

## Building Cultural Appreciation and Critical Thinking Skills through Language and Literature Learning At Pahlawan National Primary School

Waldio Manihuruk<sup>1</sup>, Delisma Siregar<sup>2</sup>, Kartika Sari<sup>3</sup>, Abdurrahman Adisaputera<sup>4</sup>,  
Khairil Ansari<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia  
[diomanihuruk99@gmail.com](mailto:diomanihuruk99@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Language learning plays an important role in the development of critical thinking skills. This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods to explore the relationship between language learning, literature and critical thinking skills. The process of language acquisition, whether naturally or through formal learning, involves complex interactions between various aspects of an individual's biological, cognitive, and social maturity. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the role of language and literature in developing critical thinking skills. Through analysis of the process of language acquisition, literature learning, and its impact on understanding culture and society, this research highlights how language and literature learning builds analysis, evaluation, and synthesis skills, and stimulates imagination and creativity. The results show that the integration of language and literature in education is important to form individuals who are able to think critically and reflectively in facing the complexity of life.*

### Keywords

*Cultural appreciation; critical thinking; Indonesian*



## I. Introduction

Indonesia is a country rich in diverse local culture. However, in this era of globalization, more and more young people are losing or having minimal understanding of their own local culture. Therefore, it is important to explore how learning Indonesian language and literature can increase appreciation of local culture.

Language and literature learning in schools is recognized as having an important role and function that cannot be separated from the overall goals of national education. A study conducted by Mustakim (2001) shows that learning about literary appreciation in schools is only limited to literary understanding, and has not yet touched on inferential, evaluative and appreciative abilities. This cannot be separated from the general reality that literature learning in schools still revolves around discussions about literature, memorizing works, and carrying out the learning through lectures. In response to such problems, studies and thinking related to literature learning in schools must continue to be carried out. For example, by aiming at creative, productive literary learning. Coupled with paying attention to the socio-cultural conditions of the Indonesian nation, this learning must present a positive meaning of Indonesianness (multiculture). With this perspective, literature learning will be truly "educational". This means being able to cultivate students' human

aspects, which at the same time strengthen their identity as Indonesian people. This is intended to analyze and find solutions towards learning literature in schools as expected.

In fact, language and literature can be used as media to introduce national culture through written language. Literature learning introduces the nation's culture contained in literary works through written language. Language is part of May 2017, P.141-147 142 culture that needs to be studied. Learning a language will indirectly learn about culture. Language and culture are related. Language is present in human life because humans need it to communicate (Nurgiyantoro, 2014). In the current era of globalization, language is an important factor in communicating. Communication between nations can use culture as a medium for conveying messages. Culture is precisely a collective noun used to define the realm and environment of humanity which marks its ontology clearly and separately from the purely physical, natural environment (Jenks, 2013). Culture develops in society as a form of behavior that forms habits.

Apart from providing knowledge about the language as well as getting to know the nation's culture. Literature contains character education that forms a society with knowledge rooted in wisdom. Literature learning aims to develop students' sensitivity to sensory values, intellectual values, affective values, religious values and social values individually or in combination with all of them, as a reflection in literary works (abiding, 2013). This means that studying literature teaches character education which is the basis of human character. Community values and norms formed from culture are rules that need to be taught in character education. Character education that is rooted in local culture through literature forms a character that loves the country by respecting the nation's traditions and culture. Language is a form of communication between humans that reflects the human character. The use of language is an early example of getting to know someone's character.

Language is a very powerful communication tool, while literature is a reflection of the life and culture of a society. Through language and literature learning, students not only learn the structure of language and the beauty of literature, but are also trained to analyze, evaluate and understand the cultural context behind the literary work. This process intrinsically involves critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are vital abilities in facing challenges in this era of globalization. In this case, language and literature are important aspects of modern education that enable students to filter information, question and analyze carefully. Through learning Indonesian language and literature, students have the opportunity to hone their critical thinking skills.

Thus, this research aims to fill the knowledge gap in Indonesian educational literature by investigating how learning Indonesian language and literature at National Hero Elementary School can help build students' cultural appreciation and critical thinking skills. It is hoped that the results of this research can provide valuable input for improving the curriculum and teaching methods in Indonesian education.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Cultural Appreciation**

Cultural appreciation is an accurate understanding and recognition so that appreciation and assessment of the results and culture are restored or cultural appreciation is the activity of experiencing cultural results seriously so that understanding, appreciation, critical sensitivity and good feelings towards the work of work grow. Culture must be appreciated because culture is a legacy from ancestors that must be preserved. Appreciation for Indonesian culture is very important so that there will be no claims of cultural ownership by other nations. Therefore, appreciation and respect for culture can be

instilled from an early age. Appreciation is carried out in order to maintain noble cultural values.

## 2.2 Critical Thinking Skills

Thinking is one of the things that differentiates one human from another. According to Irdayanti (2018) Thinking is the process of producing new mental representations through information transformation which involves complex interactions including reasoning, imagination and problem solving activities. According to Ahmadi and Supriyono (in Najla: 2016) "Thinking is a "dialectical" process, meaning that as long as we think, our minds are in a state of question and answer, to be able to establish the relationship between our knowledge." In thinking we need a tool, namely reason (ratio).

According to Santrock (in Rahmawati: 2014) "thinking is manipulating or managing and transforming information in memory". This is often done to form concepts, reason and think critically, make decisions, think creatively, and solve problems (Rahmawati, 2014). According to Najla (2016: 16), thinking also includes the activities of doubting and confirming, designing, calculating, measuring, evaluating, comparing, classifying, sorting or differentiating, connecting, interpreting, looking at existing possibilities, making reasoning or interesting analysis and synthesis. conclusions from existing premises, weighing, and deciding.

## 2.3 Indonesian Language and Literature

Language is a communication tool, through language, humans can communicate with each other, share experiences, learn from each other, and improve intellectual abilities. Therefore, learning a language is essentially learning to communicate. Learning is directed at improving learning abilities in communicating, both verbally and in writing, this is in accordance with the opinion of (Resmini et al, 2006) who stated that, Indonesian Language Learning can be interpreted as learning to improve students' abilities in communicating with language, both spoken and written.

According to (Sayogha, A, 2023) Language is a communication tool to convey thoughts, feelings and ideas. Language is also a tool for self-expression and creativity, while literature is a branch of art that uses language as a tool. Literature is the work of humans who use language as a tool to convey ideas, concepts and feelings. Literature is also the result of human imagination and creativity. Language is a communication tool that humans use to convey feelings, thoughts and ideas to other people. Literature is a work of art that uses language as a means of communication. Language and literature cannot be separated.

Furthermore (Sayogha, A, 2023) explains that the relationship between language and literature are two things that cannot be separated. Literature is the work of humans who communicate through language. Language is used as a means used by writers to communicate their ideas to the wider community, language and literature complement each other. Language is used to communicate ideas, while literature uses language to communicate ideas aesthetically. Good literary works use beautiful and interesting language. The language used in literary works can be figurative, figurative, or poetic. Beautiful and interesting language makes literary works easier for readers to understand and enjoy.

### **III. Research Method**

The type of research used is qualitative, namely research that aims to deepen knowledge and is open to different answers (Perreault and McCarthy, 2006). This research uses library research methods. Data collection methods include reviewing literature, books, notes and various reports regarding language and literature learning as well as strengthening the character of National Hero Elementary School students. The data used is the result of direct observation and was strengthened by distributing questionnaires to students at National Hero Elementary School.

### **IV. Result and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Language and Literature Learning**

Language acquisition is a complex process in which a person, especially students in elementary school, acquires new language or vocabulary throughout their life. This process is strongly influenced by interactions between various aspects of an individual's biological, cognitive and social maturity. According to Tarigan (in Iskandarwassid, 2008), every modern approach to language acquisition will face the fact that language is built by children from the start. This means that language is not only passively learned, but also actively constructed by individuals from the moment they are born.

Children have a variety of innate capacities that enable them to learn language quickly and effectively. Their interactions with experiences in their physical and social environments also play an important role in this process. In a supportive environment, children naturally begin to observe, imitate, and experiment with the language they hear around them. This shows that language learning does not only occur in the classroom, but also through daily interactions with their environment.

Modern approaches to language acquisition recognize the complexity and dynamics of this process. This emphasizes the importance of a supportive environment, social interaction, as well as providing opportunities for students to be actively involved in the language learning process. By understanding that language is built early on by children, educators can design learning strategies that utilize students' innate capacities and integrate experiences of the physical and social worlds in language learning in the classroom.

The process of language acquisition is complex and involves many complicated cognitive aspects. One of the important phases in the language acquisition process is the imitation phase. In this phase, children tend to imitate the people around them in speaking. This is an important first step in honing their language skills.

Through the imitation phase, children not only learn to pronounce words, but also to understand how those words are used in the right context. For example, they learn about syntax, vocabulary, intonation, and various other aspects of language through observing and imitating the verbal behavior of those around them.

Apart from that, children's experience in telling stories or listening to stories also has a very important role in enriching their vocabulary and knowledge of various languages. These activities help them gain a deeper understanding of language structure, word meaning, and language use in specific contexts. Apart from that, listening to stories can also stimulate children's imagination and awaken their interest in language and literature.

Thus, the imitation and experience phases of telling stories and listening to stories are an integral part of the language acquisition process in children. In a learning context, educators can utilize these activities as a means to enrich students' language experiences and help them develop language skills effectively.

Literary learning has important value in human development. It is not just about reading literary works, but also about motivating individuals to action. Including literary learning materials in schools is crucial, because literature has the ability to connect reality with imagination. Through literary works, readers can learn from other people's experiences and reflect on how to face challenges in their lives. In schools, literature studies are often integrated with Indonesian language lessons, known as "Indonesian Language and Literature".

The importance of presenting literary material in schools cannot be doubted. Literature not only contains complex life values, but also gives readers the freedom to interpret the work from their personal point of view. Through literature, students are given the opportunity to be at the center of the language education process, explore the world of literature, and develop their personal experiences.

Engagement with literary works also contributes to enriching the vocabulary and increasing understanding of various languages. This supports students' ability to interpret information critically and produce creative narratives. Literature not only teaches students to read and understand texts, but also invites them to reflect on deeper meanings, consider different perspectives, and develop complex thinking skills.

Literary education delivered through the learning process at school has significant benefits for students' overall education, as explained by B. Rahmanto (1989). Here are some of the main benefits offered:

1. **Helps Language Skills:** Literature learning helps improve students' language skills, including reading, writing, listening and speaking abilities. Through the analysis of literary texts, students can understand complex language structures and enrich their vocabulary.
2. **Increase Cultural Knowledge:** Literature is a mirror of the culture of a society. By studying literary works, students can gain a deeper understanding of the values, traditions and cultural history contained in these works.
3. **Developing Creativity and Sense:** Learning literature helps develop students' imagination and empathy. Through exploring stories in literature, students are invited to use their imagination and understand different points of view.
4. **Supports Character Formation:** Literary works often present complex characters and challenging moral situations. Through analyzing character and conflict in literature, students can learn about ethical values, honesty, loyalty, and leadership, which can help in shaping their character.

These four benefits as a whole can help students hone their overall literary appreciation skills, allowing them to better understand, enjoy and express themselves through literary works.

## **4.2 Cultural Appreciation Through Language and Literature**

Language plays a central role in the introduction of culture in the era of globalization. Various nations use language as a means to introduce and maintain their cultural identity. Language is also a tool for recording thoughts and ideas that have been carried out by previous generations. The written form of the language makes it an integral part of culture that continues to be studied and absorbed today.

Meanwhile, literature has become one of the main media for expressing ideas and thoughts in a more complex form. Through literature, these ideas are recorded in written form which then become cultural heritage that can be read and studied by the next generation. Learning literature, language and culture forms a more critical way of thinking

about the surrounding environment. This helps individuals to understand and appreciate cultural diversity and be able to interact effectively in a multicultural society.

For this reason, critical thinking skills that are honed through literature and language learning are very important in facing the challenges of the era of globalization. In this era, individuals must be able to filter information wisely, understand different perspectives, and make the right decisions in complex situations. Therefore, learning literature, language and culture not only helps enrich knowledge, but also forms essential thinking skills for success in an era of globalization that continues to change and develop.

Sugihastuti (2011) believes that literature is a tool for recording various histories that can describe various events constructed by the author in the form of stories. Literature, both written and oral, which provides information about the past in the form of information to us deserves to be called documentary material for historical studies. Literature which functions as a historical recording tool which later becomes a source of data in conducting research based on the experience of the writer or authors. . The author's experience of past events becomes literature as a historical document which is very important for the nation's desire to determine the future. The history of a nation has a role in building a more advanced nation. Literature and history are related, influenced by language and culture.

Apart from that, literature is also a reflection of the society depicted by the author by adding imagination. Literature in the form of imagination even if the author is not fully aware that he is including data that concerns social conditions. This means that literature is closer to social reality (facts) and does not completely contain free imagination. Literature in Indonesia describes social and cultural conditions. Indonesia's multicultural society with various tribes, languages and religions creates a culturally diverse society that is interesting to study. Culture cannot be separated from society because culture is born from the habits of society which are carried out continuously. The Indonesian nation is a nation formed from various cultures that produce various languages that describe how that culture is implemented. Literature is an appropriate forum for describing culture as a form of recognizing national identity.

Thus, it can be concluded that culture is born from habits and language is born from society and literature is a reflection of society. Language for a nation is an identity that should be proud and upheld. Language is a communication tool that is able to advance the nation through its culture. Foreign nations are interested in culture, so culture needs to be introduced and preserved to become a medium of communication between nations. The Indonesian nation has various cultures that differentiate the Indonesian nation from other nations. This makes the Indonesian nation an interesting nation to study. Other nations who want to learn Indonesian culture will first study the language. Literature is a medium for studying the language and culture of the Indonesian nation. Language becomes a symbol of the development of the times. A language that is widely studied indicates a developed nation. Language in literature is used to convey the author's message about the experiences he has through thoughts and ideas in aesthetic form.

### **4.3 The Role of Language and Literature in Critical Thinking Skills**

Language and literature have an important role in developing critical thinking skills. Here are some explanations of how the two are related:

#### **1. Building Analytical Capabilities**

Literature often presents complex and varied texts. Through reading and analyzing literature, a person is invited to decipher and understand the structure of the story, characters, themes and messages hidden within it. This process trains a person to break

down information into smaller parts, dissect them, and then draw conclusions. This is one of the important aspects of critical thinking.

## **2. Stimulates Imagination and Creativity**

Language and literature encourage one to think beyond conventional boundaries. Creative literature, poetry, and prose invite readers to think about alternatives, question norms, and explore new ideas. This not only broadens one's horizons but also opens the door to thinking critically about existing and possible realities.

## **3. Improve Speaking and Writing Skills**

Language is a primary means of communication, and effective speaking and writing skills are important in building critical thinking skills. Literature provides examples of rich and varied language use, helping readers to develop their ability to communicate effectively. When someone can convey their thoughts and ideas clearly and persuasively, it is a reflection of strong critical thinking skills.

## **4. Training Argumentation Analysis and Evaluation Skills**

Literature often introduces readers to complex and often contradictory arguments. In reading and analyzing literature, a person is invited to evaluate the arguments presented, identify supporting evidence, and question the underlying assumptions. It trains one's ability to judge the truth, accuracy, and appropriateness of arguments, which are key skills in critical thinking.

## **5. Deepening Understanding of Culture and Society**

Literature often reflects the culture and society in which it is created. Through reading literature, a person can deepen their understanding of the various values, norms, and conflicts in a particular culture. It opens a person's eyes to diverse perspectives and broadens the horizons of their thinking, which is an important aspect of critical thinking.

Thus, language and literature are not just a means of communication or entertainment, but also an important means of training and honing one's critical thinking skills. Through reading, analyzing and interpreting literary works, a person can develop critical, analytical and reflective ways of thinking that are useful in various aspects of life.

## **V. Conclusion**

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that language and literature learning at National Hero Elementary School plays an important role in developing critical thinking skills. The process of language acquisition, whether naturally or through formal learning, involves complex interactions between various aspects of an individual's biological, cognitive, and social maturity. Language is not only learned passively, but is also actively constructed by individuals from the beginning of their lives. Language and literature learning allows individuals to develop skills of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Through reading and analyzing literature, a person learns to break down information into smaller parts, dissect it, and draw conclusions. Additionally, literature stimulates imagination and creativity, helping one to think beyond conventional boundaries and explore new ideas. Language and literature learning also improves speaking and writing skills, and helps in practicing analytical and argumentative evaluation skills. Literature

often presents complex arguments, allowing readers to evaluate supporting evidence and question underlying assumptions.

Apart from that, learning literature at National Hero Elementary School deepens understanding of culture and society. Literature reflects the values, norms, and conflicts within a particular culture, opening readers' eyes to diverse perspectives. This is important in developing a deeper understanding of social and cultural realities, which is an important aspect of critical thinking. Overall, learning language and literature is not just about learning words and literary works, but also about developing critical, analytical and reflective thinking skills that are useful in various aspects of life. This emphasizes the importance of integrating language and literature in the educational curriculum to produce individuals who are able to think critically and comprehensively.

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