The role of Indonesian School Librarian in increasing students' literacy skills in digital age

Rachmawati

ATPUSI (Indonesian Association of School Librarian)
Yayasan Al Kausar, Jl. Habib, Babakan Jaya, Parungkuda, Sukabumi, West Java
Indonesia
alkausarlib@gmail.com

M.I. Ekowiyanti
ATPUSI (Indonesian Association of School Librarian)
Santa Laurensia
ekowiyanti@yahoo.com

Abstract

Literacy level of Indonesian students are low compared to other countries. The most responsible party for this problem is school. To resolve this problem, school should pay more attention on how to teach literacy effectively, particularly in elementary level, so it can increase student's literacy. Effective literacy teaching should take into account six components or the six T's which are "time" (scheduled in short time but continuously), "text" (made available in different level), suitable "teaching strategy", "task" given, "talk" and "test" to measure students literacy level. School librarian can play some important roles to make the teaching successful. They play as a role model for the love of reading, expert in books published and literary works, partner in teaching, leader in literacy program, reading advocate and promoter for resource-based learning.

(Keyword: reading, literacy teaching, literacy program)

Background

It has been a great concern for many educators and interested parties that the literacy level of Indonesian students are low. Both in PISA (Programme of International Students Assessment) 2012 Result and PIRLS 2011 (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) Indonesia was ranked in almost at the bottom of their list.

As those assessment are applied to students, it is obvious that school is the most responsible party for literacy skills of the students. Reading is taught in schools as a part of language learning besides writing, listening and speaking. Reading is basic skills for acquiring knowledge. Language is often considered as a bridge to other subject in schools.

Since schools deal with this skills, it is expected that school librarian play their roles in enhancing literacy skills of the students. School librarian is also an educator. Partnering and collaborating with teachers in literacy teaching will make literacy teaching at school more powerful. Library as learning resources center provides books and other learning resources.

Library and librarian also encourage reading, both for learning and pleasure. It is one of competencies that Indonesian school librarian should have.

In line with the effort to increase students' literacy skill, Indonesian Government through the Ministry of Education and Culture has launched Gerakan Literasi Sekolah or School Literacy Movement. The movement is a realization of Minister of Education Regulation Number 21 Year 2015 on Building Character. It is focus on habituating 15 minute silent reading every day at school. The goal of this movement is to instill reading habit and to create a learning supported environment at school. This movement is a collaborative effort among all stakeholders within the school. Unfortunately, the role of school librarian in this movement is poorly emphasized.

Literacy

The understanding of term of literacy changes over time. The most common and simple definition is that it is an ability to read and write with understanding in daily life. This is a skill to acquire knowledge. Later, oral skills and numeracy were included in the concept of literacy. Oral expression is as important as written expression. As for numeracy, many people has already acquired this literacy as a mental skills even among the illiterate community.

In 21st century, literacy is more than an ability to read and write. UNESCO defines literacy as an ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying context. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society (UNESCO, 2004).

A similar but simpler definition comes from The American Library Association's Committee on Literacy. It defines literacy as the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential. (ALA, 2016).

 Later, the term "literacy" is used in a broader concept which include different kind of literacy. As literacy is a skills to access information and knowledge, and information comes in different format and through different medium, literacy is associated with other concepts. The term such as information literacy, visual literacy or media literacy are introduced. There are different skills and competencies to be acquired for this literacies.

This paper emphasizes on literacy as skill to acquire information, particularly in reading literacy. Reading is basic skills for acquiring knowledge. It's a foundation for lifelong learning. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) uses reading as one performance indicator of education system in a country, while PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) specifically assess reading achievement of fourth grade students as well as school and teacher practices related to instruction.

Effective Literacy Teaching

Literacy teaching in elementary school focus on reading and writing. This is a fundamental skills for learning other subject. In Indonesia, the term *calistung*, which is an acronym for *baca tulis hitung* or reading writing and counting, is widely known. Even though it is still debated whether the skill should be taught in early years, many schools require it to be mastered before

enrolling elementary school. This condition make teaching literacy only focus on how to read and write without a real understanding on the text.

Based on his research and observation, Richard Arlinton listed six common features in effective literacy teaching. Those features, known as six T's are:

1. Time: 50% time in literacy teaching is used for reading and writing.
2. Text: Lots of texts in different level is provided for literacy teaching. Students read text appropriate with their level.
3. Teach: teacher actively models useful strategy
4. Talk: encourage discussion about reading. Teacher encourage conversation, not interrogation. The purpose of the talk is not for finding correct answer but to make thinking possible
5. Task: longer time is given for completing task. Task in form of writing their own, not just completing the worksheet.
6. Test: Test should also evaluate the process not only the product. Effort made in learning should be recognized.

In line with this observation, USAID PRIORITAS in a resource book they prepare for teaching literacy guide lists some aspects that should be taken into account for literacy teaching. The aspects are:

1. Time : effective literacy teaching should be done
   a. every day
   b. duration: short time, between five to fifteen minutes
   c. only one kind of activity in a day
   d. the whole school implement the program consistently
2. Task: task given to students should consider individual student's reading level and their learning style.
3. Text: in selecting reading materials, teacher should consider students' need, interest, learning environment, background and culture. Criteria for selecting text include:
   a. Language; vocabulary, text organization, language style and content
   b. Text format: print and illustration
   c. Concept and content: familiar theme
4. Teaching strategy: Teacher should employ various methods of teaching. They could be focusing on one aspect of language skills or integrated them all together. Teacher can use literature circle, literacy work station, literacy workshop or journal writing.
5. Talk: Oral skills consist of speaking and listening skills. One method in literacy teaching that focus on these skills is circle time. During circle time, a student talk about something and other students listen. This strategy practice speaking skills while at the same time practise listening skills and it can be a way for teacher to teach respect each other.
6. Assessment is an integral part of literacy teaching. The purpose of assessment to measure skills needed and to have a description of student's' condition. This assessment can be used as a guide for future teaching.

USAID PRIORITAS recommend those strategies for early literacy which focus on reading and writing literacy. They also recommend the use of various reading and writing tools to help students understand the reading and organize their thinking to produce their response to the reading.

Early literacy is very important. Research shows that there is relationship between early literacy and literacy and the later age. Low level in early literacy will affect children's understanding of the text in their later age. This is what known as Matthew Effect (USAID, 2015, p.11). For this reason, literacy teaching in elementary should be prioritized.

In higher level, students are expected to use literacy in functional level. It means they can use literacy for their daily life. Literacy teaching is still a part of language learning but the content is more academic. Students are introduced with different types of text. They are expected to understand descriptive, expository and explanatory text as well as produce various types of text. The aim of teaching literacy in this level is to develop literacy skills. It focuses on how to use the skills for searching and finding information. With literacy skills, students are expected to develop critical thinking, ethical manner, refine their character and become more active in their personal life as well as in community.

The role of school librarian in developing literacy

School librarian, as well as other librarian, has been into business of developing literacy since long time. Not in form of teaching literacy to students but developing it, creating a reading/learning-friendly environment and instilling reading habit among. They use all their expertise and resources for supporting teaching and learning at school by supplying appropriate books and other materials and giving information services. Unfortunately, only a few school recognized this effort.

Instilling the habit of reading has been regulated through Act of The Republic of Indonesia Number 43, Year 2007. Article of 51 section (3) of this act states that every education unit develop the cultivation of reading habit among students by utilizing the library. For effectively implement this, school library should be well-facilitated and well-managed by professional librarian. But it seems that not many school leader are aware of this regulation. They realize that library is a part of school facilities but they list it at the bottom of their priority.

Now many related parties has been aware of the importance of literacy. The government has released a regulation for implementing literacy activities at school and School Literacy Movement has been launched. Does it mean school librarian now can be at ease? What roles a school librarian can play in increasing literacy skills of Indonesian? What should a school librarian do?

1. Model for a love of reading
   One of competencies expected from Indonesian school librarian is showing a love of reading. This can be a personal character as well as professional since librarian deals with books and information. In traditional paradigm, library is associated with books but in modern paradigm it is information that become the core business of library. Whether we use traditional or modern paradigm, model for the love of reading is still relevant and become an significant role. Students, particularly in elementary, see and copy what older people do.
   In a higher classes, a librarian who shows the love of reading and have knowledge about teenage reading will gain trust among students. With this trust, its will be easier to talk to students, to get support and involve them in library programs.

2. Understand literacy and its teaching
   In Indonesia, literacy teaching is not a school librarian's responsibility but knowledge on how literacy is taught is important for librarian. With this knowledge, school librarian can provide different level of text according to student's reading ability and guide them to read the appropriate text. Reading text appropriate to his/her ability is important for students because successful reading can motivate them to read more. The more they read the better their reading ability. It is not easy to find books that suitable for each level. For literacy teaching, a series of leveled-books are carefully designed, written and published. The table below can be used for understanding literacy level and book suitable for each level.

	Reading level	Characteristic of books
1.	Emergent	1. No word up to six sentences in a page 2. Short sentence to sentence using compound words 3. Illustration to describe text 4. From no storyline to familiar storyline or theme 5. Nonfiction books: Simple biography, folktales, easy information books
2.	Early	1. Using simple language with repetition of new words 2. From one sentences per page to longer sentences with many words in a page 3. From illustrated in each page to no illustration, only some pages are illustrated 4. From real-life storyline to simple fantasy 5. Fiction books: comics, factual theme story books, serial books, simple mystery 6. Nonfiction books: Biography, more detailed information books
3.	Fluent	1. From 10 line per page with more difficult words and combination of spoken and written expression 2. Up 30 words using some punctuation 3. Illustration: 4. a few or none (only book cover illustration) 5. Graphic, diagram, table, map 6. Fiction: realistic fiction, science fiction, mysteries, combined genre, fantasy, historical fiction, short stories, parody 7. Nonfiction: more detailed information books, descriptive, causality, opinion and legend

3. Knowledge of books published.
   At this point, there's still no guidelines for school librarian in Indonesia to select books appropriate to reading level. Some children's book writer state a reading level for their

books but the leveling is not standardized. School librarian should be able to evaluate books available in the market and rank them according to reading level.

School librarian should also choose quality books for the library. Award-winning books can be used an indicator as good books. In Indonesia, there's a book awarding event to select the best book of the year but it's not organized sustainably over the years. Fortunately, we have good books or award-winning books translated and published in Indonesia.

Along with greater awareness of the importance of literacy, some communities, foundation or organization published good and qualified books in limited number. They realized most books published and commercially available are insufficient. These organization usually work only in their targeted area. Because it is not commercial production, there's no publication about this and only targeted school have the opportunity to access the books and the program.

To be able to have an extensive knowledge of books published, both commercially or limited, school librarian should build a professional network. It can be done by joining association, communities that have concern in literacy, and attending various professional development event.

The knowledge of new publication has to be compiled and disseminate to teachers. Teachers will select books according to their need in teaching and their students need.

4. Knowledge of literary works
    School librarian should understand that literary works, including ones that come from folktales, are more than recreational reading. They have values beneficial to a child's development. The values of folktales to child development encompass holistic, emotional, cognitive, moral, language and social development. Holistic development comes from the values of the story that teach children that human have feelings, born and die. Folktales provide a world of fantasy that help children to see their fear and frustration. This is essential for children emotional development. Within this imaginary world children can themselves as the hero of story who fight against injustice, inequality and wickedness.

    Literary works support children's cognitive development by providing knowledge of the variety of culture that reflects diversity of humankind, and that every culture has its own uniqueness. Literature help children learn narrative patterns and discourse mechanism, this will increase their narrative skills and make them better reader and ready to understand the more complex literature formats. Literary works give confidence and sense of capability as well as views of life related to morality.

    If school librarians understand the value of literary works they will to do their best to collect any literary works published and serve the work in the library.

5. Lead literacy program
    School librarian leads in planning and organizing literacy program at schools. They have knowledge of what literacy program that might work for their community, but what they lack is the leadership. The lack of leadership come from the low motivation or underappreciation.

Some school librarian need to upgrade their leadership skills or get a motivation to be more assertive.

Literacy program will be best organized and lead by some who understand the problem of literacy. School librarian should be the one. But he or she need to be supported by the whole school. This steps that have to be taken to lead a literacy program at school:

Looking for support from the school leader or principal. Design and create a convincing proposal with detailed reasons, goals and benefit.

Organize a workshop for teacher so the school community share the same perception. Implement book leveling. This is not an easy work, look for help from the expert or professional.

6. Assess students' literacy level and show it to teachers.
   School librarian help teacher to assess students' literacy skills by:

     a. Evaluating student's choice of reading. If their choices are not suitable to their reading level, then school librarian may recommend the appropriate reading. School librarian can also inform teachers about the reading level of their students.
     b. Informing teacher about students' favorite reading topic or genre. This input is useful for teacher to be used when he or she teaches reading strategy. Using the preferred topic can increase students' engagement to the learning.
     c. Sharing information about students' reading behavior so teachers can correct it. School librarian might know this better than teacher. For example, a students might read too close to the book, or pointing at words or any other ineffective reading behavior.
     d. Sharing information on students' activities and attitude towards reading, on what their favorite books, book club they belong to, book discussion they involve, etc. This information will be an important contribution to the whole assessment of students' reading skills.

7. Advocate the importance of literacy to all school community
   A successful literacy program need support from the whole school community. Reading habit should be a concern for everyone in school. It starts at home and develop in school. Literacy at emergent level is a parent's responsibility at home. School will continue to develop early literacy but at home parents still have to strengthen it. School librarian have to advocate this. Connect with parents, make them aware and understand that reading is crucial for their children's future. Ask them to cut down the use of gadget or television viewing at home. Ask their participation in developing literacy of their own children. School librarian can organize a class or seminar for parents. School, including school librarian, will deal with basic literacy, library literacy, technology literacy and media literacy.

8. Encourage resource-based learning.
   The love of reading will create the love of knowledge and lifelong learning. At first most students only read book for pleasure but with motivation and encouragement from teacher they read books for searching information and acquire knowledge. Resource or book-based

learning is a way to encourage reading for information and increase student's participation in class.

Book-based learning reduce the cognitive burden in receiving and processing information. By using this approach students will used to process, sort and select information according its accuracy and purpose. To implement this method of learning, students should have information literacy skills.

This method of learning needs librarian's involvement and participation to teach information literacy. School librarians are the trained in information literacy, while teachers are more focused on their own subject expertise. Implementing book-based learning can make the learning more meaningful and the teaching of information literacy is more contextual. Therefore, school librarian should build a collaborative relationship with teachers.

Conclusion

Even though the role of school librarian in literacy movement is rarely recognized, school librarian can play important roles in literacy program. Literacy program implemented at schools with hope that it can increase literacy level. It takes a long way to reach goal so it should be consistently and supported by the whole school community, particularly by school librarian. And Indonesian school librarian should possess the knowledge and skills in reading or literacy program as well as determination and assertiveness to stand in equal with teachers.

Bibliography

Allington, R. (2010). *The Six Ts of Effective Elementary Literacy Instruction*. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from http://www.readingrockets.org/article/six-ts-effective-elementary-literacy-instruction

Faizah, D. U. (2016). *Ayo Membaca Indonesia.* Retrieved January 6, 2016, from http://www.ayomembacaindonesia.org/?page_id=2

IFLA. (2015). *Call to Action: International Literacy Days*. Retrieved 10 January, 2016 from http://www.ifla.org/node/9861

Murti Bunanta. (1998). *Problematika Penulisan Cerita Rakyat: untuk Anak di Indonesia.* Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.

UNESCO. (2004). *Education for All: A Global Monitoring Report*. Paris: UNESCO.

USAID PRIORITAS (2014). *Pembelajaran Literasi Kelas Awal di LPTK*. Retrieved January 25, 2015 from http: //www. Prioritaspendidikan.org

USAID Prioritas. (2015). *Pembelajaran Literasi di Sekolah Menengah Pertama*. Retrieved January 21, 2016 from http ://www. Prioritaspendidikan. org.

Biographical Notes

Author 1:

Rachmawati has worked as school librarian in Al Kausar Boarding School in Sukabumi, Indonesia since 2001. She has Under Graduate Degree on Library Science from University of Padjadjaran, Bandung and now is pursuing her Master Degree in Magister Teknologi Informasi untuk Perpustakaan from Bogor Agricultural Institute. Her main professional topic is Information Literacy. She has attended many workshop on the topic. In 2010, she had been granted Jean Lowry Leadership Award form IASL and in 2014 she got a fellowship from Australia Endeavour Award.

Author 2:

Eko Wiyanti has worked at Santa Laurensia School Library for 18 years. She gained her Master Degree on Library and Information Science from University of Indonesia. She thinks that there are so much to be done by Indonesian school librarian and she want to be able to lead librarian in Indonesia to work together to improve school librarianship in Indonesia.