



Explaining the Important Contribution of Reading Literacy to the Country's Generations: Indonesian's Perspectives

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Abstract

The problem of student's reading literacy ability has achieved considerable attention with the active movement of the reading culture conducted both in developed and developing countries. As a developing country, the Indonesian government has risen and is actively working to move the reading culture for the Indonesian people. The movement starts from early childhood through the provision of libraries in various areas, such as schools, sub-districts and villages as reading parks for all ages. The movement of the reading culture that is undertaken will produce positive habits that possibly improves a student's interest in reading and affects student's future career. Qualitative analysis is implemented to obtain information about the important contribution of reading literacy for today's and the next generations to build strong nations. Using interview techniques, this study involves participants who like reading and experience the positive effects of reading on human life. The results of the study shows that reading literacy can influence the way people think and act.

Keywords: *literacy, reading, indonesia*



Introduction

The results of a study conducted by PISA (2015) on Indonesian students about reading literacy showed that Indonesia was ranked 64th out of 72 countries involved in the study. In addition, BPS data (2015) shows that 91.47% of school-age children prefer to watch television, and 13.11% like to read. Realising these results, the Indonesian government has recently risen and is actively working to move the reading culture for the Indonesian people. The movement starts from early childhood to the provision of libraries in various areas, such as schools, sub-districts and villages as reading parks for all ages. Literacy activist communities are also starting to emerge, either working voluntarily or those who have affiliations with the government. Universities are also competing to pour funds into the Community Service Programs which support the development of reading literacy culture. The reading culture movement is very important because the ability to read is a nation 'capital' to build educated people.

All over the globe, both in industrial countries and developing countries, reading literacy is one important subject taught at school. Even real life shows that children learn letters and numbers long before they go school. Such learning frequently happens outside of the school and from the children's home environment. When children start learning letters, the parents or care-givers extend them to learn to read. Some children recognise words and sentences before they go to school. Some children learn to read before they go to school; however, some children learn to read when they enter kindergarten or school. The learning situation indicates that reading literacy is an important aspect of life and many people learn it and they try to teach their own children at home.

The importance of reading literacy is characterised by the placement of reading as a subject at school and in the university curriculum. Reading literacy is important in the context of self-improvement, personal branding, professional development, schooling, and national development. Literate people are one of the primary capitals in national development.

Countries in Asia, for example China, have succeeded in developing science rapidly due to the success of the movement to preserve the teachings and culture of their ancestors through reading literacy culture. There is no doubt that China has the oldest culture and science in the world. Japan succeeded in developing a reading literacy culture based on the development of local culture, so that Japan was not only strong in its technological development, but also strong in developing its people's reading facilities. Acknowledging the reality above this paper aims to explain the reasons why reading literacy is an important skill to develop to a building nation.

Literature Review

What is Literacy?

The literacy definition varies, and the variant is increasingly developing (Assessment, 2013). In Indonesian language, literacy is more popularly known as 'melekhuruf' or literate in English, which is the ability to read and write. But in various references the definition of 'literacy' can vary, sometimes referring only to the ability to read, sometimes involving the ability to read and write, and more rarely referred to as the ability to read, write, speak, and hear. Inglis and Aers (2008, p. 32) noted that most children learn to speak fairly easily, while learning to read and write requires a process. From this study, it was explained that the ability to read and write made someone 'literate', which of course with a certain level of fluency. Therefore, The National Literacy Trust defines literacy as the ability to read, write, speak, and hear with the reason that literate people are able to communicate effectively with others and are able to understand written information.

Along with the development of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), the definition of literacy is increasingly expanded (Rintaningrum, 2009a), so that it is not only based on the definition of mere reading and writing skills. In the modern world we often hear the term digital literacy, computer literacy, and media literacy. Thus, the definition of literacy also varies

considerably, depending on which literacy will be measured, by adjusting the study needs and the data held. Because of the many attributes associated with literacy, this paper only focuses on reading literacy.

Reading Literacy

Reading is one of the important aspects that need to be mastered by students because reading is the foundation for learning subjects across all sciences (Rintaningrum, 2009b, 2015b). The ability to read is very important for finding a job or going to college. Reading ability plays an important role in improving an individual's life, ability in school, and is important to support the development of a country (Rintaningrum, 2015a), because the ability to read provides many benefits including increasing the repertoire of knowledge, opening new information, the ability to explain new information to other people, improve concentration, and also for entertainment (Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2018).

The ability to read is a skill (Geske & Ozola, 2008) which is the foundation of almost the entire learning process, and is very important for students not only to learn languages and literature studies, but also important to learn other subjects. A study showed that if students' reading skills were low, it would automatically have implications for difficulties in learning other subjects (Rintaningrum, R; Aldous, C; Keeves, 2017).

In the various results of international testing, for example, the results of a study by the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) showed that the reading ability of Indonesian students is still low (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2017). PISA is a three-year survey sponsored by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) by taking a sample of 15-year-old students from various schools randomly from various countries in the world including Indonesia, to take the Reading, Maths and Science skills test. The results of the study showed that in the 2012 PISA data, Indonesia is

ranked 64th out of 65 countries that are the object of the research. While the 2015 PISA data showed that Indonesia is ranked 64th out of 72 countries participating in the study (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2018). The first rank was occupied by Singapore.

For reading ability, the average reading score of Indonesian students is still concerning, namely 397 from the OECD average score of 493 (Suprayitno, 2016). This indicates that Indonesia still has many things to do to improve students' reading skills so that they are skilled in understanding the text. Because reading is a skill, students have to frequently train and sharpen themselves continuously.

Although there are some factors contributing to the level of reading literacy (Adams & Wu, 2002; Alderson, 2000; Elley, 1989, 1994; Kobayashi, 2002; Kotte, Lietz, & Lopez, 2006; Lesaux, N. K., Lipka, O., & Siegel, 2006; Lietz, 1996; OECD, 2001, 2003; Purves, 1973; Rintaningrum, 2007, 2009a; Weir, 2007). (Geske, A., 2008) and (Rintaningrum, 2007, 2009a, 2015a), it is crucial to improve the level of reading literacy for Indonesian generations. Therefore, a study about the perspectives of the importance of reading literacy and its effects on human life is necessary to document.

Research Questions

A research questions is advanced:

What are the Indonesian people's perspectives concerning the contribution of reading to their life?

Methods and Data Collection

Interview

Recently, interviewing was used as a data collection tool in the area of linguistic research. Some researchers in the field of social sciences (Bell, 1987; Berg, 2007; Kvale, 1996) recommended that interviewing should be used as a means of data collection in social research since it provides useful information obtained from direct interaction with interviewees. Moreover, (Dörnyei, 2007) argued that interviewing is a data collection that can be conducted for various topics in a different context. Therefore, qualitative researchers tend to provide detailed information obtained during the interview session such as an explanation about individuals and events in their natural setting.

Several interview trials have been conducted to examine if the interview runs well. The trials are intended to decide how many participants are involved in the interview, how old the participants are, the gender of the participants, and whether or not the participants like reading. After running the trials, a decision was made that sufficient rich information is achieved by employing 8 participants, four male participants, and four female participants, and all the participants like reading. From eight participants, four participants are university students, while four participants are employers. Therefore, this study is conducted to gather information concerning the importance of reading from participants who like reading.

This study involves one-on-one, semi-structured interview. This type of interview is employed because it is a more flexible version of interview than a structured interview. Rubin & Rubin (2005, p. 88) pointed out that it “allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses.” In this situation, the interviewer has opportunities in some parts of the interview session to expand the interviewing for addressing various issues covered in the research questions and the aims of the study.

Findings and Discussions

Question: What are the Indonesian's people's perspectives concerning the contribution of reading to their life?

Several reasons are explained as to why reading literacy is important. Information obtained from the interview is summarised as follows.

Religious Reasons

Information recorded from the interview show that reading literacy is important in human life due to religious reasons. In Islam, reading is the very first instruction The Propheet Muhammad received from God, and this needs to be followed by all Muslems (Islam followers). For this reason, people are encouraged to read, whether it is a written text or not, because reading has some definitions. Reading does not only refer to the text but also reading has a wide meaning. For example, in real life people are required to be able to read a situation, identify the characteristics of something, and read what is on people's minds.

Self-development

Information obtained from the interview shows that reading literacy is important for self-development. Self-development is another word for personal development. Self-development is activities that are intended to improve or develop ourselves. By so doing, the respondents said that they know something that they haven't known, or they know something from something that they did not know. There may be some activities to improve yourself and one of those activities is reading. Different people have different ways to develop their personal development. Respondents said that reading is able to broaden their horizon that makes them open to new



experiences. Moreover, respondents said that they can do some evaluation about what they have done.

Professional Development

Information obtained from the respondents shows that reading is a form of professional development. Respondents said that reading is important for someone's professional development. This indicates that reading is one way to improve someone's profession such as teacher, manager, school principal, researcher, lecturer and some leaders and other professions. Professional development is a process of how someone improves his or her capabilities through access to education such as training and workshops. Staff or leaders can improve their capabilities by reading.

Solving Problems

Reading has another positive effect for their readers. A respondent said that reading is able to help people to solve their own problems. People who like reading will have rich information and knowledge stored in their brain. With the knowledge they have, they are able to solve their own problems.

Personal Branding Improvement

The more people read, the more information and knowledge they have. People's quality improves very well because of their knowledge. Reading helps people improve their soft skills such as communication skills, presentation skills, leadership skills, and socialisation skills. With these skills people have, they become more confident to face their life. People also have more ideas with reading.



With knowledge people have from reading, people will be more creative and innovative. Combining with the soft skills they have, this will improve their personal branding that makes them different from other people.

International Participation

Information gathered from the interview shows that respondents have opportunities to participate not only on local, regional and national levels, but also on international levels such as international conferences, international joint research, visiting lecturer, students' exchange, international competition such as speech, debate and paper writing, and school representatives. It is because they have some knowledge from some resources they read, they practise the knowledge regularly and continuously, that finally leads them to take a part in international events. The more they read, the more knowledge they have, the more international opportunities they have. They have ideas in their mind. They find it easy to express their ideas due to a lot of reading.

School Success

Respondents explain that reading helps them for their school success. They add that the ability to read helps them to understand instruction spoken by their teachers, instruction written in books, and help them to understand school subjects that force them to read. If it is done, this helps them gain good results that finally help them to succeed at school.

Family Pride

Reading literacy done by children can lead to family pride. It is because children are seen as an expensive asset for parents. Parents are very happy and proud when they know that their children arrive to the stage of certain development, namely, reading ability. After the children are



able to spell, say the words, then sentences, children develop their ability in reading. When parents know that their children are able to read well, although it is just decoding, parents are very happy. Children's knowledge improves and children get smarter.

Parents are happier when they know that their children are able to comprehend what they are reading. Moreover, the more they comprehend the content, the more they gain good results in their study. This will lead them to succeed at school and help them to participate in larger society. Parents are feeling proud of them because their children's linguistics ability develops in the right stage.

Helping Teachers

Teaching reading is not as easy as people think, as teachers face students with different characteristics, background knowledge, socio-economic status, and home environment. Reading is categorised as a complex skill. In order to be good readers, students need to understand some elements of reading such as letter knowledge, phonics, vocabulary, knowledge of language, syntax, and semantics. Students' background knowledge affects their ability to read well.

Since there are some factors that contribute to the ability to read, teachers are very happy when they see their students are able to read. It is because this reduces the teachers' load and the teachers' responsibility. In particular, the teachers' moral responsibility becomes less, and their load becomes lighter. This also indicates that teachers are successful in teaching reading, although some students still need some help.

Helping Other Students

Students who are able to read are more likely to have opportunities to help other students. It may be not realised by some schools or some teachers, but schools and teachers can make 'buddy' systems, in which students who are able to read are paired with students who have



difficulty in reading, in order to help them to read. It is done at school time at reading time, or at the school library at break time. It depends on the school's policy. This activity can also be extended outside of school hours.

Self-Confidence

When students are able to read, students' self-confident improves. Similarly, when children are able to ride a bike, they feel more confident to ride a bike a bit far. This situation also happens when students are able to do mathematical operations, their confident increases because they are able to do so.

The improvement of feeling self-confident is expressed by the fluency of their reading, the willingness to read more books as well as the action to show up their ability to read in front of their friends, teachers, parents, and their siblings. Moreover, another indicator of self-confidence is the students' ability to tell and explain others about what they read.

Furthermore, people with a lot of knowledge and information will be more confident to interact with their colleagues, either academics or business people because they have knowledge and information to share.

Acquiring More Language Knowledge

The more frequently students read, the more language knowledge students acquire. Knowledge of language includes vocabulary, grammar and structure. Students are more likely to have more opportunities to acquire different patterns of grammar and structure when they like reading. Different types of books serve different patterns of grammar and structure.

Students' vocabulary improves quickly when students like reading. Every book they read provides different vocabularies and this will enrich their vocabulary quickly. Reading will increase our vocabulary and help us find out new things. Good sentences will affect the way people

express themselves and speak in front of other people, plus extensive insight into many topics that make people more open and confident.

Syntax

Students recognise a variety of syntax from different resources. Syntax is the structure of a language. Students recognise the structure of the language, which one is subject, which one is verb, adverb, adjective, noun, phrase, noun phrase and clause, and recognise different types of sentences.

Visualisation Ability

Information collected from the interview shows that reading helps them to visualise what they read. For example, picture, colour and shape. Even, from some paragraph they are reading, two respondents said that they are able to summarise what they are reading into a diagram. This is not only the ability to imagine in their mind, but this is extended into the ability to visualise in the written form.

Recognising Reading Pattern

Respondents are finally aware that a text has a variety of patterns. They do not know the knowledge of reading, but by practising reading regularly they realise that a passage or a text has a different pattern. Sometimes a text only has a description, sometimes cause and effect, and sometimes pros and contrast. This indicates that reading also provides information not only about the content of a text but also the pattern of a text itself or how a text is organised.

Improving Reading Skill

Reading is a skill. Because it is a skill, the improvement does not occur in quick time. Reading skill improves well if we practise reading regularly and continuously. Speed of reading can be controlled if we practise reading regularly.

Improving Writing Skill

The more people read, the more knowledge, creativity and imagination people have. People find it easier to pour various ideas for writing, with good language, so that one's writing is more pronounced. People are able to write after they read some materials.

Developing Knowledge and Information

Reading improves the information and knowledge of the reader. Books such as Economics, Religion, Politics, Information and Technology and Business Management contain useful information and knowledge. People find it easy to socialise with others because they understand the knowledge they are discussing. Moreover, people have opportunities to share information and knowledge with each other due to them having knowledge. People become open to new experiences because they have rich knowledge and information. Even, people can have new knowledge and information that they had never known and heard before.

References

Books are a source of knowledge, information and insights; you can learn various kinds of knowledge by reading books. Information and insights from reading can be used as references to be applied in life. For example, how to make writings such as scientific work, articles and content, or maybe lighter writing, we can read some references as a source of knowledge.

Entertainment

Reading is one of free entertainment. It can be conducted at home, bookstore, library, office, garden, or playground. Getting free entertainment by reading books such as the benefits of reading short stories, novels, comics or other topics that you like in the library, will pamper yourself and make you more relaxed.

Becoming Calmer and Wiser

Reading will have a positive effect on your attitude, where you will be wiser in acting, and seeing from many different points of view. Content of the reading will influence how we think and take action about what we are doing and what we are going to do.

Improving Power of Concentration

Reading will train and increase our concentration; when reading we focus on what we read, in everyday life you will concentrate more. When we are reading, we sit in a certain place, and keep a distance from distractions. It is the way we try to concentrate on what we are reading. If we do it regularly, this is more likely to improve our concentration.

Conclusion

Reading literacy needs to begin in early childhood, because the practice of reading in children has actually been done before children formally enter school. Even though reading has been done early, it turns out that the results for each individual are different. This can be seen from the results of a study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), showing that reading ability of Indonesian students is still low. Many factors contribute to students' reading skills. Some actions need to be conducted to



improve reading literacy culture among Indonesian people. One of the actions is increasing awareness about the importance of reading literacy to a building nation.

Reading literacy has many benefits for the readers such as religious reasons, self-development, professional development, solving problems, personal branding improvement, international participation, school success, family pride, helping teachers, helping other students, self-confidence, acquiring more language knowledge, syntax, visualisation ability, recognising reading patterns, improving reading skills, improving writing skills, developing knowledge and information, references, entertainment, becoming calm and wiser, and improving powers of concentration. Therefore, no one can deny that the ability to read improves people's horizon and that information helps them to be one of the agents of change in the nation.



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