

## THE ACADEMIC LITERACY OF SIXTEEN-SEVENTH GRADERS OF AN ENGLISH IMMERSION JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN SEMARANG

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### Abstract

This research was conducted to observe sixteen seven graders of Mondial Junior High School' academic literacy in their academic written texts. The participants were accustomed to using English at their school. Yet, when they had to produce academic texts, the texts were produced in the level of knowledge-telling, which lacked time to plan and to set the goals. The data of this study were taken from their quizzes and final test of four subjects with different genres of texts. Because the quizzes and final test were graded, the quality of the data is ensured. The analysis was observed qualitatively from three dimensions, i.e. the linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions of literacy. To describe each dimension, there were some descriptors to guide the analysis process. The result shows that in general, the sixteen learners' academic literacy was fairly good. However, some parts of the dimension of academic literacy such as the linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions should be improved in order to master the holistic dimensions of literacy. The learners should be introduced to some genres of texts which were considered new for them such as explanation text. Their mastery towards past tense should also be improved.

**Keywords:** Academic Literacy, Linguistic Dimension, Cognitive Dimension, Socio-cultural Dimension

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### INTRODUCTION

Examining the title of this thesis, the main keyword 'literacy' found in the title need to be elaborated. Literacy based on Kern (2000: 16) refers to "the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts". In addition to that, a definition of academic literacy is offered by Papashane&Hlele (2014: 661) foregrounding the importance of not only

reading the information in the text but also communicating ideas using the information found from the texts. Thus, based on the aforementioned explanation, this research deals with the reality on how these learners performed their academic literacy in their written texts. Comparing the writing issues the subjects have, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987: 5-10) have a theory about two models of writing. The theory differs writing as the knowledge-telling model, which mainly

involves only the retrieving of information from the writer's memory and puts minimum time of planning and setting the goal; and knowledge-transforming model, which requires the writer to plan and set the goal of the text carefully as well as provide some time to reflect to his/ her written text.

The knowledge-telling model is a common thing to be faced and it becomes the main problem among the sixteen-seventh graders in Mondial Junior High School. As a result, some of the texts produced by the sixteen learners are not well-planned. This causes the texts' generic structures to be neglected. In addition to that, the texts are also produced spontaneously.

It needs to be clear since the beginning that all subjects of this research have been exposed to English since they were in their pre-schools in their daily activity. Most of them (56%, or nine out of sixteen) even acquired English as their first language, while the rests (44%, or seven out of sixteen learners) have used English as the delivering language in their primary schools. Therefore, this research expects the sixteen learners to master the functional level of literacy compared to those who learn at national secondary schools in the performative level of literacy.

Relating the situation above to Wells' (1987: 109-111) study, there are four levels of literacy; they are performative, functional, informational, and epistemic. Each of which is differentiated by the relationship among speaking, writing, and thinking (Wells, 1987: 109); and conceiving all of them is what makes one literate (Wells, 1987: 111). The first level of literacy is performative, which considers literate as being able to put a speech as a written message and vice versa according to the language conventions. The second level of literacy is functional, which emphasises on the interpersonal communication or being able

to be a part of society. This level of literacy is expected from the seventh graders at Mondial Junior High School. As in the school, the subjects are mostly delivered in English, they should have been able to fulfil life tasks within the functional level of literacy, such as writing job application letters and elaborating popular knowledge. This demands that they use English as means of communication in English across the Curriculum context. The third level of literacy is informational, which deals with communicating the knowledge or delivering "discipline-based" knowledge. The last level, which is also the highest level of literacy, is epistemic. This level requires the ability to generate knowledge so that the knowledge will be available for those who cannot read and write. Concerning the gap between the reality and the expectation as elaborated above, I feel the urge to address this issue.

In their junior secondary school, the learners are stepping up to a higher level of English competence where they are expected to be able to compose some academic texts. Thus, as English is required for them to gain knowledge at school, seventh grade is a significant phase of their study to learn how to deal with academic texts with certain genres. This argument is also in line with Gerot and Wignell (1995: 226) stating that usually junior secondary school students start their writing "apprenticeship" in this stage. Even though the sixteen learners have started learning English since they were in pre-schools, the focus of learning English in pre-schools and primary schools is oracy. Therefore, in Junior High School it is now important to start moving to literacy.

In addition, as seven grade is seen as the site to start writing academically, these learners should be able to understand the idea of literacy. In line with the idea of introducing the learners to academic literacy in their early

secondary education, Texas Library Association (2010: 6) reveals that it is beneficial for the learners to have an early start as it will help them have a foundation and develop the progress of their academic literacy throughout their education despite the classical writing problems faced by many teachers that students are indeed having difficulties in writing (Odell & Swarsey, 2003: 38). Having academic literacy does not only a matter of one's ability to use technical or specific terms to write a certain subject. Writing should not again be a matter of copying and pasting from the internet or other sources. The learners should be able to read and synthesise the information they obtain from some resources and write it based on certain rules or expectation of the readers. They should keep in their mind that creating a context is not merely understanding a set of facts.

Nonetheless, creating a context should not be translated into understanding those facts as separated units but an integrated unit which has its context (Kern, 2006: 31). The context itself is the one they should provide in their written texts instead of a set of facts without logical relationship among them. Because the idea of literacy is still novel for them, those learners might not understand comprehensively or even be literate academically at the time of the research.

What makes Mondial Junior High School differs from other schools is the use of English in all subjects while applying KTSP (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* or school-based curriculum). The two previous paragraphs state that being able to perform their academic literacy in their written texts is still a challenge for them. Besides the problem mentioned, a question on whether Indonesian might facilitate them to be literate in English also arose. To answer this question, Kern's (2000: 25) statement about the linguistic

dimension of literacy needs to be considered, "literacy has to do, first and foremost, with language and knowledge of how it is used, and only secondarily with writing systems." It means the learners need to comprehend English, how to use it, and its writing system. Curry (2004: 59) advises that learners' written texts might sometimes seem peculiar or unusual as the effect of the transfer from Indonesian. Thus, despite the facilitation in some writing systems the learners obtained from mastering their native language, the influence of Indonesian resulting the writing errors might not necessarily mean a positive transfer for them (Myles, 2002: A1). The learners might have some prior knowledge related to language use in Indonesian. However, because of some different features on Indonesian and English, they still have to learn "new writing system, new conventions governing written genres, as well as new social practices" (Kern, 2000: 60-61). Thus, the teachers should make sure the learners' English academic literacy in spite of their academic literacy in Indonesian.

Being academically literate is not only a matter of applying the language conventions or rules, such as grammars, punctuations, spellings, etc but also what is being delivered or said through the language. Language can be seen as the media to communicate their ideas of a certain problem. On one hand, the learners ought to master how to write academically as this is their key to represent their ideas in form of written texts. On the other hand, the mastery of the content or ideas of a certain subject is also needed. This phenomenon is in line with what cognitive scientists believe as found in Kern's (2000: 30-31) study. Knowledge is divided into two major categories, namely "declarative knowledge (knowing that) and procedural knowledge (knowing how)". Declarative knowledge

consisting “the ideas, concepts, facts, and definitions one can draw on to make sense of a text or to write about a particular topic” refers to learners’ knowledge about the facts related to a certain subject, while procedural knowledge “has to do with one’s ability to do things like drive a car, write a letter or speak one’s native language”. The two types of knowledge work as an intertwined system in one’s literacy. An idea suggested by Curry (2004: 59) to increase academic literacy is using the instruction of academic literacy in various subjects such as research papers for different subjects, laboratory reports, reflective essays, etc in order to relate academic literacy practices and the subjects for better learners’ achievements. To achieve the goals of enabling the learners to write academically in all subjects, the teachers are suggested to combine writing lesson and the materials (Odell & Swersey, 2003: 39). Thus, this research focuses on language subject such as English, as well as on other subjects such as Physics, Biology, and Social Science.

Odell & Swersey (2003: 50) posed some questions which might arise in the teachers’ thought questioning their responsibility to teach someone else’s subject matter; both the language teachers and the subject teachers might think they are in service for another subject’s sake. In addition to that, this might also be seen as another working burden for the teachers. However, it should be understood that this process is also immensely beneficial for the learners as it will enable them to write not only grammatically correct, based on Standard English, but more than that they will also be able to communicate their ideas through their written texts.

Looking back the definition of literacy proposed by Kern (2006: 16), as he mentions that “[Literacy] entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual

conventions and their contexts of use and, ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships.”, some people are misled to an understanding that academic literacy is something tacit and therefore should not be taught explicitly (or be better left tacit) so that learners who cannot achieve this tacit knowledge will only be graded accordingly (Odell & Swersey, 2003: 49). This argument is contrary to what is proposed by Papashane and Hlele (2014: 661) pointing out learners should not be considered understanding the academic literacy automatically. Therefore, one emphasis on this study why academic literacy has to be done in an educational institution and not in natural settings is because literacy is indeed not a natural phenomenon, instead it is a learned ability. This point is also what Kern (2000: 34) argues that “literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon, not a naturally occurring process” and is also supported by Agustien (2015: 3) stating the acquisition aspects of literacy, critical thinking ability, cannot be developed naturally but should be fostered by education system in the school. Even Curry (2004: 57) underlines the importance of teaching academic writing in learners’ native language and English as well as the materials in order to help them master academic literacy. Learners should be assisted to master reading academic articles, recognising the vocabulary, and also making use of the vocabulary with the appropriate genres combined with other writing components as this is not available in their natural daily life but indeed can only be nurtured in their academic education (Curry, 2004: 58-59). Thus, learners “need explicit instruction in academic literacy” (Curry, 2004: 59). This elaboration explains why this research should be done in formal, instructional basis.

Teachers should help the learners express

something that is worth stated and also at the same time guide them to do what is needed to express it (Odell & Swarsey, 2003: 40) because writing is considered as the hallmark of being a part of educated society. Based on Odell and Swarsey's (2003) study, it is believed that writing ability should be nurtured in an instructional context. This idea influences the model of this research to be conducted in instructional rather than natural context.

### **Literacy**

The term 'literacy' does not only conceive the activities of writing and reading; instead, it also covers the relationship between "readers, writers, texts, culture, and language learning" (Kern, 2000: 2). The focus of literacy involves the social effect of writing and reading itself.

Based on the scholarly subsets of literacy (Colorado State University, 2004 as cited from Larsen), there are four types of literacy. They are traditional literacy, basic literacy, functional literacy, and academic literacy. Those literacies are ordered based on their skill levels. Below are some elaborations about them.

Traditional literacy is defined as one's ability to read the written words to gain their understanding and meaning (Mancinelli, 2005: 8). However, as literacy evolved further, the function of merely reading the written words started to be questioned because "being able to read does not mean one does read" (Bond, 2011: 13)

In addition to this literacy, a higher level of literacy is basic literacy that needs more skills to be mastered compared to the previous one. Basic literacy skills can be referred as one's ability to make an inference (Wiener, 1992: 16-33). In this level of literacy, the learners move from a point of only being able

to read written words to reading those words and making an inference from what is written there.

In addition, even higher than basic literacy that only deals with inference, another type of literacy is functional literacy. It is introduced by Gray (as cited in Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language, 1998) defining functional literacy as one's ability to read and write, and function their reading and writing ability to perform some actions such as able to read to perform some tasks. However, those aforementioned literacies do not fulfil the three dimensions of literacy (linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural).

To fulfil the three dimensions of literacy, a specific approach is needed in language teaching process. Based on Kern (2000: 15-16), a literacy-based approach prepares the language learners to answer the demand of "multilingual, multicultural, and multitextual competence". This approach focuses more on the communication effect of a text given to a specific audience which will help the learners obtain ideas of the language, culture, as well as communication. In practising this approach, learners learn about the grammar and vocabulary of the target language along with the discourse and the process of creating discourse (Kern, 2000: 17). To teach learners to communicate, this approach should be given at any levels (introductory, intermediate, and advanced).

### **Academic Literacy**

Nowadays, academic literacy is seen as the highest literacy. It is believed that literacy should be emphasised in the school curriculum for all subjects and all learners at any ages (Wells, 1987: 109 – 123). In this research, academic literacy is defined as the ability to weave the three dimensions of literacy which are linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions to communicate

through written texts in academic context. Academic literacy enables learners to present and connect their ideas to the cultural and social situation around them in an acceptable writing manner based on academic knowledge (Curry, 2004: 51).

### **Dimensions of Academic Literacy**

The main theory used in this part is suggested by Kern (2000). Based on Kern's framework, literacy is classified into three dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions.

Linguistic dimension deals with how learners use the language to express their ideas through their written texts as well as the writing system of the language. The writing system, in this case, deals with "conventions of usage, syntax, organisation, and idea development" (Odell, 1995: 46). A text can be considered as communicative, not because of the use of the words only. Its "visual elements" such as the use of headings, bullets, numberings, etc. can help readers understand the organisation of the text better (Odell, 1995: 46). It also deals with the conventions of the language. This dimension also requires learners to understand the coherence and cohesion of the texts they create. However, relying merely on this dimension is not enough for learners because mastering this dimension while neglecting the others might lead the learners to an incomplete level of mastery.

Cognitive dimension of literacy will bring us to pinpoint "existing knowledge" as the centre of our attention. Both declarative and procedural knowledge play an important role in one's academic written texts, both types of knowledge can be improved to enable one to be a better reader and writer. It should also be clear that having both types of knowledge are not sufficient if the knowledge is only

considered in a vacuum space. The knowledge should have a context in order to bring it into meaning. Understanding and relating the knowledge will help learners master the academic literacy. The process of understanding and relating the knowledge itself that, later on, will be schemata for the learners and to accommodate some unlearned knowledge. Learners are expected to access and also synthesise the information for the purpose of communication (Papashane & Hlele, 2014: 662). Besides, learners' ability to infer the information they receive is also an important aspect of critical thinking (Wiener, 1992: 16). Wiener (1992: 18) also provides a clear definition of inferring which involves "a complex process of reasoning that balances assumptions, induction and deduction, instinct, prior experience, perception, hunches,... [and] extrasensory perception". By inferring, learners read the text beyond what they literally receive as they need to connect the information they read and the context (or schemata) they already have in their minds. After all, one of the most important points is to enable the learners to make use of their written texts to achieve certain objectives.

The socio-cultural dimension of literacy brings a new layer of understanding toward the literacy. Literacy is meant to communicate or create discourse among a certain community. Literacy also deals with the knowledge of writing conventions based on the people belong to a certain group. Learners should be able to create a link between themselves and others and also assess others' work. Curry (2004: 58) proposes some examples of possible problems that might emerge among the learners dealing with this dimension such as learners finding themselves uncomfortable in taking "objective stance" as they might not yet have been exposed to this kind of academic language features, and their

lack of knowledge to be persuasive in order to hook the readers using thesis statements, claims, arguments and some evidence.

As a result of the combination of the three dimensions above, the expected outcome from the learners is that they can use appropriate strategies to read and communicate their ideas through their written texts (or speech) that are considered as “lingually and technically” appropriate to academic context (Papashane & Hlele, 2014: 663). They underline their statement that it is important for learners to synthesise the information they obtain as it performs their critical thinking ability.

### **Seven Graders and Literacy Level**

Wells (1987: 109-123) proposes a four-level of literacy. They are performative, functional, informational, and epistemic. Those levels are based on the relationships between writing and speaking and between writing and thinking. The first level of literacy which is performative level focuses on the skill acquired to decode a written message into speech to understand the meaning as well as to encode a spoken message into written form according to the language rules and conventions.

The second level which is functional is where the seven graders are expected to master. In this level, language users are considered literate when they are able to deal or solve everyday problems using written language, such as writing job application letter, following a manual book on how to use a certain electronic device, and completing a form. In academic perspective, therefore it is important to prepare the seventh graders to handle such situations as mentioned above. That is why it is important to highlight this level of literacy for the seventh graders. In instructional context, the seventh graders are

expected to be able to write popular science articles and use popular science terminologies.

The third level, informational level, perceives literacy as a conduit to communicate knowledge. In this level, language users are able to make use of discipline-based terminologies. The emphasis in this level is reading as reading is treated to obtain more knowledge, while writing is considered as a method of recording information that has been learned. In this level, learners already master the code, causing the assumption that the code is not problematic. Therefore, any difficulties faced by learners are considered to relate to the content of the text.

The final level of literacy, epistemic, requires learners to generate information (knowledge) and experience, which once is unavailable for those who cannot read and write, become available for them. All the four levels are influential in developing learners’ academic literacy.

Pedagogically, changing the mode of communication (from spoken to written or vice versa) is not only a matter of a change in channel to express the message. Nonetheless, it should be understood that once we change the mode of a message, we have to consider to change the nature of the message itself to serve its function. Written message is not merely a speech written down, and spoken message is not merely saying what is written. The reason why this happens is because in the spoken mode the speaker can get some help from the context around the speaker and the listeners. However, in written mode, the writer must build the context for the readers so that the readers understand the context of the message. Hence, it is important to teach the seventh graders to have this perspective

and make use of it to be in the functional level of literacy.

### **Writing Targets in an English Immersion Junior High School**

It is really important for learners to know what the expectations for a certain genre so that their written compositions can be considered as effective texts (Kern, 2000: 198). The genre-based approach can help them by exposing and giving specific expectations and standards to their written compositions. In teaching using genre-based approach, the focus is not on the product or the process of the writing only. Instead, this approach highlights a more communicative form. Therefore, the target of teaching genre-based approach is to enable the learners to communicate based on specific discourse communities (Kern, 2000: 182 - 185). Within the process of teaching to communicate among the society members, those learners are also taught the conventions that are held by a certain discourse community. It is to help them fit the community they are involved. By having this genre-based approach, it is expected that learners can fulfil the audience's expectation.

In academic discourse, learners are expected to produce texts with certain genres. They are taught to make them aware of the characteristics and patterns of particular genres. It is expected for the learners to master scholastic genres such as "reports, explanations, summaries, and argumentative essays" (Kern, 2000: 183) to help them cope with academic tasks.

Based on Kern (2000: 184), the instructional goals of teaching genre-based approach in an immersion school are to raise "awareness of the conventional parameters of expectations for particular text types within particular discourse communities and the

ability to conform to those conventions" and to "understand these conventions in terms of social and psychological contexts."

When looking closer to Kern's (2000: 192 – 199) explanation about situated practice (immersion) and genre-based approach, it seems that there are some similarities between the two practices. Both practices have emphasised on the communicative effect of learning the target language. In addition, both practices also expose the learners to have extensive activities to develop the fluency and automaticity in writing.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted in Mondial Junior High School, Jl. Candi Golf Boulevard no. 2, Semarang. There was only one class of 7<sup>th</sup> grade at the academic year 2015-2016 when this research was conducted. This research was conducted in the second semester of the year and took about three months to collect the data, starting from April – June 2016.

The participants under study were sixteen students of Mondial Junior High School. They were all in grade seven when the study was conducted. The sixteen students, however, have quite different backgrounds as far as English proficiency is concerned. Eleven students graduated from Mondial Primary School where English was used as the main medium of instruction. Under this system, these students had been intensively exposed to English for at least six years before they started Mondial Junior High School. The other five, however, had quite different backgrounds in that they did not have the same exposure to English learning prior to their junior high school education. Generally speaking, the five students had a lot to catch up when it comes to English proficiency. However, as those five students had learned

for a semester in Mondial Junior High School, it was expected that when this research was conducted (in the second semester of their study), they had been able to adapt to the use of English as the delivering language in the classroom. In order to give these learners some background knowledge, these learners had been exposed to some writing conventions such as the use of punctuation marks, capitalization, verb conjugation and agreement, text layout, as well as spelling. This research which observed their linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions was conducted.

Written texts (quiz answers) of subjects delivered in English were observed such as Social Studies, Biology, Physics, and English. Nonetheless, Biology was delivered in both English and Indonesian such as Biology. The topics of Biology being excluded from this research were those materials that were delivered in Indonesian. In addition, some other materials such as Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan (Civics), Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian), Pendidikan Agama (Religion), and Kimia (Chemistry) were not observed as they were delivered in Indonesian. Subjects enhancing the learners' computer literacy such as Information and Computer Technology and Graphic Design were not observed as the learners' assignments and tests were in form of graphic or text formatting. Mathematics is also excluded from this research as there is only limited data related to learners' written texts.

I collected learners' written texts as the main data of this research. As this research was under descriptive qualitative research, the data yielded was also descriptive data in form of written texts. The collected data was called soft data. The data of this study was in form of portfolio of several subjects explained before. In controlling the data, the teachers

knew that their subjects were under study. However, the learners did not have any knowledge about the research itself.

In this study, I obtained the naturally occurring data. The data collected for this study were quiz and final test answers (in form of essay questions, as also suggested by Wiener (1992: 21) that questions with why, how, and what might help learners draw some inferences and therefore foster their critical thinking ability). Using those quiz and final test answers, learners were expected to provide some answers or responses to be used as the data of this research. The process of data collection was done in the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016. It took three months from April until June 2016.

I collected the copies of learners' written quizzes and final test and creating a portfolio out of learners' written quizzes and final test. One of the benefits of having quizzes and final test as the data source for this research is because quizzes and final test affected their scores, and thus the quality of the data is guaranteed as those learners would not have risked their scores in providing low-quality answers (unless they are lack of understanding about the related tasks or questions).

The data analysis was done through some steps. Firstly, I classified each subject (or chapter of a subject) into technical, science, social science, or humanities (based on Gerot and Wignell's (2006: 229) "classification of discourses of secondary education").

Secondly, I reduced some subjects or topics presented in *Bahasa Indonesia* such as *Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan*, *Bahasa Indonesia*, and *Kimia*. Some subjects, such as Biology and Physics were presented in both languages. Therefore, topics presented in *Bahasa Indonesia* were omitted from the discussion. Meanwhile, other subjects such as

Mathematics, Information and Communication Technology, Graphic Design, Performing Arts, and Physical Education were also be omitted from this research because those subjects rarely produced written texts. Thus, the subjects under study were Social Science, Biology (covering topics delivered in English), Physics (covering topics delivered in English), and English.

Thirdly, I analysed the data qualitatively based on the three dimensions of literacy, i.e. linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions.

Fourthly, I drew an inference based on the interpretation results yielded from the previous steps; and lastly, I analysed learners' portfolio when there were some noteworthy details to be described further (learners' writing progress for the last three months; some spelling, grammar, punctuation, coherence, and cohesive issues).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The three dimensions of academic literacy are interweaved one to another (Kern, 2006:38) so that it is difficult to separate each of them into clear-cut parts. Thus, this highlights that the descriptors were arranged as such to help realise observe each dimension closer.

### Linguistic Dimension

This section discusses the linguistic dimension. First things first, I would like to discuss the layout observed from all subjects. One point that one should have to be categorised as fulfilling the linguistic dimension of academic literacy is "familiarity with writing system and graphic and organisational conventions" (Kern, 2006, p. 38). The layout is a part of how a certain genre is arranged in a certain format. The layout of a certain genre should be relevant to what the readers expect. Layout or formatting

is often used by the readers to deduce the context and content of a text. The layout can be a clue for readers the reasons a text is written (Kern, 2006, pp. 72-73). For example, when we look at a poster, we can anticipate what kind of information we are going to find there. It is different from when we read a recipe. Learning the layout of a recipe itself, again we also imagine and expect other types of information we may derive from it. This works similarly with learners' texts under this study. A learner should be able to perform an expected layout for the text in order to fulfil readers' expectation. Thus, how to put a text in a certain format or layout is one of the important keys to developing one's academic literacy.

Related to the texts' layouts, some phenomena, perhaps because of the learners' carelessness, appeared. For instance, a learner did not indent the first line of the paragraph. Although it seems trivial when it is related to a short text, it might have crucial to be noted when writing a long text. How a writer arranges the ideas of the text in each paragraph might significantly influence readers' understanding. Therefore, I believe it is important to accustom those learners to design and plan how to put their ideas in each paragraph.

An interesting case was found when learners were asked to do their Biology Final Test. In response to a task to explain an indiscriminate fishing, Student 15 provided a list of definition for some terminologies related to indiscriminate fishing. As for how other students answered, it was also expected from Student 15 to respond similarly in form of an information report text. As a consequence, it is expected for the learners to write the texts in a run-on paragraph. Student 15, as opposed, presented something different. This perhaps was because of his

lack of understanding towards the task given (cognitive dimension) as well as his lack of familiarity towards the layout of a certain genre of a text (linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions). This phenomenon, in this case, shows the need of improvement for the three dimensions of academic literacy. As a result, the text he produced deviates from the expected rhetorical acts, meaning the text fails to fulfil its socio-cultural functions. Other examples of this case were also found in Social Science quiz addressing the question on the effect of the Constantinople fall to the explorations to the East. Student 2, as well as Student 5, presented some points without any further explanation in respond to this task. Similarly, those two learners lacked mastery towards the task given (cognitive dimension) along with the unfamiliarity towards the genre of the explanation text. Thus, in their struggle to figure out how to answer the tasks, they decided to present them in such layout with limited information. Likewise, the texts they produced does not fulfil the expected rhetorical acts, meaning the texts fail to fulfil the socio-cultural dimension of academic literacy. Thinking about this, it is essential to introduce or perhaps re-introduce and make them accustomed to present such texts as expected from the layout descriptor.

Learners' knowledge about spelling is also one of the several descriptors of academic literacy's linguistic dimension. Familiarity towards written style is one point in linguistic dimension (Kern, 2006, p. 38). In several cases, the spelling problems deal with learners' familiarity towards written styles. As suggested, it is preferable not to contract the negation of modalities and finites. Nonetheless, several practices happened in the learners' texts despite the information given to them at the beginning of the academic year to avoid contracting words.

Some obvious examples are "it is" contracted as "it's", "cannot" as "can't", "will not" as "won't". This was deduced as an attempt to make the writing time shorter even though in the school it is highly suggested for the learners to write them completely.

Misspelt could happen when two words are homophones or pronounced similarly. It occurs when learners were about to produce the words "it's" (the contracted version of "it is" or "it has" or "it was") and "its" (possessive pronoun). They did not pay attention carefully towards the apostrophe used to make the pairs different. Other examples of this cause are also present in the learners' text. To demonstrate, I would take the word "than" and "then", "their" and "there". As those words are homophone or pronounced similarly, learners became careless in using both words.

The pluralization is also a problem dealing with spelling system. When learners produced the plural form of "fisherman", instead of "fishermen" they wrote "fishermans". This might happen because of the overgeneralization towards pluralization. As most of the nouns are pluralized by adding a suffix "-s", then they predicted that the word "fisherman" must be ended by the suffix "-s" as well. However, as the word "fisherman" is exceptional, they misspelt the word.

Still related to the word "fisherman", a different case was found when a learner used the word "fisher" instead of "fisherman" or "fishermen". Again, this was perhaps because of the overgeneralization. As he thought many occupation names were ended with the suffix "-er" such as "teacher", "painter", "drummer", "football player", as well as "gardener" and many other occupation names. He predicted that "fisherman" should have been ended with the suffix "-er" as well, omitting the last syllable.

The inconsistent use of British and American English also happened several times. Understandable, it sometimes takes a lot of memorising and recognising to differentiate the two versions of English.

When combining a certain amount and words in a phrase, such as “two-week holiday”, learners tend to write the numerical symbol followed by the words as in “2-week holiday”. In this case, learners might put an attempt to short the writing time. The phenomenon above shows that it is important to first, introducing them to the linguistic knowledge about spelling or refreshing their minds (in case perhaps they had been taught about this but forgot), and second, encouraging the learners to also apply the linguistic knowledge in their written texts.

I consider the other misspelt case as a result of carelessness, not linguistically influencing the academic literacy. Therefore, some cases, for instance, the misspelt of the word “other” as “othe”, “nowadays” as “nowdays”, “usually” as “ussually”, are left out of the discussion. However, this emphasises the important of encouraging learners to do reviewing and editing after they are done with their writing process.

Next, addressing the following descriptor which is still under linguistic dimension, the discussion will be focused on the verb conjugation and agreement. As verb conjugation and agreement are parts of linguistic knowledge learners should have, it is expected from the learners to be able to perform them in their written texts. Some inappropriate practices were perhaps only a mistake, meaning the learners have the linguistic knowledge or know the grammar rules, instead they fail to perform their knowledge in their texts. Some others performed repeated inappropriate practices so that they can be concluded as errors. For

example, the case found in Student 10’s text for Physics quiz. Several times he performed these group of words “will gets up”, “can goes”, and “will goes”. Looking at the pattern, it looks like he was trying to put the modalities (“will” and “can”) and the fused form of finite “does” and predicator as if he was trying to perform Simple Present Tense (“gets” and “goes”). The repeated inappropriate practices showed the lack of linguistic knowledge about how to produce Simple Present Tense sentences.

A confusion in using the appropriate tense in a text also caused Student 2 to make an inconsistent as well as a swift change of tense in her text. She moved from the Past to Present Tenses in her text several times as found in her English quiz.

Some learners also put a preposition to end a sentence or a clause which is not preferable for written mode. This is deduced also because of the lack of linguistic knowledge about the rules and their familiarity towards writing convention. As a result, they performed such sentences or clauses which are considered as informal rather than academic. This shows the need of improvement for their linguistic knowledge so that the communication they tried to build would not seem defective from the lack of information or knowledge of linguistic aspects. Perhaps, the attention should also be given or emphasised for this part as now they learn to produce a lot of academic texts, especially in written mode.

The influence of transfer from Indonesian into English also influenced some learners’ texts. For example, the missing of finites also appeared several times. I deduced it happened because of the non-existence of finites in Indonesian as their native language. Secondly, Student 8 produced a clause “hot water easy to go up”, which does not follow English

structure. Perhaps it was translated directly from Indonesian structure “air panasmudahnaikkeatas” as well as a clause “it make me feel fresh” as if it were translated from Indonesian “itumembuatkumerasasegar”. It looks like Student 8 has a certain pattern of doing a direct translation from Indonesian into English. This shows that because of the differences in one language’s writing system and conventions, learners who are able to write in a language is not necessarily able to write effectively in another language (Kern, 2006, p. 64).

The non-existence of the noun plural forms in Indonesian also caused many inappropriate practices related to the use of plural forms. The examples can be observed in these clauses or phrases “we need to wait for above 5-10 minute” and “When the burners is on”. Another phenomenon caused by transfer from Indonesian is found in Student 2’s text when he produced the word “individu” which is Indonesian.

An unusual case was found in Student 1’s text. As he was asked to produce a historical text which should have been performed in Past Tense, he seemed not to make any attempt to write the text in Past Tense. Instead, the text he produced was written in Present Tense. Nonetheless, compared to the recount text he produced for English quiz when he had to address the task by re-telling his past experience about his holiday, he could fulfil the tasks despite some grammatical inappropriate practices. It seemed that after learning that linguistic dimension did not affect his score for Social Science, he performed less effort for this dimension.

Student 9 also mistakenly predicted the verb form of the noun “exploration” as “explorate”. Perhaps it was because he

overgeneralized the linguistic rules. Some English verbs are indeed following a certain pattern related to the nouns, such as “separate” and “separation”, “dominate” and “domination”, “generate” and “generation, meaning a four-syllable noun with the ending of “-tion” would have a three-syllable verb as well with ending “-ate”. As a consequence, he deduced the word “exploration” which is also a four-syllable word and ends with an ending “-tion” to have a three-syllable verb ended with “-ate” (“explorate”).

Discussing punctuation, some learners seemed to put minimum efforts for this. This probably was because of the fact that the linguistic dimension did not affect their scores. In fact, punctuation marks as one of the typographical devices are used to convey certain functions (Kern, 2006, p. 70-71). For example, question and exclamation marks are to show an intonation or stress such as in spoken language, while commas and periods are to separate an idea to another in written texts; dashes and brackets can emphasise the importance of clauses or phrases (Kern, 2006, p. 71). Nonetheless, as found in Student 3’s Physics quiz, there were no other punctuation marks aside from commas to separate one idea to another. Thus, it is also important to emphasise the importance of punctuation marks. Despite their knowledge about the punctuation marks, they took for granted the use of punctuation marks.

Some other learners did not master the use of punctuation marks when it co-occurred with linking words. Thus, they repeated some inappropriate practices several times. This shows the need of emphasising the teaching of punctuation marks as well to make the learners get used to punctuation marks in written texts. Even though punctuation marks are considered as something trivial, it might cause confusion for readers if this is not noted

properly. Since the use of punctuations is perhaps different across languages, it is suggested to teach them about how to use those punctuation marks to avoid their being unaware of the use of punctuation marks (Kern, 2006, p. 71).

Similar to punctuation, capitalization is often seen as something insignificant in written texts. This made the learners miss some uses of capitalization. Regarding the issue of punctuation and capitalization above, it is highly encouraged to enforce the post-writing process, one of the suggested ways is by having a peer review so that learners may learn from other learners' inappropriate practices as well as learning to be more careful in producing written texts. As written texts are permanent, it is a good idea to learn from written texts to facilitate learners noticing and reflecting towards those texts (Kern, 2006, p. 61).

Learners' problems with the spelling system, the use of punctuation and capitalization, their organisation and planning for the texts is predicted because of the nature of their instant communication (Defazio, J. et al., 2010, p. 35). The same problem with this method of communication is that learners find it difficult to differentiate spoken and written mode of communication. As already mentioned before, some learners started their sentences with "so" and "and" that resemble the use of fillers in spoken communication. This leads to an understanding that in their instant communication (which the mode is spoken to be written) is considered as a written mode of communication. Therefore, it is predictable that they also tried to perform similar pattern even in the formal written texts such as in the quizzes or final tests.

As can be seen from Chart 4.1, it is contradictory from the expectation that the linguistic dimension for English quiz score is

the lowest among all. This might be because of the psychological state after knowing that linguistic dimension counts for grading in English quiz. As opposed to that, other lessons do not apply a grading system based on linguistic dimension. This might as well influence them. Aside from that, both Physics and Biology tests were supposed to be presented in Present Tense. Meanwhile, English and Social Science tests were expected to be presented in Past Tense. Their mastery toward these tenses might perhaps affect their scores in linguistic dimension.

Regarding some inappropriate practices in linguistic dimension that perhaps happened because of learners' carelessness or learners' lack of knowledge, it is also essential to start inviting them learning how to assess or evaluate others' as well as their own written texts (Defazio, J. et al., 2010, p. 34, 36; Curry, 2004, p. 61). Aside from improving their linguistic knowledge, it will help them to improve their critical thinking (Defazio, J. et al., 2010, p. 34). Moreover, it can also help them to perceive writing as a social rather than individual activity (Curry, 2005, p. 61). Hopefully, by using this reflection method towards others' written texts as well as their own written texts, they are able to learn from their mistakes (Defazio, J. et al., 2010, p. 41).

### **Cognitive Dimension**

Considering the cognitive dimension, I had got plenty helpful hands from my colleagues. Aside from English quiz that requires me to do the grading, the grading was done by each subject teacher to maintain the grading quality. This because I believe all subject teachers have better competency and capability in grading the cognitive dimension.

In all subjects, the learners are considered mastering the cognitive dimension. It is shown by the average scores they obtain that

can be considered as excellent for Physics, very good for Biology, and Good for English. The average score for Social Science is rather low.

### **Sociolinguistic Dimension**

Now, moving the discussion to the last dimension of academic literacy, which is socio-cultural, I would like to address the learners' knowledge or familiarity towards the genres of the texts they produced.

Genres are important to be mastered by the learners as genres set the parameters of "appropriateness of language use" (Kern, 2006, p. 86-87). For example, the language we use to produce a prose or a poster perhaps is not appropriate when we use it to write a scientific report. It is clear that genres help create communication, but at the same time genres limit it (Kern, 2006, p. 89). Learners' ability to make use their knowledge about genres can facilitate them to create texts as well as limit the texts they produce.

Almost all learners did not follow the generic structure of the explanation text. This is perhaps because they had not learned about this text type in primary school. Now, it is an urgent call to introduce them to this text type and how it should be structured in order to help them gain better academic literacy.

Most learners mastered the generic structure of the information report text. That is why they could produce the texts and at the same time fulfilled the generic structure of the texts. Some of them only focused on answering the question, causing them to only fulfil the detailed description and leaving the general classification. Apparently, a learner did not comprehend how to produce an information report text so that the text he produced does not address the generic structure at all.

The learners seemed to have a good comprehension of recount text as also performed in English quiz. Most learners in English quiz followed the generic structure of recount texts. A significant influence on their familiarity towards the text is because they are accustomed to writing a weekly journal. This influences big deals so that almost all learners understand how to produce such texts. Only two learners neglected the generic structure of the texts.

The similar case to the Physics quiz explanation texts also appeared in Social Science. Most learners did not provide complete generic structure, focusing only on answer the question. Even a few of them did not arrange the texts as expected.

It is not surprising that they also did not structure the explanation texts well. The data tells us that the learners need to be introduced to this text type. It is essential to teach the learners this genre of the text as many of the text they have to produce is in this genre. In line with Kern's (2006, p. 101) statement that when a text is produced out of what is assumed or expected, it causes broken comprehension for the readers, I believe that academic literacy is not something that can be left tacit. It has to be taught in order for the learners to be familiar with the genre in order to improve learners' writing ability and to avoid the comprehension breakdown for the readers.

Addressing the expression or language feature used in the texts, first I would like to address the language feature for Physics quiz explanation texts. Most learners did not use passive voice.

In spite of learners' ability to arrange passive voice, they did not make use passive voice in the Physics quiz explanation text. Perhaps, this is because the idea of using passive voice did not come across their

minds. In fact, as the texts should provide an explanation about non-human participants, passive voice is needed. Only a few learners used passive voice in their texts. Thus, it is important to help them improve how they produce explanation texts.

Meanwhile, for information report text which appeared in Biology final test, all learners could perform the expected language features. For English quiz recount texts, eleven learners could perform the expected language feature. This happened because the learners are familiar with information report texts as well as recount texts.

Similar to the previous explanation texts presented in Physics quiz, there were some learners who did not follow the language features of the texts. In this case, most learners did not use temporal and causal relations as well as conjunctions. Therefore, the texts they made only focus on giving information without creating relations among one idea and another. However, a half of the learners performed the use of passive voice, which was in percentage more than the number of learners performed the use of passive voice in Physics quiz. It is deemed so because in Social Science quiz, the texts involved human participants (“the traders”), this helps the learners to think about producing some passive voices.

Related to the last descriptor of socio-cultural dimension, most problems related to relations are that learners did not pay attention to the logical connection to be followed by the readers. Most of them saw the teachers as the only readers that would understand even though they did not put much effort in connecting one idea to another. This finding is similar to Odell’s (1995, p. 51) study. It is mentioned in Odell’s study that learners typically perceive their teacher as the only audience who reads their texts and he/ she

should know the acceptable response towards the task. As a result, this leads they did not put many efforts in building a communication with other readers aside their teacher, causing their texts are not as informative as expected by the readers.

Another issue is that they did not make use conjunctions properly. Some conjunctions did not represent the logical connections between clauses. Some ideas also were not written completely when they used conjunctions. Some dependent clauses were not followed or preceded by independent clauses. The problem that underlays from this phenomenon is perhaps the learners did not understand how dependent and independent clauses can elaborate a relation among them. It is important for the learners, too, to learn to determine main clauses (independent clauses) and subordinate clauses (dependent clauses) and put a relation among those two pieces of information. Another thing that is also paramount to be understood here is that the relation among those main and subordinate clauses is not always marked by linguistic markers such as conjunctions and linking words (Kern, 2006, p. 62).

Some conjunctions such as “so” and “and” were not use properly to connect two or more clauses. Instead, they are only used resembling fillers as in spoken communication. This is again because perhaps they did not accustom to the written mode of communication. Other learners as found in English quiz did not really pay attention to the text arrangement but merely trying to fulfil the task, appearing some irrelevant ideas in the text. A different case related to this descriptor is about the reference. Some learners did not use the proper reference to refer to a certain entity.

As have been discussed before, the explanation texts which seemed not well-

mastered by the learners gained the lowest scores among all. This is deduced because the learners were still in the transition process to learn new discourse, in this case, academic discourse (Myles, 2002, p. A3). They need to get used to genres, academic vocabulary, and writing conventions which should serve their functions differently from what the learners faced in primary schools. However, as the learners were accustomed to information report text along with recount text, the socio-cultural dimension scores are considered as good.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude this study, we can say that learners' overall academic literacy is fairly good. In general, learners' linguistic dimension is meeting the expectations. Most of the time, the learners could apply correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. In addition to that, specifically, the learners' linguistic knowledge about Present Tense was also well-applied in their written texts. Nonetheless, there is always a room for improvement. It is suggested for the learners to improve their linguistic knowledge about Past Tense.

Overall, the learners could accomplish the tasks given by the subject teachers. Most of them could give a complete response to the

task. Mostly, the information they provided is also relevant and accurate. Moreover, they could also provide logical interpretation for their responses to the tasks given. This proves that the learners' cognitive dimension is generally excellent.

Aside from that, the socio-cultural dimension can be described as fairly good in general. In most of the time, the learners could communicate through the texts effectively. In addition to that, specifically, the learners could compose recount and information report texts well as they are familiar with them. Yet, an improvement is needed to help learners' ability in composing explanation texts. As a consequence, it is very advisable for the learners to develop their mastery towards explanation texts. In addition to that, aside from the three genres of text presented here, there are more text types the learners should be encouraged to be familiar with them. In addition to that, the learners also rarely used various conjunctions to help the readers' understanding.

Lastly, we can conclude that in general learners' academic literacy; including linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions; is meeting the expectations of functional literacy, which means they could communicate the messages to help them solve daily life problems.

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