

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF LITERACY SKILLS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Literacy refers to a set of skills for being literate of texts existing in society. There are many kinds of information penetrated among us. Being literate is now not only just represented by reading and writing as we simply do every day orthographically. It remains on basic literacy. This one itself has been improved for considering economic development by adding arithmetic skill. Literacy, with those language competences, considers its contribution for society in this modern age. It is considered as resource to reflect quality of each person. This functional literacy takes us for being functionally beneficial for surrounding environment. For dealing with the information around us which is massively spread, critical literacy should be optimized to make sense and take stance. In higher education context like university, scientific literacy is highly required to apply the subject for phenomena in the society. Along with types of literacy, how are their contributions on society? Being capable on multiple literacy levels is believed as the right way for familiarizing social phenomenon so that literate people have more chances to get possibilities for themselves up to strengthen citizen involvement for their nation as well. Literacy is finally constructed from optimizing each citizen on nation's development.

Keywords: critical, functional, literacy, scientific, society

INTRODUCTION

Language exists and develops along with civilization. It is not just based on expressing language itself, but also its involvement to result continuation both language user individually and social issue, even collaboratively to develop a nation. There are some impacts by language to needs of documentation, education, and self-achievement. Literacy plays important roles in comprehending and employing printed information in daily activities to achieve one's knowledge and potential (Shohet in Coming, Garner & Smith 2001, 190), in upgrading life skills for adults with support from a nation's education department (Belzer, Drennon & Smith in Coming, Garner & Smith 2001, 153), and in arousing children's achievement performance (Collins in Tankersley 2003, 134) after taking steps of commanding more attention and

resources by improving early reading instruction (Rosemary, Roskos & Landreth 2007, vii).

The realization of language affects currently on the richness of information in society. This phenomena happen because of our civilization which is more complex than what happened in the past. That is why people are now bombarded by information in many ways. It is important to manage each individual to maximize language skill to comprehend, aware, and be critical toward the information they are encountering.

In the context of Indonesia, The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (as compiled by Imawan et al 2014, 79-82) shows the media penetration in Indonesia happens on cellphone as the highest (104%) followed by television (95%), smartphone (67%), radio (47%),

newspaper (25%), internet (24%), and magazine (13%). There are 415 daily newspapers, 495 magazines, and 257 tabloids. This survey may show higher nowadays because the presence of better internet connection allows spreading information. It is still on the same source, internet use is dominantly consumed by medium class. In addition, this reality has improved our consciousness to redefine mode of transferring information. The result of technology in literacy expands paper-based to computer-based delivery channel (Programme for International Student Assessment by OECD, 2015. OECD stands for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It researched education issue globally in the countries as listed on OECD members. The research was done towards reading ability as literacy skill by students in the research locations). Unfortunately, *World's Most Literate Nation 2016* survey published by *Central Connecticut State University* (as published on *Kompas* daily, June 15th 2016) shows Indonesia as the 60th of 61 listed countries. It is unequal with the information availability among us.

This condition arouses us the importance of literacy skill because it is required for managing well of the information variously existing in society. The power of literacy is believed as the choice for reflecting intelligence like the way of making students aware their subject, keeping knowledge and understanding up to date, checking their work and ideas and research (Fairbairn & Fairbairn 2001, 3) or producing positive traits as reflected in logical thinking and objectifying experience (Scribner & Cole 1981; compared to Health in Thezen & Pletzen 2006, 24).

Recent government, handled by The Ministry of Education and Culture, obligates students to read non-text book before their classes (*Kompas* (a) 2015, 10/*Kompas* (b) 2015, 11). It is believed as the option for gaining students'

literacy. This decision tries to combine the quality of reading with the necessity of expanding mind. The capability of each individual to reach literacy skill affects their influences on the individual's functioning and well-being up to reflect critical for the social good and well-functioning society (Hauser et al 2005, 24). In these current days, The Ministry of Education and Culture promotes the importance of literacy on many issues such as national library, digital and internet, as well as building competence and character. On June 9th 2016, The Minister inaugurated The Head of National Library. In this inauguration, Anis Baswedan invited the library to grow literacy. He cooperated with The Minister of Communication and Information Technology, Rusdiantara, to support digital literacy for promoting healthy internet activities. It was done through the seminar held on June 6th 2016 entitled *Bersama Anak Berteman dengan Dunia Online* to invite children befriend with internet. Anies, in his speech on May 17th 16, said that there are three pillars in handling age change—there are literacy, competence, and character.

This decision reflects the importance of reading as part of literacy skill. Mostly believed in society, literacy is shown through reading and writing competences. This term is highly comprehended while investigating on its root, "literate" as an adjective which has meaning "able to read and write), then become a noun "literature" as the product.

In fact, literacy performance in developed countries have changed. It is not enough to refer those two competences for literacy. They are parts of literacy to create the foundation of basic literacy (see Rassool 1997, 7). Bakhtin (in Ball & Freedman 2004, 6) gives the base of stepping forward to reach functional literacy (see Papen 2005, 9) up to providing requirement in the context of critical literacy (see

Freire & Macedo in Papen 2005) and reflecting specialization as Thesen & Pletzen (2006) shows on scientific literacy.

Literacy is now improved to higher level adjusting requirements in societies around the world. This article has interest in explaining and revealing this issue. Literacy is a set of skills for life to grasp issues in the world as our participation among society. Here, the writer tries to provide related sources to show how literacy has changed to be more complex than just reading and writing.

LITERACY IN THIS MODERN AGE

The first excitement of literacy can be traced from the existence of literacy products. There many literacy products spread traditionally or electronically. They all involve texts in their realizations. With texts, taking-giving information exists from authors to their readers. It is also applicable for fiction texts to perform their functions as the transformation of moral, social, and other values happens.

Illiteracy becomes problem in many countries by considering the importance of literacy for citizens. Papen (2005, 7) says that illiteracy has effect on the difficulty of having job which presents burden on social exclusion. Social exclusion is handled by government – for instance, to provide funds.

Literacy facilitates people to receive information and to use it for individual, community, and society largely. Reading is an activity for receiving and grasping knowledge, while writing is for documenting and expressing ideas so that the results can be continued.

Nordtveit (2009, 81) proposes the concept that literacy involves instrumental skills which are not only reading and writing, but also arithmetic skill. It connects with Papen's (2005) saying those three aspects as a set of skills for life. Those skills are helpful as the foundation to comprehend literacy

products because there are shared information textually (e.g news, analysis, opinion, note) or qualitative and quantitative data (as provided in table, percentage, diagram, survey, interview, and so on). That is why reading, writing, and arithmetic play their roles for literacy products. In advance, literacy does not only have its meaning literally. It happens because the development of civilization affects us to handle information which has been merged with the development of economy, politics, social, and culture.

IMPROVED LITERACY AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY

Rassool (1997, 7) defines basic literacy as the acquisition of technical skills which involve reading written texts and writing simple statements in daily contexts. Dominantly, people think about this definition. Literacy is meant as the reinforcement of getting information via reading and expressing by writing. Literacy, in this level, is appropriate for those who are taking on basic education as children are faced by many texts to internalize them. The capability on neat writing is to build good literacy with writing. On this education level too, arithmetic is also applied for students both numerically and narratively. Noesjirwan (1974, 99) does research showing that literacy skills will not disappear when each person is able to operate them optimally in elementary school.

Actually, basic literacy is not just limited for having good preparation and basis. Basic literacy is prepared for facing Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is hoped that optimal literacy realizes MDGs which focuses on decreasing poverty. World Bank (in Nordtveit 2009, xviii) defines poverty as the condition showing income less than US\$ 1 per day. It seems that those skills are frequently used in working place. If someone masters them better, it is said that he will get better condition as well.

Various activities on literacy are done by people on and through texts. Their requirements on texts (as literacy product) develop along with their ages. In passing their ages, people have been passing many issues which can be codified into certain patterns and enhance their resources toward faced environments. This is then called as experience. Children and adults have different responses when they encounter texts. Then, literacy development normally increases along with someone's age.

In adult age, human faces issues which are more complex. Literacy is then hoped to contribute on politics and social (Nordtveit 209, 81). Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, a philosopher, literary critics, and semiotic expert from Russia focusing his studies on literary theory, ethics, and language philosophy, refers literacy as individual's involvement in society as ideological environment (Ball & Freedman 2004, 6). This kind of environment leads to working place, family, and other gathering communities. It affects the presence of certain genre on specific context. Bakhtin views this environment as the place of presenting a term named ideological becoming. It is human's consciousness existing not only from contacting with direct existence, but it is through the medium of world which is ideologically appropriate with its surrounding.

There is correlation between literacy and environment (i.e. it connects to socio-cultural context). From Bakhtin's view, literacy develops to the level of functionality. That is functional literacy. To elaborate functional literacy, Gray (in Papen 2005, 9) states that someone is literate when he acquires essential knowledge and this capability enables him to use it in all activities which the proficiency of literacy is required for the effectiveness in his group or community, and the results on reading, writing, and

arithmetic make him enable to continue his abilities for himself and community development.

Gray's view on functional literacy shows that literacy reflects individual quality in the midst of society. This quality allows a person to reach his professionalism. Then, his capability contributes on developing the community where he does his activity such as job, organization, and so on.

Functional literacy concerns on the sensibility as part of society. It maximizes how people use literacy skill for their environments. To perform this level, it is important to have strength on basic literacy as the resource for building functional literacy.

History has proved that our ancestors applied the example of functional literacy. Through literacy product, poets wrote *serat* (Javanese literary works) as we can see in the library of Radyapustaka, Surakarta – the oldest museum in Indonesia. In other area, Indonesian ancestors contributed to spread the knowledge of traditional herbs, building ship guides, treaties, and poems by writing, especially on dried *lontar* leaves (traditional and natural writing medium before using paper). Those literacy products were made as the response of happening in society. In addition, they had spirit to document local wisdom.

In its development, literacy is also applied in the context of transferring identity. It can be shown in the decision of language documentation as *Balai Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa* (Indonesian Language Development and Advisory Bureau under supervision of The Ministry of Education and Culture) does *Unicode* for documenting local alphabets or scripts to be readable largely on Latin. This strategy has being done since 1970s and applied online now (Sugiyono 2015). In this part, literacy happens as the response of preserving local identity. There is like a local genius which should be

literate by others so that it will not be extinct and remains exist.

Functional literacy attracts basic level to be improved. As a result, reading, writing, and arithmetic can be expanded for applying literacy on social use. They contribute in the requirements, functions, and participations for accepting the goals of being social (Baynham in Papen 2005, 9). The effect brings literacy not only concentrated on how to get job, but also reach economic development. Literacy stimulates productivity in human's life (Longlo in Nordtveit 2009, 80).

As the explanation of literacy meets this point, the involvement of using literacy skills for society is comprehended as the indicator in order to reach high quality literate people. It is like Freire and Macedo (in Papen 2005, 10) calls critical literacy not only "reading words", but also "reading world". Critical literacy developed around 1970s to 1980s when adult illiteracy became potential problem in the United States and England – as taken from the same source.

Bringing society together with literacy comes from the fact that we are living in social atmosphere. Then, society with its whole context becomes interesting phenomena to research. Facts provided around us (e.g book, journal, newspaper, survey, etc) do not reflect numerical data on the table or percent. Those data are social reality which show factual in the society. Both generally and specifically, they are part of society.

CRITICAL TO SCIENTIFIC LITERACY

Functional literacy can be expanded to critical level as it improves the literacy skills. This activation stimulates broader use of literacy in making sense of world. Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher proposing critical pedagogy, views critical literacy as world citizens' concern. He states that this kind of literacy involves critical reflection of students in the social environment and

the positions they take part in. It involves literacy in the context of education. This statement is based on the existence of education as part of society, even building it.

Critical literacy should be strongly applied for students where they face texts daily in the class. It is important because those texts are social processes which are resulted, recorded, and documented for the society itself with its participants. Students are required to be critical thinkers and producers of new knowledge if they want to see themselves as stakeholders in the future. Those texts are needed to be meant not in isolation. There are variety ways to make sense of a text by considering point of view, context, background of person interacting with the text, intertextuality, gaps in the text, and silences in the text (*see* Booth in Ontario Ministry of Education 2012, 17; Ontario Ministry of Education 2010, 32).

Literacy takes turn on scientific perspective in university. In this part, we refer university because it is the place where this education level has reached social involvement as it dedicates for society. Compare with the education in the range of elementary to senior high school. Those schools enhance students' basic literacy. For schooling, the earliest period of applying improved literacy provided in vocational school. It happens because the students have positioned themselves ready being part of society via job description as the materials prepared for this purpose. That is the reason why language competences and aspects surrounding them are adjusted. The texts or other discourses are directed to the specialization the students take. As the result, they have reached functional literacy.

Talking deeper for university context, this education level combines functional and critical literacies. This statement is sourced from the decision taken by students for their

concentrations reflected in choosing study program to writing for their theses.

Thesen and Pletzen (2006) explain how students at university adapt their language skills through critical literacy which is then improved to scientific one as done through teaching and learning processes. It is shown in the activities by lecturers and students. Thesen and Pletzen (2006, 33) say:

Learning, and proof of learning, for students and lecturers in the natural sciences at university is largely centered on scientific “knowledge”, which usually means scientific concepts and theories and the generation, management, and analysis data related to them.

The curriculum provided in university is managed to dig concepts and theories scientifically related to the concentration. So, they are composed hierarchically to get the scientific goal. It is hoped that the students are able to reach learning goal as the direction supported by standard competences in every subject.

To perform evaluation in monitoring students’ comprehension, “say it in his or her own words” skill is applied for demonstrating students’ mastery on the given assignments. The action is shown by exploiting their knowledge via language while doing presentation, writing paper, or facing examination. Moreover, the assessment is interpreted by showing failed students with their assignment and examination are categorized as their incapability for thinking, writing, and speaking “scientifically”. As the result, students with the higher capability of thinking along with cognitive strategy are considered as those who are literate scientifically (see Hurd 1998, 414; Thesen & Pletzen 2006, 34-54)

Language, related to “say it in his or her own words” skill, is the medium which is “transparent” for showing various ways of expressing something (or concept) equivalently. It is like

scientists who use language in particular ways which must be learnt along with the “content”. Scientific literacy is then meant as the cohesive result shown through logical sequence along with the studied context. Furthermore, scholars express through language used particularly with related terms.

People with their educations in the society are the resource of building nation. As the result of accomplishing education grades, those well-literate people functionally exist for their involvements in social sphere. An interesting finding by Wallerstein (in Nordtveit 2009, xvi) shows that there is relationship each other as the form of curiosity including cause-effect issues. Therefore, it results citizen’s development with his literacy. For instance, there are sociology of economy, language of politics, economics of education, and so on. Those merged disciplines happens because of unique and various perspectives toward phenomena. The richness of literacy allows the establishment multi-discipline issue.

So, it is important for a nation to consider its policy based on science. It is the contribution of the top level of literacy in building nation supported by knowledge and science. Hurd (1998, 413-414) shows various indicators of someone who is literate scientifically as listed into twenty eight indicators. They affects the person himself, socially, and economically. Daoed Joesoef, the Former Minister of Education and Culture, states “In the society, there are diverse communities such as politics, science, business, religious, and arts. However, society can go forward if it is based by scientific community because it is the source of resulting ideas bringing advancement (*Kompas* (c), 2015, 11).

CONCLUSION

To reach nation’s development with literacy is not granted in seconds.

It needs perseverance to master every level of literacy so that it is hoped that each citizen has good competence to maximize their capabilities in comprehending and making sense of texts in the society well. The explanations above has shown there is shift on supplying literacy which firstly optimizes each individual, then spreads its benefits for taking part of social resource. Literacy has evolved to gain society in the midst of world's communities.

Nowadays, Indonesia enters trading and market treaties regionally and internationally. This condition requires high quality human resources because there happens firmly competition among countries. In addition, the movement of employee or labor appears much real with competitive qualifications. Literacy should be enhanced to adjust this situation. Language competences, especially reading and writing, needs fully optimization which is not literally executed. The competences are the approaches to be literate for those who are handled variously with the levels of literacy. The texts around us are the forms of social practices. To master them means to be capable of dealing with their contexts.

The explanations in this article have revealed many kinds of literacy required by each individual to a nation development, starting from the members of society to the contributions for their environments which symbolize the nation. Basic literacy supplies individuals while functional one leads them being beneficial for their surroundings. When critical literacy has reached, we are trying to connect literacy with its use for viewing world than just words. Critical thinking and scientific values result scientific literacy which exploits language skills for expressing solutions or dealing with phenomena by educated people. It is highly needed for realizing this circle because developed nation affects

prosperity of its citizens which does not only gain the country's rank for surveys, but also prestige because the country has reasonable quality holistically. The quality refers to the capacity mastered by citizens to improve their lives. It starts from fulfilling their needs themselves to presenting literate society together.

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