INCORPORATING LOCAL WISDOM INTO CREATIVE WRITING: EXPLORING THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRAK

Telah banyak penelitian yang menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai kearifan lokal, secara umum, telah banyak bergeser dan bahkan cenderung tergerus. Dalam banyak hal, globalisasi menggeser persepsi para agen budaya masa kini atas pentingnya warisan nilai-nilai budaya yang luhur. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui dan memetakan posisi kearifan lokal dalam persepsi mahasiswa Program Studi S1 Sastra Inggris Universitas Brawijaya Malang. Hal ini dimaksudkan untuk melacak bagaimana mahasiswa mempersepsi pentingnya nilai-nilai kearifan lokal dan sejauh mana mereka meresapi nilai-nilai tersebut sebagai bagian dari konsepsi diri mereka, khususnya dalam konteks menulis kreatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran (mixed method), yaitu gabungan antara metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Pengambilan data kuantitatif dilakukan dengan cara menyebarkan kuesioner kepada 88 mahasiswa semester 5. Sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh dengan cara observasi kelas dan mencermati materi ajar dalam kelas creative writing. Meskipun sebagian besar mahasiswa sadar akan pentingnya nilai- nilai kearifan lokal, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada jarak (gap) antara kesadaran mahasiswa akan pentingnya pengetahuan kearifan lokal dalam menulis, dan akses mereka terhadap kearifan lokal itu sendiri. Bagi mereka, nilai-nilai kearifan lokal kurang cukup terjangkau (inaccessible). Oleh karena itu, mereka menganggap bahwa penting kiranya untuk memasukkan materi tentang kearifan lokal ke dalam mata kuliah creative writing.

Kata kunci: *persepsi, kearifan lokal, konsepsi diri, creative writing, identitas kultural*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is an era whereby the flow across cultures of ideas, goods, and people occurs at unprecedented speed, scope, and quantity. People around the world have established closer contacts over centuries, but the pace has dramatically increased in recent decades. The communications revolution through cheap telephone services, televisions, computers especially internet has made the world what McLuhan (1964) term a global village. Modernization, as a direct impact of globalization, affects all aspects of people's life, not to mention people in Indonesia.

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With regard to culture, scholars have different views over the impact of globalization. To some, globalization is viewed as conductive condition to culture homogenization (see Ritzer, 1993). While for others (Castells, 1997; Tomlinson, 2003), globalization is viewed as the harbinger of cultural identity. Those who advocate the latter view believe that people are not mere objects of cultural influences, but subjects who can reject or integrate culture (Wang, 2007). Regardless of this heated debate, in the context of Indonesia, it has to be admitted that modernization has in some ways shifted the values of local wisdom among adolescents, in this case college students. Nurturing cultural identity among students is not an easy task. Arnett (2000) observes that adolescence may be a time of life with a noticeable openness to diverse cultural beliefs and behaviours. Adolescents, in many ways, have not yet settled on particular beliefs and behaviours. Moreover, globalization makes them increasingly have exposure to different cultures and a global world. Therefore, cultural identity development becomes a more complex process.

In a cultural paradigm, higher education institution should be one of the places to nurture one's identity. University is a place to generate young generations equipped with an inquiring mind, open-minded outlook, constructive attitude and wisdom that are compatible to the values of local wisdom adhered by the concerned community (Meliono, 2011). These local wisdom values in turn become the crucial aspect of students' cultural identity formation. In the case of English literature course, creative writing provides a means of cultural identity formation by incorporating local wisdom values. To reach this goal, then it becomes an urgent need that requires planning, formulating and constructing a more ideal learning process. Why should we consider this? Because, an education system should ideally be founded on a certain culture, in this case Indonesian culture which comes from the minds of Indonesian society, a culture that symbolizes consciousness toward Indonesian cultural identity. Consequently, there is a need to form a more adaptive curriculum as a crucial factor to reach the goal of directing students to embracing the values of local wisdom and hence constructing their cultural identity.

Creative writing can be regarded as the process of shaping the self as it tries to piece together or, in other words, "re-member" fragments of recollections from the past, of haunting guilt and traumas, of beautiful dreams and aspirations and that identity, far from being a fixed and essentialised entity, is, rather, an endless and unfinished process filled with clashes and conflicts (Nalbantian, 2003).

The study of questionnaire revealed some valuable findings. Students think that local wisdom provides significant influences in generating imagination needed for inspiration to write. They also think that it becomes an urgent need for materials containing local wisdom to be incorporated into creative writing subject or into the curriculum of English literature course. This effort can be done by incorporating subjects focusing on local novelists concerned with local cultures in their works. More elaborated discussion about this will be given in the following section.

This study examines the perception of English Literature students at Brawijaya University Indonesia towards the significance of cultural identity and how it is developed through creative writing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

(Indonesian) Cultural Identity

Whiting and Child (1953) described the relation between cultural beliefs and practices as a "custom complex" that consists of customary practices and of the beliefs, values, sanctions, rules, motives, and satisfactions associated with it (quoted in Jensen et al., 2011, p. 286). Forming a cultural identity involves adopting the beliefs and practices – the custom complexes – of one or more cultural communities (Jensen, 2003). Is it necessary to form or to preserve cultural identity? Does cultural identity really exist? Isn't it a mere imaginary construction? These questions are frequently probed and hotly debated among academics. Answering these questions is not an easy task to deal with. Indeed, a notable scholar like Tomlinson (1999) argues that cultural identity is much more the product of globalization than its victim. Identity is considered to be a mere contemporary cultural imagination, just like nationalism which is the product of nation-state emergence that flowered since the eighteenth century. But, here we want to assert that cultural identity is more than a sheer national identity. The former is different from the latter. Cultural identity, insofar it is simply understood as national identity – nationality – is indeed a modern imagining. An imagining that emerged after *Nusantara* became a nation-state after independence.

However, in the context of Indonesia, what we mean by cultural identity is not a single unified identity. Indonesia consists of hundreds of distinct native ethnic and linguistic groups (http://www.ethnologue.com/country/ID) and also various cultures of the western, central and eastern parts of the country. The regional cultures that are cultivated by the ethnics in the Indonesian archipelago feature unique as well as original patterns, characteristics, values and particular symbols that are originated from the local wisdom adhered by the concerned communities. The long-rooted influences of foreign cultures of India, China, Arab, Dutch and others have coloured the developing ethnic cultures of Indonesia. The current Indonesian culture that we know today is in fact formed through a long process. It has experienced many changes and modifications through various interpretations and understanding of the locals, some are omitted, and some are preserved. In other words, Indonesian culture that we are now familiar with has undergone a dynamic and eclectic process started long before the emergence of Indonesia as a nation-state.   From the discussion outlined above, we argue that Indonesian cultural identity is inclusive; it can be understood as the embodiment of two dimensions at the same time. Indonesian cultural identity is not exclusive to one's own cultural background (Javanese, Bugis, Betawi, Papua, etc), but instead includes the multicultural status of the whole Indonesia without negating the diversity and uniqueness of each culture that constitute the Indonesian cultural identity. So when we talk about Indonesian cultural identity, it includes Javanese, Bugis, Betawi, Sundanese, Bataknese etc. or the other way around. All in one, one includes all. As manifested in the philosophy of the nation *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* which means unity in diversity.

Local Wisdom and its Existence in Indonesia

In general, local wisdom can be understood as local ideas that are thoughtful, wise, decent, embedded and followed by the members of the community. Local wisdom is a product (ideas, beliefs, practices) of culture of the people related to the environment and human based on Godliness, humanity, and the environment that are fused in such a way so as to ensure the harmony between human and the nature (Hamad, 2011). Local wisdom is generated from decent past cultures that should be consistently adhered as a way of life. Though locally generated but the values contained in it are considered universal.

The existence of local wisdom is not without function. Local wisdom contains values that are very essential. Sartini (2004) argues that the local wisdom in Indonesia serves as, among others, conservation and preservation of natural resources, ethical and moral guide, source of advice, beliefs, literature and abstinence and also for the development of culture and knowledge.

Human intelligence, in a way, constructs knowledge in quite a long and complicated process. Knowledge then becomes the prime fabrication and potential expression in developing local and global civilization which will give a big impact to the formation of human nature. Undeniably, knowledge becomes one of the prime foundations for human civilization. Through that knowledge, as a result, human has enabled himself to a civilization and given something beneficial for the fulfilment of his nature, existence, dignity and culture. The knowledge, possessed by ethnic communities throughout Indonesia, is one of the strong basic points of the local wisdom in Indonesia.

In the context of Indonesia, therefore local wisdom can be understood as a form of expression of the ethnic communities in Indonesia, out of which, the people do their activities and behave accordingly. This means that the local wisdom in Indonesia is a compilation of ethnic cultures, a process expressed in the lives of the people through learning process. Meliono (2011), observes that there are three basic elements which constitute the sources of local wisdom in Indonesia, namely empirical aspects, characteristics of knowledge and symbols of culture which include arts and literatures. One interesting point to note here is, in the context of Indonesia, when local wisdom is confronted with the sense of nationalism. As described above, local wisdom emerged as a result of long dialectical process between the individuals and the environment. Often, the local wisdom is rooted from our ancestors long before the emergence of Indonesia as a nation-state after independence. However, as proven from many cases in many different places, the dialectical process seems to continuously take place, even to this day. Hence, Local wisdom describes the way people behave and act in response to changes in the scope of the physical environment and distinctive culture (Affandy & Wulandari, 2012).

Picture 1:

Opak-opak Tradition in Dusun Rambaan, Klandungan village, Malang – East Java

(Source: Sri Herminingrum, 2013)

The photographs above depict opak-opak traditional ceremony held yearly in Klandungan village, Malang - East Java. The ceremony is conducted as a ritual for saying grace to nature and to the Devine being. This practice is handed down from the people's ancestors and is continuously carried out over generations up to the present day. The photographs show us how the local wisdom has fused in harmony with the symbol of nationalism (red and white flag of Indonesia) and even with the symbol of globalization (notice how the dishes, food and fruits are wrapped with plastic, a relatively new practice). More importantly, this traditional ceremony serves as social integration, religious practices and at the same time for ethical and moral guide. These positive values should be maintained and preserved.

Adolescents and the Quest for Identity

Adolescence is a stage of human development that is the most unique, dynamics and full of challenges and expectations. Steinberg (1993), states that at this stage, they experience some fundamental changes including their cognitive aspects as well as their social networks. With regard to change in cognitive aspect, adolescents have reached the formal operational stage. At this time, adolescents undergo major changes in the way they understand many things they encounter in their life and become more critical in responding what happen around them.

Adolescence is also a stage where the expansion of their social networks is accelerated, moreover those who go to university. In the university, they meet people from different social and cultural backgrounds and also different interests. Here, transfer of ideas takes place freely and openly.

Furthermore, globalization along with all its aspects carries significant effect to the process of cultural identity formation in adolescence. With respect to this, Schlegel notes that:

> The influence of globalization on cultural identity formation may be particularly salient in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Media such as television, movies, music, and the Internet contribute to the rapid and extensive spread of ideas across cultures, and adolescents and emerging adults have more of an interest in popular and media culture compared to children or adults. (Schlegel, in Jensen et al. 2011, p. 287)

http://jurnal.unimus.ac.id

A fast pace revolution in the field of communication seems inevitable. It changes our life radically. So many changes come about in such a short time that we could not even really understand what happen to us. Our life becomes truly much more comfortable than ever before. We receive information (news, films, music, etc.) faster and easier than ever before. We can reach anyone anywhere in an instant. However, as in many cases, the communication revolution is like a double-edged sword. The bombardment of ideas across cultures through television programs, movies and the internet is so massive and inevitable. And in many cases, youngsters are not yet ready to absorb those ideas. Consequently, they are trapped into what Erikson (1968) term identity confusion. Some successfully pass this stage and some others fail.

This identity confusion might happen because adolescents are assumed to be adaptable to changes. Adolescence may be a time of life with a very salient openness to diverse cultural beliefs and behaviours. In many ways, they have not yet settled on particulars beliefs and behaviours (Arnett 2000, in Jansen et al. 2011, p. 287).

Creative Writing and the Process of Identity Construction
In an attempt to understand the parallels between the process of writing and the process of identity construction, it is essential to have an overview of the concepts of writing and the concepts of identity.

Writing can be seen as a form of communication which is composed of three factors: the message, the sender and the receiver. Traditionally, these three units are often viewed as mutually exclusive: the sender, the active agent, writes in order to convey the message to the passive receiver. However, as studies on the relationship between literature and culture, especially in postcolonial texts, tend to point out, such a communicative model can be deemed simplistic and insufficient as it is unable to account for the fact that the author and the reader are likely to think, write and read from their position in the cultural context to the extent that it is, in fact, the culture itself which speaks and interprets what an individual perceives of the world. Roland Barthes (in Makaryk, 1993), asserts the idea that the author does not have a privileged position in determining the meaning of his or her work. It can be concluded, therefore, that the surrounding culture is the fourth element, playing a significant part in the construction of identity or narrations of identity.

Taking such concepts of writing into consideration, the concept of identity and the process of identity construction can be seen in terms of a narrative, as Sarup lucidly explains:

> When considering someone's identity, there is necessarily a process of selection, emphasis and consideration of the effect of social dynamics such as class, nation, 'race', ethnicity, gender and religion. I think we all link these dynamics and organise them into a narrative: if you ask someone about their identity, a story soon appears. (Sarup, 1996)

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There have been some research findings which show how globalization affects adolescents' identity development in such key areas as sexuality, marriage, work and moral values (Griffin, 1993; Dubsky, 1995; Nilan, 1999)   . One of the valuable works in light of this issue is done by Chang (2008). Chang observes that in Guangdong province, one of China's titanic manufacturing bases, a mass movement of "factory girls" in their late-teens to mid-twenties streams from rural villages to cities to work. In the process, their lives are changed in myriad ways as some attend English classes, some become escorts for wealthy businessmen, and many increasingly emphasize self-reliance while also sending hard-earned money back home.

Likewise, the impact of globalization on adolescents' cultural identity development is also salient in Indonesia. Kaparang (2013) notes how adolescents in Manado imitate Korean pop culture that is currently very popular in the community. The Korean pop culture is imitated more in term of its fashion. In their daily lives, they are without a doubt dressed like a teenage Korean or Korean artists. Kaparang argues that the process of changing and imitating against Korean pop culture is snowballed by the rapid development of technology and information through the mass media, especially through television, movies and the internet.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study attempts to gather empirical data on how the students perceive the significance of local wisdom values and how far they internalize the values as part of their self-concept. Hence, to reach that end, this study combines quantitative and qualitative method. Sukmadinata (2008: 130) asserts that although the two methods hold different assumption and different basic principles from one another, many scholars embrace a more pragmatic view seeing that the two methods can be mixed. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, there is no point of disputing the choice of one over the other as they actually complement each other.
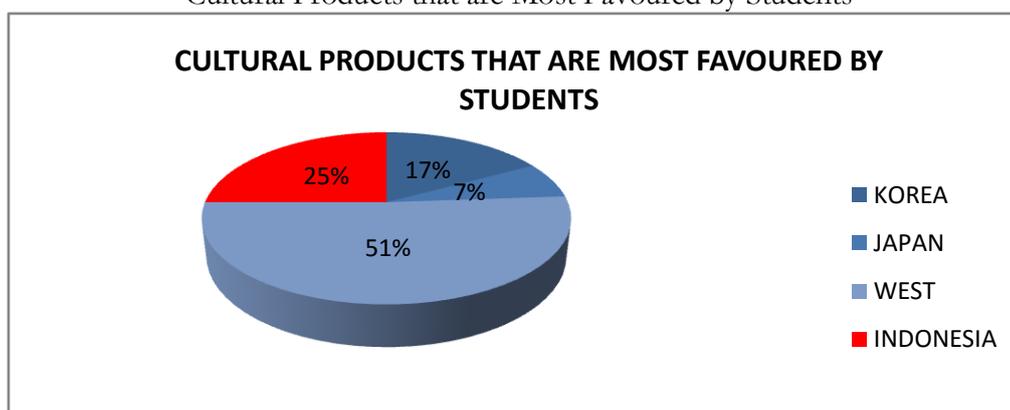
The quantitative data in this study were collected through questionnaires involving 88 students of the fifth semester who attended creative writing class offered in that semester. The questionnaires were distributed in the first week of December 2013, at the end of odd semester. These respondents were chosen for the study as they had just completed the creative writing course and they might be entitled to give evaluation to the course they had taken. The quantitative data were then synthesized with the qualitative data obtained through class observation and the scrutiny of teaching materials.

The questionnaire contains 10 questions (see the appendix) and it was designed in such a way as to map the position of local wisdom in the students' perception and also to disclose how their experience over the accessible cultures helped them shape imagination needed for writing. The results of the questionnaire will be presented in the form of charts containing the percentage of each answer and followed by qualitative discussion (resulted from the synthesis between quantitative and qualitative data) for each of the charts. Here, we will present four charts assumed to represent the whole picture of the result of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines our attempt to map and to locate the position of local wisdom in the perception of English Literature Department students of Universitas Brawijaya. It is aimed to trace how the students perceive the significance of local wisdom values and how far they internalize the values as part of their self-concept.

Figure 1:
Cultural Products that are Most Favoured by Students

The above chart is the result showing cultural products that are most favoured by the students. The students were asked to choose one country out of four options, i.e. South Korea, Japan, the West, Indonesia, of which the cultural products they favour the most. As already predicted, the result shows that most students favour the products of Western cultures the most. This is not surprising given that first, they are students of English Literature, and second, our mass media is always swamped by the products of Western cultures. They are exposed to them day and night, moreover with the easy access to the internet. This makes them easy to access the products of Western cultures like movies, music, fashion, lifestyle etc.

The TV industry personnel also capture this youngsters' tendency by reproducing TV programs like reality show, singing contest, cooking talent show etc. that mimic similar programs of the Western TVs. And again not surprising, these programs always reap success. From the chart, we can also see that Indonesia comes second, accounting for 25% of the total students, ahead of students who chose Korea and Japan with 17% and 7% respectively. This finding is somewhat a relief considering the cultural products of South Korea and Japan have been mushrooming Indonesia.

Figure 2:
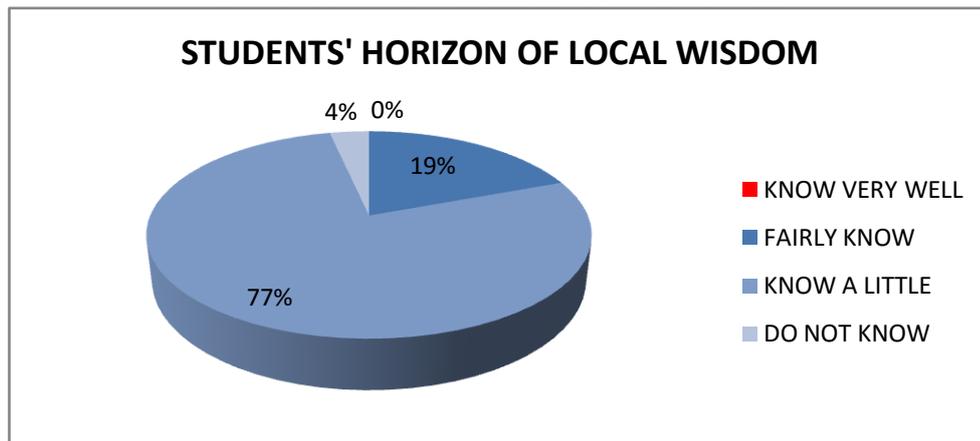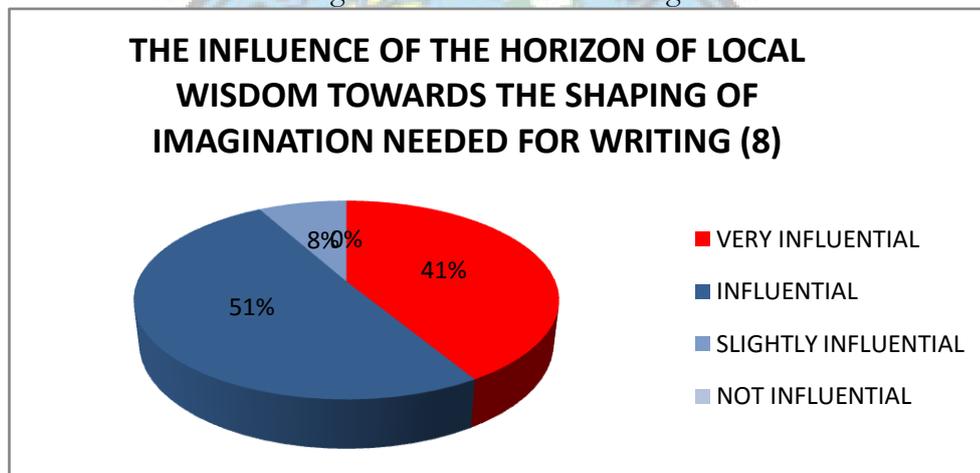Level of Students' Horizon of Local Wisdom

STUDENTS' HORIZON OF LOCAL WISDOM

4% 0%
19%
77%

- KNOW VERY WELL
- FAIRLY KNOW
- KNOW A LITTLE
- DO NOT KNOW

Figure 3:
The Influence of the Horizon of Local Wisdom towards the Shaping of
Imagination Needed for Writing

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HORIZON OF LOCAL
WISDOM TOWARDS THE SHAPING OF
IMAGINATION NEEDED FOR WRITING (8)

8% 0%
41%
51%

- VERY INFLUENTIAL
- INFLUENTIAL
- SLIGHTLY INFLUENTIAL
- NOT INFLUENTIAL

Myriad exposure of accessible culture is said to influence what and how people think. In line with this, Oyserman asserts that:
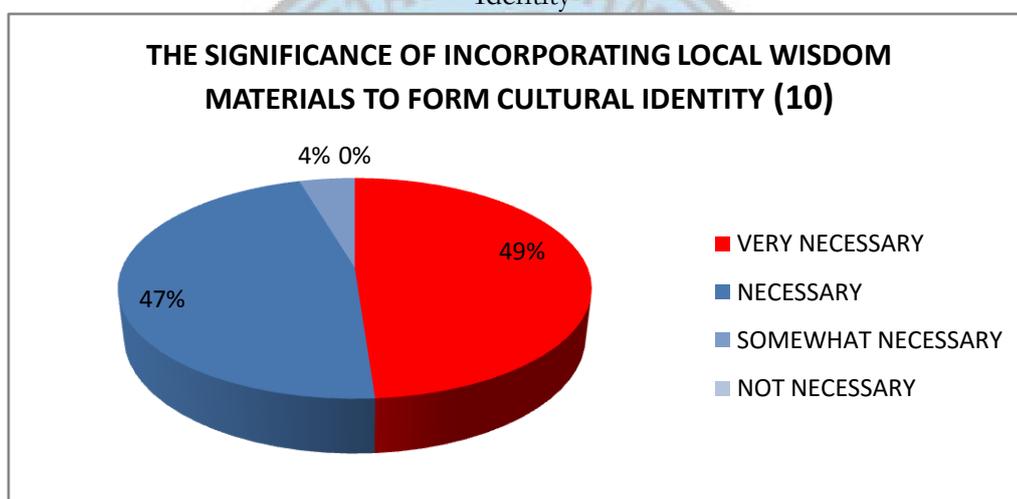
> … one of the ways in which meaning is organized in context is through the meaning provided by salient and accessible culture (operationalized as individualism and collectivism) and that once a particular cultural focus is cued, it is likely to carry with it relevant goals, motives, actions, ways of interpreting information, and processing strategies. (Oyserman, 2008)

The chart in figure 3 tells us something valuable about students' perception of the Indonesian local wisdom and how their horizon of this local wisdom helps to shape imagination needed for writing. The chart shows us that 41% out of 88 students believe that their horizon of the local wisdom is very much influential in

generating fresh and original ideas in writing. Whereas, 51% of them think the local wisdom is influential, 8% of them think it somehow affects the way and what they write and none of them consider local wisdom has no effect in writing. This result reflects that the students are actually aware of the significance of local wisdom in writing, and it confirms what Oyserman asserts above. Students are aware that their conscious experience of Indonesian local wisdom, given it is sufficiently accessible, is very essential and is directive to what and how they write.

But, notice that the awareness depicted in figure 3 is not in line with what is shown in figure 2. Here, asked how far they knew about the values of local wisdom, the majority of the students answered, only knew a little. This fact tells us that there is a gap between the students' awareness of the significance of local wisdom horizon in writing and their access to the local wisdom per se. The local wisdom is not sufficiently accessible for them. This gap has to be bridged; it is what needs to be considered by the stakeholders, we as lecturers.

Figure 4:
The Significance of Incorporating Local Wisdom Materials to Form Cultural Identity

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INCORPORATING LOCAL WISDOM MATERIALS TO FORM CULTURAL IDENTITY (10)

4% 0%

49%

47%

- VERY NECESSARY
- NECESSARY
- SOMEWHAT NECESSARY
- NOT NECESSARY

Aware that knowledge of local wisdom can lead to the emergence of fresh and original ideas needed for writing, most students find it very necessary for the local wisdom materials to be incorporated in creative writing course. As we can see from figure 4, this tendency accounts for 49% of the 88 students. Only slightly less than the top tendency is the number of students who find it necessary for the incorporation which accounts for 47% of the total students. Then, only 4% of them who find it fairly necessary and none of them think the incorporation is not necessary. To sum up, this chart reflects the aspiration of the students of the need to incorporate local wisdom materials in creative writing course.

EFFORT THAT CAN BE DONE: SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

Literacy practices are believed to be useful in constructing one's identity which in turn contributes significantly to development of firm individual personality characterized by the values of local wisdom. In a cultural paradigm, creative writing is perceived to be capable of providing a means of cultural identity formation by incorporating local wisdom. This assumption is justified by the results of this study. It was revealed that most students believe that their knowledge of the local wisdom will greatly assist them in generating fresh and original ideas required for writing. However, their awareness is not supported by the fact that their knowledge of the local wisdom is minimal because they lack access to it. Therefore they aspire for the need to incorporate materials containing local wisdom values in creative writing course.

One of the efforts that can be done is, among others, incorporating the study of novels (or other literary works) written by Indonesian authors that contain some values of local wisdom. One good example is probably a novel by Ahmad Tohari (1982), *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*. This celebrated work of Tohari is known to exploit not only figurative language and imagery with uniqueness and idiosyncrasy but also some dimensions of local wisdom values. The values are, among others, wise attitude facing the wrong doers, living the life in fairness and predetermination of human lives by God. These values have long lived in Javanese culture. Other novels that contain local wisdom values include *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijk* by Hamka, *Para Priyayi* by Umar Kayam and many others.

Finally, we argue that the incorporation of local wisdom in creative writing class is an effort of cultural identity contestation against cultural globalization with all its facets. We might not win however, but we have to set the armour.

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