

12-2019

## “If We Don’t Include Literature, Where Do We Teach Our Students From?” An Effort to Introduce Children’s Literature to Indonesian Preservice Teachers

Tati L Durriyah  
*Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Jakarta*, [tatiwardi@gmail.com](mailto:tatiwardi@gmail.com)

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### Recommended Citation

Durriyah, T. (2019). “If We Don’t Include Literature, Where Do We Teach Our Students From?” An Effort to Introduce Children’s Literature to Indonesian Preservice Teachers. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 58 (3). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol58/iss3/4](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol58/iss3/4)

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## "If We Don't Include Literature, Where Do We Teach Our Students From?" An Effort to Introduce Children's Literature to Indonesian Preservice Teachers

Tati Lathipatud Durriyah

*Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif*

Hidayatullah, Jakarta

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### Abstract

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Indonesia's new literacy initiative, Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (GLS), focuses on developing literacy-rich school environments through a sequence of book engagements. As the locus of control in daily literacy activities (Lehman, 2007), teachers in Indonesia assume much of the responsibility for student literacy learning. Despite this expectation, Indonesian teachers receive minimal preparation in facilitating literacy instruction using literature; for example, courses that introduce student teachers to children's literature are not commonly offered in Indonesian teacher education. This study aims to fill in the dearth of data regarding efforts to introduce Indonesian preservice teachers to literature for children and the pedagogy of literature in an introductory children's literature class. One semester's data shows the promising development of preservice teachers' perceptions of reading literature and literature's role in teaching; teachers reflect upon being a reader, cultivate an understanding of literature, and envision teaching with literature. Findings also reveal what is yet missing from the GLS literacy initiative, most notably the need for literacy teachers who are knowledgeable about literature and who are able to teach with literature.

**Keywords:** *children's literature, preservice teachers, gerakan literasi sekolah, teacher education*

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In Indonesia, an interest in the inclusion of children's literature and books other than textbooks in literacy instruction grew with the introduction of a literacy initiative called Gerakan Literasi Sekolah, a 2016 school-based literacy movement emphasizing an engagement with books within Indonesian K–12 schools. Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (hereafter called the GLS literacy initiative) aimed to provide students with more opportunities for book engagements in a literacy-rich school environment. According to the GLS literacy initiative manual, the program has three main components of literature-based literacy activities to promote a successful school-based literacy movement. First, students spend 15 minutes a day independently reading books other than their textbooks. Second,

students actively engage in a nontextbook reading activity. Third, students learn subject area content with authentic book sources that include a variety of genres and relevant themes (Indonesian Ministry of Education, 2016). These activities are implemented together to help students become structurally immersed in literacy activities revolving around literature. Students are introduced to authentic books, become engaged with the stories, and are then able to make connections across the curriculum through books.

This initiative is a departure from Indonesia's earlier literacy program, which focused on basic illiteracy (reading and writing) eradication (Antoro, 2017; Indonesian Ministry of Education, 2006). To my knowledge, this earlier program centered on textbooks containing short stories, word study, spelling, and worksheets (an approach that was perhaps similar to phonics literacy instructions as practiced in many classrooms in North America). The Indonesian Ministry of Education highlighted some of the factors that precipitated the change from an illiteracy eradication program to a book engagement literacy initiative. For one, members were disheartened by surveys that revealed a low reading culture among Indonesians and by results of the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which consistently put Indonesia's literacy level among the survey's bottom rank of 72 countries (Antoro, 2017).

According to the PISA report, Indonesian students are low in ability to reflect and evaluate information presented to them. Because of these findings, the Indonesian government was drawn to a literacy program that promised to tackle these issues of low critical reading and reading culture (Antoro, 2017). The implementation of the GLS was intended to foster reading engagement among students so that they would be motivated to read and to enjoy reading frequently and widely, which I understand is similar to reading engagement as defined by PISA (see Ho & Lau, 2018). The GLS literacy manual described fostering engagement with any books other than textbooks written with school age consideration whose themes centered on good values (Indonesian and universal values) and contained wide knowledge (Indonesian Ministry of Education, 2016). My definition of a nontextbook refers to an authentic book, i.e., picturebooks or chapter books written for public audiences beyond schools (Ciecierski, & Bintz, 2015)—similar to a definition of trade books used in North America.

Despite this national GLS literacy initiative in promoting literacy-rich school environments, however, a systematic effort to educate teachers about book knowledge (Sharp, Diego-Medrano, & Coneway, 2018) is conspicuously minimal. It appears the success of the GLS literacy initiative depends only on in-service teacher participation in short-term professional development programs in the form of seminars and workshops related to the school-based literacy movement. Aside from being brief, the workshops focus mostly on providing teachers with materials related to procedures for implementing the GLS literacy initiative. In this case, teachers learn how to manage a daily 15-minute independent reading session and learn how books should be more visible in the school environment. GLS workshop contents appear to focus more on getting teachers to know about the procedures and less on developing teachers' understanding about literature. For example, teachers learn how to evaluate books for quality and how to help students choose one for independent reading. I argue that relying on this kind of professional development to make the GLS literacy initiative successfully take root in Indonesian schools is insufficient.

A glimpse of teaching in Indonesia particularly related to literature is revealed through my inquiry to preservice teachers. I typically begin courses that I teach by surveying their experiences with books in their own primary and secondary educations.

Many students admitted that they did not like reading for pleasure, and those who liked reading could not recall the title of a book they had once read, nor could they name school or teacher influence on their reading habits and preferences. My student teachers claimed that they did not have any book engagement experiences in classroom activities other than textbooks (even in an Indonesian language class mostly focused on learning facts about the language and structure). Most teachers relied heavily on textbooks as the main source of teaching. When I asked the preservice teachers what kinds of books they would read voluntarily for pleasure and who would influence their reading selection, they named some popular book titles and described peers and random picks as their main influences in selecting those books.

More sustained and systematic teaching efforts within Indonesian teacher education are rarely available. Indonesian student teachers may receive a few courses on literature-based literacy instruction that fosters an engagement with literature. Take my story as an example: I earned a bachelor's degree in education at a government-funded university where I currently serve as a faculty member. Back then, no option to take courses such as children's literature was available. To this day, such courses are not commonly offered to student teachers. As a result, Indonesian teacher educators who happened to have relevant academic backgrounds might modify existing courses to include discussions about children's literature. In my case, I modified an existing general introduction to literature course syllabus to focus on introducing preservice teachers to literature for children, especially its role in education and the pedagogy that fosters literacy development.

Documented studies on the efforts of teaching children's literature in teacher education in Indonesia are difficult to find. To my knowledge, one study that is close to such a description was a dissertation by Surya Sili in 1998 when eradication of basic illiteracy was still the goal for Indonesia's literacy education (Indonesian Ministry of Education, 2006). Sili conducted exploratory research on the implementation of literature-based instruction with a group of Indonesian in-service elementary teachers as part of an extended teacher professional development program. She taught these teachers to deliver language arts instruction based on children's literature. Sili observed that the teachers gradually gained confidence with literature-based instruction, especially after observing their own students' positive attitudes toward books and increased literacy skills (reading and writing). However, Sili was concerned with the sustainability of the effects of professional development such as this because many Indonesian in-service teacher seminars and workshops typically lasted for a short time and did not provide support going forward. Additionally, Sili was aware then that the literature-based literacy program she introduced to the teachers was not common educational practice in Indonesia, nor was the practice part of teacher preparation programs.

Even in today's era of the GLS literacy initiative emphasizing literature-based literacy instruction, the urgent need for including children's literature in teacher preparation programs remains unfulfilled. This inattention to preparing future Indonesian teachers with knowledge about children's literature means Indonesian teachers will likely be unable to fulfill their strategic role in nurturing students' engagement with literature and reading habits.

This present study expressly acknowledges the concern over a near-absence of a systematic effort to introduce literature into the program content of teacher preparation programs in Indonesia. Thus, this study aims to provide data on efforts to teach children's literature in teacher education program in Indonesia. Specifically, it raises the following

questions: How do Indonesian preservice teachers respond to an introduction to children's literature course? How do their responses change over time during their participation in children's literature course?

### **Research on Learning from and Teaching with Children's Literature**

Many researchers have passionately made a case for teaching with children's literature in classroom literacy activities (Sloan, 2003; Lehman, 2007; see Lehman, 2009 on teaching literacy in a literary way). Research has shown that studying children's literature contributes to the development of people's minds (Rosenblatt, 1995) and critical thinking skills (Sloan, 2003). Children's literature also plays an important role in providing for the basic human need for stories and for connecting with others through stories (Dyson & Genishi, 1994). Children's literature as it is represented in the majority of picturebooks also offers readers an artistic experience through visual art. Cotton (2000) asserts that the visual narratives and succinct texts provided in picturebooks provide opportunities for classroom use that crosses cultural and linguistic barriers, which is of particular relevance in a context where readers are not native speakers of the book's language.

Theories of reading response, most prominently Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional reading theory, have anchored a general understanding about the equal partnership between readers and text. Readers are actively making meaning when they read. Inherent in this understanding is a belief that the reading context, like a reader's experience, serves as an important element in reading. Research has identified teachers as a locus of control in daily literacy activities (Lehman, 2007). They serve as part of an important context (Marshall, 2000; Roser, Martinez, & Wood, 2011) in which students engage in and respond to books by way of teachers' instructional moves and approaches (Roser, Martinez, & Wood, 2011). Inquiry into student teacher responses in teacher education reveals the critical need for providing literature courses for student teachers. For instance, student teachers who study courses related to children's literature gain a knowledge of literature and demonstrate critical reading attitude (Floden & Meniketti, 2005). Consequently, such courses could shape their teaching practices.

Many educators and researchers have addressed ways to teach with children's literature (e.g., Kiefer & Huck, 2010; Sloan, 2003; Lehman, 2007). For example, Lehman's (2007) *Children's Literature and Learning: Literary Study Across the Curriculum* documents extensive studies of children's literature use in classroom instruction. In helping teachers to decide what strategies to include in order to have successful literature-based literacy learning, Lehman offers a learning sequence in which students would first together experience *reading and interacting with literature* through activities that focus on an individual aspect of literature learning such as reading aloud. The sequence following, *sharing individual responses to literature with other readers*, includes activities that move students from an individual nature of literature learning to a more shared-response experience. Lehman also details a range of instructional methods for literary teaching that invite students into meaningful classroom activities within each learning sequence. In the first sequence, for example, students are given book selections and time to read independently, enabling their growth as readers by providing many opportunities to read and interact with literature. The next sequence includes activities that promote literature response-sharing and expose students to multiple perspectives different from their own. To improve the shared experience, Lehman (2007) recommends that teachers create a range of activities such as reading aloud, book discussions, and small-group activities. Children's literature instructional strategies such as Lehman's helped guide me in the

design of literacy activities and strategies to teach in my own course. Additionally, those instructional strategies especially helped me to ensure that my preservice teachers had a chance to select books and read for pleasure (e.g., through a reading log activity) and to engage in many shared literature activities including read-alouds and group assignments.

### Study Context and Participants

The aim of this study is to provide a description of Indonesian preservice teachers' responses to an introduction to children's literature course. The study was conducted with student teachers in an English education department at a state-affiliated Islamic university in Jakarta. I followed Koerber and McMichael's (2008) techniques of convenience and purposeful samplings, and I conducted my research in a class of preservice teachers from the same cohort. Further, I established some criteria for participant recruitment that fit my research purpose. Because my research entailed engaging with literature written mainly in English, participants had to have a certain level of English proficiency. Fortunately, the preservice teachers recruited for this study had already passed an English proficiency test administered by the program. The research participants were juniors in the Department of English Education, and all had agreed to be part of the observational component of the study. For the purpose of refining the focus and providing rich data description, I decided to narrow the range of attention to several student teachers. I asked the group if any students were willing to become focal participants, and ten preservice teachers—six females and four males—volunteered. After each session, data from these ten preservice teachers was immediately sorted to become data sources for the study. In addition, these focal point preservice teachers agreed to meet occasionally for an extra hour in addition to the course session. The purpose was to give them additional opportunities to discuss books they read for independent reading (reading log). The extra meetings were not designed to have a direct contribution to the data sources.

### The Course

The course aimed to provide a context in which Indonesian preservice teachers learned about children's literature and pedagogies—it was not aimed at specifically addressing what was lacking in the GLS literacy initiative in terms of teacher professional development. The course was modeled after an introductory children's literature syllabus from Children's Literature Assembly ([www.childrensliteratureassembly.org](http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org)), a professional community under the auspices of the National Council of Teachers of English. Specifically, I structured the course so that it could achieve two goals: to introduce Indonesian preservice teachers to an understanding about why children's literature matters, and to introduce the preservice teachers to the many ways in which children's literature can be taught in classrooms (children's literature pedagogy). Most of the activities focused on exposing the preservice teachers to children's literature through classroom instructions and activities such as read-aloud modelling, independent reading, and bookmaking. A few other activities such as creating an instructional unit were designed to explicitly prepare the preservice teachers to become children's literature teachers. The course activities and instructions were also structured to provide a balance between activities that were independent (journals, independent reading), small group (group discussions, presentations, bookmaking, and teaching unit projects), and whole class (reading aloud) in hopes that the preservice teachers would benefit from the varied formats. I selected scholarly books and professional readings for the course material that could provide preservice teachers some basic understanding and practical knowledge about children's literature and the instructions. The course's required texts included Kiefer's (2010) *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature* and Sloan's (2003)

*The Child as Critic: Developing Literacy Through Literature.*

**Modeling read-alouds.** I blocked 20–25 minutes of the total 100-minute class meeting time for reading picturebooks aloud. The read-aloud was framed as the storytelling/sharing time where I read the preservice teachers a story from an author/storyteller. The preservice teachers were encouraged to verbally respond during read-alouds.

**Small group discussion.** The preservice teachers engaged in small group discussion about the stories and in tasks related to the topics presented, and I provided them with prompts to guide their discussions. For instance, when discussing one course topic on the importance of literature (including picturebooks), the preservice teachers were to discuss books that they had brought to class. I posted prompts such as *Talk about the children's literature you have brought in your group* and *If any, what do the images and text tell you about the story?* The preservice teachers felt comfortable in small groups; many of them actively participated in small-group discussions.

**Independent reading log.** The preservice teachers had to log at least 10–15 minutes a day outside of class time reading books of their own choosing. The log encouraged them to read on a regular basis and to expand their book selections to various genres. Due to time constraints, I was only able to check briefly on the preservice teachers' reading log, and they only had a few chances to share their independent logs during the class meetings.

**Lectures and group presentation on teaching topics.** I delivered lectures on theories, research, and teaching practices relevant to the topic discussions. I shared this responsibility with the preservice teachers, and after the first several weeks they worked in groups to present assigned teaching topics.

**Bookmaking.** For the midterm project, the preservice teachers in groups of three teamed up to create a book consisting of words and pictures. Their task was to tell stories about growing up and then to report on a couple of their favorite books from their independent reading log activity.

**Literature-based teaching unit.** For the final assignment, the preservice teachers collaborated to design a literature-based teaching unit. As part of this unit, they had to provide a teaching framework and literature-centered activities.

**Weekly journal.** The purpose of the weekly journal was to give each preservice teacher an opportunity to reflect on literary and learning experiences during each meeting. Knowing that writing a reflective journal was a new experience for most preservice teachers, I provided clear instructions and samples of reflective journals. The goal was to find answers similar to those found in Holt-Reynolds and McDiarmid's (1994) classic study that asked how preservice teachers think about literature and the teaching of literature. In this research, I wondered how preservice teachers develop their sense of what it means to understand literature and what it means for them to understand teaching with literature. I provided a variety of journal prompts, such as *What did you like about the class today?* and *What have you learned from today's class?* Many preservice teachers suggested that writing a weekly journal was a profound learning experience, as it enabled them to reflect on earlier learning that otherwise might have been forgotten.

### **Data Sources and Analysis**

Two primary data sources for this study were the focal point preservice teachers' reflective journals and the videotaped course activities (all of the course activities above). An assistant was hired to film all course sessions while I was teaching. After each session,

preservice teachers were asked to write a reflection about class activities related to children's literature. I also reviewed the taped sessions for segments and incidents that enhanced data from reflective journals. I analyzed data during and at the conclusion of the course. The data analysis procedures were conducted in three stages: the first occurred in the preliminary coding where data were coded when collected; the second involved the monthly analytical memos where I created relationships by converting the preliminary coding into a couple of sentences summarizing the findings from data collected each session. I looked for common themes and put them together into narrated sentences using the students' own words. As I thought about this activity, I referred to my research question that was centered on preservice teachers' responses to the course instruction, including how those responses change over time.

The third stage entailed the analysis conducted after the course ended in which all data were (re) coded and categorized. While my analysis still focused on the data that supported the findings on literature reading and teaching, in this stage I also tried to explicate a range of themes included in the findings by returning to the analytical memos and looking for some of the major themes discussed. For example, when the focal point preservice teachers discussed making sense of literature, I looked for a range of references to this development of understanding, including perceptions on literature, visual literacy in picturebooks, and literature and music.

## Findings

In this section, I aimed to show the findings from ten focal point preservice teachers who participated in an introductory course of children's literature. These focal point participants are identified largely as a group but also sometimes referred to as "they" to suggest representation of a collective voice in order to share overall trends and tendencies. Individual voices through the use of quotes are also included (see Table 1).

Table 1

### *Findings and Subthemes*

Being a Reader	Developing an Understanding about Literature	Teaching with Literature
Reading Purposes and Preferences	Perceptions on Literature	Literature for Learning
Critical Reading	Visual Literacy in Picturebooks	Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Using Literature
	Literature and Music	Becoming Teachers of Literature

### **Being A Reader**

The theme of Being a Reader encompasses all responses that referred to the preservice teachers' references to reading for pleasure outside of class and to the growing state of becoming a critical reader.

**Reading purposes and preferences.** This study uncovered a range of preservice teachers' reading purposes and preferences as expressed during their participation in the study. Personal reading provided them with a form of entertainment, a way to explore lives different from theirs, a form of inspiration, and a means of learning. Many preservice

teachers were entertained when reading. They typically had entertaining experiences when reading adventurous fantasy stories that allowed them to enter into a story and to act as if they were one of the characters. They could imitate Harry Potter's acts of waving a wand, flying a broomstick, and talking to fire, or they could mimic a witch in a fairy tale by replaying the story dialogue. When reading a fantasy story, they also learned some new and uncommon words. One preservice teacher learned to make sense of the word "alibi" when reading a Japanese graphic novel whose detective story inspired her to want to become a detective. Reading was also a means of entering other people's lives. One preservice teacher explained that *When reading stories, readers could feel the stories like what an author would feel; readers get involved inside the story*. Reading stories seemed to enable the preservice teachers to experience the lives of others that were different from their own.

Overall, despite a range of purposes and preferences for reading, the preservice teachers said that they would read voluntarily any books whose stories appealed to them. Preservice teachers' reading purposes and preferences noticeably expanded over the semester. Many preservice teachers said that they were fascinated with picturebooks; they said they really enjoyed picturebook art and regularly visited local used bookstores to increase their picturebook collections. They also expressed that they were increasingly open to many more types of books in their personal reading. One preservice teacher said that she became a devoted fan of horror author Stephen King after reading one of his books for a reading log assignment. Others began to challenge themselves to read books with unusual cultural themes, such as same-sex relationships, and writing styles, such as science fiction.

**Critical reading.** The subtheme term critical reading refers to a state in which readers grow to become critics of literature—a process that requires readers to experience and study literature in a systematic way involving responding and sharing from multiple perspectives (Sloan, 2003). A discussion of how to be an active and critical reader appeared in many preservice teachers' responses. Early in the semester, they began to note that they had to be active readers and critical thinkers when discussing and "responding to the story." For example, in picturebook read-alouds, they noticed that they had to pay attention to pictures and make predictions before the story was read aloud: *Sometimes my prediction was true but sometimes it was wrong*. They felt that such critical reading was especially noticeable when they shared and discussed stories in small groups; they had to listen to what others said and offer different interpretations. They attributed such critical reading to helping them understand and to make sense of stories. As one preservice teacher explained, *"I read it, analyzed and discussed it; therefore, I began to understand."*

A discussion of picturebook reading as a way of promoting critical thinking also appeared in the preservice teachers' responses. They suggested that working with picturebooks could facilitate critical thinking. They noted that discussing images and text could "stimulate their thinking" and that children who read picturebooks would "grow up with a developed sense of critical thinking." One preservice teacher commented on the role of pictures for young children who cannot read: *Pictures are very important for them, so when reading picturebooks, they will develop their critical thinking*.

Later in the semester, the preservice teachers' discussion of critical reading as a way of analyzing text was even more noticeable. One preservice teacher described her growing analytical reading abilities:

[As readers], we never realized before about points-of-view in picturebooks. If the picture is viewed from afar, it suggests the general

overview of a story, but if the picture [is] viewed closer and is getting a close up, it indicates that a specific story object/character is being told.

They seemed appreciative of this analytical ability. As one preservice teacher confessed in her reflection: “*I like to analyze a lot. We learned to pay attention to the details of pictures, such as shapes, colors, and even the smallest things.*”

The preservice teachers’ critical reading ability also seemed to affect their critical thinking. For instance, they realized that they did not have to agree with everything that an author wrote. At the end of the semester, many preservice teachers said that they now realized that critical thinking was indeed very important. One preservice teacher confessed that now he was in the habit of thinking more critically. He now thought critically about any information that he read. He had also grown more observant about the environment around him. Many preservice teachers noted that they learned about critical thinking after taking this class.

### **Developing an Understanding about Literature**

**Perceptions on literature.** Discussions of literature began early in the semester when preservice teachers appeared to be trying to make sense of literature and its importance. Some struggled to “understand about literature.” Others offered their working understanding about literature and why it mattered. They noted that literature offered them an aesthetic experience. One preservice teacher said the following:

Literature is written aesthetically like a novel, story, or poems. We do not care about true and false, nor believable or not. I use my imagination and my emotion when I read the story. Literature brings my mind out of a box. It improves my creativity.

This assertion echoes earlier preservice teachers’ statements that their purposes for reading were predominantly aesthetic in nature; they associated their personal reading with entertainment, life experiences, inspiration, motivation, and learning. Later in the semester, preservice teachers suggested that they also felt like they learned more from reading literature than from reading other texts, such as textbooks. More specifically, they felt reading stories was more meaningful than reading textbooks. One preservice teacher noted that reading literature had helped her make sense of theories about reading that she had learned in the past. In terms of their perceptions of literature, they seemed to revise their understanding about what was considered literature. They used to think that the only literature was classic literature (e.g., Shakespeare), or some canonical literature learned in Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language). Now their understanding of literature was more inclusive, and they admitted that it made sense to them that a picturebook was also part of literature—something that was seemingly hard to comprehend in the beginning.

**Visual literacy in picturebooks.** The preservice teachers credited literature, particularly picturebooks, with helping them read more critically, particularly in terms of the contribution of images in a picturebook. They referred to the need for an equal contribution between text and pictures in picturebooks. (Picturebooks used in the course mostly contained text and images together; therefore, students had little awareness about wordless picturebooks). They also began to acquire an understanding about picturebooks as literature and art objects. One preservice noted, “In order to make a beautiful story, we need not only to have an ability to write a story but also the ability to draw pictures so that we can deliver the story in an artistic way.”

This increased understanding about the picturebook was even more noticeable

later in the semester. In reading picturebooks, the preservice teachers had become aware that pictures are related to the story's text; they have to focus on the pictures because every picture has value; and words cannot stand alone without pictures, and pictures cannot stand alone without words. They are interdependent. A discussion regarding the visual literacy of picturebooks occurred later in the semester. Having learned the art of picturebooks (such as the art elements and codes), they seemed to appreciate their increased ability to enjoy picturebook visual art. One preservice teacher noted the following:

This is the first time I learned about accessing visual narratives. To me, learning narratives will be more interesting if there is visualization. It also can attract readers to read the narratives. Moreover, I can learn about art from picturebooks. For example, I learned about the technique of pictures zooming in and zooming out where each can offer different meanings. I also learned about signs and symbols in picturebooks. For example, a dove [in *The Librarian of Basra*] is a symbol of peace. Wowww...that's very interesting!

This comment about to *The Librarian of Basra* referred to one of the book's last pages, on which there was a close-up image of the story's character appearing content while looking up at the sky. Next to that image was another of a little dove hovering above. This particular image triggered some discussions among the preservice teachers, especially a discussion about the meaning of a dove symbol in the story.

Nearing the conclusion of the semester, the discussion about picturebook visualization reappeared. Reading picturebooks was deemed supportive of visual literacy. One preservice teacher elaborated ways in which picturebooks could develop visual literacy, and she contrasted the experience with watching movies:

Talking about the benefits of picture book, there are a lot of things I could get from reading picturebooks. First, a picturebook has not only magnificent words but also is full of inspiring pictures. When reading picturebooks, I sometimes wonder why the illustrators drew the pictures in such a style. For instance, they will choose blue instead of red colors. Everything in the picturebook is considered carefully. Second, picturebooks contain minimal words but powerful messages. Third, reading picturebooks activates my brain; I like to observe small details in picturebooks. It is a different experience than when watching movies where I simply watch without engaging my thinking and observation. I have learned in this class that picturebooks are accessible for children. With picturebooks, children can see and analyze details of a book. As a future teacher and a parent, I think this is important to know so that we'll know how children enjoy reading in an early age.

Echoing the sentiment about reading picturebooks versus watching movies, another preservice teacher highlighted some of the benefits of reading picturebooks. She admitted that, unlike watching movies, reading picturebooks could increase her critical reading ability. She wrote:

I learned about the difference between videos/movies and picturebooks. Actually, when we are watching a video we just focus on the story, what we look in there is just a glimpse, we do not give attentions to the images. Meanwhile in a picturebook our eyes are trained to be more critical of the pictures, and we are drawn to observe everything on a page. Reading

this way will train our eyes to be increasingly critical. I confess that watching movies is an interesting activity, but I will learn very little from it. I think reading is better than watching movies. Reading is a way to increase our knowledge and intelligence.

It is quite clear for the preservice teachers that the knowledge about paying attention to images in reading beyond simply looking at text seemed to give them a new understanding about literacy and that visual literacy matters.

**Literature and music.** Later during the semester, when the class turned to a topic on music and movement as part of an in-depth study of book discussion (Kiefer & Huck, 2010), the preservice teachers began to see the connection between literature and other forms of expression such as music. This experience was new for these Indonesian preservice teachers whose only past experience with literature in school was when they took a Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language) class that heavily emphasized grammatical aspects of the language. To my knowledge, most teachers who teach the subject hardly make any connection between Bahasa Indonesia literature with other forms of art, let alone music. This new understanding about literature seemed to allow the preservice teachers to connect with their own music experiences, thus expanding their greater understanding about literature. One preservice teacher who was involved in music activities found it interesting that she could “compose” music inspired by literature:

The most interesting part which I like from this meeting is about composing music from children’s writing and children’s books. Apparently, composing music from a book is a thoughtful process and it should be related to the book that is being composed. I really like music, any kinds of music: country, pop, and jazz. That’s why I joined a music group; that’s because I like music.

Another connection the preservice teachers made about literature and music is related to general information about music and its benefits, such as enhancing a learning environment through classical selections. As one preservice teacher recalled, “I remember Mozart who is a composer. He creates classical music that can help students focus on studying. He made music that could help students to comprehend the lesson better.” Echoing the sentiment, one preservice teacher connected the information to his experience of reading with a music background and said that music complemented the pleasure of reading. He said, “With music, I can create an atmosphere for reading. When I’m reading, I feel like there is music playing inside my head. I feel calm when reading with music in the background.”

In summary, the fact that music, something that many preservice teachers enjoyed, could serve as an extension for literature learning seemed to be genuinely appealing for the Indonesian preservice teachers.

### **Teaching with Literature**

**Literature for learning.** In addition to the aesthetic experience of reading, the preservice teachers also considered literature as a resource for learning. A discussion of literature as learning resource seemed to expand as the course progressed. By week 11, preservice teachers had broadened their discussion from focusing on “the importance of literature in people’s lives” to exploring literature as a learning resource. They began to learn that

- As an object, literature can be very important for other subject matters. I can teach everything through literature. Literature could become a basis for many

subjects, e.g., learning history through literature, and many others. We can do many activities when teaching through literature. It's far from a boring class; we can enjoy learning-teaching activities. And I think literature is a must for every teacher from various fields. Math or science teachers need to learn literature, because they can use literature in their teaching.

- What I have learned in this meeting was about the importance of literature. Literature can be very useful for teaching, not only teaching literature itself but also teaching other subjects. For example, throughout the story we also learned about history, geography, math, and so on. And I think using literature can be more effective, because we can relate the current events from the story with the topic that will be discussed, so it will be making sense for students.

On the importance of literature and the efforts of teaching through literature, the preservice teachers appeared to clarify their understanding. Having been in the course for 12 weeks, students began to realize literature's role in classroom teaching. One preservice teacher said the following:

Literature gives a new experience in teaching. In this class [the introduction to children's literature course], we did not realize that we had been using literature for teaching. Literature is not a method; it is just how we are using literature for teaching. I think literature is one of the options to making students aware [about the importance] of literature itself.

In a reflective manner, one preservice teacher wrote about his evolving understanding of literature, particularly in relation to teaching. He said that literature and its function in teaching was beginning to make sense to him now.

When I first learned (weeks earlier ago) about literature, I was still confused and I wondered why I had to study literature; at that time I really had no idea what literature was. But now after studying so many things about literature I realized that through literature I could teach nearly everything to my students in lovely ways, such as through reading aloud, reading log, and so on.

Overall, the quotes indicate the Indonesian preservice teachers' growing understanding about literature, especially in context of a future teacher who begins to contemplate the idea of using children's literature as a learning resource for a future teaching.

**Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) using literature.** As future EFL teachers, the preservice teachers began to see how literature could play a role in their teaching, particularly how literature could be used for teaching English. Taught mostly in using textbooks and a grammatical method themselves, the preservice teachers suggested that the use of literature in English teaching would motivate students to learn. One preservice teacher posited the following:

Teaching English needs interesting stuff to help teachers improving students' understanding about the materials delivered. I think literature is stuff to help teachers in teaching English; literature can be introduced to teach English.

The preservice teachers also reflected on the practice of English teaching in Indonesia and contrasted it with their new knowledge about literature. One preservice teacher suggested

the following:

Many English teachers in Indonesia teach English with boring methods. Typically, they just give tasks and homework to their students. Eventually, students would think that English is difficult and boring. That was how I felt when I learned English in the secondary schools. And now having been in an introduction to children's literature course for almost 12 weeks, I learned that I can create an English class using literature as the basis for teaching.

Some preservice teachers offered concrete plans as to what they would do when teaching English using literature. One preservice teacher envisioned his teaching in the following way:

Today's class has inspired me to design a teaching plan that is based on literature. I will divide my project into four sessions. Reading aloud will be the first activity I'm going to do. And my objective is to support students as they write a narrative text. With picturebooks, I can make the theory of narrative more relevant so that it will make sense to students what a narrative is.

Having learned about teaching EFL using authentic children's literature in this course (e.g., a literature-based teaching unit assignment), the preservice teachers appeared to be inspired by the many possibilities of teaching with children's literature in their future classes.

**Becoming teachers of literature.** Discussions across the theme of teaching with literature overall suggested that preservice teachers intend to teach using literature. As future teachers, they show intent to use literature in their classroom instruction. Many preservice teachers noted that one basic quality of literature teachers was knowledge about literature. The preservice teachers seemed to suggest that teachers' love of reading would not be sufficient unless they had also studied literature themselves. They insisted that reading would give them a "surface" knowledge only, but studying literature would give them a much deeper and wider knowledge about literature itself. One preservice teacher insisted that acquiring knowledge about literature was important for teachers so that they would know what literature to offer their students. After the course progressed for nine weeks, the preservice teachers began to discuss how they would use picturebooks with their own students. One preservice teacher wrote, *Someday when I become an English teacher, I will start my class by introducing and reading aloud picturebooks. Doing this routine, I will get my students' full attention.*

In terms of teaching using literature, they began to recognize some classroom activities that were based on literature and how those activities could be applied in their own classrooms.

I learned that there are many activities that I can apply in my class. In the beginning of the class I will read aloud, then I will ask students to write some words and to make a poem out of those words, and I will end the class by reading aloud again. From this [literature] class, I learned many things. For example, now whenever I read a storybook, I pay attention not just to the story but to the details as well. I'll pay attention to the plot, structure, organization, images, and so on. I notice now I tend to be critical when interpreting the meaning conveyed by the story.

Echoing this statement, another preservice teacher added a suggestion for an activity to use in her classroom:

I learned that there are many class activities that are related to literature, some of them are reading logs and journal writing. As I see, by using a reading log, students will get used to reading any genre. Even though the reading log may seem like a boring activity at the beginning, I think that doing reading logs would make students like to read, and eventually the reading logs will help form the students' reading habit. Like everyone said a force of habit can eventually become a habit.

In general, the preservice teachers noted that teachers had to facilitate students' reading habits. As one preservice teacher asserted, *As teachers, we have to make the effort to develop students "love of reading." And eventually the students will become aware of the importance of literature.* Finally, as if to conclude their growing understanding about literature, later in the semester one preservice teacher wrote that *Literature is the source for nearly everything: "If we don't include literature, where do we teach our students from?"* This quote indicates a reflection of learning and perfectly summarizes the journey of these Indonesian preservice teachers who have engaged in studying children's literature for one semester in a teacher preparation program.

### Discussion and Implications

Early in the project, one of the Indonesian preservice teachers wondered what literature is and why literature matters. Through their reflections, we observed that the preservice teachers had grown a range of understanding related to literature. In this section, I will discuss the results of introducing Indonesian preservice teachers to a children's literature course. The findings point to three themes: being a reader, understanding literature, and teaching with literature (literature teacher). The findings suggest preservice teachers' positive attitudinal changes in terms of the reading habits and increased attention to critical reading. Their own reading for pleasure increased, and they began reading more varied genres. Their sense of literature understanding broadened from exclusively classical books to visual literacy in picturebook art and literature's connection to music. The preservice teachers discovered many opportunities for teaching using literature, including reading for enjoyment, literacy development, and teaching EFL. They also explored how these opportunities could be applied in the classroom.

The changes shown by Indonesian preservice teachers indicate the extent to which their perceptions and attitudes about reading literature and the teaching of literature (including their future aspirations for becoming teachers) shifted after participating in a semester-long introduction to a children's literature course. These are remarkable shifts considering their lack of experience with literature and teaching methods. Moreover, the preservice teachers also attempted to contextualize their knowledge by looking for teaching opportunities using literature in the Indonesian context, such as teaching EFL using literature. These findings, I argue, strengthen an understanding that courses such as this one in teacher education are influential in shaping the knowledge and teaching practices of beginning teachers (Floden & Meniketti, 2005; Dillon, O'Brien, Sato, & Kelly, 2010). What is also pleasantly surprising from the findings is that such positive influences seem to have similar effects on beginning teachers who have minimal experiences with books as did these Indonesian preservice teachers.

However, when I look closely at the findings and connect them to the context of Indonesia's GLS literacy initiative that was earlier discussed, I notice a gap between what is deemed important in order to develop literature-based literacy teaching and learning. As discussed earlier, the GLS literacy initiative in Indonesia has paid great attention to

efforts to provide teachers with pedagogical references to literacy activities, for instance, specifying a list of daily prescriptive literature activities for teachers and students. This list includes 15 minutes of daily reading, literature engagement, and connections across subject areas. In other words, the larger focus of the GLS literacy initiative rests heavily on the teaching of literature.

What has been overlooked, I argue, is a factor considered key to a successful literature-based literacy instruction: teachers who read and have a good sense of literature understanding—literature teachers who are readers. As the locus of control in literature-based literacy classroom activities (Lehman, 2007), a teacher’s own reading experience and a knowledge of literature matters (Scheffel et al., 2018; Cremin et al., 2008) for successful literature instruction, and there should be more attention on viewing teachers as readers and making inquiries about teachers’ engagement with literature (Durriyah, 2018).

Like all readers, literature teachers need to engage with literature and learning. As readers themselves, teachers should have opportunities to engage in a range of literature engagement activities (Scheffel et al., 2018; Wolf, Ballertine, & Hill, 2000) and to reflect upon their reading history. I like to think this part of viewing teachers as readers is similar to Wolf’s (2001) task to have her preservice teachers *read themselves* (italic is original) in which they reflect “on how you learned to read, home and school influences on your reading development, and the kinds of reading habits you have formed” (p. 206). This reading reflection process enables teachers to be more aware of other sources of experience (beyond teacher education courses) that may influence their approaches to teaching literature, including reading history (Agee, 1997, 1998) and managing standardized test demands (Cremin et al., 2008; De-Malach & Poyas, 2018). For these Indonesian preservice teachers, the recently gained literature experiences will be in competition with those other sources. This is a valid concern, as Indonesia’s GLS literacy initiative, which emphasizes literature-based literacy activities, is a considerably new approach to most Indonesian schools and is still taking shape. The course experience that gave these preservice teachers a rich and supportive environment for teaching with literature will probably be in contrast with an actual teaching site whose supports and culture of teaching with literature are not yet available.

Teacher education research investigates teachers who will teach literature (Zancanella, 1991; Agee, 1997, 1998). Two important conceptions, first developed by teacher education researcher Lee Shulman, are applied here: teachers’ knowledge about literature and the knowledge about teaching with literature, (De-Malach & Poyas, 2018; Zancanella, 1991). These conceptions are useful to explain the state of the preservice teachers’ learning in this study. Indeed, as the findings suggest, the preservice teachers’ approach to literature is predominantly with a mindset toward literature pedagogy and is less clear about recreational reading (reading for pleasure). The current study shares similar concerns with De-Malach and Poyas (2018), who surveyed a group of Israeli literature student teachers and found that they view literature with a heavy consideration of its relevancy for teaching, a view that is similar to that of the Indonesian preservice teachers in this study.

I share De-Malach and Poyas’s conclusion that the phenomenon is not unusual among those who study literature within the confines of teacher education—student teachers naturally will bring a substantial consideration about pedagogy into their literature learning process. Indeed, some researchers argue that it is positive when a teacher shows pedagogical considerations in the thinking process (Shulman, 1987, as cited in De-Malach

& Poyas, 2018). Yet, I agree with De-Malach and Poyas's assertion that this view can be problematic because teachers might overlook the pleasure aspect of the literature reading experience. In Indonesia, the dilemma is something that Indonesia's GLS literacy initiative should discuss if it is their genuine interest to advance a literature-based literacy teaching approach by way of preparing teachers who possess both the content and pedagogical knowledge of literature. And these concerns, I argue, should be a top concern in Indonesian teacher education.

## **Implications**

The research findings carry an implication in the area of teacher preparation design. It is a common belief in teacher education research that in order to prepare literature-based literacy teachers, equal efforts in developing both content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge should exist (De-Malach & Poyas, 2018; Zancanella, 1991; Agee, 1997, 1998). My observation of the Indonesian preservice teachers who studied literature for the first time in an introductory children's literature course appears to confirm this belief. Their responses to the course revolved around the issues of reading experiences, developing a sense of literature understanding, and instructing with literature—their learning grows from learning to understand the content to gaining the knowledge to teach it. These issues, I argue later in the paper, can be summed up into two identities that are intertwined: being a reader and being a (future) teacher. Therefore, this study urges teacher education programs to nurture student teachers who read well and possess the knowledge and skill to teach with literature.

For an immediate step, Indonesia's GLS literacy initiative could learn from literacy education researchers from the United Kingdom led by Cremin, Mottram, Bearn, and Goodwin (2008), who surveyed the country's elementary teachers' knowledge about literature. Their research found a rather disappointing state of teachers' own reading for pleasure habits and lack of knowledge of children's literature. From their survey, Cremin and colleagues could see the connection between the teachers' lack of literature knowledge and reading habits in their literacy teaching practices and choices of books, which eventually could result in a poor quality of literacy instruction. The researchers blame this on a lack of urgency in England's teacher education programs to include courses that introduce student teachers to children's literature. I urge Indonesia's GLS literacy initiative to make an effort similar to England's. As a country whose literacy education objective has just recently departed from illiteracy eradication to literature engagement, it is crucial for Indonesia to gather data about the current state of literacy teachers. Doing so could advance the development of Indonesia's GLS literacy initiative to include nurturing literature teachers who are also readers. This paper argues that this process should begin with the inclusion of courses designed intentionally to build knowledge about children's literature and the pedagogies in Indonesia's teacher preparation program. One suggestion is to create a specific introductory course on children's literature, as exemplified in this study. Another suggestion is to infuse children's literature content into existing courses; for example, courses related to teaching and instructions could be infused with contents on children's literature. The latter could become a solution in a context in which there is a little opportunity to add a specific introductory course on children's literature. The primary goal is to provide a space in teacher preparation programs where preservice teachers' understanding about children's literature can grow.

### About the Author

Tati Lathipatud Durriyah (Tati D. Wardi) is a faculty member at Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia. She was a Fulbright recipient for a master's degree at Teachers College, Columbia University, and earned a PhD in education from The Ohio State University. Her research interests include literacy, children's literature, and international education. Tati is an affiliated researcher to Jakarta-based Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC).

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