

THE MANIFESTATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL LITERACY PROGRAMME: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The government policy on reducing English language teaching hours at schools should be carefully responded and considered as it potentially poses a creative way to fill the void. The literacy programme, which is now being the concern of the government, can serve as a promising alternative solution to the issues that might arise due to the implementation of the policy. This study is aimed at narrating the literacy programme implemented at a junior high school in Surabaya, illustrating how the literacy programme can be a medium to help fill in the students' deficiency in English language learning at school and potentially can help enhance their acquisition of the language. The data in this study are garnered by conducting interviews with three teachers and one student and through classroom observations. School documents including workbooks and book records are gathered through a systematic data collection. The research findings demonstrate that the literacy programme has been transformed into the creative ways of promoting English language skills through reading, speaking and writing activities out of the school hours. This case study indicates that when the reduction of English learning hours at school becomes a serious problem causing a decrease of the students' English language proficiency, the implementation of the literacy programme can have beneficial outcomes to fill in the gap and promote the students' English language skills.

Keywords: Literacy programme, school hours, English language learning, case study.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike other country in Asia such as in China which promotes English language teaching as a compulsory subject in primary schools (Yue Qi, 2016), Indonesian government tends to reduce the lesson hours at all educational levels including at elementary school and junior high school. The Government policy on reducing English language teaching hours through the implementation of curriculum 2013 has sparked debates among teachers and practitioners, as reported in several national newspapers¹. The implication of reducing English teaching hours, as has been reported in newspapers, is not only about the challenges

¹ <http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/surat-pembaca/2016/06/14/kaji-kembali-pengurangan-jam-pelajaran-bahasa-inggris-di-smk-371732>

of English teachers to fulfill the required teaching hours², but it potentially inhibits the language acquisition - limited exposure and time for the students to study English within the classrooms. When compared to the previous curriculum which provided slot for 4 hours a week for English subject, reducing to two hours a week might likely contribute to the poorer English language competence. As has been reported by EF EPI in 2011 that Indonesia is categorised as the Very Low Proficiency country in English Proficiency Index.

As has been aforementioned that reducing English lesson hours can potentially be a serious problem among the students, particularly the students coming from lower economic class. These students rely much on school lessons to study English language, as they commonly cannot afford to invite private teachers at home. To this end, educators, policy makers and researchers need to seek an alternative and innovative programme which could help fill in the deficiency of English lessons at school.

This study is intended to illustrate how the literacy programme sheds light the complex problems of English language teaching in Indonesia, particularly on how the literacy programme can fit with the current condition - the reduction of English lesson hours at schools. In a more specific, this study reports the literacy programme at a junior high school in Surabaya which possibly can be of representation of the school's creativity and innovation in improving the exposure of English language to students. In this sense, the importance of literacy programme is on sustaining the language proficiency the students have gained during their school lessons and the potential of the literacy program develop students' English language acquisition and fluency through the literacy practices outside the classroom hours.

METHODS

This research is a case study in that the study was conducted at an elite urban school in Surabaya. This case study focuses on the literacy practices in day to day school activities which involve all school personnel including students, teachers, and school staffs. As a brief illustration, the school is categorised as one of the favorite schools within the city of Surabaya in term of its academic excellent such as the minimum entrance test score is 25,50 out of 30,00. Moreover, the students background, based on the school data, are mostly coming from the middle-class family.

The amalgamation of narrative inquiry, observation and document review are utilised to garner a better understanding of the literacy practices within the school. The narrative method is utilised to uncover the experiences of teachers, students, and school staffs in regard with their experiences of literacy programme. Narrative interview is used as a means of exploring of how the programme is designed, how the implementation of the programme, and how the programme is socialised. Whilst the narrative method is utilised as a way of exploring the school personnel's experiences. Narrative interview is also used to reveal the students' experiences in relation to how they learn and get engaged in literacy programme. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) argue that narrative seeks to build up stories of

² <https://m.tempco.co/read/news/2014/08/24/078601897/guru-khawatirkan-kurikulum-2013-ganggu-sertifikasi>

individual lives and experience. In addition, Creswell (2005: 252) contends that narrative method is a research ‘focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences’.

Moreover, observation is conducted during the literacy practices - before the class lesson begins. Classroom observation is utilised to get a deeper understanding and contextualised analysis of the data. Artefacts (the students’ work book, diary and the Government policy documents) are also being the source of data in that it is specifically used to get richer data and to contextualised analysis.

This study adopted thematic analysis in that the data obtained went through several steps of analysis; principally, through three steps, namely familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes and searching for themes (Braun and Clarke (2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Literacy practices can help facilitate the acquisition of English language

From the data sets it is revealed that literacy practice within the school is initially aimed at habituating the students with the skills of reading and writing in any languages including English. The teachers said that the literacy programme is a perceived as a respond of the Indonesian Government to lower rates of literacy index of Indonesia. In this sense, the primarily goal of literacy programme is combating poor reading habits among Indonesian students. One of the teachers, for example, asserts that

Extract:

As I said previously that if there is no reward, like a booster to make them aware, they are likely less motivation to read. So, at the moment, we only focus on raising students’ awareness through writing resume. after reading they need to write, we provide a format for the students to write the summary. Afterwards, they need to bind and submit to their language teachers or the classroom teachers for approval. (teacher 1)

From the extract, it is recognised that the major problem of Indonesian students are poor reading habits, and the literacy programme plays significant role to eradicate the problem. Research has indicated that good reading habits help improve reading performance (Imran, 2005). Moreover, Rukmini (2004) and Firmanto (2005), for example, has illustrated that unfamiliarity of the explanation and discussion genres and vocabulary in reading texts is the major problem contributing the poor interest and motivation among students in the university reading classes. In regard with English language, when the poor English competence among students is often linked with the low motivation to read (Kweldju, 1996), the literacy practices within the school can be utilised as a strategic way anticipating the problem might arise when the students are at the university. Moreover, as it is indicated that the low HDI (human development index) is often associated with the poor reading habit among Indonesian students, the literacy programme can be potential to help increase Indonesian’s HDI.

Other than focusing on raising up Indonesian human index and combating lower literacy rates of Indonesian, the literacy programme is proved to be beneficial to help acquire English language competence. In this sense, literacy programme is not only focusing on surrounding local and or national language, it is also covering foreign languages including French and English. In this sense, the literacy programme started to provide spaces for the students to develop and explore their competence in variety of activities including reading, writing and speaking.

Extract

...the students use many languages on their writing, they use Arabic, French and English. It's consequence is that, we do not know the language, we do not know what the students writing. But we collected (the students)'s work for the library and school reference and being examples for further writing work". (teacher 1)

Although the students are able to write stories and other genres in any languages, the teacher said that they are much prefer to write in English.

Students are quite familiar with English language. It is likely that English has become their second language after Bahasa Indonesia (teacher 1)

It can be said that familiarity is the key preference for a productive work, arguing that when the students are quite familiar with the long texts, vocabulary, and good habits in reading, they are likely able to actualise themselves producing written work including short stories and other genres. It, therefore, indicates that literacy programme can be beneficial to facilitate and generate language competence. This research finding corroborates the previous research which shows that extensive reading can enhance language competence (Maley, 2010), extensive reading provides comprehensive inputs which is essential in language acquisition where the limited exposure and contact with the target language. In addition, extensive reading when it is linked with the vocabulary acquisition, it can extend, consolidate and sustains vocabulary growth (Maley, 2010).

From the research findings, it indicates that when the students are quite familiar with the literacy practices; reading, speaking and writing in English, their English language acquisition tends to be improved. The research findings also show that when the students have limited exposure of English in the classroom, they can compensate through their reading, speaking and writing activities through the day to day literacy programme which take a slot an hour before the lesson starts. By doing this, the deficiency of English lesson at school can be minimized, whilst also at the same time, the students' competence in English can be improved.

Literacy programme can be a potential model of reading habits out of English language classroom

The findings indicate that literacy programme within the school is perceived positively by the school personnel. One of the underlying reasons is that the concept of hybrid literacy, in that the programme accomodates the local values/local social culture whilst also utilizing the global concept of literacy which emphasizing on the reading and

writing skill. In this sense, the concept of hybrid is meant to accommodate the oral tradition of Indonesia literacy whilst also adopting the concept of literacy which is associated with the activity of reading and writing. In this research context, how speaking / oral story tradition of Indonesian is placed in a very substantial application of literacy program within the school.

...to accommodate (hybrid) literacy program, we eventually decided that the first phase for 7th grade use Javanese language, all students need to write any writing genres in Javanese language, whilst 8th grade students need to write in Bahasa Indonesia, 9th grade students need to write in English. (teacher 2)

It can be seen from the extract that the practice of literacy is quite flexible, it depends on the aims and the strategic programme of the school. It can be said that literacy programme is multidimensional. In other word, the literacy programme is not only about one language but it also about multi languages, it is not about habituating the reading habits but also about habituating other language skills. The following extract illustrates the multidimensional aspect of literacy programme within the school

Extract:

Yes aside of reading and writing activities before class, we also make a forum for the students to speak in the library (speak corner). We also ask the students to write a short story (teacher 2)

The research finding indicate that literacy programme conducted outside the classroom lessons are quite beneficial to accentuate the reading, speaking and writing habits. This corresponds with the research which shows that the role of school in helping build up students' reading skill is quite essential (Inderjit, 2014). Moreover, numerous research has consistently indicated that extensive reading is effective to learn L2 in term of its comprehension and speed (Bell, 2001), reading and writing. In addition, the concept of 'investment' (Norton, 2013), which is a key important aspect on the success of language learning seems adequately displayed by the implementation of the literacy programme in the school. In addition, the practice of reading, speaking and writing outside the classrooms can be linked with the concept of investment where providing investment for students will likely generate their motivation. As has been argued that having high motivation in English language is not always associated with adequate investment, whilst sufficient investment in English language is usually connected to the possessing high motivation (Cummins, 1996).

It is therefore arguably that literacy is a promising programme which helps provide language investment whilst also potentially improved the students' motivation in learning English. In addition, since the literacy programme is about habituating and socialising reading, speaking and writing habits among Indonesian students, the positive values and building up the cognitive and belief that the students are familiar with the variety of texts and genres can hugely impact on the success of language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown the creative ways of utilizing literacy programme within the school in addressing the deficiency of English language teaching in the school hours and how the programme supported by the collaborative work between students, teachers, staffs and parents can be effective way to cope with the limited hours of English lesson at school. In this sense, literacy programme is not perceived as a normative practice which is highly regimented by the government. It provides, however, flexibility and highly contextual, allowing creativity of the school and its personnel to fits with the government goals, and at the same time it can be a program to help students acquire English language. This study, therefore, reiterates the previous study which revealed that literacy programme is crucial in building up the students' skills and develop their critical thinking, all these skills are crucial for being the global citizen. In more specific, in regard with the English language teaching in Indonesia, literacy programme can be one of the alternative promising programmes to be implemented in schools including at Elementary school where English is now being an extracurricular activity. However, the school which tends to focus on the tests and exams orientation has disrupted the students from having good extensive reading habits. In effect, the students tend to turn to read their lesson books rather than exploring knowledge and skills through the literacy programme.

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