

# THE PERSPECTIVES OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION IN BECOMING LITERATE IN ENGLISH OF AN ADULT INDONESIAN STUDENT

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**Abstract:** Many studies on learners' literacy in the language they learn reflect how a learner learns a language. However, becoming literate in that language is a personal experience. A case study conducted to an Indonesian postgraduate degree Program at La Trobe University in Melbourne Australia gives an overview of this reflection in which an EFL student being literate in English. This article is based on a study which addresses questions: (1) What are the factors that enable an Indonesian adult student to acquire good literacy in English, (2) In what particular ways that adult Indonesian student's perceptions about her competence in English contribute to her academic studies in English speaking. (3). To what extent are the contributions of becoming literate in English to the Subject academic study as the perspectives of holistic education. The findings of this research are: (1) The factors that enable an adult Indonesian to acquire good literacy ability in English as the first question of this research are family literacy practices, family's perceptions about learning English, teacher's approach, preference for reading, and immersion in learning English, (2) the Subject had two particular ways in which she developed her competence in English reading and writing: the way she engaged in the academic world and the way she immersed herself in the English speaking country when she followed the Master Program, (3) The contribution of becoming literate in English to the Subject academic study as the perspectives of holistic education is in terms of self-concepts, the role of past experiences, and learning style.. This paper begins with a brief discussion of theories; becoming literate in EFL and learning from the perspective of holistic education.

**Key words:** *holistic education and becoming literate*

## INTRODUCTION

Miller (1999, 2-3) points out "human life is fulfilling and meaningful

when we experience ourselves as being connected to the world connected to the land, to cultural heritage, to a living, striving community, to archetypal spirits and images, to cosmos as a whole.” The subject of this study has the experience in becoming literate in English as the reflection of what Miller states. She had competence in her dialect, the local dialect, and the national language before learning English in Indonesia. English was the first foreign language she learnt. However, she had competence in German because she had learnt this language in Senior High School and as her major when she studied for her S1 Degree and she is also a German lecturer. She had the experience of being immersed in a foreign language and culture since she has taken a six months training course in German to strengthen her competence in German.

A case study of the Subject of this study becoming literate in English is significant because it aims to discover how an adult Indonesian student develops competence in reading and writing in English during her stay in Australia. It deals with the achievement of English literacy through the perspectives of holistic education. By highlighting the Subject’s experience, this study is intended to contribute to our understanding of literacy-related experiences and practices that influence Indonesian postgraduate students in achieving English literacy. Therefore, this study concentrates on discovering the perceptions of a single adult Indonesian student who has become literate in English while living in Australia. This study is limited by the fact that the student was purposely selected due to her academic capability. This is not representative for students who have lived in an English speaking country before they take a Master Degree in Australia.

Love and Love (2003, 2) point out that the practices of bringing the personal experiences of students to bear on a topic hold tremendous potential for reshaping individual practice. Miller (1998, 7) says that holistic education requires people to understand themselves as humans to acknowledge their relationship as individuals to larger community. Holistic education is concerned with the connection between thinking and intuition, mind and body, subject and knowledge, self and community (Miller, 1988, in Miller 1998, p.13). Rogers (1983, 270) acknowledges man is not free, nor can he as a free man commit himself to some purpose, since he is controlled by factors outside of himself. Learners who have self-awareness will learn effectively.

Miller (1998, 55) states that the ultimate purpose of holistic education is to transform the way we look at ourselves and to change our relationship to the world. Transformative learning is as learning that changes the learners significantly Neville (1994, 3). A model of transformation allows for qualitative change in learners.

Kulick & Stroud in Street (1994, 102) examine how people are affected by literacy in order to demonstrate how individuals in a newly literate society can be passively transformed by literacy in their environment. Street (1996, 9) defines new literacy as self development, at a personal level. Literacy is an important consideration in the experience of the adult. People have different literacy that work can be associated with different domains of life such as home, school, religion and (Barton, 188) and Health (1986, 22).

Learners as the whole have a connection to themselves. Learners' understanding about themselves will enable them to know how to learn. Green (1986,) in Smith (1990, 119) emphasizes that understanding learning to learn requires that a person understands these connections and perceives patterns in their own learning. Like and Freebody (2000,1) claim that the institutional shaping of social practices and cultural resources in a society change the literacy requirements of a society.

Adult learners need literacy in order to study, but they will need to work on their literacy from their own definitions and understanding of reading and writing, from their own purposes, and from their current communication practices (Barton, 1994, 195). Knowles (1990, 148) says that a person must be immersed in an environment containing literacy in order for a person to develop skills that will remain throughout life.

Draper & Taylor (1994, 24) classify the main characteristics of adult learners: self-concepts, the role of past experiences, and learning style (24). These are interrelated. Learners as academic readers are influenced by the purposes for reading and for writing in choosing texts (Neville, 1996, 43). Lytle & Schultz explore several assumptions about adult learners: (a) adults come to literacy programs with particular goals or objectives (190,369); (b) adults bring with them perceptions of literacy, reading and writing, teaching and learning – all of which affect what and how they learn. (c) assessment procedures themselves communicate notions about literacy.

Hawisher and Soter (1990, 107) suggest that if a book is read at a certain time in the student's life it will take on a meaning determined by more than the text because the meaning is also determined by surrounding events. Donin and Silve (1994, 75) emphasize that the learner must have these capabilities in understanding a text. Good readers use predictive skills based on their knowledge of syntax and semantics (Goldman, 1987, 61). Gunderso (1991, 147) says that mature readers change their reading rates depending upon their purposes for reading and whether they read fast or slow is also related to their understanding of the text they read. Salibrici (1999, 628) focuses on how students become better reader through writing and better writers through reading, which is also affected by teachers' instruction.

The Subject's experiences becoming literate in English from the perspectives of holistic are discussed in this article. These are as the answer of the research questions as follows: (1) What are the factors that enable an Indonesian adult student to acquire good literacy in English, (2) In what particular ways that adult Indonesian student's perceptions about her competence in English contribute to her academic studies in English speaking. (3). To what extent are the contributions of becoming literate in English to the Subject academic study as the perspectives of holistic education. The findings of this research are:

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used in this research is qualitative (post positivist). Holloway (1997, 10) remarks that "qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way the people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. The main features of this methodology according to Caulley (1994, 5-13) are natural setting, the use of the human instrument including holistic emphasis, tacit knowledge, qualitative methods, purposeful sampling, inductive data analysis, grounded theory, emergent design, negotiated outcomes, and the use of case reports.

The research approach is a case study. Yin (1984, 14) points out that a case study allows an investigation to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events including individual life cycles. The participant chosen in this study was a Post Graduate student in Graduate School of

Education, La Trobe University. I chose her as the participant in this study because she was one of a group of the successful Indonesian students taking the Master Program in La Trobe University. Stake (1995, 64) indicates that people are similar in many ways and different in many ways and also unique in many ways. With regard to this case study, it is possible that her motivation and experience may be different from others who appear similar to an outside.

In this study, the main method of the data collection was interviewing. The Subject was interviewed three times. The three interviews were semi-structured interview and open-ended questions. (1) To find out how the respondent perceives the factors that enable an Indonesian adult student to acquire good literacy in English, (2) To identify the key factors that adult Indonesian student's perceptions about her competence in English contributing her academic studies in English speaking. (3). To identify the key factors that adult Indonesian student's perceptions about her competence in English contributing to her academic studies in English speaking country reflect the perspectives of holistic education. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is to access the perspective of the participant on the understanding that the best way to understand a person is from that person's own frame of reference (Patto, 1990, 278)., The interviews were recorded.

Through the three interviews, I explored the Subject's perceptions of her process of becoming literate in English. I read and reread the interview transcription in order to immerse myself deeply to the information given by the Subject. The notion of "human as instrument" in qualitative research implies that intuitive or holistic interpretations following immersion in the data are as legitimate in research terms as item by item analysis of the details of the data. It was this holistic approach which was taken here.

The third step was to discover the answer to the four questions. I grouped the data into her experiences that led her to become competent in academic English. I analyzed and interpreted this data with reference to the first question. For the second question, I analyzed and examined the data related to the reflection of holistic education that made the Subject competent in English literacy. I analyzed and interpreted this set of data. I answered the third question by examining the particular ways that the Subject's level of English literacy contributes to her academic. For the fourth question, I analyzed

and examined the data related to particular ways as the reflection of holistic education. As the final step, I present this study as a case report on how the Subject became competent in English literacy in an English speaking country.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The factors that enable an adult Indonesian to acquire good literacy ability in English as the first question of this research are family literacy practices, family's perceptions about learning English, teacher's approach, preference for reading, and immersion in learning English.

The data gained prove that family literacy practices of the Subject's perception are based on what her father did in building her capacity on reading. The Subject's literacy experiences were various, challenging and interesting. He provided many different stories for her to read and was constantly presenting her with new book. He let the Subject interpret and understand the stories in her own way. He also read stories for her. She would retell stories to her mother. Before she reached the school age she attended classes taught by her father, albeit with her own tasks and reading material. It meant that she was exposed to an environment in which children were involved in meaningful reading and writing from a much earlier age than most children. The Subject's love of reading was largely due to her father's direct support and encouragement.

Family's perceptions about learning English are also based on what his father did in building her capacity in English. Her father provided her with the English text and encouraged her to speak. Her grandfather also encouraged her to speak English by correcting her. He knows English a little because he can speak Dutch. Teacher's approach in teaching also affected Melinda. It makes her enjoy learning English since she was at Senior High School, preference for reading, and immersion in learning English.

This study addressed the second question "What particular ways enable an adult Indonesian student to acquire good literacy ability English?" The answer of this question is that the Subject had two particular ways in which she developed her competence in English reading and writing: the way she engaged in the academic world and the way she immersed herself in the English speaking country when she followed the Masters Program. Her

personal intention and motivation to develop her in developing her English and her immersion in an English speaking country are the basis of her competence in English. These two particular ways of improving literacy (engaging world and immersing her in an English speaking country) encompass her struggle based on her goal of finishing her study.

This focus came from within her, and helped to shape her learning. Her early experience in her family had given her a love of books and a sense that she could handle language competently. Even though she had a crisis of confidence when arrived in Australia and faced the considerable difficulties of postgraduate study in a foreign language. Her childhood experience provided a solid ground on which to build her identity as a speaker, reader and writer of academic English. She immersed herself in Australian culture and language by facing the requirements of her academic and daily life, relating everything to the understanding of English.

The findings of this research prove that the contributions of becoming literate in English to the Subject's academic study are as the perspectives of holistic education. The contributions are in terms of the ways engaging in the academic world and the ways immersing in the English speaking country for Master Program.

To what extent are the contributions of becoming literate in English to the Subject academic study as the perspectives of holistic education? The ways done by the Subject are categorized as the perspectives of holistic education because she knows and intends to do what she wants and needs to do indicating in learners in terms of self-concepts, the role of past experiences, and learning style. This is as the answer of the third questions.

Miller (1998, 7) says that holistic education requires people to understand themselves as humans to acknowledge their relationship as individuals to larger community. The Subject understands about herself as an individual to be immersed in the community in which English is used. Holistic education is concerned with the connection between thinking and intuition, mind and body, subject and knowledge, self and community (Miller, 1988, in Miller 1998, p.13).

The Subject's effort engaging in the academic world and immersing in the English speaking country for Master Program made the Subject

succeed in academic study. This is in accordance to Miller's (1998, 55). Hepoints out that the ultimate purpose of holistic education is to transform the way we look at ourselves and to change our relationship to the world. Transformative learning is as learning that changes the learners significantly. The Subject's success is as the transformation for her in becoming literate in English speaking country. She changes qualitatively as the model of transformation. Neville (1994, 3) states that model of transformation allows for qualitative change in learners.

The Subject could finish her Master Degree in English speaking countries with the satisfactory grade is based on her literary practice studying in English speaking country. Street (1996, 9) defines new literacy as self-development at a personal level. People have different literacy that can be associated with different domains of life such as home, school, and religion (Barton, 1994: 188) and Health (1986, 22). As an adult in learning, the Subject applied literary practice as the reflection of her intention to change. Draper & Taylor (1994, 24) classify the main characteristics of adult learners: self-concepts, the role of past experiences, and learning style.

Adult learners need literacy in order to study, but they will need to work on their literacy from their own definitions and understanding of reading and writing, from their own purposes, and from their current communication practices (Barton, 1994, 195). These are interrelated. Learners as academic readers are influenced by the purposes for reading and for writing in choosing texts (Neville, 1996, 43). Hawishire and Soter (1990, 107) suggest that if a book is read at a certain time in the students' life, it will take on a meaning determined by more than the text because the meaning is also determined by surrounding events.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Becoming literate in English is a part of life facing by students. Learners might gain their aim to be literate in English from the perspective of holistic education as long as he or she experiencethemselves as being connected to the world: to land, to cultural heritage, to a living, striving community, to archetypal spirits and images, to cosmos as a whole (Miller, 1999:2-3). They should experience things relating to reading holistically. Learners are expected

to have the capacities in understanding a text. Donin and Silve (1994, 75) emphasize that the learner must have capabilities in understanding a text like predictive skills based on their knowledge of syntax and semantics. They also should choose the reading materials, learners should have a purpose.

The Subject of this study proves that one enables literacy in English from the perspectives of holistic education as the findings of this research. They are in terms of the factors that enable an adult Indonesian to acquire good literacy ability in English, particular ways in which she developed her competence in English literacy, the contribution of becoming literate in English to the Subject academic study as the perspectives of holistic education. The factors that enable an adult Indonesian to acquire good literacy ability in English are family literacy practices, family's perceptions about learning English, teacher's approach, preference for reading, and immersion in learning English. The Subject's particular ways in developing competence in English literacy in English are her ways engaging in the academic world and immersing herself in the English speaking country when she followed the Master Program. The contribution of becoming literate in English to the Subject academic study as the perspectives of holistic education is in terms of self-concepts, the role of past experiences, and learning style.

The findings of this study suggest two recommendations. The first one is recommendation for the inclusion of the perspectives of holistic education in teaching reading and writing. This is because one has own concept, experience, and learning style. It might develop the learner's love of reading and writing which would have an effect on their ability to read and to write in English. These abilities are useful for the students, academic world. The second one is the recommendation for the further research. Another researcher might study how Indonesian students develop their reading ability extensively. This is because the focus of *Extensive Reading* is in terms of readers' interest and need in reading.

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