

Conference Paper

Developing Reading Literacy through Parent–Teacher Partnership Program in Indonesian Primary Schools

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ORCID:Sahiruddin Sahiruddin: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0156-6407>**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper was to explore the reading literacy programs of Indonesian primary schools and examine the parent–teacher collaborations in dealing with the students’ reading literacy development in Bahasa Indonesia. Eight teachers with an average of five-year teaching experience from two primary schools and forty-six parents of four-grade students were interviewed to investigate the reading literacy practices and parent–teacher collaborations. The study revealed that the reading literacy practices in the investigated classroom or at school levels includes 15-minute reading before the lesson, story-sharing, book content rewriting, and book summary writing. Book swap or book exchange program, classroom mini library, and weekly library visit some activities used to facilitate the students’ reading development. Regarding the parent–teacher partnership in facilitating or monitoring students’ reading literacy development, parent–teacher conferences (where teachers and parents discussed issues regarding students’ behaviour, progress and achievement), parenting and literacy workshop and outreach activities were conducted. In addition, parent–teacher communication books and parent–teacher online social media groups were also found to be effective and efficient in monitoring and developing students’ reading literacy. All teachers generally agreed that active parental support towards children’s education brought about children’s academic achievement. Some challenges in literacy development and their pedagogical implication at primary education level were also discussed.

Keywords: reading literacy, reading development, parent-teacher partnership

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Published: 1 March 2021

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ISOLEC Conference Committee.

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1. Introduction

Reading literacy plays its important role in human life. Reading literacy has been highly correlated with academic achievement or academic success as indicated by perceiving good grades and earning an advanced degree for tertiary students (Poole, 2019) and for school students (Leahy & Fizpatrick, 2017). Thus, reading literacy is perceived to play

a fundamental role in the development of academic skills. Among the factors affecting the children literacy development is the existence of partnership between teachers and parents in supporting children education (Bocconi et al., 2012).

In an Indonesian context, reading literacy has been found to be at low level when compared to other developing countries as portrayed in *Programme for International for Student Assessment (PISA)* under *Organization Economic Corporation And Development (OECD)* in 2008. Study focusing on “*Most Liberated Nation in the World*” conducted by *Central Connecticut State University* in 2016 reported Indonesia ranked 60th out of 61 countries in terms of reading literacy, suggesting that reading literacy in Indonesia was very low. A study by Herminingrum (2019) demonstrated that primary school students were found to have difficulty in reading in L1 as affected by their low reading interest and motivation as well as less support from family and community. Several studies illustrated some factors affecting low reading literacy in Indonesia, such as lack of available books and resources, lack of innovative teaching and learning at schools, the rise of digital technology which demotivate children to enjoy reading, and family factors which did not facilitate the reading culture (Nasikhatul, et al., 2020). This study argues that the reading literacy level of school students or young generation is affected by the environment where they live. In particular, family and school environments are the two key factors playing an essential role in the development of reading literacy.

A little is known about this literacy activities patterns in Indonesia. This study tries to explore the perceptions and experiences perceived by teachers and parents in developing reading literacy and how the two parties work together to develop reading literacy. No efforts have been conducted in the Indonesian literature about this parental-teacher involvement or partnership in reading literacy development. Bridging parents and teachers’ activities will allow us to advance our understanding of how literacy develop and interacts with home and school environments. Clear partnership and literacy activities conducted between these two parties have not been much explored in Indonesia. Model of parent-teacher partnership is of interest in this study.

Theoretically, the nature of initiatives in connecting home and school has been the focus of extensive research and attention. Current study by Hutchinson et al. (2020) found that the connection between home-school can be through digital literacy practice (digital technology) in this digital era. This paper utilizes the theory mainly drawn upon sociocultural theory and Bourdieusian theory of habitus development (Wacquant, 2014; Bourdieu., 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). Sociocultural theory explicitly explains literacy as a cultural dynamic while Bourdieu’s theory is relevant in terms of its conceptualization of socialization process in the family and that of school

environment. According to Bourdieu, children have already family upbringing entailing deeply habit, belief or attitude and skills (primary habitus) before they start schools (Bourdieu, 1984). Children have been instilled with certain skills and attitudes by their family upbringing. This primary habitus in turn affects later literacy practices as primary habitus has been embodied in the child. The primary habitus plays a fundamental role as the basis in the subsequent formation of any other habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The aim of this study was to describe the ways how teachers and parents develop reading literacy and how both parties work together for reading literacy development. The questions addressed in this paper are: (a) How do parents develop reading literacy culture at home, (b) how do teachers facilitate the development of reading literacy, and (c) what are the activities or practices which support the existence of parent-teacher partnership?.

2. Method

This study scrutinized the parents and teachers' perception and experience in developing reading literacy for children at primary school level in Indonesia. The design of this study was qualitative aiming to describe the perception and practices of literacy development by parents and teachers. The purpose of analysis in qualitative research is to inquire deeply into the meaning of different situations and different participants' understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This study involved forty-six parents and eight teachers from two primary schools. The participants of this study were those parents who had children at fourth grade, and those teachers who taught a lesson at fourth grade level. The target grade was defined in the fourth grade, where children have had 4 years of formal instruction in reading, and are in the process of becoming independent readers. Target grade in this study is in line with the desired target population of reading study in primary school at other studies (Mullis, et al., 2007). To ensure adequate representation of specific group in the sample, explicit stratification (grouping of sampling units into smaller sampling frame) is applied, particularly two schools involving two strata – public and private sector schools. Two primary schools were involved in this study.

The data were taken from online asynchronous computer mediated interview using structured-interview (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Through the interview, the writer has an opportunity to uncover rich and complex information from participants (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001, p. 138). In this context, both parents and teachers were required to

answered closed and open-ended questions via online communication. Online interview was conducted due to covid-19 pandemic situation which avoid the writer to have direct meeting for interview for safety and healthy purposes. The questions for interview used in this study were adapted from Mullis et al (2007). The data analysis of this study (interview data) was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing patterns or themes within the data, that are considered to be important to the descriptions of the phenomenon being studied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Small data from closed item interview involving Likert scale items were reported in percentage as secondary data. The themes found in this study cover the attitude or perception toward the importance of reading literacy, practices of building reading habits, reading resources provided, and programs facilitating reading development and parent-teacher partnership activities.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1. Finding

3.1.1. Parents' attitudes, home resources and parental literacy activities

In response to the first concern of this study which investigate parents' perception and experiences in dealing with literacy development practices at home, this study found that 70% parents read any book without any goal to get essential information from it showing they like reading. In addition, they enjoy reading in their spare time (84%). They also generally like discussion about book with their friends. Taking into account the evidence that reading culture has been cultivated in home environment, this study also looks at the role of parents in literacy development. Thirty-three parents generally posit the same idea that the role of parents is substantial in developing reading literacy:

In my opinion, the role of parent is fundamental in developing children literacy. Early reading literacy habit will affect future literacy development of the children, particularly in the development of thinking skills in understanding sentences and contents of the texts. Children with less reading habit will find it difficult to comprehend the sentences through the text. (R.D, Parent).

The above evidence showed how parental model in reading literacy encouragement was essential for current literacy and future literacy development. On the other words, less reading habit was assumed to affect the delay of text comprehension by children. Parental high awareness about the role parent for accelerating children literacy in this

study is of interesting finding. The following fact also provided evidence that parents who did not like reading in turn made their children hate or avoid reading.

Parents are model for their children. Personally, I do not like reading, and it affect the condition that my children do not like reading a book too. (S.R.U., Parent)

This study attempts to describe the index of early home literacy activities by looking at parents' report on their engagement on literacy activities at home. The study found that 51% parents often accompanied their children reading a book, 17% parents stated they sometimes accompanied their children to read books, 23% parents occasionally assisted children reading books, and 8.5% parents rarely helped children reading. In terms of reading sources, particularly the use of local story in reading, this study exhibited that 38% parents used local story for telling story for children, 30% parents were moderate in the use of local story and use of storytelling as a media to develop reading literacy. About 15% parents rarely or never told stories for their children in enhancing reading literacy. In addition, this study found that 51% parents employed singing as a practice to develop their children reading literacy. Meanwhile, other parents (68%) preferred accompanying children playing educational games. Thus, in general, parents had shown their efforts in assisting children literacy development at home.

This study found that all parents involve in this study had made efforts to provide physical and non-physical activities for their children as a way to improve children's reading literacy. There are various efforts made, for instance buying a variety of books including fairy tales, fiction stories, comics, and textbooks (28 parents), building small library or special shelf for children's books (2 parents), providing study desks and gadgets (smart phone or laptops) to access online reading materials (10 parents), internet access (1 parent) and subscribing monthly magazine. Parents encouraged children to choose the books they like by taking them to a bookstore.

Buying books regularly, downloading online books from internet, providing a special shelf for reading books which are separated from school books, and ensuring to bring books while on the trips out of town with a reading light attached. (L. O., Parent)

In addition to physical resources provided, non-physical resources were also described as to support children literacy development, such as paying attention to their reading, accompanying children to watch cartoon, accompanying children to search for information on the internet, and explaining to children about the importance of reading. As part of the efforts to build reading culture, parents also always required

children to bring books with them during travelling and also to read any book before doing school assignment at home.

3.1.2. Teachers' attitudes, school resources, and teachers' literacy activities

In response to the second concern of this study investigating teachers' perception and experiences in dealing with literacy development practices at school, this study demonstrated that in dealing with the importance of developing reading literacy, the teachers stated that they regularly upgrade their literacy teaching technique through training. Once a year there is special training from the department of education in local area. With regard to the importance of reading literacy for children, teachers in majority agreed that reading literacy played an essential role in children life in the future. Reading literacy was perceived very important, because it built children's abilities and character, and that reading was the basis for them to understand the content of the text.

By reading, children can open a window of the world. In words, the more they read, the more fluent they will be. The more fluent they are, the easier they can understand the text content (A., Teacher)

Moreover, teachers stated that the sources of material in the development of reading literacy used in the classroom varied, for example, textbooks and modules recommended by department of education, relevant books, worksheet, YouTube, books available in libraries (folk tales, collections of general knowledge, etc.) and online materials from internet. One of the teachers stated that *"The teacher is obliged to have a handbook as additional knowledge or insight from various library media. One of the sources of learning for children is through YouTube"* (M., Teacher). In this regard, providing materials compromising visual and digital mode in developing reading literacy is considered relevant in this digital era. Teachers also often required children to read via online media or use computer / laptop gadget devices where 25% of teachers confirmed they used this teaching technique very often, 50% of teachers claimed they often employed this teaching technique and the remaining 25% say they never used technology for development reading literacy of students.

Other efforts made by teachers in facilitating the developments of students' reading literacy is the practices of requiring children to go to the library to borrow and read books. Fifty-percent of teachers stated that they obliged children to go to the library once a week, and the other teachers obliged twice a week. All teachers agreed that in every class, there is a mini library where children bring books from home and read

in class, and the book is left in the mini school library so that it can be shared with other friends. The source of books available in the mini library were from the grant of the department of education, school library, and children's books that are brought from home. Regarding the issue of utilizing local story books for developing reading skills, seventy-five percent teachers stated that they often used them, and twenty-five teachers stated that they rarely used local stories. Character-building books are also provided. This can be recognized from the teacher's answer below.

There are many books focusing on character-building that are placed in the school library and mini library in each class. There are many books from school equipping children with character building. Each child gets a different book according to the grade level of the child as recommended in the national curriculum" (R., Teacher).

Moreover, this study was also interested to examine school programs which facilitate the development of reading culture and reading literacy. The teachers posited that there was a reading literacy program where students were required to read silently and aloud between 5-15 minutes before lessons. Literacy activities were also done through program where school provided a reading corner / mini library in the classroom. Another program illustrated by teachers were 30 minutes reading and retelling the book content to the class.

Various activities in class were carried out by teachers to improve reading literacy by requiring children to make an essay, summarize a reading book and retell the book content (in their own language), produce a summary of texts, and determine main ideas and supporting ideas from reading texts. These activities were conducted as to provide maximum supports for reading literacy development at schools or classroom context. In addition, teachers made several efforts to develop students' reading literacy, such as that fifty percent teachers gave homework or assignment once a week, and twenty-five percent teachers declared of giving assignment twice a week.

3.1.3. Activities or practices supporting parent-teacher partnership

The last concern of this study investigates how teachers and parents build collaboration and partnership in developing children reading literacy and the challenges they have in its implementation. This study found that the teachers-parents coordination was conducted regularly, in particular the teachers stated that they coordinated twice a year through parent-teacher conference (50%), three times a year (25%), and more than three times a year (25%). Generally, teachers confirmed that twice meeting a year between

parents and teachers were in the form of school progress reports, where schools handed in children learning report for every parent in each semester (6 months). In this context, generally teachers communicated what had been done throughout last semester and what would they plan for the next semester. In addition, teachers also posited that meeting or communication between teachers and parents can be conducted when certain conditions were met. The communication media for teachers and parents was generally done through WhatsApp and telephone or Parent Forum group where parents are usually asked to come to school directly. One of the key points in meeting between teachers and parents was the idea that teachers could share what might possibly work at home to facilitate the development of reading literacy.

Another media to make parents get involved in children literacy development was through assignment or homework. As teachers reported, they have monitoring book which mediates the communication between parents and teachers. In this regard, any assignment completed should be signed by parents, and any grade or mark for any assignment should also be recognized and signed by parents and teachers.

3.2. Discussion

This study has three points to scrutinize including reading literacy activities or practices developed by family at home and reading literacy experiences and practices designed by teachers and schools, and the practices of parent-teacher partnership. The first finding reveals that parents in majority confirmed that reading literacy is essential in child life, and that reading activity becomes one of the family habits in their live. Parents believe that reading literacy influences future reading literacy of the children. This finding is in line with previous finding that reading literacy is highly correlated with academic achievement or academic success as indicated by perceiving good grades and earning an advanced degree for school students (Leahy & Fizpatrick, 2017). Reading literacy is perceived to play a fundamental role in the development of academic skills.

The nature of reading culture in this study developed by the family for the children indicates parents' awareness about the role model of family in facilitating children reading literacy. This can be explained using sociocultural theory and Bourdieusian theory of habitus development (Wacquant, 2014; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Family environment which build reading habit and facilitate reading development by resources needed may positive contribution to the children's reading literacy.

In regard to the teachers' perspectives in the practices and experiences carried out at classroom to support children reading literacy, this study demonstrates that

teachers show similar perception in terms of the importance of reading literacy. As part of efforts made to enhance children reading literacy, teachers use various sources of materials such as textbooks, worksheets, online materials from YouTube and internet engine search. The use of local story in the classroom is also applied to facilitate character building education (Herminingrum, 2019). School resources like school library and classroom mini library are provided to create reading culture in the school. In addition, teachers also administer some reading literacy activities or practices, such as the daily routine of 15 minutes reading before lesson, two-day reading programs with 30 minutes reading per day, reading and sharing the content, and other related assignments developed to facilitate reading literacy development.

In relation to the last concern of this study about the practice of parent-teacher partnership in monitoring the progress of children education, this study reveals that both parents and teachers agree to collaborate monitoring children reading literacy. Parental involvement to the school (school-based parental involvement) has been designed in terms of constant meeting with schoolteachers, participating in school meeting and also to home environment by helping with homework, and discussion book or relevant topics with the child (Pomerant, Moorman, and Litwack, 2007). This partnership program finds its relevant when dealing with the advantages of family engagement and partnership between teachers and parents in supporting children education (Bocconi et al., 2012).

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that the parents all supported better collaboration between parents and the school. These parents want to be more involved in improving children's literacy programs in schools. Various suggestions for literacy activities can be applied by schools in the future. The first suggestion is to empower school and class libraries. The idea of beautifying the library space to make it more attractive, increasing the reading book collection and bringing the library program that could attract the children reading interest. Reading 15 minutes a day (before or after class), administering one-day reading program, obliging children to bring books from home and read them in class. Other literacy activities can be carried out regularly such as making book resumes, presenting students' readings in class, making summaries of the books especially those related to subject matter, making crafts and literacy competitions. The school is also advised to cooperate with outside parties to hold these literacy activities.

In addition, the presence of digital era today should be taken into consideration in generating home-school partnership program by incorporating the technology information. However, it is essential for both teachers and parents to educate children how to seek information through internet. It is recommended that parent-teacher partnership should be established in any school levels (primary, secondary, and senior) in Indonesia as aiming to maximize the output and outcome of learning experience. Even, children literacy development should not only supported by school and home, but also community. These parties should interact each other to foster children reading literacy development. Finally, further research may explore in more detail the relationship between socio-economic status of parents and reading literacy achievement and also scrutinize the nature of literacy practices developed by schools at urban and rural area and how it affects the reading literacy development.

Acknowledgement

This research was fully supported by the Institute of Research and Community Services, Universitas Brawijaya, for funding.

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