



Capturing the Understanding of Cultural Literacy in Prospective Elementary School Teacher Students: Bringing Culture into Education

Karimatus Saidah^{1*}, Endang Sri Mujiwati¹, Rian Damariswara¹

¹Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri, Indonesia

*Correspondence to: karimatus@unpkediri.ac.id

Abstract: Cultural literacy is a person's ability to understand, appreciate, and behave towards various cultures. Students must have cultural literacy skills to socialize, respect, and show tolerance towards different cultures in the institutional environment and the community. This study aims to reveal the understanding of the cultural literacy of PGSD students. The research method used is the mixed method with the explanatory sequential design. The study results showed that the cultural knowledge demonstrated by students was included in the good category, namely in language and arts literacy, multiculturalism, nationalism, and cultural inclusivity. They had the willingness to see and be involved in different cultures. However, the initiative and attitude towards different cultures were not seen in the results of this study. The conclusion of this study shows that students have a fairly good understanding of cultural literacy. This research contributes to how cultural literacy is implemented in lecture activities and how students understand cultural literacy, the importance of cultural literacy in higher education especially in elementary school teacher education to develop awareness of cultural differences to increase tolerance and the process of intercultural socialization.

Keywords: culture; elementary school teacher; tertiary education

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INTRODUCTION

Modern societies are defined as a plurality of cultural heritages, narratives, and ideas that differ, even competing, about cultural heritage and traditions (Maine et al., 2019). Globalization has brought changes in the socio-economic and technological order. Furthermore, globalization changes people's mentality and how they interact with the environment around them. In today's world, which is becoming more interconnected, a key responsibility of educators and educational institutions at every level is to cultivate, advocate for, and enhance cultural literacy (Shliakhovchuk, 2021). Cultural literacy is essential for living in harmony with others (Garcia-Mila et al., 2021). Cultural literacy, comprising values and characteristics that arise from constructive dialogue and argumentation with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, is a crucial skill for society in the 21st century, regardless of geographic location (Rapanta et al., 2021; World Economic Forum, 2015). Cultural literacy is a competency that contributes to developing positive habits, learning, attitudes, communication, and building values (Simamora et al., 2019). Helaluddin (2018) stated that cultural literacy is an individual's competence to understand their culture and how to behave towards their culture as their national identity. It can be said that cultural literacy is the perspectives, knowledge, and contributions of a set of cultures that will be used in the learning process (reading and writing). Meanwhile, Lähdesmäki et al. (2022) said that cultural literacy is an inherently dialogical social practice based on learning and acquiring knowledge through empathetic, tolerant, and inclusive interactions. Cultural literacy is considered value-based knowledge, which emerges in response to the requirements of sustainable community coexistence (Kobakhidze, 2021).

When discussing cultural literacy, it is important to recognize which culture requires comprehension. In Indonesia, cultural literacy demands that students comprehend and engage with culture and be connected to civic literacy. Civic literacy refers to an individual's capability to comprehend their rights, duties, and responsibilities as a member of society. Cultural and civic literacy must establish conceptual limits in their execution. There are seven elements of culture conveyed by Kuntjoroningrat (Juhanda, 2019). The seven elements of culture include the system of language, knowledge system, social system, life equipment and system of technologies, occupation system, religious system, and art (Sumarto, 2019). Ministry of Education and Culture (2017) provides cultural and civic literacy limitations that must at least be mastered. There are six principles of cultural and civic literacy, including culture as a way of thinking manifested in language and behavior, art as part of cultural products, multicultural and participatory citizenship, nationalism, awareness of nationality, cultural inclusiveness, and presenting direct experience as part of developing literacy understanding. The emphasis in cultural literacy is not on how many cultures should know but on how they behave wisely and can develop an attitude of mutual respect for the diversity of cultures that have been known. Education enhances and updates technology and facilitates student intercultural relationships' evolution and socialization processes.

Education can also influence the growth of tolerance among students involved and foster an appreciation for the cultural diversity within society. This can help individuals understand their own culture and the culture of other nations, fostering appropriate evaluation and understanding skills both about individuals and the diversity of other cultures. Education needs to be designed to ensure a person's entry into a culture by introducing individuals to the national values of their nation (Sergeeva et al., 2019). Educational institutions, particularly those of higher education, must prepare college graduates to engage with the various socio-cultural conditions present in society. Higher education establishments face distinct obstacles in preparing graduates to excel in transdisciplinary and transcultural settings. Higher education institutions must prepare their students with abilities that provide them with mobility and adaptability to work effectively across various cultural and professional environments (Ochoa et al., 2016). This indicates that students need to possess fundamental cultural literacy abilities. Cultural literacy empowers graduates to overcome disciplinary and cultural divisions, improving their comprehension, openness, respect, and accountability for themselves and others (Ochoa et al., 2018).

Cultural literacy can be implemented in various ways. Bal and Mete (2019) stated that cultural literacy can be taught through the use of the mother tongue, making it easier to understand because it is close to the known environment. Ritchie (2017) uses a pedagogical strategy by using an approach related to local community culture to explore cultural literacy in the world of education. Meanwhile, Darder and Cronin (2018) introduce cultural literacy through dance arts. Dance is a pedagogical means to learn to read the world or learn about various cultures. There is a growing body of research on 'cultural literacy,' but little has been written about how it is implemented and even less about how to teach it in higher education contexts (Ochoa & McDonald, 2019). This may be due to the assumption that higher education students are considered independent learners, so the need for cultural literacy skills depends on the needs of each student and is not an urgent matter to teach. Cultural literacy at the higher education level is intended to build cross-cultural understanding and respect for the minority cultures around students. As conveyed by Daddow et al. (2021), higher education needs to create safe spaces, respectful dialogue, and the emergence of personal narratives to support the development of intercultural literacy in participants and encourage the participation of minority student voices. In Indonesia, promoting cultural literacy centers around the school setting, family, and society. The government does not identify universities in the cultural literacy initiative that has been proposed. The indicators presented in the technical guide focused more on implementing the cultural literacy movement in the three previously mentioned settings. However, it does not clarify the degree to which the indicators measure the success of the cultural and civic literacy program. Articles related to cultural and civic literacy that have been discussed in Indonesia, based on search results using the *publish or perish* application on the Google Scholar database, over the past five years have reached 740 articles.

Meanwhile, articles discussing cultural literacy at the tertiary level with students as subjects were only found in 8 articles in the same period. Hamdani et al. (2023) noted that Cultural and civic literacy in Indonesia is currently not well applied as many young generations remain unfamiliar with Indonesian culture, with some even lacking an understanding of their own regional culture, such as customs, language, arts, traditional games and more. Rizkia et al. (2024) reinforce that individuals tend to be more acquainted with and favor Western music and traditional attire from foreign cultures or other countries rather than local songs. Consequently, people become oblivious to their own culture, including regional songs and traditional clothing from their area. It is shown that there is a need for a more in-depth study of how to implement cultural literacy for the younger generation, especially at the tertiary level.

There are several studies related to the implementation of cultural literacy. Barrette and Paesani (2018) link cultural literacy with language learning, especially foreign languages, and show that a measurable definition of cultural literacy can facilitate the alignment of goals and outcomes with the principles of disciplines and have implications for curriculum development and teaching practices in foreign language teaching programs in universities. In this context, cultural literacy is used to improve the quality of learning. Meanwhile, Yuki (2020) employs cultural literacy to enhance interest and motivation in reading, elevate learning quality, and encourage students to collect information from various reference sources. This indicates that studies on cultural literacy can apply to multiple scientific settings, but it is also important to understand what cultural literacy skills students possess beforehand. It means that applying cultural literacy can have a broader effect on education. This study intends to uncover student comprehension of cultural literacy and citizenship, encompassing (1) Language and arts diversity literacy, (2) multicultural literacy, (3) nationalism literacy, and (4) cultural inclusivity.

METHODS

This research uses a mixed method with an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This design was chosen because the researcher wanted to reveal the hidden facts behind the phenomenon by combining two forms of quantitative and qualitative data. The subjects of this study were 93 PGSD (elementary school teacher education) students of Batch I of Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri and lecturers teaching

language courses. The research instruments used were questionnaires, document check sheets, and interview guidelines. The questionnaire was addressed to students. The questionnaire was compiled based on modifications to the six principles of cultural and citizenship literacy by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the 2017 literacy program support module, namely (1) Language and art diversity literacy, (2) Multicultural literacy, (3) National literacy, (4) Cultural inclusivity. Table 1 presents the question outline of this research.

Table 1. Question Outline

Aspect	Statement
Language and Arts Diversity Literacy	Mastery of regional languages Understanding Javanese proverb éwuh pakewuh Understanding Javanese proverb tut wuri handayani
Multicultural Literacy	mastery of knowledge about the art Desire to Participate in other cultural customs Desire to try various traditional clothes Desire to Learn other culture Knowledge about forms of culture Knowledge about forms of daily activities that reflect mutual cooperation
Nationalism Literacy	Knowledge about elements of mutual cooperation in other regions knowledge related to national songs form of nationalism
Cultural Inclusivity	Agreement of their culture is the best Desire to wear traditional clothes from other culture

The document check sheet was used to analyze student assignments. The assignment's design was that students were asked to make a mind map of an area that contained information about the uniqueness of each area, including traditional food, art, customs, language, and so on. The interview guidelines were used to interview students and lecturers teaching courses, which, in this case, were Indonesian language and literature and regional languages. Interview guidelines for students contain the reasons for choosing a region when working on mind-mapping tasks. At the same time, interviews with lecturers contain the lecturers' views on students' understanding of aspects of cultural literacy. Both data were analyzed sequentially, starting with calculating the percentage level of students' cultural literacy understanding in the four aspects as above, then interpreting and describing. Then, the results of the analysis are followed up with the results of the interview data analysis. Interpreting and drawing conclusions on both instruments uses the Miles & Huberman Technique (Miles et al., 2014), as seen in Figure 1.

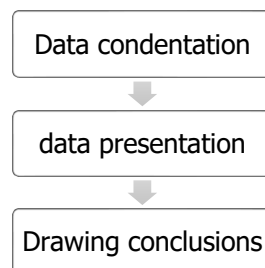


Figure 1. Data Analysis Stages

Information from survey results, student worksheets, and interviews is subsequently gathered, organized, and streamlined to produce data that aligns with the research subject via the data condensation process. Subsequently, the information is showcased to address the research aims, specifically to capture cultural literacy in higher education, with the final phase being the formulation of conclusions that reflect the ultimate findings of this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The information gathered from this study included the outcomes from the questionnaire given to students, followed by the findings from the task analysis and the results from interviews with the lecturers. The following table displays a summary of the questionnaire findings.

Table 2. Summary of the questionnaire result

Aspect	Statement	Percentage
Language and Arts Diversity Literacy	mastery of regional languages	83%
	Understanding Javanese proverb <i>éwuh pakewuh</i>	96%
	Understanding Javanese proverb <i>Tut Wuri Handayani</i>	52%
Multicultural Literacy	mastery of knowledge about the art	78%
	Desire to Participate in other culture customs	86%
	Desire to try various traditional clothes	96,8%
	Desire to Learn other culture	97%
	Knowledge about forms of culture	15 %
	Knowledge about forms of daily activities that reflect mutual cooperation	75%
	Knowledge about elements of mutual cooperation in other regions	33%
Nationalism Literacy	knowledge related to national songs	100%
	form of nationalism	87%
Cultural Inclusivity	Agreement of their culture is the best	37.6%
	Desire to wear traditional clothes from other culture	96%

The information reveals differing outcomes. Subsequently, every facet of cultural literacy will be detailed and contrasted with the task analysis findings and interviews with the lecturer. The questionnaire results indicated two distinctions concerning students' comprehension of regional languages and regional arts. Initially, regarding proficiency in regional languages, the researcher inquired if students were proficient in Javanese through *kromo inggil*. The questionnaire results revealed that 83.9% of students had mastered *kromo*. To gain further insight into students' language knowledge, the researcher posed questions about two proverbs that are quite familiar in Javanese culture (nearly all students belong to the Javanese ethnicity), specifically *tut wuri handayani* and *ewuh pakewuh*. The questionnaire results revealed conflicting findings: 96.8% of students understood the meaning of *tut wuri handayani*, while conversely, 52% of students were unaware of the meaning of *ewuh pakewuh*. It may be that throughout the lecture, the phrase *tut wuri handayani* was encountered more frequently than the phrase *ewuh pakewuh*. The questionnaire results showed conflicting differences. 96.8% of students knew the meaning of *tut wuri handayani*, but on the contrary, 52% of students did not know the meaning of *ewuh pakewuh*. This could be because *tut wuri handayani* was heard more often during the lecture than *ewuh pakewuh*. Literacy in language diversity is crucial for Indonesian society, particularly for students. Introducing language diversity literacy can equip students to respond thoughtfully to diversity (Triyono, 2019). Good literacy in language diversity from various cultures will enable students to accept, adapt, and behave wisely regarding differences (Pratiwi & Asyarotin, 2019).

Secondly, regarding knowledge of the arts, 78% of students can identify five art forms in their province, and every student can mention songs and dances from different regions. This implies that students typically possess a basic understanding of the arts in their local province and across various areas in Indonesia. Introducing arts literacy at an early age can foster a greater appreciation for one's artistic expressions (Hartono et al., 2022). Besides that, art can be a powerful reference for interpreting culture, such as history, worldview, lifestyle, customs, and traditions found in various groups of people (Hume, 2024). The advantages of teaching art encompass nurturing an appreciation for diversity, enhancing cultural awareness, developing literacy abilities, cultivating emotional intelligence, reinforcing cultural identity, and encouraging creativity and self-expression (Bao & Boonsrianan, 2024). so that art literacy can enrich students' understanding of cultural differences and build cultural tolerance.

In this context, multicultural literacy relates to students' enthusiasm for learning about or understanding other cultures and their awareness of diverse cultures or traditions from various areas. 86% of students wish to engage in different cultural practices, 96.8% express a desire to experiment with traditional attire from other cultures, and 97% recognize the importance of understanding other cultures. These findings indicate that students are excited about cultures that differ from theirs. Nevertheless, when inquiries are made regarding the values or objectives of a specific culture, such as when questioned about their knowledge of cultural practices associated with mutual cooperation, merely 15% of students can articulate the cultural forms they recognize related to mutual cooperation activities like *sinoman*, *Gugur Gunung*, *Sambatan*, and others. The remaining 75% describe daily activities that demonstrate collaborative effort. When inquiries are posed about culture, it is observed that students struggle significantly to demonstrate how the culture in their region, particularly those featuring aspects of cooperation. The limited grasp of cultural literacy is evident, stemming from insufficient cultural education, a finding also observed in other studies (Kurniawan, 2021). In the following question regarding culture with elements of mutual cooperation in different regions, 33% of students provided the correct answer, a result that was surprisingly superior to their responses about elements of mutual cooperation in their

areas. Many students noted the *ngaben* and *ngayah* culture, which comes from the island of Bali, indicating that Balinese traditions are well-known to students.

Indonesia is a nation with diverse cultures. Sustainable implementation of multiculturalism is essential to instill values of diversity and difference in the nation's youth (Bahfiarti et al., 2020). Multiculturalism can promote empathy, conversation, and cultural diversity, and involvement, transparency, and tolerance of different viewpoints are important components of cultural knowledge (Al-Zadjali, 2024). In a multicultural nation, differences are inevitable and must be managed properly. Through multicultural education literacy, the empowerment of a diverse and heterogeneous society to understand and respect differences can be developed (Tilaar, 2004).

Nationalism literacy is represented by several questions regarding their understanding of national songs, and all students can write national songs. 87% of students can write the form of nationalism they have done so far. Nonetheless, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that their actions reveal similarities in their responses, often involving copying from one another, suggesting that the integrity of students in this regard cannot be trusted. The remaining 13% provided responses that did not correspond to the questions and showed signs of copying and pasting. Thus, in this instance, the type of nationalism they engaged in has not been determined.

Massive technological developments seem to have an influence on the cultural field, one of which is the loss of the original culture of a region or a country, the erosion of the sense of love for culture and nationalism in the younger generation, and the decline in the sense of nationalism and patriotism (Rachmawati & Purwaningrum, 2019). This occurs due to the lack of application and understanding of the importance of culture in the community environment (Wahyuni et al., 2013). Meanwhile, other research results show a significant relationship between technology mastery and nationalism, especially in lectures. Instructors proficient in digital technology exhibit greater awareness of national matters and regularly leverage digital platforms to advocate for national values and enhance national identity among learners (Kusumajati & Chairiyani, 2024). Regarding cultural inclusivity, nearly every student response suggested they were receptive to all cultures. Inclusivity is essentially a philosophy about respecting diversity, respecting that everyone is a valuable part of the togetherness of society, regardless of their differences (Heijmen, 2005). The philosophy of inclusivity views humans as equal beings even though they are different (Harthanti, 2015).

For example, 63.4% of students stated that they disagreed on whether their culture is the best, meaning that most students realize culture has the same value, both their own culture and other cultures. 86% of students stated they wanted to participate in other cultural events, and 96% wanted to try wearing traditional clothes from other cultures. This means that in terms of cultural understanding, students show that there is no cultural exclusivity. They have an inclusive view of the various cultures they know. Eden et al. (2024) stated that educational policies and curricula must reflect a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Leaders in educational institutions play an important role in creating a culture of mutual respect and appreciation for diversity among students and staff. In addition, cultural competency technology can be used through virtual exchange programs, digital resources of diverse cultures, and online forums for intercultural dialogue. The findings from the questionnaire indicated that students possess a strong foundational understanding of Indonesian cultures and demonstrate an open mindset towards diverse cultures. Nonetheless, it is important to examine further how students express their attitudes regarding the culture they are familiar with and what actions they should take. This is because knowledge alone is insufficient.

The results of the analysis of student work documentation on cultural literacy demonstrate their understanding of a culture. Among all the mind-mapping projects concerning the local culture, they usually clarify general information about a specific area and its characteristic foods. Many of these pieces do not articulate their views on the culture they showcase. The task solely conveys information through mind mapping. It is impossible to quantify how the comprehension of culture is manifested in the work. During the interview, when asked why a specific culture was selected for mind mapping, they replied that there was no particular reason, simply because the data was readily accessible online. Nonetheless, some claimed that the culture originated from its original region, leading them to seek out information and present it more effectively. The findings from an interview with Rian Damariswara, a lecturer for the language study course, revealed his insights on the cultural literacy comprehension of PGSD students, particularly those in the first grade, as he employed a cultural literacy approach in his teaching.

"Most students have a tendency related to culture as far as knowledge alone, and they do not show any special initiative when studying a culture. I think they understand culture in terms of what is written on the internet. They do not try to express their thoughts regarding a culture even though they have been stimulated to engage in activities that bring them closer to various cultures. Students have not been seen showing attitudes towards a particular culture, whether it is defending a culture or finding meaning behind certain cultural symbols. We still have much homework so that cultural literacy and citizenship are not only understood as symbolic knowledge, but an understanding of cultural literacy is

still limited to the outer skin or just knowing so that it has not touched on the goal of mastering cultural literacy itself."

As Ochoa et al. (2018) stated, Cultural literacy empowers graduates to go beyond disciplinary and cultural limits, promoting comprehension, openness, respect, and accountability toward themselves and others. Cultural literacy is a mindset regarding social and cultural phenomena that influence our lives (Segal, 2015). Cultural literacy also refers to understanding one's values, customs, beliefs, and communication about other people's cultures. This means that knowledge alone is insufficient to show that someone has good cultural literacy skills.

Students, especially in the PGSD department, must have cultural knowledge and intercultural dialogue skills, as conveyed by Cook et al. (2022). Cultural literacy, as a social practice of dialogue, appreciates diverse viewpoints. Navigating various viewpoints in conversation necessitates a 'strong tolerance' for ambiguity, 'marked by a positive, open, and adaptable approach to uncertainty. The results of this study provide an overview of how students view the culture they know but have not been able to describe their attitudes and intercultural dialogue skills. Therefore, the recommendation for implementing cultural literacy should be a structured program that is integrated with classroom lecture activities, not only in courses that discuss a particular culture but can also be integrated with various activities that improve the quality of students' understanding of cultural literacy.

CONCLUSION

The cultural literacy skills of PGSD students can be considered satisfactory in terms of their understanding of different cultures, including those from their areas and national cultures. However, the ability to behave towards culture and show initiative and concern in learning culture is still invisible. Lecture activities need to be integrated with programs that provide knowledge about various cultures and improve the quality of students' attitudes and cultural skills. The results of this study provide an overview of the importance of cultural literacy in higher education in developing awareness of cultural differences to increase tolerance and the process of intercultural socialization.

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