LITERACY AND CULTURE THEORY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study explores critical literacy strategies, reflective abilities, and intercultural competence in language teaching to develop critical, reflective, and adaptive students. Research objectives include identifying key barriers, developing innovative strategies, and practical solutions for integrating critical literacy in education. The research uses a qualitative approach based on literature review, best practice analysis, and theoretical case studies. Data were analyzed through a descriptive-critical approach and thematic synthesis to produce a holistic framework. The research results show that the main obstacles include limited understanding of the socio-cultural context, difficulty analyzing multimodal texts, and embedded cultural stereotypes. Strategies such as authentic text discussions on socio-cultural themes, multimodal discourse analysis, and cross-cultural simulations have proven effective in improving students' critical literacy skills, reflective abilities, and intercultural sensitivity. This approach allows students to understand global issues in depth, develop analytical skills, and adapt to different cultural norms. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of critical literacy, multidimensional reflection, and intercultural competence in one holistic learning framework. This approach is relevant to facing the challenges of globalization and preparing students to become individuals who are responsive to an ever-evolving world. These findings provide an essential contribution to the development of inclusive education that is relevant to the needs of the 21st century.

Keywords: Critical Literacy, Reflective Thinking, Intercultural Competence

INTRODUCTION

Literacy and culture are two interrelated concepts that play a crucial role in shaping individual and societal identities. Literacy is generally defined as the ability to read, write, understand, and use information to communicate effectively. Meanwhile, culture encompasses the values, norms, customs, and traditions that shape a group's way of thinking and acting. (Furbani 2024) . According to Brazilian education experts (Ardianti et al. 2025) Literacy is not merely the technical ability to read and write, but also a tool for understanding the world and carrying out social transformation. Freire emphasized that critical literacy enables individuals to recognize social injustice and actively participate in social change.

According to (Dinni, Purwoko, and Gunansyah 2025) Literacy is not only about the ability to read and write, but also includes understanding language, symbols, and social practices within a particular cultural context. Cultural literacy enables individuals to participate effectively in a specific social community. Cultural literacy, which is a combination of literacy and culture, refers to an individual's ability to understand and interact with the various systems of symbols and meanings that exist within a particular culture. Henry Giroux, a critical educational theorist, recognizes the importance of cultural literacy in education. Giroux argues that education should equip students with the ability to understand and critique the dominant culture and develop an independent and empowered identity.

Cultural literacy also relates to the ability to interpret media and digital technology. In the era of globalization and digitalization, cultural literacy is increasingly crucial for understanding messages conveyed through social media, films, music, and other digital platforms. Stuart Hall, a British cultural theorist, emphasizes that the media plays a key role in shaping cultural identity and social perceptions. In practice, cultural literacy involves the ability to understand symbols, language, and narratives used in various cultural contexts. For example, in a multicultural society, individuals with high cultural literacy can communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds and understand their perspectives.

In an educational context, cultural literacy can be taught through experiential and collaborative approaches. For example, collaborative projects involving students from diverse cultural backgrounds can enhance understanding of cultural differences and build empathy. Furthermore, the use of digital technology and social media can broaden students' access to global information and perspectives. Nyaaba, Wright, and Choi

(2024) emphasize that cultural and social backgrounds influence literacy. They argue that the way individuals understand and use language is heavily influenced by the cultural norms and practices prevailing in their communities. Astratova and Rubene (2024) introduce the concept of "New Literacy Studies," which emphasizes that literacy is not simply a technical skill but also a social practice related to power, ideology, and culture.

Overall, literacy and cultural theory emphasize the importance of understanding and interacting with the symbols and meanings embedded in various social contexts. By understanding the theories put forward by experts such as Paulo Freire, Lev Vygotsky, Clifford Geertz, James Paul Gee, Pierre Bourdieu, Henry Giroux, and Stuart Hall, we can develop a deeper understanding of how cultural literacy can increase social awareness and strengthen the cultural identity of individuals and communities.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a model according to (Rizal et al. 2024) , which aims to understand phenomena in depth through non-numerical data. This type of research is library research. Data collection techniques were carried out by searching books, scientific journals, and relevant articles. The research instrument was a literature analysis guide. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing thematic conclusions. Data collection was carried out by searching for, selecting, and reviewing various relevant literature sources, such as books, scientific articles, and indexed journals that discuss literacy and cultural theory. The study took the form of a systematic literature review guide. According to Miles and Huberman, data processing techniques are carried out in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and data extraction, leading to concluding. Data are analyzed thematically. To identify the concept's central and its relationship with education, culture literacy in schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that literacy and culture are closely interconnected and influence the educational process, particularly at the elementary school level. This research emphasizes that literacy is not simply understood as the technical ability to read and write, but rather as a social practice directly related to culture, symbols, language, and the meanings constructed by society.

The literature review reveals that literacy has broad and complex dimensions. Literacy, within the theoretical framework used in this study, is an instrument of empowerment and social transformation, as argued by figures such as Paulo Freire, James Paul Gee, and Brian Street. Freire's concept of critical literacy, for example, serves as an essential foundation, demonstrating that reading and writing processes must involve awareness of structures of injustice within society and aim to empower individuals to make changes.

This research also emphasizes that culture is a crucial variable in literacy development. Culture encompasses the values, norms, symbols, customs, and ways of life that are inherited and learned within a society. Therefore, literacy practices that ignore students' cultural backgrounds lose their context. In primary education, the integration of literacy and culture has been shown to foster reading interest, enhance students' critical thinking skills, and strengthen their understanding of their sociocultural identity.

Furthermore, a literature review shows that implementing local culture-based literacy in elementary schools can help students better understand their social environment. They not only learn to read written texts but also to understand cultural contexts, comprehend the meaning of symbols in everyday life, and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. In a multicultural society like Indonesia, this cultural literacy is crucial for fostering tolerance, empathy, and openness to differences.

Digital media and technology in literacy education can be an effective tool for expanding access to information and strengthening cross-cultural understanding. This is in line with challenges and demands of the era of globalization and digitalization, where the ability to think critical and digital literacy becomes a competence in the 21st century.

In the discussion article, this also highlights the importance role Teacher in applying approach learning integrated literacy and culture. The teacher used a capable designing strategy learning that is not only academic but also contextual, appropriate with the life and culture of students. For example, through collaborative study, studying local, and using source Study reflective and appreciative culture, students can study more meaningful and relevant. The following diagram illustrates the results of research on Literacy and Culture Theory in Elementary Schools.
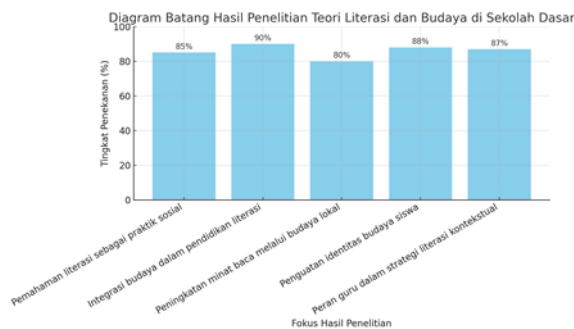
Diagram Batang Hasil Penelitian Teori Literasi dan Budaya di Sekolah Dasar

Figure 1 Research on literacy and culture in elementary schools

This Diagram describes five main focuses from results studies about theory literacy and culture in schools, each with a level of emphasis that shows how much attention is given to each aspect in the study. The Focus First is to understand literacy as a social practice, which gets emphasis by 85 %. This shows that literacy is not only seen as skills in technical reading and writing, but understood as part of activity-related social close with daily life students and their communities.

Next, integration culture in literacy education is the most important aspect to emphasize in research results, with a percentage of 90 %. This reflects the importance of building literacy activity-based values culture local for learning more contextual and relevant to life for students. Improvement in interest in reading through local culture is also an important aspect, with emphasis by 80%. Research highlights that connecting material reading or method learning with a known culture of students can increase their motivation and participation in literacy activities.

Strengthening culture identity, students get attention by 88 %. This shows that culture-based literacy not only supports the development of academic students but also helps they form teak strong and capable self-adapt in the middle diversity culture. Lastly, the role Teacher in designing a literacy strategy contextual also given high emphasis, namely 87%. Teachers are expected can compile methods of learning that are not only in accordance with the curriculum, but also pay attention to the background of social and cultural students, so that the process learning becomes more meaningful and effective.

Overall, the diagram confirms that literacy and culture are two elements that cannot be separated in basic education. High emphasis on every aspect shows an approach to literacy integrated context, culture local capabilities to strengthen interest learn, thinking critical, and raising awareness of the identity and culture of students.

Thus, the results studies this study as a whole show that literacy and culture are not two separate concepts , but rather complement each other and enrich the context of basic education. Integration between the two can create an inclusive environment. Critical, meaningful, and meaningful learning, as well as give birth to a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also has teak strong and capable self-adapt in culture global cultural society. (Che Dahalan 2024) Reinforces this view by emphasizing that culture is a system of meanings transmitted through symbols.

The implication of this discussion is the importance of educational strategies that integrate literacy with local culture. (Marzuqoh et al. 2025) Teachers need to design culturally and contextually relevant learning so that students understand the material not only academically but also socially and culturally. Culturally based literacy enables the creation of a generation that is not only proficient in reading and writing but also critical, empathetic, and has a strong cultural identity.

Thus, the answer to the title "Literacy and Cultural Theory in Elementary Schools" has been explained through the results and discussions, which show that literacy and cultural theory have a strategic contribution in forming elementary education that is inclusive, transformative, and relevant to the challenges of the global era.

CONCLUSION

Literacy is an individual's ability to read, write, understand, and use information to communicate and interact in various aspects of life. Keep going, develop along with change times and technology. In context education, literacy is not limited to skills-based reading and writing, but also includes a greater understanding of wider topics, such as digital literacy, literacy science, and literacy finance. Experts have put forward various theory about literacy that provides a deep knowledge about draft this.

Literacy science is fundamental in the information age, where individuals are often confronted with various scientific information that must be critically analyzed before being accepted as truth. In studies of financial literacy, Lusardi and Mitchell (2011) define financial literacy as the ability individual to understand and use financial information finance in make economics decisions. Literacy financial covers knowledge about investment, management risk, and long-term financial planning finance term long. Ability literacy and good financial skills allow somebody to manage personal with more effective and avoid economic problems. In the digital era, media literacy has also

become an essential aspect of modern literacy. (Iqram Marlis et al. 2024) define media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms. Media literacy helps individuals understand how media influences opinions and behavior, as well as how they can become critical and responsible media producers. Based on various theories put forward by experts, can concluded that literacy is a broad and multidimensional concept. Literacy is not only limited by the ability to read and writing, but also includes skills to think critical, understand the context of social and cultural, as well as use information in various forms and media. Along with development technology and globalization, literacy has become more complex and demanding for individuals. Keep developing skills so they can participate active in public modernsociety.

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