

FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: REINVENTING LOCAL LITERATURE THROUGH ENGLISH WRITING CLASSES¹

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Abstract: Many do not realize that the current practice of teaching English in Indonesia has overlooked the function and potential of local literature. Being a multicultural country, Indonesia is rich in ethnic and minority literature to contribute to the world. However, due to misconceptions among Indonesian educators and decision makers, consciously or unconsciously this local genius has long been marginalized and less appreciated. In many English departments, for example, its value and significance has been underestimated. A survey of collaborative writing classes in English Department of UPI has revealed that the students positively responded the Sundanese literature-based writing courses. The course was successful in two ways: developing writing skills through collaborative workshop and raising awareness of their own ethnic literature, which is a bridge to appreciate English literature.

Key words: collaborative writing, ethnic literature, English literature, MKDU.

The teaching of English as a foreign language (henceforth TEFL) in Indonesian junior and senior high schools has been focused on developing the four language skills with various degrees of proficiency. In my observation, techniques, methods, approaches; listening, speaking, reading, writing; proficiency and accuracy have been the most discussed issues in EFL discourse in Indonesia. Only recently did a few EFL educators problematize the issue of types or genres of text. Teaching is essentially a matter of engaging students with text. Thus, meaning-

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ful and authentic text selection is a key to success in EFL teaching.

The 2004 English curriculum, which aims at developing literacy competence rather than communicative competence, underscores the importance of providing the relevant genres of text for developing speaking and writing skill on junior school levels and senior school levels respectively. Conversation gambits are believed to be a head start for developing speaking skills. Likewise, appropriate genres of text are inevitable for developing writing skills. Conversations gambits and genres are numerous if not infinite. The teacher's job is to select purposefully the basic and commonest ones used by native speakers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indonesian Literature in EFL Context

Apparently, fiction, poems, and literature in general are under utilized if not neglected in the EFL school curriculum as well as textbooks. Most curriculum developers, textbook writers, and teachers would believe that English literature is too difficult to be appreciated by Indonesian EFL students. There are two related reasons behind this pessimistic and erroneous belief. First and foremost, Indonesian students have not appropriately and proportionally learned how to appreciate both ethnic literature and Indonesian literature. Hence, we cannot expect them to appreciate English literature.

Secondly, in the Indonesian school context, literature is by design separated from grammar. This separation is unnecessary and counterproductive to developing whole language competence. It comes to reason that many Indonesian teachers have suggested extra time be allocated for literature and accordingly be taught by literature teachers. By way of comparison, in the U.S. education system, the so-called language arts involves the development of skills related to the use of language, such as spelling, listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and literature. An English teacher, by definition, teaches grammar as well as literature. The following quotation shows a clear picture of how English curriculum functions in the high school.

The foremost objectives of any English curriculum are to produce adults who are competent in communication and who display and appreciate the functional and aesthetic uses of language. We have also seen that young adolescents bring to the teaching-learning situation qualitatively different intellectual skills from those of younger children (Hodges 1980: 88).

Dwelling on his survey of teaching Indonesian literature in high schools, Alwasilah (2000) summarizes his findings in the following tables.

Table 1. Language Components Most Presented in the Class

<i>Language component</i>	<i>Percentages of respondents</i>
Vocabulary	54.8%
Grammar	52.7%
Literature	34.4%

Table 2. Perceived Lack of Interest in Studying Language Components

<i>Language component</i>	<i>Percentages of respondents</i>
Grammar	35.5%
Vocabulary	31.2%
Literature	23.6%

As Tables 1 and 2 show, grammar and vocabulary seem to be over-taught; therefore, they become uninteresting and unproductive. Grammar-dominated, the class does not provide students with enough literary works; hence, the students are not well acquainted with literary works. When it does, the teacher preaches theories of literature, as if he was training high school students to be literary critics. The respondents, who were 100 freshman students of English department of Universitas Pasundan in Bandung, West Java, also reported that some of them (18.3%) did not read any fiction at all during their schooling. The statistics above are evidence enough that language education in Indonesia has neglected literature in favor of linguistics. Accordingly, our high school graduates fail to display and appreciate the functional and aesthetic uses of language.

Even worse is the teaching of ethnic literature. Due to the centralistic policy of language education and language planning exercised by the New Order government, practically ethnic languages have been marginalized. Under the pretext of maintaining national unity and economic developments, the central government exercised a full control over all the provinces. In such a restricted condition, virtually there was no room for language and cultural developments. Rosidi (2004) contends the government pays no serious attention to the developments of ethnic language and national language (including literature), as culture is not considered important for developing the nation.

Reading-Writing Connection

Basic to language and cultural development is reading habit, which is positively correlated with writing proficiency. From research on writing in American colleges, Krashen as cited by Alwasilah (1998) concludes that skilled writers are those who (1) did more expository writing in high school, (2) were required to do more writing in high school, (3) did pleasure reading when younger, (4) read the newspaper more, and (5) had more books and newspapers in the home. It is safe then to hypothesize that lack of exposure to literary works and writing practice in high school is the main reason behind the lack of writing proficiency among college students and even college instructors.

At college levels, non-English majors are required to take an obligatory course of college English, called *MKDU Bahasa Inggris*. This two-credit course is usually offered in the first or second semester. Several studies of college English in Indonesia (Lengkanawati and Sukyadi: 2003, Alwasilah: 1999, Coleman: 1997) conclude that this course is a repetition of high school English, quasi ESP-oriented, and not well received by students). On the whole, this course is different from College English or Freshman English in American universities, which is generally aimed at developing technical or academic writing skills. There are cultural and academic-ideological forces that keep this course in place as the only universally required course in the American academy (Crowley: 1998). In my observation, our freshman students are not ready to go ahead with technical writing in English, and even in Indonesian.

The curriculum of English department varies from college to college. In general, however, English majors demonstrate two weaknesses: (1) inability to write both in Indonesian and English, and (2) lack of appreciation of ethnic literature and Indonesian literature, thus they learn English literature to the detriment of Indonesian and ethnic literature. At the undergraduate level and graduate level, to the exception of the Department of Indonesian Studies, *sastra Nusantara* or ethnic literature is not included into the curriculum (Rusyana: 2003). Again, these two weaknesses to a great extent constitute the end result of the failure of teaching Indonesian and English. To minimize these weaknesses, I propose a model of ethnic literature-based collaborative writing. I fully agree with Wibawa (2004) that by using literature as teaching materials, the students have better chance to develop their language competence and literary appreciation. Through this model, the students were readily sensitized to deal with literary criticism, and some of their comments and analysis went beyond the text.

Literature-based Collaborative Writing

Research has shown that collaborative writing is effective for handling big classes. From a longitudinal study of undergraduate EFL writing classes employing collaborative writing, Alwasilah (2004) concludes that through collaborative practice in groups, students were empowered to develop confidence, authorship, and enjoyment of being part of the writer community. To develop EFL writing skills, attention should be paid to the process rather than product, quantity rather than quality, and fluency rather than accuracy. In the similar vein, Anshari (2004) experimented a four-cycle workshop model of collaborative writing in the Department of Indonesian Literature of UPI. His study has reconfirmed the similar findings as follows: Students became more able to solve the writer's block, more productive, mature in style, and more confident to publish.

On using literature as material for teaching writing, Hyland (2002) suggests the potentials of texts to be considered in developing techniques of teaching as follows.

- As a product, literary texts are seen as aesthetic artifacts amenable to a range of critical theories or as a model of writing to be emulated.
- Literary texts have also been seen as a resource for focusing on language and developing both language and writing skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

In one semester-long collaborative writing course, Alwasilah (2004a) experimented three modes of engaging 179 undergraduate students with literary and non-literary works, as follows:

- Mode 1 Writing Indonesian responses to published Indonesian texts
They were asked to write responses to researcher-selected opinion articles from a newspaper, short stories, and poems.
- Mode 2 Writing poems in three languages: Sundanese, Indonesian, and English; and short stories in English
They were asked to write as many poems as they wished in three languages, and to write an English short story based on a Sundanese novel of their choice.
- Mode 3 Writing comments in English.

They were asked to write responses to 20 chapters in Alwasilah's *Language, Culture, and Education: A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesia* (2002), an anthology of articles published in *The Jakarta Post*.

Mode 4 Writing a reflective essay.

They were asked to write a self-evaluation of their learning process throughout the semester. These essays provide a 'window into the mind.' Reading this essay, in Indonesian or English, readers can get into their 'head' to know how they perceived the course and what they have learned and what they wished they had learned. This essay is very important especially for the instructor as invaluable feedback in developing a better course of writing.

By the end of semester the students were asked to submit their portfolios, namely the collection of all the assignments described above (Mode 1-4) for evaluation. The portfolio ranges from 35 pages to 120 pages, and was designed by the respondents themselves. Through this portfolio, they learned how to title the assignment, design the cover, write the preface and acknowledgement, plan the table of content, write the blurb, design the dedication page, and redo the page numbering. This portfolio, in effect, has cultivated among the students a sense of ownership and authorship.

RESULTS

Writing Indonesian Responses to Published Indonesian Texts

As mentioned earlier, freshman students are not ready to write academic writing in Indonesian, let alone in English. The majority of them (48%) reported that writing has been neglected in our education from elementary to college, and the writing courses they (42%) have taken fail to enable them to write as the emphasis of teaching is on theories of writing. By doing exercises in Mode 1, the majority of them (51%) realize that L1 writing proficiency is a prerequisite of L2 writing proficiency.

On genres of texts to be responded, the majority of them (58%) shared that short stories are easier to be critiqued than opinion articles (34%) and poems (23%). For the respondents, writing short stories was easier than writing essays, which provides more freedom to be imaginative (81%), to be expressive (74%), and (3) were less restricted by conventions. They (58%) also reported that they learned a lot from writing literary criticism of poems and short stories, and this

exercise was an appropriate way of developing literary appreciation (42%). It is reasonable, then, to argue that a particular genre of text should be taught before the others. The respondents suggest the following order of presenting materials: short stories, opinion articles from the newspapers, poems, literary criticism, and research reports. This finding is more or less consistent with the finding of another survey (Biskoyo: 2002), where college students reported to be most interested in short stories (43.32%), novels (33.32%), poems (15%), and serials (8.32%).

Writing Short Stories and Poems in Three Languages

The assignment of writing an English short story based on a Sundanese novel of their choice has developed respondent consciousness of the fact that due to the current education system, they are not concerned about Sundanese literature (61%) and that it is worth appreciating (37%). Besides, reading Sundanese novels has helped them (53%) rather than restricted them (30%) in writing the short story in English.

By writing poems in Sundanese, Indonesian, and English, the respondents recognized their literary potentials (53%), realized that the three languages have the capacity to express beauty (47%). However, the level of difficulty in writing largely depends on the language. Writing poems and short stories in Sundanese is much more difficult (77%) than that in English (28%), thus suggesting the respondents are more proficient in English than in Sundanese.

Writing Comments in English

In the experiment, gradually the students were asked to write expository essays in English. There were three major obstacles faced by the respondents as follows: boredom (63%) as they had to do almost the same thing, limited vocabulary (51%), unfamiliarity with the content of the book (45%). Only 26% of them reported grammar as an obstacle, suggesting that the majority of them have relatively developed grammatical mastery. The corollary is that English grammar is not to be taught explicitly in writing classes. Efforts should be made to minimize boredom by developing various techniques of teaching and by using more enriched reading materials.

Through this exercise, the respondents reported to have gained four things: enriched knowledge about the topic of the reviewed chapters (81%), increased vocabulary of English (61%), better mastery of mechanics (34%), and better

English grammar (27%). The statistics show that writing seems to be the surest way to master vocabulary and convention of writing, where all these are put directly put into practice.

However, as perceived by the respondents, this assignment had two major weaknesses as follows: time consuming (54%) and less corrective feedback from the instructor (51%).

Perceived Fluency in Writing and Ways of Teaching Writing

The respondents reported to have enjoyed freedom to write as they wished (61%) and got encouragement to be creative (53%). After joining this one semester-long collaborative writing, they felt more proficient in writing than before. This progress was particularly attributed to three activities, i.e., (1) intensive collaborative writing involving peers under lecturer's supervision (88%), (2) reading literary works (35%), and (3) reading nonliterary works (30%). The respondents believed that to be proficient in writing English, they had to do the following: (1) practice collaborative writing in English with supervision from the lecturer (88%), (2) reading English materials (53%), (3) learning English grammar (32%), and learning theories of writing (31%). Outside the classroom, the activities that have contributed most include (1) reading newspapers, books, magazines, etc. (83%), listening to the TV (47%), and attending discussions and seminars (31%).

Some undergraduate courses seem to have contributed to their writing performance, namely Reading (79%) and Literature (58%), while *MKDU Bahasa Indonesia* has contributed least (10%). The other courses that have contributed least to writing competence are listening comprehension (80%) and conversation (44%). Learning from collaborative writing, they agreed that to produce quality writing, their drafts should be consulted with the lecturer to get corrective feedback (89%) and be shared with peers to get constructive feedback (57%).

All in all, the respondents as summarized in the following table perceived collaborative writing positively. As evident in the table, collaborative writing has been most helpful in developing awareness of own mistakes, critical thinking, and self-confidence in writing.

Table 3. The Respondent Perceptions about Collaborative Writing

<i>Statement about collaborative writing</i>	<i>Responded by percentage of respondents</i>
1. Makes you aware of weaknesses of your writing.	81%
2. Makes you more critical of others' writings.	72%
3. Makes you feel more prepared to teach writing.	59%
4. Enhances your writing potentials.	54%
5. Is the best way of teaching writing so far.	35%
6. Motivates you to read more.	29%
7. Makes you more confident to write.	27%
8. Creates democracy in the classroom.	21%
9. Is not well understood by teachers and lecturers.	11%

Writing a Reflective Essay

Methodologically this assignment was designed to be a technique of triangulation, namely to support the validity of findings. Reflective essays represent students' voice as an authentic expression of a stable self after joining the one semester-long project of collaborative writing. Following are sample student statements of inquiry on various aspects of Sundanese literature-based collaborative writing. They are authentic and unedited statements made by three respondents.

- Statement 1 *... have made me interested in reading too.... Feel that my interest in reading is increased....I do realize that my writing skills is still far from perfect, but he have gives a great motivation and inspiration to me. After all great experiences that he has given to me. I can only promise that I will try to improve my writing skills.*
- Statement 2 *Anyway, this semester is interesting, especially Writing class. His idea is great, "coz we asked to more practice. And I really agree if student give faith to evaluate others work (peer revision).*
- Statement 3 *I'm facing so many obstacles in doing this assignment. I almost*

give up and does not finish this assignment. But thank God, I have so many best friends who are always supporting me in finishing this assignment.

DISCUSSION

Globalization does not generate any integrated culture that improves the quality and diversity of traditional cultures. In fact, it has marginalized their function in developing the society (Adimihardja: 2003). This explains why ethnic literature is not fully appreciated in schools. In the Indonesian context, as a matter of fact, long before globalization issues surfaced about 10-15 years ago, ethnic literature and ethnic culture in general had already been marginalized. Evidence shows that the students—who are almost 100% Sundanese—are more proficient in English than in Sundanese. The same observation would also apply to other ethnic and minority groups throughout the archipelago. The current policy of decentralization of education has authorized the local government to re-design education including language education.

Language educators now have the task to elevate the status ethnic literature to a higher and respected one. Realizing that our national education has neglected the teachings and values inherent in ethnic literature, we need to revitalize it by repositioning the status of ethnic literature *vis a vis* Indonesian literature, and foreign literature, especially English literature, in the school as well college curriculum. Cultural revitalization is a process of identifying, socializing, reinterpreting, and applying cultural values, all of which are essentially facilitated by education in schools and beyond.

Presenting ethnic literature on the spotlight of college curriculum will not lead to ethnocentric and myopic ways of thinking. Instead, it develops critical thinking through persistent self-questioning on cultural identities long forgotten in the national education. Reading Sundanese novels and poems for reproducing English short stories serves three critical functions as follows:

1. To reinvent the local wisdom long buried due to the government's negligence of ethnic literature in particular and ethnic culture in general. The objective is among others to revitalize traditional cultures and preserve them through education, especially pre-college education. The present study shows that not until they joined the writing class, some respondents--English litera-

ture majors--did not realize that some of Sundanese masterpieces--in many respects--are comparable to English ones.

2. To sensitize the students of the aesthetic value of ethnic literary pieces as a product and literary texts. Incorporated into writing classes, they are seen as artifacts amenable to a range of critical theories or as models of writing to be emulated. English literature majors are readily familiar with modern theories of literary criticism as covered in the curriculum. Being the object of literary criticism, ethnic literature is exposed to a larger audience and is subject to critical interpretation. This interpretation is essential for revitalizing ethnic literature. In this enterprise, the students became critical of what is ascribed and what is achieved. Ethnic literature is not simply a heritage, but an object of inquiry to generate the process of getting meaning.
3. To offer the students an alternative triggering material for writing. The collaborative writing has identified Sundanese short stories and poems as literary texts for developing both language and writing skills. Some respondents got provoked to improve their writing skills in Sundanese and Indonesian--the skills relatively unlearned when learning English. Some bluntly blamed their schoolteachers for not introducing Sundanese culture and not teaching how to write poems and fiction in Sundanese and Indonesian. This model, to a certain extent, has encouraged students to be multilingual in ethnic language, Indonesian, and English. This model is also consistent with the long held traditional wisdom saying that teaching should proceed from easy to difficult, from here to there, and from familiar to unfamiliar.

Generally speaking, writing teachers and lecturers in Indonesia still hold the view that writing is a product. They are more concerned with the finished product, rather than the process. Their evaluation is more on grammatical accuracy rather than writing fluency, thus developing cognition at the cost of ignoring affection. As product-oriented teachers, they would overlook the long, tiring, exciting, and sometimes frustrating process behind the finished product. This product-oriented approach to writing has been around and has failed to provide students with writing skills in ethnic language, national language, let alone in English. By and large, Indonesian intellectuals lack writing skills. It is high time we overhaul the method of teaching writing at all levels of education from kindergarten to college. Writing skills develop over the years through trial and error; therefore, each level should serve their students to develop the skills functional for their age and level of education.

Basic to the model proposed here is the view that writing is a process rather than a product and that writing competence is manifested in the form of written text not in the acquisition of knowledge about writing. It is through a relatively long step-by-step process that students acquire writing competence. Unless they produce text--be poems, short stories, comments, or reflective essays--they cannot be said to be competent. The act of making or producing text in three languages is indicative of meaning making. As evident in their reflective essays, the respondents were self-conscious, self directed, and self satisfied. Throughout the semester the respondents were encouraged to be self-expressive. The teacher's task is to facilitate them by creating meaningful learning, to which self-expression is fundamental. Ethnic literature as a triggering material in this model is meant to accommodate students' underlying interests, values, and wisdom.

The theory underpinning this model is reader response to literature, namely writing in response to reading literature. The writing of responses in the form of portfolios not only creates the basic conditions for meaningful learning, but also plays a role in developing creativity by helping them construct new meaning. In other words, in this model, writing is defined as a creative act of making meaning. The act of reader response also has another constructive dimension in terms of planning, composing, and revising. As reported earlier, these three steps of writing are done collaboratively in groups and through individual conferences. This model basically promotes social learning and dialogic inquiry, which is essential for developing critical thinking.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From the discussions above, I draw the conclusions and suggestions as follows.

1. It is time to redefine the current language policy of ethnic languages and their literature. The teaching of ethnic literature in itself is valuable and constitutes a practical way of preserving the local 'wisdom.' Besides, they have the potential to be used as triggering materials for sharpening student appreciation of national and foreign literature.
2. In general, success in teaching EFL literature to a certain extent is dependent on the success in teaching local literature: ethnic literature and Indonesian literature; therefore, appreciation of local literature should be developed first

before that of foreign literature. While ethnic literature and Indonesian literature are not well appreciated in high schools, they can be incorporated into the curriculum of English departments and other foreign language departments. English students should be encouraged to do research on Indonesian and ethnic literature. This would enhance appreciation of ethnic and Indonesian literature enroute to appreciation of English literature.

3. Ethnic literature can be incorporated into writing courses. Students learn not only how to write but also how to appreciate their ethnic literature. Through well-designed assignments such as reading for reproduction and writing literary criticism, students gain a heightened appreciation of the richness and vitality of the ethnic literature, and at the same time develop high confidence in writing in a foreign language.
4. The essence of cultural revitalization is preserving the essentials of culture, which is basically an act of documenting cultural facts, artifacts, and texts for effortless access in the future. Our national education should be redesigned to shift the long established oral culture to the critical literacy culture. This reconfirms the importance of promoting Indonesia as a nation of writers, through overhauling the writing curriculum from elementary school up to college.
5. Both MKDU Bahasa Indonesia and MKDU Bahasa Inggris seem to have failed to meet students' needs. No systematic needs analysis is conducted to develop the syllabus and the lecturers tend to use conventional ways of teaching such as lecturing, drills, translating, and summarizing. ESP should be redesigned to meet the needs of freshman students, whose Indonesian proficiency is not enough to be basis for developing academic writing. I suggest the faculty of both MKDU Bahasa Indonesia and MKDU Bahasa Inggris to work together in identifying the common grounds for developing a program of writing across the curriculum.

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APPENDIX

Sample poems in English, Indonesian, and Sudanese

Unforgettable Memories

By: IFN

I gazed at the stars
Mused, deep down to the past
Lost in thought
Unknown amount of time passed

I startled
When a light came through my eyes
Then I remember
Of Father's dead body

Tears streamed down
Through my cheek bone
Down to the ground
In the middle of the night
(*Writing in Progress*, 2004)

Angan

Oleh: FH

Anganku melayang menembus pekatnya awan tak berujung
Khayalku menapak menembus rimbunnya rimba tak bertuan
Pandanganku tertuju pada sebuah keindahan
Telingaku ku serasa sejuk karena desah suara tak berarah

Tanpa sadar ku terbawa ke dalam hamparan asa yang tak tersapa
Terbangun dalam gumpalan harap yang tak tertahankan
Indahnya angan tak tertandingan
Darinyalah tercipta sebuah inspirasi
Tatapan angan dapat mengubah arah waktu

Lambaiannya pun dapat menghentikan kepenatan
Halus dan tak berbentuk
Itulah kekuatan angan para pemikir dan penemu
(*Goresan Tinta Hitam*,, 2004)

Sumoreang
Oleh: IFN

Kuring cicing di buruan
Nangkeup harigu nyaksian layung anu beureum
Hate kuring sumoreang nyawang lampah ka tukang
Ngedalkeun rasa hanjakal ka panon poe nu geus surup
Asup kahalang gunung
Tali kadeudeuh anu pageuh meungkeut dua hate
Anu ayeuna peugot tinggal waasna
Beureumna layung mintonkeun raray salira
Anu ngait dina ati cumantel di jero hate
Ka cai jadi saleuwi, ka darat jadi salebak

Hanjakal tinggal hanjakal
Lampah anu geus disorang
Teu bias dibalikkeun deui
Urang geus papisah
Kiwari anjeun aya dimana
(*Writing in Progress*, 2004)