



From the Eastern Tip of Sumatra: Bringing Local Wisdom to Life Through English-Language Films

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Abstract: This community service program was implemented in Secanggang Village, Langkat Regency, at the eastern tip of Sumatra, a region renowned for its rich Malay traditions. The initiative aimed to preserve and promote local wisdom by producing an English-language short film, while simultaneously enhancing the English proficiency and acting skills of the younger generation. Using a participatory, training-based approach, participants received practical instruction in English communication and performance, which they applied directly in film production. Supported by Arti Studio Creative Network, the program encompassed language training, acting workshops, and technical assistance in filmmaking. The 28-minute film highlighted key aspects of Malay culture, including the historical Datuk Secanggang House, the Tepak Sirih Dance, and traditional culinary practices, thereby blending cultural documentation with global communication. Evaluation results indicated notable improvements in participants' speaking confidence, acting ability, and cultural awareness. Beyond functioning as a work of visual art, the film served as a medium for language education, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. This activity demonstrates that local traditions can be creatively sustained through the integration of international languages and film. Future efforts should focus on sustained film production, broader community engagement, and optimized digital dissemination to ensure Malay cultural heritage from North Sumatra reaches a global audience.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Malay, Film, English, Community Service.

Introduction

Local wisdom is a crucial foundation for maintaining national identity and character amidst globalization. Local values, embodied in customs, traditions, and the arts, serve as a cultural strength that distinguishes one community from another. However, the rapid flow of globalization has the potential to threaten the existence of local cultures if not balanced with efforts to preserve and introduce them to the younger generation. Therefore, strengthening local wisdom and expanding its reach is urgently needed, particularly by utilizing media and language that are relevant to current developments (Nasution & Lubis, 2020).

Langkat Regency, located at the eastern tip of North Sumatra, is a region rich in Malay cultural heritage. Secanggang Village, the location of this activity, preserves various stories, traditions, and values of the Malay community that are still preserved to this day. However, reality shows that several obstacles remain in efforts to protect this culture, including limited documentation and media, a lack of understanding of cultural values among the younger generation, and the community's limited ability to use international languages for promotion. This situation results in local Malay wisdom in the region remaining largely unknown at both the national and international levels (Sari & Ahmad, 2022).

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Language is a crucial tool in communication, as noted by Efrizah et al., (2025). Language is more than just a means of communication; it embodies cultural identity, social hierarchy, and shared values. Therefore, language is critical to learn. Besides national languages, learning international languages is also equally important, one of which is English. In the context of globalization, English has a strategic role as a bridge of communication between nations. In line with this, Purwarno & Efrizah (2025) emphasize that English literature and language are not only tools of communication but also vehicles of cultural identity and critical reflection, making them highly relevant in cultural studies and preservation efforts. The use of English in introducing local culture can open up opportunities for cultural promotion to the international sphere while increasing the competitiveness of the younger generation. In line with that, film is a creative medium that has great appeal because it combines elements of language, visuals, and acting. Film can serve as a means of documenting and promoting culture that is more readily accepted by the wider community, including today's digital generation. Research by Yunus and Rahman (2023) shows that community-based films are effective in strengthening cultural identity and increasing community participation in preserving their cultural heritage.

Several previous community service activities have also demonstrated the success of strategies for strengthening local culture through creative approaches. For example, Huda and Widodo (2021) emphasized that the use of international languages in culture-based activities can help expand the reach of local values while enhancing the community's language capacity. Therefore, the integration of English language learning, acting, and film production can be seen as a relevant innovation to address the need to preserve and promote local wisdom.

Based on this description, the urgency of this activity lies in the importance of providing creative media that can document and promote local Malay wisdom in Secanggang Village through a language accessible to the global community. By directly involving the younger generation, this activity also serves as a means of empowerment, education, and character building.

The objectives of this community service program are:

1. To improve the English language skills of the younger generation,
2. To train the community's acting skills through a creative approach,
3. To produce an English-language short film that highlights the local Malay wisdom of Secanggang Village, the eastern tip of Sumatra, and

4. To expand access and promote local culture to a broader audience through digital media.

Method

1. Location and Time

This community service program was implemented in Secanggang Village, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra, a region known for its strong Malay cultural identity, located in one of the easternmost parts of Sumatra. The location was chosen based on the consideration that this village still maintains Malay traditional values, but has relatively little exposure at the national and international levels. Furthermore, the village is home to a Datuk house, a cultural heritage icon, and was chosen as the primary filming location.

The program lasted five months, from May to September 2025, encompassing preparation, training, film production, and evaluation. The preparation phase included coordination with partners, community outreach, and script development. The training phase lasted two months, focusing on English language skills and acting. The film production phase lasted one month, followed by post-production and evaluation.

2. Target Group

The majority of the target group for this activity consists of the youth of Langkat Regency, with a focus on young men and women from Secanggang, Stabat, and Tanjung Pura Villages, as well as young people from other areas who possess significant skills. The majority of participants are schoolchildren, university students, and community youth with an interest in arts and culture. This target group was selected based on the consideration that young people are important agents in cultural preservation and have a high potential for adapting to foreign languages and technology.

Furthermore, the general public was involved as audience members during the film's screening phase, providing input and appreciation for the work. Thus, this activity targets not only the individual actors but also the broader community as part of the cultural ecosystem.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques were carried out through several methods, namely:

- a. Participatory Observation, where the community service team directly observed participants' engagement during English language training, acting exercises, and the film production process.
- b. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants, trainers, and community leaders to

- determine their experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits during the activities.
- c. Questionnaires were distributed to participants after the activities to evaluate improvements in English language skills, acting confidence, and understanding of the cultural values promoted.
 - d. Documentation, in the form of video recordings, photos of activities, and field notes, was used to strengthen the data and serve as evidence of the program's sustainability.
4. Data Analysis
- The data collected were analyzed through a qualitative descriptive method. Observations, interviews, and documentation were examined to detail the training process, challenges faced, and achievements. Quantitative questionnaire data were analyzed using basic percentages to evaluate the progress in participants' English skills before and after the program.
- The analysis was conducted using the following steps:
- a. Data Reduction, which involved selecting important information relevant to the program's objectives.
 - b. Data Presentation, which involved grouping the data into themes: improvement in English skills, acting skills, and internalization of cultural values.
 - c. Conclusion Drawing, which was used to assess the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the community service objectives.
5. Data Presentation
- Data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, and visual documentation. Narration is used to explain the process and experiences of participants, and tables are used to display the results of the questionnaire evaluation. In contrast, visual documentation (photos and film clips) is used to enhance the presentation.
6. Tools and Materials
- This activity used several tools and materials, including:
- a. Audiovisual equipment, such as a digital camera, tripod, microphone, and lighting equipment to support film production.
 - b. Editing software, including video processing applications (Adobe Premiere Pro and DaVinci Resolve) for post-production.
 - c. English language training materials, in the form of simple conversation modules relevant to the film script.
 - d. Film props, including traditional Malay costumes and supporting equipment as needed for the scenes.
 - e. All of these tools and materials were provided by the community service team, with the support of

the creative community partner, Arti Studio Creative Network, which served as the film production coordinator.

Result and Discussion

1. Characteristics of Community Service Subjects
- This community service activity involved six main participants and six supporting participants, consisting of schoolchildren, university students, and adults. Most of them came from several sub-districts in Langkat Regency, namely Secanggang, Stabat, and Tanjung Pura. Participants were selected based on their interest in acting and their willingness to learn English as the primary medium in film.
- Participants ranged in age from 10 to 36 years old, representing the leading group of participants who spoke English, with diverse educational backgrounds ranging from elementary school to university. Based on initial interviews, two participants had good English skills, while four participants had intermediate skills. The remaining six supporting participants had lower proficiency. Although some had good skills, they still required intensive training to perform in English-language films, reflecting their respective roles effectively. In terms of artistic experience, five of the six main participants had no prior acting experience, while one had experience in arts/theater activities.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Main Participants in the Community Service Program

Participant Characteristics	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Age 10 years (school students)	2	33%
Age 19-25 years (university students)	3	50%
Age 36 years (adults)	1	16%
Good English proficiency	2	33%
Intermediate English proficiency	4	67%
No prior acting experience	5	83%
Previous experience in arts/theater	1	17%

This data shows that the majority of the prominent participants have minimal acting experience but are strongly motivated to learn. The involvement of people of all ages also demonstrates a spirit of togetherness in preserving local culture through film. Furthermore, the six supporting participants, who are children, also have no acting experience.

2. Results of Training and Film Production Activities
- a. English Training
- During the two-month training, participants were equipped with simple conversation skills,

pronunciation, and script comprehension. Based on the questionnaire evaluation, 80% of participants reported an improvement in their English skills, particularly in speaking confidence.



Figure 1. Discussion



Figure 2. English Training

b. Acting Training

Instructors from Arti Studio Creative Network facilitated the acting training. The training focused on facial expressions, gestures, intonation, and dialogue improvisation. Observations showed that approximately 70% of participants improved their character-expression skills, although some were still limited to mastering simple expressions.



Figure 3. English and Acting Training



Figure 4. English and Acting Training



Figure 5. English and Acting Training

c. Film Production

The film depicts the values of local Malay wisdom, represented through the Datuk House in Secanggang Village, which serves as the central feature of the story. This traditional house is not only a symbol of traditional Malay architecture but also holds important historical significance, particularly in relation to the events of the 1946 Social Revolution. The presence of the Datuk House provides an authentic feel and serves as a living witness to the historical journey of the Malay community in the eastern tip of Sumatra.



Figure 6. Datuk House



Figure 7. Shooting Preparation



Figure 8. Shooting Process



Figure 9. Shooting Process



Figure 10. Shooting Process



Figure 11. Shooting Process - Tepak Sirih Dance

The film also features the Tepak Sirih Dance (Offering Dance), a form of respect and a symbol of Malay hospitality. Through this dance, viewers are introduced to the etiquette and traditional values of welcoming guests, while also showcasing the beauty of Malay arts and culture.

Another local wisdom showcased is a variety of traditional Malay dishes, which reflect cultural identity and serve as a symbol of togetherness during traditional meals. This culinary representation demonstrates that food is not just for consumption, but also a means of maintaining relationships and strengthening social bonds.

The approximately 28-minute film uses English as its primary medium, with additional Indonesian subtitles. This aims to ensure the cultural message reaches an international audience without losing its local roots. The central filming location, Datuk Secanggang's house, reinforces the authentic feel of Malay culture, creating a meaningful historical atmosphere.

The results of this activity indicate that this community service program successfully achieved two main objectives:

1. Improved Community English Skills

Participants who initially had only basic English skills were able to understand simple scripts and convey them in a performing arts context. This aligns with findings (Sari & Nugraha, 2021), which state that contextual learning in English is more effective in improving communication skills.

2. Preserving local culture through creative media

Film, as a medium for cultural preservation, has proven effective in introducing local wisdom values to the younger generation. This aligns with the community service initiative (Rohimah et al., 2020), where the production of local documentaries raised public awareness of the importance of preserving traditions.

In terms of social benefits, this activity not only provided participants with new skills but also helped build their self-confidence. Participants felt greater pride in their local culture when they could convey it through

a global language. This finding aligns with the opinion of Handayani and Putra (2022), who emphasized that the collaboration between cultural preservation and foreign language proficiency is an appropriate strategy in the era of globalization.

However, several challenges were encountered, including limited training time, differences in individual abilities, and technical constraints in film production. Nevertheless, the involvement of creative community partners was a key factor in helping overcome these challenges.

The use of English in this film does not adopt a Malay accent. However, Malay culture remains a prominent presence, serving as the primary content communicated to a global audience. As Efrizah (2023) noted, the linguistic aspects of the Malay community reflect a cultural identity that deserves preservation. By presenting local Malay wisdom in an English-language film, this program demonstrates that cultural preservation does not always have to be done through regional languages, but can also be achieved through global languages that reach a wider audience. This finding aligns with Purwarno and Efrizah (2025), who emphasize that English literature and its performative traditions serve as a medium for cultural identity and critical reflection, allowing local heritage to be contextualized and communicated within global cultural dialogues.

Conclusion

The community service program "From the Eastern Tip of Sumatra: Bringing Local Wisdom to Life Through English-Language Films" was successfully carried out in Secanggang Village, Langkat Regency. The program achieved its dual objectives of enhancing English proficiency and preserving local Malay wisdom through participatory training and film production. Evaluation results indicated that approximately 80% of participants reported an improvement in English-speaking confidence, while around 70% demonstrated progress in acting skills, despite most having no prior performance experience. The resulting 28-minute film authentically showcased Malay heritage, including the Datuk Secanggang House as a cultural and historical icon, the Tepak Sirih Dance as a symbol of respect and hospitality, and traditional cuisine as an expression of identity and social bonds. Beyond documenting culture, the film functioned as an effective medium for contextual English learning, fostering participants' confidence and pride in representing their heritage. Overall, this initiative demonstrates that integrating language education, performing arts, and film media can serve as a powerful strategy for cultural

preservation, youth empowerment, and global promotion of local traditions.

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