

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH FINAL PROJECT: A CASE STUDY OF POPULAR CULTURE AS A RESEARCH OBJECT

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Abstract: *Choosing an object of the study can be a boomerang to some researchers, not to mention for the university students who have to conduct the final project research. This study aims to find out the experience encountered by English Education Department students in a particular institute when they choose popular culture as the object of the study. This is a case study research which applies interview as data collection and descriptive analysis in the analysis process. The result of the study embodies four spectrum that can define the experience of the students in conducting their final project research, namely motivation, research environment, research orientation, and self-efficacy. This research result shows that popular culture as an object of the study can make the research process more fun and give the students the right track to finish their research instead of some lacking in the reference resource and academic atmosphere provided and maintained by the institute.*

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INTRODUCTION [ALL CAPITAL, type in Bold, Cambria, in 11pt font size]

McDonalds, Starbucks, Avengers: Endgame, Seniorita, Mobile Legends, Zara, Vogue, and Ria Ricis' Youtube Channel are merely a few of popular culture forms (Strinati, 2004), those big brands are reminders that the popular culture is close to our life. A lot of people will feel isolated when they do not know what is hyping at a certain moment. For example, when a lot of people start talking about a certain film series and one do not know about it since he/she does not watch it, that person will feel secluded every time their friends or circle start to talk about that certain film series.

Storey argues that popular culture is something that arise from the emergence of industrialization and urbanization. Storey highlighted the term popular culture was used more often when British the Industrial Revolution happened. The Industrial revolution influenced the relationship between employee and employers. Whilst, the urbanization created separate housing for different social-class. Both of this condition interconnected to each other. The relationship of employees and employers was changing from mutual obligation to something more economical, called cash nexus (Storey, 2009). When something is measured by its economic value, then it will create distinction among its involved elements. This what induced the separate housing for different classes in the

society (Storey, 2009). This argument about popular culture manifest its meaning. Popular culture is a culture that is close to industrialization because it must be something manufactured in mass production and it is also mass consumed by the society to fulfill the economic demands. The mass consumption creates distinction between social class in the society because it will distinguish the product the society consumed by high culture for middle-upper class and popular culture for middle-lower class, or so-called common people.

It is said that popular culture is, now, become the main element in people's social life in almost every society. The form of popular culture has become inseparable from human's lives and social process additionally because of the development of the technology and communication. Since the invention of internet, the dissemination of popular culture has become unstoppable. The form of popular culture can, now, easily be access from a compact gadget such as smart phone. Therefore, popular culture infiltrates people's lives easily and also get more abundant in term of quantity (Clapton, 2015). However, people rarely put much consideration about how popular culture had influenced their lives. It gives a powerful impact to people's live either consciously or unconsciously. From the fashion they wear to the films they watch, all of them are determined by the popular culture circulating around them (Luke, 2017).

Nowadays, popular culture has a strong relation to people's literacy, especially young people's literacy. Therefore, understanding popular culture will help to understand the development of young people's literacy. This literacy is often connected to the knowledge of mainstream in certain period of time. People will be considered 'literate' if they know what is still hyping at the moment. Otherwise, they will be considered 'socially secluded' (Petrona, 2013).

Popular culture is the field that can be assessed by so many points of view, one of them is in the perception of educational field. Understanding popular culture give people the access to the other knowledge (Thompson, 2007). In the sense of education, the knowledge can be applied in the process of teaching and learning since the popular culture will make the process teaching and learning more fun. Even the education field cannot escape from the influence of popular culture, more importantly when it was said that the youth literacy has a strong connection to popular culture. In a research done by Petrona (2013) the exposure to popular culture will help the students to develop sustaining teaching practices which is essential to the students since they eventually will become teachers in the future.

Popular culture position in English Education is very central. In English Education, popular culture can be the source of learning and practicing the skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this case, American Pop culture is a very helpful resource for the process of acquiring and developing English because the public, students

in particular, are often exposed to forms of American popular culture, either through songs, films, or literature. In a survey that was conducted in the World Englishes Pronunciation class for 3rd semester English students at IAIN Pekalongan, some students answered that in learning and practicing English pronunciation, forms of American popular culture, in the form of songs, films, and books, were considered most effective. The students explained that learning and practicing pronunciation through American popular culture was fun and not boring. Therefore, because of this, the students feel more enthusiastic to continuously practice their English pronunciation. Not only in practicing pronunciation, American popular culture also provides a more enjoyable learning experience and vocabulary acquisition than other methods. Through films, songs, and fiction books, students are 'forced' to know new vocabularies in order to understand the plot of a film or fiction book or the meaning contained in a song. Students as audiences who enjoy the form of popular culture will indirectly learn new vocabulary through the media they see, read, and listen to in a fun way and with minimal compulsion. Through this description, it can be seen that popular culture is not only a source or medium for acquiring and learning English, but also a learning medium that can provide comfort and enjoyment in the process. Hence, students do not feel heavy when they have to learn English through the form of American popular culture. This statement is in accordance with what Clapton (2015), Tierney (2007), and Dougherty (2002) mentioned that the use of popular culture somehow excited the students about the course where the popular culture is used and also the content of popular culture that is presented to them. In the term of ELF teaching popular culture may be the fruitful source of learning since there are a lot of form of popular culture is presented in English. Furthermore, even there is so many popular culture products that is originated in the English speaking countries, such as films, music, books, and magazines. Therefore, such popular culture products will be a very helpful medium to learn and acquire English (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017).

The learning process of English is the capital for the most crucial period of a student's life which is known as final project research. Final project research is the manifestation of years of study. The knowledge that the students get from the education is poured in to the research with the topic they choose to do. The final project of the undergraduate students need to be paid attention since the final project can be considered as the peak of learning process in college or in university. The final project is expected as the manifestation of the knowledge that had been studied for at least 3 years in higher education level. For further academic context, the final project can be the root/ground of the next research graduate and post-graduate degree. Thus, academically, final project for undergraduate is one of the most important process in one's scholar life (Khair et al., 2010).

It is scientifically proven that popular culture is a fun medium in learning and acquiring English. However, the most essential phase in students' academic life, final project research, is still lacking in scholarly recognition. Moreover, the ones who decide to choose popular culture as the research object. This research tries to bridge the gap and find out what kind of experience encountered by the students who chose popular culture as their object for the final project research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Context of Popular Culture in Education

Learning and teaching a second language means that both the students and the teacher have to be open towards new experience of learning a culture since the language is also one of the form of culture. Learning is sometimes regarded as series of instruction from teacher to the students (Jamaluddin & Ghofur, 2020). There is also no difference when learning English whose main objective is developing the competencies in cross-cultural capability. Thus, learning and teaching English will make the students and teacher to acknowledge the culture contained in the language. One of them is popular culture (Sudiran et al., 2020). Moreover, Sudiran, Kurniawati, and Adityo (2020) explain that popular culture is way of thinking and acting, attitude, and behavior of people prevailed commonly in the society. On the other hand, Lee and Bai (2016) categorizing people's behavior towards popular culture into two. The formal one is when a person in a formal setting activities such as presenting on a meeting. Whilst the informal one is when a person involved in an informal setting of activities, such as doing their hobbies or in a vacation.

In the context of education popular culture can be used as teaching materials for EFL. Some steps are needed in developing popular culture as EFL teaching materials. The first one is analyzing and understanding the elements of popular culture that can be applied instructionally as teaching materials. Furthermore, the teachers must pay attention to the curriculum, the standard and basic competencies. The observation of this set is very essential because it is necessary to formulate the indicators and teaching objectives. After that the teachers need to implement several activities that can encourage students' interest in learning. The popular culture which is liked by a lot of people will promote learning experience that is innovative, creative, and enjoyable (Sudiran et al., 2020). Jeng explains that popular culture is a promising source for EFL. The form of popular culture in EFL teaching process is widely implemented, such as films, songs, and books (Wang, 2008). There are several research on how popular culture, proved by modern learning theory, can facilitate teaching and learning process of EFL.

The Context of Experience

Jantzen (2021) states that experience is obtained by sensing and feeling existed in the present time. Moreover, it does not only contain the sense and feeling of the present but experience also requiring the validity of the past events. On the other explanation, Jantzen also suggest that experience is formed by events occurred regularly on daily basis. Some events are easily remembered but the others may become any usual occurrence happen in humans' life. The easily remembered events may take forms as divorce, marriage, and giving birth. The importance of experience in humans' life relies on how physical and social aspects of the occurrence influence the action and the point of view of the person. On the other hand, the evocation of experience involves mood, goals, expectations, attitude, and capabilities of the person. Thus, the experience is a very subjective matter (Jantzen, 2021).

In the term of research preparedness, the experience will be broken down into four aspects, motivation, research environment, research orientation, and self-efficacy. Motivation as what Shaw, Holbrook, and Bourke (2011) say is that the perception of significance and the objective owned by the students in finishing the research successfully. It also can be seen on what kind or approach the students conduct to overcome any research hurdles and finish the research. Research environment, according to Lovitts (2005), is the condition where the students work on and the interaction happened within the condition. Moreover, research environment also involves the resource availability and the supervision of research advisor in conducting the research. The first group represents learning community and the later is seen as research support. Research orientation can be defined as the students' ability in acknowledging the highs and lows of the research process. The understanding towards the research process and the student's feeling to it is the most dominant part of this aspect (Shaw et al., 2011). The self-credence of the students in conducting the research. The skill of conducting the research is the main element in this aspect. Part of it is also handling the unexpected occurrence in the process of the research (Shaw et al., 2011).

METHOD

Qualitative approach can be described as a mode to acknowledge either social or human problem experienced by one or group of people. Applying qualitative approach for the research means that the data collection is in the participants' setting. The researchers analyze the data in inductive way which will result in a general themes. Moreover, the role of the researchers in this approach is more subjective and it is seen from the data analysis where the researchers interpret the data (Creswell, 2009). This research is conducted by a qualitative method and also take form in a case study research. Case study is one of

research varieties in qualitative method. Case studies can be defined when a researcher examine comprehensively and thoroughly either a program, event, activity, process, or, one or more individuals. Cases are those mentioned above which is attached to time and action. Thus, the researchers need to gather the data by conducting certain steps and procedures in accordance to the period of time (Creswell, 2009).

The data that is used in conducting this research is about 7 until 10 undergraduate students of English Language Education Study Program of particular institute who choose popular culture as their final project research object. The data collection is done by asking them to fill in the questionnaire through google form. The questionnaire contains of open-ended questions that makes the students possible to explain and describe their answers. In addition, some of the students are going to be invited to do face-to-face interview to more and thorough data. In doing this follow-up interview, the questions asked will be semi-structured questions. This type of questions makes the researchers possible to develop the questions as the research need. After the data is collected, the data analysis is done by describing and interpreting the data. This means that the researchers use their perspective in explaining and analysing the data. In the data analysis, the psychological framework of experience will be applied. Nevertheless, it will be limited on the discussion of motivation, research environment, self-efficacy, and research orientation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This result encompassed the outcome of the open-ended questions through google form questionnaire and additional personal interview for further and clearer answer.

Results

Through google form questionnaire, four students answered twelve open-ended questions. Their answers were registered in the tables as followed:

Table. 1

Q.1	Final Project Research Title
A	Introducing Vocabulary for Young Learner through Cartoon Film "eza dan adi" : Action Research
B	An Analysis of Positive Politeness in the Avengers: End Game Movies
C	Politeness Strategies in the Film Entitled "Freedom Writer" by Richard Lagravenesse
D	Students' Experience of Using Free Fire Game in Learning English : A Narrative Research

Table. 2

Q.2	The duration of doing the final project research up till now/until it is finished
A	9 months
B	5 months
C	9 months
D	8 months

Table. 3

Q.3	What do you know about popular culture?
A	I don't know
B	Never heard of it
C	Popular culture is a culture developed and well-known in the community.
D	Culture that has been influenced by globalization

Table. 4

Q.4	Why do you choose popular culture as your reasearch object for the final project?
A	Because I like cartoons
B	Because in my opinion, popular culture will be easier to analyze. There are also quite a number of resource available, making the research process easier.
C	Want to focus more on conducting library research.
D	Because it is interesting and a lot of people like it.

Table. 5

Q.5	How is the availability of the references you need on campus?
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A	It is enough
B	It is inadequate, so I decide to use resources taken from the internet.
C	I do not use the references provided by campus, such as books in the library. I use journal references on the internet.
D	The amount is still few.

Table. 6

Q.6	How is your thesis advisor's rule in doing this whol research process?
A	My thesis advisor is very patient in directing my research
B	So helpful
C	Very helpful in directing and correcting my final project.
D	In addition to guiding well, he also always gives advice and motivation.

Table. 7

Q.7	How do you feel during the process of conducting your final project research?
A	This final project is hard. Sometimes I want to give up on it, but I cannot.
B	Quite happy because I think it is easier to get the data by watching movies.
C	Sometimes it is so stressful because the research need to be analysed deeply.
D	Sometimes I'm so excited and motivated, but when I get in trouble it can bring me down.

Table. 8

Q.8	What are the process that you have to do in conducting your final project research?
A	It's very hard to gather the interviewee for getting the information
B	Researching the effect of language change towards someone. The factors influencing it, and the type of change that is used.

C So hard

D After I had found my passion, I adjusted to the availability of the participants. Then, I started to design the title of my research and do the research guidance with my thesis advisor.

Table. 9

Q.9 Which part of this process that feels the hardest for you?

A Data collection

B Categorizing the type of language change used by the characters

C Analyzing the data and also the observation because I need to watch the movie over and over.

D Writing the research result. It is very hard for me to pour my thought to form a written content.

Table. 10

Q.10 Which part of this process that feels the most fun for you?

A Introducing English vocabulary to the children through watching cartoon cartoons

B Observing and watching the movie

C Watching movies to be analysed

D Observing the participants, I like children particularly

Table. 11

Q.11 How do you think about your preparedness before and during conducting this research?

A Just so-so

B The research preparedness is increasing. I mean

C Before conducting this research I personally think that it is hard because I feel my

capability I still lacking. However, when I go to the researching process I realize that this whole three and a half year studying was to prepare me to do the final project research. Now that I realize it, I feel easier in understanding the data I need to finish my final project.

- D** Actually either mental or references preparedness for conducting this research is still lacking because when I go through the process I realize that there are so many things that I need to synchronize and learn.
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Table. 12

Q.12 **How is your capability in executing your final project research plan?**

A I am sure that I can finish it

B By this far, I think it is still under control. It is because I do it neither in a slow mode nor in a rush mode so that it will turn out with a best result.

C I can analyze well

D Not too bad.

For further data that is needed for the research the four students were invited for in-depth interview. From the in-depth interview it was found that all of the students feel happy doing the research since they choose a fun object to be studied. As what Student A confirmed that *“Doing the research is so much fun although I understand that not all parts are fun. However, I like watching cartoons and I have to watch cartoons to accomplish my final project. Thus, at least the activity of watching cartoons can give me more courage in doing my research quickly (personal communication, February 10, 2022).”* Student A understands that there are steps that fun and there are steps that are difficult. On the other hand, she understands fully what her passion are and choose cartoons as the research object which hopefully will give her more courage in finishing the final project. Meanwhile, Student B elaborate and connect the reason of choosing popular culture as the object of her research and the data collection process. She mentions that *“By choosing film as my object study, basically I do the library research instead of field research. I need to watch the film over and over in the term of observing my variable to answer the research questions. The repeated action of watching the movie may become such a tiring process, but I think I can handle that because I like watching movies. Therefore, I hope those repeated action will not become a pressure to me (personal communication, February 10, 2022).”* The

answer showed the courage and motivation to finish the research comes from one of the fun process that Student B should do.

However, when the questions about research environment were asked, the students mostly complaining about the lacking of source provided by the campus. It is conveyed by Student D that *“The resources on my research topic provided by the campus library is still lacking. I need to go through the internet to get the resource”* (personal communication, February 10, 2022). A quite same answer was also revealed by Students C. She stated that *“I do not use any source in my campus library. The sources I needed are not provided by the campus library, so I just use the internet to search the resource I needed”* (personal communication, February 10, 2022). The students was in unison when they were asked about the academic atmosphere in the period of conducting their research. Student B stated that *“I never ask or discuss anything about my research to my friend. I think it is because we have never meet anymore, you know, we don’t have any class in our senior year, we just do our research, so the chance to meet my friends and have an academic discussion is just impossible”* (personal communication, February 10, 2022). Whilst Student C and D expose slightly different answer. Student C said that *“I asked my friend about the step or the methods on doing research but we never go further academically”* (personal communication, February 10, 2022). Moreover, Student D added that *“I asked my friend about how to write literature review, my friend give me the direction on how to do it. And that’s all. I never discuss about the theory or anything academic with my friends. It (the academic discussion) is always with the thesis advisor”* (personal communication, February 10, 2022). From the interview, it is revealed that the students rarely or never do the academic discussion with their friends. They always ask or discuss about their final project with their thesis advisor.

In addition, to acknowledge the students’ preparedness towards the research they conducted, there are further question about self-efficacy asked to them. Student C responded to this question by stating *“I understand that we can plan the research whatever we want. But there must be things that go out of direction. For my case, it is the result that did not align with what I expected. It upset me, a lot. But, I think as a researcher I need to be objective in conducting the research. I hope for the factors how the game will affect the vocabulary, but instead the game is affecting the students’ attitude in using language variations. So, I think I will just put both of them in my research”* (personal communication, February 10, 2022).

Discussion

Descriptive analysis conducted on the results of the interview provided four spectrums of answers that embodied the experiences of students who were working on

their thesis, namely motivation, research environment, research orientation, and self-efficacy.

Motivation

As has been stated by Shaw, Halbrook, and Bourke (2011) that the motivation here is related to the importance of the final project research and the determination shown by students to complete this research. In this element there are two findings. The first is that all participants stated that they chose the form of popular culture because they were happy with the activities that would and should be done related to popular culture, which most of the participants in these cases revealed, watching movies. Even though the participants feel foreign to the term popular culture or do not even know the nature of popular culture, but as an audience they are able to know that several forms of popular culture can provide entertainment, in this study are movies and games. They decided to choose popular culture as the object of research so that they feel enjoy in the process. This is because they hope that the difficult research process will be diverted by the fun process of collecting data, such as watching movies and playing games.

However, the choice of popular culture does not mean that they are free from problems when doing their final research. This obstacle will lead to the second finding, namely the support of the people around the participants. In the process, even though the participants were helped by the chosen popular culture so as to provide a more pleasant data collection process, boredom still hit. Especially when they meet a dead end to in writing the content they have to write in their thesis. However, all participants revealed that their parents and family who kept asking about the progress of their final project research as well as watching some friends who had finished their final project made the participants feel motivated to finish their final research immediately.

Research Environment

In the aspect of the research environment, there are several findings related to the resources provided by the campus, thesis advisor, and the academic atmosphere in the process of conducting the final project research. Regarding resources, all participants said that they used research sources from the internet because they could not find the sources, they needed related to popular culture in the campus library. The campus has not provided varied sources of study so it has not been able to cover students who undergo researches in non-religious fields.

On the other hand, the role of the thesis advisor is very central, because all participants feel helped by the direction and guidance of their thesis advisor. In the mentoring process, participants often discuss with their supervisors to find out whether the content they put in their thesis is appropriate or not.

However, when talking about the academic atmosphere, the participants stated that the academic atmosphere on campus did not have much of a hand in the process of conducting their final project research. This is related to the lack of or almost no discussion that should be carried out among students. Of the four participants, two of them stated that the absence of the discussion was mostly due to the pandemic so they did not have the opportunity to meet their friends, let alone discuss about the final project research. Even if the discussion did occur, it would be a light discussion about the steps to be taken, not a discussion about theory or more in-depth content. One of the participants revealed that she once asked a friend who had already done the work before her. She inquired about the next steps to be taken. After one question, she never asked her friend again. This participant also revealed that academic discussions are often conducted with his thesis advisor only because she feels that its validity is more secure.

Research Orientation

In the aspect of research orientation, students were again confused by how to link the object of their study, namely popular culture, to English education. This affects the writing of their thesis content. They know popular culture through everyday life. However, academically they have never been introduced to popular culture. Thus, they have limited knowledge about popular culture which they have to study.

After carrying out the mentoring process several times with their advisor, they realized that the popular culture they used was only as a source of data. Therefore, that popular culture in their research will be used in the data collection process. In the process of collecting this data, the participants still felt bored with the repetitive activities. As in the participants who use the film as an object of study. They have to watch the film over and over again to obtain the data that must be collected. At some point they feel bored, but this comes back to the motivation they have especially those related to the people closest to them. So that they have the power to complete their final research project.

Self-Efficacy

In this section, the results of the interviews show that at the beginning of writing their research, they felt inadequate with their ability to execute this research. Nevertheless, after they did the first mentoring, they started to be able to formulate what they would write in their research proposal. As time goes by, and they carry out the next stages of the research process they realize that they are actually ready to execute this research because for three and a half years they have attended various classes to prepare them for the research process.

At the beginning of the work they have doubts about themselves and after some time they become more confident in their ability to execute research because they believe

the knowledge, they have from three and a half years of studying in classes will be a solid foundation for them.

CONCLUSION

The final project research using popular culture as the object of study has indicated several results. The experience of the participants while conducting the final project using popular culture as the object of their study proves that popular culture helps the participants go through the difficult process of conducting the final project research, especially in the data collection process. Collecting data becomes more fun because the participants carry out activities related to entertainment. In addition, because these participants were students of English education, their limited knowledge of popular culture had created confusion in relating popular culture to education. However, in the end, it was understood that popular culture was used in the data collection process. At first, the participants had doubts about their abilities to carry out their final research project, but they realized that with the knowledge they had through three and a half years of studying on campus and the guidance of their thesis advisor, they had confidence to complete the final project research. On the other hand, the campus still has shortcomings in the aspect of the research environment. The lack of reference sources provided by the campus and the lack of an academic atmosphere in the research process are 2 problems that need to be considered by the campus academic community so that the acceleration of the student final project research process can be carried out.

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