Understanding Differences, Enhancing Competencies: Embedding Indonesian Literature in EFL Class

by Ied Veda
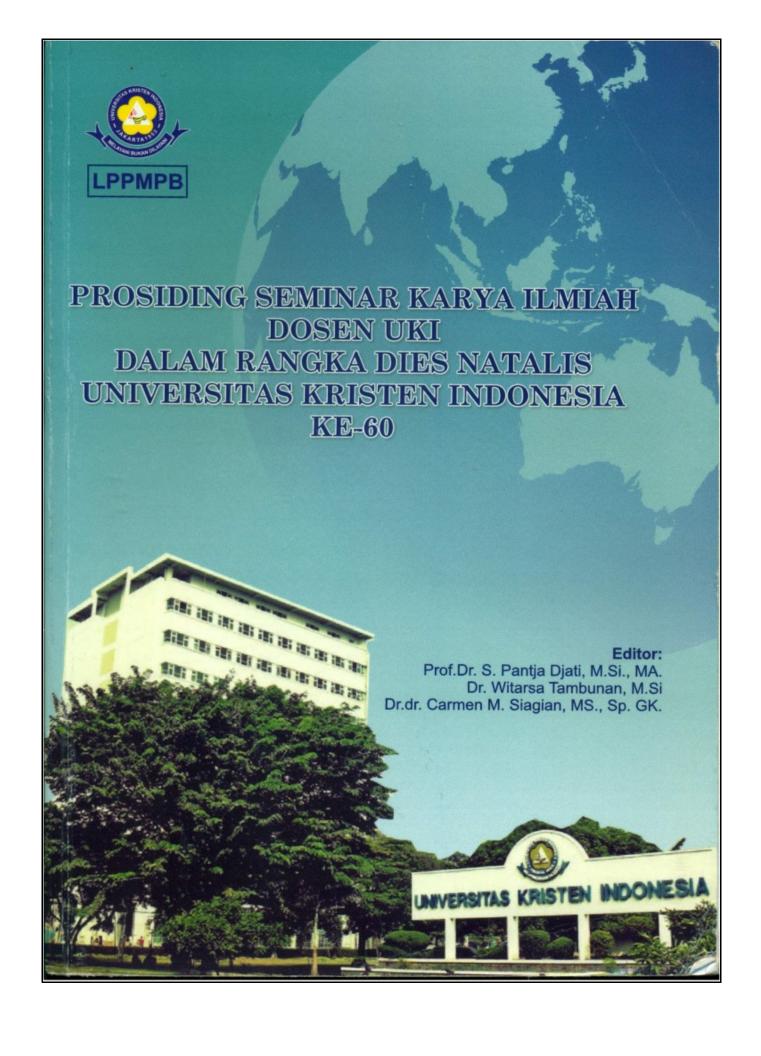
PROSIDING SEMINAR KARYA ILMIAH DOSEN UKI DALAM RANGKA DIES NATALIS UNIVERSITAS KRISTEN INDONESIA KE-60

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Understanding Differences, Enhancing Competencies:
Embedding Indonesian Literature in EFL Class[1]

Ied Veda Sitepu[2], Susanne Sitohang[3]

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Abstrak

Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dapat juga diberi muatan-muatan lain yang menjadi "hidden curriculum" dari suatu institusi. Hasil tracer study UKI tahun 2009 dan exit survey menunjukkan bahwa 'toleransi' dan 'pemahaman akan norma dan nilai-nilai yang berlaku di masyarakat' menjadi kekuatan para lulusan UKI sehingga kedua kompetensi ini perlu terus diasah dan ditingkatkan. Selain itu, lima nilai UKI, yaitu, rendah hati, perduli, bertanggung jawab, disiplin, dan profesional juga perlu diperkenalkan dan dijiwai oleh para mahasiswa

Materi bacaan kesusastraan berbahasa Inggris—asli maupun terjemahan--dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris telah terbukti dapat menolong mahasiswa tidak saja dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbahasa namun juga apresiasi terhadap bahasa tersebut karena kesusastraan bukan saja membuat belajar bahasa jadi menyenangkan namun juga memperkaya dan memperluas khasanah bahasa para pembelajar. Selain itu penguatan kompetensi-kompetensi tertentu dapat terlaksana melalui pengajaran bahasa Inggris.

Artikel ini mencoba melihat penerimaan bacaan alternatif bahasa Inggris, yaitu penggunaan cerita rakyat Indonesia terjemahan bagi mahasiswa semester satu non-bahasa Inggris. Hasil dari satu pertemuan tersebut dicatat dan direkam, dan mahasiswa di akhir pertemuan memberikan evaluasi aktivitas pembelajaran tersebut.

Rationale

Officially English is the first foreign language in Indonesia (decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Number 096/1967, dated 12 December 1967). The status of the language has given English a privilege to be taught in all school levels, as a compulsory subject, and education institutions are allowed to adjust credit units to the schools' need. The 2013 Curriculum, however, has slightly changed the teaching of English language as a foreign language in Indonesia, i.e. it is only compulsory in junior high school and senior high school levels. Despite the government decree forbidding the teaching of English in the elementary school curriculum, the use of English as medium of instruction is extended especially after the government granted international status to a

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[1]Makalah disampaikan pada Konferensi Asia TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) 2013, di Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, the Philippines, 26-28 Oktober 2013.
[2] Dosen pada Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Kristen Indonesia; Penelitiannya meliputi: EFL, Pendidikan Tinggi dan Tracer Study.
[3] Dosen pada the Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Kristen Indonesia; Penelitiannya meliputi: EFL, Pengajaran Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris.

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number of schools, a fact which consequently allowed them to use English as a medium of instruction, aside from the national language, Bahasa Indonesia.

Despite a long period of English learning--6 years if we count only in junior and senior high school periods or 12 years if they started learning English at elementary school -- English is still taught in university level, as the most significant elective subject or even compulsory in general course, putting English still as the most important foreign language in Indonesia.

In non-English study programs at Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI), the teaching of English has always been a challenge since the English competence of incoming students is generally low to pre-intermediate levels. Because English belongs to MPK courses (general courses), it is appropriate that the subject also carries certain values or other competencies that students need to develop as students of UKI which will be beneficial for them after they graduate, as Harvey (2000: 3) puts it, "the primary role of higher education is increasingly to transform students by enhancing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities while simultaneously empowering them as lifelong critical, reflective learners."

In addition, the decree of the minister of Education and Culture, No. 045/U/2002, about Core Curriculum in Higher Education, which dictates the design of the core curriculum of a study program, in the level of Non degree program, *Sarjana*, graduate and post-graduate programs, also allows curriculum development to integrate certain values that will be beneficial in shaping the competencies of the graduates. The decree further states that the core curriculum of a study program should help students achieve certain competencies during their study period (article 2):

> *Competencies that students will gain in each study program cover (a) core competency; (b) supporting competency; and (c) other competencies that are related to the core competency.*

> *Concerning the three competencies, the decree also states that the curriculum of a program should be designed in order that the graduates possess the five elements of competencies as follows: (a) foundation of personalities; (b) mastery of science and skills; (c) ability to work; (d) attitude and conduct at work according to the level of expertise based on the mastery of science and skills; and finally (e) understanding of the norms in the community where he/she works."*

Based on the above, the English syllabus is designed by the following:

(1) The results of UKI's 2009 tracer study which depicted graduates' competencies in tolerance and appreciation of different points of views. These strong competencies were developed during their study at UKI Campus, known as a multicultural campus housing students from different ethnic cultures (Sitepu, 2011).
(2) UKI's exit surveys which are conducted to gather fresh graduates' perception of their study experience at UKI and their perception of work and future career. The result showed that the graduates were aware that English is the most important requirement for work, followed by computer operating skills and Internet and their recommendation is that study programs give more credit units to English (Sitepu, 2010)

The tracer study results showed that strengthening the competencies is found positive and that study program should take into consideration curriculum development and classroom learning activities that lead to acquisition of those competencies. Fresh graduates' responses regarding the addition of credit units to English language was distributed to respective study programs but *Pusat Pelayanan Bahasa* (PPB) or Language Service Centre took it as one of the foundation in constructing a syllabus.

Language Service Centre also found it important for studens to not only acknowledge UKI's 5 values: (1) Humble, (2) Caring and Sharing, (3) Professional, (4) Responsible, and (5) Disciplined, but also traslate them into their way of life, during the study and after they graduate from this institution.

English in Non-English Study Programs

At Universitas Kristen Indonesia, English is given to non-English study program freshmen, from 2 to 10 credit units depending on the curriculum in the study program, under the coordination of Pusat Pelayanan Bahasa Fakultas Sastra Universitas Kristen Indonesia (PPB FS-UKI) or Language Service Centre of the Fakultas Sastra UKI. The Centre designs a syllabus and course description based on learning objectives given by respective study programs. However, due to limited time allocation for this subject, the teaching and learning focuses on reading comprehension.

PPB FS-UKI is a unit in charge of the development and improvement of English competence of students, teachers and employees of UKI. Therefore, it also designs material and testing, such a standardized test that is aimed at measuring the English competence of UKI's students, faculty members and staff. The standardized test is internally acknowledged as the basis for determining English competencies of the students. For example, in Fakultas Sastra, new students are tested to measure their English language skills. New students achieving certain high scores are waived for English skills subjects, such as Speaking I-IV, Listening I-IV, Reading I-IV, and Writing I-IV. This is an acceleration program, which is in line with the government policy regarding recognition of prior learning (RPL).

In Academic Year 2013/2014, PPB FS-UKI designed a project of Embedding Literature to Language Learning for students of non-English study programs. The aim of this program is to increase reading understanding of the students through alternative reading materials that are familiar but written in English. For the pilot project the team introduced a folktale, Bawng Merah and Bawang Putih, a tale from West Java. As Chen (2006) states "Folktales enable students to relate their own experiences and feelings to the reading." If the story given is familiar, it is hoped that students will show interests, and consequently, increase their reading understanding.

Why Literature in English Language Class?

The use of literature in English language classes as materials or tools of teaching has proven beneficial to the development of English competence of students. Literature can even be used for basic language classes and used to teach all skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and also to teach vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. (Hismanoglu, 2005: 54). Moody in Chen (2006) states that literature "builds up students' listening comprehension when used aurally, encourages oral practice through discussion and offers many interesting chances to write."

Literature can also be the source for other types of communicative activities using the language learned. For example, with the use of literary texts, students can be asked to write the ending of a particular story. Students can also dramatize a short story. Hismanoglu (2005: 59-60) lists activities that can follow the inclusion of literature in an English class: (a) adding to the work (b) changing the work (c) drama-inspired writing (c) a letter addressed to another character (d) oral reading (e) drama (f) dramatization (g) improvization and role-playing.

Maley in Hismanoglu (2005) listed four reasons for using literary texts in a foreign language classes: (a) valuable authentic material, (b) cultural enrichment, (c) language enrichment, and (d) personal involvement (54-55). Khatib (2011) furthers adds that the inclusion of literature as materials in an English class contributes to the development of emotional intelligence of the students (their affection, feeling and emotion). Literature helps increase the critical thinking faculties of the students. Students also have more articulate awareness in cross cultural and global communication. (Chen 2006, Khatib 2011,)

Other reasons for adding literature in the material for English classes are also listed by Maley, as quoted in Hismanoglu (2005): universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power, and ambiguity.

What literary materials are suitable for students should also put be into consideration. Teachers should think about the students' needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students. One type of texts that students may find interesting is using translated literary work, for example translated folktales. Folktales are resources which students will find interesting as they are more familiar with the cultural contexts and can make the connection to the texts more easily.

Class Profile and Learning Objectives

The tryout of including literary texts in an English class was conducted in Econ 1 Class, which is a class in the Economics study programs. The class consists of 35 first year students of different levels of competence and of diverse cultural bacgrounds.

The text used is a folkstory titled Bawang Putih, Bawang Merah, which is an Indonesian folktale from West Java. It is a story that the students are familiar with. The tale is about a girl named Bawang Putih, who lives with her stepmother and stepsister called Bawang Merah. The plot revolves around a day in Bawang Putih's life when she meets and helps an old lady. To show her gratitude, the old lady asks Bawang Putih to have one pumpkin.

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Bawang Putih can choose from two pumpkins: the small and the big one. Bawang Putih chooses the small one, which apparently is filled with jewelry. When the stepmother and Bawang Merah, the stepsister, find out, they are envious of the luck Bawang Putih has. The stepmother, then, asks Bawang Merah to find the old lady. When they meet, the old lady asks Bawang Merah to help her; however, Bawang Merah refuses her. Still, the old lady offers Bawang Merah to choose one pumpkin, the small or the big one. Thinking that the big pumpkin will be filled more jewelry, Bawang Merah picks it. They later find out that their greediness results in a disaster as the pumpkin is filled with snakes.

The objective of the lesson was for students to be able to read the story and come up with the values of UKI. The hidden curriculum was to instill in the students the values of being humble, caring and ready to share, and being responsible (three of the five values of UKI) in addition to other values, such as being helpful and respectful to elders.

Activities included reading the text, comprehension questions, and group and class discussions. The text was read by T as sample of pronunciation, followed by students reading the text individually. Students were then asked some comprehension questions and were asked to name the values found in the story. As their final assignment, students worked in groups and answered some questions related to the values. For evaluation of the class, the students worked in pairs and gave their comments about the lesson they had just experienced.

Lesson Learned: From Classroom Activities to Student Feedback

This tryout activity of including literary material in the form of a translated folktale from Indonesia was received well by the students. They gave positive feedback as they enjoyed the story. They also realized that there are values that they need to embrace in the society – values as exemplified through out the story of Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih and other folktales from Indonesia – to be better and more responsible individuals.

This positive experience is a springboard for more intense use of literature in English classes for non English students. The literature included may be Indonesian literature in English or literary works usually used in the literature classes. The forms of literary works should also vary. Teachers may make use of poems, one act plays, short stories and other literary texts, of course, with much consideration given to matching the materials with the language competence of the students in hand. Classroom activities and the skills focus should also be diverse as already elaborated in the previous part of this article.

Care should be taken, however, that teachers do not fall into teaching literature and not teaching language. They should remain focused and alert on what objectives they really wish to accomplish through the use of literature in English classes for non English students – that the purpose is only using literature as a tool in teaching language.

Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Program

Limited time allocation for English language class for non-English study program students must be used effectively in an interesting way. Integrating Indonesian literature in English

into English language class is one way of making the language learning enjoyable without sacrificing the objectives of the subject.

Careful selection of reading material and organized classroom activities will help to achieve objectives of the course. Values, attitude and principles that need to be specifically introduced or strengthened are given as hidden curriculum in the learning materials and classroom discussions.

The student' feedback is positive, they enjoyed the class discussion and at the same time the objectives were achieved. There are several (classroom) activities that can be introduced to make learning more enjoyable and challenging, for instance rewriting the folktales or recreating the folktales (adaptations) in a group of two or three, to minimize the pressure when working individually. Another recommendation for classroom activities are storytelling by using: folktales from students' own region and other regions in Indonesia or folktales from other countries and rewrite or retell in English and the most challenging and motivating to produce is dramatization of folktales.

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Appendix 1: Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih

BAWANG Putih lived with her stepmother and her stepsister, Bawang Merah. Bawang Putih's mother died when she was a baby. Her father remarried another woman and later her step sister was born. One morning, Bawang Putih was washing some clothes in a river. Accidentally, her mother's clothes were washed away by the river. She was really worried so she walked along the riverside to find the clothes. Finally she met an old woman. She said that she kept the clothes and would give them back to Bawang Putih if she helped the old woman do the household chores.

Bawang Putih helped her happily. After everything was finished, the old woman returned the clothes. She also gave Bawang Putih a gift. The old woman had two pumpkins, one pumpkin was small and the other one was bigger. Bawang Putih had to choose one.

Unfortunately, not long after that, her father died. Since then, Bawang Putih's life changed. Her stepmother and her step sister treated Bawang Putih badly and always asked her to do all the household chores.

Bawang Putih was not a greedy girl. So she took the small one. After thanking the old woman, Bawang Putih then went home. When she arrived home, her stepmother and Bawang Merah were angry. They had been waiting for her all day long. Bawang Putih then told about the clothes, the old woman, and the pumpkin. Her mother was really angry so she grabbed the pumpkin and smashed it to the floor. Suddenly they all were surprised. Inside the pumpkin they found jewelry.

"Bawang Merah, hurry up. Go to the river and throw my clothes into the water. After that, find the old woman. Remember, you have to take the big pumpkin," the stepmother asked Bawang Merah to do exactly the same as Bawang Putih's experience.

Bawang Merah immediately went to the river. She threw the clothes and pretended to search them. Not long after that, she met the old woman. Again she asked Bawang Merah to do household chores. She refused and asked the old woman to give her a big pumpkin.

The old woman then gave her the big one. Bawang Merah was so happy. She ran very fast. When she arrived home, her mother was impatient. She directly smashed the pumpkin to the floor. They were screaming. There were a lot of snakes inside the pumpkin! They were really scared. They were afraid the snakes would bite them.

"Mom, I think God just punished us. We had done bad things to Bawang Putih. And God didn't like that. We have to apologize to Bawang Putih," said Bawang Merah. Finally both of them realized their mistakes. They apologized and Bawang Putih forgave them. Now the family is not poor anymore. Bawang Putih decided to sell all the jewelry and used the money for their daily needs. ***

Appendix 2: Student Feedback

Student 1:
I think the story is good because from the story we can get the positive values and we can know that the story (Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih" is the folklore from Central Java.

Character I like is Bawang Putih because she has good character. She is humble, caring, kind, patient, helpful, responsible, respect and like to share.

Character I dislike is stepmother because she is bad, greedy, impatient, not care, and selfish.
The positive values are we must caring and humble to all people. We didn't like stepmother and Bawang Merah.

Student 2:
What values or what positive idea do you learn from the story?
We must do the Bawang Putih's behaviour because she is a kind girl but we mist too like Bawang Merah. She apologize for her mistakes and her mother's.

What other folklores from your region that also have positive values?
The legend of Lake Toba. We dont speak about the privacy (secrets) of the families, we must fulfil promises.

Student 3:
The story is very good because the story describe 2 sister live together but one of 2 sisters has a good behaviour and the other sister has a bad behaviour

Which character do you like or do you dislike? Why?
I like Bawang Putih because she has a good behaviour, she is patient, kind, helpful, humble. We can do like her in our life. I dislike Bawang Merah because she is badly girl, too greedy and angry everytime to Bawang Putih, also the stepmother. She is like an evil girl, angry everytime.

Student 4:
Like: Bawang Putih: kind, humble, responsible, care, helpful because she was patient in all things and be facing a thing. She also likes to help

Dislike: Bawang Merah and Stepmother: bad, greedy, grumpy, cruel, impatient, not helpful because she was never satisfied with what she had, greedy and evil to others, never help others.

In the story we are taught to always remain patient in the problems we face, no grudges against fellow.

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