

THE INTEGRATION OF BALINESE WISDOM “TRI HITA KARANA” IN PRIMARY STUDENTS’ ENGLISH STORYTELLING PERFORMANCES IN DENPASAR

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ABSTRACT

In an era of globalization, preserving local cultural values while developing English proficiency presents a significant challenge, particularly in culturally rich regions like Bali, Indonesia. This study explores an innovative approach to addressing this challenge by integrating the Balinese philosophy of Tri Hita Karana (THK) into English language storytelling performances of primary school students in Denpasar. Through qualitative analysis of 40 students’ storytelling performances and in-depth interviews with six competition winners, this research reveals the profound potential of culturally responsive language education. The findings demonstrate that young learners can effectively internalize and creatively express traditional values through a foreign language medium, seamlessly incorporating concepts of *parhyangan* (human-divine relationship), *pawongan* (human-human relationship), and *palemahan* (human-nature relationship) into their narratives. Notably, students displayed a sophisticated ability to apply these ancient principles to contemporary issues, challenging assumptions about the dichotomy between global language acquisition and local cultural preservation. The study uncovers a synergistic model where English becomes a tool for cultural expression and evolution, rather than a threat to traditional values. This approach not only enhances language skills but also deepens cultural understanding and fosters a strong sense of identity. By bridging the gap between global communication needs and local wisdom, this research opens new avenues for developing culturally responsive English language teaching methodologies. The integration of THK in English storytelling performances emerges as a promising model for nurturing linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and creative expression, potentially revolutionizing language education in culturally diverse, non-native English speaking contexts.

Keywords: Balinese wisdom, cultural integration, English storytelling, primary education, Tri Hita Karana

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the challenge of maintaining local cultural values while developing English language proficiency has become increasingly significant, particularly in culturally rich regions like Bali, Indonesia. The integration of local wisdom into English language teaching presents a promising approach to address this challenge, especially for primary school students who are at a critical stage of both language and cultural development (Padmadewi et al., 2009; Suja, 2010).

The concept of Tri Hita Karana (THK), a fundamental philosophy in Balinese culture, offers a unique framework for this integration. THK emphasizes three harmonious relationships: between humans and God (*parhyangan*), among humans (*pawongan*), and between humans and nature (*palemahan*) (Sudira, 2014; Kertih & Widiana, 2022). This holistic approach to life and education aligns well with the goals of both language acquisition and character development, which are key objectives in primary education (Harun et al., 2020).

Storytelling, as a pedagogical tool, has long been recognized for its effectiveness in language learning and cultural transmission (Pardede, 2011; Žigárdyová, 2006). For primary school students, storytelling provides a engaging and meaningful context for language use, allowing them to develop linguistic skills while exploring cultural themes (Beyhaghi et al., 2016). When combined with local cultural elements like THK, storytelling has the potential to become a powerful vehicle for both language acquisition and cultural preservation.

The Indonesian education system has increasingly emphasized the importance of character education and the integration of local wisdom into the curriculum (Muhtar & Dallyono, 2020). The 2013 curriculum, in particular, highlights the need to incorporate cultural values into all aspects of education, including language learning (Suyatno et al., 2019). This aligns with the broader goal of fostering a strong sense of cultural identity among students while preparing them for global communication (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2017).

In Bali, where tourism plays a significant role in the economy and society, the need for English proficiency is particularly acute (Raya, 2022). However, this need must be balanced with the preservation of Balinese culture and values. The integration of THK into English language instruction offers a potential solution to this challenge, allowing students to develop language skills within a culturally relevant framework (Paramandhita, 2017).

Previous research has shown positive outcomes from integrating local culture into English language teaching. Nurlia and Arini (2017) found that incorporating local cultural elements improved students' writing achievement. Similarly, Widyahening and Wardhani (2016) demonstrated the effectiveness of using culturally-based literary works in language learning and character development. However, these studies primarily focused on written skills, leaving a gap in understanding how cultural integration affects oral production, particularly in storytelling performances.

The concept of *ethnopedagogy*, which emphasizes the use of local wisdom in education, provides a theoretical foundation for integrating THK into English language teaching (Suarmika & Utama, 2017; Oktavianti & Ratnasari, 2018). This approach not only enhances the learning process but also contributes to the preservation of cultural values in the face of globalization pressures (Dwijendra & Mahardika, 2018).

In the context of Denpasar, Bali's capital city, the intersection of traditional culture and modernization is particularly pronounced. As a hub of both Balinese culture and international tourism, Denpasar provides a unique setting for exploring how local wisdom can be integrated into English language education (Wirawan, 2017). Primary school students in this urban environment are exposed to both global influences and traditional Balinese culture, making them ideal subjects for studying the effectiveness of THK-based English language instruction.

The use of THK in education has shown promising results in early childhood settings (Paramandhita, 2017), but its application in primary-level English language teaching, particularly in performance-based tasks like storytelling, remains underexplored. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity to investigate how THK principles can be effectively incorporated into English storytelling performances by primary school students.

Moreover, while previous studies have examined the integration of Balinese culture in English teaching materials (Damayanti et al., 2019), there is limited research on how students actively interpret and apply cultural concepts like THK in their own language productions. Understanding this process could provide valuable insights into the development of culturally responsive English language teaching methods.

The potential of storytelling as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural values has been recognized in various contexts (Turan & Ulutas, 2016). However, its specific application in teaching English through the lens of THK principles represents a novel approach that merits further investigation. This is particularly relevant in the Balinese context, where storytelling (*satua*) has traditionally played a significant role in cultural education (Mertayasa, 2018).

Furthermore, the integration of THK into English language instruction aligns with the broader goals of Indonesia's character education initiative, which emphasizes values such as religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2017). By exploring how students

incorporate these values into their English storytelling performances, this study can contribute to our understanding of how language learning can support character development and cultural identity formation.

In conclusion, the integration of Tri Hita Karana principles into English storytelling performances by primary school students in Denpasar represents a promising area of research that intersects language acquisition, cultural preservation, and character education. By examining how students interpret and apply THK concepts in their storytelling, this study aims to contribute to the development of culturally responsive English language teaching methods that can foster both linguistic competence and cultural awareness. This research has the potential to inform educational practices not only in Bali but also in other culturally diverse contexts where the balance between global language acquisition and local cultural preservation is a pressing concern.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the integration of the Balinese concept of Tri Hita Karana in students' storytelling performances. The research focused on 40 primary school students participating in a storytelling competition in Denpasar, Bali. Data collection was primarily conducted through observation during the competition, where students presented their prepared stories incorporating elements of Tri Hita Karana.

Following the competition, in-depth interviews were conducted with the six students who won the competition. These semi-structured interviews aimed to gain deeper insights into the students' understanding and application of Tri Hita Karana concepts in their storytelling performances. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, with the researchers coding the observation notes and interview transcripts to identify recurring themes related to the integration of Tri Hita Karana in the students' storytelling. This qualitative approach allowed for a rich, descriptive exploration of how primary students interpret and apply traditional Balinese values in their English language storytelling performances.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the storytelling performances and subsequent interviews revealed several key themes related to the integration of Tri Hita Karana in students' English language storytelling. These themes demonstrate how primary students in Denpasar interpret and apply traditional Balinese values in their linguistic productions.

Representation of Parhyangan (Human-Divine Relationship)

During the storytelling competition, 32 out of 40 students incorporated elements of parhyangan in their narratives. This was often manifested through characters participating in religious ceremonies or seeking divine guidance. For example, one student's story featured a young protagonist praying at a temple before embarking on a challenging journey.

In the interviews, winners emphasized the importance of this aspect. One student stated, *"I wanted to show how important it is to remember God in everything we do. My character always prayed before making big decisions."* This reflects a deep-rooted understanding of the spiritual dimension of Tri Hita Karana.

Exploration of Pawongan (Human-Human Relationship)

All 40 students included themes of human relationships in their stories, with a strong emphasis on community cooperation and mutual respect. Stories often featured characters helping each other or resolving conflicts through dialogue and understanding.

One of the winners explained in their interview, *“I created a story about a village working together to overcome a drought. It shows how we need each other to solve big problems.”* This demonstrates the students’ grasp of the pawongan concept and its relevance to contemporary issues.

Integration of Palemahan (Human-Nature Relationship)

35 out of 40 students incorporated environmental themes into their stories, reflecting the palemahan aspect of Tri Hita Karana. Common narratives included characters learning to respect nature, protecting endangered animals, or cleaning up polluted areas.

An interviewed winner shared, *“My story was about a girl who learns to appreciate the rice fields and stops littering. I wanted to show how we should care for nature because it cares for us.”* This indicates a sophisticated understanding of environmental stewardship rooted in Balinese philosophy.

Creative Linguistic Expressions of Balinese Concepts

Observation revealed that students creatively used English to express Balinese concepts. For instance, many incorporated Balinese words for specific cultural elements, seamlessly code-switching between English and Balinese. This demonstrated their ability to navigate between languages while preserving cultural authenticity.

One winner commented, *“I used some Balinese words because they express ideas that are hard to say in English. It made my story feel more real.”* This suggests that students are actively bridging their cultural knowledge with their English language skills.

Modern Interpretations of Traditional Values

A notable trend observed was the application of Tri Hita Karana principles to contemporary scenarios. Students often set their stories in modern Bali, addressing issues like tourism, technology, and globalization through the lens of traditional values.

An interviewed student explained, *“I made a story about using social media responsibly, showing how people do their communication and how we treat people online too.”* This indicates that students are adapting traditional concepts to their lived experiences in a globalized world.

Emotional Engagement and Personal Connection

During the performances, it was observed that students displayed strong emotional engagement when narrating parts of their stories related to Tri Hita Karana concepts. This was evident in their voice modulation, gestures, and facial expressions.

In the interviews, all six winners expressed a personal connection to the values they incorporated. One student remarked, *“Telling this story made me feel proud of being Balinese. It’s not just a school thing; it’s part of who we are.”*

These findings suggest that the integration of Tri Hita Karana in English storytelling serves multiple purposes. It not only enhances students’ language skills but also deepens their understanding and appreciation of Balinese cultural values. Moreover, it provides a platform for students to creatively explore the relevance of traditional concepts in a modern, global context. The students’ ability to articulate complex cultural ideas in English, while maintaining the essence of Balinese philosophy, indicates a successful blend of language learning and cultural education. This approach appears to foster a sense of cultural pride and identity, even as students develop their English language competencies.

Discussion

The integration of Tri Hita Karana (THK) principles in primary students' English storytelling performances reveals a complex interplay between language acquisition, cultural preservation, and modern interpretation of traditional values. This study's findings both align with and diverge from previous research in significant ways, offering new insights into the potential of culturally-grounded language education.

The strong presence of THK elements in students' narratives aligns with Paramandhita's (2017) findings on the effectiveness of THK in early childhood character development. However, while Paramandhita focused on general character education, our study demonstrates that these principles can be successfully integrated into specific language learning tasks, such as storytelling. This extends the applicability of THK beyond general character formation into the realm of language acquisition, suggesting a novel approach to culturally responsive English language teaching (ELT).

The creative linguistic expressions observed in students' performances, particularly their seamless code-switching between English and Balinese, echo Padmadewi et al.'s (2009) observations on the integration of Balinese culture in English learning. However, our study goes further by demonstrating how students actively use this bilingual approach to express complex cultural concepts, suggesting a more advanced level of cultural and linguistic integration than previously documented in primary education settings.

The students' modern interpretations of THK principles in contemporary scenarios present a striking contrast to concerns raised by Dwijendra and Mahardika (2018) about the erosion of local cultural values due to globalization. Instead of cultural degradation, our findings suggest that young learners are adeptly adapting traditional concepts to modern contexts, indicating a dynamic and resilient cultural identity. This challenges the notion that globalization and English language learning necessarily lead to cultural loss, proposing instead that they can facilitate cultural evolution and reinterpretation.

The observed emotional engagement and personal connection to THK values in storytelling performances align with Widyahening and Wardhani's (2016) assertion that literary works can effectively convey character education. However, our study extends this concept by demonstrating that student-created narratives, not just established literary works, can serve as powerful vehicles for cultural transmission and character development.

Importantly, the successful integration of THK in English storytelling addresses a gap identified by Nurlia and Arini (2017), who found positive effects of local culture integration on writing skills. Our study suggests that this approach is equally effective in oral production, particularly in storytelling, which has not been extensively explored in previous research on culturally integrated ELT in Indonesia.

The students' ability to articulate complex cultural ideas in English while maintaining the essence of Balinese philosophy presents a notable advancement from the findings of Tafaroji and Raeesi (2015). While they emphasized the importance of cultural awareness in EFL classrooms, our study demonstrates a higher level of cultural integration, where students are not just aware of cultural differences but are actively synthesizing cultural knowledge with language production.

Furthermore, the application of THK principles to issues like environmental conservation and social media use in students' stories reflects a sophisticated understanding that surpasses expectations set by previous studies on primary-level cultural education (Oktavianti & Ratnasari, 2018). This suggests that when given the appropriate framework, young learners are capable of applying traditional wisdom to contemporary challenges in surprisingly mature ways.

The novelty of this study lies in its demonstration of how deeply rooted cultural concepts like THK can be effectively used not just as content for language learning, but as a

structural framework for creative language production. This approach goes beyond the surface-level cultural integration often seen in ELT, offering a model where language learning becomes a means of cultural exploration and expression.

Moreover, the study challenges the dichotomy often presented between global language acquisition and local cultural preservation (Sudira, 2014). Instead, it presents a synergistic model where English language skills become a tool for articulating and evolving local cultural concepts, potentially enhancing both language proficiency and cultural identity simultaneously.

This research also extends the concept of ethnopedagogy (Suarmika & Utama, 2017) by showing its applicability not just in general education but specifically in language acquisition. The success of this approach in a storytelling context suggests that ethnopedagogy could be a powerful tool in developing communicative competence in English while reinforcing cultural values.

To end this discussion, this study presents a novel approach to culturally integrated English language teaching that goes beyond previous research in its depth of cultural integration and its applicability to creative language production. It suggests that THK-based English instruction could offer a powerful model for addressing the dual goals of language proficiency and cultural preservation, presenting a potential solution to the challenges of maintaining local wisdom in an increasingly globalized educational landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the significant potential of integrating the Tri Hita Karana philosophy into English language storytelling for primary students in Bali. The research reveals that young learners are capable of deeply internalizing and creatively expressing traditional cultural values through a foreign language medium. By seamlessly incorporating concepts of *parhyangan*, *pawongan*, and *palemahan* into their narratives, students not only enhanced their English language skills but also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of their cultural heritage and its relevance in contemporary contexts. This approach bridges the often-perceived gap between global language acquisition and local cultural preservation, offering a model where English becomes a tool for cultural expression and evolution rather than a threat to traditional values. The study's findings challenge previous assumptions about the limitations of cultural integration in language learning, particularly at the primary level, and open new avenues for developing culturally responsive English language teaching methodologies. Ultimately, this research suggests that the integration of Tri Hita Karana in English storytelling performances can foster a harmonious development of linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and creative expression, potentially revolutionizing the approach to English language education in culturally rich, non-native English speaking contexts.

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