

LOCALLY BASED SYNCRETIC LITERACY PRACTICES AMONG MULTICULTURAL STUDENTS IN NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstract: This study reveals how different multicultural students in North Sumatra interpret heritage symbols as literacy artifacts available in their new place, and how the assimilation process occurs in the context of broader literacy practices in the surrounding environment. Through a participatory case study approach, students were encouraged to capture photographs of literacy artifacts of their choosing within their own environments and to engage in group discussions about these images. The data were analyzed using a framework of syncretic literacy practices, emphasizing acceptance, adaptation, adoption, and synergy or reaction. This study explores ethical meaning-making across different spaces, languages, and modes, examining how multicultural students interpret local culture from their home contexts and whether these interpretations mirror broader faith-based literacy practices within their communities. The results suggest that syncretic literacy practices hold significant potential to inform policy development, enhance the role of literacy in everyday life, and improve literacy education curricula. Moreover, such practices promote the blending and integration of culturally diverse traditions in both the form and organization of literacy activities.

Keywords: *assimilations, literacy practices, multicultural students, North Sumatra, syncretic literacy*

INTRODUCTION

Syncretism has been widely discussed all over the world and in the lives of the people of North Sumatra in particular. In this cultural syncretism, it is seen as a cultural system that describes a mixture of foreign culture with local culture. In other words, it is an image of a cultural genre that is far from the pure nature of its place of origin. Some students do not know that this tradition has been passed down from generation to generation and has undergone various stages of change.

Students from many different backgrounds should be prepared to be mixed with other cultures. People use language as a cultural product, a system of phonetic symbols, to communicate, collaborate, and identify each other (Maisaroh et al., 2024). They should be adaptive to some elements of the new culture, including oral communication in different cultures, and also kinds of literacy practices that occur in the environment, on the other hand, may not be the same as what the students originally practiced before. Many students speak languages other than the language of their new places.

In the practice of writing, human lives are inscribed. People leave traces of literary activity throughout their lives, in emails or in the form of notes, postcards, and other communications such as photographs. It weaves people's lives into discussions and stories. The reforms have not resulted in better literacy conditions for language minority students. In its current understanding, literacy is seen not only as a skill but also as a cultural, social, and synthetic practice (Cintra, 2013). It addresses how multicultural students combine, interpret, and transform their experiences with language and text in the process of entering different cultural communities. Quickly discover a rich and diverse literacy culture within the student community, including texts, images, films, digital resources, religious knowledge, and popular culture (Christensen, 2019). In the case of language minority students, literacy activities learned at home intertwine and inevitably influence literacy acquisition and socialization in school and can include a wide range of themes, such as syncretism of various sorts related to the language and the culture of origin, such as religious literacy practices.

Literacy is a culturally mediated and practiced activity that consistently involves the individuality of speakers, writers, and readers. The ways in which people express themselves through speaking, writing, and reading are closely linked to various discourse communities that, in turn, contribute to shaping their identities. Syncretic

literacy refers to the fusion or integration of culturally diverse traditions within structured literacy practices (Duranti & Ochs, 1996). Literacy practices are deeply intertwined with identity, encompassing the collective thoughts, values, and actions of a society that embody noble principles (Febriyanto et al., 2021).

Literacy exists everywhere and remains inseparable from practice (Duranti & Ochs, 1996). The relationship between literacy events and literacy practices is therefore significant, as it connects classroom experiences with activities beyond the school environment. Literacy activities often manifest as recurring events, reflecting repetition in everyday routines. Many families, for example, engage in regular literacy-related practices such as writing thank-you notes to relatives, sending birthday cards to friends, or completing forms. Each of these recurring acts demonstrates how literacy is embedded in the continuity of daily life.

Individuals use literacy as well as groups. It can act as a resource for people and a way to become self-reliant. Culture is a truth that no man who lives and participates in community events, who is not justified by cultural values, would be of it has been recognized by communities over. Values that culture uses as the basis for the provision of meaning have kicked off the concept, and what does it mean to be in communication among members (Lestari, 2018). However, literacy practices can include many forms of representation. Understanding what it means to be literate must include other forms of symbolic creativity. This can include symbols used on screens, symbols, and signs associated with the cultural spaces occupied, drawn, and photographed, related to speaking and literacy practices.

Such an approach to critical literacy could enable bi/multilingual learners' ethical meaning-making across places, languages, and modes (Chang-Bacon et al., 2021; Zhang, 2023). This approach to developing critical competence allows bilingual and multilingual learners to recognize the ethical dimensions that emerge across different places, languages, and modes of communication. The purpose of this research is twofold. First, it seeks to explore how students interpret and make meaning from the symbols available to them. Second, it aims to illuminate the literacy practices that take place within students' community contexts. The analysis focuses on syncretic literacy events, which are defined as empirical instances where written language plays a central role in shaping participants' interactions and interpretive processes. The progression

from limited to full literacy signifies a shift in an individual's engagement with one set of ethical values toward the acquisition and internalization of another. Social roles, however, are not so smoothly or harmoniously interchangeable (Cintra, 2013).

Several studies have shown that syncretic literacy becomes a theoretical concept to argue for literacy around the form of learning designed to create resonance spaces that support educational, economic, and sociopolitical opportunities for youth from nondominant communities (Gutiérrez, 2014). A study about syncretism was published by Lundqvist and Erduyan (2024) focusing on home literacy practices of teenage students of Arab heritage living in an urban setting in Denmark. The analysis was centered on the syncretic literacy events that refer to empirical occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes (Volk, 2013), a study about syncretic literacy projects of young bilinguals. This study was chosen because it departs from the fact that students in North Sumatra live in diverse socio-cultural contexts, so that the way they understand, interpret, and produce meaning in literacy activities is influenced by local experiences.

Therefore, this study tries to fill this gap that lies in the exploration of local-based literacy practices that are also syncretic in multicultural students, because previous literacy research generally discusses literacy in general or relates it primarily to formal education without explaining how local knowledge sources influence the way students understand, use, and interpret texts/information, so this research is expected to fill this gap.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In general, multiculturalism encompasses various dimensions such as cultural diversity, customs, religion or belief systems, identity, cultural acculturation, historical context, power relations, and tolerance. A multicultural society is one that comprises two or more distinct cultural groups. The term *multicultural* denotes the factual presence of cultural diversity, whereas *multiculturalism* signifies a normative response to that diversity (Setyani, 2011).

Activities such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing all involve processes of use, production, and change. Viewing literacy as a social practice enables us to recognize its presence across diverse contexts, as literacy interacts with and

participates in other social domains, including everyday practices such as banking (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). Literacy is deeply embedded in individuals' identities and everyday practices. The development of literacy takes place across multiple contexts, including the home, school, and workplace. Adopting a social practice perspective on literacy requires careful consideration of several key aspects. This approach acknowledges that schools represent only one of the many environments where literacy is enacted and that the materials and resources used in classrooms may differ significantly from those utilized by students in their home settings.

Literacy is deeply interwoven with individuals' identities and everyday experiences. Its development occurs across diverse contexts such as the home, school, and workplace. Embracing a social practice perspective on literacy requires thoughtful attention to several essential considerations. This perspective acknowledges that schools constitute only one among many sites where literacy is enacted and that the materials and resources employed in classroom settings often differ substantially from those utilized by students within their home environments (Dyson, 2016). The concept of coordination aligns with the notion of interpretive reconstruction, as both emphasize the way students actively reconfigure elements to reconstruct literacy activities. Through such practices, literacy enables learners to navigate particular social interactions within specific social contexts. Space and place are understood as relational and dynamic rather than fixed or static. They are socially produced and, therefore, open to contestation, reinterpretation, and reconstruction. Incorporating the concepts of space and place into literacy studies represents an effort to balance semiotic perspectives with the material dimensions of lived, embodied, and situated experience (Mills & Comber, 2013).

The concept of mixing linked architectural forms with elements of physical culture cannot be traced only with an architectural science approach, but must borrow another science, namely anthropology. Acculturation occurs when groups of individuals have different cultures interact directly with each other intensively and deeply for a long time, with the emergence and then major changes in cultural patterns from either of the two cultures concerned. According to Duranti and Ochs (1996) the syncretic nature of literacy activities is due to; the temporary landscape of literacy demands the utilization of tools that were not originally designed specifically for literacy activities, reflecting

the diverse requirements of today's learners. This necessity arises from the need to accommodate various cultures, where blending traditions and expectations become essential in fostering inclusivity. Use tools not originally designed specifically for literacy activities.

In acculturation, the attitude of local people towards foreign (outer) civilization occurs in three circumstances. First, if self (local) civilization is weak, then what happens is adoption, namely a position that is always dictated by the stronger (foreign). Second, if the local civilization is strong, facing a weak external civilization, adaptation occurs. Third, if both are strong local and foreign civilizations, synergy occurs, meaning giving each other equal input. Those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups (Sam & Berry, 2010). This is how people acculturate and integrate into a new society.

According to Cultural Adjustment by Barkeley International Office (n.d.), the cultural adjustment consists of the following sequences. Cultural acceptance; the cultural acceptance strategy includes four key principles. Cross-cultural management requires someone to step beyond their narrow ethnic perspective and accept other worldviews as viable alternatives to their own. This requires people to acknowledge other cultural value systems and behavioral norms as valid. And that acceptance inherently means someone is non-judgmental. People become “culturally neutral,” not putting things into “good” and “bad” boxes, but simply seeing them as facts of life (Wittwer, 2020).

Cultural acquisition, acceptance means actively accepting a certain behavior, norm, or value as their own. Cultural restrictions, consultation, chief approval, and ancestral approval (Tanko, 2022). When people adopt, people dig deep into the roots of the baobab tree, its values, and its invisible parts. Truly accepting the values of another culture means people adopt them into their own. Like actual adoption, this process takes time. When people adopt a child, people will no longer feel culture shock because the values and norms of the two cultures will no longer conflict with them. Achieving this milestone will help people become global citizens. People will feel a deep connection to this new culture that people have immersed themselves in, and people will also gain freedom and valuable insight into their own culture (Wittwer, 2018).

Cultural adaptation means adjusting one's behavior to suit a foreign society. This means following cultural norms, even if only while someone lives and works in a culture, to demonstrate their respect and dedication to cultural understanding and sensitivity, regarding the development of mutual understanding and practical methods for coexisting peacefully with others. Adapting to a new environment is a gradual process, and the pace of adjustment varies from one individual to another. The commonly accepted model of cultural adaptation comprises four stages: Honeymoon, Crisis, Recovery, and Adjustment. It is important to note that this cycle may recur when individuals return to their home country or original cultural environment. *The honeymoon phase*; This stage is characterized by sentiments of excitement, optimism, and amazement while encountering a new environment or culture. Students prefer to focus on the good qualities and pleasant variations in their new surroundings. *The crisis phase*; The crisis era is frequently referred to as “culture shock”. In general, culture shock refers to the uneasiness and feelings of surprise, disorientation, or bewilderment that a person feels when working in a radically different cultural or social setting. *Recovery and Adjustment Phases*; Everyone heals from cultural shock in various ways. Each individual has distinct circumstances, abilities, and limitations to consider. Acculturation can have the following benefits: greater self-confidence, increased personal motivation, and increased cultural awareness.

Cultural synergy assumes that there are many valid ways of looking at the situation and many ways of interpreting goals. The implementation of a cultural synergy solution must be planned carefully. The need for cultural synergy is developed by cultural self-awareness (an understanding of cultural assumptions) and cross-cultural awareness (an understanding of the other culture's assumptions and perspectives (Adler, 1980).

According to Dixon (2014) there are many ways in which the nature of these social interactions around literacy can be analyzed. It also offers a straightforward metaphor for understanding the complex process of knowledge construction, which can be applied across various organizations engaged in teaching and learning activities. Dixon guides readers through the literacy experiences of both students and teachers, documenting literacy events and practices through multiple forms of representation, including transcripts, student work samples, maps, field notes, and photographs (Kuby,

2012). Within this theoretical framework, educators and researchers observing students' literacy practices can move beyond evaluative models that measure such activities against predefined notions of literacy. Instead, they can adopt assessment approaches that recognize and value new, diverse, and unexpected forms of literacy engagement effective or otherwise in achieving communication goals and/or social priorities (Henning, 2023).

METHOD

This article was carried out by applying a qualitative approach with a participatory research design. To ensure the reliability of research instruments and analysis, researchers can pilot test the instruments and seek expert assessments to ensure the questions are relevant and understandable, while also using consistent interview and observation protocols. Qualitative research is considered to be able to reveal hidden meanings by interpreting what is seen, heard and understood (Apriyani & Nalurita, 2023). In this study, the researchers established an initial sample of fifty individuals as the basis for data collection in the initial stage. However, to ensure in-depth analysis in accordance with the research objectives, the researchers then selected only five respondents as the main subjects of the study. The selection of these six respondents was carried out so that the researchers could dig deeper for information, conduct a more focused search, and focus on the variety of experiences relevant to the study's focus, namely local and syncretic literacy practices among multicultural students in North Sumatra. Thus, although the targeted sample size was relatively large, the involvement of six respondents was considered sufficiently representative to answer the research questions in more detail.

Observations focused on moments when students: (1) interpreted information, (2) used specific language/phrases, (3) connected material to cultural experiences or local knowledge, and (4) demonstrated a combination of elements from various cultural backgrounds in their responses to texts or literacy tasks. Data analysis technique used is qualitative descriptive analysis.

The data were collected through downloaded images and online searches from <https://vncojewellery.com/artikel/mengenal-baju-pengantin-adat-batak-toba-2023-08-02/>, <https://sumut.inews.id/berita/ornamen-batak-toba-seni-ukiran-gorga-di-rumah-adat>,

<https://www.traveloka.com/id-id/explore/destination/rumah-adat-sumatera-utara-acc/327281>, <https://batikta.com/read/335/ulos-sadum-simata-kilat-emas>, <https://www.gotravelaindonesia.com/aktivitas-di-danau-toba/>. In qualitative research, the aim is to understand a phenomenon holistically rather than by breaking it down into isolated variables. The primary objective is to achieve a comprehensive understanding and in-depth insight, rather than relying on numerical analysis of data (Ary et al., 2009). Literature is a significant component of the culture of a society; hence, its research can strengthen the social and cultural aspects of that society (Adolph, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the results of the analysis carried out, departing from the theory related to syncretic literacy practices, the writer can assume the discussion has two main elements. Interpreting involves recognizing element that may be assumed or figuratively sought, often represented as symbols or reliefs. Each object of study will be asked of the respondent in the following form. This background informs the inner layer of literacy that unfolds in the interview, as the participants interpret the photo for the interviewer.

Table 1 shows in the analysis of the photos, a stable set of themes was identified across all the photos, such as Gorga (traditional Batak reliefs) where not all of the students can recognize the picture. Two of five can recognize it. It means this picture is not popular to them, it can be seen that only one student (S5) can recognize it. Traditional clothes also indicate almost all students recognize, except S4. The traditional Toba house also indicates almost all students recognize by seeing the answer except S4. Furthermore, Ulos is popular with all students, but the students S4 are not sure about it. Toba Lake view, the answers indicate this picture is popular with all students, all students had the right answer. However, the Toba old alphabet is not popular with anyone. The analysis shows that most students have the right answer except for the old Toba alphabet.

In the acculturation process, there are four strategies, namely the process of assimilation, separation, integration (integration), and marginalization (marginalization). Assimilation occurs when individuals do not want to maintain their identity in their culture and seek daily interactions with the culture other. Here individuals prefer to shed

Table 1. Style Study Object

Symbol/Relief	Students	Interpretation
	S1	I come from Nias Island. Yes. This is a new case for me. I don't know what kind of symbol it is. It looks beautiful. I believe it is one of the reliefs that can be found in Ulos Batak, isn't it?
	S2	I am Hokkian, but my mother is Batak Simalungun. This symbol is usually found in the traditional house of Batak. I've been to Samosir Island. We can find many. I am not really familiar with Batak heritage but I love to see this.
	S3	This picture is beautiful. Oh, I am sorry I am Melayu. What kind of picture is it? I couldn't find it here at all. Could you tell me please, what is it?
	S4	Yes, I am Bunggali. No, I never seen this before. But it is really unique. I have Batak friends but they do not tell me about this
	S5	Wow, I love this. I spent my holidays going to Samosir Island, so I recognize this picture. This is called Gorga
	S1	Yeah. This is the traditional clothes of Batak. But I do not know what is it called. I used to go to the Batak Wedding ceremony, and we can find it there.
	S2	Of course. I see, my mother wearing these clothes at once. This is Ulos, right?
	S3	Yes. We can find this in the history book when I was at school. This is such a beautiful outfit.
	S4	I know. This must be related to the first picture, coz it is similar. No, I am not. I never use it
	S5	Yes. These are traditional Toba Batak clothes. It is usually worn on a prewedding ceremony.
	S1	Everybody knows this picture. But I never know what it looks like inside. I want to see this.
	S2	Tradional Toba Batak house. It's unique and beautiful. But I couldn't find this in Medan. Should I go to Samosir to see it?
	S3	This is similar to the traditional house of Simalungun. I have Simalungun friends. I wonder if I can take photos in front of this house.
	S4	This is still Batak's heritage. Do all Batak people have the same house like these?
	S5	Yes, it is. This is one of the popular traditional houses in North Sumatra. I wonder if I can see what it looks like inside.
	S1	Ulos. Yes, I see. Like the second picture.
	S2	This is Ulos Batak. This is popular in Medan actually
	S3	Yeah. My neighbor always takes this Ulos to a ceremony.
	S4	Yes. Is this Ulos Batak? I hope so
	S5	This must be Ulos. My neighbor always uses this
	S1	Oh my God. This must be Danau Toba. I never go there. But it is okay, we have a similar view too in Nias
	S2	Yes. Toba Lake is one of my favorite destinations
	S3	This is like Datau Toba. Is it right?
	S4	Yes. The most beautiful lake in Sumatra
	S5	Toba Lake? Danau Toba, it's gonna be a nice trip to go there
	S1	No and never. What is this picture?
	S2	Oh, my ghost. I don't know
	S3	No. This is like the author old Alphabet. But, I don't know
	S4	No, I am not. It looks weird
	S5	Not really much. I don't know what is it

Source: *simbol tradisi Batak Toba*

culture their heritage, and become absorbed into that society.

Table 2. Acceptance of Different Culture

Students	Judge	Ambiguity	Tolerate	Self-Explaining
S1	I never	Yes, still	Yes	Sometimes
S2	Sometimes	No, I do not	Of, course	Never
S3	Never	Yes, I do	Yes	I do
S4	Never	Yes	I do	Yes, I do
S5	Never	Yes, I do	Yes, I do	Yes I do

Source: worksheets data processing

Table 2 shows the different experiences of each student in the context of acceptance in society. Almost all students answered never judge a new culture before the students join it. In the context of ambiguity, the four students had the same answer except for S2 because she had a bit of the same cultural background. In the context of tolerance, all did the same thing to tolerate other cultures. In the context of self-explaining, it showed not all students had the same experiences with self-explaining before joining a new culture except for S2. It can be assumed that acceptance is one of the main requirements to melt and mingle a new culture in society.

Table 3. Different Cultural Adoption

Students	Behavior	Norms	Values
S1	Always	Not at all	No
S2	Yes, I am	Some	Yes
S3	Yes	No	Yes
S4	Yes	No	No
S5	Yes	No. I am not	Yes

Source: worksheets data processing

In the context of adopting, there are three points that must be fulfilled by each student. Table 3 shows in the behavior column, that all the students do the same thing. The norms column also shows the same answer, because students do not understand the norms of a new culture, but should be adopted. In the values column, it showed not all students absorb the values of new culture, it can be seen from the answer of S1 and S4. It can be assumed that adoption is one of the main ways to easily melt and mingle new cultures in society.

Table 4. Different Cultural Adaptation.

Students	Honeymoon	Crisis	Recovery	Adjustment
S1	Yes	Yes	No	Sometimes
S2	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
S3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
S4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
S5	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: worksheets data processing

Table 4 illustrates that nearly all students provided similar responses related to adaptation. The *honeymoon* phase reflects students' experiences of happiness, optimism, and curiosity emotions typically associated with entering a new environment or culture. With the exception of Student 5 (S5), most students tended to emphasize the positive aspects and appealing differences found in their new surroundings. Four students provided identical responses in the *crisis* phase, except for Student 2 (S2), who appeared to be more familiar with the new culture. In the *recovery* phase, only Student 1 (S1) responded differently, suggesting that he or she did not experience a need for recovery from culture shock. In the *adjustment* phase, all students reported similar responses, indicating shared experiences during this stage. The positive outcomes of cultural adaptation include increased self-confidence, enhanced motivation, and greater cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Table 5. Different Cultural Synergy

Students	Cultural self-awareness	Cross-Cultural Awareness
S1	Now I know	Yes
S2	Yes, I know	Yes, I am
S3	Yes	Yes
S4	Yes	Yes
S5	Yes	Yes

Source: worksheets data processing

Cultural synergy assumes that there are many valid ways of looking at the situation and many ways of interpreting goals. Table 5 shows that all students had the same answer in both the context of cultural self-awareness and cross-cultural awareness. The students had many valid ways of looking at the situation and many ways of interpreting goals. During entering and joining a new culture, cultural and cross-cultural awareness become necessary elements of acculturation and assimilation, because all the participants had the same experiences.

Starting by showing a photo, participants answered freely whether the students recognized the photo. Each answer does not determine the final result it just wants to know how far the students know the symbols around them during their stay there. The way the students answered freely regarding the photo shows that so far, the students are not used to being integrated with the local culture so some of them find it difficult to recognize the photo because the information the students provide does not fully support the writer's expectations. This also shows that the participants only associate with others who have the same culture even though one of them has a background that is

closely related to the local culture. However, this indicates that yes or no does not mean the students experienced the same thing while living and joining the local culture. When some of the brands see pictures from history books or from stories the students have heard, it does not mean that the students directly experienced it as felt by one of the participants who had gone into the field to see the objects depicted or simply took part in an invitation to a traditional ceremony.

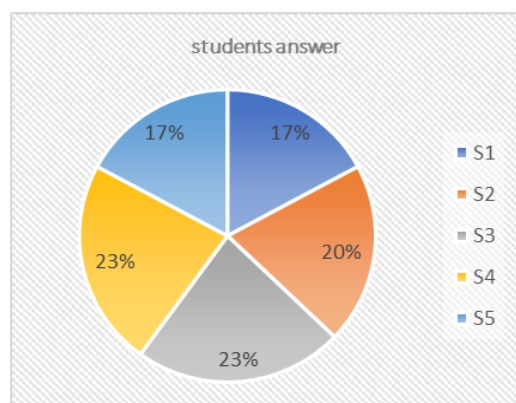


Figure 1. Pie chart of students' answers
Source: data calculation results

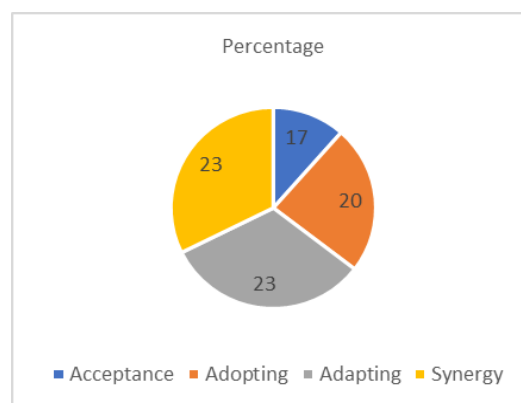


Figure 2. Pie chart percentage of the assimilation
Source: data calculation results

The pie chart shows the students' answers and percentage of each assimilation divided into four parts: acceptance 17%, adopting 20%, adapting 23% and synergy 23%. The students S1 almost do not recognize the available images, except by guessing one correctly, and then because the students get information from books, the internet, or from other people. This is different from the students S2, who have a background related to local culture so the students can easily recognize the pictures provided, unless the students do not know the alphabet at all. Meanwhile, students S3 are almost as safe as undergraduate students who are not familiar with the image, and the information the students get is from other people such as neighbors. Furthermore, the students S4 only recognize one of the available images, and then the information is obtained from other sources, not from their own experience. Finally, the students S5 only rely on their ability to guess images because the students don't get accurate information and have never even experienced it.

Discussion

Previous studies have shown that literacy practices among multicultural students are syncretic, formed through the integration of various languages, cultures, and social

experiences. Research by Volk (2013) revealed that the concept of syncretism is just one of many theoretical tools explored in the literature as researchers have worked to understand cross-cultural interactions. This finding is reinforced by Curdt-christiansen (2022), who demonstrated that syncretic literacy practices among multilingual children are strongly influenced by their social environment, particularly their family and cultural community, which serve as important mediators in the literacy learning process.

In the educational context, syncretic literacy practices are also evident through the translanguaging approach, which allows students to flexibly use multiple languages in their learning. A study by Wulandari et al. (2023) demonstrated that translanguaging can bridge the gap between home and school literacy and increase student participation in learning. Furthermore, research by Ren and Hu (2013) confirms that syncretism in literacy is a critical process that can create more inclusive learning spaces, where students are given the freedom to integrate their cultural experiences into their literacy practices.

Furthermore, a local culture-based literacy approach has also proven effective in improving the literacy skills of multicultural students. Research by Magfiroh et al. (2026) shows that the implementation of culturally responsive teaching can increase student engagement and understanding by integrating their cultural context into learning. Overall, these studies indicate that locally based syncretic literacy practices are a relevant and strategic approach in multicultural communities like North Sumatra, as they accommodate diversity while strengthening the literacy learning process.

As already started to research syncretic literacy by some previous authors, it is stated that this article has a different focus to reveal. It is proven that the syncretic literacy practices by the different cultural students have a potential contribution to the students' awareness improvement, particularly policies and linguistic understanding. Therefore, culture literacy is included in the list of main subjects in faculty of language and Arts curriculum. It allows one to deeply know and understand how the process of melting and mingling with different new cultures. The previous research focused on home literacy practices of teenage students. The study revealed that syncretic literacy practices hold significant potential for enhancing literacy education policies and curricula, particularly in supporting literacy development among linguistic minority students. It also highlights the ways in which students engage in creative and

transformative processes blending religious understanding with everyday experiences to construct and negotiate meaning.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The analysis presented in the previous section indicates that syncretic literacy practices among students from diverse cultural backgrounds contribute meaningfully to the development of critical awareness, particularly in relation to language use and sociocultural norms. However, the findings also reveal a significant gap in students' recognition and interpretation of local cultural symbols. Many participants demonstrated limited familiarity with these symbols, which affects their ability to engage critically with their surroundings. As a result, rather than actively negotiating meaning, students often adapt passively melting into the dominant environment without fully understanding the cultural and linguistic dynamics at play. Moreover, students who lack prior exposure to their own or others' cultural heritage are not necessarily able to acculturate or assimilate effectively. Instead, their integration tends to remain superficial and uncritical.

At the same time, the implementation of syncretic literacy practices offers substantial pedagogical potential. By encouraging students to draw on multiple cultural and linguistic resources, syncretic literacy fosters a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate and reconcile differences across cultural contexts. It enables students to move beyond passive adaptation toward more reflective and intentional engagement with diversity. From this perspective, syncretic literacy is not merely a blending process but a meaning-making practice that supports the development of interpretive flexibility.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that syncretic literacy expands students' capacity to generate multiple interpretations of cultural phenomena. This multiplicity of perspectives allows learners to reframe what initially appears unfamiliar, ambiguous, or even incomprehensible into something more accessible and meaningful. In this way, syncretic literacy contributes to more expressive and nuanced learning experiences, as students actively construct understanding rather than simply receiving it. Consequently,

these practices play a crucial role in fostering culturally responsive and critically aware learners within multicultural educational settings.

Suggestions

Despite offering important insights into locally based syncretic literacy practices among multicultural students in North Sumatra, this study has several limitations. The relatively small and context-specific sample limits the generalizability of the findings to broader multicultural settings, while the reliance on qualitative methods introduces potential subjectivity in interpretation. In addition, the study focuses primarily on students' experiences, with limited attention to institutional dimensions such as curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, which may also shape literacy practices. The cross-sectional nature of the research further constrains understanding of how syncretic literacy develops over time, particularly in relation to acculturation and identity formation. Based on these limitations, future research should involve more diverse and larger samples across different regions and educational levels, adopt mixed-methods approaches to enhance validity, and examine the role of teachers, curriculum, and institutional policies in supporting syncretic literacy. Moreover, longitudinal studies are recommended to better capture the dynamic development of students' cultural awareness, linguistic competence, and intercultural engagement within multicultural educational contexts.

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