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## **Exploring and Proposing Practices in Developing Students' Cultural Awareness through Literature in EFL Context**

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### **Abstract**

The rapid growth of globalization has made English becomes international language of communication in modern technological world. Responding to this condition, English teachers are encouraged to change their role in order to meet the modern global needs of learners. Knowing that cross-cultural interactions will no longer exists in big urban center areas but it may take place everywhere particularly in most social and professional contexts as individuals are from multiple countries, cultures and languages, therefore being aware of other cultural groups' behaviors, expectations, perspectives and values in a global context is considered as essential concept to be understood by students. In response to this call, teachers should encourage their students to understand the reasons for the actions and beliefs of the other cultural group/s whose language they are learning to use by designing class activities which will develop students cultural awareness and help them to be culturally literate students who have required skills for being successful member and communicator in global community. Literature has been considered as the source material for language learning by educators as it facilitates awareness of cultural, linguistic, and cognitive/metacognitive skill of students to improve. This paper, through an extensive review of literature, addresses the importance of cultural awareness in EFL context, discusses results from previous studies regarding the use of literature and finally presents recommendations on ways to improve cultural awareness using literary text in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** Cultural Awareness, Literature, EFL

### **Abstrak**

Pesatnya pertumbuhan globalisasi telah menjadikan bahasa Inggris menjadi bahasa komunikasi internasional di dunia teknologi modern. Menanggapi kondisi ini, guru bahasa Inggris didorong untuk mengubah peran mereka untuk memenuhi kebutuhan global peserta didik modern. Mengetahui bahwa interaksi lintas budaya tidak akan ada lagi di daerah pusat kota besar tetapi dapat terjadi dimana-mana terutama dalam sebagian besar konteks sosial dan profesional karena individu berasal dari berbagai negara, budaya dan bahasa, oleh karena itu menyadari perilaku, harapan dan perilaku kelompok budaya lain, perspektif dan nilai-nilai dalam konteks global dianggap sebagai konsep penting untuk dipahami oleh siswa. Menanggapi panggilan ini, guru harus mendorong siswa mereka untuk memahami alasan tindakan dan keyakinan

kelompok budaya lain yang bahasa mereka sedang belajar untuk digunakan dengan merancang kegiatan kelas yang akan mengembangkan kesadaran budaya siswa dan membantu mereka secara budaya melek huruf siswa yang memiliki keterampilan yang dibutuhkan untuk menjadi anggota yang sukses dan komunikator dalam komunitas global. Sastra telah dianggap sebagai bahan sumber untuk belajar bahasa oleh pendidik karena memfasilitasi kesadaran budaya, linguistik, dan keterampilan kognitif / metakognitif siswa untuk meningkat. Makalah ini, melalui tinjauan literatur yang luas, membahas pentingnya kesadaran budaya dalam konteks EFL, membahas hasil dari studi sebelumnya mengenai penggunaan literatur dan akhirnya menyajikan rekomendasi tentang cara-cara untuk meningkatkan kesadaran budaya menggunakan teks sastra di ruang kelas EFL.

**Kata Kunci:** Kesadaran Budaya, Sastra, EFL

### INTRODUCTION

Literature is known as one of teaching media particularly in teaching and learning language. According to Moody (1971) cited in Turker (1991), literature acts like an umbrella term giving information on every business. Therefore literature, may have the connection with various field of interested such as in every kinds of written and spoken business, can be the best media of expressing a specific subject for example in language learning, child raising, communication, business, and literature for the author's style.

From language teaching perspective, according to Baird (1968) cited in Turker (1991) that it is the use of language effectively in suitable conditions. Further he explains that the language used in literary texts is suitable for the contexts of the events thus, literary texts can be used in language teaching. McKay (1982), points out the advantages of literature in ESL/EFL classes. It can be useful in developing linguistic knowledge both on a usage and use level. Secondly, to the extent that students enjoy reading literature, it may increase their motivation to interact with a text and thus, ultimately increase their reading proficiency. It may also enhance students' understanding of a foreign culture and perhaps "spur their own creation of imaginative works". In the same vein, Brumfit (1986) states that literature was a skill subject, not a content subject and stressed the potential of literature in enhancing the reading skills. Carter (1991) adds that literary texts contain lots of meaningful contexts in which linguistic components such as lexical items and grammatical structures are used in a natural way. The above mentioned benefits of literary texts in language classes show that Literature is considered as potential source for language development (Hall, 2005).

Researchers had been conducted various studies related to the use of literature in ESL and EFL classroom. Study by Van (2009) also showed that literature is full of instances of real-life language in various situations; it provides lots of opportunities for students to improve syntactic, pragmatic, cultural, and discoursed awareness among learners. The uses of literature as a source of teaching encourage the students to experience literary experience while reading a piece of literature shows the positive role of literature (Khatib, Hossein & Rahimi, 2012). Another scholar believes that literature course in EFL context help students to increase their critical thinking and make intercultural connections through literary works (Armstrong, 2015).

Furthermore, Lazar (1993) says that literature can be used as a tool for creating opportunities for discussion, controversy, and critical thinking.

The use of literature in EFL classroom is not only giving benefits for teaching foreign language aspects but also addressing the cultural aspect and other important aspects such as emotional intelligence and critical thinking (Khatib, 2011). Collie and Slater (1994) claim that one of the advantages in using literature in language classrooms is the potential of cultural enrichment. In similar point, Belcher (2001) contends that literature increases learners' cultural knowledge as it includes a variety of cultural elements through the text. Therefore, literature becomes one of other ways to introduce students to other countries' culture to improve their cultural awareness. Cultural awareness (CA) has emerged as a significant part in conceptualizing the cultural dimension in language teaching (Baker, 2011). Further, Baker (2011) defines CA as a conscious understanding of the role culture plays in language learning and communication (in both first and foreign languages). The conception of CA stresses on the need for learners to become aware of the culturally based norms, beliefs, and behaviors of their own culture and other cultures. Therefore, through the use of literary texts as authentic materials which naturally include cultural elements will be beneficial inputs for students' improvement of cultural awareness in EFL classes. In addition, students' appreciation on their own culture, empathy and openness toward other cultures will also develop indirectly.

In line with the revolution industry 4.0, the use of literature in language classes can be integrated with technology. Zainal (2012) conducts a case study to analyze teachers' use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching English literature. The results of the study shows that how the teachers use technology is related to their beliefs about the value of technology in addressing learners' needs such as language difficulty and motivation, and teachers' integration of computer program were not used in ways that promoted learner collaboration but rather as a whole class activity (Zainal, 2012:237).

One of the most popular trends in Education is the implementation of 'Flipped Classroom'. It is one where students are introduced to content at home, and practice working through it at school. In this blended learning approach, face-to-face interaction is mixed with independent study via technology. According to Jenkins et al. (2017) flipped learning pedagogy stems from the premise of inquiry-based and egalitarian philosophy: with the growing access to vast information through the internet, the traditional model of teacher as the sole steward of knowledge has become obsolete. In attempt to keep up with the growing trend in Education and engaging in the concept of Education 4.0, thus, it is important to creatively integrate the use of literature and technology in language classes to promote learner interactions and also to increase their cultural and language enrichments. Based on those reasons, this paper aims to address the importance of using literature to improve cultural awareness in EFL classes.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This conceptual paper proposes a new model in teaching English through the combination of using literary works and online platform. Using existing theories in teaching English using literature as well as results from previous studies on the use of technology in teaching foreign language, the proposed model is developed.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

There are some possible approaches to using literature with the language learners. According to Lazarus (1993), those are: a language based approach, literature as content and literature for personal enrichment. First, a language based approach assumes that students are encouraged to draw on their knowledge of familiar grammatical, lexical or discoursal categories to make aesthetic judgments of the text (p.23). Second, it is the most traditional approach. Literature itself is the content of the course (p.24). Students acquire English by focusing on the content through literary texts and criticism. Third, it assumes that literature is a useful tool for encouraging students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings and opinions (p.24). These three possible approaches become a reference to select and design materials for classroom use.

Savvidou (2004) describes various approaches to teaching literature and provides a rationale for an integrated approach to teaching literature in language classroom based on the premise that literature is language and language can be literary. The suggested integrated model integrates a linguistics approach which utilizes some strategies used in stylistic analysis. There are six stages. First, preparation and anticipation, this stage is to obtain learners' real or literary experience of the main themes and context of text. Second, focusing, learners begin to experience the text by listening or reading and focusing on specific content in the text. Third, preliminary response, learners give their initial response orally or written. Fourth, working at it part one, is focusing on comprehending the first level of meaning through intensive reading. Fifth, working at it part two, is focusing on deeper level by analyzing and exploring the text to convey the message through overall structure and any special uses of language, such as figures of speech, imagery, rhythm, etc. Sixth, interpretation and personal response, the final stage is focusing on increasing understanding, enhancing enjoyment of the text and enabling learners to come to their own personal interpretation of the text (Savvidou, 2004, p. 3-4). The integrated model promotes the use of literary texts in language classroom as a potential power pedagogic tool. Since it offers strategies to analyze and interpret language in context. Not only to recognize how the language is manipulated, but also the reason. Moreover, learners are also able to develop their linguistics and communicative skills.

The combination of model and approach on using literature in language classes provide complete aspects to improve learners' skills. The focus of using literature is not only to promote the literature itself but also the language. Furthermore, by involving the cultural aspect, it can provoke learners' critical thinking and cultural awareness toward various literary works from different countries. Thus, the mixed methods of language based, content based and personal growth is a complete method on using literature in language classroom.

With regards to cultural awareness, this study focuses on the qualities as propose by Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), they are awareness of one's own culturally-induced behavior, awareness of the culturally-induced behavior of others and ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint. These qualities are developed through careful selection of cultural contents and thought provoking activities. In the process of raising students' cultural awareness, the cultural contents are referred to the elements of culture which relate to things like the beliefs, values, customs, products, and the communication styles of a given culture or society (Cohen et al. 2003). To be

more specific, in this study, The Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLEP 1999) which include a framework for students to integrate the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the product both tangible and intangible of a society is used as the reference in deciding the cultural contents presented in EFL class. The standard has become known as the 3P model of culture. It covers *Perspectives* (what members of a culture think, feel, and value), *Practices* (how members communicate and interact with one another) and *Products* (technology, music, art, food, literature, etc.; the things members of a group create, share, and transmit to the next generation). In addition to the use of the 3P model of culture, the ‘Iceberg Analogy’ proposed by Hall (1976) is also used as the reference to identify and understand the *deep culture* (cultural practices and social perspectives that underlie the behavior of a specific culture).

Selecting the teaching materials which have cultural contents is the first way before conducting classroom activities. Various stories from different countries with issues on belief and custom are chosen to be used in the classroom. Teachers may consider the criteria of selection based on geographical location and also the common experiences between Indonesia and other countries. For example a short story from Africa. Considering the common colonial experience, Africa and Indonesia had been colonized by other countries. Thus, it may be relevant for Indonesian students. It may give students a chance to observe the African belief in their tradition which is influenced by colonization. It is encouraged to introduce students to literary works from different countries considering their different culture to improve their cultural awareness.

Students will read the text and some questions will be provided to check their understanding about the story. The questions will consist of: reading comprehension, guessing meaning from context, and grammar. This phase will be useful to measure their language competence. Then, on class discussion, there will be some questions relate to the content of the story. The patterns of the questions are to find out about: their opinion on some actions or events in the story, what they will do and what they feel if they become the characters of the story, and relate to their experience the formulation of a question by using “have you ever ...” will be suitable for students. Thus, class discussion is a phase to dig out the deeper meaning of the story by stimulating the students with some questions to improve their cultural awareness. It is important for teachers to highlight the issue that they want to share because it will support them to formulate the questions. Through the appropriate questions, students will be able to understand the issues—specifically cultural issues—and improve their cultural awareness. Knowing different culture from many countries that portray in fiction will encourage them to appreciate a rich diversity of culture and enrich their understanding of their own culture.

By conducting careful selection on cultural contents and classroom activities, it is expected that students are provided with ample opportunities to explore and recognize cultural differences. In other words, this means both students’ awareness on the target culture and their own culture will improve. Furthermore, the cultural bias will be minimized along with the increase of students’ personal growth.

In line with the growth of globalization, the use of technology to complete the mixed methods can give more chances to learners to understand the text. By using

online website learners can access the text and do the exercise everywhere and every time. There are two steps for conducting the mixed methods by using online website (*Designing In-class Activities for Flipped Classroom: A Step-by-Step Guide*, 2018):

#### *Pre-class*

Students have to access reading the literary text in [geschool.com](http://geschool.com) and do the exercise by answering some multiple choice questions. The questions consist of: comprehension questions, guess meaning from context, and grammar point modeled in the text.

#### *In-class*

Teacher will do a cross check on the numbers of students taking the online exercise. Only students who have done the online exercise may join the class. In-class activities involve three stages:

##### 1. Briefing

Teacher should introduce the topic and provide background information about the learning activities through a short briefing.

##### 2. Building ideas

After the briefing stage, students should be ready to process the information, explore the topic and generate ideas, in groups or individually. Examples of activities are case analysis, brainstorming and discussion. This part should be led by students themselves, with teachers acting as facilitators and/or monitors. Teachers should take an active role in communicating with students from time to time, in order to provide timely support and suggestions.

##### 3. Presentation and feedback

Lastly, students are encouraged to present their work for feedback and suggestions from peers and teachers. The presentation can be conducted in class or online.

### **CONCLUSION**

Having known the purposes of education as stipulated in the law of national education system does not automatically makes the institution, in this case the writer of the textbooks aware of addressing cultural literacy in their learning materials. The cultural aspects are addressed in reading texts and tasks are represented by information about national tourist spots and national heroes, national celebrations, and folk stories. They were not even explicitly stated that the teacher might not be aware of them, let alone addressed them in the teaching-learning activities. It could be tentatively concluded then that cultural literacy was not deliberately addressed in the documents of English Language Instruction under this study.

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