

# THE MEDIATION OF LOCAL CULTURES WITH GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

Foreign language learning with local culture contents began from the importance of the representation of the roots of the nation in foreign language. Foreign language learning strategies which mediate local cultures and cultural values existed in a foreign language generate a global perspective on foreign cultures, not only on the articulation of local messages to foreign languages, but also it compares how the local values are relevant to the values of other nations. Eventually, learners realize that by understanding themselves, they will be able to appreciate the wisdom of other nations. French culture which was compared to Javanese cultures in this article proved the statement above.

**Keywords:** local cultures, global perspective, foreign language

## INTRODUCTION

Will learning foreign language reduce the love to the motherland? It is a thought which sometimes come across the mind of teachers. On one hand, foreign language teachers are responsible for providing students the concept of cultures out of them/ cultures of target language by studying habits, values and beliefs; it keeps learners away from the characters of Indonesian nation. On the other hand, teachers are asked to preserve and maintain the cultural heritage so that learners can be the parts of and have the characters of the nation which distinguish them from other nations. In the practice, there is a conflict between those two interests, the local versus the global. Is it possible to accommodate them in a foreign

language learning design which contains local cultures?

This issue becomes the concern of the writer as a French lecturer in Semarang State University. After seeing the change of some education policies which sometimes creates conflicts in the practice and therefore executors (teachers) feel that their mission of learning is paradoxical toward the policies. It happens in foreign language learning, which has a global mission to make learners have the understanding of the target language to catch up with the development of knowledge and the contact with other people throughout the world, on one hand, and the spirit to preserve the national identity as a form of cultural conservation as the responsibility of every learner, on the other hand. This preservation is based

on a condition that every teacher in any places in the world is required to teach students a clear identity which differentiates them from the identities of other nations — an aspect emphasized in the policy of Curriculum 2013 — so that students can preserve and learn the nation's characters as the national identity.

This phenomenon becomes the reason of contemplation for managing foreign language learning with the two missions mentioned above, and therefore the problem statement can be formulated as follow: “how to manage foreign language learning which mediates local cultures with a global perspective?”

The purposes of this article were: (1) to emphasize the urgency of the instillation of local values in foreign language learning and (2) to provide examples of a project-based learning model which covers local contents in foreign language expressions.

It is expected that this article can give an alternative view to foreign language teachers who want to combine local culture elements in conducting the global mission of learning.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Some foreign language experts agree that foreign languages are learned in order to explore the values of life implemented by the people of other nations. When relating to Japanese language learning, Alwasilah (2010) also states that it is necessary to learn from the ethos of Japanese people. Hard work, cleanness, tidiness and

punctuality are several values which are supposed to inspire learners of that language. The similar thing is also emphasized by Rukmini (2012) in the inauguration of Professor of English at Semarang State University; she asserts that English language learning can be accompanied by local wisdom and become a means of character education for students. According to her, learning and teaching languages are not limited to learning words and sentences but more focused on learning meanings and messages. Syaefudin (2012) also finds the values of French cultures either materially or immaterially. Essentially, there are lots of things which can be seen and adapted from other nations.

How about bringing out local contents and making them equal to foreign cultures being learned, though? Firstly, we are going to take a look at the references on local cultural values, foreign language learning in Indonesia and the learning model which mediates local values and the global perspective.

National identity is closely related to local wisdom. This term comes from two words, namely local and wisdom. Generally, the term can be defined as wise local ideas with positive values which are instilled among and followed by members of a society. Local wisdom is formed as the superiority of the local cultures or geographical conditions in a broad sense. It is the cultural product of the past which deserves to be continuously preserved as

life guidance. Although it has local contents, its values are considered universal. (<http://filsafat.ugm.ac.id>).

Referring to Curriculum 2006, there are five foreign languages other than English which are taught at secondary level and some of them are also taught at higher education; they are Japanese, French, German, Arabic and Mandarin. Foreign language learning in Indonesia has been conducted since the colonial era. Sunendar (2010) states that foreign languages are learned – in this case foreign languages other than English – because of the increasing economic and diplomatic cooperation with those countries. The first contact with foreign languages occurred as the interest of the colonizing countries such as Netherland, which implemented its language politics in education limited to only certain people. The ruling noblemen (*ningrat*) who communicated directly and politically with the Dutch received education, and so did the class called *priyayi* (the nobles of the robe), who worked as clerks and received Dutch language teaching for supporting their administrative tasks in the colony. In its development, Dutch language was left due to the spirit of nationalism strengthened by the Youth Pledge in 1928.

French language brought by the Dutch East Indies government was also a foreign language which indirectly related to the Dutch because in the Daendels era Dutch became the part of France. French

language lesson was the second foreign language curriculum in Indonesia.

After that, English language which was firstly used for communication with colonial world in an international relation was popularized by Americans through their cultures so that it became well-known widely in Indonesia and later became an international language. The influence of English dominates from the earliest level of education to the highest one.

Next, Japanese language taught in Indonesia was used for communication in Japanese colonial era changed into a language for business communication after the independence day as the Japanese investors massively came to Indonesia for business purposes.

Arabic and Mandarin languages actually have a long history started before the arrival of European colonialism. The spread of religion, trading and diplomacy of the two cultures contributed to the multiculturalism of Indonesian nation. The difference from the previously mentioned languages is that although Arabic and Mandarin came earlier in the area of culture, the two languages were the last to be implemented in the area of education. It is proved by the fact that the study programs of the two languages were opened in university level and developed in the last 2 decades — besides the *pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) cultures which have been in contact with Arabic language since long time ago. For example, the study program of Arabic

language in Semarang State University was opened in 2005 and Mandarin in 2011.

The goal of foreign language learning transformed from merely fulfilling the economic and political needs of the colonial government in one hand and the colonized people on the other hand to carrying out diplomatic and business relations related to the cultures and economics in the present time.

This article does not have any intension to compare which foreign language has the most dominant influence in Indonesian education but the contribution in adopting local cultures in the learning process. In order to manage the learning process, the model which can be applied is Project-Based Learning model. According to the University of Nottingham (2003: [online]), this model is a systematic model which involves students to learn theories and complex skills, authentic questions and product and assignment design.

Thomas et al. in *Strategi Pembelajaran Inovatif Kontemporer* (Wena, 2009:114) state that Project-Based Learning is a learning model which provides teachers with the opportunity to manage learning in the class by involving project works.

Project-Based Learning has a great potential to create more interesting and useful learning experiences for students (Santayasa, 2006:12). In Project-Based Learning, students are encouraged to be more active in learning. Teachers only

facilitate the learning and evaluate the products made by students which are displayed in the project results.

## DISCUSSION

Accommodating the missions of making students have global skills and able to express and preserve local values in foreign language learning begins from the understanding about the goal of learning itself, whether learners will use the foreign language skills for working with native speakers who requires them to use the language for communication or they will stay in an environment with more contact with speakers of the national language so that the demand of foreign language skills is not so urgent. It is important to understand how to direct students to the targeted professional situations. For example, in learning French, students have been directed to be able to communicate in French with the topic about the condition of Indonesia, not the condition of France. This is done because most of those students will work in Indonesia. When they talk to French native speakers about the situations related to Indonesia, understanding local cultures is a must.

In French language learning, the writer described the learning models in the subjects of speaking and writing.

The approach which becomes the basis of Project-Based Learning model is action learning approach in foreign language learning which focuses on how the learning can respond to professional

challenges in the society through the works. The philosophy of the approach is how students as the candidates of social actors prepare themselves to participate in professional world and contribute through their works. They are required to perform reliably in order to respond to professional challenges.

This approach is the improvement of communicative approach which has been applied for the last two decades in foreign language learning. This approach focuses on how languages function in the context of communication and how students respond to the challenges to communicate in foreign languages according to the functions and communication partners.

The following was the example of Project-Based Learning model which combined local culture elements and information technology usage. This learning was conducted in the subjects of productive skills, namely speaking (*production orale*) and writing (*production écrite*) for the students in the beginning of their third year (semester 5). Both of them applied Project-Based Learning with the following goals: (1) students can apply the speaking/writing skills in French on cultural contents; (2) students learn other professional competences other than linguistic ones found in daily life; (3) students can collaborate to solve problems and socialize with friends so that there is cooperation and clear task division.

The product of this research was the learning model of speaking which

emphasized the acquisition of character values in it. There were four stages conducted in the development of the product draft, namely teaching structure, social system, role/duty of the teacher, and support system.

The first product was role-play teaching structure, referring to the nine steps designed by Joyce (2007). This structure was compacted into five: (1) warming up; (2) choosing participants; (3) arranging performance, (4) conducting performance; and (5) evaluating. Another reason was that in the class, the learners were not French native speakers who did not have linguistic problems. They had just started learning foreign language so some of their time was used for deepening their knowledge in structures as well as contents and the way how to express them. After sufficiently mastering linguistic aspects, the learners were directed to a situation which was similar to the reality so that they could recognize and interpret every problem.

In social system, the role-play model was developed by using social adjustment system in which the lecturer was responsible for opening the session and guiding the students through activities in every stage. Meanwhile, special materials in discussion and role-play were defined by the students by considering the topic being talked about. In the similar stage, the values contained in a story/legend which were used for role-playing were also discussed.

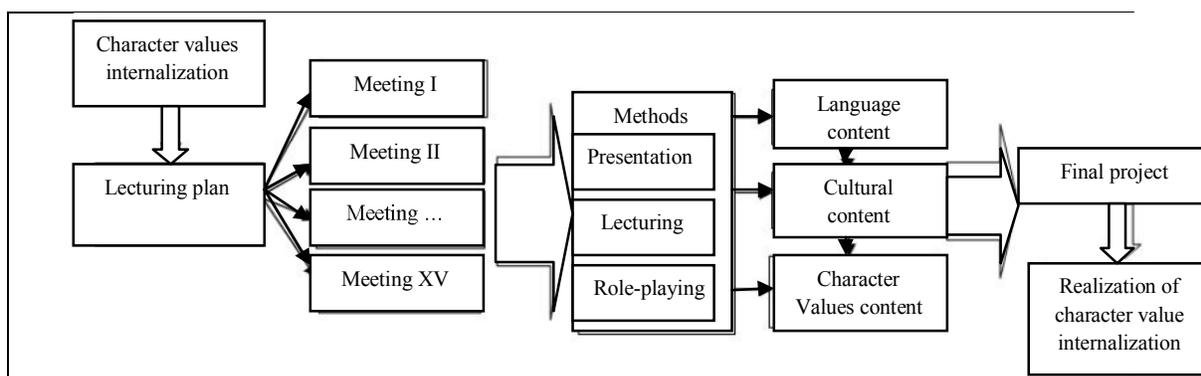
The role-play model divided the tasks of the lecturer and the students. The lecturer received all students' responses without giving judgment. It means that the students might have their own responses for the occurring event. Then, the lecturer helped the students explore the problem from various points of view and compare some alternatives for problem-solving. For example, could Javanese people who tend to yield follow the openness and dynamism of French people? Some students thought that yielding was a negative attitude for it implied passiveness and slowness. In this case, the lecturer could give alternatives according to his experience as the one who had been in contact with French people for a long time.

Then, the lecturer attempted to raise the students' awareness of their views or feelings by making reflections from, paraphrasing, and concluding the responses from the students as the

observers. The lecturer also used the concept of role and emphasized that there were many ways of playing roles. This was done to make the students understand more about how to act, whether using confrontational way, persuasive way, or dialogic way, all of which had different results and consequences. As the most important thing, the lecturer emphasized that there were many alternatives for solving problems. It was expected that students could gain character values for living among the society.

This model did not have many supporting material results except the problematic situations themselves. In the development of the model, the support system consisted of syllabus and lesson plan which made it possible to internalize values in each topic.

The following is the flowchart of role-play model for the subject of speaking in French.



From the four products, an assignment which referred to the strengthening of character values achieved in learning through a final project was developed. The students documented their achievement through a collective project in the end of the lecture. The expected result was a video or film whose idea taken from role-playing activities during the lecture. They had learned to recognize problems and solve them by interacting, making reflection and create relation to the problems in the real life. It was their turn to explore their talents and creativity in making something which could be enjoyed by other learners, especially French language learners. Some of the results were (1) Ande-ande Lumut; (2) dubbed Upin Ipin cartoon; (3) The Story of the Lost Dictionary.

The project of writing about local cultures in French was also conducted in the subject of advanced writing (*production écrite pré-avancée*). There were five steps which were conducted by the researcher and the students in making the website of Javanese cultures in French.

*First*, the researcher planned the Project-Based Learning in the writing subject to produce writing about Indonesian cultures in French. In this activity, the lecturer explained the goals of the subject, lesson plans, assignments and evaluation.

*Second*, the researcher applied the plans in several sessions, especially in the themes which local cultural elements could

be inserted. In order to apply the model, the researcher referred to collaborative writing. It was firstly conducted by selecting themes which could be developed and adapted to local discourse from the textbook entitled Campus 2.

There were ten themes which were discussed in the writing classes, namely Traditional Games (*Parler de jeu*), Comments on Journey (*Commenter des voyages*), Javanese Traditional Music (*Parler de musique*), Folklore (*Composer un conte*), Traditional Technology (*Parler des sciences*), Traditional Food (*Parler de nourriture*), Holiday Celebration (*Connaître un rythme de l'année*), Gender Equality (*Parler des femmes et des hommes*), Understanding People (*Comprendre la société*), Cultural Heritage (*Parler du patrimoine indonésien*).

*Third*, the researcher observed the process of working on the writing project. When there was a difficulty, the lecturer provided guidance. In every meeting, he explained the selected themes and provided examples of Indonesian culture exploration in French writing. After that, he gave assignments either for individual or for group. For group work, he divided the students into several themes which needed deeper cultural materials. The themes were: Traditional Games (*Parler de jeu*), Javanese Traditional Music (*Parler de musique*), Folklore (*Composer un conte*), Holiday Celebration (*Connaître un rythme de l'année*), and Cultural Heritage (*Parler du patrimoine indonésien*). Then, the

lecturer asked the students to design a website which reflected their writing. The design process of the website was supported by an IT expert so that the students could concentrate more on the content. The process from the design to

the finalization of the website took six months. The name of the website was [www.java-culture.com](http://www.java-culture.com) and it was published online.

The following is the example of the display of the website.



This website was made using CMS (content management system) called Wordpress, which is widely used even by famous companies. The domain is divided into two types; the first is blog, <http://wordpress.com/>, used for hosting and the domain has been provided. The second is self-hosting <http://wordpress.org/>. The website [www.java-culture.com](http://www.java-culture.com) itself used the second one. This website is open source, meaning that everybody has the right to share and modify as they want. Therefore, Wordpress is available in many languages. In this website, the homepage/accueil is displayed using slideshows showing Javanese cultures. There are also

articles about Javanese cultures written in French.

## CONCLUSION

The management of foreign language learning in higher education enables teachers to incorporate local elements through Project-Based Learning method for productive language skills in speaking and writing. The results of this research are: (1) the accomplishment of foreign language productive skills which was measured by giving advantages to (2) local culture conservation with global sense because it was expressed in (3) a collaborative project which demanded

information technology mastery. Thus, the mission of the learning of local culture with global sense could be achieved.

Therefore, the writer proposes the stages of foreign language leaning in higher education as follow: *First*, the teaching must be conducted in the sequence of scrutinizing, speaking, and writing. *Second*, the cultural contents are incorporated equally by reflecting to the condition in Indonesia. *Third*, the learning strategy is adapted to the professional situations which students will encounter. Teachers are required to present potential professional situations based on their experiences and observation on professional world. In order to identify the needs of professional world, institutions can cooperate with alumni association to give suggestions related to the condition of professional world because imbalance between education and professional reality often occurs. *Fourth*, in Project-Based Learning model, learners learn materials and cooperation in solving problems. This model is the improvement of Inquiry-Based Learning, which emphasizes on problem solving through activities centered in learners.

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