

Constructing Cultural Literacy in Postdigital Higher Education: A Content Analysis of Literature-Based English Course Materials

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Abstrak: The growing discourse of the “postdigital” challenges the assumption that education is merely transitioning toward digitalization, suggesting instead that digital and non-digital practices are now deeply entangled in shaping knowledge production and pedagogical design. Within this context, the meaning and construction of cultural literacy in literature-based English education require renewed examination. This study investigates how cultural literacy is constructed in literature-based English courses in higher education through a postdigital lens. Employing qualitative content analysis, the study analyzes syllabi, reading lists, teaching modules, assessment prompts, and selected digital components from five university-level courses. The analysis focuses on (1) the types of cultural knowledge privileged or marginalized, (2) the modes through which literary texts are delivered and mediated, and (3) the epistemological assumptions underpinning curriculum design in postdigital contexts. The findings indicate that literature is primarily confined to specialized literature courses, while language skills courses emphasize functional communication and rarely incorporate literary texts. In addition, course materials are largely dominated by canonical and globally recognized Anglophone works, with limited inclusion of local or regional literature. Although digital resources expand access to literary materials, their pedagogical integration remains partial. The study argues that postdigital conditions reshape not only the delivery of literary texts but also the ways cultural knowledge is curated and legitimized within university English curricula.

Kata Kunci: Cultural Literacy, Content Analysis, Postdigital, Literature Based Material, Higher Education

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Introduction

The growing discourse of the *postdigital* has reshaped contemporary educational theory by challenging the assumption that education is merely transitioning toward digitalization. Rather than marking a simple “after digital,” the postdigital describes a condition in which digital and non-digital practices are deeply entangled in knowledge production, pedagogy, and institutional structures (Jandrić et al., 2018). In this view, technology is no longer an external tool but an infrastructural and epistemic condition that influences how curriculum content is selected, accessed, and legitimized. Within higher education, this entanglement raises important questions about how cultural knowledge, particularly in literature-based English courses, is constructed and mediated.

Cultural literacy has long been associated with shared bodies of knowledge and canonical texts (Hirsch, 1987). However, critical scholarship has problematized this notion, arguing that literacy must also account for issues of power, representation, and culturally relevant knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In literature-based English curricula, tensions persist between canonical traditions and more pluralistic, global, or marginalized voices. While digital platforms expand access to diverse literary resources, it remains unclear whether such expansion meaningfully transforms the construction of cultural literacy or merely reconfigures its delivery.

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Existing studies on digital learning in higher education often focus on technology integration or student engagement, but fewer examine how postdigital conditions reshape the epistemological foundations of curriculum content, particularly in literature education (Kligyte, 2019). This study addresses that gap by asking: (1) How is cultural literacy constructed in literature-based English course materials in higher education? (2) What forms of cultural knowledge are privileged or marginalized? and (3) How do postdigital modes of mediation shape these constructions? Through qualitative content analysis of university course documents, this paper contributes to ICER's call to interrogate what the "post-" signifies for education research by examining how postdigital conditions reconfigure curriculum, knowledge, and cultural legitimacy in higher education.

The concept of the *postdigital* challenges linear narratives of technological progress in education. Rather than suggesting that education has moved "beyond" the digital, postdigital theory emphasizes the entanglement of digital and analog practices in shaping contemporary knowledge systems (Jandrić et al., 2018). In postdigital conditions, technology becomes infrastructural, embedded within platforms, learning management systems, algorithmic recommendations, and multimodal interfaces that influence how knowledge is curated and accessed. Kligyte (2019) further argues that the postdigital is not a stable category but a contested conceptual space that invites critical interrogation of epistemological assumptions in educational research.

Applied to curriculum studies, postdigital theory prompts scholars to examine not only the mode of delivery but also the politics of knowledge selection within digitally mediated environments. The issue is no longer simply whether literature is taught through digital platforms, but how digital infrastructures may reinforce, reorganize, or challenge existing hierarchies of cultural legitimacy. Cultural literacy has traditionally been defined as a shared body of background knowledge necessary for effective participation in society (Hirsch, 1987).

In this perspective, curriculum plays a central role in transmitting canonical cultural references deemed essential for educated citizens. However, critical educational scholars have challenged this notion for privileging dominant cultural narratives and marginalizing minority voices. Ladson-Billings (1995) proposes culturally relevant pedagogy as a framework that centers students' cultural identities and interrogates power structures within curriculum design. From a critical standpoint, cultural literacy is not merely knowledge acquisition but a dynamic process involving representation, ideology, and epistemic justice. In literature-based English education, this tension often manifests in the selection between canonical Western texts and local, global, or marginalized literary voices. Postdigital conditions complicate this further, as digital access may expand textual diversity while simultaneously reinforcing dominant global publishing circuits.

Curriculum development in language education involves decisions about content selection, sequencing, and pedagogical orientation (Richards, 2001; Graves, 2000). These decisions reflect broader epistemological commitments regarding what counts as legitimate knowledge. In literature-based courses, syllabi, reading lists, and instructional materials function as sites where cultural authority is institutionalized. Within postdigital higher education, curriculum is increasingly mediated by digital platforms, multimedia resources, and hybrid learning environments. Such mediation potentially reshapes how literary texts are contextualized, interpreted, and circulated. Therefore, analyzing course documents through a postdigital lens enables an examination of how curriculum design participates in constructing or reconfiguring cultural literacy.

Literature has long been recognized as a valuable resource in language teaching for fostering linguistic competence, interpretive skills, and cultural awareness (Carter & Long, 1991). Beyond linguistic development, literary texts offer representations of cultural values, social conflicts, and historical contexts that contribute to broader educational aims. McRae (2003) further distinguishes between canonical literature and "literature with a small 'l,'" highlighting the pedagogical potential of diverse and contemporary texts. In postdigital higher education, literary engagement is no longer confined to printed texts; it includes multimodal adaptations, online archives, and interactive platforms. Consequently, literature becomes both a cultural artifact and a digitally mediated experience. This study brings these strands together by examining how postdigital conditions intersect with curriculum design and literary selection to construct particular versions of cultural literacy within university English education.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine how cultural literacy is constructed in literature-based English course materials within postdigital higher education. Qualitative content analysis enables systematic, theory-driven examination of textual data while remaining sensitive to contextual meaning (Schreier,

2014). Unlike purely quantitative approaches, it allows categories to be conceptually grounded in theory and refined during analysis. Following Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is understood as a method for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use.

Research Design and Data Sources

The study analyzes curriculum documents from five university-level literature-based English courses. Lecturers were approached directly to obtain permission to access course materials. The collected data include: (1) syllabi, (2) weekly lesson plans, (3) reading lists, (4) teaching modules or slides, (5) assessment prompts, and (6) selected digital components such as LMS structures or hyperlinks to online literary resources. These documents are treated as institutional artifacts that reflect curricular decisions and epistemological positioning rather than as personal narratives of instructors.

The units of analysis consist of individual literary texts listed in reading schedules, instructional modules, and assignment descriptions. Digital elements (e.g., multimedia integration, online archives, discussion forums) are analyzed as components of postdigital mediation.

Coding Procedure

The coding framework was developed deductively from the theoretical framework, particularly postdigital theory (Jandrić et al., 2018) and competing models of cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Four main coding categories guide the analysis: Cultural representation (e.g., canonical, local, global, marginalized voices); Mode of textual delivery (print-based, digitally supplemented, multimodal, interactive); Construction of cultural literacy (fixed knowledge, dialogic interpretation, critical inquiry); and Epistemological orientation (hierarchical canon, pluralistic knowledge, hybrid postdigital mediation).

The coding process followed Schreier's (2014) iterative model: (1) familiarization with data, (2) pilot coding of selected documents, (3) refinement of category definitions, and (4) systematic coding across all materials. Categories were revised where necessary to ensure conceptual clarity and consistency.

Trustworthiness

To enhance rigor, category definitions were explicitly operationalized, and a coding summary matrix was used to compare patterns across courses. The study prioritizes transparency in analytic decisions, consistent with Krippendorff's (2018) emphasis on methodological validity. By systematically analyzing institutional documents rather than self-reported perceptions, the study aims to provide a grounded account of how cultural literacy is materially constructed within postdigital higher education curricula.

Findings and Discussion

Uneven Distribution of Literature Across Curriculum Domains

The analysis reveals a clear structural separation between literature-based courses and language skills courses within the curriculum. Literature is explicitly and extensively integrated in courses such as *Adaptation Studies* and *Contemporary Literature*, where it functions as the primary object of study. For instance, *Adaptation Studies* incorporates canonical and popular literary works (e.g., *Pride and Prejudice*, *Harry Potter*, Shakespearean plays) as core materials for theoretical and critical analysis. Similarly, *Contemporary Literature* engages with diverse texts addressing identity, globalization, and digital culture through short stories and novel excerpts.

However, this integration is not mirrored in language skills courses. In *Speaking for Academic Purposes*, the focus is on communicative functions such as presentations, debates, and interviews, with no explicit inclusion of literary texts as learning materials. Likewise, *Academic Reading* emphasizes academic texts, discourse structures, and reading strategies rather than literary works. This indicates that literature is treated as a content specialization, rather than as a pedagogical resource across the curriculum.

G. Rencana Pembelajaran Semester

Minggu Ke-	Kemampuan Akhir (Sub-CPMK)	Bentuk & Metode Pembelajaran			Pengalaman Belajar	Penilaian			Referensi
		Bentuk	Metode	Alokasi Waktu		Kriteria Penilaian	Indikator Penilaian	Bobot Penilaian	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Sub-CPMK 1 (C2): Mahasiswa mampu menyebutkan konsep pembelajaran mata kuliah Contemporary Literature	Kuliah	<i>Perkenalan</i>	100 menit	Diskusi terkait Orientasi Perkuliahan: Dan defining "contemporary literature," historical context (post-WWII to present), key themes and trends.	Sikap dan perilaku	Kemampuan memahami ide/penyampaian topik	0%	RPS,1,2
2	Sub-CPMK 1 (C2): Mahasiswa mampu menjelaskan Postmodernism and Fragmentation	Kuliah	<i>Small Group Discussion</i>	100 menit	Diskusi tentang Postmodernism, fragmentation, and metafiction. Donald Barthelme, "The Balloon" (short story); excerpt from Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49	Essay /Presentasi	Kemampuan memahami ide/penyampaian topik	5%	1,2,
3	Sub-CPMK 1 (C2): Mahasiswa mampu menjelaskan	Kuliah	<i>Discovery Learning</i>	100 menit	Diskusi tentang topik Race, gender, and identity in contemporary literature.	Quiz/ Presentasi	Kemampuan memahami	5%	3

RPS Contemporary Literature

Figure 1. Example of Literature in Lesson Plan

This suggests a traditional compartmentalization of knowledge, where literature is confined to disciplinary study rather than being leveraged for broader language development. From a curriculum perspective, this reflects a skills-content dichotomy, limiting the potential of literature to support integrated language learning and cultural literacy.

Table 1. Summary of Coding Table

Classification Course	Cultural Representation	Mode of Textual Delivery	Construction of Cultural Literacy	Epistemological Orientation
Adaptation Studies	Strong presence of canonical (e.g., Shakespeare, Austen) and global texts; minimal local representation	Multimodal (print texts + film adaptations + digital resources)	Interpretive and partially dialogic (analysis of text transformations), but still guided by established interpretations	Hierarchical with emerging hybrid elements (canon remains central, but media adaptation introduces some plurality)
Contemporary Literature	Global and contemporary issues (identity, diaspora), but still dominated by Anglophone texts; limited Indonesian/local works	Print-based and digitally supplemented (PDFs, online texts, case method discussions)	Moderately critical and dialogic (discussion-based, issue-oriented interpretation)	Semi-pluralistic but still leaning toward global literary authority
Speaking for Academic Purposes	Minimal to no literary content; culture appears implicitly through topics, not texts	Primarily oral/interactive (presentations, discussions); not text-driven	Functional and skills-oriented; no explicit cultural literacy construction via literature	Functionalist/pragmatic (language as communication tool, not cultural knowledge system)
Academic Reading	Focus on academic and informational texts; literature absent	Print-based academic texts (articles, essays), digital PDFs	Analytical but text-type restricted; cultural literacy limited to academic discourse	Instrumental and skills-based (reading for comprehension and academic purposes)

Dominance of Canonical and Global Texts

Across literature-related courses, the materials are predominantly drawn from Western canonical and globally recognized texts, such as Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and contemporary Anglophone authors. Even when addressing contemporary issues (e.g., diaspora, identity, climate change), the selected works largely originate from global literary markets rather than local Indonesian contexts. This pattern mirrors broader debates in decolonizing curriculum scholarship, which shows that English literary education continues to privilege an Anglocentric canon even where explicit efforts toward inclusion have been introduced (Rattan & Jana, 2025). Comparable studies of Indonesian English textbooks indicate that folklore and other local narratives are seldom foregrounded despite their demonstrated pedagogical value for cultivating cultural awareness (Anggraini et al., 2022), suggesting that the pattern observed in this study reflects a wider structural tendency rather than an isolated institutional choice.

This reflects a hierarchical epistemological orientation, consistent with Hirsch's (1987) notion of cultural literacy as shared canonical knowledge. While these texts provide valuable global perspectives, the limited inclusion of local or regional literature constrains opportunities for students to engage with culturally proximate narratives. From a critical cultural literacy perspective (Ladson-Billings, 1995), this may hinder the development of contextually grounded and socially responsive interpretations of culture. Anggraini et al. (2022) similarly found that Indonesian secondary-level English textbooks incorporate folklore only sparingly relative to imported texts, even though such materials support both linguistic and cultural learning goals; the persistence of this imbalance at the university level suggests that canonical dominance is reproduced across educational stages rather than resolved as learners progress.

Limited Integration of Literature in Skill Development

The absence of literary texts in speaking and reading courses suggests that literature is underutilized as a pedagogical tool for language skills development. Despite the potential of literature to enhance interpretive, communicative, and critical thinking skills, the curriculum prioritizes functional and instrumental language use in these courses. This separation is notable given that multimodal and digitally mediated literacy practices have been shown to support the integration of literary and communicative competencies simultaneously, rather than treating them as competing curricular aims (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). The lack of such integration in the analyzed courses therefore represents a missed pedagogical opportunity rather than an inevitable feature of skills-based instruction.

This aligns with a functionalist orientation in language teaching, where language is treated primarily as a tool for communication rather than as a medium for cultural and interpretive engagement. Such an approach may limit students' exposure to complex, authentic, and culturally embedded language, which literature uniquely provides. Research on digital storytelling suggests that embedding narrative and literary tasks within speaking and reading instruction can strengthen learner motivation and communicative performance simultaneously, indicating that functional and literary aims need not be mutually exclusive (Hava, 2021; Fu et al., 2022). The absence of such approaches in the courses examined here reinforces the compartmentalization identified earlier in this study.

Reliance on Open-Access and Public Domain Texts

Another key finding is that lecturers tend to use older literary texts sourced from the internet, primarily due to copyright constraints. This results in a reliance on public domain works or freely accessible materials, which are often canonical and historically distant. This pattern is consistent with broader findings on open educational resource adoption, which show that instructors frequently default to freely licensed or public-domain materials because of the practical and legal barriers involved in securing rights to contemporary works (Fischer et al., 2015). Consequently, the affordances of digital access are constrained less by technological availability than by the legal and institutional conditions under which literary materials can be legitimately reused.

This reflects a material constraint shaping pedagogical choices, where access and legality influence curriculum design. From a postdigital perspective (Jandrić et al., 2018), this highlights the tension between digital abundance and structural limitations, where the availability of online resources does not necessarily translate into diverse or equitable material representation. Farrow et al. (2015) likewise report that open resource use, although expanding access, does not automatically diversify the range of perspectives represented in course content unless deliberately curated toward that end. This suggests that expanding digital access to literature must be

accompanied by intentional curatorial decisions if postdigital conditions are to support, rather than merely reproduce, existing patterns of cultural representation.

Partial Alignment with Postdigital Pedagogy

Although some courses (e.g., *Adaptation Studies* and *Contemporary Literature*) incorporate multimodal and digital elements, such as film adaptations, digital media, and case-based learning, the integration remains inconsistent across the curriculum. Skill-based courses, in particular, do not appear to leverage digital literary forms (e.g., digital storytelling, interactive texts). This indicates a partial transition toward postdigital pedagogy, where digital tools are present but not fully integrated into a holistic pedagogical framework. The curriculum reflects a hybrid condition, combining traditional literary study with selective digital enhancements, rather than a fully realized postdigital approach that integrates technology, culture, and pedagogy. This partial integration is consistent with Fawns's (2022) argument that pedagogy and technology are best understood as entangled rather than as separate variables to be combined, and with Ball and Savin-Baden's (2022) observation that higher education institutions frequently adopt digital tools incrementally rather than through a coherent pedagogical redesign.

Taken together, these findings suggest that cultural literacy in the curriculum is constructed as: Text-centered but discipline-bound (limited to literature courses); canonical and global rather than local and diverse; knowledge-oriented rather than critically and dialogically constructed. This aligns more closely with a traditional model of cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987) than with a critical or postdigital model, which would emphasize plurality, interaction, and contextual relevance. The limited integration of literature across skill-based courses further restricts opportunities for students to develop cultural literacy as a lived, interpretive, and communicative practice.

This study contributes to postdigital curriculum studies by demonstrating that, first, curriculum design remains influenced by institutional structures and material constraints. Second, the integration of literature and culture is uneven and discipline-specific. Third, postdigital affordances are underutilized in bridging literature and language skills. Therefore, to move toward a postdigital and culturally responsive curriculum, there is a need to integrate literature into language skills instruction, incorporate local and diverse cultural texts, utilize digital platforms to access and adapt contemporary materials legally, and reframe literature as a pedagogical resource, not just disciplinary content.

These recommendations can be made more concrete by considering specific curricular actions. First, courses such as *Adaptation Studies* and *Contemporary Literature* could incorporate Indonesian folklore and oral narratives (e.g., regional legends such as *Malin Kundang* or Bangka Belitung oral traditions) alongside canonical Anglophone texts, following evidence that such materials strengthen both cultural relevance and language learning outcomes when deliberately integrated into English curricula (Anggraini et al., 2022). Second, reading lists could be diversified through the inclusion of Southeast Asian Anglophone writers—authors from countries such as the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia who write in English—so that students encounter regionally proximate models of English-language literary production without abandoning the goal of global literary competence, an approach consistent with broader calls to widen the literary curriculum beyond a single national canon (Rattan & Jana, 2025). Third, language skills courses could adopt short local narratives or digital storytelling tasks based on regional folklore as speaking and reading materials, an approach that would help address the copyright and access constraints identified in this study while embedding cultural content into functionally oriented courses (Hava, 2021; Fu et al., 2022). Taken together, these steps would allow the curriculum to move beyond a hegemonic reliance on the Western canon and toward a postdigital model of cultural literacy that is both technologically integrated and locally grounded.

Conclusion

This study examined how cultural literacy is constructed in literature-based English course materials in higher education from a postdigital perspective. The findings indicate that literature is largely confined to literature-focused courses, while language skills courses emphasize functional communication and rarely incorporate literary texts. Consequently, cultural literacy is constructed as discipline-bound knowledge rather than as an integrated component of language learning. In addition, the curriculum is dominated by canonical and globally recognized Anglophone texts, with limited representation of local or regional literature.

Although digital platforms expand access to literary resources, their pedagogical use remains partial and uneven. The curriculum therefore reflects a hybrid postdigital condition in which digital tools coexist with traditional literary frameworks without substantially transforming them. These findings highlight the need for more integrative curriculum design that connects literature with language skills development and promotes more diverse and contextually relevant cultural representations in higher education.

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