisition, and provide them with positive values for their character building. In short, engaging local contents has been officially stated in the K-13 and National Curriculum; however, its implementation is likely to be unpopular.

Keywords: local wisdom, folklore, ELT textbooks.

Artikel ini memberikan argumen tentang pentingnya memasukan cerita rakyat ke dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Seperti telah tertulis secara jelas pada kurikulum 2013 (K-13) dan Kurikulum National, menerapkan kebijaksanaan lokal merupakan aspek utama yang harus dimasukan ke dalam proses pembelajaran. Mengajarkan kebijaksanaan lokal diyakini sebagai salah satu gerakan untuk melestarikan dan menghargai warisan budaya Indonesia dan beberapa warisan budaya yang mungkin belum pernah diekspose sebelumnya. Namun hal ini memasukan cerita rakyat ke dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris nampaknya masih belum mendapat perhatian serius. Secara umum, dapat dikatakan bahwa mengajarkan cerita rakyat tidak hanya menguntungkan untuk melestarikan warisan budaya tetapi juga bermanfaat untuk, antara lain, membantu siswa belajar bahasa Inggris, membantu pemerolehan budaya, dan memberikan nilai-nilai positif untuk membangun karakter. Secara singkat, memanfaatkan nilai-nilai lokal telah dinyatakan secara resmi di K-13 dan Kurikulum National, akan tetapi penerapannya masih kurang populer.

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INTRODUCTION

Even though providing local wisdom is clearly mentioned in the Indonesian curriculum, the implementation of this idea is still not thorough and comprehensive. One of the efforts which could be done is through engaging local folklore in language learning. This idea has actually been implemented; yet, it seems that only a little well-known folklore are included, for example, *Malin Kundang* from West Sumatra province, *Legenda Danau Toba* from North Sumatra, and *Tangkuban Perahu* from West Java. This could be considered ironic as Indonesia has a lot of local folklore.

This article attempts to elaborate numerous advantages of integrating local folklore in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) as the implementation of local wisdom has been stated in the Indonesian school curriculum. Apart from the enthusiasm for withholding the Indonesian cultural heritage, this article is also motivated by the notion that folklore can be used to study foreign languages. Besides this, it is also believed that integrating local folklore into classroom activities may help students gain cultural acquisition and may provide students with positive values for building their character.

LOCAL FOLKLORE IN THE INDONESIAN ELT TEXTBOOKS

The Use of Local Folklore to Help EFL Students

It goes without saying that literature (stories, folklore) might help students acquire L2 (second language). In fact, various studies have been conducted to investigate the advantages of providing literature for students' L2 development. This statement is in line with All-Hajji and Shuqair (2014) who argue that stories play a huge role in language learning. They go on to say that stories offer a wide source of contextualized texts for language enrichment and vocabulary acquisition. Stories or folklore can also help the development of students' oral language by offering a context that is authentic for interaction verbally, discussion, role play and dialogue. In terms of first language, Myrick (2012) states that when we first learn our native language we internalize and absorb the sounds, grammar, meaning and values of the language which we acquire within the first 5 years of our life. The principle of acquiring first or second language is almost similar. That is why exposing students to folklore could also be used to promote foreign language acquisition in terms of sound, grammar, or meaning.

Apart from helping students' L2 acquisition, using folklore - including local folklore - in the classroom through story telling might enable students to develop their sense of creativity, hone their literacy, and improve their verbal skills. According to Harshap, Viger, and Kokh (in Molei, Mohammadzadeh, Rezayian, & Bazanjani, 2015), storytelling can be used as a means of improving oral language, literacy skills, and creativity.

Some also argue that engaging local folklores in the EFL classroom may encourage the students to study languages. Also, providing students with folk stories in the classroom might help English teachers create a captivating, healthy and interactive classroom environment and assist and allow pupils to acquire target language well. This is supported by Ghosn (2002) who states that authentic literature provides a motivating, meaningful text for language learners since kids are naturally drawn to stories. Hill (as cited in Linse, 2007) also points out modern

ELT (English Language Teaching) textbooks and syllabi that do not make use of stories. All of this can be assumed that the local folklore can also be considered as an effective tool to help children expand their skills in a second or foreign language.

Local Folklore to Help EFL Students Gain Cultural Acquisition

In spite of providing EFL students with their literacy and L2 acquisition, using local folklore brings another advantage. It may help students gain cultural acquisition as folklore contains cultural aspects passed from generation to generation. Nurss (2000) writes that the transmission of cultural knowledge and family experiences occur from generation to generation that help “children understand the link between their family’s past and current situations” (p. 366). Communicating the contents of culture from one generation to the other will keep its continuity.

Including literature, like folklore, is believed to be a crucial aspect for children’s literacy heritage as sentences in local folklore oftentimes contain oral tradition which is arranged musically, rhythmically, and melodically. Vansina (1985) states that those oral traditions function as verbal messages which are reported from the past to the present generation. This can be inferred that using folklore in the EFL classroom could be a way to help students acquire culture.

In the process of socialization, students have to be able to acquire the cultures and customs of society. All of them might be available during learning processes. Providing folklore can be one of the most significant aspects to be included in this process. This is due to the importance of folktales as a tool to help students achieve and comprehend the process on how the culture is communicated.

Local Folklore to Provide EFL Students with Positive Values for Their Character Building

Not only is local folklore fun and interesting, it is also imbued with positive moral values; therefore, using folklore in the EFL classrooms may help students develop their characters and teach them how to behave in society. On the other hand, it could be said that local folklore also plays an important role to the students’ mental development as there will be a lot of lessons and wisdom that they learn from local folklore. These lessons may provide students with the fundamental concepts on how to build good character and behavior which can help them deal with some problems they may encounter in real lives. According to Arnett (as cited in Kalyani, 2009), socialization is the process by which people acquire the behaviors and beliefs of the world.

Local folklore mostly emphasizes moral behavior and attitude. Paul (as cited in Amali, 2014) comments that tales usually show goodness and badness in which the former should be rewarded while the latter should be punished. Thus, providing folklore in the EFL classroom is expected to make students demonstrate and develop their positive personality and actions. Besides this, the culture aspects students can gain from folklore may encourage them to be a well-mannered individuals as folklore is rich in positive and meaningful values, habits, and beliefs being beneficial for their character building.

As has been mentioned, the integration of local folklore into EFL is not only enjoyable,

but also important to expose students to other cultures. This could make students appreciate and be more aware of other cultures, also. Wright (as cited in Linse, 2007) support this idea by stating that stories help children develop a ‘sense’ or ‘feel’ for the target foreign language.

Using local folklore may also be able to develop students’ empathy and social awareness and promote their generous acts. Myrick (2012) states that lots of folklore reveal characters who can make a sort of sacrifice on behalf of others. Exposing to this behavior, learners may find that such selflessness is a good deed. Building social empathy for and awareness of others can also be enhanced by incorporating folklore in ELT textbooks. Such behavior can promote tolerance, which is also a value having been officially included in the Indonesia’s educational objective. Ghosn (as cited in Ilyas, 2016a) states that promoting tolerance can be done through teaching literature. Through learning human sufferings and experiences of the characters in folklore, students could be more humane and sympathetic, thus promoting respect and tolerance. Seeing the role of literature can play in EFL, Ilyas (2016) argues the importance of including this not only in the textbooks but also in teaching-learning processes since it can also encourage students’ critical thinking skill.

The abovementioned information have shown the potentiality of exploiting folklore for various beneficial purposes. By reinforcing moral values, it could promote great individuals. Hence, incorporating folklore in the Indonesian ELT textbooks may be beneficial not only to conserve and appreciate Indonesian cultural heritage but also to help Indonesian EFL students learn English, gain cultural acquisition, and understand positive values for their character building.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

As mentioned, the integration of local folklore to EFL might be unpopular. Even though the ELT textbooks have not greatly facilitated this integration, EFL teachers can include folklore-based activities in their classroom. The following folklore-based activities can at least give ideas for the teachers.

Story Telling

A teacher can present stories in the classroom and discuss what the stories are about. Students can read the stories by themselves or the teacher can read the stories in front of the students. Even though the stories are written in Indonesian, the discussion can be conducted in English. When they already know the stories, they can choose one of the stories to retell. This can be an individual or group assignment. If the activity is done in a group, make sure that every student has almost the same portion of telling the story. It is true that this activity relies on memorisation; however, if is conducted in groups, there is an element of negotiation. This skill could promote social interaction.

Character Discussion

Folklore has characters. An English teacher can use this as a topic for group discussion. Students can be assigned into groups to discuss why the characters in folklore behave the way they do.

This may promote students' understanding of human behaviour and encourage their critical thinking skills if followed by students' reasoning and argumentation.

Story Continuation

This activity can be carried out individually or in groups. Students can be asked to continue the story and finish it using their own version. Their story can be written or told orally. Apart from improving student speaking and writing skills, this activity may promote students' creativity and critical thinking since students need to think how to change the story. This activity is ideal to what Ilyas' statement (2016b) with regard to the role of teaching literature in promoting Indonesian EFL students' critical thinking.

Value Identification

Folklore usually has values. The values can be positive or negative derived from the behaviour of its characters. The values can be discussed in the classroom. After reading or listening the stories, for example, students can discuss in groups what values they can find from the characters and discuss why the values are important. A teacher can relate the values to the present situation and discuss with students whether the values are still needed or not.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clearly mentioned in the Indonesian curriculum that the elements of Indonesian cultures should be provided in the textbooks. In general, folklore, which belongs to literature, can be used to introduce this notion; however, its implementation seems unpopular. Considering the importance of folklore as a medium to conserve and appreciate Indonesian cultural heritage, help Indonesian EFL students study English & gain cultural acquisition, and provide them with positive values for their character building, folklore need to be introduced in the EFL classroom. If possible, folklore can also be included in Indonesian EFL textbooks to provide English teachers with teaching materials. Doing this can be one way to introduce Indonesian cultures and heritage which eventually help students grasp the value of Indonesian cultural diversity. Finally, this implementation can facilitate students to gain some understanding and positive messages delivered in the local folktales they read.

Despite the importance of integrating local folklore in EFL, several issues may be encountered when it comes to the realizations. The first noticeable problem is the availability of translated Indonesian folktales in to foreign language since only few of them have been translated. However, the idea of classroom activities above can be an alternative. Another issue is that as teaching literature is not an easy task for teachers, there may need an effort to train English teachers dealing with the integration of folklore in the EFL classroom.

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