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Reviving Local Wisdom Through Telling Javanese Legends in Teaching English for Tour Guiding Services

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of Javanese legends into the English for Tour Guiding Services course at Universitas Surakarta, focusing on three key objectives: enhancing students' cultural literacy, improving their English-speaking proficiency, and identifying the challenges and opportunities in incorporating local wisdom into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study involved 25 students and utilized classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The instructional method centered on oral storytelling, allowing students to retell culturally embedded narratives in English. Findings indicate that students showed greater awareness of local heritage, alongside notable improvements in fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and confidence. Storytelling rooted in familiar cultural contexts also fostered identity formation and audience engagement. Despite challenges such as the lack of English-language sources and the complexity of cultural translation, students and lecturers responded with collaborative adaptations, digital storytelling tools, and custom-designed learning modules. These strategies not only addressed pedagogical limitations but also promoted student creativity and digital literacy. This research highlights the dual function of local narratives in ESP—supporting linguistic competence while revitalizing cultural heritage—and offers a model for culturally grounded tourism education.

Keywords: Javanese legends, ESP, storytelling, cultural literacy, tour guiding

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi integrasi legenda-legenda Jawa ke dalam mata kuliah English for Tour Guiding Services di Universitas Surakarta dengan tiga tujuan utama: meningkatkan literasi budaya mahasiswa, mengembangkan kefasihan berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris, serta mengidentifikasi tantangan dan peluang dalam mengintegrasikan kearifan lokal ke dalam pembelajaran ESP. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan 25 mahasiswa dan mengumpulkan data melalui observasi kelas, wawancara, dan analisis dokumen. Metode pembelajaran berfokus pada teknik bercerita, di mana mahasiswa menyampaikan ulang narasi budaya dalam bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan kesadaran terhadap warisan budaya lokal serta perkembangan signifikan dalam kefasihan, struktur, pelafalan, dan rasa percaya diri mahasiswa. Cerita yang berasal dari konteks budaya yang dikenal juga mendorong pembentukan identitas dan keterlibatan mahasiswa. Kendala seperti keterbatasan sumber berbahasa Inggris dan kesulitan menerjemahkan konsep budaya berhasil diatasi melalui adaptasi kolaboratif, penggunaan media digital, dan pengembangan modul pembelajaran oleh dosen. Penelitian ini menegaskan peran ganda legenda lokal dalam pembelajaran ESP, yaitu sebagai sarana peningkatan kompetensi berbahasa sekaligus pelestarian budaya, serta menawarkan model pembelajaran berbasis pariwisata yang berakar pada nilai lokal.

Kata kunci: *legenda Jawa, bahasa Inggris untuk tujuan khusus, teknik bercerita, literasi budaya, pemanduan wisata*

Introduction

The rapid growth of the tourism industry has elevated the demand for professional tour guides who possess not only communicative fluency in English but also a deep understanding of local culture. In culturally rich regions like Surakarta, integrating Javanese legends into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction emerges as a promising pedagogical strategy. These legends, rich in moral values and historical insights, offer authentic content that enhances students' language competence while reinforcing their cultural identity in an increasingly globalized world (Vitrianto, 2023; Legowo et al., 2023; Cahyani et al., 2023).

Effective tour guiding goes beyond linguistic proficiency—it requires storytelling skills that can emotionally engage international visitors. Storytelling, especially when rooted in indigenous folklore, helps learners internalize language structures while conveying cultural meaning (Affandi et al., 2023; Sugiartha et al., 2023). Recent studies in tourism and language education have highlighted the value of local wisdom as a contextual foundation for developing communicative competence, cultural sensitivity, and identity formation (Ambarita et al., 2023; Kristiawan et al., 2022).

While there is growing interest in culturally embedded language learning, most ESP materials remain generic, often neglecting local narratives and cultural relevance (Kurniawati & Malasari, 2022). Several scholars have examined the role of storytelling in EFL and tourism settings (Pratiwi & Rahman, 2024; Astika & Nurfajrini, 2023), yet little attention has been given to how Javanese legends are systematically integrated into ESP curricula for tour guiding in specific educational contexts such as Surakarta. This indicates a critical gap between the availability of rich cultural sources and their pedagogical application in ESP classrooms—particularly in training future tourism professionals.

Moreover, the practical integration of such narratives faces challenges. Reliable English versions of Javanese legends are limited, and cultural nuances can be difficult to translate without guidance or resources (Rosyanafi et al., 2022). Despite the growing availability of digital tools and localized materials, few studies explore how students and instructors collaboratively navigate these

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challenges in curriculum design and classroom implementation (Gao, 2023; Kristiawan et al., 2022).

This study responds to the above gap by investigating how Javanese legends can be effectively incorporated into an ESP course on tour guiding at Universitas Surakarta. Specifically, it explores three objectives: (1) to assess the impact of legend-based storytelling on students' cultural literacy, (2) to evaluate improvements in their English-speaking proficiency, and (3) to identify the pedagogical challenges and opportunities of integrating local wisdom into ESP instruction. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing literature on culturally grounded language education and offers a localized model for ESP programs in tourism contexts.

Method

This inquiry adopted a qualitative-descriptive approach to explore how Javanese folklore could be woven into the "English for Tour Guiding Services" course at Universitas Surakarta. The investigation pursued three goals: (1) gauging the influence of storytelling on learners' cultural literacy, (2) examining gains in their spoken English, and (3) pinpointing both hurdles and openings when local wisdom forms the backbone of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction.

The project unfolded in the English Literature Department and involved 25 students registered for the 2024/2025 academic year. All participants were training to become tour guides capable of conveying Surakarta's cultural heritage to foreign guests in English. The study stayed within a classroom context that blended language practice with tourism-focused content.

Data came from three primary sources: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations tracked interaction patterns and engagement levels during storytelling tasks. Interviews with students and instructors provided insights into the perceived benefits and obstacles of using regional legends. Meanwhile, students' oral presentations and reflective journals served as artefacts for assessing linguistic growth and cultural understanding.

Operationally, the work progressed through four stages. During preparation, the research team selected and adapted English versions of legends tied to local landmarks such as the Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran palaces. In implementation, learners, working in small groups, researched, rehearsed, and narrated these tales with visual aids and peer feedback. The data-gathering phase involved note-taking during performances, follow-up interviews, and collection of reflective journals. Finally, the evaluation phase examined students' spoken output and written reflections to appraise the pedagogical impact of the narrative approach.

A thematic-analysis framework guided data treatment. After transcribing and categorizing raw materials, the researchers coded emergent themes and interpreted patterns. Triangulation across observations, interviews, and student artefacts bolstered the study's credibility (Rizvic et al., 2020). Particular attention was paid to evidence of cultural literacy development, language proficiency gains, and the practical challenges of embedding local lore within an ESP curriculum.

Result and Discussion

This section outlines the study's results and interprets the findings based on the research objectives and relevant contemporary literature. Data were analyzed thematically according to the study's three aims and compared with recent scholarship to highlight the pedagogical benefits and challenges of integrating Javanese legends into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction for tour guiding.

Javanese Legends in ESP: Cultural and Communicative Functions

Daniel Agus Maryanto's *Legends from Surakarta and Its Surroundings* (2008) offers a culturally rich resource for ESP classes, particularly in storytelling-focused activities. The legends—ranging from mythic figures like Kyai Konang to historically grounded tales such as the *Geger Pecinan*—carry philosophical and socio-historical weight that aligns well with the communicative demands of professional tour guiding.

Although Maryanto's work predates the last decade, its relevance remains due to its narrative clarity and cultural fidelity. More recent studies confirm the enduring pedagogical value of such texts. For instance, Cahyani et al. (2023) and Kristiawan et al. (2022) emphasize that integrating local legends into tourism education fosters not only language proficiency but also sustainable heritage awareness.

Compared to generic ESP materials, using local stories helps students develop narrative competence in real-world settings. This finding aligns with Gao (2023), who argues that grounding language instruction in regional identity narratives builds intercultural communicative competence—a vital skill in tourism settings. Similarly, Astika and Nurfajrini (2023) found that incorporating folklore into EFL classrooms through digital storytelling enhanced both learner engagement and cultural knowledge.

In the present study, incorporating Maryanto's legends into simulated tour guiding tasks allowed learners to contextualize their English use while developing cross-cultural storytelling strategies. As summarized in Table 1, such legends proved particularly effective when integrated into expressions used for describing sites and narrating cultural histories—an observation consistent with Kurniawati and Malasari's (2022) findings on the importance of local content in community-based ESP materials.

Table 1. Insertion of Telling Legends in Tour Guiding Activities

Types of Activities	Types of Expressions	Insertion of Telling Legends
Providing Information upon Arrival on the Way to Hotel	Welcoming tourists	
	Describing the location	√
	Introducing special events and offers	
	Offering advice	
	Closing remarks	
Beginning a Tour and Describing the Itinerary	Opening	
	Beginning the program	
	Describing the 1ˢᵗ, 2ⁿᵈ, 3ʳᵈ, and the last programs briefly	
Describing Points of Interest on the Tour Route		√
Describing Processes Used in Making Art Object		
Bargaining for Souvenir Price		
Describing Tourist Site		√

As shown in Table 1, storytelling activities involving legends are particularly relevant when tour guides provide information during the journey from the arrival point to the hotel—especially while explaining the surrounding area. They are also applicable when describing notable landmarks along the tour route and offering detailed explanations of specific tourist destinations.

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Cultural Literacy Gains Through Storytelling

Storytelling with Javanese legends facilitated students' development of cultural literacy by connecting abstract values to real places and customs. Students gained deeper insight into concepts like *gotong royong*, ecological harmony, and spiritual symbolism embedded in stories tied to heritage sites like Balekambang Park or Kauman Village.

This finding mirrors the conclusions of Affandi et al. (2023), who observed that narrative-based tourism instruction strengthens identity awareness and local cultural advocacy among students. Likewise, Rosyanafi et al. (2022) found that embedding local wisdom in tourism education reinforces emotional connection to community values and contributes to more ethical tourism practices.

The reflective journals in this study suggest that storytelling was not merely informative but transformative. Students began to view their cultural background as a communicative asset—consistent with findings by Fadirubun et al. (2024) on the role of place-based narratives in raising students' pride and motivation in ESP contexts. Compared with traditional textbook-based ESP teaching, the legend-based method produced deeper personal engagement and strengthened students' perceived ownership of their cultural identity.

Improvement in English Speaking Proficiency

Learners also demonstrated marked improvement in oral proficiency. Post-intervention data showed stronger fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and confidence. These improvements were most visible in peer-reviewed presentations, where students emulated real-world guide behaviors such as audience interaction and storytelling modulation.

These gains are consistent with the literature on storytelling as a communicative method in language learning. Ambarita et al. (2023) and Pratiwi and Rahman (2024) reported that storytelling in EFL contexts significantly enhances speaking performance, particularly in fluency and confidence. Belly et al. (2022) further note that when learners connect emotionally with content, their expressive delivery and vocabulary range expand.

The present study's use of culturally familiar stories appears to have lowered speaking anxiety and fostered authenticity in delivery—confirming Kristiawan et al.'s (2022) finding that digital storytelling using local content empowers students linguistically and emotionally. Table 2 captures the observed speaking improvements across five performance categories.

Table 2. Comparison of Students' Speaking Performance Before and After Storytelling Intervention

Speaking Component	Before Intervention	After Intervention	Observed Improvement
Fluency	Halting, frequent pauses	Smooth with minor pauses	Moderate to high
Pronunciation	Inconsistent articulation	Clearer pronunciation, better intonation	High
Vocabulary	Limited to basic tourism terms	More varied and culturally nuanced vocabulary	Moderate
Coherence & Structure	Disorganized storytelling	Better narrative flow with clear beginning, middle, end	High
Confidence	Hesitant, low eye	More expressive and audience-	High

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Speaking Component	Before Intervention	After Intervention	Observed Improvement
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These improvements highlight the value of merging content familiarity with communicative tasks. In contrast to traditional ESP role-plays, legend-based storytelling simulates authentic communicative events while fostering emotional connection and audience awareness—both essential in the tour guiding profession.

Pedagogical Challenges and Emerging Opportunities

Despite its success, the program faced notable challenges. These included the lack of English-translated legend texts, difficulty translating culturally embedded concepts, and the absence of standardized modules. These constraints resonate with issues identified by Sutiawati et al. (2022), who also highlighted the scarcity of local-themed EFL teaching resources.

However, such limitations spurred innovation. Students co-developed bilingual adaptations and used digital tools (e.g., Canva, video narration) to visualize their stories—similar to the methods documented in Rizvic et al. (2020) and Cahyani et al. (2023). Peer mentoring and scaffolded discussions addressed linguistic disparities, while lecturer-developed materials ensured coherence.

This flexible, student-centered approach mirrors the participatory models suggested by Legowo et al. (2023) and Kurniawati and Malasari (2022), where local wisdom becomes the framework for language learning, identity formation, and community engagement. Table 3 illustrates how these challenges were converted into pedagogical opportunities.

Table 3. Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Local Wisdom into ESP

Challenges	Opportunities/Solutions
Lack of accessible English versions of legends	Students created bilingual adaptations collaboratively
Difficulty translating cultural concepts	Group discussions and teacher scaffolding supported deeper understanding
Limited teaching materials or standardized lesson plans	Teachers developed custom storytelling modules and shared resources
Varying student English proficiency	Peer mentoring and performance-based feedback increased participation
Abstract cultural elements hard to express verbally	Use of digital storytelling tools (e.g., Canva, video narration)

Table 3 shows that while incorporating local wisdom into ESP instruction presented various teaching and language-related difficulties, these were successfully overcome through innovative, collaborative, and flexible approaches. The use of peer mentoring, lecturer-developed resources, and digital media helped resolve these challenges and simultaneously enhanced the overall learning experience—demonstrating the strengths of culturally rooted teaching methods in ESP settings.

Conclusion

This study examined the integration of Javanese legends into the *English for Tour Guiding Services* curriculum at Universitas Surakarta, with three objectives: exploring how storytelling

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fosters students' cultural awareness, assessing their English-speaking development, and identifying both the challenges and innovations involved in embedding local wisdom into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction.

The findings demonstrate that storytelling activities rooted in regional folklore significantly enhanced students' cultural literacy. By retelling legends linked to local history and geography, learners not only deepened their understanding of Javanese values but also strengthened their sense of cultural identity—an outcome echoed in recent studies emphasizing place-based narratives as tools for identity formation and heritage education (Affandi et al., 2023; Fadirubun et al., 2024).

In terms of language development, students showed notable improvements in speaking fluency, vocabulary range, pronunciation, coherence, and confidence. These gains align with prior research that highlights storytelling's potential to increase communicative competence and reduce speaking anxiety in ESP contexts (Ambarita et al., 2023; Pratiwi & Rahman, 2024). The emotional connection to the content enabled learners to speak more naturally and with greater audience awareness—key skills for future professional tour guides.

Despite its benefits, implementing this culturally embedded approach came with pedagogical and linguistic challenges. These included limited English versions of legends, translation difficulties, and varied student proficiency levels. However, these obstacles fostered creativity and collaboration. Students created bilingual adaptations, used digital tools to enhance storytelling, and worked in peer-supported environments—practices supported by recent scholarship on learner-centered, culturally responsive pedagogy (Kristiawan et al., 2022; Kurniawati & Malasari, 2022; Legowo et al., 2023).

Overall, the integration of local legends into ESP courses proved both feasible and pedagogically sound. It enabled learners to acquire practical language skills while simultaneously preserving and promoting cultural heritage. This approach not only supports national goals for character and cultural education but also prepares students to become culturally informed communicators in the tourism industry.

Future research could explore cross-cultural storytelling exchanges, the role of digital media in enhancing folklore-based ESP instruction, or the development of multilingual resources. For policymakers and curriculum developers, this study reinforces the value of systematically embedding regional narratives into English language instruction—supported by teacher training, resource development, and community partnerships. Training students to narrate their cultural heritage in English equips them to serve as authentic cultural ambassadors, linking Indonesia's local wisdom to a global audience.

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