

EMERGING LITERACY GENERATION

Critical Analysis of the Roles of Libraries in Encouraging Literacy Generation

Zulkipli Lessy



Abstrak

Secara umum literasi dianggap sebagai kemampuan untuk membaca, menulis, berbicara, dan menghitung pada level tertentu. Untuk meningkatkan kualitas sumberdaya manusia suatu bangsa, maka kemampuan literasi sangat diperlukan. Makalah ini membahas tentang bagaimana perpustakaan berperan penting untuk meningkatkan kemampuan literasi seseorang. Selain perpustakaan, beberapa aspek yang dapat meningkatkan kualitas literasi seseorang adalah keluarga, sekolah, serta lingkungan sosial. Beberapa cara yang dapat ditempuh oleh perpustakaan untuk meningkatkan kualitas literasi adalah promosi perpustakaan serta pelayanan perpustakaan untuk literasi.

Kata kunci: generasi, literasi, membaca, perpustakaan, sekolah, anak

A. Introduction

Library has an important role in emerging literacy generation. However, almost all libraries in Indonesia have very poor conditions. This statement can be proved by evidence from a recent research conducted by Ki Supriyoko¹, which shows, most of 155.000 primary schools in Indonesia do not have adequate facilities of their libraries. Collection of coursepacks and general readers on the shelf are not complete. Even, many of the elementary schools do not have enough rooms provided for library and do not have special administration officers to manage library. Thus, it is not strange when students of elementary school level of Indonesia do not have sufficient habit to read.

Such condition also experienced by the students of junior and senior high school. Even ironically, students of university as well as lectures do not have habit to read. Many of our universities have adequate collections in the library: books, journals, magazines, and others in large quantities, but many others do not have such facilities. Most of students and lecturers do not have habit to visit the library, even libraries outside campuses. The students and lecturers usually visit the library when they have to write papers, thesis and reseach projects. Outside these tasks, it is certain, most of them are hesitate to visit the library.

According to the Head of the Notional Library, Dady P. Rachmanata, recently, in an event of *Aksara* Nasional Day, the number of visitors to the Notional Library has decreased, yet this has happened to all libraries across the country. From the existing visitors, only 10 to 20 per cent who borrow books. Of the fact, it is assumed that they have reading habit so the degree of habit of our literacy nationally

¹ Ki Supriyoko, "Minat Baca Dan Kualitas Bangsa" in <http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com>. (Retrieved on February 20, 2007).

is only 10 to 20 per cent. Comparatively, in most developed countries, such as Japan, Canada, the United States and Great Britain, however, it can reach 80 per cent². The data demonstrate that library and literacy culture have not become the life style of the academia yet, even the Indonesian in general. What is meant by literacy and roles of the library in activating literacy generation will be discussed in this paper.

B. Literacy Generation

1. Definition of Literacy

In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, literacy means "the ability to read and write." Contextually, literacy has wider meaning. It may mean technological literacy, critical thinking, and environmental sensitiveness.

According to Scamber Linda³, generally, literacy is considered the ability to read, write, speak, and compute at a certain level. Functional literacy involves skills needed by an adult to cope with every day situation, such as reading newspapers or completing application forms. People lacking of these abilities are often subjected to such categories: poverty, crime, and unemployment.

Recent statistics of the U.S. Department of Education states functionally there are 27 million illiterate adults in the country; more than 47 million people have difficulties in some of the domains tested⁴. The current extent of the problem is thought to be much greater than these figures indicated. The need for programs to increase literacy has been acknowledged through the federal government's support in collaboration with other organizations in such fields: education, library and information, business and industry.

² *Ibid.*, Ki Supriyoko.

³ Scamber Linda, "The Role of Libraries in Literacy Education" in www.libraryinstruction.com, (Retrieved on February 20, 2007).

⁴ Judith Davidson. 1988. "Adolescent illiteracy: What libraries can do to solve the problem – A report on the research of the project on Adolescent Literacy" in *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*, p. 215-218.

Kirsch and Jungeblut in *Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults*, define contemporary literacy as one's ability in utilizing written information to develop knowledge in order to bring advantages for his society. Furthermore, one is said to be literate if he understands contexts when he reads.

Until recently, literacy generation is absolutely needed so that our nation can develop even compete and live with other developed nations. Wagner (2000) asserts, low level of literacy is related to high level of drop-out, poverty, and unemployment. These three criteria are parts of the indicator showing of low rank of development human resource.

Creating literacy generation is a means of creating prosperous society which is critical. The generation is selective to all information received so that they are not emotionally reactive, but environmentally aware. Theoretically speaking, to create literacy generation means to activate reading motivation among the society. In order to do so, it would better create a conducive literacy environment.

2. Creating a Conducive Literacy Environment

a. The Family Environment

The family is dominant to develop children's literacy. A current research shows, children begin to read and write from their parents at home. They are keen to read if they notice their parents or other family members read books, newspapers and magazines. Actually, a child should be stimulated by reading since his earlier age, even when he is still in the mother's womb. A pregnant woman who often reads a book aloud to the fetus, she tends to teach her child who then will become reading lover.⁵

In order to generate children love reading, there are some steps that can be endeavored:⁶

⁵ Ahmad Bukhori. "Creating Literacy Generation" (Retrieved, February 20, 2007) in <http://pribadi.or.id/diary/2005/06/22/>.

⁶ See www.kompas.com. "Agar Anak Gemar Membaca" (Retrieved, February 20, 2007).

- Since earlier age, regulate the children read stories or read the stories aloud for them. This can activate their capacity to read since their earlier age.
- There is times when children are hesitant to read, mainly when they pass their childhood age, i.e., beginning from elementary to junior high school. Let this flow naturally. Parents do not have to force the children to read. To attract their interest in reading, let the children read whatever they like, including comics. Essentially, they still want to read.
- When children become adolescence, they will be enough busy so that they do not enough time to read even a book. Instead, let the children read articles of magazines or any other easier writing so that they can finish reading.
- When the children are at grade two of their elementary school, it is time to know their ability of reading. If the children have difficulties in reading, accompany them to a therapist to have counseling.
- At the garde three and four, it is a crusial of their academic successfulness. If the children do not have the ability to read, it can be an indication that they have mental retardation. Find out their interest on certain topics to attract their willingness to read.
- Grow reading habit in the family. Since earlier age, the children have accustomed to notice their parents read, it will raise thier interest.
- Give the children books as a gift when celecrate their birthday and encourage them to save for buying books, thought not expensive. Accompany the children to visit book fair that gives discount.
- Put reading materials at home and in car. Let the children access that reading as the activity which is pleasurable and useful.
- Invite the children to discuss any issues that they have read and let them feel like experts, while you are the person who need much information.

Early childhood education has become center for attention of every body. This should become motivation for the children to promote their wish to read. Reading aloud activity for the children should be planned as early as possible. This can

replace a story telling activity before going to bed that has been a tradition in the society since long time ago. A mother can also push her child's motivation in reading by hosting an activity that involving the child to read a recipe, writing a message to his friend and ask the child borrow books from school library. This activity is the stepping stone from the oral culture to the literate culture.

Josette Frank in *Parents, Children and Books* (1984) comments the children would better read a book that makes them happy⁷.

Reading aloud is useful for the children. Nicole Niamic in *The Benefits of Reading to Your Children* claims of parents read short stories to their children since earlier age. Parents actually have introduced other pleasing metaworlds for them. Yet, the habit may determine their academic successfulness in the future. A two-year-old child who gets "a reading aloud" every day tends to be successful at school than who does not. If he gets a reading aloud three times a week, he will have learning ability three times higher than the child who gets "the same experience only one to two times a week. A current research demonstrates the child who has "a reading aloud" at home since earlier age may have better numerical ability. The relationship between reading and academic ability has no connection to the economic and academic background of the parents.

b. The School Environment

School library should have a respectful place in national educational environment because, generally, library is still in poor condition. According to Fuad Hasan (2001): 1. From 200.000 of primary schools approximately one per cent of which have standard library. 2. From around 70.000 junior high schools, there are only 34 per cent of which have standard libraries. 3. From about 14.000 senior high schools, there are only around 54 per cent which have standard libraries. 4. From around 4.000 higher institution, there are approximately 60 percent institutions which

⁷ Josette Frank.(1984). *Parents, Children and Books*. Jakarta: Gunung Mulya, p. 21.

have standard libraries. While for general library, village/neighborhood and district have no more than 0,5 per cent of standard library.

Consciously and unconsciously, roles of library seem to be marginal in the sector of national education. Bill Nomor 20 Year 2003 of National Education System shows no chapter which mentions the word "library". This, of course, is a surprising phenomenon. Whereas, according to UNESCO, education for all could be successful if it is equipped with library.

The relationship between library and education is illustrated by Soetarno (2003): "because education is the process of transference and knowledge development--- which school and library as media---the development of education has tied relation to the existence of library. Following the development of science and technology, education also develops so that education and library are two sides of simetrical coins which both have the same values; one cannot be separated from the other. In other words, one complements the other⁸.

School can promote students' motivation in reading by activating the library as a conducive place. School library can create a reading club, reading day, reading compulsory, weekly reading time, promotion, advertisement, book resonance, story telling club, poem and short-story competition, etc.

To encourage students to have high motivation to actively visit library and borrow books, the school library can grant rewards to the visitors and borrowers who are very active which is held in every academic term.

Besides loading textbooks, school library also stores popular books that have become favourite for the students. For example, "*Chicken Soup*", "*Einstein Doesn't Know*" (*Robert L. Wolke*), "*Writing is Beautiful*" (*Albert Camus, et al.*), "*Cerdas Jenaka Gaya Nobel Fisika*" (the autobiography of Richard P. Feynman), "*Harry Potter*" (J.K. Rowling), "*Eragon*" (Christopher Paolini), etc.

⁸ See <http://www.penulislepas.com> "Library and Meaningful Learning" (Retrieved, February 20, 2007).

In addition, to promote comfortable environment for reading and in order the students will stay longer, the library turn on soft music.

The role of school librarian in some ways differs from that of general librarian in that the school librarian may have academic background in managing library which is oriented toward educational function.

The school librarian not only deals with "standardized" duties, such as aquisition, classificaton, cataloguing, indexing and labeling, but also he understands the expectation of the library users. In other words, he understands students' psychology.

School library would better provide books that are needed by the students according to the psychological development, unless the content of the books have educational functions.

c. The Societal Environment

In the last few years, there has been phenomenon for literacy renaissance in society. For example, bookstores provide visitors a space for reading; and discussions conducted by writers and academia persons. Ideally, this is one of ways to encourage several expert groups who are aware of opening private library to public. Verily, this idea helps the people love reading but they do not have books. Many publishers also seek to support literacy promotion through cheap book fairs, writing competition, and even give opportunities for writers of children stories to be creative more freely.

By mushrooming bookstores, some of the owners provide spaces for readers. This is a place to create social environment that supports society in activating reading interest.

The society can participate in emerging reading interest by establishing forums, such as Reading House, Reading Cottege, Reading Club, "001 Book Community", and "Book Village" (Taman Kyai Langgeng), etc.

C. Function and Role of Library in Emerging Literacy Generation

1. Library Fuction

A library functions to manage, store and regulate both written material and non-written one. It is the source of information and education; and general users can utilize the library for research. A librarian says, "Library is a place to store, gather collections of books, written material and recordings for public. Library is considered an independent and democratic institution governed by the society so that every member of the society has the rights and opportunities to search of knowledge.

Briefly speaking, a library has at least five functions:⁹ First, it is the source of information. Second, as the facility of nonformal education, especially for the citizens who do not have opportunities to have formal education. Third, it is as the medium for developing arts and culture, demonstrated through books, magazines, periodicals, etc. Fourth, it is the recreational place for readers. Fifth, the library as the important place for a scientific reasearch.

Nevertheless, so far, it is complained that low motivation of reading of the society may trigger the presence of library is often useless because it has been not utilized optimally. Yet, it is often a complain to be heard that the libraries---state-owned or private-owned---are not well managed. So it is not surprising that many collections in the libraries have been damaged and are not adequate to be read.

Perhaps, because reading motivation is decreased, many libraries now are loosing visitors. Even in the universities, many students do not use the service of the library maximally. One of the reasons students rarely visit the library because they do have enough English and other foreign languages.

2. The Role of Library to Develop Literacy Generation

⁹ Drajat. (2006). "Function of Library." Retrieved in www.pikiran-rakyat.com on February 20, 2007.

To develop literacy generation among the society, the library should have began to maintain itself. The library should promote services and programs for literacy.

1. Promotion Held

- a. Promoting collections in the library, not only by mentioning the number of collections but also all details of classification in the collection.
- b. Communicating to all staff; all activities and programs that will be handled so that all staff know what they will do and how they will behave.
- c. Promoting through media such as newspapers, newsletter, plachards, atc.
- d. Promotion by other techniques.

Besides, staff may do such programs like campaigning to collect books, reading competition, outstanding librarian competition, reading motivation research, etc. The librarians continuously develops so that terwujud masyarakat berbudaya membaca. And so, the general and specific objective can be achieved.

General objective is to develop literacy society through service. This is to create reading environment for all with various disciplines. Whereas the specific objective:

- a. Implement reading interest developmental system according to the needs.
- b. Run programs of developing reading moivation that is suitable to need development.
- c. Develop reading interest for all ages and class of the society to anticipate the development of science and technology.
- d. Provide various collections in the library according to the needs of the users is scattering information that mainly related to the promotion.

Library promotion should be done when the library is introduced to the society and the library will be utilized by the users. The promotion will increase the numbers of visitors. People will not recognize, without promotion, what is in the library such as product and service. The product and service of the library should be promoted actively if the product and service have been yet utilized at all. The product

and service provided routinely and are communicated to the users. The library should take a new approach, marketing recognize to attract the users who have not been aktive as users. Besides, the program should focus on service and suffice the users' needs. Promotion have to important sides: promotion held in the library and promotion held oustside the library for the general users. For this purposes it is requered for one who has the following qualification:

- a. Determine selectively what is suitable given to the staff and when it is to be conveyed.
- b. Develop efective communication of the staff.
- c. Make policy of the library and share it to the staff and users.
- d. Plan a grand activity done by the staff and diminati by the users.
- e. Anticipate a daily-routine activity to become a promotion activity.

Things that should be considered in promoting library are:

- a. Promote honestly by showing advantages and disadvantages of libraries and services given.
- b. Provide cooperation with othe libraries. Librarian should tie cooperation wtih other libraries mainly aims to provide good service for users. In the cooperation, each library has each autonomy, not only in financing and providing human resouce but also in joining voluntarily to other libraries in order to give better service for the readers. The objective to be gained in the cooperation is better service promotion to the users by sharing of resources, both through material in the library that is available and tenaga. The cooperation has major characteristics:
- c. Having information source such as books, journals, documents or any other information utilized by the users.
- d. Having readers or users who utilize the information source.
- e. Availability of formal organization created because of the needs to obtain information.
- f. Ability to convey information from resource to readers.

- g. Availability of communication equipment.
- h. Creating and promoting the users' awareness of information value in certain specialization, educational system and daily life.
- i. Integration between information service of library and teaching-learning process.
- j. Hold workshops in searching information useful for people who conduct research so that they are able to access resource and service provided by library in-country and abroad via technology existed in the library.
- k. Educational program for library users also intended to the laymen by using media which is easier to be understood by marking signals and special codes. In education, for the users there are several factors should be taken into consideration are motivation, level of users' activity, vice-versa elements for development, the ability to listen and sharp eyes, chances to control every steps and instructions given so that there is an interaction between users and librarians, users and users. Users' activities such as: provide counseling for library users since earlier academic year, give routine counseling, i.e., once in three months and provide special training in the area of library, etc.

2. Library Service for Literacy

Over the years, many libraries have supported literacy education efforts by providing teaching resources, space for tutoring, and information and referral services. Some program sponsors have compiled bibliographies of adult new reader materials--materials that are not too "childish" to appeal to mature learners and that respond to their personal interests, such as getting a driver's license. Others have adopted or developed software programs that provide interactive drills and testing for computer-assisted learning.

A more active approach has been taken by libraries offering literacy classes or one-to-one tutoring programs. Many libraries have outreach programs designed to meet the needs of specific groups of people with limited literacy skills. For example,

people for whom English is a second language, who present a diversity of first languages and literacy levels, have been reached through tutoring programs with materials that match their cultures and interests. Appropriate materials have also been distributed to the institutionalized, including those in prisons, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and group homes for the elderly and disabled. Intensive prison programs, coordinated under a literacy librarian, have offered specialized software and English-as-a-second-language training¹⁰.

In addition, some libraries offer programs for groups at risk for literacy - related problems. Adolescents have been targeted because illiteracy has been associated with other problems including crime, pregnancy, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and school failure. After-school and summer literacy programs have sought to encourage young people to become employable, contributing members of the community and generally to raise their self-esteem. Strategies have included homework help sessions, peer tutoring, and peer-group reading sessions¹¹.

Families have been targeted because illiteracy seems to be passed from one generation to the next: children whose parents are functionally illiterate are twice as likely as their peers to be functionally illiterate are. In family literacy programs, emphasis is on the parent's role as the child's first teacher. Parents, who may have been inspired to seek literacy training by concern for their children, are taught interactive language activities for use with infants and young children. Some libraries invite entire families to share in reading activities and book talks, with each member borrowing a book to take home¹².

Many resources exist for libraries interested in literacy education. Project reports, guidance manuals, and bibliographies have emerged from successful library-

¹⁰ Mathews, Anne J.; Chute, Adrienne; & Cameron, Carol A. (1986, Fall). "Meeting the literacy challenge: A federal perspective" in *Library Trends*, 35(2): 219-241.

¹¹ Davidson, Judith. (1988, Winter). "Adolescent illiteracy: What libraries can do to solve the problem--A report on the research of the Project on Adolescent Literacy" in *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*, 1(2): 215-218.

¹² Talan, Carole. (1990, November). "Family Literacy: Libraries doing what libraries do best" in *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 65(3): 30-32, 158.

based literacy programs. Much information is also available through statewide literacy coalitions and various literacy organizations.

D. Conclusion

Reading skill is a significant catalyst to empower human resource of Indonesia whose population are among the largest four after Cina, U.S. and India. One of the ways to develop the country is by developing the human resource. Therefore, not only teachers, but also parents, the government and all sides who are concerned with the future of the next generation do compulsorily hold developing literacy generation (generation of reading lovers). Library holds an important role in developing literacy generation. Several ways are undergone by the library in enhancing literacy education is by library promotion and library services for literacy. Besides it, the family, social environmental and school have the succes key in growing reading education for the children since earlier age.

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