

CHAPTER 18: PROMOTING LOCAL IDENTITY THROUGH DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY WRITING ACTIVITIES

Istiqamah Ardila

(UIN Antasari Banjarmasin)

ardilaistiqamah@uin-antasari.ac.id.

A. Introduction

Learning English in Indonesia begins to adapt a wisdom-based education to the students. As the country that rich with cultures, values, and wisdoms, all students must have a sense of local wisdom awareness to be wiser in experiencing their lives. Albantani & Madkur (2018) claimed that the integration of culture in the instructional activities is needed in the teaching of language. It also becomes an alternative for English teacher to build students' nation character and identity of Indonesia citizenship. Moreover, the learning English will be more meaningful if it's connected to local values from students' environment that creates interesting and enthusiastic atmosphere in the class (Dwimaulani et al., 2025; Giyatmi, 2020; Hasbi et al., 2025).

Faizin et al. (2022) mention the integration of local content in ELT materials will help learners to use language

to communicate effectively, provide familiar lexical and cultural items to engage active participation in the learning process, and enrich cultural knowledge. Particularly in writing instruction, the use of local content in the writing process increase students' creativity in writing as they become more interested and enthusiastic in developing ideas connected with local contents (Dwimaulani et al., 2025). In Kalimantan, integrating local wisdom into writing activities helps foster a sense of cultural pride while enhancing students' writing proficiency. For example, in descriptive essay which ask students to write about Kalimantan traditional foods and rituals such as *Baayun Maulid*, *Bubur Asyura*, or *Nasi Kuning Masak Habang*. The local content integration is not only teaching language skills but also contribute to the preservation and appreciation of cultural identity.

This paper intends to illustrate the integration of local content in EFL writing activities particularly in descriptive essays by using Kalimantan's local wisdom. Descriptive essay writing provides students with the opportunity to articulate detailed representations of local people, places, traditions, and rituals. This activity fosters the developments of students' writing skills in English and improves their awareness and appreciation of their own cultural heritage. By engaging with locally relevant topics, students are encouraged to explore and express their identity and improved the writing process more meaningful.

B. Teaching Design

A writing class is designed for university-level EFL learners that focus on descriptive essay genre to promote local identity through writing. The approach is divided into three stages: Pre-Writing, While-Writing, and Post-Writing. Each stage was carefully planned to encourage students to reflect on and write about **local wisdom** using descriptive writing techniques as a center theme in students' essays.

Pre-Writing Stage

The lesson begins by engaging students with visual materials related to South Kalimantan's tradition, for instance **Baayun Maulid** (a traditional baby-swinging ceremony during the Prophet Muhammad's birthday). Some examples also can be used in this initial phase such as tradition of making *Bubur Asyura* (a traditional porridge made by various ingredients and shared during 10th Muharram/the Islamic day of Asyura), **Lanting** (floating wooden houses on rivers), and **Pamali** (cultural taboos), or other local practices. In this phase, students are given time to share what they have known about the traditions that still exist in their society to active prior knowledge and build curiosity about their local heritage. It is also used to connect their emotional and personal connections to the topic.

Then, the teacher introduces the objective of the lesson: *to write a descriptive essay about local wisdom across Indonesia using sensory detail and spatial organization.*

The teacher highlights how descriptive writing uses vivid imagery to appeal to the senses to bring the reader into the scene. According to Giyatmi (2020), Hasbi (2017) and Pratama and Sumardi (2022), lessons that relate to students' real-life experiences help them understand material easily because the learning process become more familiar to them. Therefore, connecting descriptive writing with local traditions helped students feel that their writing was meaningful and personally relevant.

After introducing the lesson objective, the teacher explains the key points how to develop descriptive essay easier:

- Choosing the topic and the way how to describe the topic (subjective/objective)
- Writing the thesis statement based on the topic.
- Giving description by using sensory detail (words that help the reader imagine by using five senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing) and
- Organizing with spatial order (arranging the description in a logical order, such as left to right, top to bottom, or from outside to inside).

After that, the students give time to practice making a good thesis statement and sensory images based on the provided local wisdom of Kalimantan and then develop it to writing as their first draft. The local wisdom as follows:

- **Lanting:** the house that floating on the river. It has special wood for the house in Kalimantan



- **Mandai:** the sharp aroma, chewy texture, and sour-salty taste of fermented cempedak.



- **Bubur Asyura:** a traditional porridge made during the Islamic month of Muharram, especially in 1 Muharram.



- **Pamali:** unwritten rules passed down through generations that guide behavior, such as avoiding sit on the door of a house.



While the students practice making thesis statement and sensory images, the teacher guides them to brainstorm the ideas. The students can discuss their answers in pairs or small groups and share it. After brainstorming, students created an outline for their essay, collecting sensory details and organizing them using spatial structure. The teacher provided a template to help guide their planning, encouraging them to include at least three to five vivid descriptions.

While-Writing Stage

During this stage, students developed their first drafts, focusing on sensory detail and spatial organization. They are allowed to write local wisdom across Indonesia of just want focus on Kalimantan. They were encouraged to describe their topics vividly: the glistening surface of a lanting under sunlight, the pungent aroma of Mandai, or the solemn atmosphere of a traditional ritual. Spatial order was used to structure their writing—from left to right, top

to bottom, or inside to outside—as appropriate for their topics (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

Teachers facilitated peer review sessions, where students gave and received feedback on clarity, imagery, and cultural expression. Language support was provided through vocabulary sheets, culturally specific word lists, and discussions on how to translate or explain local terms (e.g., “*sesajen*” or “*pantun adat*”) in English. This collaborative environment enabled students to revise their drafts critically while maintaining the authenticity of local cultural representations.

Post-Writing Stage

In the final phase, students revised and finalized their essays. It can be done in two meetings or based on the time needed by the students. Selected students were invited to read their work aloud in class, creating a space for mutual appreciation of local culture. Reflection activities included writing short commentaries about what they learned from each other’s essays and how the assignment influenced their view of local identity followed by constructive feedback for students’ writing. The essays were later compiled into a classroom anthology to celebrate students’ work and provide models for future classes (Gay, 2010; Suryani, 2020).

C. Further Discussion

Integrating local content into EFL writing classes has multiple pedagogical and cultural benefits. Firstly, it increases student engagement by connecting academic tasks with real-life experiences and personal values. Research shows that writing about culturally relevant topics fosters deeper cognitive involvement and emotional investment (Aspiandi et al., 2015) as well as motivation, and active participation of the students (Fathan et al., 2023). Students who write about their own culture are more likely to write with detail and confidence (Hasbi, 2025).

However, challenges remain. Some students struggle to find the English equivalents for culturally specific terms, and not all are equally familiar with local traditions. Teachers must provide sufficient scaffolding, including vocabulary support, model texts, and opportunities for peer collaboration (Madkur, 2021). Despite these challenges, the advantages far outweigh the limitations. Embedding local identity into descriptive writing promotes language skills, cultural awareness, and national pride. As educators in multicultural contexts, we should continue to explore strategies that link English learning with local values to create meaningful, empowering educational experiences (Alwasilah, 2006; Fauzi, 2020).

Author

Istiqamah Ardila is a lecturer in English education with over seven years of academic experience in higher education.

She got her S1 degree in IAIN Antasari Banjarmasin and S2 degree in Universitas Negeri Malang. She is now working in the English Language Education Department of UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. Her research interests include ELT, psychology in teaching and learning, and character education. She can be contacted via email at ardilaistiqamah@uin-antasari.ac.id or Instagram at @isti.a.r.

References

- Albantani, A. M., & Madkur, A. (2018). Think Globally, Act Locally: The Strategy of Incorporating Local Wisdom in Foreign Language Teaching in Indonesia. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(2), 1. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.7n.2p.1>
- Alwasilah, A. C. (2006). From local to global: Reinventing local literature through English writing classes. *TEFLIN Journal*, 17(1), 11-27.
- Aspiandi, Sutapa, Y. G., & Sudarsono. (2015). English writing materials based on local needs for students in remote areas. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa*, 4(10).
- Dwimaulani, A., Setiawan, B., & Risviana, R. (2025). Enhancing EFL Young Learners' Writing Proficiency Through Local Content: A Classroom Action Research.

Journal of English Education Program, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.26418/jeep.v6i1.87825>

Faizin, H. A., Permatasari, I., & Aziz, M. (2022). The Value of Local Content in ELT Materials in Indonesia. *Journal of English Language and Education*, 7(2), 19-26. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v7i2.243>

Fathan, F., Rasid Talib, R., & Napu, N. (2023). Designing English Writing Worksheet Based on Experiential Learning Approach Integrated with Local Wisdom Content. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 10(7), 124-136. <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20230718>

Fauzi, A. (2020). Teaching English as a local content in the fourth grade students of SDN Bogorejo Merakurak Tuban. *Tadris : Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam*, 14(2), 62-79. <https://doi.org/10.51675/jt.v14i2.102>

Giyatmi. (2020). Bringing Indonesian Local Wisdom Into the English Class. *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Language, Literature, and Arts Education (ICLLAE 2019)*. 1st International Conference on Language, Literature, and Arts Education (ICLLAE 2019), Yogyakarta, Indonesia. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200804.009>

Hasbi, M. (2017). Preparing digitally literate graduates through journal article reading-based activities. In: *The 1st International Conference on English Language*,

Linguistics, and Literature (ICELL 2017), 176-184.
Institut Agama Islam Negeri Surakarta.

Hasbi, M., Perdana, M. T., Madkur, A., Sari, E. D. P., Nor, H. (2025). *Powerful Vocabulary and Grammar Classroom Activities*. Rizquna. <http://e-repository.perpus.iainsalatiga.ac.id/23749/>

Hasbi, M. (2025). Vocabulary and grammar learning activities inspired by Squid Game TV series. In *Powerful Vocabulary and Grammar Classroom Activities* (pp. 1-13). Rizquna. <http://e-repository.perpus.uinsalatiga.ac.id/23502/>

Madkur, A., Farih, A., Rojab, A. R., Linarsih, A., Hamdani, B. (2021). *Reflections on Pedagogical Practices during COVID-19 Pandemic*. Pena Persada.

Pratama, A., & Sumardi, M. S. (2022). Contextual Teaching and Learning Using Local Content Material on Students' Reading Comprehension at a Junior High School in Indonesia. *SALEE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, 3(2), 184-194. <https://doi.org/10.35961/salee.v3i2.494>