

Cultural Pedagogy in Practice: Embedding Torajan Heritage in Language Learning Resources

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Abstract

This study explores how the integration of Torajan cultural elements into English language learning materials can enhance language acquisition and students' understanding of local culture. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through observations and interviews with lecturers and students from the English Department. The findings reveal that the integration of Torajan culture in the classroom is achieved through curriculum adaptation, context-based approaches, and creative projects. Specific cultural elements included folklore (e.g., *ulelean pare*), traditional arts, dances, rituals, culinary heritage, traditional clothing, and everyday life in Toraja society. The study shows that embedding these cultural components had a highly positive and significant impact on students' comprehension. It fostered greater engagement and motivation, improved language proficiency, deepened cultural awareness, and encouraged an appreciation for cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Additionally, the integration allowed students to form emotional connections with learning materials and strengthened their critical thinking, evaluative, and reflective skills. These findings suggest that the application of local cultural content not only enriches language learning but also contributes to students' holistic development as culturally aware and globally competent individuals.

Key Words: *Cultural pedagogy, Torajan Heritage, Learning Resources*

Introduction

The use of local culture in English language instruction serves as a creative means to provide students with more meaningful context while enriching their understanding of a rich cultural heritage. In an effort to preserve and honor local traditions, the integration of Torajan culture into English learning materials becomes particularly significant.

When students learn English while exploring Torajan culture, they not only develop their language skills but also gain deep insights into the traditions, values, and identity of one of Indonesia's most unique ethnic groups Toraja. In practice, incorporating Torajan culture into English language teaching can be achieved through a variety of creative strategies.

One such strategy is the use of Torajan folktales and legends translated into English. This offers students the opportunity to understand cultural values while simultaneously practicing reading in English.

In addition, traditional Torajan cuisine can serve as an engaging tool for vocabulary building. Students can learn English culinary terms while becoming familiar with dishes such as *Pa'piong* and *Pantollo Pammarasan*.

Cultural exhibitions, learning traditional songs and dances, and engaging in direct interaction with Torajan cultural figures through English are other effective methods for enhancing language proficiency while deepening students' cultural knowledge.

In the pursuit of cultural sustainability and fostering stronger connections between language and culture, the integration of Torajan culture into English education represents a positive and mutually beneficial initiative. It not only supports the development of students' English proficiency but also cultivates more culturally literate and socially conscious individuals. Thus, implementing Torajan culture in English language learning benefits both education and cultural preservation.

Method

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative method. The research design adopted was descriptive qualitative. A qualitative approach was utilized with the aim of identifying patterns, themes, or categories that emerged from the collected data. This approach facilitates the development of deeper theoretical or conceptual frameworks. English lecturers and the academic community of UKI Toraja in general may adapt the principles of integrating Torajan cultural elements into English language learning practices on campus.

The selection of research subjects was based on the assumption that they could provide the relevant data required by the researcher. The primary subjects of this study were English lecturers in the English Language Education Study Program, selected through purposive sampling. In addition, students also served as research subjects and were selected using the snowball sampling technique.

The research was conducted through five stages: (1) preparation stage, (2) data collection stage, (3) data analysis stage, (4) report writing stage, and (5) reporting stage (including progress and final reports). The researcher prioritized direct observation as the primary data collection technique, followed by interviews and document analysis. The data analysis techniques employed included transcription and coding for analyzing observational and documentary data, while interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis consisted of six steps: familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Results

Approaches in Implementing Torajan Culture in English Language Teaching

Based on direct observation and interviews with English lecturers regarding the implementation of Torajan culture in teaching, the researcher identified several approaches employed by the instructors, including:

Curriculum Integration

This approach involves incorporating local cultural values, traditions, and practices into the educational curriculum. Learning materials, activities, and projects are designed to reflect and strengthen students' cultural identity. One concrete example observed was the inclusion of Torajan cultural elements in the instructional materials delivered to students. This practice is aligned with the objectives outlined in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which mandates the integration of local wisdom into the curriculum. This legal basis underpins the lecturers' efforts to implement Torajan culture in the teaching and learning process.

"I personally integrate local culture in this case, Torajan culture into English language teaching with the aim of not only enhancing students' language proficiency but

also raising their awareness and curiosity about their own cultural heritage, so that it is not lost to the passing of time,” stated one of the lecturers during the interview.

Context-Based Education

This approach emphasizes presenting learning materials within the context of students’ local culture. Instructors may use examples, stories, and case studies that are relevant to students’ everyday experiences and cultural backgrounds. The goal is to create meaningful and relevant learning experiences that empower students to develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. It also supports the development of a strong cultural identity and a better appreciation of diversity and the complexity of society.

In this study, the researcher found examples of the use of Torajan culture that were relevant to students’ lives and utilized by lecturers during classroom instruction. For instance, when teaching **procedure texts**, an English lecturer used the process of making traditional Torajan food as a contextual example.

An example of such a text is as follows:

How to make Pa’piong (one of famous traditional food of Toraja)

To make Pa’piong, a traditional Toraja dish, begin by marinating chicken pieces with a blend of salt, pepper, lemongrass, shallots, garlic, turmeric, and galangal. Wrap the seasoned chicken in banana leaves, securing the packets with toothpicks or kitchen twine. Cook the wrapped packets either on hot stones in a pit for a smoky flavor or in a pot with hot coals beneath, steaming them until the chicken is tender. Alternatively, bake the packets in an oven. Once cooked, unwrap the banana leaves to reveal the fragrant and flavorful Pa’piong, perfect to serve with steamed rice for a taste of Toraja tradition.

In addition, the researcher also identified several activities that are closely related to or form part of students’ daily lives. These were incorporated into lessons on the topic of **daily activities**. The lecturer introduced the topic by providing examples drawn from students’ everyday experiences, such as:

Lecturer: what time do you usually get up in the morning?

Students: five and sometimes six o’clock!

Lecturer: What do you do after get up?

Students: help mother in the kitchen.....clean home.....and so on.

Lecturer: Any body help parents in feeding pigs?.....or help mother pick vegetables for pigs?.....or herding buffalo?

Based on excerpts from classroom interactions between the lecturer and students, it was concluded that the lecturer provided vocabulary items related to students’ daily routines. According to the lecturer, the use of such vocabulary aims to enrich students’ lexical repertoire and to encourage them to apply these words in their everyday lives, thereby fostering familiarity with more contextualized use of the English language.

Creative Project

Lecturers employed this approach by encouraging students to engage in creative projects that integrate local cultural elements into English language learning. These projects included activities such as producing documentary videos on local culture or writing stories inspired by traditional folktales.

One example of a creative project that incorporated Torajan cultural elements was storytelling based on *Ulelean Pare*, a collection of Torajan folktales. Students were invited to understand and preserve Torajan culture through these traditional stories, which were once used by parents to spend quality time with their children. Besides serving as bedtime stories, these narratives were also a medium for transmitting ancestral values embedded in Torajan traditions.

In addition, lecturers facilitated **role-play** activities to enhance students' English proficiency, particularly their speaking skills. Students were required to act out roles closely related to the everyday lives of Torajan people, such as social interactions in public spaces (e.g., traditional markets) or during customary ceremonies (*rambu tuka'* and *rambu solo'*). These activities enabled students to use the English language in culturally relevant and meaningful contexts.

Cultural Elements Incorporated in the Learning Process

Several elements of Torajan culture can be integrated into English language instruction, including:

1. Torajan Folktales
Utilizing Torajan folktales, such as *Ulelean Pare*, as reading materials or storytelling content to teach vocabulary, sentence structures, and listening skills in English.
2. Traditional Arts
Incorporating traditional Torajan arts, such as woodcarving and weaving, as topics for discussion or creative projects. These activities can foster students' creativity and appreciation for cultural arts within the context of English language learning.
3. Traditional Music and Dance
Engaging students with traditional Torajan music and dance, such as *ma' pompang* (bamboo music), through listening and speaking activities. This introduces students to the musical and performing arts traditions of Toraja.
4. Traditional Ceremonies
Exploring and discussing traditional Torajan ceremonies, such as Rambu Solo' or *Ma'randing*, to broaden learners' understanding of Torajan values, beliefs, and cultural practices.
5. Traditional Cuisine
Studying and preparing traditional Torajan dishes, such as *Pa'piong* or *Pammarasan*, as part of learning vocabulary, recipe instructions, and speaking activities related to food culture.
6. Traditional Clothing
Introducing traditional Torajan attire, such as *baju pokko'* and *seppa tallu buku*, as discussion topics to teach physical descriptions, clothing materials, and cultural dress customs.
7. Daily Life Activities
Presenting daily activities of Torajan communities such as farming in rice fields or trading in traditional markets as materials for learning English vocabulary and expressions related to everyday routines.

The Impact on Students' Comprehension

The implementation of Torajan culture in English language learning can have a significant positive impact on students' comprehension and engagement. The following are several observed outcomes:

1. **Increased Learning Motivation**

The integration of local culture such as folktales, traditional arts, and cuisine can enhance students' interest and motivation in learning English. Students feel more connected to the learning materials due to their relevance to their own cultural context.

2. **Development of Language Skills**

Utilizing Torajan cultural content in English instruction supports the development of language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students have the opportunity to practice new vocabulary, sentence structures, and expressions related to Torajan culture.

3. **Cultural Contextual Understanding**

Students gain a deeper understanding of Torajan values, traditions, and cultural practices. This helps them realize that language is inseparable from its cultural context, thereby fostering a more holistic understanding of English.

4. **Appreciation of Cultural Diversity**

Through learning experiences that involve Torajan culture, students develop an appreciation for cultural diversity and multiculturalism. They learn to respect differences, value other cultures, and broaden their perspectives on the world.

5. **Emotional Connection**

Integrating local culture creates an emotional connection between students and the learning material. Students feel more engaged and inspired because the content holds personal and cultural significance for them.

6. **Development of Critical Thinking Skills**

Through the analysis and discussion of Torajan culture in the context of English language learning, students enhance their critical thinking, evaluative, and reflective abilities in relation to the cultural information presented.

Conclusion

Based on the results of classroom observations and interviews regarding the integration of Torajan cultural elements as pedagogical practices in English language instruction, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Several approaches were employed to implement Torajan culture in English language learning, including curriculum integration, contextual-based approaches, and creative projects.
2. The cultural elements used in the learning process included Torajan folktales (*Ulelean Pare*), traditional arts, dances, customary ceremonies, traditional foods, traditional clothing, and everyday life activities of the Torajan community.
3. The incorporation of Torajan cultural elements had a highly positive and significant impact on students' understanding of the learning materials. It also enhanced students' cultural awareness and appreciation of the values embedded within these practices. As a result, students demonstrated increased motivation to learn, improved language skills, deeper cultural contextual understanding, greater appreciation for cultural diversity and multiculturalism, stronger emotional connections to the learning content, and enhanced critical thinking,

evaluative, and reflective abilities regarding the cultural information they encountered.

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This study is by no means perfect; therefore, constructive criticism and suggestions are highly welcomed for future improvement. It is our hope that the findings of this research will offer meaningful contributions to the development of English language education, particularly in the context of integrating Torajan cultural elements as pedagogical practices in English language learning materials.

Finally, we hope this research proves beneficial and serves as an inspiration for readers interested in or engaged with English language education. May this study also serve as a foundation for future research aimed at improving the quality of education in Indonesia.

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