

# Reconstruction of Local Wisdom for Character Education through the Indonesia Language Learning: An Ethno-pedagogical Methodology

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**Abstract**—Developing good characters may take quite a process of enculturation early at the primary schools. Character education may include local wisdom or local knowledge learnt through the Indonesia language curriculum. Bali's local wisdom, which adheres in the Hindu philosophy, is potentially rich for the development of character education's themes and sub-themes. The central themes and sub-themes fleshed out from the Hindu philosophy are coherently tied into a system of meaningful moral entity. Children may learn the moral characters contextually and meaningfully through the national language of Indonesia at schools. However, caution should be taken as the themes and the sub-themes are critically beyond the first and second graders' cognitive and moral development stages.

**Index Terms**—Indonesian language learning, character education, local wisdom or local knowledge

## I. INTRODUCTION

Local knowledge may often be termed as local wisdom or local genius (Purna, 2010: 2). Since the implementation of *Undang – Undang Otonomi Daerah Nomor 22/1999*, local wisdom or local genius becomes a popular discourse for character education. Hobsbown (in Mudana, 2003) defines it as a set of practices determined by clear or subtle rules, rituals, and/or symbolic characteristics. Local wisdom or local knowledge is often used to mediate a set of norms, values, morals and ethics through repeated behavioral practices, which imply a balance between the past and the present times (Purna, 2010: 2). Local wisdom or local genius may often function as a moderator variable for negative characters. As information technology develops swiftly, local wisdom or local genius tends to be marginalized and/or even eroded into a complete absence (Choesin, 2002:1). Histories often disclose the fact that whenever developments created negative impacts on human wellness, local wisdom or genius offered a moral therapy to such an illness. It is widely believed that local wisdom or local genius originates from a belief system which manages the life of a society (Purna, 2010: 3). As Razali (1987:11) states that a belief builds power beyond human ability. This power will govern human behaviors. When it is added with experience, it will become a character (Geertz, 2000: 50 – 51). Religion is subsumed under social category. As a social category, religion becomes a social phenomenon pivoting around the non-empirical axis to achieve safety, security, tranquility and wellness (Hendropuspito, 1990:34).

Adhering to Geertz's (2000) and Hendropuspito's (1990) inspiring ideas, local wisdom or local genius should become good behavioral governance for achieving safety, security, tranquility and wellness. Therefore, learning religion, which is pivoted around local wisdom or genius, should get a firm place in the school curriculum, especially for character education. Through language learning, especially the national language of Indonesia, local wisdom or genius could be communicated meaningfully to young children. So is the case with young children in Bali, they will develop good characters by knowing, understanding and applying the local wisdom or local genius, which is based on the Hindu philosophy. According to Ahmad (2010:4), local wisdom or local genius provides references for good conduct since it contains codes of relationships between human and God, human and nature, as well as human and other human or *Tri Hita Karana* (Suhardana,2006:50).

Harmonious co-existence needs people of good characters. Anthropologically, character education is educating people to retain morally good cognition, affection and action (Endraswara, 2013:1). While, Kueller (1983:1) states that "Anthropology is the study of mankind and his ways of living." Both statements contain a moral message, i.e., human ways of living could not be separated from their own characters. Likewise, when a teacher could manage his anger, the process of learning will be smoothened. Contrastively, when an anger is afore-driven, a social conflict will certainly appear (Rasna, 2013:14). Negative social phenomena will create clashes between two individuals and/or among groups in the society. For example, adolescents convoyed on roaring motor cycles without helmets would certainly create chaos to pedestrians and the police (Bali Post, Monday 8th April 2013:3).

Nowadays, Indonesia is on the verge of collapse in morality. People ran in amuck had caused material damage and loss, for examples, the Bali Nuraga case, Sumbawa, district and provincial elections. They had left misery and vandalism behind. This situation has been created by people of no-good-characters. The situation is worsened with non-equitable social welfare, corruption, nepotism and the likes. Moreover, political figures often play a role as a state property's predators. This situation has become a vicious circle, where to begin a solution and when to terminate a bad deed is surely chaotic (Rasna, 2002:1). Good characters could only be developed through education and it should be started as early as developmentally appropriate. Regardless of the frustration, education still offers the best solution ever. However, quality education is still rare in Indonesia, let alone good character education (Suryadi and Tilaar, 2003:123).

It is widely known that quality education is dictated by good learning objectives, learning materials, learning approaches/methods/techniques, time allotment, media, learning sources, and assessment of learning process and outputs. Moegiadi (1984) has shown that the use of good books will discriminate indexly between high and low achievers. The World Bank has also given special attention to quality of course books in schools in Indonesia (World Bank Report, 1996). Moreover, Galib (1993:1) recommended that education quality management should be based on the needs of the learners themselves. He suggested that learning materials should ease children in constructing knowledge cognitively, affectively and in psychomotor way. Siregar (2003:5) added the conceptual ecology will facilitate children to construct knowledge.

The above ideas inspire the necessity to implement Balinese local wisdom or genius as a vehicle for character education in learning the national language of Indonesia in the Elementary Schools in the Province of Bali. Character education containing the Balinese local wisdom or genius will facilitate contextual interaction during learning (cf. Posner, 1992; Strike and Hewson, 1992). Halliday and Hassan (1992) convinced that learning materials containing local knowledge systematized lingually will facilitate understanding. (cf. Burbles and Linn, 1992). In short, the reconstruction of course materials in curriculum of the national language of Indonesia is of prime importance for character education with the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge (Hidayat, 1990:6).

## II. METHOD

### A. Research Design and Respondents

The present research was of a mixed design. It was aimed at exploring the central learning themes and sub-themes for character education with a perspective on the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge. The local wisdom or knowledge will substitute the themes and sub-themes in the Indonesian language learning curriculum for the first and second graders. The corresponding themes and sub-themes derived from the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge were described and surveyed systematically. Therefore, the implemented research design was of a descriptive survey (Gall, et al, 2007). Viewed from the data collection methodology, this research was of a qualitative study. The local wisdom or knowledge suitable for character education was in the form of qualitative data. The data were directly informed by an expert in Hindu philosophy.

### B. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered directly from the expert through in-depth interview. It applied a question-note taking-excerpting-verification technique. The expert was asked the corresponding themes, sub-themes and the authentic sources of the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge suitable for substituting the themes and sub-themes in the 2006 Curriculum. The themes and sub-themes were written in terms of text genres, namely; description, narration and exposition. The obtained data were analyzed descriptively. The lexical and grammatical items contained in the texts will be used to develop language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing in the national language of Indonesia.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Research Findings

The research findings mainly consisted of themes and sub-themes extracted from the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge appropriately implemented as learning materials for character education at early levels in elementary schools. They will be used to substitute the themes and sub-themes for character education in the Indonesian language learning curriculum at the first and second grades of elementary schools in the Province of Bali.

There are 8 central themes collected from the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge suitable for first graders of the Elementary School, namely: (1) *Myself*, (2) *My Hobby*, (3) *My Activity*, (4) *My Family*, (5) *My Experience*, (6) *Clean, Healthy and Beautiful Environment*, (7) *Objects, Pets and Garden Around*, (8) *Natural Incidence*. Whereas, there are 32 sub-themes altogether. They are (1) *I and My New Friends*, (2) *My Body*, (3) *I Take Care of My Body*, (4) *I Am Special*; (5) *I Like Sports*, (6) *I Like Singing and Dancing*, (7) *I Like Drawing*, (8) *I Like Reading*, (9) *Morning Activity*, (10) *Noon Activity*, (11) *Afternoon Activity*, (12) *Night Activity*, (13) *Members of My Family*, (14) *My Family Activity*, (15) *My Extended Family*, (16) *Family Togetherness*, (17) *Childhood Experience*, (18) *Experience with Friends*, (19) *Experience at School*, (20) *Unforgettable Experience*, (21) *Home Environment*, (22) *Milleau Environment*, (23) *School Environment*, (24) *Keeping Clean and Healthy Environment*, (25) *Animate and Non-animate Objects Around Me*, (26)

*Animals Around Me, (27) Plants Around Me, (28) Forms, Colors, Sizes and Surfaces of Objects, (29) Climate, (30) Dry Monsoon, (31) Wet Monsoon, and (32) Natural Disasters.*

Good characters could be developed through learning the Indonesian language. For example, theme **Myself** which runs: “*Purify your senses, but thoughts are purer than senses. The purest of budhi is atman. Pure atman will manage thoughts and smart thoughts will manage the sensitivity of senses*” (Bhagavadgita XIII.23; Wrehaspati Tattwa 24). This text stresses the importance of enhancing the quality of senses by thought which in its turn can be improved by *atman*, which is the purest *budhi*. The Hindu concepts can be learned by young children through lexical and grammatical items directly through listening, speaking, reading and writing in meaningful context.

Moreover, young children will learn that good thoughts will cherish *budhi* and *atman*. In Hinduism or Buddhism, human beings are endowed with *budhi* which helps in making good decisions (Jayaram V., 2001). *Budhi*, according to the tantric scriptures, is the target which is reflected by the radiance of *atman*. *Budhi* enables us to tell the good apart from the bad. It is the power that pushes us to respond to the environment. However, it does not only help us in making impartial decisions, but it also helps in heightening the ability to see things clearly, understanding them fully, learning something quickly and thinking clearly, using experiences and knowledge sensibly to enable us to understand and appreciate what happens around us in an appropriate way.

We understand, interpret, act, decide, develop our beliefs, preferences, and control our lives at the dictate of *budhi*. In the absence of *budhi*, we are left under the control of our passions. Consequently, we will stop ourselves from thinking and doing things that trap ourselves in reincarnation. We will always suffer as we fail to make a balance during the union and separation of the senses and the reason with the things being perceived.

Similarly, the theme **Family Togetherness** which runs: “*A state has to protect the existence of asrama dharma and varna dharma. It means that my big family includes all creatures live as brahmachari, ghrastha, wanaprasta and sanyasin*”. Similarly, all colors be it *brahmana, ksatriya, vaisya or sudra* should live based on *asrama dharma dan varna dharma*” (Manawa Dharmasastra VII.35). Colours influence our perceptions and interactions. Each colour stimulates our mental, physical and psychological states in a different way. They affect moods, feelings and emotions, metabolism, blood pressure and strain to the eyes. Red, orange and yellow are colours that make us feel warm and comfortable. They also stimulate in us a strong desire or cause us to get angry, while blue, purple and green are colours that calm us down and make us sad.

Colours in Hinduism also represent different qualities. The paintings of gods and goddesses show them wearing dresses and accessories in colours indicating their characters. The colours are more than decorative. Offerings have the some basic colours of red, yellow, green and white. The colours come from leaves, herbs, flour and other natural substances

*Red* has sensual and pure connotations. Hindus use red colour to celebrate important religious events that are related to life cycle, such as birth, marriage and death. The forehead is given a red mark during important occasions. People throw red powder on statues of deities and phallic symbols during prayers. Red also represents bravery. Gods and goddesses who are believed to be the protectors against evil, who are kind and brave are dressed in red. Before a dead woman is cremated, she is wrapped in red cloth.

*Saffron* is the colour which is believed in Hinduism to be the most sacred colour. It symbolizes fire capable of purifying sin. It also indicates forbearance. Thus it is used by holy people and ascetics who have rejected the world. They wear saffron dresses to seek enlightenment. It represents life and happiness in Maharashtra. Green symbolizes nature, happiness and life. It brings peace to our mind.

*Yellow* represents competence and stimulates us to meditate. It is the colour of Spring. Lord Vishnu wears a yellow dress to symbolize a representation of knowledge, so do Lord Krishna and Lord Ganesha. White is a mixture of seven different colours and symbolizes all the qualities in a small amount, like chastity, tranquility, harmony and enlightenment. Hindu painters the goddess of knowledge, Saraswati, in a white dress in a sitting position on a lotus, which is also white. The Brahmin is dressed in a white dress. The high growth in spirituality is symbolized in white. Thus Hindu religious leaders use white ashes to cover themselves to represent their spiritual rebirth. When Hindus mourn they are dressed up in white.

*Blue* is the dominant colour of Nature (sky, the oceans, the rivers and the lakes, etc.) It symbolizes bravery, determination, stable mind, strength in character, Lord Rama and Lord Krishna wear blue dresses to represent their struggle for the good of humanity that protects it against evil. All creation is made up of the three *gunas* or qualities that balance nature. The colours of white, red and black are regarded to represent these qualities. *Sattva*, peaceful agreement and chastity, by white; *rajas*, power and strong desire, by red; and *tamas*, motionlessness and lack of knowledge, by black.

There are also 8 central themes gathered from the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge suitable for second graders, namely : (1) *Harmonious Life*, (2) *Playing in the Environment*, (3) *My Daily Duty*, (4) *I and My School*, (5) *Clean and Healthy Life*, (6) *Water and Sun*, (7) *Caring Pets and Plants*, (8) *Home and Journey Safety*. Whereas, there are 32 the sub-themes, they are: (1) *Harmonious Home Life*, (2) *Harmony with Friends*, (3) *Harmony at School*, (4) *Harmony with People Around*, (5) *Playing at Home*, (6) *Playing at Friend's Home*, (7) *Playing at School*, (8) *Playing at Recreational Sites*, (9) *My Daily Duty at Home*, (10) *My Routine Tasks at School*, (11) *My Duty in Religion*, (12) *My Task and Social Life*, (13) *My School Tasks*, (14) *Extra-Curricular Activity*, (15) *My School Environment*, (16) *My Achievement at*

*School, (17) Clean and Healthy Life at Home, (18) Clean and Healthy Life at School, (19) Clean and Healthy Life at Playground, (20) Clean and Healthy Life in the Vicinity, (21) Water, (22) Earth, (23) The Sun, (24) Nature Around Us, (25) Animals Around Us, (26) Caring for Pets, (27) Plants Around Us, (28) Caring for Plants, (29) Rules of Home Safety, (30) Home Safety, (31) Travel Safety, (32) Tour Safety.*

The sub-theme **Myself and My New Friend** which runs: “*I am a whole body. My body is Purusa and Pradana*”. “*After birth, my new friend is Stavira or plants, animals and human beings, for example: my neighbors, my close friends who I play games with*” (Katha 1.3. 3-4; Bhagawad Gita XIII.23; Wrehaspati Tattwa 24). Friendship is defined widely as includes plants, animals and human beings. Bodily parts are understood as an integrated physical and mental entity.

True friends remain no matter what has changed over time. Friendship is a mixture of love, loyalty, respect, truth and fun. People are close to each other because of having common interests. In a close relation one feels comfortable and safe. A true friend is rare. With a true friend, one does not have to be careful in expressing oneself. He or she knows more about you than yourself and is always on your side. He or she is present in time of trouble. He or she will come to help you when you face difficulties in life.

There are many different qualities that define friendship such as trust, unconditional love, companionship. People define friendship based on their experiences. Mythologies have stories about friendship. Friendship is a relation that has been cultivated continually. Well known stories about friendship can be read in mythologies. The stories say that you would be very lucky if you found a faithful friend because it means that you have found something indispensable. Friendship is dynamic. To have a healthy relation a child has to learn to accept others’ behaviours and to adjust his or her behaviours in order to be accepted by others and he or she needs to learn when to be with a friend and when to be alone. Friendship helps children to develop their emotional maturity. It needs to be developed from time to time if it is going to survive.

Children start to make friends when children start to get along with other children. Parents need to take care of the kind of friends their child chooses until he or she is able to between right and wrong. When a child makes friends with children who have a bad character, this means that it is more likely for him or her to develop a bad personality. Wrong peers or lack of socializing can cause the children to suffer from severe psychological traumas and disorders, which will end up with social maladjustment. Choosing correct peer group for a child is the first step toward the attainment of a good personality for him or her. Both positive and negative experiences help in refining the child’s personality. Thus it is essential for us to find friends who agree most of the time with us.

Another example of the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge suitable for character education, especially for the second graders could be described as the following. The theme **Harminous Life** which runs: “*With rta, God the Almighty rule nature for wellness. When rta and dharma are in line with norms and ethics, it will develop synergy among elements to create peace and harmony between human and human, human and nature, human and the Prime Cause. Harmony exists when dicipline and order are developed accordingly*” (Manawa Dharmasastra VII.14). According to the text, harmony and peace in life will be experienced when *rta* and *dharma* are in accord with norms and ethics. Hence, children should learn good norms and ethics to create harmony and peace in their life.

Likewise, the sub-theme **Harmonious Life in the Family** which runs: “*Every home has to be divided into three sections, namely; prayer site or hulun karang, Dewa Pitara or ancestors, a place to live at, and people to live at, like: father, mother, children. Children who live at home are at the stage of brahmacarī*” (Manawa Dharmasastra VII.14). When sounds are in tune with each other we have harmony. Best friends can be maintained if they keep in harmony. It means they agree with each other in what they perceive. To keep in harmony at home, the house has to be divided in such a way that ensures a harmonious relation between human and human, human and nature and human and the Creator. Other words with related to harmony in meaning are unity, peace, friendship, consistency. The antonyms include clash, clang and dispute.

In one sense, harmony is a concept that indicates that there is love, affection in between different people, regardless differences in gender, race, religion, other social and cultural variables. Harmony is supported and encouraged in the National Constitution of Indonesia. Every citizen is free to choose and practice any religion and belief. This will make different traditions co-exist harmoniously. Any one has to remember that an excessive devotion to his or her religion at the expense of condemning other religions will cause him to harm his or her religion. Thus, a good inter-religious relation should be maintained from time to time if the objective is to live in harmony with each other. One should respect the doctrines of other religions.

## B. Discussion

The afore-mentioned Balinese local wisdom or knowledge could be authentically used to develop themes and sub-themes for young learners, whose religion is Hinduism. The character education could also be implemented through the Indonesian language learning for young children. Themes and sub-themes derived from the Balinese local wisdom are realistic and relevant to learning the Bali’s social, cultural and religious values. The social, cultural and religious values nested in the Balinese local wisdom seems to strengthen the universalism of truth and morality. Moral universality, therefore, is a meta-ethics. It means that moral truth contains no biases in terms of culture, race, gender, religion, nationality and sexuality (cf. Syariati, 1996; Scott, 2000; Sadullah, 2008; Adib, 2011). Therefore, character education should contain universal social, cultural and religious values developed in the young learners’ moral repertoire. However, the universality of the social, cultural and religious values should not neglect the idiosyncrasy of Hinduism.

For instance, a lexical item such *atman* should emphasize the perfection of senses in order to shape *budhi*. In Hinduism, the purity of *atman* will govern *budhi* or cognition. Consequently, pure *atman* and conscious *buddhi* will in turn shape actions.

Similarly, the theme of Myself could be broken up into parts as I and My Friends, My Body, I Take Care of My Body, I am Special. This theme should be explored as an existence of Self to be juxtaposed with Others. Self is understood as whole *Purusa* and *Pradana*. Others are not meant solely to humans, but animate and inanimate objects, which include plants, animals, or water, air, earth, or ether. Through these young children learn how to interact and maintain harmonious interaction with animate and inanimate beings. Young children will learn parts of the body as well as five important elements, such as solid substance, fluid substance, hot substance, air, and ether called *Panca Maha Bhuta*. In the Balinese local wisdom, the senses are metaphorically called the carriage, while cognition is the horses. Similarly, *buddhi* is compared to a rider, while cognition is the laces. Maintaining healthy body and soul, one has to take care of the carriage, the horse, and the will. This moral religion is transmitted through young learners by observing the daily religious life in family or in the community. I take care of myself is an obligatory morality to the Balinese Hinduism.

In the Balinese local wisdom, all Balinese should believe in God the Almighty and conduct regular *bhakti* or prayers. Take care of the body and soul will maintain good health throughout life. Through prayers, good characters will be developed, and subsequently will condition *bayu*, *sabda* and *idep* or power of knowing, saying and thinking or else *Tri Kaya Parisudha*.

The teaching of moral and religious characters should take into account the Piaget's moral development (Jamaris Martini, 2001). Balinese local wisdom will certainly develop young children to morally smart in thinking, saying and acting in daily life. Piaget asserts that social problems and dilemma could be developed through healthy interaction with the environment. Kohlberg believes through moral reasoning, young children learn to make moral decisions. Kohlberg also emphasizes that moral logic and morality develop through stages appropriate with children's moral and cognitive development. Therefore, local wisdom nested in folklores and folksongs are beneficial to children's character development. Thomas Lickona adds the necessity of developing children's character through education which is appropriate with their moral and cognitive development or *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Character education involves many disciplines. The purpose is to educate the students to become more developed in perception, intelligence, emotion, and social relation, and morality. However changes occur in all aspects of life due to globalization. The students are expected to have Awareness and social control mainly derive from the society as the owner of language, literature, and culture. The students are expected to possess good social, cultural and religious knowledge and understanding of the Balinese local wisdom in Indonesia. The awareness, self-awareness, could create the character building of the nation like *atman*, *bayu*, *sabda*, *idep*, *Panca Maha Bhuta*, etc. This study was aimed at finding out the Balinese local wisdom or knowledge which can be used to develop good characters in young children in Bali. This study was a combination of field research and text analysis of semiotic symbols. The twofold objectives of Indonesian education system are to train the students to pursue careers in their lives and to educate them to become good citizens who are ready to take an active part in promoting a better democratic life. Character education fits for the second aim very well.

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