

# Incorporating Local Culture in English Teaching Material for Undergraduate Students

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the incorporation of local cultural material in a teaching material developed for the students of the Hinduism Education Department of IHDN Denpasar. Teaching material plays an important part in teaching learning process, yet inappropriate teaching materials may become more harmful than useful. The unique nature of the HED students warranted the need for a tailor-made teaching material. The study found that the use of culturally familiar materials is beneficial for the students learning process. The result of the study also highlighted students' needs and prior knowledge as the main factors to be considered when developing teaching material.

## 1 Introduction

Teaching material is an integral part a teaching and learning process. It plays a vital role in improving students' achievement and motivation in learning. With the shift of teaching learning focus from teacher centered to student centered, teaching materials plays an increasingly focal part in teaching [1]. A good material may become the tipping point which decide the result of a learning. In order to better facilitate students' learning teacher often have to develop their own material that will suit the students' needs [2], [3], [4], [5]. A good teaching material will be able not only to facilitate students' learning process, but also provide enjoyment for the students [6]. Furthermore, a good teaching material, which provide enough room for the students' development, will prompt and sustain students independent learning [5].

To be able to produce a good material, the teacher should always start from the students [2], [3]. The material should be able to capture students' need and, both present and future needs [4], [5]. The teaching material should also take into account students culture and background, for language is inseparable part of culture. Therefore, when teaching English in the context of English as a Foreign Language, then both the English language culture and the students' own culture must be taken into account [7], [8]. Local culture can be a great help in teaching English for non-native English speaker students [9]. [9] integrated local Filipino literature (*cordillera*) into English material for the first graders in The Philippines. Her result showed that the local literature helps the students to learn English, as well as keeping the students rooted to their culture.

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Indonesia. One of the main objective of the university is to train and educate future Hinduism teachers. The future Hinduism teachers are trained and educated in the Hinduism Education Department, hereinafter HED. English is one of the important competences to be mastered by the students of the HED, both for their present and future needs. English as the language of academics serves as the means to understand the ideas in foreign journals and literature for their study [10], [111, p.279].

English teaching in the HED poses several unique conditions for the lecturer. The first is the specialized nature of the students. The students need teaching materials which provide them not only with English learning material but also Hinduism materials. The second condition is that the existing material for English course, is considered to be too heavy and relied heavily on reading, with no activities for listening and very little activities for speaking. The third condition is the inherent mindset of the students, that they do not need nor want to study English, basing on the assumption that they do not nor will not need English for their study. These conditions thus prompted the researcher to develop a totally new material which will help and encourage the students to learn English [12], [5].

## 2 Discussion

The study was designed and conducted as Research Development study using a simplified version of the ADDIE development model by Dick and Carrey [13]. The object of the study was to develop English teaching material for the students of the Hinduism Education Department of IHDN Denpasar. The subject of the study were the 82 students of the first semester from HED IA and HED IB at the Denpasar Campus. In developing the material, there were four phases of development. The first is the Blueprint Phase, the second is the Draft Writing Phase, the third is the Draft Testing Phase, and the fourth is the Final Production Phase.

The Blueprint Phase aimed at observing the teaching learning process and the existing material, to identify the weaknesses of the existing material. The weaknesses of the existing material, as well as the findings of the observation, was then used as the basis of writing the blueprint for the new material. The new material was written by observing the blueprint, and then referred to the experts on English teaching and religious education to be reviewed. The criticism and suggestion from the experts were then used to improve the material. after the material was deemed acceptable, it was used in teaching learning activities in the Draft Testing phase. The students were also asked to give criticism and opinion regarding the material. the result of the criticism and students input were then used to revise the material during the Final Production Phase. The result of the final Production Phase was a ready to use, tailor-made English teaching material for the students of Hinduism Education Department.

During the Blueprint phase, it was found that the existing material had three main weaknesses. The first weakness was the topics of the materials which was considered to be too foreign by the students. There were five reading texts, and the content of the texts were considered to be too advanced for thy students' level. The second weakness, was that the level of difficulty. 88% of the students considered the existing material to be very difficult. It was found that the reading texts were too long, used advanced level of diction, and used numerous vocabulary from foreign language notably Sanskrit. The third weakness was caused by the layout and presentation of the material. The students considered the material as boring, since the material relied heavily on structural exercises, and little else. Furthermore, the material was printed in black and white with very little pictures.

To overcome the weaknesses of the existing material, the researcher developed the material based on the needs and the criticism from the students. To do this, the researcher decided to use materials which are culturally familiar for the students. Learning a language

also means learning a culture. Culture is so intertwined with language that in order to be able to use the language correctly and accurately, one must also understand the culture of said language. Scholars [14], [15], [16] agreed that culture of the target language should be taught to promote a situation where the students are aware of other cultures and can accept the other cultures.

Many scholars also put emphasis on the local culture or the culture of the learners. These scholars believe that the local culture is just as important as the target language culture. The students' local culture will act as an identity for the learners, this identity will enable the students to construct their own meanings and to reflect on their own culture as well as the culture of the target language [7], [8]. On the other hand, [17] stated that the local culture should be integrated into the teaching of a target language, in this case, English. [17] argues that by integrating local culture in teaching English as a foreign language, will reduce the "foreign" sense of the language. Due to the local culture integration to the teaching materials, students will learn English as if they are learning something familiar since the materials deal with things which are familiar to the students [18], [19], [20].

The improvement started with the reading text. In order to provide students with culturally familiar reading texts, which will reduce the sense of "foreignness", the researcher decided to use simple reading text taken from various sources. The sources of the reading texts were newspaper articles, official briefs from the Indonesian Hindu Dharma Parisadh (PHDI), internet articles provided by travel agents, as well as material from Hinduism textbooks.

The texts were selected based on their cultural familiarity with the students. There were eight texts selected for the eight chapters of the course material. The texts were, 1) The Gods of Balinese Hinduism, 2) Balinese Offerings, 3) Besakih Temple, 4) Traditional Tooth Filing Ceremony in Bali, 5) The Sacred Mount Agung, 6) Balinese Marriage, 7) Galungan and Kuningan, and 8) Nyepi. All these texts discuss the aspects of Hinduism and the life of the Hindus in Bali, something which the students are familiar with.

To ensure that reading texts in the new material were appropriate to students' level of English mastery, the reading text selected were modified in terms of difficulty. The modification was not done simply by shortening sentences or omitting difficult words, for such actions does not always reduce the difficulty level of the text [21]. Instead, the texts used were selected based on students' interest, needs, and prior [22], [5].

The difficulty level of the texts was further reduced by using redundancy of ideas by providing extra-textual support. The extra-textual support was in form of pictures which provide information in line with the content of the reading. The pictures support the explanation in the text by providing more concrete representation of the ideas in the text [23]. the pictures were used as facilitating tool to help understanding the text. The presence of the pictures is very important, because lowering the difficulty of a reading text should be achieved by providing facilitation tools instead of simply using simpler words [24], [21]. Another step taken was deleting unnecessary information from the reading text. Such unnecessary information within reading text were usually found in articles taken from newspaper. These steps ensured that the reading texts were appropriate to the students' level [21], [22], [25].

Appealing colors and pictures in a material is important, as stated by [26]. A teaching material should be able to achieve impact on the students. The term impact here means that the material is able to arouse students' interest and curiosity. This is achieved by using appealing pictures and color scheme. The pictures and colors will reduce students' boredom when studying the book. The pictures and color scheme can also act as a sort of landmark, which helps the students navigating the material. students can use a certain picture to

mentally bookmark certain part of the material, such as the last part that they read or worked on.

As stated before, one of the weaknesses of the existing materials was the monotonous repetition of very limited types of activities in the material. To overcome this weakness, the new material was developed with numerous activities. Besides reading text, the new material incorporated relevant pictures and colorful presentation, structural points, speaking activities, listening activities, writing tasks, and language games.

Other learning activities in the new material were added to provide students with activities which can be used by the students when learning independently at home. Each of the chapters in the new material contains a section called structural point which consists of grammatical explanation and examples, which followed by grammatical exercises. The listening sections were added and designed with ample activities, to help students learn independently at home. For the writing activities the students were provided with a number of writing exercises, ranging from retelling a story, to writing a complete story based on a series of pictures. All these activities were included to enable students to practice all the aspect of English. Because mastery of English does not stop at the mastery of reading skill alone, but also other skills of English, such as speaking, listening, writing and the structure of English [27], [28].

After a lengthy process of revision and rewriting, the new material was then put into field testing. The students were asked to review the new course book while studying with them. The students were also asked to fill a questionnaire about the material. The data from the questionnaire were triangulated through observation and interview. The result of the interview is presented in the following table.

**Table 1.** The questionnaire results (in percent).

NO	QUESTION	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	This material more interesting than the existing material	77	17	5	1	0
2	This material is easier to understand than the existing material	68	28	4	0	0
3	This material is more fun to learn than the existing material	72	23	4	1	0
4	This material helps me learn English better than the existing material	85	15	0	0	0
5	I prefer to study English using this material than the existing material	91	9	0	0	0

The majority of the students, prefer the new material rather than the existing material. the students favored the existing material in terms of appeal, level of difficulty, enjoyment during studying, material content, and overall preferences. The interview with the students showed that the students love the fresh and colorful look of the new material, and they also love the pictures included in the new course book. The students claimed that the pictures, colors, language games, and language activities in the material help them reduce their anxiety and stress level.

The above results highlighted two things. The first is that the students' needs must be the most vital factor in developing material. Because material that directly correspondent with said needs will automatically be useful and meaningful for the students. This finding is similar to the results of [3], and in line with the conclusion of [2]. With appropriate material the students will be prompted to learn well because they realize that they are learning not for the sake of exams or grades, but more for the mastery of skills that they need in the first place. This realization is further supported by the material ample activities which enable

students to learn more outside the classroom own their own pace which allows students' path to autonomous learning [5].

The second is that the students preferred the new material over that existing material due the culturally familiar materials. The familiar material is in line with the students' prior knowledge, thus helping the students in understanding the new material. This result is similar to [9] results. In both researches, local culture plays important role in improving students' involvement in English learning. Therefore, local culture should always be considered when developing English material. Furthermore, as noted in the observation the familiarity of the material enables the students to learn more and achieve more. This achievement boosted students' motivation and involvement in learning. This result confirms various research results from around the world [18], [19], [20].

### 3 Conclusion

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that the incorporation of local culture material helps the students in learning English, the use of cultural material has decreased the foreign nuance of the material, it reduces the stress level of the students due to the familiarity of the material. The result of this study confirms the notion that a culturally familiar material will help students in learning a foreign language. It is recommended for other researcher to also inquire the effectiveness of culturally familiar material compared to less culturally familiar material in teaching English in different level or learning.

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