Implementing Project-Based Approach to Nurture Learners' Cultural Awareness at the Beginner Level

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Abstract

Learning a language entails learning its culture (Kramsch, 1993). There is a close relationship between language and culture that makes them inseparable in the teaching and learning process. Brooks (1960) made a distinction between 'Culture' with a capital 'C' – art, music, literature, politics, and so forth – and 'culture' with a small 'c' – the behavioral pattern and life style of everyday people. Nurturing learners' cultural awareness holistically is necessary from the beginning of their learning process. Byram and Morgan (1994) stated that cultural learning has to take place as an integral part of language learning. This study describes the procedures for implementing a project-based approach to nurture learners' cultural awareness in a beginners' level Indonesian language course offered to undergraduate students. Every semester, a cultural project is organized beyond the classroom contact hours to give students hands-on experiences of the target culture. A survey was conducted to obtain students' perceptions of the value of using a project-based approach to cultivate cultural awareness. The results of this study show that hands-on experiences implemented in the project have enriched students' knowledge about the culture of Indonesia. The project supports and is an extension of what has been learned in class. It is an eye-opener and provides an insight into the target culture and also a means to enhance collaboration and good interactions among students and teachers.

1 Introduction

A considerable amount of research has been conducted to define the importance of culture in foreign language learning. Byram and Morgan (1994) mentioned that cultural learning has to take place as an integral part of language learning. Language and culture are fused: one reflects the other and, therefore, learning a language entails learning its culture (Kramsch, 1993; Moran, 2001).

Reflecting the significance of introducing the culture of the target language to language learners, this study explores the application of a project-based approach to nurture learners' cultural awareness in a beginners' level Indonesian language course offered to undergraduate students. It describes the procedures for implementing a cultural project as a means to provide hands-on experiences to students and to cultivate students' cultural awareness.

The Indonesian Language Programme at the Centre for Language Studies (CLS), National University of Singapore (NUS) offers 6 modules ranging from elementary to advanced levels. At

every level, the cultural aspect of the target language is introduced through different forms of activities. At the beginners' level (LAB1201 and LAB2201), a cultural project is conducted every semester to introduce to students cultural knowledge of the target language and community. At the intermediate and advanced levels (LAB3201, LAB3202, LAB4201 and LAB4202), a one-day field trip to the target country is conducted every semester to enable the students to interact with the people who speak the language and to have a close look at the Indonesian way of life.

This study focused on the lower elementary module (LAB1201) with an enrollment of about 180–200 students every semester. The project is conducted as an enrichment activity beyond the classroom contact hours. In addition, the teaching of culture, including behaviours and attitudes, is introduced in class through the lessons, podcasts, authentic reading materials and on-line reading materials. The cultural project outside of the classroom contact hours is meant to complement what the students have learned in class.

2   Literature review

2.1   *Culture in language learning context*

In the past, language teaching and learning has been mainly concerned with the teaching and learning of the four language skills of the target language. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, language teachers and researchers began to see the importance of integrating culture into the language teaching curriculum.

There are many different definitions of the word 'culture,' because it is multifaceted. Theorists and practitioners also bring their own perspective and experiences to their definitions. Kramsch (1998) defined culture as "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings" (p. 10). She also mentioned that the members of this discourse community may retain a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting in their daily life even after they leave the community. Moran (2001) described culture as:

> The evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts. (p. 24)

Byram and Grundy (2003) mentioned that "culture in language teaching and learning is usually defined pragmatically as a/the culture associated with a language being learnt" (p. 193). Language is a product of the culture, as much as its art forms, institutions, places and artifacts, but it also plays a distinct role in carrying the cultural practices of the members of the culture, and to identify and organize the other cultural products (Moran, 2001). Therefore, people who learn a particular language will also need to understand the culture of the community in order to use the language as a means of communication. Hall (1959, as cited in Moran, 2001) asserted that culture is viewed as communication, verbally and non-verbally.

Cultural awareness and cultural experiences will be best acquired when students immerse themselves in the country of the target culture (Istanto, 2011). Moran (2001) stated that "cultural experiences consist of the cultural content, the activities in which students engage this content, the outcomes that are intended or achieved, the learning context, and the nature of the relationships the teacher develops with students" (p. 13). If there are no opportunities for the students to visit the target country, the cultural experience can be encountered in a language class. Byram (1989) mentioned that cultural experience could be obtained through educational visits, home stays, family trips and the like. Yet, not all cultural experiences require living in or traveling to the foreign culture. It can also be experienced in a language class. Moran (2001) also stated that the cultural experience consists of four interconnected learning interactions. They are knowing about, knowing how, knowing why and knowing oneself. "This cultural knowings framework offers a means for

describing culture in terms of what learners need to do in order to learn it – their encounters with another way of life" (Moran, 2001, p. 15). Knowing about includes all activities that are aimed at gathering cultural information. Knowing how involves acquiring cultural practices. Knowing why deals with developing an understanding of fundamental cultural perspectives and knowing oneself concerns the individual learners and their values, opinion, feelings, reactions, thoughts and their own cultural values as the central part of the cultural experience that will lead to self-awareness.

Moran (2001) suggested that, in a language learning context, culture can be taught through an experiential learning cycle based on Kolb's experiential learning model. "Learning occurs through experiences. Through a cycle of observation, theorizing and strategizing, learners go from one experience to another and move toward mastery of the subject matter at hand" (p. 18). He adapted the stages in the cycle proposed by Kolb (1984) as follows:

1. *Concrete experience*, where learners participate and are engaged on a number of levels becomes *participation* where the task is direct or indirect engagement in the culture with the emphasis of knowing how the culture is.
2. *Reflective observation*, where, subsequent to the experience, the learners need to reflect on what they have experienced, which becomes *description* with a focus of knowing about one's culture.
3. *Abstract conceptualization*, where the learners assign meaning to the experience by developing explanation or theories, which becomes *interpretation* where learners concentrate on knowing why.
4. *Active experimentation*, where the learners reenter experience by devising strategies consistent with personal learning goals, and the nature of the content and the form of the experience becomes *response*, with an emphasis on self-awareness, knowing oneself.

The following diagram illustrates the experiential learning cycle for the teaching of culture proposed by Moran (2001).
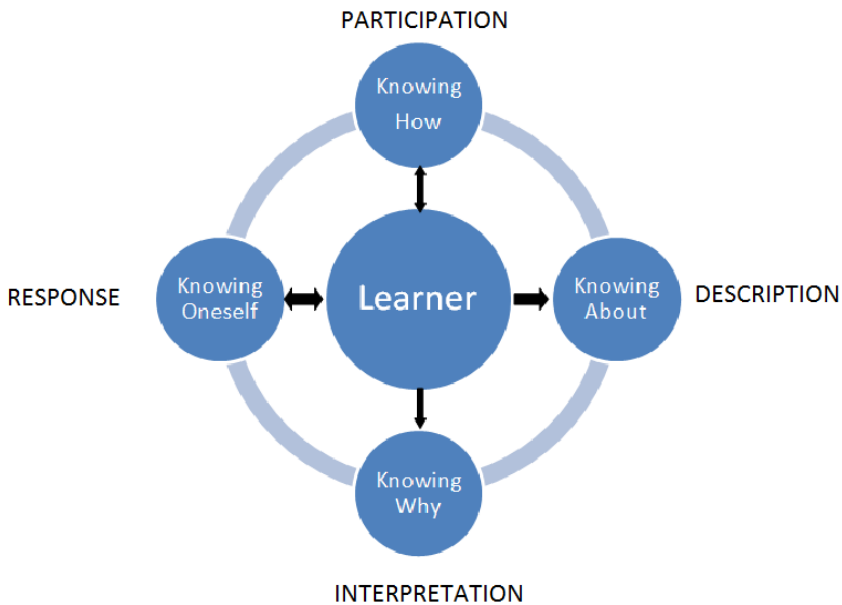

Fig. 1. Moran's model of experiential learning in teaching culture (Moran, 2001, p. 19)

"In the participation, description and interpretation stages, the learners' attention is on the culture, whereas in the response stage, the learners' focus shifts to self" (Moran, 2001, p. 19). It is

expected towards the end that the learners will achieve intercultural awareness. However, this study will only describe one of the techniques that language teachers implemented as an extension to classroom contact hours to nurture students' cultural awareness. The investigation of how the projects have changed the students' intercultural understanding will be the subject of a further study.

2.2 Project-based learning in language classroom

Summarizing the definitions of a project found in project-based handbooks for teachers, Thomas (2000) states:

> … projects are complex tasks that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentation (Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffitt, 1997; Thomas, Mergendoller, & Michaelson, 1999). (p. 1)

In the language learning context, project-based learning is defined as a practice where students are exposed to a series of individual or group activities that involve simultaneous learning of language, content, and skills (Slater, Beckett, & Aufderhaar, 2006). Stoller (2006) mentioned that project-based learning in the language class is more complex than merely incorporating projects into the curriculum. In project-based learning, the students are engaged in many different types of learning, including experiential and negotiated learning, problem solving, and research. The project is used as a medium to elicit collaboration among students; they can be simple assignments or complex tasks that take weeks or even months to complete (Mikulec & Miller, 2011).

It was mentioned previously that experiential learning can be facilitated by implementing project-based learning. Boud and Pascoe (1978) mentioned that student involvement, learner control and the correspondence of the learning task to activities outside the classroom are essential to any experiential learning activity. Kolb (1984) defines experiential learning as "the process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). Horwitz (1989) asserted that experiential learning is the process of acquiring knowledge and skills through means other than the formal or traditional methods commonly encountered in the academic classroom. It implies active participation of the learner in a real or stimulated context where what is to be learned is embedded in a larger setting, one which is encountered in real life or which simulates real-life situations.

Project-based learning can also promote collaborative learning among students. Project work allows instructors to distance themselves from teacher-dominated instruction and move towards creating a student community of inquiry involving authentic communication, cooperative learning, collaboration and problem solving. Hadim and Esche (2002) mentioned that apart from enhancing students' participation in the learning process, project-based learning also helps to improve communication and collaborative skills of the participants.

Despite having numerous benefits, a project-based learning approach also presents several challenges. The teachers' content knowledge should be sufficient; in terms of culture learning, the teacher should be able to share his/her cultural experiences with the students. Moran (2001) stated that "the teacher should be able to present or elicit cultural information, coach and model cultural behaviours, guide and conduct cultural research and analysis" (p. 138). In addition, he also mentioned that, in a project-based learning approach to teaching culture, the teachers also need to be learners of culture. Another challenge is that the organization and administration of project-based learning is time consuming (Frank, Lavy, & Elata, 2003) and it is also important that projects be designed to sustain student motivation (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). The students should find the projects interesting and worth doing.

3   Methodology

3.1   Research objectives

This study aims at investigating students' perceptions of the benefit of implementing a project-based approach to nurture novice learners' cultural awareness, and at obtaining students' feedback on the implementation of such an approach in a beginners' level Indonesian language course.

3.2   Participants

The participants of this study were undergraduates who enrolled in the Bahasa Indonesia 1 (LAB 1201) module of the Indonesian Language Programme at NUS. LAB1201 is a beginners' module for students with no prior knowledge of the target language. 153 subjects participated in this study. All of them were between 19 and 25 years of age.

3.3   Procedures

In this study, a mixed qualitative-quantitative method of investigation was used in the data analysis. The data were collected anonymously from the subjects through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants were requested to choose from a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) in response to the statements given. As the questionnaire uses Likert-type response items, descriptive statistical methods were used to describe the basic features of the quantitative data in the study. In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants have to answer five open-ended questions. This part is provided in the questionnaire to obtain more information on the participants' opinions and insights related to the implementation of the project based-learning in this study. The questionnaire of this study can be found in Appendix 1.

There were four phases in the implementation of project-based learning to nurture students' cultural awareness. The first one is the socialization of the project. Information related to the available groups, the description of activities in each group, the dates of briefing and practices, the venues, the quota of each group, when and how to sign up, time needed to prepare for the project is disseminated to the students through the university learning management system, Integrated Virtual Learning Environment (IVLE), in the second week of the semester. Every student in the cohort needs to spend approximately 10 hours on their project. There are eight different groups available for the students to choose, depending on their interest and their availability to join the practices during the semester. It means that the student should choose a project group that does not have any timetable clash with other modules he/she is taking in the semester. The available groups are as follows:

1. Indonesian traditional costume (cum research on the specific regions of Indonesia represented by the costume)
2. Traditional musical instrument *Angklung*
3. Traditional dance *Gaba-gaba*
4. Traditional dance *Saman*
5. Singing group
6. Drama Indonesian Folktales
7. Fabric dying *Batik Jumputan*
8. Cooking

In the third week of the semester, the students have to sign up online through IVLE. Three days were given during the weekend for them as the project sign-up period. In this phase, registration is based on first-come-first-served basis and therefore a quota was set for each group at the beginning of the semester, depending on the enrollment of the students in the semester. For example:

1. Traditional costume group: 30 students,

2. *Angklung* group: 25 students,
3. *Gaba-gaba* dance: 10 students
4. *Saman* dance: 20 students
5. Singing: 20 students
6. Drama: 15 students
7. *Batik Jumputan*: 20 students
8. Cooking: 40 students divided into 4 subgroups (10 students per group)

Once a group is full, students will not be allowed to sign up for that particular group and will have to choose another project.

The next phase involves the workshop and rehearsal, which are conducted out of class during a seven-week period in the course of the semester. There are 12 facilitators who supervise the cultural activities. They are also involved in teaching the language component in class. Each group has a different meeting schedule, as announced in the first phase.

Students who join the *Angklung*, *Gaba-Gaba* dance and *Saman* dance groups have to attend practices for about 3–4 times before project presentation day. The facilitators teach students the musical instrument and the dances, respectively, during the practices. Students in the *batik jumputan* group learn how to make *batik* from the facilitator and they have to produce *batik* on their own after the workshop. The students in the singing group will be given some options to choose Indonesian songs by the facilitator and to rehearse for 3–4 times before the project presentation. The students in the drama group are introduced to two or three different kinds of Indonesian folktales and they need to create a 10 minutes performance based on one of the folktales chosen. They also need to write their own drama script in the target language. The students in the cooking group have to attend a cooking workshop held at the facilitators' residences, where they will learn and practice cooking together with the facilitators for two hours. On the day of the project presentation, these students have to cook for their peers and hold presentations. Students who are in the traditional costume group will carry out research related to the regions they are assigned, such as West Java (Jakarta), Central Java (Yogyakarta), Madura, Bali, Sumatra (Padang, Palembang), Sulawesi, Kalimantan and Irian. Each sub-group writes a report of about 300 words in English about important facts related to the regions (flora and fauna, architecture, traditions, rituals, places of interest, special culinary, etc.). Based on the research, students introduce the traditional costume group and write scripts to introduce each region during the project presentation.

In addition to the presentation during the cultural project presentation night, every student in the cohort also needs to submit an assignment based on cultural knowledge after the project night. A sample of this assignment can be found in Appendix 2. The objective of this assignment is to ensure that the students learn not only language skills, but also the cultural aspects of the target language. The answers for the first part of the cultural knowledge assignment can be found during the group presentations on the project night. The answers to the second part of the assignment have been discussed during class lessons and can be found in the textbook used in class and the podcast units as well. Besides this, the students also submit a short composition of 100 words in the target language to describe their experiences during the cultural day activities.

The last stage is the night of the cultural project presentation when students from different groups have the opportunity to present projects to their peers. The date of the project presentation is announced at the beginning of the semester to ensure that the students will not have any problems attending the project presentation. Each project group presents and explains the background, and the processes and the experiences in preparing the projects. They also showcase what they have been learned through their workshops and rehearsals.

The cultural project has a weight of 15 % in the overall module assessment, which also comprises a written report (40%), an oral test (15%), class participation (15%), and written homework (15%). The assessment criteria and weightage for the cultural project can be found in Appendix 3. The weight of the various subcomponents for the assessment of the culture project is as follows: 30% for the preparation, 20% for the presentation, 20% for the individual written report, 10% for the group written report, and 20% for the individual cultural assignment.

Indonesia is the biggest archipelago in the world and consists of more than 14,000 islands with a population of more than 230 million people. There are hundreds of ethnic groups living in Indonesia, which has diverse cultures and ways of life. The cultural activities in this project are chosen to reveal the differences in costumes, culinary practices, beliefs, dances, musical instruments, rituals, and so forth, among different ethnic groups living in Indonesia. Through the project, students are expected to enrich their knowledge about the geography of Indonesia as well. In addition, we would also like to introduce our students to the *gotong royong* spirit of the Indonesian people through this project. *Gotong royong* describes the way many people cooperate to attain a shared goal. The cultural activities chosen are mostly dependent on communal work. We hope this project can be used as a means for students to learn and experience the spirit of *gotong royong* of the Indonesian society. It is also expected that the project-based learning approach will allow them to experience the learning process with their peers and gain different perspectives from their experiences during the project night.

4   Findings

4.1   Learners' definitions of culture and perceptions of the importance of culture in the language classroom

As previously mentioned in the literature review, the term 'culture' is complex and an individual's perspective can influence how he/she defines culture. In this study, we wanted to understand how students perceive and define the word 'culture' and asked them to define the word in response to one of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. It is important to understand students' perceptions of culture in order to obtain a better picture of their expectations of the cultural project. We hope that our cultural project will also be able to fulfil our students' expectations, while it nurtures their cultural awareness. Here are some of the students' opinions about culture:

> I feel that culture refers to set of customs, beliefs and traditions that a distinct group of people holds which ultimately gives them a sense of identity. (S1)

> Culture is a way of life. A system/patterns of behaviour and habits. Basically the characteristics of a group of people belonging to the same culture. It includes many aspects like language, social habits, music, the arts, religion, cuisine, beliefs, etc. (S2)

> Culture is a tradition honoured by generations, consisting of the ways of living, the food that we eat, the way we speak, what we wear, what we choose to do. Culture is what nurtures us and what we bring with us as a gift from our parents and generation before us. (S3)

If we examine the students' comments, it seems that the definitions of culture according to our students are in line with the expert definition elaborated in the literature review. Even though the students did not mention and classify culture into the two dimensions as stated by Brooks (1960) – namely that there is a distinction between 'Culture' with a capital 'C' (art, music, literature, politics, etc.) and 'culture' with a small 'c' (behavioral patterns and life styles of everyday people) – the students are aware that culture consists not only of tangible products such as food or art works, but also involves intangible things such as life styles and behavioral patterns of the people who speak the target language.

Through this study, we also would like to know if students consider it important for them as language learners to learn the cultural aspects of the target language or if they think it is enough to just learn language skills. Here are some of the comments from the students in response:

> Yes, this is because the way the foreign language interacts within the society is often interconnected with its cultural roots. Learning a foreign language without understanding its culture is like eating steak without knowing what a cow is. (S5)

> Yes, I think it is important to learn the culture and foreign language together as they are not separate entities. The foreign language is what makes up the culture and vice versa. By learning the language, one learns the context of certain formal/informal way of speech. (S10)

> To a certain extent, yes. A society's language is largely influenced by its culture and in order to understand the nuances of language usage, one has to comprehend the subtle cultural connotations involved. (S25)

From the students' comments, we can conclude that they already understand the importance of learning the target culture in order to be able to function well in the target language. These comments line up with what has been stated in the literature about the importance of culture for communication. Culture is one of the aspects that need to be understood when learning a foreign language; as one student mentions, foreign language is what makes up the culture and vice versa.

4.2   Learners' perceptions of project-based learning

Analyzing the answers given by students in the questionnaire, the most obvious benefit of project-based learning in LAB1201 is to give students hands-on experience of the Indonesian culture. In the questionnaire, we asked students to state whether they agree or disagree that the cultural project conducted in the module enriches students' knowledge about the culture of Indonesia, gives them hands-on experience of the culture and is an extension of what has been learned in class. The results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' questionnaire responses about the effectiveness of project-based learning to nurture cultural awareness

Statements	Frequency					Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
The project provided extra knowledge about the culture of Indonesia	0	1	9	95	48	4.24	0.59
The project was a hands-on experience of the Indonesian culture.	0	1	21	70	61	3.96	0.78
The project supported and was an extension of what have been learned in class.	0	5	35	74	39	4.25	0.7

Notes: 1 – strongly disagree; 2 – diagree; 3 – neutral; 4 – agree; 5 – strongly agree

Of the 153 participants in this study, 93 agreed and 48 strongly agreed that the project provided extra knowledge about the culture of Indonesia. Nine participants remain neutral and one participant disagreed with the statement.

It also can be seen from the participants' responses that around three-quarters of the participants agreed that the project provides hands-on experience of the Indonesian culture to them. More than half of the population in this study also agreed that the project supported what has been learned in the classroom. In order to give more insights of how the participants view the project, here are some of the qualitative comments related to the three statements provided above:

> It was an enriching and eye-opening process because I got to experience various aspects of the Indonesian culture. I had the opportunity to play some traditional games and learn more about Saman Dance. Overall, it was a very enjoyable process for me. (S50)

> The project not only allows us to have a chance to wear the traditional costumes, in the process of doing the power point slides and write up creates the chance for us to learn more about the culture of the region and the country. (S33)

It was interesting. Initially unsure as to how it was supposed to turn out to join the drama group since our Indonesian was substandard. But after breaking up the task into parts, we all managed and had a pretty good time rehearsing and thinking. We need to contextualize our language usage, and figuring out how we can communicate with the limited knowledge we have. It was fun and enriching after all, when ironically most of us were in it because we were left with no choice as we signed up late. (S14)

It was definitely a unique and wonderful experience for me as I was exposed to a wide variety of activities, food and information that I rarely have the chance to come across. It was an enriching experience for me in general. (S7)

The project is very fun. I have learnt more about the different practices in different parts of Indonesia. The project has definitely widen my knowledge about Indonesia. (S1)

I feel that it is very useful in helping me understand the Indonesian country and culture better. This project also makes the module more holistic and interesting. (S3)

It is a great experience as we have a real hands-on experience and I enjoy the whole process. (S10)

It is interesting to note that the students view the project as something unique that can give them a holistic learning experience. It is also worthwhile to note that there is a shift in the perceptions of the students after joining a certain group, as can be seen in the comments from S14. Even though he/she was not able to join the group that he/she was initially interested in, he/she found the project to be enriching by the end of the process. Some of the students had to join a certain group, not because they are interested in that particular group, but because of other factors that forced them to join the group such as time constraints or group availability.

The second benefit of implementing project-based learning is that the cultural project can enhance collaboration. 136 students agreed that through this project group they had the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers. The project also helped developed good interaction among students and teachers. 71 students strongly agreed, 69 students agreed to this statement, and 13 students were neutral. Table 2 shows the participants' responses linked to the second benefit of implementing project-based learning in the module.

Table 2. Participants' questionnaire responses on the project's benefits for collaboration and interaction

Statements	Frequency					Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
The project enhanced collaboration among students.	0	1	16	65	71	4.35	0.69
The project enhanced good interaction among students and teachers.	0	0	13	69	71	4.38	0.64

Notes: 1 – strongly disagree; 2 – diagree; 3 – neutral; 4 – agree; 5 – strongly agree

As previously mentioned, project-based learning can be used as a form of collaborative learning where every member of the group and the supervisor can work collectively to construct and produce the outcomes. In addition to the numbers stated in Table 2, here are some comments from the students:

Through the project, I not only got to know more about many different aspects of Indonesian culture, I also got to know people from the other tutorials & lecture groups better. Since we have to work together to prepare our project night. (S45)

On top of linguistic abilities, the project showed me how to appreciate and understand the Indonesian customs and traditions, not to mention the friends whom I have made along the way after we work collaboratively preparing the project. (S130)

The project showcases from the other groups allow me to appreciate the Indonesian culture better. It is a collaborated effort from all the groups to share the experience with each other that adds the value to the project. (S75)

The ibu (the teacher) was also very nice and super helpful with the suggestions. She also provided us with a lot of guidance which helped the project run more smoothly. ☺ (S99)

Aside from establishing the benefits of project-based learning above, we also wanted to seek students' opinions about the workload of the cultural project and whether the project met their expectations. It is important to consider the students' opinion, since learners should be at the centre of the learning process. As teachers, we should be able to facilitate learning and create tasks that enable students to actively participate in the learning process. Table 3 shows the students' responses on the workload of the project.

Table 3. Participants' questionnaire responses on students' expectations and the project workload

Statements	Frequency					Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
The project met your expectation of what a cultural project should be.	0	4	23	85	41	4.07	0.7
The time spent for the project is reasonable for a group project.	1	7	22	82	41	4.01	0.81
The workload of the project is not too heavy.	1	13	38	54	42	3.84	0.94

Notes: 1 – strongly disagree; 2 – diagree; 3 – neutral; 4 – agree; 5 – strongly agree

The data in Table 3 shows that the project does meet students' expectation of what a cultural project should be. 126 students agreed that this project is in line with how they believe a project conducted to nurture cultural knowledge should be.

Though half of the population who participated in this study approved of the workload of the project, we need to pay attention to the fact that around 38 students remained neutral in their opinion and 14 students found the workload quite heavy for them.

Table 4 showed students' opinions of whether the cultural project embodied any significant value for them. 131 respondents agreed that the project was worth doing and 142 respondents stated that the project was an enriching activity for them.

Table 4. Participants' questionnaire responses on the overall value of the project

Statements	Frequency					Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
The project was worth doing.	1	1	20	73	58	4.22	0.74
The project was fun and yet very enriching.	0	1	10	74	68	4.37	0.63

Notes: 1 – strongly disagree; 2 – diagree; 3 – neutral; 4 – agree; 5 – strongly agree

These are some comments from the quantitative data on the students' perceptions of the workload and the project's overall value:

The project was very educational and yet enjoyable, and I think that it is worth doing both for the knowledge you gain and the friendships that you make. (S7)

Definitely! It surprises me how doing a project can be so enjoyable and fun given my fair share of experience (usually stressful) doing various project in NUS. It was certainly not time consuming and in this short amount of time, I had the opportunity to have a deeper insight regarding Indonesian culture. It was surely a project worth doing. (S11)

The project was a new experience and gave me new insights to the Indonesian culture. It's fun and interesting. However, it's a bit time consuming to prepare the project. (S12)

Despite it taking quite a bit of time, I think on the overall it's very comprehensive when we come together to share our learnt knowledge with each other through the project night. I really enjoyed the performances and I don't think I will actually get other chances to receive a similar experience. (S125)

The project is worth doing because it exposed me to more genres of music and also allow me to learn new vocabulary from the song lyric. This made the learning of new vocabulary much easier and also allowed me to remember the words better. Through the showcase of other project groups I also got to learn the different cultural aspects of Indonesia, enjoy various interesting and funny performances as well as taste of delicacies of Indonesia cuisine that the groups cooked! (S145)

This result shows the tendency towards the positive perception among the students that, while the workload can be quite heavy, it is also a good learning experience for them to enhance their understanding of the target language culture.

Finally, in Table 5, we collate students' responses on their likes and dislikes in relation to the cultural project.

Table 5. Participants' likes and dislikes

Likes	Dislikes
Enriching and fun experiences	Time consuming
Practical work of the language used	Uneven workload distribution between groups
Exposure to Indonesian culture	Limited choice in the number of projects
Being able to make friends	Different contribution among group members
Enhance interaction between classmates	Group members who do not put enough effort
Hands on experience	Need to write an essay
Being able to express creativity	Bad timing, too early in the morning
Stress reliever	Additional time spent other than tutorials
An eye opener to different culture	
Application of language skills	

From Table 5, especially the 'dislikes' column, we can observe that there are some aspects of the project that need to be re-evaluated in order to enhance the efficiency of a project-based learning approach.

5   Conclusion

Lafayette (1998) mentioned that among the three major components of the language curriculum (language, literature, and culture), the greatest amount of time and energy is still devoted to the grammatical and vocabulary aspects of language. Culture remains the weakest component due to its uneven treatment in textbooks and the lack of familiarity among teachers with culture and the technique needed to teach it.

If we, as teachers, believe that learning a language cannot be separated from learning its culture, we have the responsibility to incorporate culture into the language class. We have to try to find ways to teach it, and support students in learning the culture. If classroom activities are not suitable, we can create opportunities outside the classroom**.**

The term culture can be interpreted differently. Some language teachers use the term to refer to cultural products such as literary works or works of arts, others use it to refer to background information such as the history or geography of the target language country, while some others also include behaviours and attitudes, and the social knowledge of the people.

Projects may differ according to the use of the target language. For beginners, the use of the target language can be limited in accordance to their proficiency level. It should also be taken into account when designing tasks. The teacher could tailor tasks which require limited use of the target language such as playing music, cooking, dancing, collecting pictures or doing art and craft, tasks which require the use of formula such as singing, or tasks which require only the formulation of simple sentences such as performing a skit.

Teaching culture in a language class is undoubtedly no easy task in terms of implementation and the assessment. It really needs a lot of effort from language teachers in trying to give students opportunities for hands-on experience, guiding them in their research, helping them write scripts, and arranging the logistics. It requires extra time and energy, as well as some funding.

The Indonesian Programme at NUS-CLS has been trying its best to incorporate teaching and learning of culture in its language courses through in-class and out-of-class activities and this has gained positive responses and feedback from students. Even though we cannot claim that the technique implemented in the program is the best one for nurturing students' cultural awareness, the results of the evaluation study described above show that we have managed to introduce the Indonesian culture to students and to give them hands-on experience in the sociocultural practices of Indonesia. This the students have found to be enriching and valuable. Further studies on how this cultural project might have changed the students' intercultural understanding and sensitivity need to be conducted to ascertain if and how intercultural competence can be achieved through a project-based approach.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The Questionnaire

Please select any number from 1-5 to indicate your preference.

1= strongly disagree	4= agree
2= disagree	5= strongly agree
3= neutral	

a.	The project provided extra knowledge about the culture of Indonesia.	1 2 3 4 5
b.	The project was a hands-on experience of the Indonesian culture.	1 2 3 4 5
c.	The project supported and was an extension of what has been learned in class.	1 2 3 4 5
d.	The project enhanced collaboration among students.	1 2 3 4 5
e.	The project enhanced good interaction between students and teacher.	1 2 3 4 5
f.	The project met your expectation of what a cultural project should be.	1 2 3 4 5
g.	The time spent for the project is reasonable enough for a group project.	1 2 3 4 5
h.	The workload of the project is not too heavy.	1 2 3 4 5
i.	The project was worth doing.	1 2 3 4 5
j.	The project was fun and yet very enriching.	1 2 3 4 5

Please answer the following questions:

1. What is culture according to you?
   _____

2. Do you need to learn culture when you learn a foreign language? Why?
   _____

3. What group do you join in the cultural project in LAB1201?
   _____

4. Please tell us what you think of the project in general. Would you please list 3 things that you like and dislike from your cultural project group?

    _____

5. Do you think that the project worth doing? Why?

    _____

Appendix 2

Cultural Knowledge Assignment

<u>Indonesian Culture Knowledge Assignment</u>   **Nama: _____**
                                                          Kelas: _____

Please choose the correct answer (the following questions are based on the cultural research and presentation done by the different groups in the cultural project): (15 points)

1. Angklung berasal dari:
    a. Sumatra
    b. Jawa Tengah
    c. Jawa Barat
    d. Maluku

2. Tari Saman berasal dari:
    a. Kalimantan
    b. Aceh
    c. Jawa Timur
    d. Bali

3. Karapan sapi berasal dari:
    a. Madura
    b. Irian
    c. Sulawesi
    d. Riau

4. Baju bodo berasal dari:
    a. Sulawesi
    b. Riau
    c. Lombok
    d. Flores

5. Batik jumputan berasal dari:
    a. Pekalongan
    b. Yogyakarta
    c. Palembang
    d. Jakarta

6. Tari Gaba-gaba berasal dari:
    a. Bali
    b. Maluku
    c. Flores
    d. Irian

7. Candi (temple) Borobudur ada di :
    a. Jawa Tengah
    b. Madura
    c. Jakarta
    d. Padang

8. Makanan khas Palembang namanya:
    a. gado-gado
    b. empek-empek
    c. klepon
    d. tahu isi

9. Makanan khas dari Bali adalah:
    a. ayam penyet
    b. babi guling
    c. ikan bakar
    d. rendang

10. Orang Dayak tinggal di:
    a. Irian
    b. Timor
    c. Lombok
    d. Kalimantan

11. Warna baju tradisional orang Padang waktu menikah:
    a. hijau
    b. putih
    c. merah
    d. hitam

12. Hiasan kepala (headgear) pengantin perempuan Padang namanya:
    a. Konde
    b. Topi
    c. Suntiang
    d. Blankon

13. Warna baju tradisional orang Yogyakarta waktu menikah:
    a. biru
    b. hitam
    c. ungu
    d. coklat

14. Makanan Padang rasanya:
    a. manis
    b. pedas
    c. asin
    d. pahit

15. Makanan orang di Jawa Tengah biasanya:
    a. pedas
    b. tawar
    c. manis
    d. asam

16. Lagu Kebangsaan (National Anthem) Indonesia adalah:
    a. Aku Cinta Indonesia
    b. Majulah Indonesia
    c. Indonesia Raya
    d. Indonesia Bangsaku

Please answer 'betul" (correct) or 'salah' (wrong). If 'salah" (wrong) please give the correct answer (in English) (10 points):

1. The term address of 'mbak' and 'mas' can only be used when the speaker is younger than the addressee.

2. When the addressee is older than you 'kamu' is appropriate to be used as a second person pronoun.
    _____

3. 'Malam Minggu' means Sunday evening.
    _____

4. The time indication 'nanti' means exactly later time in the day.
    _____

5. As a guess when you are served drink and food, you may directly consume them.
    _____

6. 'Mau ke mana ?' can also be used instead of 'Apa kabar?'as a greeting to someone who is in close relation with the speaker.
    _____

7. To ask somebody's marital status 'sudah menikah? 'is a common way to show friendly interest.
    _____

8. It is considered impolite when we visit someone without inform the host/hostess in advance especially in small towns or villages.
    _____

9. As neighbours one may ask to do a favour when needed.
    _____

10. Living in an extended family is not a common practice anymore in Indonesia.
    _____

Appendix 3

The Assessment

No.	Name	Preparation 30%			Presentation 20%		Written Report 30%	Cultural Knowledg 20%	100%	Note
		Attendance	Punctuality	Participation	Creativity	Cultural Persentation				
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										