

Students' Perception of Cultural Literacy Development in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigated the EFL students' perceptions of cultural literacy development in higher education. **Method:** The research design was an ethnographic study. The study was conducted in two private and state universities in Indonesia. The subjects were students from the English education department at two universities. The researcher chose four students from each university as research subjects who know and understand more about cultural literacy development. The technique for analyzing data in the ethnographic study was descriptive labels, selecting, identifying, generalizing, and noting. **Result:** This study's findings showed that in higher education, two students have a high perception, one has a moderate, and the last one has a low perception of cultural literacy development in the academic context. Each student's category generally has a different impact on the development of their cultural literacy in the academic context. **Novelty:** This study produces the Makugawene (harmonic) Cultural Literacy model to develop EFL students' cultural literacy in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural literacy is understanding and participating fluently in a given culture. Therefore, cultural literacy requires proper literacy- writing and reading letters (Shliakhovchuk, 2021). Cultural literacy can be defined as follows: "the capacity to comprehend and analyze culture in all of its forms (cultural artifacts) through the application of the abilities and knowledge inherent in literary and cultural studies, providing the opportunity to change one's perspective on or attitude toward these artifacts.". It should be highlighted that the concept of "culture" used in this method is rather broad; it covers academic fields and the practices linked with them in addition to particular customs that may be connected to an individual's ethnic-geographic heritage.

Literacy refers to the ability of people to read and write. Reading and writing are about encoding and decoding information between written symbols and sound (Nelisa et al., 2020). The capacity to utilize and comprehend written words or other symbols for communication is known as literacy. They learn to read and write early in pregnancy. When newborns read to, they might acquire a love of reading and learn the rhythms and sounds of their native tongue while still in the womb. Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write well. It also involves using critical thinking skills to evaluate information from print, visual, digital, and auditory sources (Xie & Liu, 2024). Those with literacy skills are also expected to be able to adopt a positive outlook. The definition of literacy is comprehensive and multifaceted, encompassing basic, financial, digital, scientific, and religious knowledge.

Perception is people's opinions that can be shared with other people about what they feel. Perception is a process where people give their impression about someone or something (Yeleussiz, 2024). People can deliver their perceptions based on their experiences in a positive concept to each other; it can be a change for someone to be better. Perception can be used for giving suggestions. Perception is a process of understanding something or a message people find (Steel et al., 2024). Every person has a different perception of phenomena that happen around them. Perception is a process that can help us understand our experiences, and how we receive, filter, and define conversations and behaviors that someone else might not be the same in completing the same process (Cotos et al., 2020). Understanding our perceptions will allow us to consider misunderstandings and help us communicate effectively (Xie & Liu, 2024).

The last phase of perception is interpretation. Interpretation has attached the results of what we have chosen and arranged. We can interpret what others say to us according to our relationships with them. For example, if our friends say that we are lazy, then our perception of these words is only a joke. However, we will be offended if someone else says it (Gedik & Akyol, 2022). In this case, our experience can influence how we interpret a word someone else conveys to us or how people perceive us (Steel et al., 2024). The experiences we have passed can influence how we think, interpret what we receive, and organize things in various ways. Perception is a process in which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environment. In a broad sense, perception is the view, understanding, or how a person sees and interprets something (Ricketts et al., 2020). Meanwhile, perception in the narrow sense means how a person sees things. Attitudes, motivations, interests, past experiences, expectations, targets, and situations affect someone's perception.

Students' perception is the preferential treatment of students toward information they get from an object. Student perceptions are their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about persons, situations, and events (Furyanto et al., 2021). When a reader concentrates on a written message, the next step is to perceive the message. In other words, perception must take place. Before learning anything, one must become aware of anything through one of the senses before learning anything. Usually, one has to hear or see it (Ahmad et al., 2021). Many factors may influence the perceptions of the perceiver. The three significant factors include motivational state, emotional state, and experience (Gedik & Akyol, 2022). These factors, especially motivation and emotion, significantly contribute to how the person perceives a situation (Nisa et al., 2024). For most people, vision is their most important sense. Indeed, vision is crucial in many situations in our daily lives, like reading and writing habits, books, and articles.

Perception creates our experience of the world around us; it allows us to act within our environment. Perception is critical in understanding human behavior because every person perceives the world and approaches life problems differently (Paige et al., 2021). In this study, Cultural literacy is the key to a person's success because cultural literacy is an analogy to literacy proper (the ability to read and write letters). On the other hand, the author defines cultural literacy as understanding and participating fluently in regular reading and writing activities. Meanwhile, culture is closely related to language, and the function of language is culture, society, individual, and education. However, the above expectations do not match reality. Internal and

external factors influence this. Therefore, the author is researching all student activities at the university. Based on the problem above, the researcher asked one fundamental question: What are EFL students' perceptions of cultural literacy development in higher education? To answer this question, the researcher conducted exploration in the form of participant observation and interviews with all informants to find and answer this question. So, these findings produce a makugawene (harmonic) cultural literacy model to develop EFL students in higher education.

RESEARCH METHOD

An ethnographic approach is used in the design of this research. Ethnographic research is a qualitative research design helpful in investigating the behavior patterns of lecturers at the university and in the community (Spradley, 2015). In education, ethnographic research is used to describe lectures and lecturers' behaviors, their viewpoints, their needs, their interaction, their language use, etc. From this, effective educational or training programs can be designed. Any topic involving social behavior impinges on education is a potential candidate for ethnographic research (Grant, 2017).

The research design was an ethnographic study. The study was conducted in two Universities located in north Maluku, Indonesia. The subjects were students of the English Education Department in two Universities, private and state universities. The researcher chose two students from each university as research subjects who knew and understood more about cultural literacy development. The techniques for analysing data in ethnographic studies are descriptive labels, selecting, identifying, generalizing, and noting.

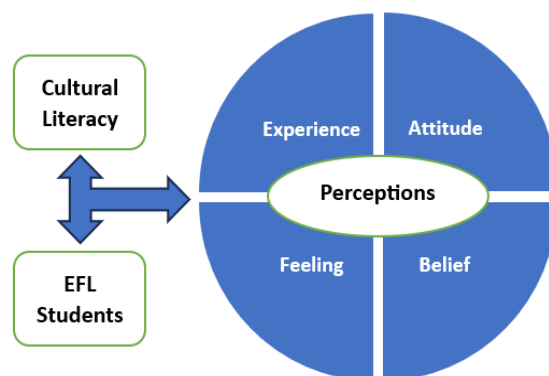


Figure 1. Research procedure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on class observation, interviews, and field notes, the author presented the data findings about EFL students' perceptions of Cultural literacy development encompassing a range of experiences, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs that shape their language learning. Here is how these elements contribute to their overall perception:

Experience

EFL students' past experiences with English literacy development greatly influence their current perceptions. Positive experiences, such as successful language acquisition milestones, engaging learning activities, supportive feedback from lecturers, or meaningful interactions with English speakers, can foster confidence and motivation. Conversely, negative experiences, such as language difficulties, academic setbacks, or lack of support, may lead to feelings of frustration, self-doubt, or disengagement.

Transition Challenges: Many English students experience challenges transitioning from high school or previous educational levels to university-level reading and writing expectations. They may initially find the increased complexity of texts, academic vocabulary, and writing styles more manageable. **Exposure to Diverse Texts:** University-level English courses often expose students to various literary genres, historical periods, and cultural contexts. This exposure can broaden students' perspectives and deepen their understanding of literature and writing techniques.

Arin's experience in cultural literacy development

"Yes, sir. Now, I am in my second semester. As a student, my reading and writing development in English was still in the adjustment stage. Based on my experience, I initially thought it was easy, but the literacy level is starting to increase daily. Keep going...sir. I think this is normal because if it is normal, it usually means I am not making progress, and of course, this can be detrimental to me. Because sir... I hope we need to be aware of the culture of ino fomakatinyinga. I am sure that with this culture, we will have a passion for learning and high motivation so that there will be good development; that is what I think, sir."

(Interviewed, 06/02/2023)

Rais's experience in cultural literacy development

"Okay,..... about the development of cultural literacy, especially reading and writing at this time, I think.....my friends and I have to think critically to deal with the level of difficulty of texts. Because it contains things related to culture and important messages, we sometimes have to read and understand the meaning according to the context of each text we read. Apart from reading, writing activities are also the same. After carrying out writing activities, the results of the work need to be accompanied and evaluated to perfect the goals we want to achieve." Apart from that, sir... in developing cultural literacy, concern for each person's skills or abilities is necessary so that reading and writing abilities continue improving. Apart from that, this is a form of our culture of love, or the local term yocoinge or Yadodara, which means caring about the existence of or loving our students to provide them with knowledge in the future."

(Interviewed, 8/8/2023)

Fia's experience in her cultural literacy development

"Yes, sir, if I look at the development of cultural literacy, especially regarding reading and writing, you can explain several things. First, to improve our reading and writing skills, it is mandatory to do research. What is it...In terms of book research, we can ask simple questions and ask colleagues and those from different classes so that in this way, we can get answers and correct all our shortcomings in terms of reading and writing. The second is a group discussion,...which is also very important because by discussing, we can get various input and criticism, which can broaden our insight and correct various mistakes in our writing and reading skills. Then, we must instill a culture; what is the term makuwaje? This means

reminding each other during group discussions so that reading and writing literacy can develop further. Yes.....I think, sir".

(Interviewed, 10/02/2023)

Research Skills: English students often develop research skills by conducting scholarly inquiries and gathering evidence to support their arguments in written assignments. Locating, evaluating, and integrating sources strengthens students' abilities to engage in informed discourse. **Peer Collaboration:** Many English courses incorporate peer review workshops or group discussions, allowing students to receive peer feedback and engage in collaborative learning. Peer collaboration can provide valuable insights and perspectives, fostering a sense of community among students. **Personal growth** engaging with literature and writing assignments can be a transformative experience for many students, leading to personal growth and self-discovery. Through literary exploration and self-expression, they may better understand themselves and their world.

Time Management and Organization: Managing reading assignments, writing deadlines, and research projects in university courses requires strong time management and organizational skills. Students learn to prioritize tasks, allocate time effectively, and meet deadlines to succeed academically. **Writing Across Disciplines** English students often encounter opportunities to apply their reading and writing skills across disciplines, such as interdisciplinary courses or research projects. This multidisciplinary approach helps students see the relevance of their skills beyond the English department and prepares them for diverse academic and professional contexts. **Lifelong Learning:** English students develop reading and writing skills in university courses as a foundation for lifelong learning and intellectual curiosity.

Fais's experience of cultural literacy development

"In developing cultural literacy, especially concerning reading and writing, the key is time management; writing across disciplines instills a spirit of lifelong learning. The first is related to time. Indeed, we are all busy with various other academic activities, not just reading and writing. However, in line with my experience, time is a significant factor in reading more and practicing my writing skills so that my literacy development becomes better and more valuable. Time goes by, and I cannot do much except waste time in vain. I expected something else. Second, reading and writing are not only in our field; I can read any book, and the same goes for writing; I can write about any issue or topic in English. This activity will have many benefits. Lastly, I must remind myself that learning is a step towards curiosity about science, especially reading books, articles, scientific journals, and other mass media. So, this becomes a good habit and, of course, can benefit myself and others".

Fais's experience in cultural literacy development

"My attitude in seeing literacy development is at least two things. First, I love literary works. I have an interest in literary works. So it is unsurprising that my hobby is reading, which I consider entertainment. The point is that I enjoy literary works. Second, writing activities must be seen as extraordinary academic activity, so there must be a form of appreciation for the results of written work. In this way, my friends and I are happy and interested in continuing to produce various written works."

Attitudes

Attitudes refer to students' overall evaluations or predispositions towards English literacy development. Positive attitudes involve viewing literacy as a valuable skill worth acquiring, enjoying reading and writing activities, and feeling confident in their ability to improve. Negative attitudes may manifest as boredom, indifference, or resistance towards literacy tasks stemming from perceived irrelevance, difficulty, or past negative experiences with language learning. The attitudes of English students regarding reading and writing development can vary widely based on individual interests, goals, and experiences. However, some common attitudes are often observed among English students:

Arin's attitude on cultural literacy development

*"In developing cultural literacy, especially regarding reading and writing, the key is time management; writing across disciplines instills a spirit of lifelong learning. However, based on my experience, time is an important factor in improving my reading skills and practicing my writing skills so that my literacy development becomes better and more valuable. Meanwhile, I expected something else. Second, reading and writing are not just our fields; I can read any book and write about any issue or topic in English. This activity will provide many benefits. Thus, to improve literacy culture to the maximum, it is necessary to have a relationship or a **form of coexistence with each other**, especially parents and students, lecturers and students or teachers, so that each other is more familiar and open to guiding and directing. Lastly, I must remind myself that learning is a step towards curiosity about science, especially reading books, articles, scientific journals, and other mass media. So this becomes a good habit and can benefit yourself and others."* (Interviewed, 13/02/2023).

Commitment to Improvement: Despite the challenges of academic writing, English students are generally committed to improving their writing skills. They may actively seek feedback from instructors and peers, engage in revision and editing processes, and dedicate time to honing their craft. **Openness to Feedback:** English students are typically open to receiving feedback on their writing and view constructive criticism as an opportunity for growth. They recognize that feedback from instructors and peers can help them identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing and make improvements accordingly. **Desire for Authenticity:** Many English students value authenticity in their writing and strive to find their voice and style. They may resist formulaic approaches to writing and seek opportunities for self-expression and originality in their work.

Rais's attitude on cultural literacy development

"First, I am committed to improving my abilities, especially in terms of reading and writing in English. Specifically for writing, my attitude is interactive, and I discuss and correct what I have written. In this way, what I have produced can be a good written work, and others will also enjoy reading it. This is my commitment to continue to increase my academic capacity. The second is that I am always open to receiving suggestions and criticism regarding what I have done, for example, writing an article or expressing an opinion. Furthermore, this is an excellent attitude to continue developing yourself". (Interviewed, 8/2/2023)

Engagement with Critical Analysis: English students often embrace the challenge of critically analyzing literary texts and academic arguments. They enjoy exploring complex themes, symbols, and character motivations and are eager to delve deeper into the layers of meaning within a text. **Interest in Academic Discourse:** While some students may initially find academic writing intimidating, many English students develop a keen interest in participating in scholarly discourse. They enjoy engaging with academic texts, theories, and debates and may seek opportunities to contribute their insights to ongoing conversations in the field.

Fia's Attitude on Cultural Literacy Development

"Of course, I am one of those people who wants to engage in critical thinking and analysis. I like reading texts or e-books that contain meaning or cultural values. By reading and understanding the contents of the text well, my understanding of the culture contained in the text will also be good. Indeed, sometimes I feel worried, but I am happy when I am involved in scientific discourse and can contribute insights and ideas". (Interviewed, 10/2/2023)

Awareness of the Writing Process: English students generally know the writing process and the importance of planning, drafting, revising, and editing their work. They may appreciate opportunities for peer collaboration, brainstorming sessions, and workshops that help them refine their writing skills. **Recognition of Writing as a Skill:** English students recognize that writing is a skill that requires practice and perseverance to master. They may approach writing assignments with a growth mindset, viewing challenges as opportunities for learning and improvement rather than obstacles to be overcome. **Appreciation for Feedback and Support:** English students value the support and guidance provided by instructors, tutors, and peers in their writing development. They appreciate constructive feedback, encouragement, and resources that help them enhance their writing skills and achieve their academic goals.

Fais's attitude on cultural literacy development

"Good. Of course, I am aware of the writing process. I also know the steps or stages in writing. Whether it is in planning, compiling, revising, or editing, if I found some problems, I would ask questions and discuss them with classmates or seniors who understand more about the matter". (Interviewed, 13/02/2023)

Overall, English students' attitudes regarding reading and writing development are characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, curiosity, and a commitment to continuous improvement in their craft. They approach reading and writing as opportunities for personal and intellectual growth, embracing the challenges and rewards of literary exploration and academic discourse.

Beliefs

Beliefs shape students' perceptions of their abilities, the nature of language learning, and the effectiveness of instructional methods. Students' beliefs about language learning (e.g., the importance of practice, the role of innate talent) and their beliefs about themselves as learners (e.g., self-efficacy, locus of control) significantly influence their motivation and engagement in literacy development. Additionally,

beliefs about the relevance of English literacy to their academic and personal goals impact their willingness to invest effort in learning.

The beliefs of EFL students regarding reading and writing development can significantly shape their learning approach and overall language proficiency. Cultural factors, prior educational experiences, and personal motivations often influence these beliefs. Here are some common beliefs that EFL students may hold regarding reading and writing development: **Language as a Key to Success:** Many EFL students believe that proficiency in English reading and writing is essential for academic and professional success (Al-Ahdal & Abduh, 2021; Bai & Wang, 2020; Jamoom, 2021; Naghdipour, 2021; Udu, 2021). They see language skills as a gateway to higher education opportunities, career advancement, and participation in global communication networks. **Practice Makes Perfect:** EFL students often believe consistent practice is essential for improving their reading and writing abilities. They may prioritize regular reading habits, writing exercises, and language practice activities as effective strategies for language development. **Importance of Vocabulary:** EFL students recognize the importance of vocabulary acquisition in reading and writing development. They believe expanding their vocabulary knowledge enhances their comprehension of written texts and allows them to express themselves more precisely and fluently in writing.

By mastering reading and writing, I will be successful academically and in my career in the future. I have made progress in my life, especially in my academic abilities. Moreover, the most important thing is that I can communicate well through language, and of course, I have achieved success not only at the national level but also at the global level. On the other hand, to master these reading and writing skills, I must train myself to continue improving gradually, little by little. Then, mastering vocabulary is the key to mastering language and communication.

Grammar as Foundation: Many EFL students believe a strong understanding of grammar rules is fundamental to successful reading and writing in English. They may focus on grammar exercises, sentence structure, and punctuation rules as building blocks for effective communication. **Cultural Awareness:** EFL students often believe cultural awareness is essential for understanding and interpreting written texts in English. They recognize that cultural differences influence language usage, idiomatic expressions, and literary themes, and they strive to develop cross-cultural competence in their reading and writing practices. **Motivation and Engagement:** EFL students believe motivation and engagement are crucial for reading and writing development. They understand that intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest in topics or texts, plays a significant role in fostering active engagement and learning.

Rais's belief in cultural literacy development

"Mastering English grammar well and correctly is the key to mastering reading and writing skills. One of the keys to the development of cultural literacy is understanding the cultural values contained in the text that is read. I have to be directly involved to create motivation to be curious about exciting issues and themes in the book I want to read". (Interviewed, 03/10/2023)

Autonomy and Self-Directed Learning: Many EFL students believe autonomy and self-directed learning are essential for language development. They may seek

opportunities for independent reading, writing projects, and language practice outside formal classroom settings to enhance their skills and confidence. Feedback and Revision: EFL students value feedback from teachers, peers, and language resources as essential to their reading and writing development. They believe that receiving constructive feedback helps them identify areas for improvement and refine their language skills through revision and practice. Lifelong Learning: EFL students often believe language learning is a lifelong process beyond formal education. They recognize the importance of continuous exposure to English language materials, cultural immersion experiences, and ongoing practice in maintaining and improving their reading and writing abilities.

Fia's belief in cultural literacy development

"Good cultural literacy development means that I must be independent or be free to seek opportunities for independent reading, writing projects, and language practice outside the formal classroom to improve my skills and self-confidence. Constructive feedback helps me identify areas for improvement and refine my language skills through continuous revision and practice". (Interviewed, 03/010/2023)

Confidence and Growth Mindset: EFL students believe in the importance of confidence and a growth mindset for language development. They understand that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process and that resilience, perseverance, and a positive attitude are key factors in overcoming challenges and achieving success in reading and writing. Overall, the beliefs of EFL students regarding reading and writing development reflect their understanding of the importance of language proficiency, the value of consistent practice and engagement, and the role of motivation and cultural awareness in language learning. By fostering and supporting these beliefs, educators can help EFL students develop effective strategies for language development and achieve their academic and personal goals in English proficiency.

Feelings

The feelings of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding reading and writing development can be influenced by various factors, including their language proficiency, cultural background, prior educational experiences, and personal motivations. Some common feelings that EFL students may experience about reading and writing development: Frustration: EFL students may feel frustrated when they encounter difficulties in reading and writing tasks due to language barriers or unfamiliarity with academic conventions. They may need help comprehending complex texts or expressing their ideas effectively in writing, leading to frustration and discouragement.

Arin's feeling of cultural literacy development

"Well, my cultural literacy development is currently facing me. Sometimes, I feel frustrated when encountering difficulties with reading and writing assignments due to language barriers or unfamiliarity with academic conventions. In this regard, I need to help understand complex texts or express my ideas effectively in written form. Sometimes, I worry about my ability to

meet academic expectations or communicate effectively in English, which can hinder My beliefs and motivation". (Interviewed, 10/11/2023)

The demands of reading and writing development in a foreign language can sometimes feel overwhelming for EFL students, particularly if they are juggling multiple coursework assignments or need help to keep up with the pace of instruction. They may feel overwhelmed by the amount of reading material or the complexity of writing tasks, leading to feelings of stress and burnout. Isolation: EFL students may experience isolation or alienation in academic settings where English is the primary language of instruction. They may struggle to participate in class discussions fully or to connect with their peers due to language barriers, leading to feelings of social exclusion and loneliness. Determination: Despite the challenges they face, many EFL students approach reading and writing development with a sense of determination and perseverance. They are motivated to improve their language skills and to succeed academically, even in the face of obstacles and setbacks.

Arin's belief in cultural literacy development

"By mastering reading and writing, I will be successful academically and in my career in the future. I have made progress in my life, especially in my academic abilities. Moreover, the most important thing is that I can communicate well through language, and of course, I have achieved success not only at the national level but also at the global level. On the other hand, to master these reading and writing skills, I must train myself to continue improving gradually, little by little. Then, mastering vocabulary is the key to mastering language and communication". (Interviewed, 6/2/2023)

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Fais's belief in cultural literacy development

"Self-identity and a growth mindset are essential in language learning, especially reading and writing. Apart from that, persistence and a positive attitude are key factors in overcoming challenges and achieving success in reading and writing. (interviewed, 13/2/2023)

Various methods, such as interviews and classroom observations, gather data on students' reading and writing development in the academic context, providing a comprehensive understanding of integrating Indigenous cultural literacy practices into education. These methods offer distinct but complementary perspectives. Interviews with students, teachers, and community members yield qualitative insights into personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward incorporating indigenous culture in literacy education. These narratives help identify the cultural elements that resonate most with students and how they enhance their engagement and comprehension.

Interviews also reveal the challenges and successes experienced by educators in implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies, providing a nuanced view of the practicalities involved. On the other hand, classroom observations provide a direct, real-time glimpse into the dynamics of teaching and learning reading and writing skills in a culturally enriched environment. Observing students' interactions, participation, and responses to culturally relevant materials and activities allows researchers to assess the effectiveness of these approaches in fostering literacy. This method also helps identify specific teaching practices that are particularly effective in integrating indigenous cultural elements into the curriculum. Together, these data

collection methods create a robust picture of the impact of Indigenous cultural literacy practices on academic reading and writing development. They underscore the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy and furnish proof of the successful implementation of these practices in classroom environments. By combining interviews and observations, researchers can cross-validate findings, ensuring a more reliable and comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with this approach.

Discussion

Based on the research question about EFL students' perceptions of Cultural literacy development in higher education and findings it consists of students' experiences, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs through class observation, interviews, and also field notes, so understanding EFL students' perceptions of reading and writing development is crucial for educators and researchers. These perceptions encompass their experiences, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs, shedding light on their learning process and informing instructional practices. Here is a discussion highlighting the significance and implications of EFL students' perceptions: Experiences: EFL students' perceptions are shaped by their experiences with reading and writing in academic contexts. Positive experiences, such as completing a challenging reading assignment or receiving praise for a well-written essay, can foster a sense of achievement and motivation (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Conversely, negative experiences, such as struggling to comprehend complex texts or receiving criticism for writing errors, may lead to frustration or self-doubt (Hodgson & Harris, 2022).

Attitudes: EFL students' attitudes toward reading and writing significantly affect their learning outcomes. Students with positive attitudes approach reading and writing tasks enthusiastically and confidently, viewing them as opportunities for growth and self-expression. Conversely, students with negative attitudes may feel apprehensive or disinterested, perceiving reading and writing as daunting or irrelevant to their goals (Moats, 2020). Feelings: EFL students' feelings about reading and writing can influence their engagement and effort. Feelings of enjoyment, curiosity, or pride when reading and writing can enhance motivation and persistence (Habók et al., 2019). Conversely, feelings of boredom, anxiety, or frustration may impede learning and hinder progress. Understanding and addressing students' emotional responses to reading and writing can help educators create supportive and inclusive learning environments (Crossley, 2020).

Beliefs: EFL students' beliefs about their abilities and the value of reading and writing shape their approach to learning. Students who believe in their capacity to improve and view reading and writing as meaningful and essential are more likely to invest time and effort in developing these skills (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Conversely, students with limiting beliefs about their language proficiency or the relevance of reading and writing may need help to make progress and disengage from learning opportunities (Marzuki et al., 2023). The student's cultural background, the intricacy of the problem scenario presented in the material, the topic's sensitivity, and their exposure to the topic discussion are just a few of the variables that determine how appropriate the interculturally focused English curriculum is. Thus, it was

necessary to find out how the students felt about the content they were taught while learning English (Furyanto et al., 2021).

This qualitative study examined the academic reading and writing difficulties faced by international master's students at a Malaysian institution studying English as a foreign language, focusing on the lecturers' viewpoint (Singh, 2019). Semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with sixteen professors who instructed overseas students in various graduate programs were used to gather data. The results from the viewpoints of the lecturers show that the students needed help with academic reading and writing practices, including following rules of academic writing and comprehending material in an English language learning environment (Sun et al., 2022). In order to ensure the academic success of international EFL students enrolled in graduate programs, this study recommends policies and programs to address the difficulties associated with their academic writing and reading practices. In the subject of risk research, social and cultural views are becoming more and more significant (Ahmed, 2019). The cultural theory (CT) has been used in recent empirical studies on how social and cultural elements affect people's perceptions of danger (Tiawati et al., 2024).

Besides that, students must be attentive to cultural and linguistic diversity. Lecturers often acknowledge EFL students' cultural and linguistic diversity and recognize the value of incorporating diverse perspectives into reading and writing activities (Singh, 2019). They may perceive cultural differences in writing styles, rhetorical conventions, and communication norms, which can influence how EFL students approach academic tasks (Robillos & Bustos, 2023). Furthermore, students also need supportive instruction. Lecturers may perceive the importance of providing supportive instruction and scaffolding to help EFL students develop their reading and writing skills (Bunga et al., 2022). They may implement pre-reading activities, vocabulary instruction, model texts, and peer feedback to support EFL students' comprehension and composition abilities. Moreover, Integration of Language and Content: Lecturers may recognize the interconnectedness of language and content knowledge and perceive the need to integrate language development with subject-specific content in their courses (Robillos & Bustos, 2023). They may design reading and writing assignments that require EFL students to engage with course material while practicing language skills.

Developing reading and writing skills within the academic setting is a fundamental component of a student's educational progression, significantly impacting their academic achievement and cognitive advancement. Activities that focus on phonemic awareness, vocabulary expansion, and comprehension exercises facilitate the development of reading and writing abilities during the initial stages of schooling (Si'ilata et al., 2023). These activities are crucial for deciphering written information and developing understanding. As students advance, they interact with more intricate texts and writing assignments that require critical thinking, analysis, and information integration (Fahlevi et al., 2021). Well-organized educational programs facilitate this progress by incorporating literacy in various areas, promoting the integration of knowledge from various disciplines, and enhancing the practical application of reading and writing skills in various contexts (Taladngoen et al., 2020). formative and summative evaluations assist educators in identifying specific student needs,

allowing for focused interventions and individualized training. Consistently improving these talents is critical, as skilled reading and writing are fundamental to scholarly investigation, efficient communication, and the ability to interact with various viewpoints and intricate concepts. Advanced reading abilities are essential in higher education, forming the foundation for academic investigation and professional preparedness. These skills equip students to meet the requirements of their chosen disciplines and promote continuous learning throughout their lives.

Students' perceptions of cultural literacy development through reading and writing in an academic context vary significantly, typically categorized as high, moderate, or low. High-perception students deeply engage with culturally diverse materials, demonstrating advanced critical thinking, cultural competence, and the ability to incorporate diverse perspectives into their writing (Nisa et al., 2024). They appreciate the richness that cultural diversity brings to their academic work. Students with moderate perceptions recognize the importance of cultural literacy but may not consistently apply it in their analyses or writing. They selectively engage with cultural materials, and their ongoing development of cultural understanding often results in superficial interpretations. Conversely, students with low perceptions usually find cultural content irrelevant or challenging, leading to minimal engagement and a lack of depth in their academic work (Almén & Langebro, 2024). They need help with cultural competence and must see the value of integrating cultural perspectives into their reading and writing. This variance in perceptions highlights the need for tailored instructional strategies to support and enhance cultural literacy development across different student groups, ensuring all students can appreciate and utilize cultural diversity in their academic pursuits.

Makugawene (harmonic) cultural literacy is critical to EFL students' reading and writing development in higher education because it fosters a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to language learning. The curriculum integrates cultural awareness and competence, exposing students to diverse cultural contexts that enhance their comprehension and interpretation of texts. This broadens their understanding of various literary forms and genres and sharpens their critical thinking skills as they analyze and question cultural assumptions and biases. In writing, harmonic cultural literacy encourages students to draw from their cultural backgrounds, helping them develop a unique voice and express their identity. It also improves their audience awareness and adaptability, enabling them to communicate with diverse readers effectively. However, successfully implementing this approach requires careful balancing to avoid stereotyping and address cultural biases. Strategies such as inclusive curriculum design, cultural exchange programs, reflective practices, and teacher training are essential to overcoming these challenges. Ultimately, harmonic cultural literacy enriches the educational experience of EFL students, preparing them for global citizenship and fostering a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity.

CONCLUSIONS

Fundamental Findings: Students' reading and writing development in the academic context is significantly enriched by engaging with makugawene, or harmonic cultural literacy because it is rooted in their Indigenous culture. This approach emphasizes the

integration of students' cultural narratives, values, and perspectives into their literacy education. It creates a more inclusive and resonant learning environment where students can see their identities and experiences reflected in their academic work. Harmonic cultural literacy entails exposing students to diverse texts and writing practices that reflect their and others' cultural backgrounds. This not only enhances their understanding and appreciation of different cultures but also strengthens their ability to read, comprehend, and produce written work that is culturally relevant and meaningful. Engaging students with materials that align with their cultural experiences increases their motivation and engagement in learning. **Implication:** This approach helps students develop critical thinking skills as they learn to analyze and interpret texts from multiple cultural perspectives. It supports the development of a sophisticated use of language and enhances their ability to communicate complex ideas effectively. Students build a strong foundation for lifelong learning and academic success by grounding literacy development in their indigenous culture. Thus, *makugawene*, or harmonic cultural literacy, plays a crucial role in fostering a more dynamic and inclusive educational experience that respects and values the cultural diversity of all students. **Limitation:** Indigenous culture often focuses exclusively on the academic context in developing students' reading and writing skills. While this focus is crucial for understanding how culturally responsive teaching strategies can enhance literacy skills within formal educational settings, it may overlook the broader, more holistic aspects of literacy development that occur outside the classroom. Academic-focused research may need to fully capture the vital role that oral traditions, storytelling, and community-based learning play in literacy development in indigenous cultures. **Future research** should include other settings where literacy development occurs, such as at home, in community centers, or during cultural events. This narrow focus might also lead to an underappreciation of the potential for integrating indigenous cultural literacy practices in non-academic environments, where they could equally contribute to enhancing reading and writing skills.

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