

DOI: [doi.org/10.21009/ISLLAE.01115](https://doi.org/10.21009/ISLLAE.01115)

Received: 5 June 2018  
Revised: 10 June 2018  
Accepted: 14 August 2018  
Published: 31 January 2019

## Literature for Developing Students' Humanity Awareness

Athriyana S. Pattiwael<sup>a)</sup>  
athriyana.pattiwael@ukrida.ac.id<sup>a)</sup>

### Abstract

This paper proposes ELT classroom activity aims at developing students' humanity awareness as the path of cultivating their cultural literacy. Cultural literacy is central to students' learning journey as learning is not only about being competent in language, but also about using the competence to take part in social transformation. The design of the activity integrates language activities and the efforts to develop students' humanity awareness by using literary texts in order to serve this purpose. Literary texts are chosen for its possible strength and contributions for the purpose of developing students' humanity awareness. Using literary texts to develop students' humanity awareness might simply be understood as providing students with humanity empirical situations in the form of poems, songs, short stories, fictions, plays to be critically explored and judged before a set of humanity values and norms. It is expected that a new perspective and consciousness about how they should perform in their personal and societal roles would be gradually instilled at the end of the activity.

**Keywords:** Culture Literacy, Humanity Awareness

### Abstrak

Makalah ini mengusulkan kegiatan kelas ELT bertujuan untuk mengembangkan kesadaran kemanusiaan siswa sebagai jalur menumbuhkan literasi budaya mereka. Literasi budaya adalah pusat perjalanan belajar siswa karena belajar tidak hanya tentang menjadi kompeten dalam bahasa, tetapi juga tentang menggunakan kompetensi untuk mengambil bagian dalam transformasi sosial. Desain kegiatan mengintegrasikan kegiatan bahasa dan upaya untuk mengembangkan kesadaran kemanusiaan siswa dengan menggunakan teks sastra untuk memenuhi tujuan ini. Teks sastra dipilih karena kekuatan dan kontribusinya yang mungkin untuk tujuan mengembangkan kesadaran kemanusiaan siswa. Menggunakan teks sastra untuk mengembangkan kesadaran kemanusiaan siswa mungkin hanya dipahami sebagai memberikan siswa dengan situasi empiris kemanusiaan dalam bentuk puisi, lagu, cerita pendek, fiksi, drama untuk dieksplorasi dan dinilai secara kritis di hadapan serangkaian nilai dan norma kemanusiaan. Diharapkan bahwa perspektif dan kesadaran baru tentang bagaimana mereka harus melakukan dalam peran pribadi dan sosial mereka akan secara bertahap ditanamkan pada akhir kegiatan.

**Kata Kunci:** Literasi Budaya, Kesadaran Kemanusiaan

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The potrait of the world where our students live**

Recent social realities show that our society have almost accepted violence, injustice, discrimination, inequality and inequity as a normal phenomenon of a developing world. Treating other people improperly and disrespectfully and alienating them regarding their sex, belief, skin color or any other entity is considered a logic consequence of an unavoidable competition on certain interest in global world. The society in which we live is based upon aggression in which competition is considered a fact of life. Our students grow up and develop in such a world. They pick up violence-base life functioning from their immediate environment such as family, neighborhood, and school. Cartoons, books, movies, social media trending topics, and news on media later strengthen this mechanism. They actually are the prospective society member in the future who will play the crucial societal role in working on transforming this violent and unjust relation socially.

### **What can be done? : the proposed idea**

It is imperative, then, to execute certain kind of systematic efforts to reconstruct this reality by introducing humanity issues in the classroom. By doing this, we assist our students to understand and value human rights and take responsibility for respecting, defending and promoting their human rights as well as the rights of others. The imperative is also should be understood as part of the societal responsibility and response of ELT classroom towards its surrounding environment.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This paper, then proposes an ELT classroom activity integrating language activity and the effort to develop students' humanity awareness by using literary texts. The proposition of integrating language activity and the development of humanity awareness is based two main reasons. The situation related to recent education practice and system is the first main reason. Recent education system and practice has been challenged for its limited contribution to creating informed, responsible and creative members of society. It has focused more on intellectualism and competition, rather than on developing the quality of humanity. Hirsch (1987) observes similar practice when he presented his work of Cultural Literacy. Despite of the critics addressed to him, Hirsch developed this construct as part of his critics towards American's educational systems (around that time) which focused its literacy exclusively upon formal cognitive skills. Hirsch (1987 in House, Emmer and Lawrence, 1991) asserts that literacy goes beyond the acquisition of formal skill, but it is also a political decision for both teachers and students upon the utilization of these skills. Hirsch calls for education with higher purpose in which it share responsibility in creating social transformation by involving students and teachers in a more critical, humane and liberatory practices.

The second main reason relates to the call for English language teaching and learning. ELT classroom doesn't pose solely to the responsibility to provide students with language competence and skill. It should also deal with cultural and humanity issues, since they are the place and medium where language is used and applied. Language teachers share with families and society a responsibility for the formation of the whole human beings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The proposition of including humanity awareness development in this paper finds a more relevant construct of cultural literacy proposed by Segal (2015). She characterizes cultural literacy as *an attitude to the social and cultural phenomena that shape our existence—bodies of knowledge, fields of social action, individuals or groups, and of course cultural artefacts, including texts—which views them as being essentially readable*. It is about ‘the reading’ of social surroundings, including unjust, violent and unequal social, political and cultural practices. The reading is taken place at and facilitated through the lens of literary and critical thinking. Within this frame, the integration of humanity awareness issues is considered as part ‘the reading’. The students are provided with ‘reading experience’ through the designed classroom activity in which humanity awareness issues are presented and introduced. The goals of this ‘reading experience’ is to transmit basic knowledge of human rights and to foster its integration into public values, to promote the development of the social mores and qualities (positive self-images, a sense of responsibility for self and others, a capacity to trust others), to develop the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (problem solving, conflict resolution, emotional management, interdependence, critical thinking, and personal/social responsibility) of the students.

The integration of the humanity awareness issues will appear in at least three alternatives considering teacher’s competence and readiness, students’ proficiency level, school’s agenda, allocated time, classroom necessity and the availability of the learning materials required to implement this idea. The alternatives are proposed here for teachers to choose because introducing, promoting or even teaching humanity issues as a single activity may pose several constraints such as the already-overloaded curriculum, the overcrowded time table and the attitude and policy of educational authorities. The first alternative is the issues are developed inherently in language activity. This alternative allow the teachers to address humanity issues by tailoring them to the real issues in the classroom, for example developing and encouraging students to listen to their friends while they are speaking as this skill of mindful listening will shape them as a person who respects the right for opinions and who share the responsibility to respect the opinions of others. Another example of tailoring is teachers’ instructional decision to increase the frequency of group work instead of encouraging students to perform individually. This decision strengthen students’ interdependence and collaboration skill.

The integration that deal with how the teachers manage classroom is the second proposed alternative. The rationale for this alternative is the fact that classroom is the microcosm of the society and teaching-learning is social process and action. Within this alternative, classrooms might be the place where the students will practice how to be a fair, tolerant and respectable society member. The teachers are demanded to be the role model in leading to social transformation on class level. The way the teachers handle the conflict among students, respond to the diversity of the classroom member, present a non-threatening learning process, or treat the minority constituent in the classroom (being minority due to the religion, ethnic, language, etc) will determine and influence the way the students view and engage with such problems.

The third proposed alternative is the activity of developing humanity awareness will appear as an integration to language activity. The introduced and developed issues will be integrated to language activity. The option of this alternative starts from presenting more reading texts that contain specific humanity awareness issues to make the students aware about the issue to designing classroom activity addressing to a specific humanity awareness issues integrated to language activity. The classroom activity proposed in this paper falls into this third alternatives. If the third alternative is chosen, then there are two points which need taking into accounts:

- Since this is an integration, the proportion of the language skills acquired and the humanity issues which will be developed should be balanced. Focusing on the humanity issues doesn't mean that the focus on language skills area should be neglected or reduced.
- Language skill (s) which need to be acquired and humanity issues introduced should be defined clearly along with its instructional objectives to be achieved.

### **Why in elt classroom and the advantages offered**

The decision to implement this classroom activity in ELT classroom is based on several reasons. Firstly, the effort to promote and raise humanity awareness requires an atmosphere where the participants are able to engage in an attitudinal skills as well as knowledge development. This seems to be in line with the kinds of activities an ELT classroom could provide. Secondly, apart from language competence and communication skills acquired, ELT classroom activities could provide students with an opportunity to be exposed to different values, belief, experience and cultural orientation. It will simultaneously develop creative imagination and critical thinking, enhance their understanding and appreciation of the diversity. The third reason is related to the possibility of language instructional flexibility, which means that language teacher can limit or expand the syllabus with the component not directly related to the languages issues.

There are some advantages offered when teachers work with this proposed activity. By integrating language activities and humanity awareness development activity, we will able to provide the students with language competence, communication, intellectual and social skills at the same time. Teachers can help the students feel more connected to the world and current events and raising students' awareness of their social context. They may help the students to see the relevance of school subjects to the real world around them. Furthermore, teacher-student relationship will be built on mutual respect which will enhance the learning process in a short term impact. Whereas, the formation of the sense of respecting others in society may appear as the long term impact.

In relation to the language learning process, this idea presents several positive contributions, either supporting, fostering or empowering the language competence and skills acquisition. Firstly, in a sensitive-humanity classroom where the stress-free environment and mutual respect is part of the classroom atmosphere, language acquisition follows naturally as an outcome of personal and social growth. Mantle-Bromley claims that without a positive learning atmosphere,

students may gain little or nothing from curricular infusion (Mantle-Bromley, 1995). Furthermore, such classroom atmosphere will also help the students in viewing the errors and accuracy realistically. They will find that making mistakes and errors in language learning is normal and they will learn something new from them. The mistakes and errors made may be used as the basis of their continual learning process. The shared autonomy of the teacher and the students will encourage such an active participation and involvement of the students that might inspired them to engage more actively in the language instructional activity in addition to the use of such interesting and colorful learning materials and teacher's teaching strategy.

The employment of alternative and non-threatening assessment techniques in this proposed activity (see assessment point in Some Raised Implications part), in addition to paper-pencil/pen test and individual test, will present the next positive contribution. Such assessment techniques will help the teacher to assess certain qualities which cannot be assessed in test such as effort, persistence and attitude. These techniques will be an anxiety-reducing one compared to the test which is anxiety-raising in nature. If the assessment process is conducted in the correct manner, the students will be able to refine concepts and deepen their understanding and it also conveys high expectation which further stimulate learning. Our students are the future users of English, so it is important to build their confidence.

Lastly, though this proposed idea may bring an additional responsibility to the teacher, yet it could be an enlightenment since the teacher can introduce a variety of issues into classroom setting, thus making the lesson more interesting. The students will have a greater opportunity to use the language for communicative and real purposes as well.

### **The use of literary texts**

Literary texts were known for its advantages brought into English language classroom. Its genuineness and possibility to encourage students to communicate their perception of the text in the form of interpretation which in turn will develop their language skill might be the first basic reason for its usage. Kennedy (1991) claims that as an art of words, literature can assist one to become more sensitive language. Lazar (1993) asserts the benefit of having literature in the classroom is that it provides wonderful source of material for eliciting strong emotional responses from the students.

The choice of using literary texts as a media of teaching in classroom activities on the purpose of developing students' humanity awareness is based on several reasons related to the property and characteristics of literary texts themselves. The first reason is the characteristics of literary texts which mainly deals with human issues. These issues of human and humanity is central as the context used to confront to empirical humanity condition identified around the students' life. Literary texts also could arise the chance to share experience, opinion, judgment, and reaction. Lazar (1993) states that activities designed by making use of literature will encourage students to talk about their opinions and feelings. In relation to humanity awareness development, this will be a supporting feature since the identified empirical humanity condition are needed to be explored

and judged before the universal humanity values to bring up a new perspective and consciousness.

The next reason of using literary text is that activities deals with literary texts may encourage students' mental growth. When they are able to appreciate and understand, they will realize how they function within their society and culture group properly. The students may gain better understanding with themselves as an individual as well as their relationship with people around them. The opportunity literary texts could provide in formulating philosophical concepts is the fourth property of literary texts which make it the best selection for this proposed activity. Literary texts could provide students opportunity to formulate their own philosophical concepts as the result of a combination of collective experience of human beings lie in the literary text and their own experience (through interpretation process). This contributing feature is significant in breaking misconception and gain new perspectives in how they relate with others.

The last reason relates to the purpose of developing cultural literacy itself. Referring to the aforementioned discussion of cultural literacy by Segal (2015), literary text here is used as the context to approach and challenge social and cultural issue related to humanity awareness within particular cultural model (in this case students' cultural model). Carter & Long (1991) points out that the application of literary texts within cultural model would enable the students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own. Once they learnt how to appreciate the differences of culture and ideology, they will understand and accept the differences and realize how they function within those different cultures and ideologies.

### **Classroom technical activities: notes in selecting material and designing the activity**

There are some aspects that teachers need to consider in working with this proposed classroom activity. The position of literary texts within the whole of activity design is the first aspect to consider. Literary text is the media to promote humanity values by posing and introducing humanity issues lie in it and initiate students' interest and raise their empathy before they define their concept about it. It is important for the teachers to be aware that this is not the literature class as well as humanity education.

Maintaining the balance between developing language skills and developing humanity awareness is the second aspect to consider. Since this is an integration then the proportion of the language skills area and the development of humanity awareness activity should be balanced. Stay focused on the theme (humanity issues) and stimulate students to share their experience and reaction doesn't mean that the focus on language area (depend on the skill defined) should be neglected. Language skill (s) area and humanity values/issues to be developed should be defined clearly as well as its objectives to be achieved instructionally.

Finding suitable literary texts to meet the objective of this proposed activity is the next aspect of consideration. Finding suitable literary texts containing humanity issues decided to be introduced can be very challenging. It is really helpful since there is a very wide variety to choose from classical to contemporary

literature. The teachers can also provide rooms for making use of students' literary artifacts to meet this need.

Teachers shall consider this general guideline in choosing literary texts to use in the class. Firstly, the text should be familiar and interesting enough to students. Secondly, the level of difficulty of the literary texts. This is essential to be considered since the students are not able to engage in critical action if they cannot attain the basic level of comprehension. In addition, it will decrease the motivation to engage in the rest activities. Therefore, it might be helpful for students if the literary texts are given prior accompanied with some guided questions related to language properties. Understanding the message lies behind the literary texts assists the students to engage into further critical judgment activity. Students' proficiency level is the third point of guideline. The difficulty level of the literary text should not beyond students' proficiency level related to vocabulary and idea.

The selection of humanity issues itself is the next big aspect to consider. There are some factors teachers should take into account in this stage of selection. The familiarity of the issues is important for the teachers to consider. The issues introduced to the classroom should be familiar to them and take place in their daily activities. The issue about the fights among students seems to be familiar to the students compared to Unites States' policy related to Israel – Palestine war, for example. The second factor is the closeness of the issue to students' immediate interest and surrounding. The issues chosen should be a student-centered one for it will encourage active participation and involvement. It should also be those which frequently happened and easy to identify in their surrounding, e.g. issues in the family, school activity, friendship, or in their neighborhood.

Teachers might also need to consider simplifying the issues. Some humanity issues need to be simplified according to students' needs and their proficiency level in terms of vocabulary and idea. The issue about gender equality should be simplified for the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. The activity may just concentrate on questioning and breaking the gender stereotype instead of discussing about the causes or the implications of the gender discrimination, e.g. breaking the stereotype. The next aspect to consider is students' immediate surrounding as the choice of issues. Teachers may observe students' immediate surrounding in order to decide which humanity issues relevant to be brought to the class as the focus. Every day school life can provide such abundant issues to be exploited and explored and can reinforce some abstract concepts such as tolerance, cooperation, fairness, justice and peace, etc. Mattheoudaki, 2002 observes that schools often discourage rather than encourage the sense of humanity, for example some schools 'allow' students to call other students from minority group (ethnic, religion, social status) an offensive names and no action is taken by teachers. Others still consider social segregation is merely an issue of peer selection, not to mention bullying as the most frequently case found in school environment. The last aspect is teachers can share autonomy with students in identifying the issue. The students are the bank of the issue. The teacher may assign the class to identify any humanity issues in their immediate environment in TV news, newspaper, film, cartoon, etc.

For the purpose of developing humanity awareness, Tibbits (2002) suggests three models of application, namely Accountability Model, Transformational

Model, and Values and Awareness Model. Related to the objective of this idea, then, Values and Awareness model, whose main focus is transmitting the basic knowledge of human rights and fostering its integration into public values is chosen as the model for the application. The application of this model demands teachers to draw their careful attention to classroom activities they develop later. The activities should provide enough space and chance to analyze, compare, share and formulate a new concept of humanity values, at least make them aware. Therefore, participative and interactive methodology is particularly appropriate where there are often many different point of views on an issues, rather than one correct answer. This method will involve students fully into learning process for they will become an explorer of the world around them rather than become a passive recipient of teachers' expertise.

Since this will include an interpretation activity as the result of the literary text use and participative methodology, it is advised that the teacher play the role as the facilitator to direct the flow of interpretation. There will be no right or wrong answer/opinions, but sensible or insensible ones. It is necessary for teachers to facilitate students with additional information related to the chosen humanity issue. This aims at equipping them to engage into critical process of examining humanity empirical realities lie in the literary texts. The teacher may facilitate them with some copies of related human rights documents and with some web site addresses or books/bulletins/articles that focus on the chosen humanity issues.

This model of application also demands teacher to address the aspect of developing humanity awareness explicitly in the design of the activity. Mattheoudaki (2002) asserts that the activity of developing humanity awareness issues, apart from language instructional objective, should provide students with at least skills, knowledge and attitude which they will need to work towards a better peaceful world within their surrounding. She, further, outlines that *Skills* component would at least provide students with skill of listening to others, making moral analysis, communicating and problem solving. *Knowledge*, such as what rights they and their fellows have and its corresponding responsibility and also what the consequences of violating people's rights are or failing to fulfill the responsibility. By knowing it, the students will be motivated and assisted to protect their rights and the rights of others. *Attitude*, such as the idea that cooperation is better than conflict, that human rights are important, that human dignity is inherent in all people, that the rights should be respected regardless sex, religion, ethnics, skin color, etc, that we are responsible for our actions. Such attitudes help the students to develop morally and prepare them for positive participation in society.

### **Some raised implications**

There are some implications raised when this classroom activity is brought into the classrooms. These implication are related to teacher's role and orientation, student's role and position, teacher-student relationship, assessment pattern, learning materials, and classroom management. The first implication is related to teacher's role in learning process. The application of this classroom activity demands the transformation of teacher's role from an expert into a guide, counselor and mentor. It will take place gradually as students gain confidence to express their opinion. Teacher must maintain an open mind in order to engage the students so that they can begin questioning their belief system. By presenting



themselves as the guide and mentor, teacher provides chances to their students to learn some social skills, e.g. collaboration through trial and error. Their students will have an opportunity to reflect on their mistakes and use it as the basis of their continued learning process. Furthermore, by being the counselor the teachers could help the students to manage anxiety by offering some strategies to improve their future performance.

When bringing this recommended activity to the classroom, teachers are expected to perceive humanity issues from a new point of view. Humanity issues brought to the class are not only topics to introduce and develop but they navigate the way of teaching. Teachers cannot develop humanity awareness in a way that against humanity. It has been mentioned before that teachers are the model for their students either in social, affective or cognitive setting. Students will pick up verbal and non-verbal cues (skills and attitude) from their teachers and collaborate it into their belief system. Furthermore, in relation to dealing with diversity among students, it is imperative for teachers to recognize and accept diversity among students, respect their rights, and be open to their suggestion. Teachers are also encouraged to expand their horizon by educating them selves about common humanity issues, especially those which are found in students' immediate interest and surrounding.

The role of students in learning process is also changed. Students are no longer the passive recipients of their teacher expertise for they are the actor in the class who has their own values and belief system and the active explorers of their world. This role of being the actor of their own learning can take the form of contributing identified humanity issues in their immediate surrounding, bringing their own visual aids, designing their assessment form, being the assessor and providing them room to decide about what and how the lesson should be done. This role change will boost their self-confidence, sense of responsibility of self and others, leadership and positive self-image. Learning materials brought into the classrooms are also the kind of materials purposefully selected to meet the whole purpose of developing humanity awareness. The issue of careful selection of learning materials is central here for the students will not only learn English but also being influenced actively during the learning process. The learning materials should promote the value of cooperation, sense of self-responsibility and others, peace, respect on cultural, ethnicity, religion diversity, ethics, tolerance, multi-cultural, democracy, equity and equality regardless sex, age, skin color, religion, ethnics, race and disability. They should expose the students to the consequences of violating people's rights in the situation and context of war, poverty, aggression, oppression, injustice, destitution, pollution, discrimination, etc. Furthermore, these learning materials should also encourage students to question their injustice and oppressed surrounding for it will raise their awareness such as the issue of gender discrimination, ethnicity conflict, environmental over-exploitation, children neglect, resistant bias, limited access to health, education and economy center, etc. If it is possible, encourage the students to take action or counteraction on certain issues e.g. working together in a class project to get more funding for local child care center.

The application of this classroom activity also demands different approach and type of assessment. The assessment process is recommended to be conducted by employing the alternative and the non-threatening techniques, such as partner

and small-group work, interview, journals, problem solving, role play or portfolio. Such assessment will encourage students to work in groups, to collaborate, to develop the capacity of trust to others and interdependence.

### CONCLUSION

Integration of humanitarian awareness problems will emerge in at least three alternatives considering teacher competency and readiness, student proficiency level, school agenda, time allocation, classroom needs, and the availability of learning materials needed. There are several benefits offered when teachers work with these proposed activities. By integrating language activities and humanitarian awareness development activities, the teacher will be able to provide students with language, communication, intellectual and social skills at the same time. Teachers can help students feel more connected to the world and current events and increase students' awareness of their social context. They can help students to see the relevance of school subjects to the real world around them. Furthermore, teacher-student relations will be built on mutual respect that will enhance the learning process in short-term impacts. In fact, the formation of respect for others in society may appear as a long-term impact. Furthermore, with regard to the language learning process, this idea presents several positive contributions, both supporting, fostering or empowering language competencies and the acquisition of student skills.

### REFERENCE

- Carter, R and Long, M. (1991). *Teaching Literature*. New York: Longman Publishing
- Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (1987) *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin.
- House, E., Emmer, C., and Lawrence C. (1991). *Cultural Literacy Revisited in Literacy for a Diverse Society: Perspectives, Practices and Policies*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kennedy, X.J. (1991). *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. New York: Harper Collins Publication Inc
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature & Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers & Trainers*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press
- Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995). Positive Attitudes and Realistic Beliefs Links to Proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal* 79/3: 372-386
- Mattheoudaki, M. (2002). Human Rights & TEFL; Globalizing school education. *Global Issues IATEFL SIG 2/00*
- Segal, N. (2015). From Literature to Cultural Literacy. *Humanities* 4, 68 – 79
- Tibbits, F. (2002). Emerging Models for Human Rights Education. *IIEP-Journal*, March Ed.