



ENGLISH LITERACY CULTURE OF UNIVERSITY LEVEL EFL LEARNERS: *HOW LITERATE ARE THEY?*

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Article History:

Submitted:

08-18-2018

Accepted:

08-27-2018

Published:

09-01-2018

URL: <https://doi.org/10.32682/jeel.v4i2.872>

DOI: 10.32682/jeel.v4i2.872

Abstract

Nowadays, English literacy becomes the hot topic spoken among English practitioners. Literacy embraces four competences including listening, speaking, reading and writing; however, in this particular study the researcher only investigates reading and writing. Many ways have already been and will be conducted to promote such literacy. In this study, the researcher is eager to contribute in giving the springboard particularly for English practitioners to see how the EFL learners' literacy culture especially in university level and to know the shortages they have faced to build their English literacy culture. The subjects of this study are eighty-two university level students majoring at English education in Unisma. The researcher uses questionnaire as the instrument in gaining the data needed which then were analyzed qualitatively. The result shows that the students' literacy culture is considered low and needs to improve greatly.

Keyword: *literacy, reading, writing*

Abstrak

Baru-baru ini, literasi bahasa Inggris menjadi topik hangat yang dibicarakan di kalangan praktisi bahasa Inggris. Literasi mencakup empat kompetensi termasuk mendengarkan, berbicara, membaca dan menulis; Namun, dalam studi ini, peneliti hanya membatasi pada kegiatan membaca dan menulis. Banyak cara telah dan akan dilakukan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan literasi. Dalam studi ini, peneliti ingin berkontribusi dengan memberikan batu loncatan khususnya bagi praktisi bahasa Inggris untuk melihat bagaimana budaya literasi para pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing terutama di tingkat



universitas dan untuk mengetahui kekurangan yang mereka hadapi dalam membangun budaya literasi bahasa Inggris mereka. Subyek penelitian ini adalah 50 mahasiswa tingkat universitas jurusan bahasa Inggris di Unisma. Peneliti menggunakan kuesioner dan wawancara sebagai instrumen dalam memperoleh data yang dibutuhkan yang kemudian dianalisis secara kualitatif.

Kata kunci: literasi, membaca, menulis

Introduction

Literacy has recently become an interesting issue spoken among linguists. Based on its historical background, literacy is famously-known as being well-educated or learned as well as being knowledgeable in particular field(s). As time goes by, the definition of literacy is incrementally narrower; it is around the late nineteenth century in which literacy is defined as the ability to read and write (Teale & Sulzby: 1986; Grabe & Kaplan: 1992; and Graff: 2006). Pertaining to the issue in the afore-mentioned elicitation, the researcher was curious to find out how high the literacy culture among university level students. Such study was once conducted by Sari & Pujiono (2017); in this particular study, they did their research investigating the Yogyakarta State University students' literacy culture and its constraints. Based on the data analysis, they concluded that their literacy culture was still considered as low and it must, then, be improved. While its constraints mostly came from the students' internal factors like lack of motivation, being lazy to read and write, being bored or not interested to read because of the boring materials. Based on this previous study, the researcher, accordingly, were curious to uncover the students' literacy culture of Unisma and the problems they faced when reading and writing—the almost similar concept of study in the different context.

Related Literatures

English Literacy

English literacy, in this sense, is defined as the ability to read and write in English. These competences are highly needed especially in the academic world. In a broader extent, however, the activity of reading and writing frequently occurs outside of the academic purposes. For the English for Foreign Language (EFL) learners, such phenomena imply the accomplishment of lifelong reading and writing in which the learners read and write because they enjoy doing such activities, not only because of the teachers' instruction to read in academic context. To be fluent readers and writers, reading and writing extended materials in extended period of time become a must for them to do by which their ability to read and write will increasingly develop from time to time (Grabe: 2009). Fluent readers and writers will consequently be successful learners whose higher achievement than those who are not (Guthrie, Schafer, & Huang, 2001:

159). English literacy culture, in this certain study, talks about the habit related to reading and writing activities of Unisma students which the higher level within which the students immerse, presumably, the more advanced level the activities they engage. The following section explains reading and writing activities, in brief.

Defining Reading

Reading, as one of skills required in learning English, is defined as "... the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in the language form via the medium of print" (Urquhart & Weir, 1998: 22) to gain comprehension for which "the readers extract and integrate various information from the text and combine it with what is already known" (Koda, 2005: 4). Comprehension, itself, is matters in its degree depending upon the purposes of reading which range from very informal purpose such as reading newspaper, flyers, or ads to very formal like reading in academic contexts or in workplace environment. Skilled readers, then, can adjust themselves the distinct strategies used for the differing purposes which possibly make them read the wide range of materials in a short time.

In line with this issue, Brown (2004) classifies reading materials into some genres which are so-called academic reading, job-related reading, and personal reading. Academic reading materials refers to those used for academic purposes; there are certain magazines and newspapers related to the academic purposes, technical report e.g. lab reports, professional journal articles, reference material e.g. dictionary and the like, textbooks, essays, papers, test directions, editorials, and opinion writing. While, messages e.g. WhatsApp messages, letters/emails, memos, schedules, labels, signs, announcements, forms, applications, questionnaires, financial documents (bills, invoices, etc.), manuals, and directions are considered as job related reading materials which are, as what famously-called, used in the workplace. The last one is, personal reading materials which the readers read either at a glance or at a leisure time with their own pace. The materials range from newspapers, magazines, letters, emails, greeting cards, invitations, messages, notes, lists, schedules (train, bus, plane, etc.), recipes, menus, maps, calendars, advertisements, novels, short stories, jokes, drama, poetry, financial documents, forms, questionnaires, medical reports, immigration documents, comic strips, cartoons, and etc.

Reading those massive materials in the afore-mentioned, of course, certain strategies are required. The diverse strategies employed, thus, depend on the reading purposes the readers want to achieve. Nuttal (1989) states that the strategies that may be employed by skilled readers when reading: 1) skimming; 2) scanning; 3) intensive; and 4) extensive. The readers, in skimming, do glance quickly the text to get its gist such as by summarizing, finding the main idea, etc., not only getting the information already stated within the text. In scanning, differently, the readers read at glance the print to either search certain information already stated in the text such as name, date, phone number, etc. or

find if the book is suitable for particular purpose. The third, reading intensively done when the readers do reading for the academic purposes; while the last one is reading extensively in which the readers read outside the classroom which is, of course, for fun activity like reading novels, magazines, comics, etc.

Defining Writing

Writing is defined as “the act of forming visible letters or characters “ (Meriam-Webster: 1928). In Hyland (2009), writing is differentiated in three distinct prioritized-purposes, those are writing as social interaction, as social construction, and as power and ideology. As social interaction, writing deals with “the interaction between the readers and the writers” (Nystrand, 1989 in Hyland, 1989). In this sense, the writing process refers to the process of creating a printed text which is presumed the reader will know; the reading process, then, is defined as the process of inferring the gist the writers want to convey. Writing, as social construction, refers to the activity within which the writers adapt their written text in order to match with the readers’ way of thinking and concepts of understanding the world. The third is writing as power and ideology; the former refers to what already exists in print, say, the soul of the written text which is maintained by the latter. This certain purpose is massively used as, say, the agent of change by which the writers can alter the society’s beliefs.

In terms of the writing products, Brown (2004) also groups those into three differing genres; academic writing, job-related writing, personal writing. They are stated in more detail in the following table.

Table 1 Genres of Writing (Adopted from Brown: 2004)

1. Academic writing	papers and general subject reports essay, compositions academically focused journals short answer test responses technical reports (e.g., lab reports) theses, dissertations
2. Job-related writing	messages (phone messages) letters/emails memos (e.g. interoffice) reports (e.g., job evaluations, project reports) schedules, labels, signs advertisements, announcements manuals
3. Personal writing	letters, emails, greeting cards, invitations messages, notes calendar entries, shopping lists, reminders financial document (e.g., checks, tax forms, immigration documents)

diaries, personal journals
fiction (e.g., short stories, poetry)

Considering the above classification, the writers, of course, write differently to produce the different outputs in terms of their performance. According to Brown (2004), there are four types of writing performance namely imitative, intensive (controlled), responsive, and extensive. Imitative is the first level of performance; in this level, the writers still concern with the mechanics of writing including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc. instead of the meaning and context of the writing products. The second is intensive (controlled) which is considered more advanced level than the first. The writers, in this sense, tend to produce written text within which a certain context is appropriate with the vocabulary, collocations, idioms, grammatical features used. The next type is responsive in which the writers give responses to some ideas printed in written form. The responses can be in the form of brief narrative and descriptions, short reports, lab reports, summaries, brief responses, interpretation of charts and graphs.

Research Method

In this study, the researcher conducts a case study to compile the data from the research subjects, which are then analyzed descriptive qualitatively. A questionnaire as an instrument asking the students' habit in reading and writing English texts is, then, given to eighty-two university level EFL learners of Unisma ranging from the second, fourth, sixth to the eighth semester. Mostly, the questions are in the form of open ended ones which enable the students to write the possible reasons which picture their real condition. The questionnaires for students related to their activities in reading and writing are stated in the following tables.

Table 2 Questionnaire for Students (Reading Activities)

1. What semester are you in?
 2. Do you read English text everyday?
 3. Where do you usually read?
 4. What kind of English text do you read?
 5. How long do you read English in a day?
 6. What makes you not like reading English text?
-

Table 3 Questionnaire for Students (Writing Activities)

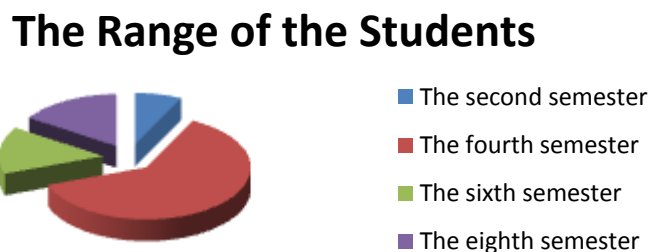
1. What semester are you in?
 2. Do you write in English everyday?
 3. Where do you usually write?
 4. What kind of written form do you write?
 5. How long do you write in English in a day?
 6. What makes you not like writing in English?
-

Those two questionnaires are given to the students via online survey provider which can automatically count the percentage of each question. These questionnaires are distributed to the students of Unisma majoring at English education; there are about eighty-two students as respondents of this study. After being analyzed in the proceeding section, the researcher then draws some conclusion regarding to the issue emerged.

Discussion

The data obtained from the eighty two students of Unisma varies greatly, within which 7.3 percent comes from the second semester, 62.2 percent comes from the fourth, 14.6 percent comes from the sixth, and the other 15.9 percent comes from the eight.

Chart 1 The Range of the Students



From the above-chart, it can be seen that most of the participants come from the fourth semester which, then, is followed by the eighth, the sixth, and the second semester, respectively reduced in terms of number.

Table 4 Daily Reading Activities

Category	Percentage
1	8.4 %
2	24.1 %
3	47 %
4	20.5 %

Note:

- 1: never read English text daily
- 2: seldom read English text daily
- 3: often read English text daily

4 : always read English text daily

Pertaining to reading activity, the result shows that from all of those students 8.4 percent—about seven students—claims that they do not read English texts everyday, twenty students or 24.1 percent seldom reads in their daily activity, those who frequently read such texts are about 38 students or approximately 47 percent, and the remaining 20.5 percent—seventeen students—reads English texts everyday. From the data obtained, it shows that most of the students frequently read English text routinely.

The reading texts they read also vary in a great number from very informal like English texts in social media, games, music lyrics, film, comics, novels, short stories, newspapers, magazines, etc. to the formal ones like articles and textbooks. From all of those reading materials articles, textbooks, magazines, newspapers, novels become the best five English texts read by the students, which are then respectively followed by others like English texts in social media like WhatsApp, Instagram, Wattpad and etc., fairy tales, film subtitles, comics, websites, quotes, and application. After those reading materials, there are song lyrics, games subtitles, and quotes. Looking at the above explanation, we know that article becomes the primadona which then is followed by textbooks. As we all know those two kinds of reading material are strongly related to their field of study; reading activity is presumably conducted because they get assignments from lecturers. This assumption will, then, be triangulated by analyzing the data got from other questions within the questionnaire.

Then, based on the questionnaire given to the students, the researcher found that the time allocated in reading English texts is also various; most of them—eighteen students—read such texts in thirty minutes everyday. Nine students read for ten minutes a day; seven others read ten minutes daily. Then, there are eight student reading in five minutes day by day; the same number—eight students—reads in fifteen and twenty minutes a day. Only seven students who read in one hour regularly; while, five students read two hours routinely. The next, four students read forty minutes costumarily; those who read for four hours a day are only three students. Two others read for three hours during the day. Only one students who routinely read English text for five hours. While, the others read English text not more than ten minutes.

Next, there are some motives encouraging the students to read English as well as shortcomings which hindered them to do so. Those two can be both from external and internal factors. Internal means the factors come from the students themselves; while the latter refers to those which are from whatever outside the students. Those two issues are then elaborated more clearly in the following.

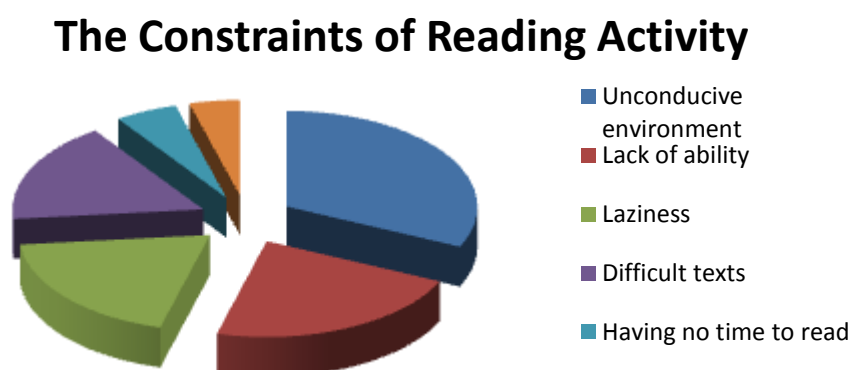
Most of the students—fifty three students—read English merely because of the needs which are basically related to their academic demand like improving vocabulary and pronunciation—the latter is only effective in reading aloud, knowing more about English in terms of its structures and its uses, and improving reading skills and speaking as well. Thirteen students claim that they like English so much; that is why they read English texts. Then, five students reveal that they read English text because they need reading English for their future prospects like study aboard and becoming English practitioners. There are two students who argue that the atmosphere in which they read affects them to or not to do so. While, the other eight students do not want to share their motives in reading English texts perhaps it is because they do not really know what factors that encourage them to read or even there are complex factors that cannot be even shared. This finding triangulates the assumption that most of the students read

English text because of a certain reason relating to their academic purpose like doing the assignment, having tests, studying the material before coming to the class, etc.

Regarding to the place in which the students read, 66.6 percent of them says that they read at home. Another 19.4 percent of the students likes to read at class; only 2.8 percent of them goes to library to read. The remaining 11.1 percent can read English texts everywhere. Based on this finding, the students only can read in a supportive environment in which they can enjoy reading because no one can interrupt them.

Talking about the shortcomings, the result shows that 31.9 percent of the students say the shortcomings they face comes from the unsupported environment such as lack of English exposures and facilities, crowded condition, unsupported friends and instructors, etc. Besides lack of ability in understanding the text and of vocabulary are encountered by 22.3 percent of the students when reading English texts. Another 19.2 percent of them say that the problem is because of the indolence coming from the students themselves. Then, 17 percent comes from the texts they read whether those are too long, too difficult in terms of the vocabulary, uninteresting materials and so forth. The next 5.3 percent of the students has no time to read. And the last 4.3 percent of the students do not recognise the problem in reading English texts. From the preceding explanation, the hinder often comes from the external factor namely lack of exposures. Talking about such problem, there are some factors attributing to its existence; it can be from the internal, the external or even both internal and external factors. Internal factor may be like the students' unwillingness to find themselves the English textbooks which are appropriate for them from any affordable resources. The minimum available facilities—books, internet connection, educators, etc.—are considered as external factors. The following is the presentation of the above explanation.

Chart 2 The Constraints of Reading Activity



Related to writing activity, 36.7 percent of the students claims that they rarely write English in their daily. Then, 29.1 percent of those students does not write in English everyday. Those who frequently write day by day in such a way are only twenty one students or approximately 26.6 percent of the participants. Only 6 percent admits that they write in English everyday. To an easier understanding, the following table may assist.

Table 5 Daily Writing Activities

Category	Percentage
1	29.1 %
2	36.7 %
3	26.6 %
4	6 %

Note:

- 1: never write in English daily
- 2: seldom write in English daily
- 3: often write in English daily
- 4: always write in English daily

Based on the above-table, the largest portion is the second category which shows that the students seldom write in English. Then, it is only six percent of the students who everyday writes in English. Comparing to the reading activity in which the least of the students do not read daily, writing activity has its smallest portion in the fourth category in which the students write in English daily. It can be concluded that the more the students read English text does not guarantee the more they write in English.

The duration of the writing activity ranges from only some minutes to hours. Some of the students, 11.7 percent, write in English for one hour. Then, 9.1 percent of those students writes for only five minutes. It is followed by 10 minutes—7.8 percent. The same percentage is from twenty minutes and two hours that is 5.2 percent. Then, those two are followed by thirty minutes and three minutes that is 2.6 percent. And the remaining percentage refers to tentative time in writing English depends on the assignment given by the lecturers.

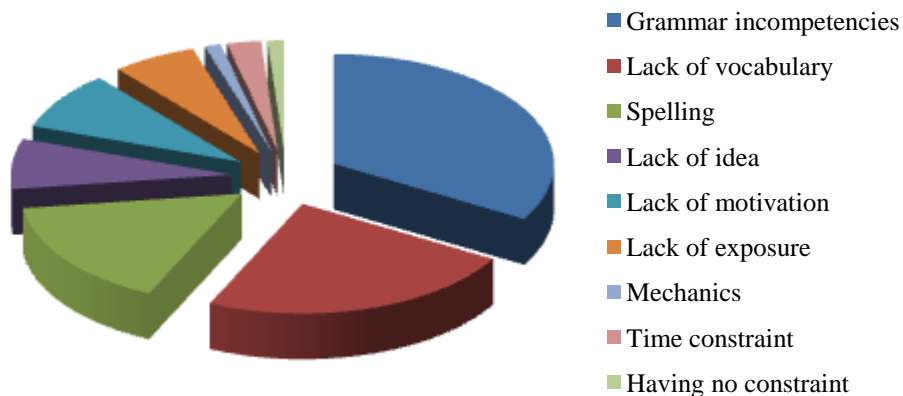
Talking about kinds of writing materials, 36.4 percent of the students writes English when they get assignments from the lecturers. A slight different that is 35.8 percent is in the form English text written in social media either as comments, posts, chats, captions, quotes etc. The next, diary is in the position of 23.2 percent which is followed by writing fiction short story that is 4 percent. While the other is in the form of memo that is 0.6 percent. Besides they read English text for the purpose of the academic success, they also do writing activity still for the same purpose.

Then, coming to the constraints the students face when writing English text, grammar becomes the most difficult problem the students encounter; the

percentage shows the highest value that is 33.3 percent. Then, it was followed by lack of vocabulary, spelling, lack of idea, lack of motivation, not enough exposure, mechanics, and time constraint; those all constraints are faced by 23.5 percent of the students, 16 percent, 7.4 percent, 8.6 percent, 6.2 percent, 1.2 percent, and 2.5 percent respectively. The last, 1.2 percent says that they have no problem at all in writing. The following chart may assist the understanding.

Chart 2 The Constraints of Writing Activity

The Constraints of Writing Activity



Conclusion

Based on the data got by the researcher as in the afore-mentioned, it can be seen that Unisma students' literacy which is in the form of their reading and writing is still considered far from being expected; it needs to improve greatly. It is because those two activities are conducted by the students mostly because they are asked to do so by their instructors as one of the assignments given to them.

From the data gathered, the researcher found no meaningful connection between reading and writing; it indicates that the participants studied by the researcher are not those who can study—read and write—autonomously. They still depend on the lecturers to study—read English texts and write in English, so the more the students read does not really affect their writing activity. From this findings, the researcher suggest to the future researcher to be more detailed in gaining the data in terms of whether or not the students who read more tend to write more and of whether or not the higher the level of the students affects their literacy culture. Besides the researcher also suggests the further researcher study the more participants using varied instruments in order to get the more valid data.

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