

“I ONLY READ A PAGE OR TWO”: NARRATIVE FROM TWO DIFFERENT LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Literacy is not only defines as the ability of reading and write but also it is the ability to think critically and cultivate information. This study aims to analyze the literacy experiences of L1 and L2 English speakers. This study interviewed two language speakers, J a native English speaker, and K a non-native English speaker. The result showed that despite the differences in learning English as L1 and L2, some similarities are discovered. The interview, showed that learning English as L1 and L2, both are required cognitive skills and learning strategies. However, for L2 learners, it demands more than just studying the language. To get maximum results, the language should be practiced outside of the classroom. One of the techniques is by practicing extensive reading has been shown to expand vocabulary knowledge and grow motivation in second language learning. Thus, some implications for English teachers in EFL contexts are carried out.

Keywords: *second language literacy; second language learner*

INTRODUCTION

The study of language and literacy has shown that there has been a shift from the lens of formal literacy learning in a school setting into broader opportunities in sociocultural contexts even exclusively looking at the intersection between these two. Formal literacy learning refers to learning opportunities arranged by the school or institutions.

It is intentional, organized, and structured. There are learning objectives and it is guided by a curriculum or other type of formal program. Whilst, literacy in society is typically never organized. It is often taught from experimental learning. For instance, parents tell a bedtime story to their children or when someone decided to read a popular novel while waiting at the bus stop.

As a native language, to be able to have competence in a foreign language, requires a lot of practice. Specifically in Indonesia,

learning English only relies on the classroom does not sufficient. This claim was based on the study conducted by Nanda & Azmy (2020) which stated that the ability of Indonesian students to read English texts was very low. Most university graduates are not able to read English without complete comprehension. Similarly in writing, the similar issues were found such as lack of motivation, minimal understanding of English grammar, and challenge in incorporating critical thinking in writing (Toba, Nur, & Sanu, 2019)

Many language teachers assume that teaching and learning a foreign or second language (English) depends on reading skills. In fact, they may devote considerable time and effort to promoting L2 reading skills among their students, often under the assumption that learners already have a developed system of literate

knowledge and skill in their primary language (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2011) On the other hand, teachers in other subjects such as math, science, social studies may assume that their students “already” know how to read. Similarly, educators in secondary or tertiary levels often assume that the students know how to read or at least that students’ have been taught to read.

The previous study of second language literacy in the Indonesian context has revealed that reading and writing in English is still a challenge for students to date. Some of the challenges are lack of vocabulary, minimal learning support, and inadequate reading motivation (Hamra & Syatriana, 2015). This finding is reaffirmed by a study conducted by Usman, Fata, and Pratiwi (2018) which claimed that despite many years of learning English, Indonesian students still face any issue with reading comprehension.

There has been sufficient study focusing on reading, writing, and English language literacy has however the study which focuses on how English native speakers get literacy skills is still minimal. The previous study conducted mainly discussed several topics such as the description of what happened in the classroom, the possible causes of students’ challenges in English literacy, and the suggested solutions for this challenge. Whereas, exploring how English is being acquired through literacy it may provide an insight on how to develop English literacy learning in the context of EFL.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the literacy learning experiences between English native speakers and English

second language learner. The findings of this study is expected to fill in the gap in answering the question on why until now Indonesian learner still has a challenge in developing their English literacy skills and how the findings provide an implication for English teachers in the classroom.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative study from a case study from two participants, James (J) and Karina (K). According to Yin (2003), the case study approach is suited to the “how” and “why” questions. Therefore, this type of research provides the reader with information about specific instances that they would not get from research that focuses on a group. Furthermore, Kervin, et. al (2015) stated that a case study can also be in an explanatory form where the researcher is trying to establish why particular things are happening. Therefore, the aim of this design was expected to find out how English native speakers build their literacy skills and to explore the similarities and differences in English literacy learning as a first and a foreign language.

To answers the two questions above, the researcher decided to choose and interview two participants from two different background. The first participant was an English native speaker. The rationale behind selecting a native speaker is to investigate how the participant develop his literacy habits and what kind of activity he applied in developing this habit. The second participant was an EFL learner. The reason was to analyze her literacy habit and how similar and different they are from the native speaker. The interview was conducted through Zoom

for J and face to face meeting for K. Furthermore, the findings were expected can provide insight and implications for English language teachers.

The first participant was James (J), 41 years old male. He was a postgraduate student majoring in finance at one of the public universities in New South Wales, Australia. He also worked as an employee until now. His parents was an immigrant from Austria however he speak English as his first language. He knows other languages but is not as fluent as when he writes and speaks in English. He considered his current literacy level in English is high as he enjoys studying, reading, and writing. The second participant was Karina (K), 22 years old female. Karina was an undergraduate student in one of the public universities in Bengkulu, Indonesia. Her first language is Bahasa Indonesia and she has been learning English since she was in elementary school. In Bahasa Indonesia, she shared that she does not really master it specifically when she read academic textbooks. She preferred to read fiction. She also considered her level of literacy in English was not really high. In English, She mentioned that she encounter several challenges, such as comprehending English grammar, understanding vocabulary, and incorporating her critical thinking into her writing assignments.

After conducting the interview, the next step is data analysis which means involves a process of making sense of the text (Tsevi, 2018). The researcher transcript the interview read it carefully and looked for the patterns. The researcher labeled the statements and categorize them into “similarities” and “differences”. The

similarities refer to the aspect of English literacy learning that resonates with learning English as a second language while the differences refer to how contrast English literacy was learned by the second-language learner. After the data were categorized and made in tabular form, the researcher engage with these data, consider what the data are saying, and made an interpretation about what the data revealed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

James story

James is a postgraduate student majoring in finance in one public university in New South Wales, Australia. When I asked him about his literacy experiences, he shared several considerable points. He shared that his literacy experiences started when he was a child. Before going to school, he remembered that his parents like to read him a book especially if it was bedtime. His father was really fond of literature such as prose, poetry, and a fiction story. According to him, this activity was really good to build his imagination and vocabulary.

In primary school, his teacher began to teach him phonics and writing an alphabet. There was also particular attention to spelling lists and pronunciation. One of the common activities was reading aloud. There was a reading list each month and the teacher recommended he give each book a rating after he finished reading them. In writing, he taught how to write various genres such as letters to friends, emails, descriptive text, and gradually into more complex text

such as argumentative essays or reports on school projects. Grammar was not taught in isolation. It was incorporated through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Examples of the activity such writing sentences or writing short stories based on pictures.

As a result, until now he is accustomed to finishing a book at least a week. In his leisure time, he enjoys reading a novel. He also has a habit of when he found an interesting or new vocabulary in the novel, he tries to include it in a conversation or when socializing. He enjoys it because it gives him a sense of satisfaction that his personal development is growing.

He also highlights the importance of critical thinking. It is because he believed an individual needs to make their own judgment and their own conclusions which means not automatically accepting the author's arguments in writing.

Karina story

Karina's experiences in L1 and L2 literacy were somewhat different from James'. She mentioned that her early literacy learning was dominated and introduced by her mother. She recalled that her mother was the one who taught her with alphabet and reading. She mentioned that "When I was a little, my mother used to buy me a cartoon of Dancow (milk) and usually the box comes with the mini-story book. I only like to see the pictures. Sometimes my mother read it for me. Before I went to elementary school, I remembered my mother taught me how to write my name and then the names of my parents and siblings. After that, she taught me how to read it."

With her family and relatives, she spoke to them using their local language, Malay Bengkulu language with a North Bengkulu accent but mostly she use Bahasa Indonesia to communicate, read, and write. "At my house, my parents and I use Bengkulu-Malay language with North Bengkulu accent but to communicate with neighbors and friends mostly I speak Bahasa Indonesia. For reading and writing, I use Bahasa Indonesia but I have to admit I do not understand all Bahasa Indonesia vocabulary."

She start learning Bahasa Indonesia when she was six years old when she was in elementary school. She stated that she did not have difficulties in learning Bahasa Indonesia because the vocabulary is not too different from her local language. "I begin to learn Bahasa Indonesia when I was in the first grade. The teacher begin with the alphabet and syllables and then asked us to listen and repeat. After that, we were asked to rewrite what is on the blackboard.". I also remembered that the teachers wrote the sentences on the blackboard and asked the students to copy the sentences in our book. Sometimes, the teacher also dictate the vocabulary or sentences and asked us to write them in front of the classroom or in our book. She checked it and gave a score. Outside of the classroom, she enjoyed reading in Bahasa Indonesia but was limited only to fiction books. She admitted she does not really enjoy reading academic text in Bahasa Indonesia due to its vocabulary which she thinks is too complex and hard to understand. "I enjoy reading in Bahasa Indonesia but I like books with simple vocabulary. I preferred fiction books. My favorite writer is Ilana Tan. I like her

because the story is about love life with a good plot and simple vocabulary.”

English learning, she mentioned that it also started when she was in elementary school. “I also started to learn English when I was in elementary school too. At that time, the teacher introduced us to English by singing a song titled “Mother how are you today?”. She also asked us to bring a dictionary to the classroom and we have to find the meaning of vocabulary in Bahasa Indonesia. Sometimes, the teacher asked us to memorize a list of vocabulary and each of us have to come in front of the classroom. At school, during English lessons, she usually read the textbook the day before and if she found new vocabulary, she checked it in the dictionary to find the meaning.” She mentioned that the resources for learning English were textbooks and a dictionary.

Surprisingly despite the lack of learning resources at that time, she admitted her interest in learning English is started to grow. “From that, I started to grow my interest in learning English and it motivates me to pursue my undergraduate degree in English education study program. I wanted to go abroad someday for instance go to Korea or Japan.” She also admitted that she meets challenges studying on campus, especially in writing assignments. “I do not really enjoy reading academic textbooks or materials from the lecturer. I only read a page or two because it is very difficult for me to understand. I am in the process of finishing my thesis now and my supervisors gave me feedback that my writing is not critical. Learning English is getting difficult for me but I have to motivate myself because I really want to go abroad.”

Discussion

From the findings above, there are several points that can be discussed. First of all, It has been believed that learning to read and write in the first and second language (L1 & L2) has particular similarities and differences. For instance, L1 and L2 reading competence are quite similar due to their cognitive process. In other words, both required cognitive skills. Furthermore, some evidence also states that the effective direction practice in L1 will also be useful in the L2 setting with some modification (Grabe, 2004). The ability to recognize written forms and to connect with the spoken forms and their meaning are two fundamental parts of reading (Nation, 2009). In learning to read in the first language, the children start to learn alphabet principles and phonic lessons at school (bottom-up approach). As they are getting more advanced, the reading is not merely about decoding letters and reconstructing the meaning activity only, it can involve building schemata and global comprehension. Likewise, in L2 learning, the bottom-up approach is favor beginner especially if they do not share the same writing and sounds system. Consequently, the instructions should emphasize the practice of recognizing how sounds and letter corresponds.

On the other hand, the major difference comes from the practice of extensive, the major difference comes from the practice of extensive reading in both languages. It has been believed that extensive reading has several advantages in developing automaticity in language learning. The result of the research showed that to most EFL learners, they read

because they have to and for the learning reason. Thus, this leads to the absence of enjoyment and develops pressure. Although it may help their English however, it is unlikely to develop their reading fluency and promote-long life reading habit (Claridge, 2012). Several studies have shown the benefits of extensive reading to students' foreign language competence. Mermelstein (2014), suggested that utilizing extensive reading can provide a successful alternative and is currently being utilized to improve Asian learners' reading levels. Another advantage is improving learners' critical thinking. It allows the students to think broadly and deeply enough about a particular topic and to achieve enormous background knowledge, compare to intensive reading alone (Hedcock and Ferris, 2009).

The finding from the research also confirms the extensive reading experience by K and J. K still encounters difficulties in reading and sometimes gets confused in understanding the vocabularies in Bahasa Indonesia and English as a result of minimum practice during school. In contrast, J enjoys it due to encouragement and suggestion from his teacher. He also believes it promotes his personal development and reading fluency. In the interview, he stated that although he rarely writes by using new vocabularies, he applied them to oral communication which he thinks establishes a sense of self-satisfaction. Besides the teachers, family involvement is also one of contributing factors. Research about junior high school students' motivation in learning L2 literacy in Indonesia showed that parents' involvement and support in literacy since

children's primary education are strongly correlated with higher levels of reading achievement. K also agrees that critical thinking is something that lack in L2 literacy pedagogy. She believes it should be taught in formal school and embedded into extensive reading activities in L1 and L2.

The result of the interview above seems to explain why the different motivations of lead to different learning outcomes. Every learner has a diverse context and motivation in learning both languages. In the English as Foreign Language (EFL) context, perhaps learners' motivation is sole because of the language test or national examination. Consequently, this leads to a lack of enthusiasm to read and write outside of what is going to be evaluated. Besides lack of encouragement from the teachers, K also experiences minimum literacy in her family. Both of her parents are high school graduates and rarely have a reading activity together. Furthermore, during her language learning L1 and L2, K admits that her motivation was mainly extrinsic one, because of the homework, school examination, or national competition she has to participate. On the contrary, although J also had a school assessment, he had a strong intrinsic motivation in literacy because of encouragement from his teachers and the involvement of his parents. He stated that his father loves telling a story when he was a child and it grows his passions for studying, reading, and writing.

In addition, both the interviewees shared limited experience with computer-mediated literacy aside from using students' online learning sites in

university, however, they agree that using technology in literacy learning is beneficial. K sometimes uses an online or electronic dictionary to help her understand the meaning of difficult vocabulary while reading and J have once written a personal blog but is almost never updated. Referring to the literature, it is believed that computer-mediated programs improve students' literacy in L2. Through the medium of the internet and computer, it can function as scaffolding tools for non-native speakers in understanding the academic tasks focusing on their writing (Cheng, 2010). This finding resonates with the previous research about computer-mediated communication (CMC). Previous research on using technology in teaching reading and writing reveals that some learning tools not only functioned to help the teacher in teaching but also improve grammatical accuracy in writing (Goodwin-Jones, 2003).

The implication for English language teachers

Reflecting on literacy learning from both learners, some implications for language teachers can be drawn. K, as a second language learner is a capable and experienced L1 learner, so her literacy experience can be transferred to the L2 task. The teacher should be aware that the first and second language might have similarities and perhaps the learners have similar experiences in learning specific second language features. For example, both English and Bahasa Indonesia share similar alphabetic symbols therefore the learners have an experience in writing those alphabets. However, both differ in the way these alphabet sound. Thus, the teacher's task should focus on how

students' can comprehend the vocabulary and match it between how it pronounce and how it is written. One of the basic example tasks can begin reading aloud the vocabulary and phonics for a beginner.

Another point that should be highlighted is the time they spend using L2 or English daily. English status in Indonesia is a foreign language which means its usage is very limited to the number of hours according to the curriculum. Typically the students read no more than a page or two at a time. Motivation can lead to different outcomes in literacy learning. Related to the previous point, most scholars agree that intrinsic motivation is more powerful than extrinsic factors in learning literacy. Therefore, the teachers need to facilitate the growth of intrinsic motivation by giving an illustration of the lifelong benefits of reading and writing (Hendgock & Ferris, 2011).

Secondly, language is an integral part of the culture. Not all students all familiar with English culture and teachers should sensitive to this issue. Despite teaching English grammar in isolation, these language features should be incorporated into language skills and it always is a good idea if the teachers can bring the context where this language takes place. One of the consequences teaching grammar in isolation. One of the consequences of teaching grammar in isolation is students failed to contextualize when and where this language takes place. They might understand and can memorize the tenses but the language they produce might lack of authenticity and context.

CONCLUSION

J and K's literacy experience as an English native speaker and an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) language learner above reveals intriguing points. First of all, parents' involvement has a tremendous factor in developing children's literacy skills. J considered his literacy skill significant because before he entered formal school, both of his parents read him a book. Then, this habit grew his passion for studying, reading, and writing. On the other hand, K admitted that her literacy experience in Bahasa Indonesia and English was somewhat limited. She shared that when she was a child, her mother was the one who taught her to read. As a result, she is not fond of reading and in learning English, she only read a page or two.

Secondly, motivation lead to a different outcome in language learning. J admitted that he did not have the motivation in learning another foreign language because he thinks that nowadays having competence in English is mandatory while K has a strong motivation in mastering English because she has personal goals of studying and going overseas inspired by her teachers and lecturers.

Furthermore, some implications for teachers are carried out. Firstly, the application of extensive reading should be considered in the classroom. The teachers should actively encourage the student to read and have a discussion about it despite the limitation of time in studying English in the classroom. Secondly, having an intrinsic motivation is a key to learning for instance by giving an illustration of lifelong benefits of reading and writing.

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