

No More Hoax

(Model of media literacy education for maintaining ‘unity in diversity’ in Indonesia)

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Abstract—This study was aimed at introducing a model of media literacy education to identify and respond to hoaxes to avoid potential conflicts threatening the unity in diversity in Indonesia. The data were derived from middle and high school teachers at eLKISI Islamic Boarding School who have access to digital media in their teaching-learning process. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and survey questionnaire were employed to find the patterns of media consumption among these teachers and their awareness of hoaxes. This preliminary study was expected to map the patterns of media consumption and build an awareness of hoaxes among teachers, which eventually increase their level of media literacy. The final result of this study is projected at introducing a media literacy education model that helps to maintain Indonesia’s unity in diversity as indicated by the teachers’ ability to identify and respond properly to hoaxes in order to avoid disintegration.

Keywords—*disintegration; hoax; media literacy education model; unity in diversity*

I. INTRODUCTION

For the past three decades, media literacy has become a growing field that invited teachers, parents, policy makers, and researchers alike to dwell on the subject. Risen to its prominence in the 1990s, media literacy education was implemented through various school-based programs in the US to emphasize the skills of analyzing, evaluating and creating media and technology messages [1]. In the UK, policy on media literacy in the late 1990s was unbundled with the enactment of the Communications Act 2003 requiring the UK’s communications regulator, Ofcom, to promote media literacy [2]. Meanwhile, recognizing the growing presence of media in modern societies as well as the need for school teachers and university educators to be media competent, a Russian researcher proposes media literacy education models to help teachers and educators train students to develop their critical thinking and abilities to analyze media texts and to experiment with the media [3].

The significance of media literacy education is irrefutable. In her study, Domine identifies media literacy education as a critical and creative framework for teacher preparation in the 21st century [4]. Meanwhile, in their research designed to assess the impact of different types of instructional practices across the curriculum, Hobbs and Frost reveal that integrating media education activities across all subject areas has a tremendous effect on improving students’ literacy skills [1].

Redmond later confirms this finding as she highlights the benefits of an integrated model of literacy for developing students’ competence to assess information and examine bias and validity at the same time [5].

Most of these studies on media literacy education have been conducted in Western context. Fortunately, recent studies investigating media literacy education in Asian context have come to surface as it is becoming an emerging field in some Asian countries, such as China and Singapore. In Chinese context, Cheung and Xu explore the implementation of media literacy education Chinese primary education in attempt to shift media literacy education from an international context to a local setting, thereby offering a point of reference to enrich the process of localization [6]. In Singapore, the presence of media literacy has also been acknowledged in recent government policy and given emphasis in the 21st century teacher education [7]. Still, compared to their western counterparts, it is apparent that most Asian countries are late to realize the need to teach their students and integrate media literacy in the curricula.

Compared to these two countries, Indonesia is a few steps behind in dealing with the issue of media literacy. Literacy in itself has always been an issue that has not been properly addressed. Reading ability as the main component of literacy competence is still significantly low. In 2014, UNESCO recorded that on average an Indonesian child read 24 pages a year. In addition, Indonesian literacy level, according to Central Connecticut State University research in 2016, ranked second last out of 61 countries, only one level higher than Botswana [8]. In addition, PISA stated that over 50% of fifteen-year-old Indonesians do not master basic skills in reading and mathematics [9].

While literacy in a sense of turning of pages and comprehending texts still poses a challenge for most Indonesians, ironically, at the same time Indonesia is considered as one of the top internet and social media users. Statistics show that 132.7 million of Indonesians access internet. Further, it states that 50.7 percent access internet through smartphones and computers, 47.6 percent through smartphones and only 1.7 percent access from computer only [10]. With the low level of literacy among Indonesians, the exposure to media may lead to a potential threat to Indonesia’s unity in diversity as people have not been equipped with the ability to critically analyze any information obtained from the

media. As a result, there are many hoaxes and fake news circulating in the society.

Many of the hoaxes spread through online media in Indonesia contains elements of ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-community known as SARA. A recent survey on hoax conducted by Indonesian telecommunication society showed that 88.6% of hoaxes circulated within the society tends to provoke hatred among people of different ethnicities, religions, races or communities [11]. Unfortunately, due to their low level of media literacy, in Indonesia not many people are aware of these hoaxes and often just consume them as facts. This is further strengthened by the desire for many Indonesians to be among the first to share information especially supported with the growing popularity of social medias and chatting applications that enable them to quickly share any kind of information [12]. As a result, conflicts between different groups are often unavoidable. If this trend continues, it may lead Indonesia to the brink of disintegration. Concerns over this matter, the Indonesian Commission of Broadcasting also agrees on the urgency for media literacy education in Indonesia [13]. Correspondingly, media literacy education is perceived as a solution since it can develop active reasoning about media that may support individual's learning about the diverse peoples and cultures, which enhances the potential of media literacy education to promote global understanding [14].

This phenomenon directed this study to examine the attitudes of teachers of eLKISI junior and senior high schools, Islamic boarding schools in East Java, Indonesia, in relation to media literacy and hoaxes, and also propose a model of media literacy education that can be applied in Indonesian context. As a predominantly Muslim country, Islamic boarding schools play an integral role in educating a majority of Indonesian young generation. Therefore, it is necessary to thoroughly investigate how media literacy education can be applied to these schools, and to start off, it is essential to ensure that the teachers have already had the necessary skills to integrate media literacy education in their teaching.

As stated earlier, in order to develop individual's ability to critically and autonomously interpret media contents, the need for media literacy education is inevitable. Moving on from the traditional notion of reading a physical text, nowadays reading involves engagement with contemporary texts that may be printed, sounded, visualized in different kinds of media [15]. New media literacy is directed to increase the level of literacy required for individuals to contribute to the current online participatory culture [16]. Accordingly, media literacy education in the modern world includes the process of the development of personality by utilizing the material of media, focusing on the shaping of culture of interaction with media, in a bid to develop creativity, communicative skills, critical thinking, perception, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of media texts [17]. Introducing media literacy education for teachers will lead them to be media literate teachers who are able to pass on their knowledge to their students. As the consequence, the students will develop media literacy competence and build awareness of hoaxes that may lead to disintegration.

In an attempt to propose a relevant model of media literacy education for schools, particularly at junior and senior high school levels in Indonesia, it is useful to learn from existing models of media literacy education that have been applied elsewhere. In the West and in Russia the preference in media education leans toward critical thinking/critical autonomy development theory along with cultural, sociocultural, and semiotic theories, protective theory is while the least favored. Furthermore, Western media educators incline to the practical approach (emphasizing on practical skills for working with media equipment) and the consumption and satisfying approach, while Russians favor the artistic/aesthetic approaches [18].

Fedorov categorizes media education models into [3]: a) **educational-informational models**, focusing on the study of the theory, history, and language of media culture based on the cultural, aesthetic, semiotic, sociocultural theories of media education; b) **educational-ethical models**, focusing on the study of moral, religious, philosophical problems relying on the ethic, religious, ideological, ecological, protectionist theories of media education; c) **pragmatic models**, focusing on practical media technology training based on the uses and gratifications and practical theories of media literacy education; d) **aesthetical models**, aimed at the development of the artistic taste and enriching the skills of analysis of the best media culture examples by relying on the aesthetics; e) **sociocultural models**, focusing on sociocultural development of a creative personality as to the perception, imagination, visual memory, interpretation analysis, autonomic critical thinking by relying on the cultural studies, semiotic, and ethic models of media education.

However, existing media literacy education in various countries rarely employs a single model. Instead, different models are synthesized and integrated in its implementation in accordance to the aims and the targets. Considering the existing models, this study aimed at identifying the most appropriate education model for eLKISI teachers in order to develop teacher's critical thinking skills and critical autonomy, develop abilities to perceive, evaluate, understand and analyze media texts of different forms and genres, and to teach students to experiment with the media, to create their own media products or texts. It is expected that by developing media literacy, the threat of disintegration prompted by hoaxes and disinformation can be averted. In order to do so, this study conducted observation and collected data to map patterns of media consumption among the teachers and their awareness of hoax.

II. METHOD

To map the pattern of media consumption and awareness of hoax, questionnaires were distributed among teachers of eLKISI Islamic boarding schools. Developed from some previous surveys and research on media literacy and hoax, the questionnaires consisted of four sections, namely pattern of internet consumption at home, pattern of internet consumption at school, internet consumption behavior, and internet interaction pattern. Most of the questionnaires were in a form of closed questions, except for the last part in which three texts were presented as sample of hoax, and open questions are placed in order to identify the participants' behavior in dealing

with hoaxes related to ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-community or abbreviated as SARA.

The participants for this study consists of 17 junior and senior high school teachers. Even though both male and female teachers participated in this study, there were less male than female teachers with a ratio of nearly 1:6. Other than distributing questionnaires, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held to further stimulate responses from the participants and reveal their ability to critically interpret media contents. Triangulation process, combining observation, as well as results of the FGD and questionnaires were directed toward media consumption, was applied as the basis for creating the most appropriate media literacy education model.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Patterns of Internet Consumption

Based on the questionnaires distributed to the teachers, the findings show interesting facts. Regarding the first part of the questionnaire on the pattern of internet access at home, 29.4% teachers claimed to access the internet frequently, while 41.1% only rarely. Thus, all participants were familiar with the internet even though their time preference in accessing the internet varies. Their most favorite time to access the internet was 12:00–15:00 or the period after midday prayer, which is considered as resting time. This concept of having resting time is comparable to the Spanish custom of *siesta* referring to take a nap or rest after heavy lunch. It seems that all teachers agreed that this was the most convenient time to access the internet. Meanwhile, regarding the purpose of accessing the internet at home, those teachers uses it more as recreational tools, namely for accessing social media, *YouTube* or entertainment sites, which accounted for 71% rather than educational resources, 29%. Hence, accessing the internet at home for personal use is likely to be a preference.

On the other hand, accessing the internet at school was done within 1-2 hours per day (70%), 3-4 hours per day (12%) and more than six hours per day (18%). These teachers mostly claimed that they have quite a good internet connection at school. Interestingly, as illustrated in Fig.1, even though they were using the school internet facility, they admitted that did not use it solely to browse for teaching materials but also personal reasons, which is mostly accessing social media. Meanwhile, concerning school’s recommendation that might

influence teachers’ selection of online materials for reference, only one teacher admitted to never ask for recommendation from the institution, another one claimed to always ask for recommendation, while the rest felt influenced by the recommendation.

Another significant point related to teachers’ internet consumption is that more than half of the teachers have own initiative in surfing the internet. Yet, their awareness of always thoroughly crosschecking online information is quite low. Only three teachers stated that they always crosschecked the information while the rest seemed to see no importance for doing so. Worse still, 90% of the teachers tended to believe most information gained from the internet. Accordingly, the need to build critical thinking skills towards the media for eLKISI teachers is essential for establishing media literacy education in their schools. It is due to the fact that these teachers have already been familiar with the internet, yet, their awareness of probable disinformation is considerably low.

In responding to the three examples of hoaxes presented in the questionnaire, apparently most teachers tended to accept texts related to Muslim adherents and Islamic teachings as true. This condition may pose a threat to the concept of ‘unity in diversity’ in Indonesia since many religious-based hoaxes are directed toward exclusivity and hatred. As illustrated in Fig.2, most teachers (64%) stated that they will check the information to verify the truth. However, when asked whether they would use the doubtful texts as teaching materials, most of them (76%) voted yes arguing that the text may increase students’ faith in Islamic teachings. The main concern here is that they could not tell for sure how the information would be verified.

Another serious concern relates to the fact that there was one teacher who believed sites providing pdf files were trustworthy because they are usually journals. In addition, many teachers (47.8%) stated *google* and *YouTube* as the most convenient sites to find teaching materials. There is also an indication that some teachers may not have the necessary knowledge on how to select and evaluate information from those search engines. Even worse, being active users of the internet, they were still unable to differentiate terms commonly used on the internet, such as sites, search engines, and so on. As a consequence, there is an increased urgency to establish media literacy education in the institution, starting from the teachers.

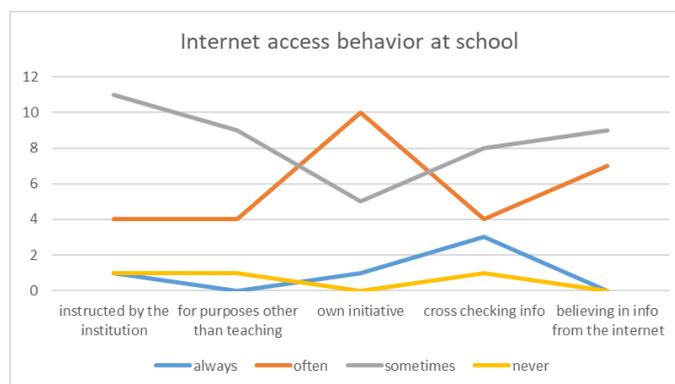


Fig. 1. Teachers’ internet consumption behavior at school.

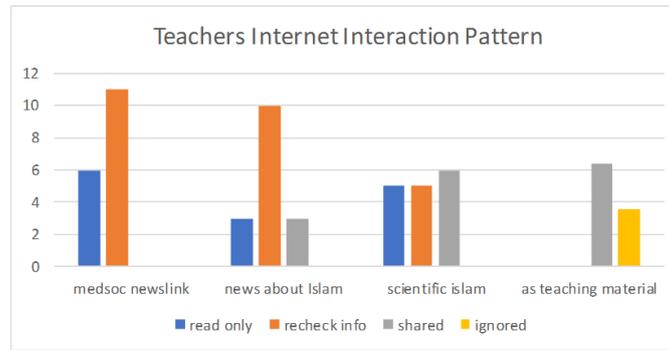


Fig. 2. Teachers' Internet Interaction Pattern.

As a matter of fact, as an educational institution, eLKISI, has made an attempt to promote literacy by providing a digital library called *maktabah al-kubro* that provides hundreds of books and references on Islamic teachings which can be accessed by both students and teachers. However, the librarian also uploaded *Wikipedia* in this digital library simply based on the consideration that *Wikipedia* provided ample information and did not require a lot of memory space. Thus, on the one hand, the institution has selected 'reputable' media sources, yet on the other hand, the librarian was unaware of *Wikipedia's* reputation as a source for information. This is also another gap to fill by media literacy education.

The finding revealed that eLKISI teachers are familiar with the internet, and technology is not a new thing for them. Thus, they have actually met the qualification of today's teachers who need to be technologically literate to teach in the 21st century [19]. Education sites and social media are favored by these teachers simply because these sites provide fast and complete information. Yet, their awareness on the trustworthiness of the sites and material gathered needs to be improved. Instructing students to find materials by themselves through the internet without an understanding of hoaxes and disinformation lurking in the media necessitates a training for teachers in media literacy education.

B. Media Literacy Education Model for eLKISI

Based on the tendencies shown by the teachers through questionnaire survey and Forum Group Discussion, it is necessary for these teachers to develop pragmatic skills to analyze, interpret, and evaluate media texts of various types and genres. As those teachers belong to Islamic boarding schools that put Islamic teachings as the utmost priority, there is a necessity to raise their awareness of the presence of other cultures and ethnics so that they will be open minded. In order to propose a suitable media literacy model for such an institution, we can refer to back to the five different categories of media education models [3].

However, in eLKISI context, employing only one of these models of media literacy education may not be the best solution. This corresponds with Fedorov who also notes common practices in many countries that rarely employ a single model [3]. Accordingly, the appropriate media literacy education model is a synthesis of educational-ethical, sociocultural, and pragmatic models. This model is deemed compatible to the specifics and unique characteristics of Islamic educational institution, such as eLKISI.

This proposed model combines educational-ethic model which puts importance on moral and religious aspects in media education with sociocultural model which considers sociocultural aspects in media education. These moral-religious and sociocultural aspects are needed to employ the pragmatic model that provide trainings in the practical and technological use of media productions. Thus, by following this synthesized model, teachers in Islamic schools, such as eLKISI, are trained to develop various kinds of active and analytical thinking towards the media and improve their skills to engage in ethical and sociocultural evaluation of media texts. This training will not make these teachers as merely passive media consumers but in turn it will provide them with sufficient skills and knowledge to produce media texts that can counter disinformation in the media.

Accordingly, the topics to be covered in the media education model for eLKISI teachers are key concepts of media education, media agency, category, technology, language, representation and audience. Thus, in order to increase teachers' awareness on hoaxes in media, the training includes but not limited to types and genres, language of media; the place and role of media education in the modern world; basic terminology, theories, key concepts, directions, models of media education; and problems of media perception, analysis of media texts and the development of the audience related to media culture. In addition, there is practical application activity to help the participants implementing their newly gained knowledge on media literacy.

IV. CONCLUSION

By mapping patterns of media consumption among teachers and their awareness of hoax, the study revealed that there was still a gap between teachers' familiarity to media and their familiarity in using information from the media in their teaching with their awareness to develop critical attitudes toward any information from the media. The existence of fake news and disinformation spread through the media has called for action to prevent conflicts leading to disintegration that threatens Indonesia's 'unity in diversity'. Hence, synthesizing educational-ethical, sociocultural, and pragmatic models is recommended for the media literacy models in eLKISI Islamic boarding schools as these models are targeted to provide a more practical analysis of media texts that will suit the unique characteristics of the schools as a religious educational institution.

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