

## **LITERACY STRATEGIES: BUILDING ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' CHARACTER EDUCATION AND ENGLISH COMPETENCE IN FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE CLASSROOM**

**Wiwik Mardiana**

Universitas Islam Majapahit, [wiwik.mardiana@unim.ac.id](mailto:wiwik.mardiana@unim.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

This study explored the implementation of literacy practice in both face-to-face and online classroom supporting students' character education and their English competence. It also described the challenges and problems in applying literacy practice in both face-to-face and online classroom. Two teachers from an Islamic privately owned Elementary school were chosen as the participants. Drawing on the observation and interview, it was found that there were two stages of teachers' literacy practice, i.e. habituation and learning stage in both face-to-face and online classroom. However, the discrepancy existed in habituation stage in online classroom. The strategies in each stage were equipped with islamic literacy resources, approach, activities, and learning cycles. Another finding also unveiled that the teachers encountered challenges related to the transformation of face-to-face to online learning. This research encapsulates that literacy practice is vital for young learners as it promotes students' character building and English competence.

**Keywords:** *Literacy, Character Education, English Competence, Face-to-face, Online Classroom*

## **INTRODUCTION.**

Indonesia's government has emphasized the vitality of literacy for young learners and established literacy in the Sustainable Development Goals program called *Nawa Cita*. This program highlights the reading habituation or culture development. The government believes that through basic or fundamental literacy, students are able to understand all lessons or subjects in the school and have a high responsibility for preserving national values. INOVASI (2019) has explained that basic or fundamental

literacy is a crucial foundation to young learners' learning comprising science, technology, math, character education, and Higher Order Thinking Skill (HOTS).

Moreover, Metcalfe et al. (2013) states that literacy gives beneficial impacts, for instance develop language and language proficiency, brain, and critical thinking. From these views, the researcher deduce that literacy has beneficial impacts for young learners' development consisting of acquiring and learning language(s) (first, second or additional language), recognizing and understanding knowledge, critical thinking, and building students' characters i.e. cultures, religious, ethical values, beliefs, and wisdom reflecting national values.

Consequently, incorporating literacy together with building character in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and other subjects or lessons is a compulsory based on the current curriculum in Indonesia. Milal et al. (2020) have proven that Islamic Life Resource Pack (ILRP) as a literacy resource assists teachers to integrate character education in teaching English and helps students improve their language skills. Recent related literatures showed that literacy is interrelated with English competence through storytelling (Damayanti, 2017; Satriani, 2019), successful literacy activities need appropriate teachers' questioning (Aimah & Purwanto, 2019), approach (Yoon, 2007), and literacy strategies (Khairuddiniyah, 2017).

Meanwhile, those studies were conducted on higher schools and education. A few studies carried out research on this issues in the context of teaching young learners (e.g. Artini, 2017). In terms of research scope, Nurgiyantoro (2010); Tyra (2012); Kusmarwantini (2012); and Ikhwan (2013) focused on literacy and character education in elementary school. Therefore, this study provides a wider lense of literacy practice which has contribution to the development of pupils' character education and English competence. Besides, due to the transformation of learning context from face-to-face to online learning, this research also explored both learning contexts in order to find out the model of strategies, challenges, and problems which is further practically suggested to English language teachers how to implement literacy strategies to elementary school students.

In this connection, this current research investigates how the teachers applied and perceived literacy strategies in both online and face-to-face classroom to build students' character education and English competence. Hence, this study practically recommends the pedagogical implication of literacy strategies in both face-to-face and online classroom since it is considered beneficial for strengthening students' character education and English competence.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literacy, Character Education, and English Competence**

Owens (2012) defines that literacy is the use of visual modes of communication, specifically reading. It comprises of thinking, memory, problem solving, planning, and execution. As in other forms of communication, the use of literacy indicates that the user is able to understand and produce messages. Similarly, Kemdikbud (2016) explains that the definition of literacy in the scope of School Literacy Movement is the ability to understand and apply the knowledge through various activities such as reading, writing, and speaking.

In relation to character education, literacy resources such as storybooks deliver the message expressing moral values. Rahim and Rahiem (2012) also say that stories are known as having an important contribution to the moral education of children and adults. Stories are effective in giving role models and chances to discuss moral dilemmas. Moreover, Nurgiyantoro (2010); Tyra (2012); and Kusmarwantini (2012) asserted that children's literature are effective to teach and shape students' character education. In the context of islamic school, Milal et al. (2019) emphasize that islamic resources or storybooks are vital in implementing literacy to build the students' character education as well as English competence.

In terms of English competence, it refers to language knowledge (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, reading skill), cognitive aspects, and the ability to use that language (e.g. speaking and writing). It is also defined as the learners' ability to produce a language (Hemerka, 2009).

Related studies, Damayanti (2017) proved that storytelling as a literacy practice help the students to improve their writing skill. Milal et al. (2019) also explaine that the Islamic Life Resource Pack (ILRP) literacy they developed impacted on students' motivation and English language skill. In the context of teaching elementary school students, Artini (2017) showed that literacy resources enhance the students reading skill.

### **Teachers' Literacy Practices, Literacy Activities and Strategies in the Teaching and Learning Process**

In practicing literacy, some activities and strategies are required to fulfill the goals of the literacy program as well as the learning goals. The general recommended literacy practices by MAISA GELN (2016) that should be carried out by the teachers include fostering literacy motivation and engagement, reading aloud, collaborative and individual instruction, explicit instruction, building vocabulary and content knowledge, doing observation and assessment of children's literacy development, as well as involving families

In Indonesian context, those above suggested practices are included in the concept of literacy activities and strategies of Kemdikbud's School Literacy Movement called as Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (GLS) (2016) in the level of elementary school. There are three stages in GLS i.e. habituation, development, and learning stages. Each stage has different scopes and purposes, principles, activities, and strategies. This concept specifically in the learning stage is elaborated with the literacy strategies in grade 4-12 by Connecticut State Department of Education (2007); and Derewianka and Jones (2016). It is also important to consider the time allocation for the effectiveness and targetted teaching. The optimal time is about two to three hours per day which can also be integrated in teaching and learning process (Louden et al., 2005; Rasinski et al., 2020).

**Table 1 Literacy Strategies (GLS, 2016; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007; and Derewianka & Jones, 2016)**

Components/ Aspects	Literacy Stages		
	Habituation Stage	Development Stage	Learning Stage
Purposes	- Motivating, reading habituation, enjoyment, and building teacher-students communication	- Improving students’ reading fluency and comprehension  - Understanding new vocabularies	- Improving students’ receptive skill (reading and listening) and productive skill (speaking and writing)
Principles	- Extensive reading - No exercises - Involving discussion - Fun and enjoy activity	- Extensive reading - Exercises (drawing, writing, art, role play) - Fun and enjoy activity	- Reading texts are based on the students’ grade - Reading texts can be authentic materials or from the lesson module given by the school
Strategies & Activities	- Timing (15 minutes before main lesson) - Eliciting prior knowledge - Teacher questioning - Activating students participation - Reading aloud by the teachers - Students independent and silent reading (sustained silent reading)	- Interactive read aloud - Story map - Thinking aloud - Shared reading - Guided reading - Listing difficult word - Students independent and silent reading (sustained silent reading) - Comparison matrix	a) Comprehension Reading-thinking activity, question-answer, chart, comparison matrix, response notebook, chapter tour, thinking aloud, map, graphic b) Vocabulary Definition of map, context clues, list-group-label, analogy with word walls, knowledge rating scales c) Fluency Repeated reading, reading theatre d) Spelling Spelling self-correction, word relationship, word sorts

Assessment	Observation Checklist	Observation checklist, Written (non-test)	Portofolio, observation checklist
Learning cycles	The learning cycle in teaching literacy based on Derewianka and Jones (2016) should consists of 1) Knowledge building (of the field) 2) Genre modelling 3) Guided reading 4) Joint construction 5) Independent use of genre (productive skill)		

### Face-to-Face and Online Classroom

Today's teaching and learning context has been shifted due to covid-19 disease. Face-to-face classroom involves face-to-face interaction with the students and engaging the students physically while online classroom based on Perveen (2016) is conducted virtually in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. Mardiana and Afkar (2020) have revealed that the different mode of online classroom affected the communication strategies used by the teachers. This, of course, also prevails on the literacy activities and strategies. Thus, this study explored in both online and face-to-face literacy activities to explain the model of strategies, challenges, problems, and benefits.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This explorative and interpretative case study used documents, observation, and interview to collect the data. The subjects of this research were two teachers (one teacher of four grade and one teacher of five grade) from Bilingual Islamic Elementary School in Mojokerto—MI-Nurul Huda. The researcher selected these participants because their literacy practices were in accordance with the goals of the current study. The different sources (the teachers) with the same technique i.e. observation and different techniques (observation and interview) to one source (teacher) and vice versa were carried out to ensure the validity of the data. The documents were used to gain information about the texts / kinds of text through the students handbook/module.

Due to the implementation of online learning in this pandemic situation, the practice of literacy strategies in face-to-face classroom are gained through one-on-one interview since the

teachers were individually interviewed in the different time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The observation was employed to explore the literacy practice in online classroom (synchronous and asynchronous). In the context of online classroom, the teachers communicated with the students through Google Meet (synchronous mode) and Whatsapp group and Google Form (asynchronous mode) in doing literacy practice. In doing observation, the researcher was permitted and involved by the teachers to join in the Whatsapp group and Google Meet for obtaining the intended data.

The data were analyzed by using literacy strategies components and classification based on Kemdikbud's School Literacy Movement (GLS) (2016) elaborated with Connecticut State Department of Education (2007), as well as Derewianka and Jones (2016). The data were classified based on the research purposes and elucidated based on the components or aspects of literacy strategies mentioned in table 1.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Implementation of Literacy Strategies in Face-to-Face and Online Classroom**

Gaining information through observation and interview, the researcher revealed that generally, the two teachers apply two stages of literacy i.e. habituation stage and learning stage. However, due to the shift of online learning, the time allocation, resources and teachers' interaction were different from face-to-face classroom. In face-to-face classroom, the time is limited to fifteen minutes for habituation stage which is not the same as online classroom. In habituation stage, the literacy was conducted before the whole lessons or teaching and learning process. In learning stage, the literacy was carried out before and during teaching and learning process in each lesson or subject. The detailed differences can be seen in Table 2 as follows;

**Table 2 Literacy Strategies Implementation between Face-to-Face and Online Classroom by the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teachers at MI-Nurul Huda**

	Face-to-face classroom	Online classroom
Habituation Stage	a) Limited to 15-25 minutes b) Extensive reading (tends to islamic storybook) c) Observation checklist d) Involving direct interaction, reading aloud, sustained silent reading	a) Time allocation is one hour b) Restricted to lesson / subject materials c) Observation checklist and portofolio d) Teachers-students communication through Whatsapp group, finding and translate difficult words, summarizing
Learning Stage	a) Conducted before and during teaching & learning process in each lesson/subject b) Both authentic and lesson-based reading texts (islamic texts are incorporated) c) Observation checklist, portofolio d) Reading-thinking activity, question-answer; Definition of map, context clues, list-group-label; Repeated reading; Spelling self-correction 6) Learning cycles: Knowledge building (of the field); Genre modelling; Guided reading; Joint construction; Independent use of genre	a) Conducted before and during teaching & learning process in each lesson/subject b) Both authentic and lesson-based reading texts (islamic texts are incorporated) c) Observation checklist, portofolio d) Reading-thinking activity, question-answer, Definition of map, context clues, list-group-label; Repeated reading; Spelling self-correction; Rewriting (asynchronous mode) e) Learning cycles: Knowledge building (of the field); Genre modelling; Guided reading; Joint construction; Independent use of genre (synchronous mode)



### *Habituation Stage*

Based on Table 2, it could be described that there was a discrepancy of literacy practice between face-to-face and online learning. In face-to-face learning, the implementation of literacy strategies in this stage has been fitted to what Kemdikbud's School Literacy Movement (GLS) (2016) suggested. However, the teachers thought that students had more opportunities to read in online environment because they have longer time. Their argument remained questions "why did the literacy resources limited to their lesson subject?". This study revealed that the sudden transformation of learning context made the teacher frustated in preparing the whole learning activities. Consider the following

T4/I1: *"for literacy activities in online context, we ask the students to read the text provided by the teachers. We chose the text relevant to their lessons. For example, if today schedule is science and the material is digestive system, so the reading text in literacy activities is science text specifically about the digestive system but we found the text in google and other resources not limited to students' handbook. This is our strategy to make the students also understand about the material because online learning needs extra for students comprehension".*

From the data T4/I1 above, it can be noted that the different resources between face-to-face and online learning was aimed at fulfilling or accomplishing the learning goals. This means that this way is beneficial for the teachers, but without considering the students' needs.

Furthermore, the teacher also used portofolio by giving assignments such as summarizing, finding, and translating the difficult words in online context in this stage which is not suggested in Kemdikbud's School Literacy Movement (GLS) (2016). Related to communication mode, the teachers tend to use asynchronous mode, i.e. using Whatsapp group instead of direct interaction in synchronous mode. This practice is obviously contrast to the purpose of literacy in habituation stage proposed by Kemdikbud's School Literacy Movement (GLS) (2016). In this stage, the literacy strategies and activities should aim at encouraging students' reading habituation through enjoyment. There should be

no assignments, and it must involve direct interaction. The teachers were not doing direct interaction because there was another obligatory activity; that was, reciting qur'an scheduled through video call whatsapp. See the following data

T5/I3: *"because it's difficult to interacting and handling students through online learning, we tend to ask the students to summarize, emm... and then finding difficult words. We are afraid that not all students will follow the instruction if we do literacy in googlemeet. If we give them assignments, we will know who do the literacy activities. It's different from face-to-face learning that I can directly interact and point them one by one. In online learning, they are reluctant to talk and tend to ignore what we ask".*

From the data above, it can be seen that the teachers were worried about the students' involvement in doing literacy activities in synchronous mode. It seems that they had no choice but think that it was the best choice for the sustainability of the learning goals. This was also their first time of online teaching and learning context. The confusion and frustration of the teachers towards the transformation of learning lead to different way of implementing literacy strategies.

### *Learning Stage*

Table 2 describes that generally both face-to-face and online learning have the same literacy strategies. The teacher used both synchronous and asynchronous mode to facilitate learning. The activities in asynchronous mode seem far from ideal teaching such as rewriting and translating the difficult words; however, the teachers fulfill the learning cycles through synchronous mode.

In teaching English subject, the literacy strategies comprise islamic text resource and reading comprehension. In learning stage, the literacy was applied before teaching each lesson to activate students schemata and incorporate character education in terms of religious values. Consider the following example of Islamic literacy text



In whilst-teaching, the literacy activities were employed based on literacy cycles of Derewianka and Jones (2016) in synchronous mode. The teachers read aloud the text and gave questions to guide the students' comprehension. This is related to Aimah and Purwanto (2019) who assert that teachers' questioning lead to successful reading comprehension. Besides, the teachers also provided islamic or religious literacy knowledge related to the topic or lesson. For example, their topic was "Healthy Food". In synchronous interaction, the teacher incorporated religious/islamic values. See the transcribed and highlighted data below

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Extract T2/O1	<p>This is the motto of our lesson. The first: Do you live to eat or eat lo live?</p> <p><u>We eat the food want to get the energy. We eat to get the energy. When we have the energi, we can do our daily activities. We live also for worship to God (Allah). We have to be grateful of God's grace. All activities we do absorb energy. We got the energy from the foods we eat. So, again we eat to live and we live to worship to God. Is it according to how we eat with islamic rules? Islam teaches us the rules in eating. I'm sure you have already known the prohibition of eating while standing up. Why?</u></p> <p>Let's think and observe the mango fruit falling down from the highest place, it will be broken. If it is rolled, it will not be broken. So, for example, if we eat mangoes with standing up position, these mangoes going into our stomach is like the mangoes from the highest place that will cause illness. Our stomach is soft which doesn't have bone. Therefore, if the foods suddenly goes into it, our stomach will be hurt easily.</p> <p>The main keys food that are good for our stomach comes also from the process of chewing. If we chew longer until soft, it will be easily absorbed by our body so our disgestion organ (stomach and intestine) absorb the food normally. <u>This is relevant to our prophet Muhammad SAW tenet that we have to eat with sitting down and chewing longer.</u> If our disgestion is healthy, our body will also be healthy</p>
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From the data above, the teachers confirmed that they must insert the religious values based on the basic or fundamental principles that their school is islamic-based elementary school. Therefore, such values are obligatory and become literacy strategy of islamic knowledge in teaching and learning process. This

strategy is also proposed to support and strengthen the other character education such as responsibility and honesty. This is in line with Milal et al. (2019) who claim that islamic resource is the strategy to enhance the students' character education.

In asynchronous mode towards Whatsapp group, the teachers asked the students to rewrite the text, translated the difficult words, and answered the questions included in the textbook or given by the teacher as an independent use of genre. In terms of rewriting the text and translating the difficult words, it is pedagogically not suggested but the teachers believed that it was beneficial for the students' vocabulary improvement.

### **The Implementation of Literacy Strategies Related to Character Education and English Competence**

In connection to character education, it can be seen from the resources used such as in Figure 1 and teachers strategy in data T1/O2 above. The teachers believed that by giving the students the knowledge of islamic rules interrelated to the subject or lesson they learn, they will understand and accept the logic reason. They were also aware of the relationship of science and islamic knowledge. The application in daily activities (in the school) was under the teacher control. Hence, the researcher suggests that the following literacy strategies to build the students' character education based on this research results in both face-to-face and online environment;

1. Providing islamic resource in literacy activities
2. Doing extensive reading using story containing moral values in habituation stage of literacy practice
3. Integrating islamic or religious values in explaining the materials
4. Reading aloud followed by building guided questions to make sure the students comprehension (if it is online teaching, it is in synchronous mode)
5. Teacher-parent collaboration in observing the students' attitude (character education)

Regarding to the students' English competence, the teachers emphasized that literacy activities and strategies (see Table 1)

contributed to the improvement of students' English competence covering vocabulary development and reading comprehension. They perceived that by understanding the vocabularies, the students are easy to understand and produce the text. The islamic literacy recources help students be familiar with the difficult terms related to Islamic lessons. Consider the following interview result.

T5/I5: *“yes, of course. Literacy is really really important since it help students' vocabulary development. When they read and don't understand the meaning, they look up in dictionary. This process unconsciously helps understand and comprehend the reading text. As you know that our school is bilingual and the textbooks are full English. Literacy program assists our students comprehend textbooks without opening dictionary. This also influences their lesson achievements (scores)”.*

The researcher revealed that the teachers are concerned on the students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. The following literacy activities are suggested based on this research results (from observation method) which encourage students' English competence (vocabulary and reading comprehension);

1. Using English text in any resources
2. Scaffolding activities by implementing learning cycles by Derewianka and Jones (2016)
3. Teachers' questioning
4. Teachers' approach

The explanation above proves that the use of islamic resources (Milal et al., 2019) together with teachers' strategies including learning cycles activities (Derewianka & Jones, 2016), questioning (Aimah & Purwanto, 2019), and approach (Yoon, 2007) are beneficial in building the students; character education as well as English competence.

### **Teachers' Views towards the Challenge and Problems of Literacy Practice in both Face-to-Face and Online Classroom**

In case of learning transformation from face-to-face and online teaching, the teachers clearly experienced difficulty in implementing the literacy practice specifically the habituation stage.

In order to fulfill the other subjects learning goals, the concept of literacy practice in habituation stage was changed. The first experience, the internet connection, and teachers' and parents' readiness became the concerns in online teaching and learning.

Although the teachers felt that online learning was beneficial for literacy practice in terms of longer time, the principles and concepts revealed the discrepancy. In face-to-face classroom, the literacy practice could be conducted in line with the concept of each stage proposed by GLS (2016); Connecticut State Department of Education (2007); and Derewianka and Jones (2016) which was different from online teaching and learning. However, the teachers could take the advantage in both modes.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The implication of this research results were obviously regarded to the literacy practice in teaching. The resources, activities, and strategies suggested in the above findings and discussion were highly recommended.

To sum up, the teachers' literacy practice in both face-to-face and online classroom in four and five grade students was generally the same. It consist of habituation and learning stage. However, the concept and principles of habituation literacy stage between online and face-to-face classroom were different due to the learning goals of each lesson fulfillment. Both face-to-face and online classroom needed supplementary resources (including islamic resources), approach, strategies, and questioning in order to implement literacy promoting students' character education and English competence. The challenge and problems faced by the teachers were due to the change of classroom communication mode, teachers' and parents' readiness.

It is no doubt to say that this study has limitations including the limited level of education, methods used, and the subjective (teachers') perspectives. Therefore, further research involving home literacy together with the involvement of the principal, students, and parents are suggested to expand the study on literacy practice aiming to contribute to the students' enhancement in literacy, characted education, and English competence.



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