

**(DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF CULTURAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH
DEPARTMENT OF UNIVERSITY OF MUHAMMADIYAH
SUMATERA UTARA)**

Yayuk Hayulina Manurung

University of Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara
ayoe_hayulina@yahoo.com

The students of university supposed to be the agents of change seem still having a lot of efforts to make it happen. The fact found that their cultural literacies are still in need of improvement. This study was aimed to review how far the students' cultural literacy in English Departments of University of Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara was. The data collection technique used was direct observation technique by researchers, discussion through Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and indirect observation through questionnaires and equipped with library research. The results of analysis and processing data showed that students' cultural literacy was dominated by oral literacy. The literacy practice as the research data was mostly through the social media because it was more effective and enjoyable in establishing social relationships. Literacy activities especially writing were generally carried out only to fulfill the tasks of the lecture. Only a very few were doing the literacy activities for personal interest or talent although a variety media had been provided to allow them to participate in creative writing. It could be noted that the cultural literacy was still not a need for student life. The campus role was really required in promoting students' cultural literacy. The application of appropriate learning models such as Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach could facilitate their cultural literacy. Because this approach provides a variety of learning models to accommodate, harmonize and create the academic habituation of cultural literacy simultaneously.

Keywords: cultural, literacy, students, English department

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently cultural literacy in Indonesia is a very interesting issue to be discussed. As it is known that literacy is as the ability of a person in using the written or printed information to develop knowledge and bring benefits to the wider community. Further, the new one can be said literate if he can understand something because of reading and doing things based on his reading comprehension (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 2005). Cultural literacy is a reflection of the nation's progress and the students university are as the spearhead of the nation's progress. In accordance with that university students are strongly required for that. They are supposed to be the agents of change but unfortunately they are still having much effort to fulfill that role. Young intellectuals are required to be active opinion leader through the publication of writing and foreign language skills. Unfortunately a surprising fact came in Indonesia, that according to the Research Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) said, the culture of "literacy" the people of Indonesia in 2012 was ranked 64th out of 65 countries. Coupled with the statistical data in 2012 that calls UNESCO index reading interest in Indonesia reached 0,001. That is, every 1,000 inhabitants, only one person who has interest in reading. It is actually really very bad for Indonesia in the context of opinion in the international community. The data excerpted by UNESCO about reading interest in Indonesia is also certainly influential in the world of higher education or universities in Indonesia which is the main base in the development of cultural literacy. This study aimed to review how far the students' cultural literacy in English Department Students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara was. The significance of this research is practically having relation with improv-

ing the insight of cultural literacy and as the basis for education practitioners to encourage the emergence of cultural literacy in term of enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia.

Culture is closely related to education, because culture is overtly nurtured through learning process. Reading habits and writing are skills that can be cultivated and developed into a culture. By reading, one can obtain information, knowledge and improved-intellectual. Ridwan (2004, p 27) states that *interest* is the desire or inclination to read hearts high (passion) to read. Interest in reading, supported by facilities and infra-structure for reading will develop reading habit, and will further develop into reading culture in society. Reading interest can be cultivated, nurtured and developed as interest in reading is a skill acquired after a person is born, instead of an innate skill. According to Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) in the perspective of anthropology, custom which also called folkway acts are repeated in the similar shape. Habits have greater binding force rather than a discussion of the relationship between individuals in society. Custom which is defined as an act that is repeated in the same form is proof that many people act predictably. However, "the ability to read in a person is not a guarantee to the creation of reading habits because the habit of reading is also affected by other factors" (Winoto, 1994. p 151), such as the availability of reading materials. Custom development activities is the process of learning.

It has been widely demonstrated that the success or failure of students in learning mostly depends on the background of the psychological, social and cultural development. Therefore, to be a successful educator, he should know the socio-cultural background of the learners in addition to their psychological background. Psychologically, "learners can be distinguished by the level of age and other variables such as talent, personality, learning style, level of language skills and motivation" (Harmer, 2004. p 221). This categorization is a marker of what kind of learners they are facing so that learning tasks are appropriate to be developed by educators. In the meantime, from the socio-cultural background, learners can be identified by the origin of a social group or particular racial / ethnic groups. In this connection, they can be identified based on things that they shared similar mission, for example, the language used, the values, traditions and ways of doing things. These things are called by the *majority culture*. Nevertheless, the majority culture does not mean having to apply equally to every individual of the group, but usually there are sub-cultures that became a minority (Cruickshank, et al., 2006).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was a qualitative descriptive study focused on how far the students' cultural literacy was and the issues found in their cultural literacy development. The subjects taken in this study were 40 students of English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara located at Jalan Mukhtar Basri No. 3 Medan. The amount taken was from four different classes. They were third academic year in 2015. The data obtained was about students' cultural literacy inside campus, either to fulfill the tasks of the course and for the sake of others quantitatively. The technique used was including participant observation conducted to observe their cultural literacy and issues found it around the campus. Then to obtain data which was not covered by direct observation, questionnaires were given to all the selected respondents. The field notes and recording results were conducted to analyze the data. In addition, this study also used triangulation to provide data reliability through group discussions with Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with the respondents. This discussion took place based on the guiding questions to guide the discussion focusing on the students' cultural literacy.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As it was stated earlier, the data analysis was done based on the type of data obtained through several types of instruments used in this research such as field notes, questionnaire and recording

the results of Focused Group Discussion (FGD). Therefore, the data were described based on the order of virtues such data.

3.1 Observation Result

Based on observations involved regarding student activities on campus, there are some ideas about their activities in general. Students' activities at the English department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara are not only to fulfill the campus rule but also to meet their personal interests. This is related to the facilities available in the campus environment. As it was found campus facilities in general, the campus provided classrooms for conventional teaching and learning activities, a laboratory for each study program to support the learning and library or reference room. Meanwhile there were also other supporting facilities such as open spaces, parks, masjid, vehicle parking, canteens and student activity spaces. Internet network was also available and accessed by students to support their lecture activities of the lectures and personal use. These facilities could create their cultural literacy.

Their main activities in the classroom were to participate in a formal lecture in the conventional way. When the lecture was over, generally they immediately left the classroom. Although sometimes some students chose to remain in the classroom while waiting for the next lecture or just rested while chatting or joking with one or two classmates. Sometimes some of them seemed determined to work with their respective laptops in the classroom, especially in classrooms where they could access the internet.

In addition to the classrooms, lecture activities were also conducted in the laboratory spaces. Activities in these laboratory spaces were generally associated with formal learning activities in accordance with the schedule set by the program of study or faculty concerned, either in classical or group activities. The laboratory work was dependent on the type of the laboratory itself. Formal lectures in the classroom and in the lab always involved oral and literacy mandatory. However the facilities of laboratory themselves were still limited so it couldn't facilitate much more than it was supposed in order to improve the students' cultural literacy.

Meanwhile, other activities which are optional activities are visiting the library or reading room. Activities in this space were dominated by literacy activities because there is a prohibition to speak at the library. Because of a very limited availability of supporting library facilities, there were only a small percentage of students who utilized this facility for reading or writing activity. Other facility as a favorite places for students to spend their time on campus was the open space around the campus. In this place they were also often seen doing conversation and literacy activities. The other facility which was highly desirable and necessary was the campus cafeteria. This place was not just a place to enjoy food but also to relieve fatigue, to hang out with other friends for having conversation and joking and sometimes to work on their their laptop with internet access. Thus, the canteen is also a place that allows for literacy activity.

3.2 Questionnaire Result

To complete the description of student' activities in terms of literacy both within the campus and outside campus, the following was put forward more detailed data obtained from the completed questionnaires by respondents (students), as listed in the following table.

No	Activities	Frequency						Total (%)
		1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	
1.	The utilization of day							

	a. Attending the lecture and do the campus assignment	28	5	4	3	0	0	40
	b. Earn a living	5	10	15	10	0	0	40
	c. Do the house work	10	20	8	2	0	0	40
	d. Talking / chatting with family / friends	13	20	5	2	0	0	40
	e. Reading	4	15	16	5	0	0	40
	f. Writing	1	2	17	20	0	0	40
	g. Watching TV or browsing internet	18	10	7	5	0	0	40
	h. A walk or visiting family / friends	10	15	10	5	0	0	40
2.	The purpose of talking/chatting							
	a. Share the opinion about personal problem or family	12	15	8	3	2	0	40
	b. Discuss the campus assignment	5	16	14	5	0	0	40
	c. Only chat and gather with friends/family	4	18	14	4	0	0	40
	d. Gossip other personal matter	5	10	15	6	4	0	40
3.	Media used in talking/ chatting with families or friends							
	a. Direct	10	15	10	5	0	0	40
	b. By phone	5	10	15	5	5	0	40
	c. Social media	7	18	12	3	0	0	40
4.	The purpose of reading activities							
	a. Fulfill the campus assignment given by lecturer	8	16	11	3	2	0	40
	b. Search the information and improve the knowledge	12	18	6	2	0	0	40
	c. Spend the spare time	10	17	8	5	0	0	40
5.	The kinds of reading source							
	a. Literature book	2	5	5	15	3	0	40
	b. Novels	7	12	15	4	2		40
	c. Magazine , Newspaper and other popular reading	5	6	20	7	2	0	40
	d. Scientific reading from internet	9	20	7	4	0	0	40
	e. Popular reading material from the internet	6	17	4	13	0	0	40
	f. Others	4	15	10	5	6	1	40

6.	The purpose of writing activities							
	a. Fulfill the campus assignment	12	17	13	0	0	0	40
	b. Note the important thing for long last memory	10	18	8	2	2	0	40
	c. Record daily activities	5	10	5	20	0	0	40
	d. Explore the Talents / hobbies in the fields of literature	3	6	7	20	4	0	40
	e. Deliver the message to others	5	14	18	3	0	0	40
	f. Share the knowledge	4	7	16	8	5		40
	g. Spend the free time	5	18	12	5	0	0	40
7.	Media used in writing							
	a. Papers/ books	6	15	14	4	1	0	40
	b. Mobile phone	3	7	8	20	2	0	40
	c. Computer and internet	15	18	7	0	0	0	40
8.	The activities in spare time							
	a. Talking	15	20	5	0	0	0	40
	b. Reading/writing	3	5	7	10	15	0	40
	c. Playing a game	5	15	12	6	2	0	40
	d. Watching TV or hanging around	7	13	17	3	0	0	40
	e. Do the useful activities	6	12	16	4	2	0	40
9.	The activities done in public places							
	a. Talking	15	18	7	0	0	0	40
	b. Reading/writing	4	7	16	13	0	0	40
	c. Playing a game / phone	15	18	5	2	0	0	40
	d. Browse the internet	18	20	12	0	0	0	40
	e. Others							40
10.	The activities done while browsing the internet							
	a. Open Facebook/Twitter and other social media	16	18	6	0	0	0	40
	b. Browsing the campus reading material	6	15	13	6	0	0	40
	c. Blogging	3	7	5	20	5	0	40
	d. Other	2	16	14	6	2	0	40
11.	The reason of tendencies of oral and literacy activities							
	a. Deepen kinship / friendship	9	16	14	1	0	0	40
	b. Communicating and obtaining information	7	20	13	0	0	0	40
	c. Improving the knowledge	5	18	11	6	0	0	40
	d. Spend the leisure time	5	7	9	14	5	0	40

Frequency:

1 : always

2 : often

3 : sometimes

4 : seldom

5 : Never

6 : No answer

Based on the calculation results of student activities frequency regarding to literacy activities, both on campus and off-campus could be explained some important things as the following description. First, it was known that most respondents (70%) were students of pure primary obligations to attend a lecture. In running the task as students, they should have literacy activities as the main task. However, only a minority of students (37%) stated often read. In fact, only 4% of respondents said always read as part of their daily activities. Similarly, the act of writing, only a small percentage (3%) of those who declared always write and often only some 42%. The rest was only occasionally and even rarely (41% and 30%). This data showed that the cultural literacy activities have not been fully a routine activity for students yet.

In contrast, the oral activity in the form of a talk with fellow students or with a family member was more dominant. There were some 48% of them stating always chatted to spend the time and there were some 38% said often and there was 2% having a rare oral activity. In other words, the oral activity of still dominated everyday much more than literacy activities.

The main reason why they prefer oral activity than literacy was to share issues or matters, either studying or college affairs, personal affairs, family and for the social intercourse purposes. Even the majority of them said that the chance of talking is done sometimes for the purpose of backbiting others. The method or medium used in the conversation was almost always through direct meetings – face to face. In addition to face-to-face, they were often or sometimes talking over the phone or on the internet social networking. Talk-activity was not only done at home or on the campus environment, but also in public places such as in the cafeteria and other gathering places or even when on the road. To use their spare time most students (66%) almost always chose to use it to talk than to read, only 27% of those who used their spare time to read. Even when they were alone with a mobile phone or laptop facilitated by the Internet, they always chatted (78%) through social networks such as Facebook, Line, WhatsApp, Skype, Twitter and the like. Nevertheless, the majority of them (64%) were also frequently utilizing this facility for browsing the internet or downloading materials lecturing or other reading materials. Meanwhile, there were still a few of them (less than 18%) who frequently used the internet facilities for the writing purposes. The student status could not be separated from the tasks of literacy (literacy). In fact, only 12 % of students always took the time daily to read and only 10 % of them always wrote as day-to-day activities. While only 35% of them primarily filled the time with literacy activities by campus assignment. For personal purposes such as recording important events it was just done by 10% of them and for hobby only done by 8% of them. Meanwhile, there were 11% of those who almost always did a writing activity for the purpose of conveying a message to others and for the purposes of leisure time (16%). In general, the media used for writing was to use paper media or books (45%) and computers (68%).

Compared to reading and writing, the students tended to choose oral than literacy activities. It was more effective to strengthen the social relationships of family / friends (80%), to deliver and to obtain information (75%), to increase knowledge (68%) and more pleasant to spend leisure time (60%),

3.3 Results of Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

Apart from the results of observational data with field notes and data on self-report of the results of the questionnaire, as described above, the following described the data obtained from the results of focus group discussions or called by focused group discussion (FGD). The discussion was conducted with a group of students consisting of 10 people representing the 40 students who had previously been designated as the subject of this study. Data obtained through this technique generally provide confirmation of the data have been obtained previously.

Oral activity was not only they did to a fellow family member, friend, or acquaintance when they met each other face to face, but also when they were separated by distance and time. Verbal communication between them could still be made through the medium of the telephone (cell phone), voice call, video call and others. This remote verbal communication was replaced by a written communication. For example, by conveying a message using a mobile phone via short messages (SMS), e-mail, MMS, BM and other social networking programs that are on the internet; it was assumed as secondary oral activities.

Oral activities was also formally done in order to fulfill the tasks of the course, for example, to interact in the process of lectures, discussions and presentations in classes, as well as for training or teaching practice, seminars and oral exams and exam subjects thesis trial. Meanwhile, in general, the real literacy activity was only done for the purpose of fulfilling the tasks of college. For example, to write papers on the subjects being studied, answered the structured task, exams, report of the practical work of laboratory and work field then to summarize the results of reading a book or article, prepare a power point presentation in classes and to fulfill the final thesis. Reading activities were considered tiring and tedious job, especially reading the lecture material. Similarly, writing was very difficult to do. Luckily there were many materials that could be accessed via the Internet so that it could be an example and sometimes even they downloaded writing materials from the Internet for assignments.

In the meantime, almost all of them prefer to spend time with oral activity than writing within the campus or off-campus area. When they were not attending lectures, a gathering place they chose was the campus cafeteria, gardens around the campus or in other open spaces by having internet access for social media activities, talking, joking and other. To do college work such as reading, writing or discussion were just tiring to do. Even when they were alone with their laptop or mobile phone, respectively they were still able to communicate with other people out there. In this spare time oral activities were still main choice compared with literacy activities. Similar activities also take place at home or in their residence.

Meanwhile, in order to fulfill the tasks of the course, the existence of internet facility they used to get it from e-books, articles and other reading materials to fulfill the tasks given by the lecturer. These tasks made them a must do activity to read and write. Furthermore, in their opinion, the availability of materials on the internet they had to do simply by customizing according to the needs. Sometimes even recognized for fulfilling this task, especially when urgent, they just copied and pasted exactly what was available on the internet.

Although some internet program provided students the opportunity to write creatively, like blogger, word press, live journal, Facebook, and others, but only a few students who had taken advantage of the facility to write.

3.4 Findings and Discussion

From the results of the above description of the data analysis could be put forward several important findings. First, the oral activities still dominated student activities both on campus and outside campus. It was not only done directly face to face but already replaced by electronic media not limited by space and time.

The second fact, literacy activities were generally carried out only to fulfill the tasks of the lecture. Only a very few were doing this literacy activity for personal interest or talent although a variety of media had been provided to allow them to participate in creative writing. The writing activities were only to fulfill the campus tasks.

The third fact was the reason why oral activity dominated in daily activities of students both inside and outside the campus than literacy activities. It was because oral activity was more effective and enjoyable in establishing social relationships. In other words, it contained the values of togetherness, solidarity, civility and comfort in communicating.

Oral activity on campus, especially in the classroom was mainly due to the assignment by the lecturer. It depended on the instructional design developed by the faculty in the lecture. There was still a few literacy work undertaken by initiative students like asking, expressing an opinion or criticism in interaction in the classroom. This was because they were not familiar with that mode of literacy activity, so that they were lack of confidence, fear, shame, and other uncomfortable feeling. In addition, the learning models applied generally required lecturers or faculty to dominate it.

Based on these findings it could be noted here that the cultural literacy was still as an integral part of student life. Meanwhile, cultural literacy by students was not a part of routine activity as a necessity in life outside campus activities. They did it if it was required regarding to the tasks of the course. It was not originally from their personal interest and inseparable from their lives. It should not only demand among the students because also to the entire academic community on campus.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, findings and discussion, as has been described above it can be concluded some points as follows:

1. Oral activities still dominated both inside and outside the campus than writing. It generally took place in informal communication in chat or talk in class outside of class hours, in the parks, in canteens, and in other open areas on campus
2. Cultural literacy also took place was still limited activity for the purposes of fulfilling the tasks of lectures given by lecturers, in particular the nature of academic literacy activities

This study suggests the applying of learning models as a learning strategy that is CTL approach. Because this approach provides a variety of learning models that can accommodate, harmonize and create the academic habituation of cultural literacy simultaneously.

5. REFERENCES

- Ball, D., & Forzani, F. (2009). The work of teaching and the challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(5), 497-511
- Elmborg, J. (2006). Critical Information Literacy: Implication for Instructional Practice. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*. 32 (2) p. 192-199
- Kramsch, C. (2008). *Language and Culture*. China: Oxford University Press.
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the Connections between Campus Courses and Field Experiences in College and University Based on Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education* 61 (2) p 123- 127
- Lantolf, J. P. (2007). *Intrapersonal Communication and Internalization in the Second Language Classroom*. In Alex Kozulin et al (Eds.), *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context* (pp. 349-370). New York: Cambridge University Press

Violet, S.E & G. Ang. (2012). Culturally Mixed Group on International Campuses: An Opportunity for Inter-Cultural Learning. *Journal of Higher Education Research and Development* 31 (1) p 21-37

Setiawan, W. (2012). Development of Personal Learning Network System to Build E-Literacy. *International Journal of Computer Science*. 9 (2) p 114- 120

Cruickshank, et al., 2006

Harmer, 2004. p 221

Kirsch & Jungeblut, 2005

Winoto, 1994

Research Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)