

# Integrated Torajan Indigenous Culture in English For Tourism Course

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**Abstract:** This study explores the integration of Torajan indigenous culture into an English for Tourism (EFT) course to contextualize language learning while promoting cultural identity. Using a qualitative research and development (R&D) approach, cultural elements such as Rambu Solo', Rambu Tuka', Tongkonan houses, and Torajan proverbs were embedded into communicative English modules. Data were collected through needs analysis, interviews with lecturers and students, and pilot implementation. The findings indicate that integrating Torajan cultural content improves students' tourism-related vocabulary, enhances motivation, and strengthens intercultural competence, while also reinforcing cultural pride. Challenges include limited availability of English-language materials on Toraja and the need for lecturer training in culturally responsive pedagogy. The study concludes that embedding indigenous culture in EFT fosters both global communication skills and sustainable cultural tourism.

**Keywords:** English for Tourism, Torajan Indigenous Culture, ESP, Intercultural Competence, Sustainable Tourism

## Introduction

Tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, generating employment, fostering intercultural encounters, and contributing to sustainable development. In Indonesia, tourism is not only an economic engine but also a platform for cultural diplomacy, as visitors are drawn to the nation's rich diversity of traditions, landscapes, and indigenous practices (Richards, 2018). Within this context, language proficiency, particularly English as the lingua franca of international tourism, plays a pivotal role in enabling local communities to communicate effectively with international visitors. However, language alone is insufficient; effective communication in tourism requires an integration of cultural knowledge that allows guides, students, and practitioners to explain local traditions with accuracy, sensitivity, and pride (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

In language education, this necessity has been reflected in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and more specifically English for Tourism (EFT). EFT courses are designed to provide learners with communicative skills relevant to professional tourism contexts, such as handling reservations, conducting guided tours, and describing cultural

attractions (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Yet, one limitation of conventional EFT curricula is their reliance on generic, decontextualized content that prioritizes standardized scenarios (e.g., hotel check-ins, airport interactions) while neglecting the local cultural heritage that learners must present to international tourists. This disconnection often leads to a lack of authenticity in language learning, reducing learners' ability to function effectively in real-world tourism contexts.

The call for integrating local wisdom into education has grown in recent years, particularly in multicultural societies such as Indonesia. Local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) represents the values, rituals, and practices that shape communal life and identity, passed down across generations (Sulastri, 2021). In education, embedding local wisdom has been shown to enhance student engagement, contextualize learning, and strengthen identity formation (Hidayat & Rahman, 2022). In language education, such integration not only enriches vocabulary and communication skills but also promotes intercultural competence, defined as the ability to interpret and relate cultural meanings in interaction with others (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2020). However, scholars have cautioned that local wisdom must be presented with depth and accuracy; otherwise, there is a risk of reducing it to surface-level folklore that entertains but does not truly educate (Zulkarnain, 2021).

Toraja, located in South Sulawesi, provides a compelling case for such integration. Internationally recognized for its spectacular funeral ceremonies (*Rambu Solo'*), thanksgiving rituals (*Rambu Tuka'*), iconic Tongkonan houses, wood carvings, and strong communal traditions, Toraja attracts thousands of domestic and international tourists annually. Its cultural wealth is not only an economic asset but also a vital expression of indigenous identity. Despite this, communication barriers often arise when local students or guides attempt to explain Torajan traditions to foreign visitors, due to limited English proficiency and the absence of culturally integrated teaching materials (Suryani, 2021). This gap underscores the urgent need to embed Torajan indigenous culture into English for Tourism courses, so that learners can communicate their heritage in English with accuracy and confidence.

Previous studies on the integration of indigenous knowledge in education have largely focused on character education, civic learning, or general cultural preservation (Rahmawati, 2020; Gay, 2018). Few studies have specifically examined how lecturers of English for Tourism select and integrate types of indigenous culture into their courses. Moreover, there remains limited research on what kinds of Torajan cultural elements—rituals, architecture, oral traditions, arts, or daily practices—are actually incorporated into EFT curricula, and how these choices reflect both pedagogical goals and tourism realities. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to investigate the types of Torajan indigenous culture integrated by lecturers in English for Tourism courses. By identifying and analyzing the categories of cultural elements embedded in classroom instruction, the study seeks to contribute to both theoretical discussions on culturally responsive pedagogy and practical strategies for sustainable tourism education. The significance of this research lies in its potential to demonstrate how indigenous knowledge can be systematically harnessed to

enrich ESP teaching, bridge communication gaps in tourism, and foster intercultural understanding.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to identify and analyze the types of Torajan indigenous culture integrated by lecturers into English for Tourism (EFT) courses. A qualitative approach was chosen because it provides rich, contextualized insights into the ways lecturers conceptualize and incorporate cultural elements into classroom practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The research was conducted at a higher education institution located in Tana Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, an area well known for its cultural tourism. English for Tourism is a compulsory subject for students enrolled in the tourism and hospitality program at this institution.

Participants consisted of three English lecturers selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- Currently teaching the English for Tourism course.
- Familiarity with Torajan indigenous culture (through academic study, community involvement, or heritage).
- Willingness to participate in interviews, classroom observations, and document sharing.
- All lecturers had between five and twelve years of teaching experience and were directly involved in the curriculum design of the EFT program.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted over a period of three months (April–June 2025) and included the following methods:

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

- Each lecturer participated in one 60–90 minute interview.
- The interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions (Appendix A) covering:
  - types of Torajan indigenous culture integrated, rationale for selecting those cultural elements, strategies for adapting them to English instruction.
- Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

#### **Classroom Observations**

A total of six classroom sessions were observed (two per lecturer).

Observations focused on the cultural content introduced, teaching methods employed, and student engagement with cultural topics.

A standardized observation protocol (Appendix B) was used to ensure consistency. Field notes were taken systematically, supplemented with photographs of classroom materials when permitted.

### **Document Analysis**

Course syllabi, lesson plans, PowerPoint slides, and sample student assignments were collected.

Documents were reviewed to identify explicit references to Torajan cultural content (rituals, architecture, oral traditions, etc.).

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-step process:

- Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and notes.
- Generation of initial codes corresponding to cultural elements mentioned.
- Organization of codes into broader categories (rituals, architecture, arts, oral traditions, social practices).
- Review and refinement of themes across all data sources.
- Definition and naming of themes.
- Production of the final narrative with representative quotations from lecturers.

Coding was conducted manually using Microsoft Word and Excel spreadsheets. To ensure reliability, two researchers independently coded 30% of the data and achieved an inter-coder agreement of 92%.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Overview of Findings**

The analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and teaching documents revealed that lecturers integrated five main types of Torajan indigenous culture into English for Tourism (EFT) courses:

- Rituals and Ceremonies
- Traditional Architecture
- Arts and Handicrafts
- Oral Traditions and Proverbs
- Social Practices and Daily Life

These categories reflect both tangible and intangible heritage, consistent with UNESCO's (2003) framework for cultural heritage. The following subsections present each type, with illustrative examples and interpretive discussion.

#### **1. Rituals and Ceremonies**

Lecturers most frequently integrated Rambu Solo' (funeral ceremonies) and Rambu Tuka' (thanksgiving rituals) into classroom activities. These were used as:

- Speaking tasks: Students practiced explaining the sequence of a Rambu Solo' to international tourists.

- Reading texts: Articles about Torajan rituals were assigned for vocabulary enrichment.
- Writing exercises: Students wrote short guides describing how rituals attract tourists.
- Discussion: Rituals were prioritized because they are Toraja's most recognized cultural attractions. This aligns with Suryani (2021), who noted that international visitors often associate Toraja primarily with Rambu Solo'. However, the challenge, as highlighted by Rahmawati (2020), is to present rituals in a way that respects their spiritual meaning rather than reducing them to tourist entertainment.

## 2. Traditional Architecture

The Tongkonan, Toraja's ancestral house, was consistently used as instructional material. Lecturers employed:

- Visual prompts (photos, slides) for descriptive speaking activities.
- Role-play where students guided "tourists" in explaining the symbolic carvings.
- Vocabulary tasks focusing on architectural terms (roof, pillars, carvings).
- Discussion: Architecture provides tangible, visual resources that facilitate language teaching. Gay (2018) emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy using familiar symbols to anchor new knowledge. Integrating the Tongkonan also supports identity preservation, echoing Sulastris's (2021) finding that local wisdom integration strengthens cultural pride.

## 3. Arts and Handicrafts

Lecturers included wood carvings, weaving patterns, and traditional dances as examples of Torajan creativity. Students learned:

- English terms for common patterns and motifs.
- How to describe souvenir items to foreign visitors.
- Short dialogues about traditional performances.
- Discussion: Incorporating arts bridges tourism communication with cultural appreciation. Since international tourists frequently purchase crafts or attend performances, this content equips students with practical vocabulary. It also highlights indigenous creativity as part of sustainable tourism, consistent with Richards (2018).

## 4. Oral Traditions and Proverbs

Torajan proverbs and expressions were integrated into translation and interpretation activities. For instance:

- Students translated sayings about kinship and communal work (mapalus) into English.
- They compared Torajan proverbs with English equivalents (e.g., "many hands make light work").
- Discussion: This practice develops interpretive and comparative skills, central to intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). However, proverbs were less frequently used than rituals or architecture, possibly due to the difficulty of translating

culturally embedded meanings. Lecturers acknowledged that more scaffolding is needed for students to grasp metaphorical language.

#### 5. Social Practices and Daily Life

Some lecturers integrated farming, buffalo rearing, and communal labor systems (mapalus) into speaking and writing tasks. Students explained these practices as part of eco-tourism experiences.

Discussion: Although less emphasized than rituals or architecture, daily practices connect language learning with sustainability and everyday authenticity. This responds to the critique of over-focusing on “spectacular” rituals (Zulkarnain, 2021), showing that lecturers are beginning to diversify the types of cultural content.

### Comparative Analysis

A comparative review shows that:

- Rituals and architecture were the most dominant, appearing in nearly every lecturer's materials.
- Arts and proverbs were moderately integrated.
- Social practices were least emphasized.
- This pattern suggests that lecturers tend to select highly visible, iconic aspects of culture (rituals, Tongkonan), likely because these are most familiar to tourists. However, subtler aspects such as oral traditions and daily practices, though less used, offer valuable opportunities for developing intercultural depth and sustainable tourism perspectives.

### Synthesis and Implications

Overall, the findings reveal that lecturers integrate a broad but uneven spectrum of Torajan indigenous culture into EFT courses. The dominance of rituals and architecture risks narrowing students' cultural repertoire, but the inclusion of arts, proverbs, and social practices indicates progress toward a holistic approach.

Pedagogical implications:

- Lecturers need to balance iconic and everyday culture, ensuring students can communicate both spectacular and ordinary aspects of Toraja.
- Curriculum developers should provide structured modules that guide lecturers in integrating diverse cultural domains.
- Student exposure to oral traditions and proverbs should be increased, as these foster intercultural interpretive skills crucial for tourism contexts.
- These findings contribute to the broader discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy, showing that indigenous culture can enrich ESP/EFT courses by enhancing authenticity, motivation, and intercultural competence, while also supporting the sustainability of cultural tourism.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the types of Torajan indigenous culture integrated by lecturers into English for Tourism (EFT) courses. The analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and teaching documents identified five categories of indigenous culture consistently embedded in instruction:

- Rituals and Ceremonies (Rambu Solo', Rambu Tuka').
- Traditional Architecture (Tongkonan ancestral houses and symbolic carvings).
- Arts and Handicrafts (wood carvings, weaving, traditional dances).
- Oral Traditions and Proverbs (sayings on kinship and cooperation).
- Social Practices and Daily Life (farming, buffalo rearing, communal work or mapalus).

Among these, rituals and architecture were most frequently emphasized, reflecting their visibility in tourism contexts. Arts, proverbs, and social practices were less integrated, suggesting a tendency for lecturers to privilege iconic aspects of culture over everyday practices. This imbalance risks narrowing students' cultural repertoire, yet the inclusion of all five categories demonstrates lecturers' efforts toward a holistic and culturally grounded EFT curriculum.

The study concludes that embedding Torajan indigenous culture in EFT enriches language learning with authentic, contextualized materials. It also strengthens students' cultural identity and prepares them to explain their heritage to international visitors. However, for this integration to achieve its full potential, more balanced coverage of cultural types and enhanced lecturer preparation are required.

By identifying the types of Torajan indigenous culture integrated into English for Tourism courses, this study highlights the role of local wisdom as both a linguistic resource and a cultural bridge in preparing students for global communication. The findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive language education that respects indigenous identity while equipping learners with the skills needed for the international tourism industry.

Future research should expand the integration of indigenous culture in English for Tourism by involving multiple cultural contexts across Indonesia to compare effectiveness, developing digital learning resources to overcome material scarcity, and conducting longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts on students' professional readiness. Practically, universities and tourism stakeholders are advised to strengthen lecturer training in culturally responsive pedagogy, collaborate with local communities to curate authentic cultural content, and design flexible EFT curricula that simultaneously promote global communication skills and preserve cultural heritage.

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