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# Integrating Indonesian Local Wisdom into Tertiary EFL Writing Instruction: Practices, Challenges, and Opportunities

**Safnidar Siahaan[1]*, Isnaini Eddy Saputro[2], Nurfisi Arriyani[3], Sri Lestari[4], Turab Hussain[5]**
*[1]Universitas Riau Kepulauan, Indonesia*
*[2]Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong, Indonesia*
*[3]Universitas Tamansiswa Palembang, Indonesia*
*[4]Universitas PGRI Madiun, Indonesia*
*[5]National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan*

## ABSTRACT

This study was initiated to support English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers in enhancing culturally responsive writing instruction by integrating elements of Indonesian local wisdom. Recognizing the need to strengthen students' cultural identity and moral values through language learning, this initiative aimed to explore current practices, benefits, and challenges faced by lecturers in embedding local content into academic writing tasks. A qualitative-descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through a questionnaire completed by 30 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers from various Indonesian universities. Findings revealed that a majority of lecturers incorporate proverbs, folktales, traditional events, and cultural values, primarily through descriptive, narrative, and argumentative essays. These practices not only improve students' linguistic and cognitive skills but also foster reflective thinking and cultural pride. However, lecturers reported several challenges, including limited resources, curriculum constraints, and lack of professional training. The results promote a more localized and meaningful approach to EFL writing instruction, empowering both educators and learners to preserve and reflect on Indonesia's rich cultural heritage. Moreover, this study contributes to the broader discourse on decolonizing EFL curricula and offers a replicable model for culturally sustaining pedagogy in other multilingual, multicultural contexts.

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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***Correspondent Author:***
Safnidar Siahaan

***Email:***
*safnidar@fkip.unrika.ac.id*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the role of English as a global language continues to expand across disciplines, positioning English Language Teaching (ELT) not only as a linguistic enterprise but also as a cultural and moral practice (Chvala, 2022; Ehlers-Zavala, 2023; Montakantiwong, 2024; Nault, 2006). In the context of Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), teaching English is often seen as a bridge to international communication, access to knowledge, and global competitiveness (Isadaud et al., 2022; Pajarwati et al., 2021; Zein, 2019). However, this perspective, when left unbalanced, can potentially sideline local cultural values and indigenous knowledge that are integral to national identity and character development (Abdelhafid, 2024; Karomah et al., 2024). The urgency of this research stems from the growing concern that when EFL learners encounter English materials rooted in unfamiliar cultural contexts, they may struggle to relate personally to the content, which can result in reduced engagement and a weaker sense of connection to the learning process. By incorporating local culture into EFL learning, teachers can address common challenges such as

student disengagement, a lack of relevance, and low understanding. When English instruction is grounded in familiar cultural contexts, students are more likely to connect personally with the material, which fosters deeper engagement and understanding.

Local wisdom refers to the collective knowledge, norms, values, and cultural expressions that have been passed down through generations within a particular community (Chvala, 2022; Hasyem & Ferizaldi, 2022; Sakti et al., 2024). It can take many forms, including traditional proverbs, folktales, rituals, customary laws, oral histories, and community practices (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2020; Shukla, 2025; Ulunma, 2023). These diverse expressions of local wisdom encapsulate moral teachings, societal norms, and cultural philosophies that reflect values such as perseverance, humility, patience, mutual respect, and communal harmony (Akinyemi & Falola, 2021; Sakti et al., 2024; Tran, 2025). When integrated into EFL writing instruction, these culturally embedded elements can serve as authentic and meaningful resources for teaching both language and values (Ngan & Dan, 2025; Sutrisno et al., 2024). However, the extent to which various forms of local wisdom are meaningfully utilized in academic writing tasks within EFL contexts, particularly at the tertiary level, remains underexplored.

Writing, as one of the four fundamental language skills, offers a rich platform for students to reflect, express, and negotiate meaning (Dewi, 2024; Lee & Schmidgall, 2020; Sparks et al., 2014). EFL writing instruction that incorporates local wisdom has the potential to encourage learners to write about culturally familiar themes while also developing moral reasoning (Septiyana et al., 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2024). Writing tasks centered around local values, for instance, can allow students to express opinions on ethical dilemmas, reflect on personal experiences, or narrate community stories embedded with moral messages (Sutrisno et al., 2024). Such tasks can enrich content, personalize writing, and create space for identity formation. However, academic writing in tertiary settings often emphasizes standardized formats, genres, and topics, leaving little room for personal or culturally rooted expression (Badriah & Permana, 2023; Déri et al., 2022; Yurtsever & Özel, 2021). Consequently, students may find writing to be disconnected from their lived experiences and local cultural frameworks.

Numerous studies have emphasized the value of integrating culture into language learning. Integrating culture into language learning has been widely acknowledged as a fundamental element for fostering communicative competence and cross-cultural understanding. Dewi et al. (2023) highlight how digital storytelling, as a multiliteracy pedagogy tool, allows EFL learners to express themselves through authentic, culturally rich contexts that enhance both language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity. Similarly, Nguyen (2017) emphasizes a three-level framework for cultural learning outcomes, arguing that clear pedagogical goals related to culture can guide both teaching and assessment in language classrooms. Yu (2020) further underscores the inseparability of language and culture, warning that cross-cultural miscommunication often stems from unawareness of differing pragmatic rules, thus stressing the need for cultural instruction in SLA/FLA. While Brdarić (2020) affirms teachers' awareness of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in EFL contexts, she also reveals a gap between national curricular outcomes and practical classroom implementation, suggesting that integrating culture remains inconsistently applied.

In Indonesia, studies have highlighted the benefits of integrating local culture into English reading and speaking classes (Irwan et al., 2019; Jaya, 2024; Ratri et al., 2024; Mahardika, 2018). Ratri et al. (2024) found that incorporating local culture into English Language Teaching (ELT) across Southeast Asia improves motivation and learning attitudes. Jaya (2024) demonstrated that pre-service teachers exhibited better comprehension and engagement when local wisdom was integrated into language courses. (Mahardika, 2018) emphasized that culturally familiar materials tailored to learners' backgrounds support more effective learning. Similarly, Irwan et al. (2019) argued that local

wisdom in ELT is crucial for preserving cultural identity and promoting national character, particularly in the context of globalization.

This lack of attention to writing is notable because writing offers more than just grammatical practice; it is a reflective and meaning-making process (Barrot, 2021). When students are encouraged to write narratives, arguments, or descriptive texts using culturally grounded themes, they are more likely to internalize both the language and the values it conveys. Furthermore, writing tasks based on local wisdom can cultivate higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, as students are challenged to interpret, apply, and critique traditional moral values in contemporary contexts. Despite these advantages, little is known about how tertiary educators in Indonesia perceive and implement such strategies, what challenges they face, and how students respond to these practices. Additionally, writing instruction is often examination-oriented and dominated by academic genres, leaving limited space for personal or culturally rich writing (Barrot, 2022; Sartika & Pratama, 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2024). On the other hand, opportunities exist in the growing movement toward contextualized and meaningful language learning, which encourages educators to make learning relevant to students' sociocultural backgrounds.

This study adopts a holistic approach by examining both teachers' and students' perceptions, documenting current practices, and identifying the challenges and opportunities encountered in real classroom settings. This integrated view is essential for developing sustainable and culturally sensitive teaching models in higher education. Given Indonesia's emphasis on character education as outlined in the national curriculum, the relevance of this study becomes even more pronounced. The Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemdikbud) has emphasized the importance of incorporating character values, such as integrity, respect, responsibility, and empathy, across all subjects, including English (Rokhman et al., 2014; Susilo et al., 2022). Aligning EFL instruction with these national goals through culturally relevant content can contribute to students' holistic development and foster a sense of national identity, even within a foreign language context.

Therefore, this research is both timely and significant. It seeks to provide empirical insights that can guide tertiary educators in designing writing instruction that is not only linguistically effective but also culturally responsive. It also offers a foundation for curriculum developers, policymakers, and teacher educators interested in aligning English instruction with character education mandates. This study aims to explore the integration of Indonesian local wisdom into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction in tertiary education. Specifically, it examines the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the pedagogical and character-building value of local wisdom, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with its implementation.

## METHOD

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to comprehensively address the research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The mixed-methods design enables the collection of numerical data through surveys while also providing qualitative insights through interviews and document analysis. The participants in this study are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from tertiary institutions across Indonesia, with a focus on those involved in writing instruction. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who are actively teaching English writing and have experience or awareness of integrating local wisdom, such as traditional proverbs, into their teaching practices. The sample size consists of approximately 30 teachers, chosen to provide a range of perspectives while maintaining a manageable group for in-depth analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 respondents to explore their views in more depth. These 10 interview participants were selected based on their survey responses, which indicated a higher level of engagement with local wisdom

integration in writing instruction. Selection also considered regional representation, teaching experience, and willingness to participate in follow-up discussions. The demographic information of the participants is in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information of Interview Participants

| Demographics | Criteria | Number of Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Region | Java | 3 |
| | Sumatra | 3 |
| | Kalimantan | 1 |
| | Sulawesi | 1 |
| | Maluku | 1 |
| | Papua | 1 |
| Institution Type | Public University | 3 |
| | Private University | 7 |
| Years of Experience | 1–10 years | 6 |
| | 11–20 years | 4 |
| Age | 30–35 years | 3 |
| | 36–41 years | 5 |
| | 42–47 years | 2 |
| Gender | Male | 2 |
| | Female | 8 |

The primary instruments used for data collection in this study include a questionnaire, interviews, and document analysis. The questionnaire was developed in the form of a Likert scale to gather information on the frequency of integrating local wisdom into writing instruction, perceived benefits, encountered challenges, and teachers' general attitudes toward its use. It was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, including open-ended responses for richer insight. A semi-structured interview was conducted to explore in depth the experiences and perceptions of EFL lecturers regarding the pedagogical role of local wisdom in writing classes. In addition, document analysis was conducted to examine syllabi, lesson plans, and student assignments, identifying how elements of local culture are embedded in classroom practices, based on established classifications such as types of local wisdom employed, instructional purposes, and writing genres involved.

The data collected from the closed questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the responses and identify trends regarding the integration of local wisdom in EFL writing instruction. This included calculating the mean, frequency, and percentage of responses to the Likert-scale questions to measure the extent of local wisdom usage and determine which types of local wisdom and teaching strategies were most commonly applied. Qualitative data from the interviews and open-ended survey responses were analyzed using a data-driven thematic analysis approach. Qualitative data from the interviews and open-ended survey responses were analyzed using a data-driven thematic analysis approach. This method involves systematically coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns. The identified codes are then grouped into broader themes that directly relate to the research questions. These themes were used to interpret the findings, providing insights into how teachers perceive the integration of local wisdom into their teaching practices. Documents were analyzed using content analysis, with a focus on identifying references to traditional proverbs or other forms of local wisdom. The documents were examined to determine how often local wisdom is incorporated into writing tasks and how it is used to support character education objectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research question examined how Indonesian local wisdom is integrated into EFL writing in tertiary education, specifically through the actual practices, strategies, or curricular content employed by lecturers. The findings from the questionnaire, answered by 30 EFL lecturers across various Indonesian universities, reveal a substantial incorporation of local wisdom elements into writing instruction. Out of the 30 respondents, 73% (n = 22) reported that they integrate aspects of Indonesian local wisdom into their EFL writing classes, while 27% (n = 8) indicated that they do not. Among those who did, the most commonly incorporated forms of local wisdom included proverbs (73%), local values and norms (68%), and folktales (64%), followed by cultural practices (50%) and traditional ceremonies (23%). Some lecturers also mentioned other elements, such as traditional games, food, and regional expressions.

The types of writing tasks used to integrate local wisdom were diverse and meaningful. A majority of lecturers described using descriptive essays to encourage students to write about traditional events such as Sedekah Laut, Ngaben, or Panjat Pinang. Narrative writing based on folktales, such as rewriting Malin Kundang or Timun Mas with modern contexts, was also commonly applied. Additionally, argumentative and expository essays focusing on the relevance and preservation of local traditions and character values were also reported. Several lecturers assigned comparative writing tasks, asking students to compare Indonesian and Western cultural concepts, while a few designed creative writing activities that required students to construct fictional stories inspired by traditional proverbs. The open-ended responses to the goal of integrating local wisdom revealed several key themes. Most notably, strengthening students' cultural identity was a dominant purpose (n=15). Many lecturers believed that incorporating local content made students more engaged and proud of their heritage. Another common goal was to promote character education through writing, where values such as integrity, perseverance, and cooperation were embedded in the content. Other lecturers mentioned goals such as making lessons more relatable (n = 10), encouraging critical reflection (n = 8), and diversifying writing content beyond Western-dominated themes (n = 6).

To explore how Indonesian local wisdom is actually embedded in EFL writing instruction, 21 documents were analyzed, including syllabi, lesson plans, and student modules from various tertiary institutions. A content analysis approach was applied using a pre-defined analytical framework focusing on (1) type of local wisdom, (2) instructional purpose, and (3) type of writing task.

**Table 2.** The Result of Document Analysis on Integration of Local Wisdom

| Type of Document | Forms of Local Wisdom | Purpose for Integration | Writing Task Types | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Syllabi (n = 8) | Proverbs, folktales, local cultural events | Promoting moral values, fostering cultural identity | Descriptive and narrative writing tasks | 75% |
| Lesson Plans (n = 8) | Proverbs, traditional customs, cultural issues | Stimulating critical thinking, comparing cultures | Compare-contrast, argumentative essays | 87.5% |
| Modules (n = 5) | Local legends, traditional ceremonies, cultural values | Linking writing to real-life issues and identity | Reflective, opinion, and expository essays | 80% |

The document analysis supports the interview findings, illustrating that local wisdom is indeed incorporated into multiple layers of EFL writing instruction. A significant number of syllabi (75%) explicitly included topics such as *Indonesian proverbs*, *local folktales*, and *traditional ceremonies* as part of the course content, particularly in units related to narrative and reflective writing. In one of the

syllabi, the students are instructed to write a story inspired by a traditional proverb such as "Air beriak tanda tak dalam" (literally: "Rippling water shows it is not deep," metaphorically implying that loud or boastful people often lack substance), the activity goes beyond language practice. It guides students to reflect on the meaning of the proverb and develop characters or situations that embody the underlying moral lesson—such as humility, depth of character, or the value of quiet confidence. These inclusions were typically aligned with character education goals, aiming to foster values such as cooperation, integrity, and perseverance. Lesson plans (70%) revealed a slightly more strategic use of local wisdom in task design. One example from a lesson plan includes a compare-contrast essay activity where students analyze Indonesian traditional wedding ceremonies (e.g., *siraman*, *martumpol*) and Western weddings. Students complete a Venn diagram or table to outline the similarities and differences in ceremony rituals, symbols, and meanings, as well as cultural values (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism). This task aims to foster critical thinking and cultural awareness through structured writing. This practice aligns with global education goals, particularly in preparing students to engage thoughtfully with both local and international contexts. Modules (80%) showed even more detailed and explicit incorporation of place-based content, often linking writing topics to local environmental practices, gender roles in traditional communities, or indigenous knowledge systems. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed three major themes in the way lecturers integrate local wisdom into their teaching, as displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The Way Lecturers Integrate Local Wisdom

| Theme | Description | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Local Wisdom as a Medium for Character Education | Lecturers integrate proverbs and cultural narratives in reflective or narrative tasks to instill moral values such as respect, honesty, and humility. | "I ask students to write a personal narrative inspired by a proverb, like *'Sepandai-pandai tupai melompat, sekali waktu jatuh juga.'* They reflect on their own mistakes and what they learned." (R3)<br>"Proverbs like *'Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing'* are used in group writing tasks. Students relate them to teamwork experiences." (R6) |
| Reclaiming Identity Through Culturally Relevant Content | Writing about familiar local culture (e.g., folktales, traditional food, or dances) helps students connect emotionally and culturally to their writing. | "When students write about something close to them, like traditional dances or food, they write with more emotion and confidence." (R1)<br>"Using folktales like *Timun Mas* or *Bawang Merah* helps students think critically about values and also see their culture as valuable, not just Western stories." (R4) |
| Pedagogical Strategy for Engagement and Critical Thinking | Local wisdom is used to scaffold compare-contrast, analytical, or argumentative writing tasks, encouraging deeper thinking and cultural reflection. | "I give a task where students compare Indonesian and foreign values, like harmony vs individualism, using local proverbs or customs." (R7)<br>"Even in academic writing, I let students take a local issue like environmental customs in their region and write an expository or argumentative piece." (R2) |

The qualitative findings reveal rich, intentional efforts by EFL lecturers to integrate local wisdom into writing instruction. The first theme, "Local Wisdom as a Medium for Character Education," demonstrates how traditional proverbs and moral stories are utilized not only to develop language skills but also to foster ethical reflection. Reflective and narrative writing tasks are often used to align linguistic competence with character formation, supporting Indonesia's broader educational goals. The second theme, Reclaiming Identity Through Culturally Relevant Content, highlights how cultural familiarity enhances students' engagement and confidence. Lecturers noted that students express themselves more effectively when they write about topics close to their personal and cultural lives. This aligns with *funds of knowledge* theory, which emphasizes leveraging students' cultural experiences as valuable resources for learning. The third theme, Pedagogical Strategy for Engagement and Critical Thinking, demonstrates that local wisdom can be a bridge to deeper analytical thinking. By inviting students to compare local and foreign values or address local societal issues, lecturers use culturally rooted content as an entry point for academic discourse, fulfilling both local relevance and global competence goals. Taken together, these findings demonstrate a growing curricular commitment to integrating local wisdom not as a superficial addition but as a core element of writing pedagogy. The practice aligns well with the movement toward glocal education, where the local is not separated from the global but rather used as a foundation for developing transferable 21st-century skills, such as cultural literacy, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning.

The forms of writing used to incorporate local wisdom were notably diverse, spanning descriptive, narrative, argumentative, expository, and creative writing. Lecturers commonly used narratives and reflective essays based on local proverbs or folktales to instill moral values. Compare-contrast and argumentative essays were used to critically examine local versus global cultural values, often with a focus on identity and intercultural competence. Interview data enriched this picture by offering concrete examples, such as using group essays to explore teamwork via the proverb "Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing" (R6) or asking students to reflect on traditional customs through personal storytelling (R3). These practices were echoed in documents that centered on units and lesson plans focused on writing from lived experience, analyzing traditional practices, or reimagining cultural stories. A significant insight from the interviews and open-ended responses was that local wisdom in writing not only enriched content but also deepened students' connection to their cultural roots. Lecturers found that when students wrote about familiar cultural phenomena, they exhibited greater engagement, ownership, and emotional resonance in their writing. This was framed both as an identity-affirming practice and as a strategic pedagogical move to develop higher-order thinking skills. Tasks such as comparing Indonesian collectivist values with Western individualism (R7) or analyzing traditional ecological knowledge (R2) illustrate how local wisdom was used to scaffold critical thinking and promote cultural pride alongside academic skills.

Lastly, the inclusion of local wisdom in curricular documents suggests institutional endorsement or at least tolerance of such integration. The syllabi and modules reviewed often featured explicit references to Indonesian cultural topics, indicating alignment with national education goals such as Pancasila values, character education, and the promotion of local heritage. This suggests that lecturers are not only independently motivated but also working within a policy framework that values local cultural integration in English language education. In response to the second research question, which seeks to identify the challenges faced by EFL lecturers in incorporating Indonesian local wisdom into writing instruction, the findings reveal several key obstacles that hinder the consistent and effective integration of culturally relevant content, as displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Challenges in Incorporating Indonesian Local Wisdom into EFL Writing

| Challenge | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of resources | 20 | 66.7 |
| Lack of student interest | 12 | 40.0 |
| Time constraints | 14 | 46.7 |
| Curriculum limitations | 17 | 56.7 |
| Others (e.g., lack of training) | 5 | 16.7 |

To explore the challenges and opportunities faced by lecturers when integrating local wisdom into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction, data from 30 respondents were analyzed. Results revealed that the most commonly reported challenge was the lack of teaching resources, cited by 66.7% of respondents. Other frequently mentioned issues included curriculum limitations (56.7%), time constraints (46.7%), and lack of student interest (40%). Additionally, 16.7% of participants noted other concerns, such as insufficient training or institutional support. Furthermore, the thematic analysis of interviews with eight EFL lecturers revealed a nuanced understanding of both the challenges and opportunities related to incorporating local wisdom into writing instruction. The results can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Themes of Teachers' Perceived Challenges in Integrating Local Wisdom into EFL Writing

| Theme | Description | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Limited Resources and Curriculum Constraints | Lecturers face difficulties due to a lack of teaching materials and limited room in the curriculum to accommodate local wisdom content. | "It is not easy to find ready-made materials or texts based on local stories that suit the level of our students."(R2)<br>"The curriculum is already packed, so inserting local wisdom means we have to drop something else." (R5) |
| Low Student Familiarity or Interest | Some students are unfamiliar with their own local culture or see Western topics as more appealing. | "Ironically, some students know more about Western culture than their traditions, so they struggle to write about them." (R1)<br>"They find local themes boring or too traditional. I have to work hard to make them see the relevance." (R6) |
| Engagement and Motivation Boost | Writing tasks based on local wisdom tend to engage students emotionally and intellectually. | "When we ask them to write about something familiar like their village's traditional ceremony, they light up. They feel proud." (R4)<br>"Students become more expressive when they write about their own culture. It motivates them." (R7) |
| Value-Based Character Development | Tasks involving local wisdom provide a natural context for instilling values such as empathy, cooperation, and respect. | "Local stories and proverbs are rich in moral values. Students often reflect on their character while writing." (R3)<br>"I have seen students show more awareness of respect and humility in their writing after we used traditional narratives." (R8) |

| Theme | Description | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Opportunities for Critical Thinking and Cross-Cultural Comparison | Some lecturers use local wisdom to build students' analytical skills through cultural comparison. | "I ask students to compare a local proverb with an English one. It sparks great discussion on cultural values."(R5)<br>"They become more critical when they contrast Indonesian and Western customs in writing tasks." (R6) |

Despite these challenges, the interviews underscored several promising opportunities. Table 6 presents the frequency of observed opportunities or benefits identified by lecturers (n = 30) when incorporating local wisdom into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction. The most commonly cited benefit was improved student engagement and motivation, reported by 20 respondents, suggesting that culturally familiar content can make writing tasks more meaningful and relatable. This was followed by enhanced cultural awareness and expression of identity (n = 18), indicating that students were able to better connect with their cultural backgrounds through writing. Richer content for reflective and narrative writing was reported by 16 lecturers, reflecting how local wisdom provides authentic material for storytelling and personal reflection. Additionally, 14 respondents noted positive character development, including the emergence of values such as humility, cooperation, and perseverance in student writing. Finally, increased critical thinking and comparison skills (n = 10) were observed when students analyzed or contrasted cultural elements from Indonesia and other countries, particularly in argumentative and compare-contrast tasks.

**Table 6.** Lecturers' Perceptions of Pedagogical Benefits of Incorporating Local Wisdom into EFL Writing

| Observed Opportunity or Benefit | Frequency (n) |
|---|---|
| Improved student engagement and motivation | 20 |
| Enhanced cultural awareness and identity expression | 18 |
| Richer content for reflective and narrative writing | 16 |
| Positive character development (e.g., values) | 14 |
| Increased critical thinking and comparison skills | 10 |

The findings from both the questionnaire and interviews reveal a balanced yet compelling picture of the challenges and opportunities surrounding the integration of local wisdom into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classes in Indonesian tertiary education. According to the questionnaire, the most frequently cited challenges were a lack of instructional resources (reported by 70% of respondents), limited student interest (60%), and time constraints (50%). These challenges were echoed and elaborated on in the interviews, where lecturers noted that suitable materials incorporating local culture were either scarce or not aligned with the students' English proficiency levels. Moreover, lecturers indicated that institutional curriculum guidelines often limit the freedom to include culturally embedded content, especially in academically rigid writing programs. Additionally, some students showed a preference for Western topics, perceiving them as more relevant or sophisticated, which poses another barrier to effective cultural integration.

Despite these obstacles, the study reveals considerable pedagogical opportunities when local wisdom is incorporated meaningfully. The questionnaire data revealed strong agreement among lecturers that using local content enhances student engagement, enriches reflective writing, and contributes positively to the formation of cultural identity. Interview results reinforced these findings by highlighting that students tend to write more confidently and expressively when tasks are

culturally familiar and personally meaningful. Several lecturers emphasized the effectiveness of local themes in promoting character education, as cultural narratives and proverbs naturally embed moral values like humility, perseverance, and mutual respect. Furthermore, activities such as comparative essays between Indonesian and Western cultural values provided a meaningful space for students to engage in critical thinking and intercultural reflection, which is essential for global citizenship.

In light of these findings, it is evident that while there are significant logistical and motivational hurdles to overcome, incorporating local wisdom presents a valuable pedagogical opportunity. It not only enhances writing instruction but also supports broader educational goals such as identity building, character formation, and critical literacy. Thus, to capitalize on these benefits, institutions may consider providing more flexible curricular space and developing culturally responsive resources that allow lecturers to integrate local wisdom more seamlessly into EFL writing instruction.

The integration of local wisdom into EFL writing instruction, as reported by the 30 EFL lecturers surveyed, aligns with the broader pedagogical movement that views language teaching as not only a linguistic endeavor but also a moral and cultural one (Chvala, 2022; Montakantiwong, 2024; Nault, 2006). The majority of respondents confirmed that they incorporated elements of Indonesian local wisdom into writing classes, demonstrating that local cultural content is actively embraced in many tertiary EFL classrooms across Indonesia. This finding underscores the shift towards a culturally responsive pedagogy that respects and promotes local identity within globalized English language instruction. The lecturers' frequent use of traditional proverbs, values, and norms, as well as folktales, confirms the potential of these forms of local wisdom as meaningful instructional materials. These elements, which have long served as vehicles for transmitting moral teachings and societal norms (Akinyemi & Falola, 2021; Ulunma, 2023), provide authentic contexts that connect students to both linguistic content and cultural values. Incorporating culturally embedded texts, such as narratives based on folktales like "Malin Kundang" or descriptive essays about ceremonies like "Sedekah Laut," not only aids vocabulary acquisition and genre familiarity but also deepens emotional and cultural engagement. These findings reflect the assertions by Dewi (2024) and Sparks et al. (2014) that writing serves as a platform for personal and reflective expression.

Moreover, the use of local wisdom in analytical, compare-contrast, and argumentative writing tasks shows a purposeful scaffolding of higher-order thinking skills. This practice is consistent with Barrot (2021), who notes that writing supports meaning-making processes and critical reflection. When students are prompted to compare Indonesian and Western cultural norms or evaluate the relevance of preserving traditional practices, they engage in culturally grounded critical analysis, thereby enhancing both language competence and intercultural awareness (Nguyen, 2017; Yu, 2020). These outcomes align with Ratri et al. (2024) and Jaya (2024), who have emphasized the motivational and cognitive benefits of culturally relevant content in ELT.

The open-ended responses reveal that one of the primary goals of this pedagogical approach is to strengthen students' cultural identity. This resonates with Irwan et al. (2019) in their emphasis on preserving local identity in a globalized world. Lecturers also reported aiming to promote character education by embedding values such as perseverance, honesty, and cooperation into writing tasks, aligning these objectives with Indonesia's national education goals and the moral function of local wisdom (Sakti et al., 2024). The perceived benefits of making writing more relatable, promoting critical reflection, and diversifying content also support earlier claims that EFL instruction often privileges Western norms (Barrot, 2022; Yurtsever & Özel, 2021). Thus, integrating indigenous elements provides a necessary counterbalance. Despite these promising trends, it is worth noting that 27% of respondents reported not integrating local wisdom, signaling that institutional, curricular, or perceptual barriers may still exist. As Brdarić (2020) pointed out, while awareness of intercultural competence is growing, its practical implementation in classrooms often lags behind policy-level

aspirations. Additionally, some educators may find it challenging to align local content with standardized academic genres that dominate university curricula (Badriah & Permana, 2023).

In conclusion, the findings suggest a growing awareness and application of culturally embedded pedagogy in Indonesian tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction. Unlike earlier studies that broadly discuss local culture in language education, this study provides specific evidence on how various forms of local wisdom, such as proverbs, folktales, and traditional practices, are actively integrated into diverse writing genres to support not only linguistic competence but also cultural identity, moral education, and critical thinking. This presents a novel contribution to the field by mapping concrete instructional strategies that localize writing pedagogy within the Indonesian context. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on culturally responsive teaching by offering empirical insights from a non-Western, multilingual setting. The implications extend to curriculum designers and teacher educators by underscoring the need for institutional support, teacher training, and resource development that align with both global academic standards and local cultural relevance. Future studies may explore in greater depth the institutional support systems, training, and materials necessary to further facilitate such integration and ensure that writing instruction remains both globally relevant and locally meaningful.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the integration of Indonesian local wisdom in EFL writing instruction at the tertiary level, revealing that a majority of lecturers actively embed cultural elements, such as proverbs, folktales, and traditional practices, to enrich students' writing experiences. The findings revealed that lecturers not only use local content to enhance students' linguistic and cognitive skills but also to strengthen cultural identity, foster moral values, and support reflective thinking. Although many lecturers acknowledge the pedagogical benefits of using local wisdom, they are often constrained by various institutional, curricular, and practical barriers. The most frequently reported challenge was the lack of resources, such as teaching materials or standardized texts that embed local wisdom, followed by curriculum limitations that do not explicitly support or allocate space for culturally oriented writing tasks. The practical impact of applying these results lies in promoting writing instruction that is both globally competent and locally meaningful. Locally meaningful content empowers students to connect personally with what they write, express cultural pride, engage more deeply in learning, and develop as critical, values-driven global citizens.

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