

**Books Review:**

**Pokoknya Sunda: Interpretasi untuk Aksi.**  
First Edition. A. Chaedar Alwasilah. 2006, 194 Pp  
PT. Kiblat Buku Utama Bandung.  
ISBN 979-3631-76-7

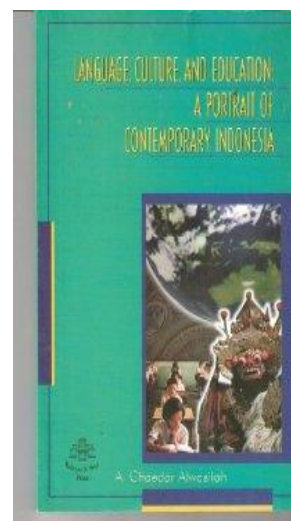
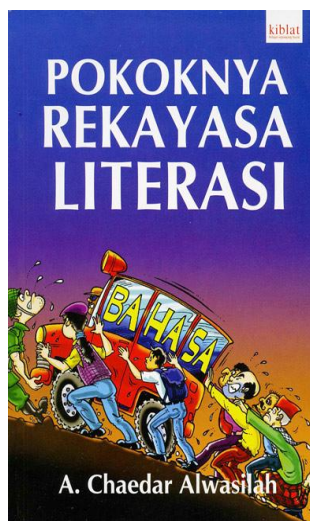
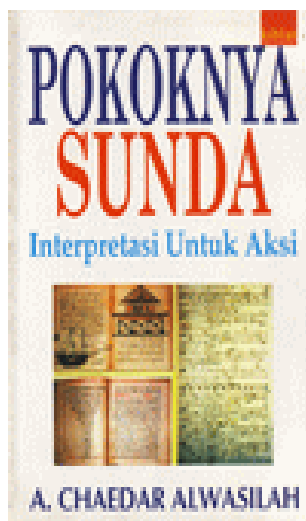
**Pokoknya Rekayasa Literasi.**  
First Edition. A. Chaedar Alwasilah. 2012, 280 Pp  
Edited by Hawe Setiawan.  
PT. Kiblat Buku Utama Bandung.  
ISBN 978-979-8001-22-2

**Language, Culture, and Education:  
A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesia.**  
New Edition. A. Chaedar Alwasilah. 2010, 130  
CV. Andira Bandung.  
ISBN 979-9296-25-0

**A. Introduction**

This review examines three Alwasilah's books entitled: 1) *Pokoknya Sunda: Interpretasi untuk Aksi*; 2) *Pokoknya Rekayasa Literasi*; and 3) *Language, Culture, and Education: A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesia*. The reviewer endeavors to evaluate the author's point of view and the contents of the books supported by a set of extant theories dealing with the similar issues.

These books are designed as a set of foundations and learning materials of some subjects taught by the author. The author explores the insight concerning various contemporary issues dealing with policy, literacy, language as well as culture and education in this beloved country, Indonesia.



**Review #01 on : “*Pokoknya Sunda: Interpretasi untuk Aksi*”**

Regarding Alwasilah’s book entitled *Pokoknya Sunda* (Nothing but Sundanese), readers might smile and look at it in such a way that, to a certain extent, there is an unfair treatment of the author to different ethnics’ languages and cultures. This also might persuade the readers to think that the author has a belief that Sundanese language and culture is better than those of others. In this case, Sugiharto (2013) puts forward his view that anyway, readers, especially those from other languages and cultures, may cast a suspicion that the book is too Sundanese – centric, exclusively exposes cases of the Sundanese language and culture and bringing varied perspectives from his language and culture.

Nevertheless, *Pokoknya Sunda* might also mean “The most prominent Matters of Sundanese” rather than “Nothing but Sundanese”. Hence, this book is not aimed to claim that Sundanese society is better than others. With this thought in mind, Harrison and Huntington (2000, p. 126) claim that there is no scientific basis for the evaluation of another society’s practice, except as the people in that particular society themselves evaluate the practices. Hence, this book is simply regarded as an auto critic of the author himself. Interpretation and contextualization of Sundanese symbols coloring this book cannot be separated from the author’s intellectual who is grown up and well educated and who joyfully administers any activities in Sundanese atmospheres, in which he has to think seriously to maintain the existence of Sundanese language and culture.

This is obviously shown by the author himself in Alwasilah (2006:11). He admits that unconsciously and shockingly, his articles in mass media are mostly dealing with the reconstruction of Sundanese culture. His success in devoting his profession to issues on advocating the existence of Sundanese language and culture is due to his deliberate effort to write these Sundanese matters gradually. In line with this, he quotes Wodehouse’s wise words in Alwasilah (2006:11): “Success comes to a writer, as a rule, so gradually that is always something of a shock to him to look back and realize the heights to which he has climbed.”

The book also reflects the author’s passion, of which he has an extremely strong feeling of love and enthusiasm in revitalizing Sundanese language and culture, which, in turn, may reinvent Sundanese in strengthening the national culture and promoting cultural diversity. The author fears that Sundanese language will suddenly vanish, unless Sundanese society has a political awareness of local language.

With this thought in mind, the author puts forward seven verses as a solution to prevent Sundanese language from its distinction, namely: 1) Sundanese’s excellent achievements must be recognized nationally and internationally; 2) Sundanese’s prosperity should be better than that of others; 3) Political function of Sundanese speakers is more qualified; 4) Sundanese speakers have a prominent role in the local, national, or even international education system; 5) Written tradition is highlighted; 6) The use of technology is put forward; and 7) the instructional goal of teaching and learning Sundanese language should be deliberately formulated to enable students to communicate fluently.

Preventing local language from the extinction might be regarded as cultural heritage preservation. Therefore, the primacy of Sundanese as a mother tongue in teaching-learning process cannot be neglected. In this case, Suherdi (2012, p.34) surprisingly states that mother tongue plays a crucial role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education. Successful mother tongue learning is required by successful learning in the whole students’ schooling history. The better mother tongue is learned, the better learning as a whole will be. Moreover, he asserts that placing mother tongue in its best place is imperative if high standard of excellence is our target. In addition, mother tongue is

very closely related to students' cultural heritage. In other words, successful mother tongue learning not only preserves an extremely large variety of our country's valuable cultural heritage but also secures better access for our people to high quality education. Hence, the revitalization of local language and the promotion of local culture among others are regarded as a smart strategy to strike the balance against the dominance of other languages and cultures. Thus, Sundanese language as one of the ethnic languages should be given a large portion in the national or international language planning.

No less important is the insight of Alwasilah's idea of growing the Sundanese society's literacy. In this case the word literacy is appropriately defined by the author in a broader scope. Kern (2009: 2) justifies that literacy felicitously conveys a broader scope than the terms 'reading' and 'writing' and thus permits a more unified discussion of relationships between readers, writers, texts, culture, and language learning.

Seemingly, discontent with the government's lack of interest in enabling people to be literate, the author tries to "provoke" the readers to secure themselves from being illiterate by among others: 1) empowering sundanese museum; 2) highlighting music as the art of thinking; 3) changing the mind of the nation and creating prosperity; and 4) empowering mass media. This school of thought and enthusiasm have, indeed, fulfilled the expectation of *Deklarasi Bogor* (Bogor Declaration), which is formulated in an International Conference on Nature, Philosophy and Culture of Ancient Sunda Civilization conducted in Bogor, held on October 27, 2010 and supported by National Education Ministry, Indonesia National Commission for UNESCO, and Indonesian Ambassador for UNESCO as well.

The main points of Bogor Declaration are among others: 1) motivating the youths through education to grow their enthusiasm and love toward the local culture; 2) reinforcing educational institutions and mass media to proactively promote, develop, and maintain the existence of Sundanese culture and art; and 3) creating publication of journals and international website in Sundanese language or in Bahasa Indonesia containing the discussions of Sundanese culture in relation to philosophy, politics, economics, and social science; 4) informing the results of the research dealing with sundanese culture through local wisdom based education system; and 5) organizing the existence of archeological sites concerning sundanese cultural heritage. (<http://www.disparbud.jabarprov.go.id/wisata/stcontent.php?id=18&lang=id>)

### **Review #02 on: "*Pokoknya Rekayasa Literacy*"**

The issues of literacy, policy of language, and language planning tend to be rarely given most time, energy, and attention by the noted Indonesian language scholars. The study of language is frequently considered unimportant. The lack of published research related to this issue indicates the ignorance of the prominence of bringing these matters to be noticed by public. Yet, recently there is a circular of *Dirjen Dikti No.152/E/T/2012* addressed to all heads of universities throughout Indonesia of which scientific publication is forced to be a must to administer by undergraduate and postgraduate students. Hitherto, regarding that circular, it is expected that such scholars may engineer their literacy.

The policy of language education in Indonesia seems to be in a hard situation in which people are not sure what to do, cannot take action simply because they are waiting for somebody else to take the action and to make a decision. This book entitled *Pokoknya Rekayasa Literacy* (Nothing but Literacy Engineering) gives us *angin segar* (fine opportunity) to melt down such a hard situation. It represents the author's feeling of worry about the death of local wisdom, local great intelligence and artistic ability as well.

This feeling of worry is based on the author's point of view on a phenomenon showing that "our national education [...] is characterized with the loss of traditional and local culture so that it is unsuccessful in providing Indonesian people to live creatively in the scope of multicultural Indonesia." Another author's angle advocating his own anxiety is dealing with the failure of national education to provide learners with knowledge and skill for achieving a meaningful and harmonious life.

This author's choice may refer to his decision on national education. It is a political act, which is advocating the primacy of progressive education. Long time ago, Beeby (1979: 263) states that "every major decision on education is a political act in the sense that it is an authoritative resolution of tensions between competing interests and purposes in a situation where a common policy is called for." He asserts that the choices in education around which tensions develop is, among others, the choice between ends which some people consider good in themselves and which others see as bad. He exemplifies the choice between secular schools and education controlled by religious organizations, or between formal schooling of the older conventional type and progressive education with its new emphasis on the emotional, creative and aesthetic development of the individual.

What's more, in this book, the author highlights the prominence of liberal education to be applied in Indonesia. Liberal arts education may refer to the course of instruction which is design to exclude professional studies. It emphasizes humanities rather than vocational skills. Though the tension in such an exclusion or inclusion may be both open and intense because it is frequent between different philosophies of life, Alwasilah deliberately persuades the readers to advocate the urgency of liberal education to be applied in the country.

The emergence of liberal arts education is in line with its lofty missions. The Yale Report of 1828 in Alwasilah (2012:197) states that "the course of instruction given to undergraduates in the college is not design to include professional studies. The object is not to teach what is peculiar to any one of the professions; but to lay the foundation which is common to them all."

Meanwhile, Shapiro in Duderstadt in Alwasilah (2012:197) elaborates the mission as the need to better understand ourselves and our times to discover and understand the great traditions and deeds of those who came before us, the need to free our minds and our hearts from unexamined commitments in order to consider new possibilities that might enhance both our own lives and build our sympathetic understanding of others' quite different from us , the need to prepare all thoughtful citizens for an independent and responsible life of choice that appreciate the connectedness of things and people.

**Review #03 on:**

***"Language, Culture, and Education: A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesia"***

The author of the book teaches anything empowering in terms of language, culture, and education which, to a great extent, enables the readers to be independent learners. The book, simply like its author, gives us a paradigm shift that is a great and important change in the way language education and culture is thought about. It also opens a new space in which its readers may freely re-conceptualize the traditional nature of language planning, language education, and culture in the country.

As we see the school of thought of its author, this book shows us the author's feeling and expression of great sadness or disappointment of indifferent politicians, power holders and bureaucrats. Showing a lack of care, thought, and effort, they seem having no interest in solving

communication problems in all walks of life, social, political, economic, educational, and cultural. “Many times bureaucrats are criticized for their sloppy use of Indonesian and retort saying that language problems are to be left to language specialist. This naive attitude shows lack of appreciation and understanding of the function of language as a means of political and national development.”

Regarding the political and national development, government should realize its commitment in making education the primary means of achieving successful competitive nation. The commitment should be realized based on the amended 1945 Indonesian Constitution-Article 31: Section 1) Every citizen has the right to education; 2) Every citizen must participate in primary education and the government has the obligation to provide funds for education; 3) The government attempts and organizes a national education system designed to increase the nation’s faith and obedience to God as well as good morale in order to improve the nation’s intelligence, subject to the existing Constitution; 4) The state prioritizes education budget at least 20 % of the state as well as regional income and expense budget in order to fulfill the needs of the national education; and 5) The government develops science and technology by upholding religious values and the national unity to create an advanced and prosper human civilization.

Based on these principles as suggested by Ali (2009, p.ii), the central and regional governments are obliged to allocate at least 20 percent of the state and regional income and expense budget. Moreover, the prominence of quality human resources through education should be highlighted by the national development program as well.

This book also intimates to readers its strong desires to, for example, more recognize writing; understand plagiarism; develop writing skills from childhood; highlight writing in school lessons; resurrect literature in schools; reform English language teaching; improve college English to function to the full; or pursue language democratization that build critical thinking.

These are all possible to continue to discuss, since the ideas and the results of the research proposed by the author in this book is intended to give every new nuance of language, culture, and education. Let say, we may find the author’s smart analysis on the relationship between immaterial and material cultures, between education and social awareness development, between community newspapers and boosting literacy, between right education and building democracy, and even between social and global vision of hajj pilgrimage.

Alwasilah presents these three books in such a way that readers may give particular annoying reactions. Nevertheless, for the sake of making the readers’ awareness better, he endeavors to serve the menu of language education and culture provocatively. Hence, the author deserves a sobriquet “The Provocateur of the Year.”

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