



# The Use of Films as an Innovative Way to Enhance Language Learning and Cultural Understanding

Johanna W. Istanto

([clsjwi@nus.edu.sg](mailto:clsjwi@nus.edu.sg))

National University of Singapore, Singapore

---

## Abstract

This article discusses how films can be used as an effective platform to allow students to immerse themselves in the target culture of a language. Through films, students broaden their understanding of the geographic, sociolinguistic, socio-economic, socio-political and educational issues in the target community. To illustrate this, the article shows how a small selection of Indonesian films has been used at different proficiency levels in the Bahasa Indonesia programme at the National University of Singapore. It also examines the role of the films in the process of teaching and learning, and how watching films reinforces class activities such as role-playing, discussions, and debating, as well as out-of-class activities such as interviews and research on topics related to the films. In order to explore students' feedback on this process, there is a discussion of students' responses to watching the films. It is proposed that three main issues need to be considered: the choice of the films; the development of lesson plans; and the possibility for efficiency gained by having the students watch the films out of class time. In conclusion, it is argued that the combination of these strategies demonstrates how films can be used in innovative ways for teaching the target language and culture.

---

## 1 Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss and demonstrate how films can be an effective platform for students to immerse themselves in the target culture, broaden their geographical knowledge of the target country, and observe the sociolinguistic, socio-economic, socio-political, and educational issues in the target community.

A few Indonesian films have been carefully selected as a means of imparting cultural values at different proficiency levels of instruction (from intermediate to advanced levels) of the Bahasa Indonesia programme at CLS-NUS.

The use of films in the process of teaching and learning reinforces class activities such as role-playing, discussions, and debating, as well as out-of-class activities such as interviews and research on certain topics related to the film.

In order to understand students' perception, a survey on the impact of the films on students' understanding about the target culture and target language will be discussed.

In conclusion, this paper argues that films play a vital role in furnishing students with background knowledge of the target community, provide strong motivation for students to learn the target language and culture, deepen their understanding of moral values of the target language speakers, and stimulate students' empathy towards the target community, in addition to enhancing the students' language skills.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 What is culture?

Kramersch (1998) describes culture as “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings” (p. 10). Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003) define culture as;

A complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, practices, rituals, and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institution they create. (p. 45)

Brooks (1960) made a distinction between ‘Culture’ with a capital C – art, music, literature, politics and so on – and ‘culture’ with a small c – the behavioural patterns and lifestyles of everyday people.

When I asked my students for the definition of ‘culture’ their answers varied from food, festivals, costumes, music, to dances. Some of them defined culture as customs, traditions, behaviours, manners, pattern of living, and how people relate with one another. Some said, culture was way of life, beliefs, values, religion, and norms. Some mentioned the history of the society, action or words that were considered rude or polite to the people, spoken or unspoken ways of living and even language itself was included in the ‘culture’.

Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world, approximately 17.000 islands, in which more than 500 different races live, and is the home of many different subcultures. However, as the motto of the nation is “Bhineka Tunggal Ika” (Unity in Diversity), Indonesians believe that they are part of one national culture, namely the Indonesian culture. This is one of the reasons why the author chose films from different parts of Indonesia to introduce the subcultures which constitute the Indonesian culture.

### 2.2 Why teach culture in a language class?

We believe that language and culture cannot be separated, and learning a language entails learning its culture. According to Kramersch (1993), second and foreign language learners necessarily become learners of the second culture because language cannot be learned without an understanding of the cultural context in which it is used. In Bahasa Indonesia, for example, there are different terms of address, depending on his/her age, status, gender, and degree of intimacy between the person addressed and the speaker. The usage of the correct term of address is important in Indonesian culture and society. Learning the vocabulary without knowing the cultural background of the usage might bring hiccups in communication.

Students should be aware of the cultural differences between his/her own culture and that of the target culture. Without this knowledge, awkward situations may arise. In Indonesian culture, for example, it is regarded as impolite and arrogant if one stands with arms akimbo. Learning the body language and gestures is important to avoid any misunderstanding. Byram (1989) placed ‘cultural studies’ at the core of foreign language learning and proposes a model of four related parts, namely language learning, language awareness, cultural experience, and cultural awareness. Byram and Morgan (1994) stated that cultural learning has to take place as an integral part of language learning and vice versa.

### 2.3 How can culture be experienced?

Cultural awareness and cultural experiences will be best acquired when students immerse themselves in the country of the target culture (Istanto, 2008). However, when students have no chance to visit the target country, cultural experience can be encountered in a language class. According to Byram (1989), the experience could be 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.

#### **2.4 *Is teaching culture a waste of time?***

Many teachers sometimes hesitate to incorporate cultural studies in their language syllabus because they are afraid of wasting time which can be allocated for teaching grammar or other language skills, as stated by Brooks (1968, p. 206), “Will special emphasis upon culture not be wasteful of precious class time and end up giving the student less rather than more of what he is entitled to expect from his language course?”

Byram and Morgan (1994) also noted that in most language courses the greatest amount of time and energy is still devoted to the grammar and vocabulary aspects of language.

Lafayette (1998) mentioned that among the three major components of the curriculum (language, literature, and culture), the greatest amount of time and energy is still devoted to the grammar 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 the culture itself and with the technique needed to teach it.

Even after more than a decade since Lafayette stated his argument as above, based on my observation, many teachers teaching the Indonesian language are still not aware of the importance of teaching culture in a language class. The problem of in-class time constraints can be overcome by asking students to watch the films outside the classroom. Thus, in this way, precious time can be allocated for learning other aspects of language in class. I have developed lesson plans which give details on how to use the materials in class, and will illustrate how the lesson provide chances for the students to carry out role plays, discussions or debates, among other things.

#### **2.5 *What is the role of the teacher in nurturing cultural understanding?***

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 facilitate the students in learning the culture. If classroom activities are not suitable, we can create opportunities outside the classroom.

Besides overcoming time constraints, the teacher should also find suitable materials which can be used to teach the culture, and develop materials in such a way that students can benefit from it. The teacher’s knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the importance of nurturing cultural understanding play an important role in deciding the instructional and methodological choices.

It is the teacher’s responsibility within or outside of the classroom, to explicitly take on the role of culture educator and deliberately assist students with their process of cultural analysis. I also believe that nurturing students’ cultural awareness is the responsibility of a language teacher.

#### **2.6 *Why teach culture through films?***

If students do not have the chance to experience culture in the target country, one of the ways to teach culture to them is by asking them to watch films of the target culture. In his book “Film and Television in Education,” Robert Watson (1990, p.3.) stated, “The culture provided by all the mass media, but particularly by film and television, represents the most significant environmental factor that teachers have to take into account.”

Peter D. Groves (1996), in his book “Film in Higher Education and Research” wrote that films represent one group in a whole ‘family’ of modern mechanical aids to learning. A film is a means of expression, a language and an art, based on modern technology.

By watching films, not only are the students’ understandings of the target culture enhanced, but also their interest in other fields of the target culture nurtured. Groves quoted Dickinson Thorold (1964, p. 12) on his result of his experiment, “It was only while exploring the extent of cinema that

we found students discussing the range of interests, historical, philosophical, linguistic, psychological, sociological, geographical, architectural aspects that could be found in one film.” So, in other words, film is also an instrument for research.

In addition, according to “Enjoying Singapore” (2006), Singapore has the highest movie-going rate in the world. On average, Singaporeans go to movies eight times a year. The high interest in watching films among Singaporeans may indicate that films would be a good avenue for teaching culture.

Knowing the advantages of using films to teach culture, and the entertainment value films can bring to students’ learning, I believe films will bring good impact to students’ process of learning. Thus, movies should be incorporated into the language class to motivate students’ interest in learning, to make lessons more interesting and to nurture students’ understanding of the target culture.

### 3 How were suitable films chosen?

As a culture educator, the teacher plays a vital role in choosing the appropriate films and preparing class activities after students have watched the films. Not all films are good and suitable for imparting cultural values and other aspects, such as geography, sociolinguistics, socio-economics, socio-politics and education of the target community.

- The choice of film should be based on some criterion that can serve the purposes of the teacher, as stated below.
- The students’ language proficiency; for intermediate low students, films with English subtitles are preferable.
- The content of the film; complicated films are better used for higher module.
- The usage of language; films using colloquial language are more suitable for higher level modules.
- The locations where the films are made; since there are many ethnic groups living in Indonesia with their diverse and unique culture, I chose films which were shot in different parts of Indonesia. In this way, the films provide exposure to different areas in Indonesia. For example, two of the films used were shot in Jakarta (Java), one in Padang, Sumatra (Western part of Indonesia) and one in Papua/Irian (Eastern part of Indonesia).

### 4 The Indonesian films used in the Bahasa Indonesia Programme at CLS-NUS

There are 4 films which have been chosen to be used in the intermediate and advanced levels of Bahasa Indonesia programme at CLS-NUS, namely,

1. “Langitku, Rumahku” (My Sky, My Home)
2. “Ada Apa dengan Cinta?” (What’s up with Love?)
3. “Jangan Panggil Aku Cina” (Don’t Call Me a Chinese)
4. “Denias - Senandung di atas Awan” (Denias - Hum above the Clouds)

### 5 Reasons why the films were chosen for the different modules

“*Langitku, Rumahku*” (My Sky, My Home)

The film was chosen for intermediate low students (LAB 3201) because of the following reasons.

- It has English subtitles
- The plot is not too complicated
- The film gives exposure to the different ways of life of the rich and poor living in the capital city of Jakarta
- The film gives an insight to how the Indonesian government handles the poor who live in slums.

*“Ada Apa dengan Cinta?” (What’s up with Love?)*

The film was chosen for intermediate high students (LAB 3202) because of the following reasons.

- It does not have English subtitles
- The film introduces problems faced by youth in school and at home
- The film gives insights into how youths tackle the problems of relationships with friends
- It presents the problem of an abusive father and its impact on the daughter
- It shows how politics can impact on one’s family life
- It gives an exposure to the use of colloquial words used by Indonesian youth living in Jakarta.

*“Jangan Panggil Aku Cina” (Don’t Call Me a Chinese)*

The film was chosen for intermediate high students (LAB 3202) because of the following reasons.

- Subtitles are given in Indonesian for the utterances spoken in Minang language.
- The film introduces Minang tradition and culture (West Sumatra), a very different culture from the first two films which were set in Java.
- Students are able to learn about matriarchal/matrilineal law which governs the Minang society.
- Students are given insight to the socio-economical and socio-political problems of Chinese Indonesians living in Padang.
- Students are introduced to the variants of the sound /a/ in Indonesian which is pronounced as /o/ in Minang language.

*“Denias - Senandung di atas Awan” (Denias –Hum above the Clouds)*

The film was chosen for advanced low students (LAB 4201) because of the following reasons.

- It does not have English subtitles
- There are issues that can be discussed after watching the film, namely
  1. Educational issues
    - How can the government handle the lack of educational institutions in Irian?
    - How can the poor be given an opportunity to have access to education?
  2. Socio-cultural issues
    - The ceremony of the wearing of “*koteka*”<sup>1</sup> and the cutting of the left forefinger; should this tradition be preserved or eliminated?
  3. Geographical issues
    - The film opens new horizons for students to know more about Indonesia, especially the geographical aspects of Irian such as its flora, fauna, and natural resources
  4. Political issues
    - Students learn about the “Papua Movement,” a separatist political organization which tried to build its own government independent from Indonesia
  5. Ecological issues
    - Discussions were carried out on how logging and gold mining have destroyed the forests in Irian, which has been called “the Lung of the Mother Earth”
  6. Moral values
    - The film shows how human nature perseveres even in times of difficulties to reach one’s goal.

## 6 How the films were used

As mentioned, in order to not waste precious class time, students were asked to watch the films outside the classroom through IVLE<sup>2</sup> or using CD/DVDs lent to the students.

The activities carried out after watching the films were not entirely the same for all the four films. The higher the level, the greater the variety and the more challenging were the tasks.

### *“Langitku, Rumahku” (My Sky, My Home)*

This film was assigned for students reading LAB3201 (lower intermediate level). The version used was the VHS form. It was not the one with the teaching notes prepared by Yvonne Goudie as a teaching resource in Australia.

In this level, the students were only asked to watch the film and write an analysis (minimum 300 words) of the film in the target language. In this way, besides learning about the target culture, the students' listening and writing skills were also enhanced.

### *“Ada Apa dengan Cinta?” (What's up with Love?)*

This film was assigned for students reading LAB3202 (higher intermediate level).

After students have watched the film as an outside class activity, they had several in-class activities. The teacher prepared questions about the film such as who the main characters were, what happened to them, and what the story line was. Besides that, there were some topics of discussion about friendship, family relationships, boy-and-girl relationships, political impact on a family life, and exercises on the usage of colloquial words used in the film. In this way, not only students' understanding of the target culture and the listening skills were enhanced, but also their speaking skills; how the students expressed their opinion orally in the target language in the discussion. The use of colloquial words which were introduced in the film enriched their vocabulary and understanding of the use of the language differently from the formal language they usually learnt in class.

In the lesson plan there might be some similarities with the resource pack produced by David Hanan, however the author did not have an opportunity to study the resource pack before and during research for this paper.

### *“Jangan Panggil Aku Cina” (Don't Call Me a Chinese)*

This film was also assigned for LAB 3202 students. The procedure was the same with “Ada Apa dengan Cinta?” However, there were more tasks and activities.

After the teacher asked basic questions about the plot of the film, there were discussions about the culture and traditions in Minang society, the life of a Chinese Indonesian compared to a Chinese Singaporean, and mixed marriages. After which, there was another activity related to mixed marriages, which was a role playing session.

The activities were expanded by giving the students reading materials on “Bahasa dan Sistem Kemasyarakatan Minangkabau” (Language and Social System in Minangkabau) and “Dukanya Jadi Laki-laki Minang” (The Unhappiness of a Minang Man) to give deeper insight about the Minang tradition and culture which is unique compared to other parts of Indonesia.

To give more information about the origins and life of Chinese Indonesians, another reading material “Asal-usul dan Kehidupan orang Tionghoa di Indonesia” (The Origin and the Life of Chinese in Indonesia) was used in the following class. The activity was further expanded by assigning the students to interview some Chinese Indonesians through the telephone, and write an essay in the target language (min 300 words) based on the interview and their own research.

By using this film, many related activities could also be developed to support other aspects besides listening and speaking skills. The film also gave background knowledge of the target culture, such that the students were better able to understand when they read reading materials about the practice of Minang matriarchal law and the life of Chinese Indonesians.

By conducting interviews through the telephone and writing reports based on the interviews and students' research, students' abilities in their speaking and writing and research skills were enhanced.

Here we can see that one activity may lead to different kinds of activities which all support the learning process in interesting ways.

*“Denias - Senandung di atas Awan” (Denias –Hum above the Clouds)*

This film was chosen for the students reading LAB 4201(lower advanced level). The class activity started with questions about the geography of the island, such as where the island lies in Indonesian archipelago, its size, flora and fauna, natural resources, population, historical background of the island, religious background of the population, and the recent political situation of the island.

The teacher had also prepared questions about the film, its main characters, and the story line. Some topics of discussion raised include the culture and tradition of the Irianese/Papuanese, the problem of education faced by most children in Irian and also those faced by the poor children, ecological problems caused by the gold mining and illegal logging, and the separatist organization called “Organisasi Papua Merdeka” (Free Papua Movement). There was another activity prepared for a role play related to the problem of education in Irian.

## 7 Discussion

### 7.1 *Film can be an effective platform for the students to immerse in the culture or way of life of the target community*

By watching the four films chosen, I believe the students can be immersed in the culture and way of life of Indonesians from different ethnic groups.

When the students watched “Langitku, Rumahku,” they witnessed how people living in suburbs go about their daily lives. This includes dancing, singing and even the food they eat or what is sold in the market place (Loken). Students also witnessed how a typical rich family's way of life whereby the family consists of the usual family members and a few servants (including maids and a chauffeur). It shows how a rich Indonesian is always protected and pampered by people around him.

There are some universal values which can be drawn from the story. Firstly, being poor materially does not always mean being poor mentally and morally. The father of the poor boy taught the boy to live honestly, and to never steal anything from others, even though they were very poor.

Secondly, it is important to be optimistic in life, no matter how hard things appear to be. When one of the slum dwellers found that the government had destroyed their slums, he comforted the boy, whose parents had been taken away by the police, by saying that wherever there is the sky, there will always be a place for him to stay.

Thirdly, material comfort does not always mean happiness, and that was what the rich boy felt. The rich boy thinks that the poor boy is happier than him because the latter has freedom like a bird, and he could ‘fly’ anytime and anywhere he wanted.

Those principles are highly valued in Indonesian cultural traditions.

In this film students also learnt about some Javanese beliefs as the old nanny always taught the rich boy to pray, to surrender one's soul to the One who gives life, before going to bed. The Javanese also believe that one never can change one's fate because life is predestined. One has to accept what he/she is and what situation he/she faces.

What the students commented after watching “Ada Apa dengan Cinta?” is also a proof that they learnt about the culture and way of life of the Indonesian youth living in Jakarta. Students witness the activities that these youths are involved in school societies, entertainment activities such as café, pop music and other literary arts, and the significance of Saturday nights for young

boys and girls with regards to dating. Students also viewed the interaction between students of different genders which is more conservative compared to Singaporeans, the social problems such as child abuse and cases of violence, the way the Indonesians make a living, and a flea market which is quite different from Singapore.

From the film “Jangan Panggil Aku Cina” students observed the practice of matriarchal (matrilineal) law which is something new for some students since they did not know that there is a society which practices different laws from most of the countries in the world. The fact that Minang women are supposed to pay a certain amount of money to ‘buy’ their husband is also something new for some of them. In addition, students also learn about the marriage culture of Minang people who typically get married to people of the same race, and promote marriage between the cousins to maintain the purity of the race. All these practices give students a new insight and background knowledge of the target culture.

From students’ comments on “Denias- Senandung di atas Awan,” it was evident that the students’ knowledge about the target culture particularly the culture of the Papuanese was enhanced. The different customs and practices that are practiced by this tribe, such as the part where the father cuts off his forefinger when his wife passed away, showed how much they value ties between husband and wife – that the loss of wife is represented by his physical pain too, even though the emotional pain might be stronger.

Students also get an insight into the way of thinking of the people in Papua, such as the attachment they have to their land, and their beliefs. This enabled the students to understand their way of thinking better. It is not only because they do not value education, but probably to them, there are more important things to do than to invest in their children’s education.

Non-verbal behaviour is something that is not easy to expose students to, except by using films. It is important for students to learn about this, since it is a part of understanding the target culture. The following are some comments from the students.

I learnt about how Indonesians behave to communicate using facial expression and body language.  
(Hui)<sup>3</sup>

From the film, I could observe the cultural aspects from the actors and actress as well as songs. For example, through the conversation and action, I noticed the way Indonesian respect elder people.  
(Bon)

In learning culture, there are three kinds of special knowledge to be learned. One is sociolinguistic ability (verbal and non-verbal behaviour patterns), another one is knowledge of the culture area and methods for observing and analyzing culture, and lastly is attitude towards and tolerance of the target culture (Kramsch, 1998). By watching the films, students have the opportunity to understand and compare the target culture with their own, and this might stimulate empathy towards the target community, as it is written below in the student’s comment after watching film “Langitku, Rumahku.”

I feel sad for the poor people living in Indonesia. They are born that way and it is unfair as compared to other people like us who at least have a shelter over us. Fate does not give them a chance to be as useful as us, neither does it give them a chance to change their situations. No matter how hard they try, their situations hardly improve, as they were never given the opportunity to begin with. (Ali)

I believe that the chosen films become an effective platform for the students to immerse in the culture of the target community.

## ***7.2 Film can broaden the geographical knowledge about the target country***

Indonesia is often referred to as the world’s largest archipelago, a name which represents its 17,000 islands which span more than 5000 kilometres (around 3,200 miles) from Sabang in



northern Sumatra (the western most part of Indonesia) to Merauke in Irian Jaya (the eastern most part of Indonesia).

By choosing films from different parts of Indonesia, the students' knowledge about the geography of the target country was broadened.

From watching the film "Langitku, Rumahku," the students realized the vastness of Indonesia. Among the five main islands in Indonesia (Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Irian/Papua), Java is the smallest island, yet it is the world's 13<sup>th</sup> largest island with the area approximately of 139,000 square kilometres. When the main characters in the film "Langitku, Rumahku" traveled from Jakarta (located in West Java) to Surabaya (in East Java) students realized that the distance from Jakarta to Surabaya is large, about 1000 kilometres. Here are some of the students' comments.

It shows how big Indonesia is as a country when the kids travelled from Jakarta to the village and to Surabaya. (Tina)

Indonesia is a large country. To travel from one city to another is a time consuming process and they have to take trains. (Ting)

The film "Denias- Senandung di atas Awan" is an eye opener for the students where they learnt about the diversity of nature in Indonesia, as it is clearly stated by one of the students below.

... by showing the vast fields and mountains of Irian Jaya, I am in awe of the depth of heterogeneity that is present within Indonesia. It is a fresh change of scenery because whenever I think of Indonesia, the first picture that springs to mind is that of the urbanized city of Jakarta. This movie reminds me of the presence of Irian Jaya, which is a strong contrast to the fast-paced, noisy lifestyle of Jakarta as the people of Irian Jaya live a more relaxing, slower pace of life and are closer to Mother Nature as compared to the city dwellers in Jakarta. I think that it is a good movie that showcases the side of Indonesia that is seldom made known to outsiders, and it is important for us as students learning Bahasa Indonesia to learn to appreciate the many sides of Indonesia. (Edy)

### **7.3 Film can give an exposure to the sociolinguistic issues in the target language**

I believe the chosen films would give exposures to the sociolinguistic issues in Bahasa Indonesia. Bahasa Indonesia is the national language of Indonesians, however, in different areas the language is slightly different in accent and vocabularies. People in Central Java will speak Indonesian with Javanese accent and use some Javanese words intermittently. From the films, student can differentiate different accents used by Indonesians as can be seen from the comment below.

... For example, in this film, even though the actors speak in an accent different from all the teachers of Bahasa Indonesia in NUS, the accent is familiar to me as it is very similar to how my Indonesian friend from Bandung talks. From the accent, we can tell that the people are from that region. (Ali)

People living in Sumatra speak Indonesian with their unique accent, and the pronunciation of the vowel /a/ most of the time will be pronounced as /o/ as the variant. They also insert Minang vocabularies in their conversation as students could hear in the film "Jangan Panggil Aku Cina" and commented as follows.

The film gives us exposure to the variants in pronunciation of Indonesian vowel /a/ in different part of Indonesia. My linguistic knowledge is broadened by knowing it. (Mike)

The language used by the youth in metropolitan Jakarta is also distinct. They use their own language in order to be different from others. Some people say, one of the reasons is to prevent the older generation knowing what they are talking about. A lot of colloquial words which are not used in formal or written language are used in the film "Ada Apa dengan Cinta?" Here are some comments on this issue.

I learned the way of using the colloquial words through the film. (Lily)

The use of colloquial words like “sih, dong, kok” always catches my attention. Because I always wanted to know how it was use in real life context and the film shown that it was indeed used very often. (Loken)

... I suppose learning colloquial words help me to communicate with Indonesians at a higher comfort level because from what I understand, standard Indonesian is primarily written – used mainly in formal contexts and in writing. The colloquial variety is more of a spoken variety which most people speak. (Mickey)

#### **7.4 *Film can give an exposure to the socio-economic situation of the target community***

From the films I chose, I want to give exposure to the students about the gap between the rich and the poor living in Jakarta, as portrayed in the film “Langitku, Rumahku.”

Students’ comments on the issue were as follows.

I’ve read about the very wide income disparity in Indonesia and watching films make it more real and vivid. It is hard to imagine by merely reading but the films portray a clearer picture of what it means to have such a wide income disparity – socially especially. (Mickey)

It shows that despite an increase in prosperity in Indonesia, the social divide between the rich and poor gets wider while the poor remains stuck in poverty cycle. (Tina)

The life of peasants in the rural Irian, most of them making a living from agriculture, was a good exposure to their economic situations. Their basic infrastructures are far from standard, even though the land is rich in natural resources. This situation can be seen from the film “Denias-Senandung di atas Awan.” One of the students commented as follows.

The present infrastructure on the province is very basic and there are very few schooling facilities for children. I learnt that Irian Jaya is rich in natural resources like gold and copper and these are actively mined. However, the profits earned are not returned to the Irian Jaya economy and the people there still live in poverty. (Amalia)

#### **7.5 *Film can give an exposure to the socio-political situation in the target community***

By choosing the films from different eras, the students will get different exposures to socio-political issues faced by particular groups of people in Indonesia. The film “Langitku, Rumahku” depicts the socio-political situation during the Soeharto era. Many people from the villages migrated to Jakarta with the dreams of having a better life, since Jakarta is the most developed city with many infrastructural developments. However, the cost of living in Jakarta is very high compared to living in the villages, and the villagers do not even have a proper place to live. They live in slums under very poor living conditions and they cannot afford to pay for their children’s schooling. Instead, the children have to help the parents to earn a living. Here is a comment of one of the students.

I think the film indirectly criticizes how the government under Pak Harto’s rule at that time neglected the fates of the poor in pursuing advancement and development. It highlights that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer and the government forcibly evicts them in cleaning up the country. The government doesn’t render enough help to the poor and add on to their misery. (Tina)

In the film “Ada apa dengan Cinta?” the father of one of the main characters was accused of being an ex-member of the Communist party, which was banned in Indonesia after the coup d’état in September 1965. He was expelled from his position as a civil servant because he criticized government policies. His wife left him and his son was often bullied by his friends as he was said

to be from a broken home. Finally, the father and son migrated to America to find a better place to work and study. One of the students commented on this issue.

... how people who have vastly different opinions are marginalized and threatened, as well as how corruption is still an unfortunate theme in the political arena. Rangga's father is moving to America in part for his own and his son's safety, as well as because safety aside, he wants to avoid being marginalized and despised by the people around him ... (Harun)

In the film "Jangan Panggil Aku Cina," the female lead character is a Chinese whose family has been living in Indonesia for three generations. She regards herself as an Indonesian since she was born in Indonesia, speaks the Indonesian language and had her education in Indonesian schools. However, she was often teased by her Indonesian friends that she is not an Indonesian, that she has slanted eyes, and that she could not use the Padangnese traditional wedding costume when she marries. The main character's grandmother hopes that her granddaughter will marry a Padangnese so that the generation after her will be regarded as Padangnese and will no longer experience racial discrimination. This issue is noted in one of the students' comments as below.

I never knew that the Indonesian Chinese were people who were 'discriminated' by the society. However, after watching the film, I have learnt a little bit more about the life of an Indonesian Chinese and the problems they face in society. In the film, it showed that, to many traditional Indonesians, it is still unacceptable for their children to marry an Indonesian Chinese. (Shery)

The separatist movement in Papua, called the "Papua Movement," fought for its independence from Indonesia; however, the Indonesian government suppressed it. This socio-political issue was discussed in class after the students watched the film "Denias-Senandung di atas Awan." The members of the movement think that the people in Irian were treated unfairly. One of the students' comments is as follows.

Papua seems like a place being forgotten by government. The island is rich with natural resources. But the people do not get government attention. (Reni)

## **7.6 Film can give an exposure to the educational issues in the target community**

The film "Langitku, Rumahku" portrays the life of a poor boy who migrated to Jakarta with his family. He desperately wanted to continue his studies, as he did when he was still in his village, but his parents could not afford it. The children living in the rural areas of Irian (where the film "Denias -Senandung di atas Awan" was shot) have a very slim opportunity to get even the basic education, as depicted in the film. The lack of teachers, facilities, and support of the parents are the main causes. The children who are living in the city can have a better education, however, only the rich have access to it. Below are students' comments about the issue.

... the different educational privileges are quite evident. Denias, being the smarter and keen to learn is almost robbed of his chance to study due to his financial and lowly status in the community. (Jo)

## **8 The advantages of using films in a language class**

There are some advantages of using films in a language class. As has been mentioned in the discussion section, films can be an effective platform for the students to be immersed in the culture or way of life of the target community. It can broaden the geographical knowledge about the target country, give exposure to the sociolinguistic issues, socio-economics and socio-political situations and also educational issues in the target country.

Besides those factors mentioned above, film may also provide strong motivation for students to learn the target language and culture because students can learn in more interesting ways compared to traditional class activities, as noted in one of the student's comment below.

The film can definitely motivate students' interest in understanding the target culture. By using film rather than notes, it is already an interesting way of learning as it seems more 'real'. (Mike)

Film can furnish background knowledge of the target community as well, as noted by some students. One of the comments is as follows.

I think that I know better of Indonesians after watching the films. Besides, the films also provide good background knowledge of Indonesians which is harder to know through readings. (Lily)

Some students said that film facilitates effective learning. According to them, some concepts are easily understood by watching film rather than by using other media of teaching such as reading materials or books. In addition, it is a more interesting way to learn since it is a kind of entertainment as well, as the students commented below.

... the exposure from a film is much greater than what you can learn from books in two hours. This is because the film covers myriad aspect of Indonesian life in the short duration of the show, and it enables us to learn more about them. (Jo)

Apart from what have been discussed above, watching films also enhance students' language skills. From twenty two respondents reading different modules (intermediate-low, intermediate high and advance low levels) ten students wrote that by watching the film/s, their listening skills were enhanced; five students wrote that they developed listening and speaking skills; two students wrote that they develop listening and writing skills; two students wrote that they develop listening and reading skills; two students wrote that their listening, speaking and writing skills were enhanced, and one student wrote that his speaking and reading skills were enhanced.

It has also been discussed that using film in a language class stimulates language and other creative activities such as discussions, role playing, conducting interviews, and research.

## 9 Conclusion

This article has shown that a teacher plays a vital role in choosing films which are to be discussed in class. It has also argued that films can become an excellent resource for developing students' interest in various topics. Films may impart cultural knowledge, broaden geographical knowledge, provide sociolinguistics, socio-economics, and socio-political background and introduce educational issues related to the target community.

If chosen correctly, films furnish students with background knowledge of the target culture and provide educational opportunities for students to witness non-verbal behaviours as they observe native speakers in authentic settings speaking with different accents, facial expression, gestures, and subtleties of attitude which cannot be easily explained in words.

The selected films bring emotional impact such that the learning experience increases retention, provides strong motivation for the students to learn the target language and culture, and thus students experience learning through entertainment.

Students are engaged during the class activity because the lesson plans provide interactive tasks, and open-ended activities such as role playing, discussions, and debates. In addition, these activities stimulate further out-of-class activities, such as conducting interviews and research.

There is no need to worry about wasting valuable time in class to teach culture since the activities does not demand extra time allocated for the class. This is because students are asked to watch the film outside the class room activity.

Students learn beyond just language skills through films. Understanding values, principles of life as understood by target language speakers' and stimulating empathy towards the target community is a kind of immersion course in language and culture. In other words, films promote favourable attitudes towards the target language and culture, and bring about greater level of cultural awareness.

The lesson plans prepared for the last 3 films “Ada apa dengan Cinta?”, “Jangan Panggil Aku Cina” and “Denias-Senandung di atas Awan” are concise, yet contain different kind of activities, which support the speaking, listening, writing and reading skills. The discussions, role-plays and debates enhance students’ speaking skill.

Similarly, the interview session gives the students a chance to speak and listen to native speakers. Thus, students’ listening and speaking skills are enhanced. Moreover, the written report based on the interview enhances students’ writing skill. Last but not least, the reading skill is also enhanced when the students are asked to read reading material related to the film discussed.

The time allocated for the classroom activities is used efficiently since some of the activities such as the watching of films, conducting of interviews, and writing of reports are done outside the classroom.

For the last three movies, students are not allowed to watch them with English subtitles. This is to give students a chance to develop their strategy in inferring the meanings of difficult words.

In conclusion, I would highlight three factors described in this article. First, the choice of the films gives students exposure to many aspects of the target country (geographical, sociolinguistic, socio-economic, socio-political and educational). Second, the lesson plans enhance the four skills in learning the language. Third, the efficiency in using the time in class by having the students watch the films out of class time. These combined with the learning strategy taught, and the interactive and communicative way of learning, illustrate how film can be used in an innovative way for teaching the target language and culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Koteka” is a sheath made from dried skin of long pumpkin to protect the vital part of a man.

<sup>2</sup> Integrated Virtual Learning Environment (IVLE) is an online portal which allows teachers and students to exchange data or files.

<sup>3</sup> Students’ names have been changed. The names that appear here are pseudonyms.

## References

- Brooks, N. (1960). *Language and language learning*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.
- Brooks, N. (1968). Teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 1, 204–217.
- Byram, M., Morgan, C., & Colleagues (1994). *Teaching and learning language and culture*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (1989). *Cultural studies in foreign language education*. Clevedon: WBC.
- Groves, P.D. (1996). *Film in higher education and research. Proceedings of a Conference Held at the College of Advanced Technology, Birmingham in September 1964*. Birmingham: Pergamon Press.
- Istanto, J.W. (2008). Language immersion programme as an avenue to nurture cultural awareness and accelerate students’ language proficiency. In W.M. Chan, K.N. Chin, M. Nagami & T. Suthiwan, *Process and process-orientation in foreign language teaching and learning* (pp. 173–192), Singapore: Centre for Language Studies, National University of Singapore.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Lafayette, R.C. (1998). Culture in second language learning and teaching: Anthropology revisited. In D.L. Lange, C. A. Kee, R.M. Paige & Y.A. Yershova (Eds.), *Culture as the core: Interdisciplinary perspectives on culture teaching and learning in the second language curriculum* (pp. 109–124). University of Minnesota: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.
- Liddicoat, A.J., Papademetre, L., Scarino, A., & Kohler, M. (2003). *Report on intercultural language learning*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Watson, R. (1990). *Film and television in education: An aesthetic approach to the moving image*. Basingstoke: The Falmer Press
- Enjoying Singapore: Going to the Movies in Singapore*. (n.d.). Retrieved June 3, 2008, from <http://www.expatsingapore.com/enjoying/movies.shtml>