Utilizing Digital Media for Embedding Local Cultural Values: Vocational High Schools Context

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Abstract. Culture and language are truly inseparable. This study explored how teachers of Vocational High Schools (VHS) embedded local cultural values in their language learning by utilizing digital media. This was a small scale exploratory case study involving six participants comprising of three Indonesian language teachers, and three English teachers of Vocational High Schools in three different regencies of Central Java, Indonesia. The data were primary collected through interview and focus group discussion (FGD). To analyse the data, the interactive models of qualitative data analysis of Miles & Huberman (2014) was employed. Evidences showed that teachers used texts or video materials containing local culture in form of (1) ideas: norms, moral, religious values; (2) activities: traditional ceremonies, and (3) artefacts: historical places, foods, or customs. Teachers reported that among of methods recommended in 2013 Curriculum implementation, Inquiry and Project-Based Learning became teachers’ preferences. Students’ projects in form of texts writing or video making of certain local culture were resulted from the learning. Teachers supported their learning by the use of various digital medias, such as internet, animated video or You tube, WhatsApp group. Whereas google classroom and quipper school were other forms of digital learning presented while students were on the job training program. Teachers- students were connected by the presentation of the materials and assignments. Overall, embedding local culture in language learning raised students’ interest, increased their participation as well as developed their’ local cultural awareness.
1. Introduction

There is an assumption that language and culture are inseparable. Many previous studies have recognized the important role of culture in language teaching. Dai claims that both of them are strongly linked to each other [1]. Its total interconnection highlights that learning target culture becomes a necessity for language learners. The learning of target language might not be properly achieved without having a rich knowledge of its culture. Bennett called it as a ‘fluent fool’ – a term for being fluent in a target language, but he/she does not have good understanding both socially or philosophically the speech content of the language [2]. However, in a particular context, not all the target language culture suits the learners’ cultural background. In western country, raising left hand as a student wants to answer teacher’s question is a good sign to convey his/her willingness to engage in the learning, meanwhile it would not be an acceptable manner for Indonesian student as it could be considered impolite. Such of a difference might cause an embarrassment for learners who do not have sufficient language cultural background. Hence, in the language learning a compromise must be made for embedding local norms, values or culture to avoid of such barriers that possibly invite irritations.

Unfortunately, in Vocational High Schools context (VHS) there is not any single subjects of teaching culture. The culture norms or values are blended in language learning. English language teachers, as well as Indonesian, or Javanese language serve as medium to teach both language and culture. In regard to teach the target language culture, they are highly recommended to embed local culture in their learning to cultivate the cross-cultural awareness of the students. This is relevant with the popular saying ‘think globally, act locally’, this further affirms the goals of the national education to produce mankind who have good characters to accommodate the living condition in the 21st century.

To incorporate local culture into language learning, teachers need to be competent in media literacy which includes technology skills, and knowledge in media including a wide range of media that can be appropriately selected to meet the learning objectives. In this case, a broader array of digital media have proven to give positive impacts in learning acquisition [3]. As long with the popularity of internet and smartphone technology, very often students can access and gain information earlier than teachers. However, in particular case, pedagogically, the presence of such technology would only reduce certain teachers’ roles but not replacing all indeed.

2. Methods

A qualitative study forms the methodological basis of this present study. This research was conducted through exploratory case study. Six teachers were selected purposively to be the participants of the study. They comprised of 2 males (T1 and T2), and 4 females (T3, T4, T5 and T6). All of them are teachers in VHS from various regencies in Central Java, Indonesia who are highly motivated to gain magister degree in Language Education as a part of their professional development. To collect the data, a semi-structured face to face interview technique was conducted twice to three times for each, and followed with other forms of communication through telephone, or WhatsApp to gain richer data. The questions were framed around the focus stated in the study. Focus Group Discussion Technique was done to assert the findings. The data collected were analyzed interactively through three main activities as proposed by Miles & Huberman consisting of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion [4].

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 The importance of Embedding Local Culture in Language Learning: Teachers’ Overviews

All participants agree that culture and language are interconnected. Embedding local culture into language learning is beneficial to build cultural awareness leading to cultural competence of the students. Table 1. is the form of local culture that mostly embedded by teachers in their language learning.
Table 1. Local Culture Form

| Forms                              | Participants |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| ideas (norms, moral, ethics, religious values) | T1, T3, T4   |
| activities (traditional ceremonies) | T1, T2, T5, T6 |
| artifacts (historical places, food, customs) | T5, T6       |

The table shows that among of six participants, three of them (T1, T3, T4) were reported delivering more than one forms of local culture. T1, delivered both ideas and activities, T5 and T6 presented activities and artifacts. Further explored, in presenting material of traditional ceremonies, participants assigned their students to make a project on writing or oral presentation on certain events, such as *Yaqowiyu* in Klaten, *Sekaten* in Solo, *Dekahan* in Boyolali, and *Cembrengan* in Sragen. Students were encouraged to search information from internet or searched for you tube video using their smart phones or laptops. Other participants preferred using ideas in form of texts discussing certain ethnic, and asked students to identify the norms, or moral values of the texts. Similarly, in eliciting students on how to start conversation with foreigners, T3 strictly emphasized their students not to ask any personal questions to them, specifically at the first meeting. It would be considered impolite manner. T4 presented norms and ethics by comparing situations of English family and Javanese family especially on the different way for calling names and on family members’ rights and authority in making decision.

In relation with the cultural learning material, two participants engaged their students with other texts of some historical places such as *Mangkunegaran* Palace, *Monumen Yogja Kembali*, and *Prambanan* Temple. They argued that such reading texts were particularly aimed at providing information about the historical places that students need to know. T5 and T6 believe that having good understanding about some historical places of students’ own districts or towns could arise their pride to be the member of its society. The findings strengthen the previous study that main goals for teaching culture is providing students to develop their ability to communicate effectively in various contexts [5]. To meet this goals, teachers have great role in the process of culture teaching. This is in line with another research findings that language teachers are not only language instructors, they function as mediators in the process of transmitting the target culture to students [6].

A deeper exploration on the focus, T1 affirms that learning a language without relating to its culture might cause misunderstanding and potentially irritated others. T5 defines local culture as the way of life of certain people as reflected in their behavior. It should be inserted in teaching language to introduce students to the local values of where they live in that might not be found in any other districts as well as other traditions, or specific habits. Such local culture issues might increase students’ interest. T2 sees culture are societal norms and it plays a vital role to build language competence. This is echoing of what Gelfand, Lund, Lyns, and Shteynberg believe that norms define how people are thinking and behaving, furthermore they highlight that norm prescribing certain behaviors, and once these behaviors are socially routinized, they become practices. The statement further implies that the cultural norms lead to cultural practices, and vice versa [7]. In another point of view, T6 argues that:

“*budaya lokal itu sangat penting disisipkan dalam pengajaran bahasa, baik bahasa asing, maupun bahasa Indonesia, karena dengan mengintegrasikan budaya ke dalam pengajaran bahasa, kompetensi budaya siswa akan berkembang. Hal ini sekalius mendorong berkembangnya karakter positif siswa, seperti sikap sopan, rasa bangga pada daerahnya, menghargai karya, memiliki kepedulian sosial, toleransi dll. …”* (In/T6/1)

The interview data reported that the integration of local culture in language teaching can either nurture the students’ positive characters to be more polite, proud of her/his own districts, appreciate the cultural products, and possibly enhance social care as well as tolerance. This highlights the previous study that such of intercultural teaching and learning enables students develop a positive cultural identity [6].
3.2. Digital Medias for Embedding Local Culture in Language Teaching

New technologies harness the development of digital media literacy. In the language learning context, the emerging and developing of digital media provides excellent source for supporting students to be more culturally competent. The interviewed teachers claimed that they utilized various digital media for teaching language as shown in table 2.

| Kinds of Media                          | Participants |
|----------------------------------------|--------------|
| internet                               | T1–T6        |
| animated video                         | T2, T5       |
| You tube                               | T2, T3, T4   |
| social media (WhatsApp group)          | T3, T5       |
| google classroom                       | T6           |
| quipper school                         | T1           |

The table shows that all participants benefitted of using internet functioning both as media and learning sources. In most cases, they took internet articles or other authentic texts or pictures to support their learning. Further tasks were performed by engaging students to search relevant materials from the browser. However, as not all schools allowed students to bring smartphones in learning hours, an off-line version of the text in power-point presentation or sway was provided.

Differently, both T2 and T5 stated that they used animated video to present materials of conveying greetings and its responses. In the activities, T2 asked students to analyse how people from other countries greeted each other and later compared with their own’ culture, whereas T5 performed a foreign family while having dinner. Students were asked to observe the manner, and further contrasted with their family dinning habit. Both participants found such learning could attract students’ interest and excitement as its context was a part of their daily life. Such result was also revealed from Abdo & Al-Awabdeh’s work when they investigated how students learn and retain English grammar by animated video. The result proved that animated video is beneficial in raising students’ enjoyment and made them happy to seeing it as a way of learning English grammar, moreover student’s understanding and the way they perceive the lesson are more efficient [8].

In relation with video, some of the participants perceived that You tube video was an interesting media for students as they could directly instruct students to open video presenting the cultural events or ceremonies in their smartphones. In delivering the material, among of the scientific models recommended in 2013 curriculum, when focusing on reading skill, they employed inquiry based learning method, meanwhile, when its focus was on writing, project-based learning was chosen. In such methods, students were encouraged to carry out investigations about the culture or any tradition of their districts to construct the knowledge, and for the final task they were assigned to make project writing or video making in particular given time using their devices to be presented in class. Such activities also impacted on students’ speaking competence as they were forced to give comments, or explanation on their project to earn high grades.

To date with the development of the global communication, two participants believed that social media, in form of WhatsApp (WA) group was considered to be the easiest media for sharing the materials. T3 and T5 created WA group of the students they taught. In this case, they utilized it for sharing the follow-up learning materials, both in form texts or cultural events, even sometimes traditional foods. Teachers engaged students in discussions and provided feedback by considering the members’ comments. They acknowledged that such activities were done out of school learning hours, and intended to enrich students to have broader cultural awareness.

Other innovations in learning were reported by T1 and T6. Beside using other media, like videos, T1 performed digital learning by engaging students in Quipper school- a free outline platform for teachers and students. It is what Anderson calls as one of learning management system functions as an online learning platform or software that is devised to organize and manage learning [9]. T1 assumed that being a web-based learning platform, it provides learners various exposure for foreign language input. In quipper school, teachers can develop learning material enriched with images, videos or other
multimedia sources for students learning. He found many advantages to engage students in Quipper school especially when they were on the job training program. Evidence from other research proves that firstly, Quipper school is suitable media for teaching students in this era as students are familiar with the use of smartphones and personal computers, and secondly, since students were engaged in online learning it could increase their interest and motivation to learn the subject [10].

Differently, T6 used Google classroom- a free web service developed by Google for schools to help classes communicate, interact, distribute and grade assignment in a paperless way. She admitted such digital learning was not only useful for delivering culture content but other materials to be learned during students were outside of class for the job training. This was to address her school’s policy. It was reported that being engaged in Quipper school or Google classroom, both T1 and T6 saved their time as they could manage multiple classes, presented materials in form of YouTube videos, or other PDF files, assignments and easily grade students’ progress. In short, it facilitated digital production, workflow, and create communication between teachers and students. Apart of its usefulness, they acknowledged that they still needed to explore more features on these medias for gaining maximum benefits for learners. The result of the study asserts Shyamlee and Phil’ study that the rapid development of the media for language teaching brings several impacts on promoting students’ communication capacity, widen their knowledge to gain an insightful understanding, improve teaching effect as well as interaction between teacher and student [11]. Furthermore, digital media including You tube, Wikis, or other social media, like Facebook or WhatsApp are found to be useful for making students become goal-oriented-material acquisition for assignment purpose [12].

4. Conclusion

With regards to the results, teachers-participants in the study have embedded local culture values in their language teaching to develop student’s cultural awareness. Teachers believe that language cannot be learned without introducing the culture of the community where it is used. However, not all target culture are in accordance with the students’ cultural background. The result strengthens the teachers’ roles to be the mediators for transmitting the culture, if not, there would be such discrepancy possibly invites an irritation or embarrassment. In most learning events, the local culture which are performed by teachers are in form of ideas, activities, and artifacts. In some practices, teachers implement Inquiry-based Learning and Project-based Learning as the methods and utilize various digital Medias for embedding local culture into the language learning. Internet, animated video, Youtube, social media, Quipper school, and Google classroom are found to be beneficial for students. Through these medias, students can better understand the nuances of the culture and more importantly, can raise their interest, increase their participants, enhance the positive characters as well as develop their cultural awareness.

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