

**P E D A G O N A L**

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<http://journal.unpak.ac.id/index.php/pedagonal>**INTEGRATING THE TEACHING OF CULTURE BASED READING AND ESSAY WRITING TO BUILD STUDENTS' CULTURAL AWARENESS****Deddy Sofyan<sup>a</sup>, Istiqlaliah Nurul Hidayati<sup>a,\*</sup>, Asih Wahyuni<sup>a</sup>**<sup>a</sup>English Education Study Program, The Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences, Pakuan University\* korespondensi: [istiqlaliah@gmail.com](mailto:istiqlaliah@gmail.com)**ABSTRACT**

The title of the research is, "Integrating the Teaching of Culture Based Reading and Essay Writing to Build Students' Cultural Awareness". Two main aims were conveyed in the research. First, it was aimed at supporting students to write an essay based on what they had read (to give them background knowledge and to build their reading habit) and the second was building students' cultural awareness and helping them realize that their nation actually has fabulous local wisdoms. By realizing that the nation has deeply meaningful local wisdoms, they will love and protect the nation with their body and soul. The researchers integrated this teaching of local wisdoms by asking the students to firstly read a cultural based text and discussed what they understand about the text with their friends. The text contained a description about different cultures in several countries. The titles of the texts were for example: Maintaining Eye Contact in Some Cultures, Innocent Gestures that Mean Rude Abroad, The Ethics of Gift Giving all over the World, etc. After being read, the text was then discussed in the classroom. The students gave their opinion as well as their experience related to the topic. The last activity was writing an essay with the same topic yet the culture being discussed in the writing had to be about the students' own culture. The method that was employed in the research was mixed method. The qualitative data was gained from classroom observation and the portfolio of students' writings while the quantitative data was gained from questionnaires distributed to the students. The results were first the students found out how to write an essay and second, they realized that their culture has high values to be appreciated. Thus the love to the nation was well established.

Key Words: Reading-Writing Integration, Cultural Awareness, Essay Writing.

**ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini berjudul, "Mengintegrasikan Pengajaran Membaca dengan Berbasis kepada Budaya dan Menulis Essay untuk Meningkatkan Kesadaran Berbudaya." Terdapat dua buah tujuan yang ingin dicapai. Pertama adalah mengajarkan mahasiswa untuk mampu menulis essay dengan memberikan teks yang harus dibaca terlebih dahulu (untuk memberikan skemata). Kedua, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kesadaran mahasiswa akan kekayaan budaya mereka dan kearifan lokal yang luar biasa. Diasumsikan jika mahasiswa mengetahui betapa berharganya kearifan lokal yang dimiliki oleh Bangsa ini, maka mahasiswa akan membela bangsa ini dengan sepenuh jiwa dan raganya. Pengajaran untuk membangun kesadaran budaya ini juga mengintegrasikan antara keterampilan membaca dan keterampilan menulis essay. Teks yang dibagikan adalah teks yang berisi nilai-nilai kebudayaan seperti: Etika Menatap Mata, Etika Memberi Hadiah, Hal-hal yang Dianggap Biasa tetapi Dianggap Kasar oleh Orang Berkebudayaan Lain, dll. Setelah dibaca, teks tersebut kemudian didiskusikan di kelas, mahasiswa pun memberikan pendapat dan pengalaman mereka berkaitan dengan topik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran. Data kualitatif didapatkan dari hasil observasi kelas dan portfolio

*mahasiswa, sedangkan data kuantitatif didapat dari penghitungan hasil kuisisioner yang dibagikan dan diisi oleh mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki peningkatan yang cukup signifikan dalam kemampuan menulis essay dan kecintaan mereka kepada budaya Indonesia pun semakin meningkat.*

*Kata kunci: Pengajaran Membaca, Kesadaran Berbudaya, Menulis Essay*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Writing, according to the questionnaire we have passed on to the students and the teachers, is considered to be the most difficult skill to learn as well as to teach. Even native English speakers also think that writing is a complex skill to master (Nunan, 1999). Probably the reason of it is because there are so many factors to think over when we are starting to write. From those factors, at least there are two dominant factors impeding students to write. The first factor is the grammar. Many students are not confident about their grammar. They are afraid of making mistakes. Another obstacle is the idea of what to write and the vocabulary that has to be owned by the students. Sometimes creative students find a bunch of ideas when a topic is given, but some other students do not. However, it does not mean that the former students can start writing. They probably have some ideas but they lack of the vocabulary so it becomes still a problem for them to convey their ideas in their writing.

From some previous research, these two dominant factors can be solved by providing texts to be read by the students. It is called as the integration of reading writing or reading- writing connection. There are so many advantages that can be taken from integrating reading and writing. Hao and Sivell (2002) mentioned four benefits of it. First, reading-writing integration let teachers effectively deal with reading and writing together. Second, students will be willing to write about what they read if teachers can provide lots of reading materials they are interested in. Third, reading materials can be used as background resources for L2 learners' writing and they can imitate or manipulate texts they have read from reading passages. And finally, the reading strategies that L2 students have learned can help them process and organize their writing effectively. Nevertheless, what kind of texts do teachers have to provide?

Teachers of course have to be selective in choosing the texts to be given to the students. Texts can be tools for teachers to teach genres, grammar, and even moral education. Today, the government is campaigning about being proud of our own identity as a nation. Therefore, the issue of local wisdom is now being discussed at large. Schools are actually great places to make students, as part of the citizens, become aware of the local wisdom. Because of globalization and information era, cultures exchange so easily. Sometimes people know other nations' cultures than their own cultures. That is why we choose texts containing local wisdom. We would like to find out whether or not reading culture based texts is able to build students' awareness of their local wisdom, as well as their ability in composing a piece of writing, especially in the form of an essay.

There have been many efforts done by English lecturers to make students able to write an essay. However the students still find it difficult to compose a good essay. A good essay is not only seen from the mechanical aspect but also from its content. Since the government is now campaigning about being proud of our own local wisdom, teachers are expected to 'plant' it to the students' mind. Therefore, the texts given to the students contain the teaching of local wisdom. Hence, by conducting the research, we would like to find out whether or not reading-writing integration is able to improve students' ability in writing and to explore the way reading culture-based texts and composing a culture-based essay raise students' awareness of their local wisdom.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Essay Writing**

An essay is a compilation of several paragraphs which are tied by a thesis statement (Livingston, 2011). However, the topic of an essay is too long and too complex to be discussed in one paragraph. Therefore, the topic has to be divided into several paragraphs, one for each major point. Then they have to be tied together by adding an introduction and a conclusion (Oshima and Hogue, 1981).

An essay has three main parts: 1) an introductory paragraph, 2) a body (at least one, but usually more), and 3) a concluding paragraph. The introductory paragraph consists of two parts: a few general statements about the subject to attract the readers' attention, and a thesis statement. The body consists of one paragraph or more. Each paragraph develops a subdivision of the topic. The conclusion of an essay has the same function as it does in a paragraph, which is to review the main points discussed in the body.

Instead of only concerning on the structure of the writing, an essay also has to have clarity and coherence. In addition, an essay also needs adequate time to think about a specific topic and to analyze

and classify any background knowledge Chakraverty & Gautum (2000). Recently, writing an essay is also seen as 'a complex activity, a social act which reflects the writer's communicative skills which is difficult to develop or learn, especially in the context of English as a foreign language (Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh, 2000). However, writing has always been considered an important skill in teaching and learning. It is useful in two respects: First, it motivates students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarize, analyze, and criticize. Second, it strengthens students' learning, thinking, and reflecting on the English language (Rao, 2007). Learning writing is considered supportive because it will assist them to keep away from memorization, rote learning, and plagiarism which are now much discouraged in teaching and learning (Ahmed, 2010).

### **Reading to Support Writing**

Starting to write is not an easy matter. When the topic is not familiar, it is so difficult to develop ideas to start writing (Santos & Sulaiman, 1993). The result of research in Egypt done by Ahmed (2010) shows that students' lack of reading authentic English texts resulting in considerable challenges with regards to topic prior knowledge, coherence, cohesion, style, range of vocabulary, and grammatical structures and punctuation. Still from the research, it is also proven that the more one reads, the better writing style and vocabulary one develops.

### **The Integration of Reading and Writing**

Since there is an awareness of the process oriented writing, many researchers further tries to incorporate "content-based instruction" with teaching writing in a process-oriented approach. "Reading" was the first resource to be adopted in process-oriented writing (Ibrahim, 2006).

In fact there are different perspectives about reading-writing relationships. El-Koumy (1997) points out that some researchers assert that reading and writing are unequal, and these two skills are totally different from each other. Influenced by this concept, the curriculum and instruction tend to separate reading and writing into different reasons (Yang, 2009). However fortunately, there has been many research papers claim that reading can enrich students' ideas for writing even for manipulating the grammar. According to the history of the integration, it is noted that reading-writing integration was first developed to native English students, who were trained to read related topics of articles before writing their compositions (Kennedy, 1994). Yang (2009) also adds that many educators believe that reading-writing connection can be beneficial for L1 learners' writing skills in several ways, such as doing extra reading activities, replacing grammar or extra writing practices (Stotsky, 1983). Therefore, through reading-writing instruction, learners can read what they will write and further discuss, analyze articles to better develop their ideas for writing.

Besides getting lots of ideas from the reading materials, students can also absorb the vocabulary, idiom, sentence patterns, organizational flow, and cultural assumptions of native speakers of the language (Raimes, 1983). In a study, Ibrahim (2006) showed that reading-writing integration can improve L2 learners' writing skills in several ways such as reading for writing approach can attend students to critically read topics, and critical thinking can help them to organize and process their writing effectively. Students can also gain various kinds of vocabulary and language knowledge and then apply to their writing tasks. The last is reading for writing instruction prevents students from getting stuck in their writing processes.

To highlight how strong and close the relationship between reading and writing should be, it is capitalized that the teaching of reading and writing are inseparable (Zamel, 1992). Students can learn a lot from the reading materials. The way the writer writes the material such as how to introduce the topic, how to write the content and how to conclude, all can be found in the reading materials. So the teaching of reading and writing should be integrated to better prepare the students to read like writers and to write like readers (El Koumy, 1997). When content and form are familiar, reading and writing are relatively easy. But when one or the other (or both) are unfamiliar, efficiency, effectiveness, and success are problematic (Reid, 1993). That is why the teacher has to introduce familiar topic such as what happens in the students' daily life.

### **Inserting the Lessons of Local Wisdom into Language Teaching**

Generally, local wisdom is local ideas which are characterized by being wise, nice and in accordance to the mainstream. Local wisdom has a tight relation to the belief system of a society. It is widespread in a number of fields (Sudjana, 2011). According to Alwasilah (2006), the revitalization of a culture can be defined as a planned and continued effort to reveal the cultures, not only to the owners but also to other people and it is able to be used to overcome any challenge.

When people are more and more likely to interact and work with members of other cultures, a new educational priority is fast emerging, namely the need for educators to provide students with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to communicate effectively across different cultures. Language

teachers are in an excellent position to play a large role in this endeavor since they teach both language and culture (Furstenberg, 2005).

### **Cultural Awareness**

Cultural awareness is the term we have used to describe sensitivity to the impact of culturally-induced behavior on language use and communication (Tomalin & Stempleski, 2012). When education is separated from cultural awareness, then students could probably not be sensitive anymore on their own cultural background and would not respect other cultures and began believing in stereotypes.

Cultural awareness does not necessarily have to become a specific subject taught like Math or science, for example, but it has to be integrated to all kinds of subjects. Tomalin and Stempleski (2012) add some ways of teaching cultural awareness in the classroom: first, access the culture through the language being taught. Second, make the study of cultural behaviors an integral part of each lesson. Next is aim for students to achieve the socio-economic competence which they feel they need. Fourth, aim for all levels to achieve cross cultural understanding—awareness of their own culture, as well as that of the target language. Lastly, recognize that not all teaching about culture implies behavior change, but merely an awareness and tolerance of the cultural influence affecting one's own and others' behavior.

### **The Research Road Map**

Building cultural awareness is the goal of this research. The integration between reading and writing creates a reading habit and supports students' ability in writing an essay. Besides that, since the texts given are cultural based, students' cultural awareness is well established.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research employed three methods, namely classroom observation, document analysis, and questionnaires distribution. To find out whether or not reading-writing integration improves students' ability in writing, classroom observation and document analysis (students' writing before and after the technique of reading-writing integration) were used. To explore the way reading culture based text and composing a culture based essay raised students' awareness of their local wisdom, a questionnaire were passed on to the students.

### **Classroom Observation**

In the classroom, the students were asked to compose an essay about their own culture. Prior to that, the teacher gave two essays containing other nations' cultures. The essays were elaborated by first being read loudly in the classroom. After listening and reading the culture based essays, the students were asked to write the first draft of their essay on the same topic as the essays being read previously but in the context of their own culture. Since it was still the first draft, so it was possible to change or improve the quality of the essay in the following week. It was expected that the students tried to gain more information from many resources such as books, articles on internet or even their own parents about their culture. To clarify my explanation, I will give an example of the topic as follows. The teacher gave two texts about the ethics of gift giving in China and Japan. The texts (essays) were then read loudly. After discussing about the essays, the students were asked to write their first draft of the essay about the same topic i.e. the ethics of gift giving in their own culture. On the first day they might only have written what they know. But it was expected that they looked for more information from some other sources. By so doing, the objective of building the students' awareness on their own culture could be achieved.

### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaires were distributed to the students at the end of the teaching-learning process. There were 15 questions and 5 answers to the questionnaires. The 5 answers were according to Likert Scale, which are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questions are closed. The following is the list of the question:

1. Writing an essay is easy.
2. Learning how to write is easier when I practice it rather than learning the theory.
3. Reading gives me inspiration.
4. The more I read, the more ideas I gain.
5. I am aware of my culture.
6. I like reading about culture.
7. I did not know about my own culture until I asked about it to other people and read more on it.
8. I am proud of my own culture.
9. Other nations' cultures are more impressive.
10. Many of the people in my country do not recognize their own cultures.
11. Teaching about culture is important.

12. I want to read more about my own culture.
13. Culture should not be taught in formal education.
14. Culture is not important anymore since we are entering the globalization era.
15. Culture is about living in the past.

### **Document Analysis**

The researcher collected students' essays and analyze whether or not reading assisted students' ability in essay writing and whether or not the activity could improve students' awareness on their own culture.

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

### **Reading Writing Integration**

From observing the classroom on the first day, it was seen that the students were interested in reading the text. The first text being distributed to the students entitled "Birthday". First of all, the teacher distributed the text which background was from Spain. Then, the teacher asked the students to read the text by heart. After that, the teacher asked the students about the meaning of some unfamiliar vocabulary. Knowing the meaning of the unfamiliar vocabulary, the students started giving their opinion about what they felt if they were Spanish celebrating their birthday. After giving their opinion and listening to others', the students were then asked to write an essay containing the same topic but on their own culture.

It was seen that starting writing was not easy for the students. So that the teacher asked them to pay attention to her and asked them to take a look at the text again and together they checked the way the writer put the thesis statement, the topic sentences, and the supporting sentences. The teacher showed the connection among the thesis statement, the topic sentences, and the supporting sentences. When the students showed that they understand, the teacher asked the students to write a thesis statement. The teacher also asked the students to show the thesis statement to her and she corrected some mistakes. Most of the students still wrote a phrase rather than a sentence as the thesis statement. The teacher then recited again the thesis statement of the text and told the students that the thesis statement does have a subject and a predicator which show that it is a sentence, not a phrase.

Another problem happened when the students would like to start writing the next paragraph was that they wrote a paragraph without any coherence with the previous one. Most of the students did not have a sentence that bridged the first paragraph to the second one. Then again, the function of the text was felt again. The teacher asked the students to observe the text gain and showed the last sentence of the first paragraph. Finally the teacher asked the students to create the last sentence of the first paragraph and started writing the first sentence of the second paragraph while also reminded the students to make them in line. The same thing happened when the students were trying to create the last paragraph.

Writing the last paragraph, which contains conclusion, was another problem for the students. The text showed that the main ideas of the previous paragraphs appeared again. It gave them a good example and they started to do the same thing. It was clearly proven that the text helped both the teacher and the students a lot.

The same finding was shown by the result of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the students after four meetings. It means that there were four writings produced by the students. Finally 43% of the students felt that writing an essay is easy. 17% of them felt that they were not sure and the rest felt that it was still hard to write an essay. The use of the text as an example also helped the teacher to convince the students that practicing writing is easier than learning the theory. 56% of the students agreed with the statement, 24% was doubtful, and the rest disagreed with it. Surprisingly, 89% of the students agreed that reading gave them inspiration to write and not quite different result was found for the statement that the more they read, the more ideas they gained. There were 87% of the students agreed with the statement, 11% were doubtful and the rest disagreed. From both observation and questionnaire results, it was seen that the use of text did help the students to write. So the connection between reading and writing is significant.

### **Students' Cultural Awareness**

As written above, the activity in the classroom was initialized by the teacher passing on a text to the students and asked them to read it by heart. The next activity was the teacher opened a discussion with the whole students in the classroom and listened to the comments of the students about their reaction to the text they have read. From the students' reaction and their enthusiasm in giving opinion, it was seen that they liked talking about cultural topics.

This enthusiasm was also seen from the ideas the students wrote on the paper. They wrote a lot. From the questionnaire result, 72% of the students agreed with the statement that they were aware of their culture. They also confessed that they liked reading about culture (69%). After reading the text, the students were asked to write their own writing about their own culture with the same topic. To guarantee

the originality of their writing, the teacher asked the students to write the thesis statement first while the rest of the writing could be done at home. They could do it at home so that they could ask their parents or anyone else about the particular culture they had to write about.

After gathering information from others about a particular culture, the students then compare their culture to the culture discussed in the text. 62% of the students agreed that they were proud of their culture and only 29% of them stated that other nation's cultures were more impressive. 57% of them were interested in reading more about their culture and 75% then thought that teaching about culture was important. From the questionnaire, only 13% of the students agreed that the teaching of culture was not important anymore since we are now entering globalization era.

From the observation, document analysis, and the result of the questionnaires given to the students, the researchers infer that the teaching of culture to the students is interesting and able to raise their cultural awareness.

As mentioned by Chakraverty & Gautum (2000), writing an essay needs a bunch of idea but the use of text can enrich the idea and even the vocabulary used in the writing (Santos & Sulaiman, 1993). It is also supported by Yang (2009). So, asking students to read before asking them to write is fruitful as mentioned by (Kennedy, 1994). It clearly means that reading and writing are inseparable (Zamel, 1992). It can be inferred that when text can be used by the teacher to seed the ideas that later on will be harvested by the teacher himself/herself. In other words, when the teacher would like to plant or raise the students' cultural awareness, then he or she can use texts containing cultural teaching so that the students are finally aware of their culture, as stated by Tomalin and Stempleski (2012).

## CONCLUSION

From all of the data that have been found and analyzed, it is obvious that reading supports writing. Not only does it enhance students' ideas, but it also helps the students improve their vocabulary and grammar. From the topic chosen, i.e. culture, it is successfully shown in this research that the topic is interesting for the students and able to make them explore their own culture so that it helps them raise their own cultural awareness.

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