

THEMATIC ANALYSIS FOR LITERACY AS CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PRACTICES OF AN INDONESIAN STUDENT IN ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRY

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Abstract: Being literate in English as a second language needs practice culturally and socially. Every body practices in different culture and societies. In order to gain the significant findings, we need to conduct the thorough study. This article is based on a study which addresses the following questions: (1) What are the literacy practices experienced by An Indonesian student in English speaking country? and (2) How are the literary practices experienced by an Indonesian student in English speaking country? Theories discussed are about literacy as cultural and social practices. The findings of the research are: (1) The literacy as cultural and social aspects of an Indonesian student in English speaking country are the literacy practices in family during childhood, the family's perception about learning English, the influence of teachers, finding enjoyment in reading and immersion in learning. The Subject experienced literacy as cultural and social practices in different ways for each theme. The ways are : being introduced to books to before school age, being asked to understand the book by her father, the involvement of his father during the process by providing the English stories. What the Subject did for literacy as cultural and social practices are the answer of the second question of this study.

Key Words: *Literacy as Cultural and Social Practices*

INTRODUCTION

Every one has different experiences in different societies as well as different families in which they grow up. Grant (1997, 221) argues that communicating with each other regarding common resources, sharing personal strengths, collaborating and making decisions together, strengthen family literacy. Everybody can see the uses of literacy because they use literacy in their life, especially, those who have frequent interaction with other people. A different family context will create a different outcome in terms of literacy.

Many recent researchers into literacy argue that literacy consists of interactive practices which are shaped by societal atmosphere, values, ways hearing and doing. It is clear that literacy affects the students capacity depends upon in part of their personality. The Subject of this study performs herself as her own personality. She solved her problem in studying by reading. She looked at language as books and she gained her knowledge through reading. She immersed herself in English speaking country for her daily life in English context. Her intention in developing herself is reflected in the development of English literacy.

Some question might be answered by referring to the Subject's experiences in terms of literacy for practice: (1) What are the literacy practices experienced by An Indonesian student in English speaking country? and (2) How are the literary practices experienced by an Indonesian student in English speaking country?

Literacy as Cultural and Social Practices

Baron (1994, 187) suggests, following work by Heath (1983) and (Street 1984, 193) that literacy is a social event. Literacy practices include the acts of reading and writing. Constructing literacy as an 'event' emphasizes the role of the written word in daily life, for instance, the receipt of advertising material or taking a phone message. Literacy is ingrained into the daily lives of most of people. Thus must people need to be at least minimally literate in order to survive. There are common

patterns in using reading and writing in any situation and people bring their culturally knowledge to an activity. Therefore literacy are embedded in different ways of life. Whether it is people who change to make society literate, or it is the newly literate society that changes the people, is a question that is still debated.

Research has indicated that that as a social practice literacy varies from one environment to another (Barton 1994 in Sreet 1996, 7). The research also indicates that if literacy is a part of cultural knowledge then literacy and culture affect each other reciprocally, i.e. if one changes, the other will change. However, learners should understand what it is that being literate means. Street (1996, 9) defines new literacy as self development, at a personal level. This means that as a dedicated learner becomes more literate she or he will be rewarded with more opportunities and t improve her or her literacy.

Literacy should be looked at in the light of social context as well as in terms of skill. A different social context will develop a student's literacy differently Kullick & Stroud in Street (1994, 12) examine how people affected by literacy in order to demonstrate how individuals in a newly literate in society can be passively transformed by literacy in their environment. Peoples literacy skills will not progress if they remain in a society for which their level of literacy is adequate. However, when they immersed in a more literate society they are transformed actively because of their new need to survive in a society which has greater demand for literacy. In order for their literacy to improve they have to be actively involved in the environment in which they must be literate,

The environment has a large role to play in literacy of individuals and communities (Szwed, 1981, and Cook-Gmperz, 1986, in Hood 1998, 362). Literacy in adult is the accumulation of varying, social and cultural influences (Lytle and Sultz, 1990, 360). Individuals will bring their own experience of literacy, making it interpretive process (Hood 1998, 15). Literacy is an important consideration in the experience of the adult, as interpretive study in the Piedmont Colinas , and Scribner and Cole 91981) in West Africa, give evidence that individuals and communities have varied purposes for reading and writing. The purpose will effect the text they choose to read and write, as well as heavily influence their reading and writing abilities (Hood, 1998, 362). The society and environment in which individuals find themselves will have a great influence on their degree of literacy.

Barton (1994, 188) points out that the home is a particularly important domain for a wide range of activities. A person at home can have many different literacy experiences during a day in a household where literacy is emphasized, books will be read for pleasure as well as for a study, diaries and may be kept, and organizational practices such as keeping and checking lists will be more common. In this type of household a person will encounter reading, comprehension, and written expression (Barton, 1994, 1960). This person will be competent in these areas because of their immersion literacy practices.

People's literacy practices area also situated in broader social relations outside the home, Baron (1994, 190) suggests that people have a range of roles and may pass through many roles in a day. In order to keep contact with people with whom they have relationship, they use literacy. They send cards, letters, messages, invitations for important moments. The people who receive the cards or message will also practice literacy as they read and reply to them. Literacy practices are useful for the people and the society. Weinstein-Shr (1992) in Street (1994, 107) believes that the study of meanings and uses of literacy in the lives of people can provide general insight into human and social process. Grant (1997, 217) claim hat if literacy in a society increases, the quality of home life for people in a community will improve. Their quality of life develops because of the improvement of knowing what they want and need to know.

Luke 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. Societies with access to modern technology become familiar with and literate in the se of resources such as Internet. Luke and Freebody look at literacy ass family practices under two different two different terms: (1) the notion of

“practices” performed in everyday classroom and community contexts and (2) the notion of “family” which suggests they dynamically related to one another on an ongoing basis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this research is qualitative (postpositivist). Qualitative research is particularly concerned with human beings within those areas of human experience which cannot be easily investigated through quantitative analysis. The main feature of this research according to Caulley (1994, 5-13) are natural setting, the use of human instrument (including holistic emphasis) tacit knowledge, qualitative methods, purposeful sampling, inductive data analysis, grounded theory, emergent design, negotiated outcomes, and the use case design. The Subject of this study is an Indonesian postgraduate student taking masters Program in Australia. For the Subject as an Indonesian student in Australia, English is as a second language. The cultural and social practice in which these students are involved dealing with coursework and interaction with people in Australia.

The intention of case study in this research is to take a close look at an Indonesian student with a view to finding out what it was that helped her become successful in English reading and writing. By understanding the findings of this research, we can find valuable understanding about one person's experience thematically in developing her reading and writing in English. The main method of data collection was interviewed two times. The aims of each interview were to find out: (1) the Subject's perceptions what she experienced in practicing English reading and writing and (2) the Subject perceives how she experienced in practicing English reading and writing.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The themes of this study can be formulated on the basis of careful readings and understanding of the interview transcripts from the two interviews with the Subject. These themes can be divided into five parts, namely literacy practices in family during childhood, the family's Perception about learning English, the influence of teachers, finding enjoyment in reading and immersion in learning in an English speaking country and immersion in an English speaking society. These themes are classified in the presentation of the data analysis as follows

Literacy Practices in Childhood

Subject childhood literacy experiences provided a basis for her becoming literate in English. This experience started before her school age. She had been introduced to books and she was also asked to understand the book by her father. These activities involve the Subject and immersed her in the world of story books. Taylor (1997, p.208) argues that all members in the family must make efforts in order to make the family become literate. Children recognize the first society from the family. When they grow up in the family, which involves them in literacy, they are affected by that involvement. On the other hand when they do not grow up in a family concerned about literacy, they might not have the sense of a love of stories and a love of reading and writing from childhood. Sagan and Druyan (1994) in Taylor (ibid, p.208) claim that when people lack literacy practices at home, they might think reading is time consuming and of little value.

Indonesian people recognize the metaphor of a child as “a white paper”. This metaphor is applied to the education of a child from, society or school. “A child is born like a white paper.” The result of his or her education depends on how they are coloured. This indicates how important is the valuable colour from the family as the first colour or the first society for the children. This is useful in order to prepare for further colouring, or for the society in which they are going to live. This metaphor is also useful for encouraging literacy education at home, thus preparing children to be readers and writers and to go on to further education.

Taylor (1997, p.301) studied how children are situated in literacy practices and events in certain families before the school age. The Subject began to be literacy because of the role of her father in the

development of her literacy. “when I was still a small child like but I was still introduced by my father with all books not other kind of toys.” (III,p). The literacy atmosphere created by her father, especially reading for his family encouraged his children to engage in literacy, including Melinda because he involved all the members of the family.

The family has the main role in introducing and engaging children and writing. Subject early love of reading and writing was a foundation for her in all her literacy learning. Clearly in subject case her father by reading and writing encouraged her early love activities. Thus preparing children to become readers and writers assists them in their personal pursuits through their school years and adult lives.

Families have a formative role to play in introducing and engaging children in reading and writing. Clearly subject father – by reading to her and teaching her to use reading – provided literacy practices with encouraged her early love of reading. As well, subject early immersion such literacy practices provided a sound foundation for all her subsequent literacy learning.

Family’s Perceptions about Learning English

The subject family followed the development of the subject capability in English in the process when she learnt English. Her father was involved in this process by providing the English stories and let her practice English with him. Rudiyanto (1988) suggests that the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents are critical in the improvement of teaching English as a foreign language. This indicates that Subject’ father could perceive the learning English was associated to the context which might involve lack of practice for subject. It should be realized that learning English must include opportunities for use.

The involvement of her father to encourage subject in learning was focused on reading and speaking. This happened when she could understand the English subject in Senior high School and became able to read and speak. This means that her father could also perceive that subject needed encouragement. As part of the extended family, her grandfather also supported her learning English by creating situations in which subject could use English.

Teacher’s Approach

Based on the information gained from the Subject, it is clear that teachers’ treatment influenced subject in acquiring English knowledge, and English literacy. This is not only based on what the Subject said explicitly. The marks she gained or her understanding about the Subjects were mostly the effects of the teachers’ approach in those classes. She could get marks or understand the course materials because she was satisfied with the teachers’ approach.

Teacher will be able to treat their students appropriately if they have accurate perceptions about the application of the curriculum. This is also what Rudiyanto (1988) suggests in his study about the implementation of the official curriculum of Indonesian Senior High Schools in 1984, and the reality of that implementation. He suggests the teacher’s perceptions are influential in teaching English in Indonesia.

The Subject perceptions about teachers’ treatment are reflected on her study since junior high school and the highest level she gained. When she was in Junior High school, she should not understand anything because she did not like the way the teachers taught. This experience did not happen when she learnt English in Senior High School because of the teachers, and she liked learning English at that time. She also liked joining the English as a second language class because of the teacher in the semester one of her course work in the Graduate School of education, La Trobe University. The sense of concern about teachers also affected her when she was writing her thesis, she felt that one of the reasons that she could write her thesis without significant difficulty was because of her supervisor. Good relationship she had with her supervisor was a significant factor in her learning. Her supervisor encouraged her to do what she should do in order to face difficulties as they arose. The

supervisor's explanations helped the Subject to cope with her problem she found while writing her thesis.

Subject's Preference for Reading

Masters Programs in Australia requires students to be competent in reading and writing in English. Students are required to make oral and written presentation in the process of their study and to write a Minor thesis if they chose the program by coursework and Minor Thesis. To acquire these skills, the students need to read many books. When they don't prepare themselves through reading, they might find difficulty in writing essays and theses and making academic oral presentations. Having a love of reading eliminates some of the problems in fulfilling these requirements.

The Subject could fulfill the requirement for master degree through her competence in English literacy. This is because her hobby is reading. It is not really a big deal for her to read the course materials that she had to read. Reading the course materials also could help her to solve her problems in English. For instance as it happened when she was in semester one, English was a major problem for her. One of the things that she did at time was reading all the course materials. She had become accustomed to doing her study this way since joining the Pre Departure English Program in Indonesia.

The Subject faced her studies by learning language through reading. She looked at language as books. She gained her knowledge through reading and she could raise her ideas in presentation or in class discussion because she knew through reading. Reading also helped her to know how to write. Salibrici (1999, p628) claims that students might be better readers through writing and better writers through reading. Her ability let her know what she had to learn and to be capable of expressing her idea in written and oral forms.

Enjoyment of reading is a key point factor for the students wishing to be literate in academic English. They can solve their problems in study by reading the materials that are included in their study. This study indicates that subject was worried about her study but she solved it by reading because her hobby is reading. By reading the books, she could gain the knowledge that is valuable for her study and gradually it can improve her English speaking and her competence in English literacy.

Immersion in Learning

The Subject immersed herself in her learning because she was motivated. The Subject could follow the difficulties and the disturbances in her learning from the perspective of holistic education because she on her own initiative. Flake (1998, 4) emphasizes that student-centred learning from the perspective of holistic education gives individuals a chance to develop themselves on the basis of their own choices, perspectives and strategies. Learning in the students – centred approach begins with students making their own choices. This will make them more eager to know what to learn.

The Subject's perception that she was scared about her study when she first arrived in Australia encouraged her to immerse herself in all subjects she learned in semester one. She studied hard in order to understand the material she learned and to write the assignment of each course she learned through reading. She also learned how to understand the text in order to match the requirements of study in Australia. Donin and Silva (1994, p.75) acknowledge that learners must know the capabilities of linguistic knowledge, semantic knowledge, specific content knowledge, and the knowledge of discourse structures. When she had difficulties in these processes she asked for help in order to be able to learn what she could.

Her success in solving her difficulties in following the Masters Program can be seen from the development of her study in the different semesters. She did not have the same difficulty in the different semesters. It seems that she moved from one semester to the next with conscious improvement. This is reflected in the fact that she gained the qualification of Masters degree in the final semester. She had been able to express her own idea as the reflection of her understanding in critical thinking that might not happen when she was in Indonesia. Students in the periods when subject

learned in Indonesia were not free to express their own ideas. Academically, The Subject's capability was also reflected in one of her marks which was "A" in the last semester. When she ended her study by writing her thesis she did not think that writing was a burden for her. During the process of writing the thesis, she was also in the process of learning how to write her thesis.

The Subject's immersion in learning indicates her capacity to gain knowledge. She did not have similar difficulties in each semester and she was conscious of her competence and confidence changing from one period of time to the next. This means that she changed significantly according to the concept of transformational learning.

The result of the thematic analysis of this study might refer to the literacy as cultural and social practices experienced by the Subject. The aspects of the themes are literacy practices in family during childhood, the family's perception about learning English, the influence of teachers, finding enjoyment in reading and immersion in learning. These findings address to the first question of this "What are the literary practices experienced by An Indonesian student in English speaking country?"

The Subject experienced literacy as cultural and social practices in different ways for each theme. The ways are : being introduced to books to before school age, being asked to understand the book by her father, the involvement of his father during the process by providing the English stories. What the Subject did for literacy as cultural and social practices are the answer of the second question of this study "How are the literary practices experienced by An Indonesian student in English speaking country?"

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Literacy is a social event, as self development, at a personal level. Involving the role of home activities, environment, and institution. It means that being literate in a language is affected by social and cultural influences. There are five aspects of the Subject's experience in practicing literacy as cultural and social practice in terms of individuals, home, environment. Each aspect has its own ways.

The result of this study proves that cultural and social practices experienced by the Subject are: literacy practices in family during childhood, the family's perception about learning English, the influence of teachers, finding enjoyment in reading and immersion in learning. This is the first finding of this study about literary practices experienced by an ESL student. The Subject did literacy as cultural and social practices are: being introduced to books to before school age, being asked to understand the book by her father, the involvement of his father during the process by providing the English stories and let her practice English with him, the reflection of the teachers' treatment and learning by reading books and writing assignment.

The findings of this study suggest three recommendations. The first one is the recommendation for further research. This study proves that literacy as cultural and social practice experienced by the Subject affected by her literacy practice. Further research might investigate the factors that might affect the students academically. The second one is to create English atmosphere at English Study Program area FKIP Riau University. It is needed to create the sense of English as a second language when the students are at campus area, especially at English Study Program area. The third one is to reconsider the aim of teaching reading. Teaching reading is not only to make the students be able to read but also to make the students enjoy reading. The Subject of this study has proved that her capacity being literate in English is affected by practicing literacy as cultural and social practice. Her interest in reading began from home and developed her literacy for academic world in English speaking country.

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