

Teaching Independent Reading in Supporting Balanced Literacy Learning for Young Learners

Ni Kadek Heny Sayukti, Wachyu Sundayana, Gin Gin Gustine

School of Postgraduate Studies
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Bandung, Indonesia
kadekheny@student.upi.edu

Abstract—This exploratory case study describes an elaboration of teaching independent reading practice in the actual classroom. The participant of this study was an English teacher of a private elementary school in North Bali, Indonesia. The data were obtained through classroom observations and interviews. Then, the analysis was done using interactive data analysis model including four steps namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion and verification. The findings reveal that the teacher implemented several steps of teaching independent reading through having book talks, incorporating minilesson, monitoring status of the lesson, managing group share, and initiating home reading activity. The teacher's implementation of independent reading practice helped students choose books by themselves before making a review of their favorite books, and sharing them with friends. The techniques used during the classroom practice indicate independent reading need to be immersed with routines and consistent practice.

Keywords—teaching reading; reading habit; literacy learning; young learner

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current era, *balanced literacy* has been frequently mentioned by educators and brought up into discussion of teaching literacy for children. It refers to a philosophical framework which promotes the practices of teacher's level of support and child control into the teaching of reading and writing [1]. The framework underlines the practice of reading, writing, and word study. Reading activity aims at helping students to become self-directed readers through the implementation of independent reading, guided reading, and literature study [1,2]. In this study, independent reading refers to a systematic way of supporting and guiding them as they read on their own. The idea of independent reading may lead to an increased frequency of children's engagement in reading literacy activity which could improve their literacy skills [3]. Teachers are actively involved in selecting books, teaching them how to choose books based on their levels, and helping them work with *minilessons* (a brief demonstration of a principle or pattern that students need to learn) [1]. In teaching young learners, to help them become self-motivated reader requires not only free access information but also full support, assistance, and intervention from their teachers and parents [4]. However, the attitudes of being self-motivated reader are

hardly to be found in most schools in Bali, Indonesia. Due to their environmental exposure, children have been dependently raised to be passive recipients of learning for years [5]. The condition influences them to be unable to picture their own goals in learning to read or learning English literacy.

Establishments of literacy program in Indonesia still encounter several problems. *Gerakan Literasi Sekolah* (School Literacy Movement) is one of the programs which enhance reading habit and strengthen character education at school [6]. With the program, the current curriculum sees literacy skills as the ability to access, to comprehend, and to use particular information through various activities such as reading, observing, listening, writing and speaking [7]. The main concept concerns on habituation, development and learning. For a smaller concept, students are required to read books for 15 minutes before the lesson every day. Based on the guidance of School Literacy Movement for elementary level, the activity consists of reading aloud, and sustained silent reading. However, several problems still occur during the implementation. Teachers have to determine certain method because most of students tend to show low interest, meanwhile most of library still lack of literacy program [8]. Based on a study in urban and rural elementary school in West Java, Indonesia, Sayukti found an absence of using non-textbook in the schools such as novels, comics, picture storybooks, and classic literature in the library [9]. From the situation, many students were left working on their homework and summarizing task during the 15 minutes reading without specific guidance from the teachers. Not only based on how well the curriculum design is but teachers also ensure students learn effectively through the curriculum [10]. It means the success of literacy learning in Indonesia lies on teachers as an executor of the curriculum, and schools as a learning provider.

Despite the effort made by the government and potential owned by children in embarking literacy, there are still problems and difficulty in implementing reading program in elementary school in Indonesian setting. Previous study by Padmadewi indicates daily repeated reading outside the classroom (e.g. home reading log) stimulates a habit of reading for young learners [6]. In this case, this article highlights how independent reading is conducted in real classroom situation to enhance reading habit for children. Not only for educators or teachers, the study is also important for students on how well

they put effort to be self-motivated readers. Therefore, the problems raised in this study are constructed to answer research question about how independent reading practice was implemented by the teacher in the real context.

A. Independent Reading

Independent reading refers to a systematic way of supporting and guiding them as they read on their own. The idea of independent reading may lead to an increased frequency of children's engagement in reading literacy activity which could improve their literacy skills [3]. In this study, the term 'young learner' can be interpreted as children aged five to twelve years old [7]. In teaching independent reading for young learners, teachers are actively involved in selecting books, giving guidance them how to choose books based on their levels, and directing them with minilessons of specific skills or literary element of text [1]. Researches believe that teaching them to be independent reader and as the motivation is stronger, children tend to spend more time reading than those who do not share the same experience [11]. Teacher's roles are being the model for students and monitoring their behaviour through the activity [1]. Based on their study, teachers should provide a book talk, give them clear instruction step by step, confer with individual child, respond each of them on regular basis, help them evaluate themselves, reinforce their motivation, and guide them into collaboration. In relation to that, independent reading can be integrated in final term reading projects and student's reading routine.

B. Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy has been defined in many ways by researchers. Frey define balanced literacy as a program which involves community, home, and library with structured plans of read aloud, guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading and writing [12]. Spiegel finds that researchers argue "everyone does not learn in the same way; not every task requires the same strategies not every teacher has the same talents; not every school has the same combination of learners and teachers" [13]. In response to this, phonics was previously considered the way to teach reading, but combining or balancing the skills of phonics and holistic teaching can produce a successful method of teaching reading [14].

In Indonesian contexts, there are few researches related to the implementation of balanced literacy approach. Diem and Atmanegara conducted an experimental study to 20 fifth graders about reading habits in Palembang, Indonesia. The results of their study recommended balanced literacy learning in inculcating pupils' reading habit and enhancing their literacy achievement [15]. Yuliyati conducted an experimental study of balanced literacy implementation involving 127 students in the experimental group and 130 students in the control from four different elementary schools in East Java, Indonesia [16]. In contrast, the results found several challenges often encountered during the implementations such as (a) limited infrastructure, (b) teachers and school staffs have limited understanding of setting priority for reading-writing literacy culture, (c) teachers suffers from inadequate resources toward the implementation of balanced literacy learning, national literacy program and curriculum design, (d) the schools have limited professional

librarians who know how to develop literacy activity for children. Based on the overview of those related studies, this study intends to provide an elaboration of implementation of independent reading as one of the component of balanced literacy, especially strategies used in the actual classroom.

II. METHOD

This exploratory case study was conducted in a private elementary school in North Bali, Indonesia. The school and the English teacher of this study were selected due to several reasons. To implement School Literacy Movement, many schools need a role model that represents length of reading program and particular strategies to integrate reading in the school program [17]. Related to the research, the participant of this study was a teacher who established reading program including the teaching of alphabet, phonemes, and interactive reading. He was selected based on several criteria which were established for guiding the case selection [18]. First, he involved in developing a reading literacy program in the school and occasionally assisted a professional development workshop for local teachers. Second, his teaching career including teaching of primary level and literacy spanned for over 30 years. Due to multiple experiences in teaching young learners and English, he professed to eagerly improve the school with more innovations of teaching literacy for young learners.

Main data were obtained from interviews with the participant. To enrich the information, classroom observations were also conducted. The observation was specifically carried out in the fifth grade class that represented independent practice. In line with the main data source, the finding also use additional sources of data such as sample of student's review and sample of task used by the teacher. Then, triangulation and data analysis were deliberately used to obtain detailed information. Data were analyzed using the framework of Fountas and Pinnell in central themes, namely the analysis of book talks session, minilesson session, individual reading and conferring, evaluation and reward, and group share [1].

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of classroom observations and interviews with the teacher revealed several steps in teaching independent reading to fifth grade students. English was given in 40-minute block four times a week. The teacher believes that children have short span of concentration, therefore the schedule of the lesson tend to be brief but daily. According to the teacher, English class was divided into two specific focuses every week, two meetings for reading comprehension, and two meetings for spelling class. In this study, the finding concerns on the practice of teaching independent reading through reading comprehension class. Students of the fifth grade class usually have reading comprehension twice a week and the other two meetings were focusing on spelling practice. According to Fountas and Pinnell, basic structure of independent reading practice starts from book talk session, minilesson, status of the class, reading and conferring, and group share and evaluation [1]. Based on the classroom observations, the teacher almost implemented those steps before students started making a book (novel) review. Based on

classroom observations, the teacher's steps of teaching independent reading are described in Table 1 as follows.

TABLE I. THE TEACHER'S STEPS OF TEACHING INDEPENDENT READING

Procedures of teaching	Levels of Support	Materials
1. Book talks during reading comprehension class	Low support (The teacher monitors student and gives minimum help)	English novels, short stories or reading passages.
2. Monitoring status of the class, individual reading and conferring	Students independently solve their problems while reading a text.)	
3. Managing group share, and evaluation		
4. Initiating reading habit through home reading log and reward		

Table 1 points out the teacher's steps of teaching independent reading to fifth grade students. Although the procedures might follow the framework of Fountas and Pinnell (2001), there were some changes that he used in his implementation.

1) Book talks during reading comprehension class: Talking about books is a way to guide student's interest in reading. Based on the classroom observation during the reading comprehension class, the teacher gave students a final term task of making a short review of one English novel that they read. Students can borrow novels in library and discussed it with the teacher. The book talks cover some information about choosing good books. It includes sharing the author of the books, information about best-selling titles, and introduce some books which probably students' favorite topic [1]. However, the teacher admitted that he chose books for children, especially for lower grade or students with low reading skills. In his words:

If you know the kid, some kids are willing to try but other kids won't. They will give up in two pages and in the next day, they will say "I want another book. I want to try another book". Because this is about language, I want them to read the book. How much they understand is not exactly what I need. It is really important they start the story and they finish the story and they try to figure things out. So, sometimes I encourage them that way. I don't force them. (Formal interview with the teacher, September 20th, 2018)

The statement above describes his concerns on each student when he tried to choose some books for them. The reason he did this is because some books might contain complex sentences which possibly difficult for students to read by themselves. He believed that some children did not know in what level they were. Based on his experience, choosing wrong book could lead to low motivation to finish reading all chapters of the book. Therefore, for low level students, he had to assist them in choosing what books they could read and books that would be suitable for them to read until the end. For those

reasons, book talks could be an important start for students before they can read books independently.

2) Incorporating minilesson with grammar lesson: The minilesson of independent reading practice usually constitutes the book talks. Minilesson refers to a form of worksheet or guidance which is specially designed to introduce a concept, focus on giving clear examples and remind students about what they learned during independent reading [1]. The concept could be in a form of teaching specific skills such as choosing books to read. However, data from a classroom observation proved that the teacher used minilesson to teach grammar in the classroom. His minilesson tended to focus on solving unexpected student's grammar problems. Although the focus has been shifted into teaching of grammar, the essence of using minilesson for anticipating unexpected particular problems in the class remained the same. Figure 1 illustrates one example of minilesson used in his class.

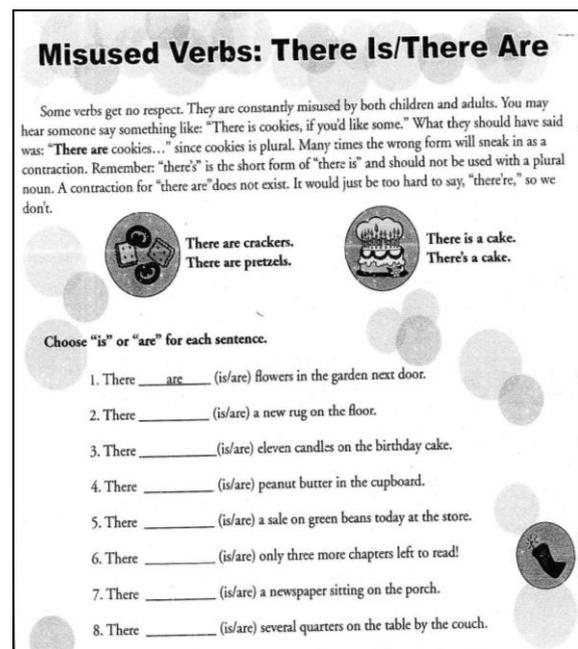


Fig. 1. Example of minilesson used by the teacher during reading comprehension class.

Figure 1 shows an example of minilesson about misused verbs. It could occur during reading or writing activity. According to the teacher, the minilesson itself helped the students during reading and writing their review about the book. He revealed that he prepared all minilessons before the semester started. Those minilesson could be used in every classes. For higher grade such as fourth grade to sixth grade, their minilesson could be used intertwined because the teacher expected the same problems could occur several times despite of their grade.

So for example, I am sitting here one day and I know that in that class, the kids will write like "I have five spoons" and they don't know how to use possessive. That's a mini

lesson. We pull that out. We talk about it and give it example. We work through it and we will put it back. When we do it like that... I mean they can self-correct after that. (Interview, September 20th, 2018)

Based on the teacher's opinion, he could use minilesson to prevent students repeating the same mistake. The point is giving them a certain lesson in a moment when they were solving a sudden problem in the middle of lesson. Based on his statement, he could pull minilesson worksheet in the middle of teaching writing and reading. In relation to balanced literacy, he did that because he found students were struggling and needed to solve it at the moment. For that reason, he included teaching of spelling or grammar in the middle of reading comprehension activity. He also added that the results could be different if he taught the lesson separately by telling them about it beforehand, giving them worksheet, and evaluating it together. As a result, the essence of using minilesson is about helping students to solve sudden problem at the moment when they really need to solve it in the middle of the lesson.

3) *Monitoring status of the class, individual reading and conferring:* To make sure that every student is working on a book that they want to review, teachers need to make a list of the books or just take a quick walk around the class as students begin reading [19]. Based on the observation in the class, the teacher usually used "no talking" sign and setted time on the stopwatch as the children given time to read silently. For particular lesson, he mentioned that he also invited students to read aloud together if the students shared the same text or books. Therefore, conferring aims at helping students to maintain their attitude of self-directed reading. In order to stay focus on what they read, the teacher monitored them and may approach some students who had questions.

4) *Managing group share, and evaluation:* Sharing what students get from the text is also a kind of evaluation. During the group share and evaluation, the members of the class usually gather and take turn to tell the book they had read [1]. Although the lesson is about reading a book before making a review, the teacher said that there was a book presentation after the students completed the review. During the book presentation, they could present their favourite books, share list of things they found interesting in the books, and make a display of their reactions. However, based on the observations, the teacher did not always have.

The activity required consistency and routines. Related to this, the teacher asked students to fill *reading response journal*, a journal form to record their reaction of the text they read. They could start by simply writing the plot of the story, and then continue to include things they like or dislike about the story. Since they are young learners, the teacher did not really force them to write the response in complex sentences. He admitted that his main point was to help them develop reading habit, not to make them wrote complex sentences of book review (Figure 2).

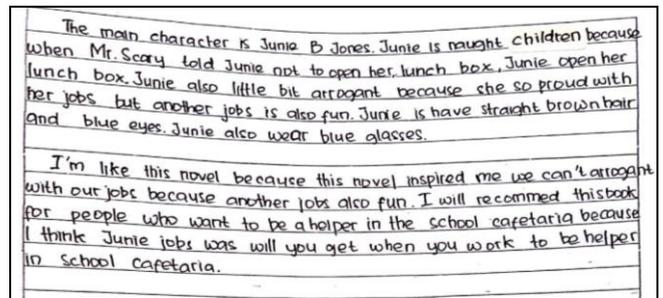


Fig. 2. A sample of student's reading response about a story in a book.

Figure 2 shows one example of student's review of a book entitled Junie B Jones, The First Grader Boss of Lunch. Not only she rewrote the story but she also included her reaction about the story. She recommended people to be helper of school cafeteria because she learned a lesson that each job owns its fun.

5) *Initiating reading habit through home reading log and reward:* Most of elementary schools in Indonesia have started the School Literacy Movement to make children read in 15 minutes before starting the lesson. However, it requires a consistency in order to develop a reading habit for children. According to the teacher, the independent reading could be successful if there is a consistency of the school program and the teachers. In this elementary private school, all teachers supported home reading log to make sure children read daily at home. The home reading log was not a part of one subject, therefore they could read anything to fill the log. The point was they have to keep reading daily. To make it more fun, they were rewarded by several reinforcement such as reading points, super certificate, or extra free time (see Figure 2).

Reading Log (Agenda Membaca)			
Day / Date (Hari / Tanggal)	Indonesian (Indonesia)	English (Inggris)	Parent's Signature & comments (Tid & komentar orang tua)
Thursday 30/08/2018	Book: <i>Misteri Sebuah Lukisan</i> (Hal 64-85) (17mnt)	Book: <i>Project Disaster</i> (Hal 36-51) (11mnt)	[Signature]
	Book: <i>Bunyi Basal</i> 27 Ayat 3 UUD 1945	Book: <i>ada PR agama</i> Hal 24	
Friday 31/08/2018	Book: <i>Misteri Sebuah Lukisan</i> (Hal 86-110) (18mnt)	Book: <i>Project Disaster</i> (Hal 52-73) (15mnt)	[Signature]

Fig. 3. Example of student's home reading log.

Figure 3 shows that the students could fill it every day and the homeroom teacher will check it every morning. The homeroom teacher calculates the points based on how long they read. If they read for minimum five minutes, they can get one point. If they could read for about 10 to 20 minutes a day, they would get 2 points and three points for reading more than

21 minutes. They got zero if they did not read any book or the parents did not sign it. For long holidays, students were given task to read every day and record their reading activity on their home reading log. By the end of the holiday, there would be super reader certificate for those who consistently read a lot during holidays.

They have to read every day in both languages, have it signed during the whole holidays. If they don't read it because they missed one or two days, we still appreciate them. We tell them "what a great job they have did" but they don't get any super reader certificate (Interview, August 30th, 2018)

Based on the overview, rewarding and the idea of getting the parent signed were because children are not yet developing a stable control of self-motivation. Furthermore, assigning children to this program train them to set goals and make choices about materials that they want to read [5]. For lower grade, the parents chose books, read aloud for their child and fill the reading log. As they grew older, they started to read by themselves and learned to choose resources they want to read. On this level, for young learners develop senses of discovering what to do and selecting materials for establishing their goal.

IV. CONCLUSION

Teaching independent reading is a long process. It requires consistency and daily reading practice. Students can use home reading log to attain a habit of reading. Through many kinds of innovative techniques, independent reading is carried out with the support of balanced literacy approach. It is a theoretical framework which combines phonics approach and whole language approach in order to make a concise reading program. By giving appropriate exposure of English, and guidance to exhibit reading habit, students could participate in independent reading activity and learn to be self-directed readers.

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