



Incorporating Local Culture in English Classroom to Create Cultural Resilience

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Abstract. English is compulsory for junior and senior high school students and an elective subject for elementary school students in Indonesia. English is taught in five aspects: reading, listening, grammar, writing, and speaking. Therefore, indirectly, students learn the culture and communication methods of native English speakers. However, learning English is not always about understanding the culture of native English speakers. In English teaching and learning activities, local culture can also be used. This article is written based on the author's experience when she taught English in two different remote areas of Indonesia, Deiyai Regency, Papua, and Tulang Bawang Barat Regency, Lampung, in the 2014/2015 academic year, and 2016. Because those schools are in two different regions, students have different cultures. This is the main reason the author determined that teaching materials should be based on the native culture of students. This article explores local culture's use in English teaching and learning activities to foster cultural resilience. The data of this article were the author's teaching experiences in Papua and Lampung. Then, the data were analyzed using cultural resilience theory. The analysis result shows that using local culture in English classrooms gives students cultural resilience because when learning how native English speakers communicate the students do not lose their native culture. However, they learn to communicate in English using their native culture or traditions in the form of biculturalism.

Keywords: Biculturalism, cultural resilience, native culture, English teaching and learning activities.

1 Introduction

In the Indonesian curriculum, English has a different status. It is a compulsory subject for junior and senior high school. Meanwhile, it is an elective subject for elementary school. In general, the situation in Indonesia can be divided into two parts, namely, urban areas and rural areas. In urban areas, schools have good and complete learning facilities, so they do not face significant issues with teaching and learning facilities. Moreover, in urban areas, the students have high motivation to learn, their parents fully support them, and the teachers prepare themselves well before teaching (Endriyati, Prabowo, Abasa, & Akmal, 2019).

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Unlike the situation in urban areas, teaching English in rural areas has a lot of challenges. Research reports have identified the challenges of teaching English in rural areas. Rural areas have difficulty accessing the schools due to damaged roads (Shahnaz, 2021), inadequate infrastructure, school facilities, learning media and sources (Shahnaz, 2021; Herizal, Marzulina, Erlina, Putri, & Amelia, 2023; Supriadi, Patak, & Korompot, 2023; Amrina, 2023; Angela, Warna, & Sukma, 2024), low-motivated students (Shahnaz, 2021; Supriadi, Patak, & Korompot, 2023; Amrina, 2023; Angela, Warna, & Sukma, 2024), language barriers, meaning that students used to speak and write in local languages at school (Shahnaz, 2021; Supriadi, Patak, & Korompot, 2023), lack support from parents (Shahnaz, 2021; Supriadi, Patak, & Korompot, 2023; Angela, Warna, & Sukma, 2024), and poor teaching circumstances where there is lack opportunity for teachers to develop their teaching capacities (Herizal, Marzulina, Erlina, Putri, & Amelia, 2023; Angela, Warna, & Sukma, 2024). Besides those challenges, learning English in remote areas is constrained by the status of English as a *muatan lokal* (local content) subject, which created less supportive conditions for teachers to teach English, most of the teachers came from non-English educational backgrounds, which affected their competence, the learning curriculum was not following the existing learning conditions, and the socioeconomic status of parents had a significant effect on students' motivation and achievement in learning (Pramesty, Maghfiroh, & Mustikawati, 2020).

Although Pramesty, Maghfiroh, & Mustikawati (2020) found that the status of English as a *muatan lokal* is the constraint of teaching English in rural areas, this status can also be a good opportunity. *Muatan lokal* subject is arranged in line with the socio-cultural conditions of the local community. Javanese culture is an example of *muatan lokal* in Yogyakarta. Javanese culture incorporates symbolic behaviors from tradition, religion, and art to promote noble qualities among students. In practice, an integrative and ecological approach is employed. The integrative approach is implemented by integrating local content or combining it with other subjects. Meanwhile, the ecological approach seeks to learn *muatan lokal* material directly from the natural environment and local socio-culture (Rofik, 2019).

The integrative approach mentioned by Rofik (2019) can also be implemented in English classrooms. In line with Rofik (2019), a study suggested that English teachers should be prepared to generate many exposures to address the shortcomings of English textbooks. They can incorporate, for instance, the utilization of outdoor learning activities that allow children to investigate their surroundings, such as going fishing and sorting the fish. This is just another illustration of how English helps pupils with their real-world activities. To gradually encourage the use of English, the English teachers may also begin class activities with mixed language usage. When society picks up a new language, it does not imply they have to throw out or forget the ones they already know. The two or three languages can coexist (Poedjiastutie, Mayaputri, & Arifani, 2021). Moreover, integrating local culture into an English classroom has been conducted by combining Indonesian oral traditions in the form of legends and Western oral traditions in the form of drama to provide character education in English teaching and learning activities (Wibowo, 2023).

Besides Poedjiastutie, Mayaputri, & Arifani (2021) and Wibowo (2023), there are a lot of studies that incorporate local culture into English classrooms. Seven studies from 2012-2023 are cited here. Among those seven studies, two studies talked about

using local culture in English lessons to promote character education (Sudartini, 2012; Sudartini, 2012; Jaya & Mortini, 2018), one study discussed a phenomenon called *glocal* English or the use of English in the bilingual speaker model where local culture can color the use of English (Seken, 2015), one study reported that connecting knowledge owned by the students and outside knowledge can help students in using English (Wiandari & Meutia, 2020), one study focused on the use of local culture as teaching material in English for tourism (Ariani & Novra, 2021), one study discussed the development of reading material based on Ende-Lio local culture to teach English for junior high school students in Flores (Ningsih & K'Kara, 2020), and one study explored a community service program at Bangka Kenda village that aims to help the local people to describe their local culture in English (Menggo, Jem, Fatmawati, Ansi, & Asman, 2023).

This article aims to explore the use of local culture in English teaching and learning activities to foster cultural resilience. From the studies cited above, there are no studies on using local culture in English classrooms to create cultural resilience. Therefore, this article can give new insight into the existing research on using local culture in English classrooms by providing a new point of view that incorporating local culture into English teaching and learning activities can create cultural resilience for the students.

2 Cultural Resilience

Cultural resilience is defined as a collection of interactions with a social and ecological environment that tries to preserve an identity perceived as distinct. Cultural resilience is valuable because it allows a group the legitimacy to stand out and support a political objective within the context of social and ecological systems (Bousquet & Mathevet, 2019). Another researcher defined cultural resilience as a community's ability to cope with misfortune, adapt to change, and grow. Cultural resilience requires both continuity and change. Absorbable disturbances are not an enemy to be avoided, but rather a partner in the dance of cultural sustainability (Holtorf, 2018).

Furthermore, Gunnestad (2006) mentioned that culture refers to a group of people's meaning of life, how they live and work (skills), what they consider right and important (values), and it also includes faith and religion. Culture has an important role in shaping one's identity. Identity is an important aspect of one's personality; it might be considered the core. From the standpoint of resilience, removing one's culture removes one's identity and, as a result, one's strength. When someone is robbed of what makes him/her strong, he/she becomes vulnerable because he/she does not inherit the cultural strengths that the majority culture has accumulated over generations.

To be able to create cultural resilience, someone must have biculturalism ability. Biculturalism occurs when a person can live between two cultures, speak the languages, understand the customs and rules, and understand why others behave the way they do. Biculturalism is possible when there is mutual respect across cultures, allowing a person to move freely in the other culture without having to hide or abandon his or her own. However, the development of true biculturalism is a hard matter. Culture is not something that you have or do not have. It has always changed. When representatives from different cultures interact, they influence one another. Contact with people who think, behave, and act differently will have an impact on values, norms, and ways of

thinking. The primary goal of biculturalism should be to be able to retain part of people's cultural values and traditions, as this is crucial for their identity, while also knowing and utilizing the majority culture, which is essential for daily life (Gunnestad, 2006).

In the context of language learning, biculturalism can be achieved through experiential language learning. An article entitled "Biculturalism through Experiential Language Learning" described English as a Second Language program designed for Mexican American adults who were educationally disadvantaged. The purpose of the program was to facilitate Mexican American adults who have strong Mexican cultural backgrounds to be able to adapt and live in the American culture in the U.S. The program observed daily behaviors of the students to make sure that they show assimilated North American culture through daily routines in many contexts (Brennan & Donoghue, 1974).

Another study mentioned that language and culture cannot be separated, so when students are learning English, English culture and English language are interconnected. This study also mentioned that second language acquisition increases cultural awareness among students studying foreign languages, highlighting the importance of biculturalism. At last, this study also found that biculturalism can enhance foreign language teaching (English was the foreign language discussed in this study), by enhancing student engagement. Raising students' awareness of foreign language culture influences their attitudes positively, resulting in increased attentiveness on their part (Lekli, 2015).

In Indonesia, a study showed that biculturalism affects literacy comprehension. This study talked about Indonesians who learned German. Those German learners build an identity shaped by family, community, and culture when learning German. This integrated cultural identity is bicultural, consisting of Indonesia and Germany. This study aimed to acquire a deeper understanding of students' bicultural literacy. The model/strategy of learning German as a foreign language, multimodal, literal competency criteria, and critical intercultural analysis were all intended to promote classroom learning. These four factors serve as the foundation for students' reading skill activities, as well as the fundamental principles of literacy and comprehension. Specifically, students investigate the text's contents, find new concepts, and critically evaluate them (Aini, Laksono, & Ridwan, 2021).

3 Method

This article was the result of exploratory research based on the author's experience when teaching English in two remote areas in Indonesia, namely Deiyai Regency, Papua in the 2014/ 2015 academic year, and Tulang Bawang Barat Regency, Lampung in 2016. According to Swaraj (2019), exploratory research is research or study on a topic that is less familiar and is carried out when the researcher only has little information on the topic. Exploratory research aims to formulate problems more precisely, sharpen concepts, collect explanations, gain insight, eliminate inappropriate ideas, and form hypotheses. From these objectives, this article aimed to gain insight because so far there has been no research exploring the use of local culture in English teaching and learning activities to create cultural resilience.

4 Results and Discussion

In remote areas, teaching has its challenges. Teaching English in particular, has a lot of challenges (Shahnaz, 2021; Herizal, Marzulina, Erlina, Putri, & Amelia, 2023; Supriadi, Patak, & Korompot, 2023; Amrina, 2023; Angela, Warna, & Sukma, 2024; Pramesty, Maghfiroh, & Mustikawati, 2020). The author faced the same challenges when she taught in Deiyai Regency, Papua, and Tulang Bawang Barat Regency, Lampung. Students in those remote areas were reluctant to learn English because it was difficult for them. The experiences that are explored in this article happened outside of the formal classrooms. They were after-school activities initiated by the author to give her students a chance to learn English in more fun and interactive ways.

First, in the academic year of 2014/ 2015, the author taught at Deiyai Regency, Papua. Her main job was teaching at the elementary school. However, she also had to give after-school activities to kids in the village. The participants in the after-school activities were students from grades 4-9 and most of them were still not fluent in reading and writing. Because of that, the author designed practical and speaking materials for the after-school activities, like talking about themselves, describing the village, describing students' family members, and describing the procedure of preparing traditional ceremonies or celebrations. In Papua, *bakar batu* is a traditional way to celebrate important events in their tribe. It was interesting discussing *bakar batu* in English with the students from Deiyai. The activity of discussing *bakar batu* in English is taken to be analyzed in this article.

Second, in 2016, a similar situation happened when the author taught at Tulang Bawang Barat Regency, Lampung. Her main job was teaching at the elementary school, and she initiated after-school activities for her students to learn English. The participants in the after-school activities were from different grades so the author arranged speaking activities that could involve all students of different ages. In Tulang Bawang Barat, the students had different traditional ceremonies and celebrations. Besides, they also had a tradition called *nyeruit*. The activity of discussing *nyeruit* in English is taken to be analyzed in this article.

Bakar batu means cooking by burning stones first, then making a small hole, then the hot stones are put into the hole, and arranged in such a way with pork, tubers, and leaves which are complemented with vegetables. The general meaning of *bakar batu* is a traditional cooking ritual which is a custom in the mountains of Papua. In its development, *bakar batu* is practiced in various social events in Papua with various terms or names, for example, the Mee tribe in Paniai calls it (*Gapiia*), and the Dani tribe in Kalome calls it (*Jugum Paga Lakwi*), another version calls it *Barapen*. *Bakar batu* is a symbol of togetherness and the sacredness of social life, therefore every important event such as resolving customary wars, women's dowries, peace with the spirits of nature, and also Christmas and Easter celebrations are always marked by the tradition of the *bakar batu* ritual (Nipur, M., & Matheosz, 2022). Students in Deiyai Regency are members of the Mee tribe, so they call *bakar batu gapiia*, but they also call it *barapen*.

Next, the *nyeruit* tradition is an eating tradition that has been carried out by the Lampung community from generation to generation to foster intimacy and togetherness between family members, in other words, it is used as a means of uniting kinship. This

tradition is usually carried out at big events in the Lampung community such as wedding ceremonies, religious ceremonies, and traditional ceremonies. The *nyeruit* tradition is an activity of eating together by consuming *seruit*. This food consists of fried or grilled fish, chili paste (*dilan*), *tempoyak*, and fresh vegetables which are stirred and placed in one bowl. People eat it using their hands (Ningrum, Turgarini, & Bridha, 2014).

When discussing *bakar batu* and *nyeruit*, students in both areas found a lot of difficulties because they had to find the English vocabulary. However, they were very interested in asking and finding out those words. Since they were after-school activities, there was no lesson plan. They were just a usual chit-chat, so anybody could raise their opinion, complete the stories, or ask questions. Then, the author helped them with the vocabulary and the structure of the sentences needed to describe cultural traditions. The vocabulary was varied, but the tense was simple present tense. In some situations, when the students talked about their experience in joining *bakar batu* and *nyeruit*, they used simple past tense. Besides simple present and simple past tense, students also learned about the procedural text when they explained the step, or the procedure needed to prepare both traditions.

Using local tradition as a content of learning is not a new thing. Based on his experience in Southern Africa, (Gunnestad, 2006) found that songs and dance may be used to learn cultural customs. Language, arithmetic, science, and other subjects can be used to learn about culture as well. When teaching songs to preschool teachers, they will easily use them with their students since it is part of their culture: learning is vital, and singing is enjoyable. Another example is the application of storytelling. In the evenings, parents and grandparents would gather around the fire and tell stories. Children used to exchange stories they knew with one another. The ability to tell stories is an important aspect of Southern African culture. Equally crucial is that the stories convey central aspects of African culture, such as history, ideals, morals, and values. Stories complemented the friendship and family togetherness.

In line with the experience of Gunnestad (2006) in applying storytelling, the author also used storytelling methods to teach English after-school activities. What was mentioned by Gunnestad, (2006) that children used to exchange stories they knew with one another, was also experienced by children in Deiyai and Tulang Bawang Barat. So, it was easier to practice their speaking than writing and grammar per se. Moreover, another study said that students find it easier to convey descriptions of places, tourist attractions, and other objects when using familiar material. The familiar material is what the students have around them, including their culture (Prayudha, 2023). What has been found by Prayudha (2023) is also experienced by the students in Deiyai and Tulang Bawang Barat.

Besides the storytelling methods, the traditions of *bakar batu* and *nyeruit* have cultural values. Both are forms of eating together traditions. Although both traditions come from different parts of Indonesia, they share the same values of eating together. The meaning presented in the ritual or culture of eating together is acceptance and fellowship. Acceptance is interpreted as a space to acknowledge the existence of equality towards fellow human beings which creates a sense of solidarity, while fellowship provides a space to connect. In addition, eating together does not only fulfill the physical needs of the body for hunger but also restores the freshness of the soul from fatigue (Dameria & Baratanata, 2021). From this excerpt, eating together has deeper values

than just fulfilling someone's hunger. Eating together becomes a means to show acceptance and solidarity among community members so that the community members pass down the tradition of eating together to the next generations.

Next, Gunnestad (2006) also mentioned that to be able to create cultural resilience, someone must have biculturalism ability. Biculturalism occurs when a person can live between two cultures, speak the languages, understand the customs and rules, and understand why others behave the way they do. In the context of Deiyai and Tulang Bawang Barat students, the biculturalism occurred when they talked about their traditions, *bakar batu* and *nyeruit*, in English. Biculturalism occurred in two ways, namely vocabulary and tense. For the vocabulary, not all words can be translated into English. The name of the tradition and some of the materials and ingredients needed for *bakar batu* and *nyeruit* have no English translation. Then, for the tense, in Bahasa Indonesia and students' local languages, there is no difference between past, present, and future. However, English differentiates the past, present, and future. In the activities of describing *bakar batu* and *nyeruit*, students learned the difference between simple present and simple past. A simple present is used to describe the facts about the traditions and simple past is used to talk about their particular experiences in the past. Furthermore, they also learned that the bare infinitive verbs are used to explain the procedure of preparing the traditions. Tenses that differentiate the time and subject-verb agreement do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia and the students' local languages, so by learning these, the students learned how native English speakers communicate.

The experiences of students in Deiyai and Tulang Bawang Barat show that when students learn a new language (English), their already known languages (Bahasa Indonesia and local languages) do not disappear. Both the new and the old languages can exist together. It was mentioned by Gunnestad (2006) that the primary goal of biculturalism is to keep part of people's cultural values and traditions, as this is crucial for their identity, while also knowing and utilizing the majority culture, which is essential for daily life. In the context of the students in Deiyai and Tulang Bawang Barat, Bahasa Indonesia, their local languages, and their traditions (*bakar batu* and *nyeruit*) are their culture. Languages and traditions are their identity. Their identity is not lost when they learn English. However, they can still use their identity when they learn English.

Learning English is important for the future of the students. In the future, they might need English to understand the university's course material and to communicate with other people, so preparing them with English skills since they were young is needed. Preparing the students with a skill that might be essential in their future is important, yet preserving their identity is also important. The experiences of describing traditions (*bakar batu* and *nyeruit*) owned by the students, instead of describing Western traditions in an English classroom is useful to prepare the students with English skills and at the same time preserve their identity.

In line with the author's experiences on using the students' local culture to teach English, Tedjakusuma (2013) mentioned that teachers should regard English language learners' original language and culture as resources for making new language and culture learning more relevant to their pupils. This allows an individual learner to feel accepted and valued for his or her ethnic background. The student should be encouraged to express his/ her opinions on a specific topic based on what he/ she has encountered rather than what his/ her culture thinks about the topic.

According to Adzima, Rochsantiningsih, & Suparno (2023), teachers can incorporate cultural topics into their English lessons. At this point, teachers should understand what cultural elements they may incorporate into their classes while matching the preferences of their pupils. Moreover, Adzima, Rochsantiningsih, & Suparno (2023) said that it is crucial to include cultural elements in textbooks for Indonesian students who may not have direct access to native speakers. As a result, material creators should examine the significant role of culture in teaching a foreign language, in addition to the importance of grammar, in order to achieve greater understanding and effective communicative skills as well as cultural knowledge. Also, teachers who are responsible for teaching a language should incorporate cultural content into English instruction in order to build students' cultural competence.

Then, to include cultural elements in English teaching and learning activities in Indonesia, a Culturally Responsive English Teaching (CRET) model is an alternative model that can be used. At its core, the CRET approach incorporates both the teacher's and students' experiences into the teaching and learning process. Initially, teachers realized that English is crucial to their students. While they had some experience teaching English, the challenges they faced influenced the development of the CRET paradigm. The model requires teachers to comprehend and be aware of English learning's purpose and aims. Through the development of the CRET model, teachers can use their teaching competencies to implement the CRET and respond to student diversity without being overly bound by old standard approaches. The approach also expects children to learn English through life experience, a participatory learning style, and the idea that learning is related to their culture (Siregar, Mayuni, & Rahmawati, 2023).

5 Conclusion

English is important for the daily communication in this era. However, in remote or rural areas, teaching English is very challenging. One of the challenges is that the students are reluctant to study English and they think that English is difficult. They think that English is difficult because English is far from them, and it does not relate to their daily life. However, this is not true because local traditions can be used to teach English.

The example of the English after-school activities in Deiyai Regency, Papua, and in Tulang Bawang Barat Regency, Lampung show that using local eating traditions called *bakar batu* and *nyeruit* can foster cultural resilience for the students. Cultural resilience occurs in biculturalism situations. In biculturalism situations, the students talk about their traditions in English. These situations make the students preserve their identity and at the same time learn a new language, that might be essential for their future. Biculturalism shows that learning English does not make students lose their identity.

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