Historical Literacy Competencies of History Education Students: Case Studies at Surabaya and Yogyakarta State Universities

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Abstract

This study aims to describes the historical literacy competence of students enrolled in the History Education study program at Surabaya State University (SSU) and Yogyakarta State University (YSU). The method used is a historical literacy test for first and second-year students. Meanwhile, the questions were prepared based on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) guidelines and the newest Indonesian History textbook for Grade XI. The analysis was carried out through a t-test, and the result showed that the literacy competence of History Education students at both universities is very poor. The mean scores of first and second-year SSU students were 49.91 and 54.14, while YSU students were 55.03 and 54.72, respectively. It means that history education study programs have to face the problem intensively, because the very low literacy will affects in many academic activities.

Keywords: history education, historical literacy, higher education, state university

1. Introduction

Literacy becomes an increasingly important indicator in measuring educational success. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) measurements showed that Indonesia's ranking is always at the bottom. In 2012, it was ranked 64th out of 65 participating countries with a mean score of 375 (OECD 2014). The ranking improved in 2015 to 62 out of 70 participating countries with a mean score of 403 (OECD 2018). In 2018, the mean score obtained dropped to 371 and was ranked 74th out of 79 participating countries (OECD 2019a).

The low literacy competence of Indonesian students aged 15 years is a severe issue that requires particular attention. Furthermore, (Aditomo and Felicia 2018) showed that a difference of 30 scores is identical to one year of learning. From this perspective, senior high school graduates have reading and writing competencies at the same level as elementary school graduates in developed countries that target the PISA survey.

The effectiveness of the School Literacy Movement (GLS), held by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) since 2015, has been questioned (Kemendikbud 2019). This is related to the fact that 55% of Indonesian students belong to the functionally illiterate category (UNICEF and UNESCO 2021), which indicates they can read but do not understand the content. As a result, they cannot solve the lowest level questions to find one piece of information contained in the reading. This condition is very concerning because it will simultaneously affect work competence and productivity. For example, World Bank data shows that 65% of new jobs that grew in Indonesia from 2011 – 2016 were in sectors with low productivity of USD 3,600. In the same period, new jobs in Thailand reached 1.5 times that of Indonesia at USD 5,300, and Malaysia almost four times at USD 15,800 (World_Bank's_Jakarta_office 2018).

The question is, why is the literacy competence of Indonesian students very low? Selvina, Indrawati, & Vianty (2018) stated that the difficulties faced were problems in unfamiliar questions. PISA questions are international; hence they may be unfamiliar to nations not culturally similar to the question makers. However, unfamiliarity cannot excuse the low scores obtained because students from Southeast Asian countries who are equally unfamiliar can get high scores, such as Singapore at 549, Vietnam at 505, Malaysia at 415, and Thailand at 393.

The factor with the greatest influence on the achievement of Indonesian students is the difficulty level of the questions. Harsiati (2018) found that 76% of PISA questions were categorized as high order thinking skills (HOTS); therefore, most were not answered correctly. In other words, the competence in solving HOTS questions is very low (OECD 2019b).

The primary factors are undeniably the teachers and the learning process that takes place. Teachers are less capable of developing student reading competency, requiring higher-order thinking abilities. Revina et al. (2020) stated that the quality of teachers is still low, and efforts to increase their competence by employing the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) program have also failed. In learning, teachers are still focused on completing the material, which has not resulted in output-based education (Khasanah and Widyantoro, 2017).

Since teachers are university graduates, their low quality and professionalism are closely related to the quality of education implementation in universities. For example, Mansyur (2020) found that most students understand the importance of reading activities, however have a low interest, and only 11% spend 2 hours a day reading (2017). Students of the Education Faculty experience the same phenomenon, and Akbar (2020) found that only 3% of Teacher and Education University students were diligent in reading. Similarly, Abidin & Ismail (2017) on Religious Education students stated that their reading literacy level was 7%. From this perspective, the root cause of the low level of literacy lies in the lack of development in universities, especially Teacher Training Institute students that will become teachers after they graduate.

This study tries to examine the literacy level of History Education students more profoundly. The major question is how the historical literacy ability of History Education students in Indonesia is measured. The study will focus on first and second-year students to determine their literacy competence development level during lectures.

2. Literature Review

Historical literacy is still very new, and the concept was first introduced formally in 2014 in the Finnish National Core Curriculum (Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al., 2014). It is explained in the curriculum that at least students should be able to work with documents and understand the narrative content. Before 2014, the term used by history education teachers and experts was historical thinking competence which included the competence to critique historiography and conduct historical study (Purwanta, 2019; Wineburg, 2001). From this perspective, the emergence of historical literacy replaces the term historical thinking and provides a minimum competence limit that students should master.

The minimum competence is significant as the foundation for developing historical literacy competence at the next levels. Without the competence to understand the content of adequate documents, students are unlikely to master various skills that are the goals of history education, such as finding continuity and change and historical significance and relevance (Seixas and Peck, 2004; Ercikan and Seixas, 2015). Moreover, competence also combines cognition and affection, such as empathy (Retz 2015) and historical consciousness (Rüsen 2004).

The trend of historical literacy studies leads to students' competence in understanding and interpreting the contents of documents in terms of historical narratives and sources. Bennet (2014) found that various reading and writing activities are significant to be carried out by history teachers. The activity can run smoothly when students have a strong foundation of reading competence, such as fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development (Bennett 2014, 62). Khawaja (2018) found the difficulties of elementary school teachers in designing learning and tools to measure the development of students' historical literacy competencies. These include the competence to recognize different sources of history, notice that historical information can be interpreted in different ways, understand the motives behind people's actions, and explain how interpretations may change due to the new sources or new ways of examining them.

In Indonesia, historical literacy has not yet developed since history teaching is more oriented to mastery of the material, such as remembering the historical narratives. As a result, teachers and students assume that the narration contained in the textbook is the final truth. Based on this perspective, historical literacy is better understood to understand historical phenomena comprehensively.

The study of developing history teaching is more directed at increasing students' interest in the subject. Studies included in this category are Kurniawati et al. (2021) regarding the screening of historical films by the Kothink Film Community (KKF) and Ayesma et al. (2020), which places film as a digital medium for history learning. However, the development discussion is still limited to the historical truth of the film's story and to clarify the subject matter of history. Kurniawati (2021) obtained the same goal by finding History Club and conducting historic film screenings.

The study of Indonesian historical literacy also discusses the development of students' understanding using textbooks

(Rizaldi and Qodariyah, 2021). However, they are only asked to look for comparison stories on the internet in their learning activities. Directions to read narratives and interpretations that contradict the textbooks are not given; therefore, the teacher's critical thinking development cannot be realized.

The failure to develop critical thinking is mainly due to the inability of teachers to find and access various books and writings that have different data and interpretations and even conflict with textbooks. For example, Purwanto (2006) stated that Indonesian historiography failed to embody an Indonesian-centric narrative. From this perspective, the history compiled is still colonial-centric, like the Dutch colonial era (Purwanta, 2018). On the other hand, Hardinanto (2017) showed that the textbook narrative contains a fatal factual error regarding the history of Pancasila creation; hence, teachers can explain that historical truth is interpretive.

History Education students' historical literacy competence level is rarely carried out. Kurniawan (2021) examined the competence in understanding the materials, such as (1) the nature of the national movement, (2) the nature of Indonesian nationalism, (3) the background of national movement growth, (4) the role of education as a driving force for the growth of the national movement, (5) the role of women in the growth of the national movement, (6) various national movement organizations, (7) the creation of the Youth Pledge, and (8) the struggle for the national movement of various cross-cultural figures (Kurniawan 2021, 89). The eight sections of the Modern Indonesian History course defined historical literacy as knowledge about historical phenomena students can remember during exams.

Historical literacy competence needs to be assessed to develop students' understanding of historical readings. Readings in this context are a series of words selected to represent thoughts on historical phenomena (Sastrapratedja 2008). Readings should be placed as a marker for the presence of thoughts and interests (Heidegger, 1996).

3. Methodology

This preliminary study was conducted at Surabaya State University in East Java Province and Yogyakarta State University in Yogyakarta Province. Surabaya State University is located in a metropolitan city and is one of the largest industrial centers in Indonesia, while Yogyakarta State University is located in a small town with an agrarian society.

The data is collected by conducting online tests on first and second-year students of the History Education Study Program. Addresses and passwords for tests are given to students through liaison lecturers from each university to prevent others from entering the study. Students work on questions made using google forms at:

UNIVERSITY	YEAR	WEBSITE ADDRESS
Surabaya State University	1	https://forms.gle/FvXoPDYhwzuX9bobA
Surabaya State University	2	https://forms.gle/P1SocA18Asv9AAwK8
Yogyakarta State University	1	https://forms.gle/qDoYRHWy9jTnKXm39
Yogyakarta State University	2	https://forms.gle/cvdxrDcZfEsM33bN7

The test questions are arranged based on the historical narrative contained in the textbook Sardiman & Lestariningsih (2017) *The History of Indonesia for High School Grade XI*. The goal is to make participants familiar with the topic and historical narrative in the test questions.

The historical literacy test was made based on PISA levels (OECD 2021). Considering that the literacy level of Indonesian students is very low, the questions compiled cover levels 1 to 4, including:

Level 1: Students can find a piece of information stated explicitly and somewhat prominently in the text, recognize the main idea on a familiar topic, and recognize the relationship between the information in the text and their daily experiences.

Level 2: Students can read to find one or more pieces of information and conclusions by fulfilling several conditions. Other tasks at this level are finding the main idea in the text, understanding relationships, or interpreting meaning in a limited passage of text when the information is not prominent, and the readers have to make lower-level conclusions. Additionally, they involve comparisons between texts and external knowledge using personal experience and attitudes.

Level 3: Students can read tasks of moderate complexity, such as finding information, making connections between different parts of a text, and relating it to familiar knowledge. The readers are expected to find and recognize

relationships between information. Interpretive tasks require integrating several parts of the text to identify main ideas, understand relationships, or interpret the meaning of words or phrases. Furthermore, they should consider many features in comparing, contrasting, or categorizing. The required information is inconspicuous, with competing information or other obstacles in the text, such as conflicting ideas or negative wording.

Level 4: Students can read complex readings, such as finding hidden information behind texts, interpreting meaning from linguistic nuances, and evaluating texts critically. Tasks at this level involving information retrieval permit readers to find and organize some embedded pieces of information. Furthermore, they should interpret the meaning of a passage of text by paying attention to the text as a whole. Other interpretive tasks require understanding and applying categories in unfamiliar contexts. Finally, reflective tasks promote readers to use formal or public knowledge to hypothesize about or critically evaluate a text. Therefore, readers should demonstrate an accurate understanding of long or complex texts whose content or form may be unfamiliar.

The scoring for each question level is 2, 4, 6, and 8 based on the Benchmark Reference Assessment System, which is generally applicable in Indonesia, such as 85 – 100 = A as Very Good; 70 – 84 = B as Good; 60 – 69 = C as Satisfactory; 55 – 59 = D as Poor; 50 – 55 = E as Very Poor, and S<50 = F as Fail.

4. Findings

The historical literacy test for history education students at Surabaya State University (SSU) is conducted online and is attended by 80 first-year and 35 second-year students. The results are pretty alarming. Of the first-year students, 51% could not understand the contents of the reading. They can correctly answer only the questions by looking for one or several pieces of information. On questions that require searching for complex information and the ability to relate one information to another, most first-year students have difficulty. As a result, only 32% scored above the passing grade (60). From this point of view, new students of History Education can be categorized as having a low reading ability.

Low reading ability becomes a severe problem when second-year students also face the same problem. Even though they have been studying for more than one year, their abilities cannot develop optimally. Of the 35 students who took the test, 43% were in the functionally illiterate category. They fail to answer questions that contain complex information and require analysis. Only 37% got passing grades.

The historical literacy test for students of the Yogyakarta State University (YSU) History Education study program was conducted online and was attended by 81 first-year students and 36 second-year students. As many as 42% of new students managed to score above the passing grade. Meanwhile, 58% of students who did not pass, including those who had poor grades or were included in the functionally illiterate category, were 43%. The condition of the second-year students is also worrying. Only 45% of students can score above the passing grade. 55% are below the passing grade, and even 31% are in the functionally illiterate category.

From the quantitative data that has been collected and analyzed, it can be understood that the quality of new student input in the SSU and YSU History Education study programs is low, especially in reading skills. These findings indicate that the problem of the low literacy quality in Indonesia is not only for junior and senior high school students but also for students at Teacher Training Institutes, such as the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at numerous Indonesian universities. The low ability of historical literacy will result in the inhibition of student involvement in various academic activities. All academic activities in History Education require the ability to read, both in the form of journal articles and books. From this point of view, the low reading ability of students makes them hampered in participating in academic activities such as discussions and debates, as well as writing historical papers and essays.

Another interesting finding is the difference in the test between new students from SSU and YSU. The independent sample t-test between first-year History Education students at SSU and YSU obtains a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.045 < 0.05 (t table). It means a significant difference between first-year students' mean literacy competence scores at SSU (49.9) and YSU (55.0). As a result, the literacy level of YSU's first-year History Education students is noticeably greater than that of SSU. This finding shows that universities in metropolises do not necessarily have higher abilities than universities in rural areas. The availability of better facilities in metropolises, such as modes of transportation, internet access, and libraries, does not automatically make people have high literacy skills.

One of the crucial factors supporting literacy skills is a high appreciation of information, thus forming a society with reading skills, alternative reading sources, reading culture, and access to reading sources. Reading activities are a means to find the information needed, both at work and socially. People who have high literacy skills will spend

particular time reading amid the busyness of daily life. From this perspective, students who live in highly literate societies will be able to build better learning systems and, at the next level, produce better quality education.

YSU's new students' reading ability is higher than SSU's, which can be justified by the literacy level and quality of education in Yogyakarta Province. From the perspective of community literacy level, Yogyakarta Province obtained a middle score of 56.20 and was ranked the second-highest at the national level. On the other hand, East Java Province, which is the location of SSU, received a low score of 33.19 and was ranked 26th out of 34 provinces in Indonesia (Solihin et al., 2019). From the perspective of the quality of education or Human Development Index (HDI), Yogyakarta Province in the 2021 census scored 80.22 and was ranked second highest. Meanwhile, East Java Province obtained a score of 72.14 and is ranked 15th (Badan_Pusat_Statistik 2021). From this point of view, it is only natural for new YSU students to have better reading skills than universities in other provinces.

Another interesting finding was when a different test was conducted between first-year and second-year students. Statistical analysis of SSU students shows that the independent sample t-test obtains a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200 > 0.05 (t table). There is no significant difference between the mean scores of first and second-year SSU History Education students. On the other hand, the different scores for first and second-year YSU students are 0.924 > 0.05, so the conclusion is the same as for SSU students; there is no significant difference. Detailed calculations can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. t-test First and Second Year SSU & YSU Students' Historical Literacy

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
SSU	Equal variances assumed	1,879	0,173	-1,289	113	0,2	-4,23661	3,28582
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,226	58,071	0,225	-4,23661	3,45522
YSU	Equal variances assumed	2,769	0,099	0,095	115	0,924	0,30864	3,23208
	Equal variances not assumed			0,1	74,556	0,921	0,30864	3,0967

The absence of significant difference between the first and second-year History Education students at SSU and YSU shows that the lectures conducted are less than optimal in developing students' historical literacy competence. The main cause is the lack of institutional attention to developing historical literacy skills. From a curricular perspective, the curriculum in History Education at SSU and YSU, none of the courses listed point out the historical literacy skills as an outcome (YSU_History_Education_Study_Program 2012). The Study Program also does not have a particular program to prepare new students with adequate literacy skills so that they can participate actively in lectures in History Education. From this point of view, institutionally, there is no concern for students' abilities in historical literacy.

5. Discussion

The literacy problem in higher education occurs in Indonesia and is also experienced by various countries. Low literacy competence is also a common problem in South African and Swedish Higher Education Institutions (Bharuthram, 2012). Although students think reading is essential in learning, they show the opposite behavior (Wollscheid, Lødding, and Aamodt, 2021). In the United States, which is known as a developed country, many students still have below-standard literacy competencies. For example, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reported that 50% of high school graduates in Kentucky require intervention in reading to enter higher education (Flory and Cramer, 2017).

Gatcho & Gutierrez (2018) on literacy in the Philippines provided a clearer picture of the problem map. The study found that literacy competence development programs at the higher education level need to be directed at reading comprehension, differentiated instruction, literacy or reading coaches, adolescent literacy, localized text, and high stakes assessment (Gatcho and Gutierrez, 2018, 41). Reading comprehension is a common problem new students face (Gruenbaum, 2012) and will cause many obstacles when studying their academic discipline. From this perspective, the low historical literacy competence is caused by the fundamental literacy problems of new students who do not get a solution.

At various universities in developed countries, the problem of new students is overcome by providing transition courses (Brunsting, Smith, and Zachry, 2018), including opening reading and writing classes for domestic and

international students from all majors (Griffin, 2018). Students are trained in basic literacy through the transition courses, such as "activating prior knowledge, summarizing text, crafting questions to establish the main idea, and using concept maps to connect ideas" (Gruenbaum, 2012).

The question that arises is whether transition courses are the most effective solution to overcome the low literacy competence of students. Calvo et al. (2020) showed that integrative interventions with students' disciplines are more profitable. The integration will also develop literacy and academic competencies simultaneously to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program (UNESCO et al., 2016). Using Wingate's word, merging literacy classes with students' disciplines provides a new notion known as Academic Literacy, defined as the ability to communicate scientifically in the academic community.

At least two literacy competencies need to be integrated into study program courses, such as reading and writing (Wollscheid, Lødding, and Aamodt, 2021). Reading comprehension is a central issue in mastering scientific disciplines. For non-English speaking students, the challenge becomes even more difficult because almost 90% of books and journals are written in English (Nallaya, 2018). Moreover, writing is the leading assessment component of academic competence in students' discipline lectures.

Various integration models have been carried out, including Writing in the Disciplines (WID), Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), and Academic Socialization. WID and WAC overlap with the same concept, namely the development of writing competencies tailored to students' disciplines (Bazerman 2005). Meanwhile, Academic Socialization assumes that students need to be acculturated to the higher education culture to be academically successful (Trigos-Carrillo, 2019).

Various integration models of literacy competence development in students' discipline open up space for the development of historical literacy, and the success depends on the lecturers of the study program. Their expertise is not in doubt because they have grown and developed during their profession as lecturers. However, the responsibility as a literacy mentor will be a demanding new job, especially for senior lecturers, and many of them do not have prior knowledge about the nature of reading and writing. Moreover, their competence in literacy is a personal struggle that is difficult to be systematized and socialized with students. From this perspective, many difficulties will be encountered in assisting the development of student literacy competencies.

One solution that can be taken is to build collaboration between discipline lecturers and EAP staff or similar institutions that take care of student literacy competencies, as initiated by the University of Wollongong (Wingate 2018). Universities that do not have literacy competence development institutions for new students can hold collaborations or workshops with English Language Education or National Language Education study programs in each country. From these collaborations or workshops, a deeper understanding of literacy competencies is gained and methods for integrating them into history education courses. In addition, the historical literacy ability of the lecturers will significantly affect the prospective teacher students (Nokes, 2010).

The integration of these skills and history education materials creates historical literacy. One aspect that gets great attention is reading historical text. Students reading history books are more focused on understanding the historical events told and seeing that the written stories have 100% objective truth. In historical literacy books, the text is placed as a communication tool to convey findings, thoughts, and beliefs (Kucer, 2015). Therefore, a critical study on the purpose of writing the book and the sources' credibility should be carried out. By understanding the perspective of the communication partner, a broader understanding of the historical narrative can be gained

Another essential historical literacy competence that should be mastered is Corroboration (Maposa and Wassermann, 2009). In this context, history education students are trained to think about historians when criticizing sources (Wineburg, 2001). They are asked to examine the statements through a critical study of the sources used and various other historical narratives with different perspectives, statements, and arguments. The problem that often arises is the inability to find competing historical narratives; therefore, mentoring lecturers is fundamental to guide students in finding primary and secondary sources of comparison and competing historical narratives.

The third necessary competence is contextualizing historical thinking (Reisman and Wineburg, 2008) since every event discussed by history books is a complex social reality. Therefore, understanding the complexities of social realities at the location and period of historical events will provide a rich understanding and perspective. Furthermore, competence in contextualization will prevent students from a present-oriented perspective (Huijgen et al., 2018).

The fourth competence is close reading. A historical narrative is not a series of facts but is a complete story. Therefore, the historian should carefully read each source, place it in proper chronological order, and fill in the

interpretation of the part lacking in data while remaining open to new data being discovered in the future. Reisman (2012) stated that close reading is a reading competence like a historian.

The fifth competency is academic writing, namely the ability to communicate academic work in written form. Academic writing characteristics are clear, concise, focused, structured, and backed up by evidence. In higher education, academic writing ability is one of the most important assessments of student achievement (Al Mubarak, 2017). Therefore, the skills to use formal words and language styles, and compose effective sentences are very important to be mastered.

6. Conclusion

The low PISA scores experienced by students are the iceberg chronic problem pinnacle of education in Indonesia. A similar problem exists in higher education institutions following the low literacy competence of History Education students. Currently, no party has assisted in the struggle to overcome various problems in reading and writing. As a result, students cannot excel in the academic field. Their studies are only written to fulfill lecture assignments, and students rarely publish their work in scientific journal articles.

The solution that can be taken to overcome the education problem is to make a thorough improvement and start from higher education. The History Education Study Program can pioneer improvements by integrating literacy skills in lectures from this perspective. At least five complementary historical literacy competencies should be integrated: reading comprehension, corroboration, contextualization, close reading, and academic writing. This allows students to master the various competencies required to become history teachers and, at the same time, have high historical literacy competencies.

Simultaneously, teachers that graduate from the history education study program will develop the literacy skills of junior and senior high school students. Students' knowledge, skills, and experiences will form the basis and, at the same time, color the learning process when history classes are taught. This is because the integration of literacy skills in history education courses develops lecturers with various linguistic knowledge and skills. Therefore, the collaboration between the history and the linguistics study program for lecturers is a step that should be taken.

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