

The Roles of Parents and Community in Supporting Children's Literacy Development

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the role of parents and community to strengthening children literacy. This study uses participatory action research (PAR) in applying qualitative data collection using interview, observation and document study. This study was conducted in Landak and Manggarai Barat, part of Wahana Visi Indonesia area program. The main informant of the study were tutors, parents, and village government officer. The result of the study describe that the role of parents assists children literacy through assisting children creating reading corner and by interaction with children after storytelling or reading a book. The support of community, including the availability of reading camp can increase parents' awareness of children literacy. The inhibiting factors of strengthening support children literacy is when parents do not have enough time to support the children and parents have a low literacy competency to assist children. It seems that, when children have access to early childhood education, it may affect parent's self-efficacy towards their children literacy. Interestingly, parents also have a more positive behavior to be more patient as they know about children development stages during assisting children literacy.

Keywords: Literacy, parenting, parent, community, children literacy, reading camp, community literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

Children literacy is very crucial for children so it can improve their future in society. Traditionally, the term of literacy is used for competency to reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Based on United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), literacy includes comprehension literacy that can be apply in daily life (UNESCO, 2008).

It seems that the earlier children are given exposure towards children literacy, the better children will apply literacy in their daily life in the future. In the past several years, children in Indonesia seems to have a low-level reading competency. The main reference of literacy data derived from PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study. PISA study is usually to measure youth aged 15 in literacy, science and math. Based on the latest PISA, the average score of Indonesian students is 371 (PISA, 2018). This score also diverse between the city and the rural areas. For example, the score PISA in Jakarta and Yogyakarta is the highest compared to other provinces in Indonesia. In reading competency, DKI Jakarta students scored 410 and Yogyakarta scored 411 (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia [Kemendikbud RI], 2019). Scored 371 is categorised level 1 (level 1 out of 6 level), which means students are only able to identify some basic information that explicitly available in the text.

Even though PISA result is very comprehensive, this study may not necessarily describe children literacy in the lower grade (for grade 1-3) aged 6-9 years old. The most appropriate measurement to measure literacy in the lower grade can be using EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) or STAR (School-based test about Reading). From the latest EGRA only 70% of Indonesian students able to read fluently with comprehension (Stern and Nordstrum, 2014). It can be noticed that the Indonesian students' capacity in literacy is low compared to other countries. Wahana Visi Indonesia also conducted mapping analysis in some areas related to children literacy in the third grade. Based on Wahana Visi study, of 2632 sample across 9 districts, it is found that only 52% children in West Manggarai and 50% in Landak are able to read with comprehension (Wahana Visi Indonesia, 2018). It can be seen that children competency of reading is quite low in Indonesia, especially in rural areas.

There already several programs to improve children literacy in Indonesia namely National Literacy Movement (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah*) dan Parents Reading Story to Children Movement (*Gerakan Orang Tua membacakan cerita kepada anak*). This shows that the government hold strong commitment to improve literacy in Indonesia. However, the implementation of this program is very diverse in each area in Indonesia.

The responsibility of children ability to strengthen children literacy is not only from teachers and schools, but also the wider areas. Some research shows that the engagement of parents and community may improve the children literacy

(Terstilsky & Wilkins, 2015; Park, 2008). Moreover, parents-child interaction of learning literacy has a positive impact on children's print knowledge and reading interest (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). The more parents have confidence to teach their children, the more positive outcomes and behaviour towards children literacy. High level of parents' involvement in home literacy may have a significant impact on children reading (Alston-Abel & Berninger, 2018).

In the context of Indonesia, awareness of literacy usually becomes the main responsibility of the school and teacher, especially in rural areas. Literacy is mainly learnt through Bahasa Indonesia lesson. This Bahasa Indonesia lesson is taught in all years from grade 1-6. The assessment of Bahasa Indonesia is conducted semi-annually and annually, not always measuring and focusing on children's reading comprehension.

There is some research related to parenting literacy in Indonesia. However, this research is usually conducted for parenting in ECCD children (Pradipta, 2014). The research focused on how parents can support children providing print-rich environment. There is also some research about literacy parenting that is conducted in Bali (Padmadewi, Artini, Nitiasih, & Swandana, 2018). This research describe that parents can fully support children literacy through some school programs. However, this research lack details on how parents are supporting their children in home. Using educational prosperity framework (Willms, 2018), parenting and family involvement is an essential part of foundation for success, including for early primary children (6-9 years old).

Overall, there is a gap where there is a lack of research in literacy parenting in Indonesia. In addition, even though there are some data that shows about parenting of literacy in Indonesia, there are no data that describe specifically for children aged 6-9 years old. More importantly, there are no data about how parents assist their children literacy in rural areas. This study is about the role of parents and community to support children literacy in West Manggarai and Landak. The research question is how the role of parents and community to support children literacy aged 6-9 years old.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is using participatory action research (PAR). This research is aimed to improve the support of parents and communities to children literacy. PAR can be used by communities to work and change their own problem (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). PAR also can be used to strengthen the interaction between parents, teachers and community. This research can be seen as a reflective experience of parents to strengthen their role in supporting children literacy. PAR is a reflective process that consider the voice and community to support children literacy. Action research also considers history, culture and local context that embedded in social relationship. PAR also provide an ample room to address problem in collaborative way. Even though PAR is mostly about creating change, however it can also use as part of learning. From the data

that is collected from PAR it can be used to create a change in a community.

PAR is sharing ownership between researchers and practitioners. What is more, during the process there is also learning and sharing, action and reflection (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007). The participants of PAR include families, teachers, facilitator, tutor, community members, practitioners and researcher. The main reason of conducting this PAR is to solve literacy problem within the community by involving community as evaluator.

There is no specific blueprint in the implementation of PAR (Harrison, 2013). In this research data mostly uses qualitative form including interview, photography, observation and documentaries. In this PAR mechanism using to identify perceptions, views and opinion of parents and facilitators. After the data is compiled it will be categorized and analyzed further. This process also carried triangulation between interview (focus group discussion/FGD and key informant interview), observation and documentation. This study is specifically about parenting literacy in children aged 6-9 years old in Landak, West Kalimantan dan West Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara. The participants are 69 parents, 30 community facilitator and 2 village officers in Landak. The participants in West Manggarai 181 parents, 7 community facilitators, and 1 village officer.

This focus of this research is to interpret and analyze the role of parents and community to support children literacy. Data sources of this research is mostly collected from primary data and several secondary data. Primary data is by conducting their own data collection process. The qualitative data in this research is also part of outcome monitoring that is conducted by Wahana Visi Indonesia during July-September 2019.

The cycle of PAR in this research includes learning, action and reflection. This research is the first cycle of the first batch of implementing Wahana Literasi Community Action.

In this first cycle, the learning process of the parents and community is held during sharing session about parents' awareness workshop. In this workshop, parents and community learn about language development and children literacy, children readiness, reading (storytelling and reading aloud), questioning skill, giving feedback and reading corner. After that, parents and community have a chance to practice their knowledge both in home or community. After series of monitoring, parents and community can reflects again on how the improvement of their literacy parenting practices. There are also 21 sessions of activities with children in reading clubs facilitated by local facilitators.

2.1. Limitation

This study only describes the role of parents to assist children literacy without further analysis of ability the children reading with comprehension. This study is conducted during the academic year of 2018/2019.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are some reasons as to why parents have a willingness to support children literacy. Based on the data, it shows that parents have a willingness because they acknowledge the awareness of the importance of children literacy. This awareness is developed regularly through 9 monthly sessions of learning and sharing with facilitators about the important literacy for children and how parents could support them at home daily. This awareness is developed during learning and sharing session with practitioners about the important literacy for children. Moreover, parents knows that educating children is their main responsibility. Previously, they assume that educating children is the main responsibility of teachers. Moreover, illiterate parents acknowledge that they still can support children literacy at home even if they are not readers.

There are several ways on how parents assist children literacy. First, parents assist children literacy using contextual learning material. Second, parents can assist children by creating reading corner in their home. In this case, at least there are 56 home reading corners in Landak (23 home reading corners in Mengkatang village, 13 reading corners in Pawis Hilir village, 20 reading corners in Angan Tembawang villages) that has been developed as their awareness of the importance in children literacy is increasing.

"I want my children so that they can read fluently, I was trained to assist children in creating a reading corner. Now, my children are willing to read at home". (SMT, parent, Angan Tembawang Landak).

"The availability of reading corner in home can make children study better, they are usually lazy but now they are motivated to learn letter, number and vocabularies". (Parent, angan Tembawang).

In this sense, children have exposure to print-rich environment. This study is in line with Neumann (2018) who's finding asserted that guiding parents in providing environmental print words and materials is a potential way to foster letter skill and create meaningful literacy activities, especially in family with low socio-economic status (SES). As part of the finding, interestingly, there is also a positive behaviour change in parents on how they assist their children. This means that parents know about children development stages and its process, and how to assist their children with it

"We used to have high egos as parents, children must obey our wishes, but the condition is different now. We need to understand why they did such things and speak in their language so children can have better understanding ... if we get angry they are afraid of us and they can't learn anymore from us". (Parent, Landak district)

Parents also assist their children by reading them stories and asking them questions and also using learning media. By reading children stories, parents and children can interact with each other.

Some parents usually read the story for their children 2-3 times a week. Parents also notice that learning with their children can improved children awareness of knowing letter and vocabularies. This study is in line with a study from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia that interaction of parents and child in literacy activities and providing print rich environment may have a positive impact on children early literacy development (Fern, 2013)

"Now, I understand how to assist my children. I ask him what is the story about and he started to share the story from the book that he read". (Parent, Pawis Hilir)

Parents also stated the support of village is very crucial. The community also created 2 reading clubs in a village in Landak. This reading club is also supported with Surat Keputusan (Decree Letter) and facilitators team from the village office. The facilitator works voluntary to assist children literacy.

"My motivation to assist children learning is because sometimes parents are busy, so I assist children because children learning motivation is high"- (Ms Kas, Facilitator, Landak)

The different approach of strengthening children literacy is conducted in West Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara. In this district, community takes an active role to support children literacy compared to parents.

"The barriers of assisting children literacy in West Manggarai is their parents reading competency. How they can assist their children, if they as parents are having difficulties in reading and writing" (SP, facilitators, West Manggarai)

In this sense, community in West Manggarai takes a greater role by assisting children literacy in reading camp/TBM (Taman Baca Masyarakat). There are at least 5 reading camps that are well-functioning in West Manggarai compared to 3 reading camps in Landak. This means that the facilitators are assisting children several days a week. As community and parents also aware that lack of nutrition is the main issue in that district, they also creating 'literacy garden' (*kebun gizi literasi*). Literacy garden means that the community are planting nutritious food/ homestead food garden and this garden also become media for children to learn literacy. This in line with a study that creating a lot of literacy activities have a positive association with children literacy (Terlitsky & Wilkins, 2015). In Liang Sola (West Manggarai village), the village office takes a part in community reading camp in the form of budgeting and paying for tutor incentive. In this case the community provide budget to support reading camp in their village funds. The village office provides this budget after they monitor the reading camp literacy activities and acknowledged that this activity is very essential.

It is clear that the village offices in both Landak and West Manggarai supports reading club literacy activities. Reading community in West Manggarai is fully supported by the local government including sharing budget. In West Manggarai, community takes active role to assist children literacy compared to parents. In other words, advocacy towards local authority or policy is also important to develop literacy program in community.

The main challenges of parents assisting children literacy is that the parents have low literacy competency. There are also limited availability of books in rural areas, sometimes there is no bookstore within the villages. Another challenge of literacy includes parents' job (for example: a farmer) who have a limited amount of time to assist the children.

The factors that influence the running of reading camp (TBM) includes the support from local district. The more support from village office, the more sustainable of the operating of the reading camp. The commitment of tutors/facilitators also has a significant impact on children interest in literacy. When facilitators have high commitment and motivation, they can assist children regularly. Parents awareness of children literacy also have a significant influence on children literacy. "Both parents and community in West Manggarai and Landak stated that stimulating children with print rich or literate environment is very crucial for children in earlier ages." In addition, both parents and community in West Manggarai and Landak stated that the availability of ECD (Early Childhood Development) Centre is very crucial to introduce children to print rich environment in early years. A study also found that, if early childhood education program improve their quality of services, it will have a meaningful impact on children development, including literacy (Brinkman et al., 2017). As part of this study finding, it is also stated the role of teachers who join to facilitate in community reading club is very important. Shared-literacy through a school-based family literacy program may strengthen the role of parents and teachers at the same time (Stacy, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

Parents in rural areas are providing support to their children literacy through assisting children in creating reading corner, reading children story and giving feedback to their children. Interestingly, parents also change their attitude during assisting their children to be more patient as they more aware of children development stages. Furthermore, community may have a positive role to assist children literacy, especially where the parents are having difficulties to assist the children. The support from the community can be seen through reading camps or reading clubs. The more parents, village office and community support reading camps there are, the more effective reading camp can operate in creating literacy activities.

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