

Local Culture Literacy Movement: Empowering Students' Mother Tongues to Promote Cognitive and Affective Development in the Primary Schools

Sri Minda Murni and Mutsyuhito Solin

Abstract—Previous researches show that students learn better in their mother tongues in the first years of schooling. However, the power of mother tongues as an effective learning resources have been long forgotten. As the consequences, local vocabularies which bring with them local wisdom are replaced with unfamiliar ways of perceiving life which make the first years of schooling become more difficult in terms of cognitive and attitude development. The study was conducted with two purposes: a) To find out relevant learning resources from the mother tongue for students/teachers use in the first years of schooling; b) To describe how these learning resources work in promoting both cognitive and attitude development. The study was conducted in Dairi District in North Sumatera Province. Local wisdoms and narratives were collected, selected, and rewritten to be used as learning resources for students to learn to read. The data were analyzed to show how those learning resources improve students' cognitive achievement (the reading competency) and attitude (the internalization of local wisdom). The results show that students' reading competence and attitude improve better if they are exposed to mother tongues based learning.

Index Terms—Attitude, learning resources, literacy, local wisdom, mother tongue, mother tongue-based learning, narratives, reading competency.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is an important literacy activity. Children must acquire a number of vocabularies to comprehend a reading text. The fact shows that most of Indonesian children who live in remote areas acquire very limited vocabularies of Indonesian language which has resulted in their reading failure. Based on an interview with a teacher in the city of Sidikalang, Dairi District North Sumatera Province, it was found out that 10 students out of 37 still could not read by the end of their first year in the primary school and 3 of them still have reading problem until the present time (grade 5).

Reference [1] reports that only 30% of the students in Bengkulu acquire this skill when they were assessed through the researcher-made test in reading comprehension. The percentage is assumed to be lower if the students are assessed through a standardized test.

There are three cognitive processes that work simultaneously in different levels when someone is reading [2]. They are (a) perceptual, (b) cognitive, and (c) metacognitive. Students' difficulties in reading involves the

three levels. Reference [3] suggests that the difficulties are due to very limited vocabularies. Reference [4] map the difficulties in the area such as (1) inability to identify diphthong, double vocal, and consonant cluster, (2) inability to read a sentence, (3) reading haltingly, (4) inability to mention a few consonants, (5) inability to spell well, (6) reading carelessly, (7) quickly forgetting the words he or she has been spelled, (8) adding and replacing words, (9) long-period of spelling, and (10) inability to read thoroughly. In the university level, they found that the inability to comprehend a text will cause students to be a massive copy paster [5], [6].

Based on the preliminary study on the reading texts used by teachers in teaching the first year of primary schools students, it was found out that the texts used deal with lives in the cities. Students who live in remote areas are not familiar with such kind of life. In addition, the texts do not represent childrens' perspectives. Many times, it is more to adult's perspective in perceiving life - in the case of the book - adults perspective in perceiving a true friend, such as *teman membuat kita tersenyum* (A friend makes you smile), *teman membuat kita tertawa* (A friend makes you laugh), *teman menolong kita* (A friend helps you), and so on.

One of the ways in promoting students literacy is to include cultural content in the books they read [7]. This is called cultural literacy. Cultural content increases students' knowledge and involvement as well as students' interest and motivation. The need to include cultural content in students' textbook is also found in Utami [8].

For the need of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Reference [9] emphasizes the importance of increased awareness about intercultural communicative competence. He suggests the reading materials should include the local culture as well as the culture of the target language. The results of his study on TEFL reading textbook used for Turkish students show that the book is dominated by the target culture and some inadequate elements of local culture.

In the case of Indonesia, they also suggest the theme in students' textbook should be in line with Indonesian culture to promote students' literacy competence [10].

The cultural content can be inserted in the curriculum as an extensive or intensive topic. Cultural content will help students to be able to comprehend reading materials by the support of sufficient knowledge background.

II. METHOD

The study was conducted in a Primary School in the village

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of Bintang – Dairi District North Sumatera Province, about 160 kilometres from the capital city. The native language used in the village is Pakpaknese. The method used is research and development. The procedure of collecting and analyzing data is: a) analyzing the existing materials and the process of teaching reading in the primary schools; b) designing and developing new materials by referring to local culture and mother tongue-based; c) implementing the materials in the real classrooms; e) evaluating the materials and the process.

Data for the existing materials and the process of teaching reading were collected in the first semester of the previous year 2016/2017. The design and development of the material was done in the second semester of 2016/2017. The implementation of the new material started on the first day of school which was in the second week of July 2017.

The designed material was used by the teacher to teach her students to read. The observer took anecdotal records and video recording to record students performance in terms of cognitive and affective factors.

III. RESULT

A. The Existing Materials and the Process of Teaching and Learning

There are at least two weaknesses found in the existing materials as well as in the process of teaching reading in the classrooms. Firstly, the reading materials do not represent the students' natural perceptions of life. The first page of the textbook for example displays a reading material which is very artificial to the cultural context of the village.



Fig. 1. The existing material.

In addition, the sentences are adult sentences forced to the mind of the children in the first week of schooling and are aimed at introducing a new concept of an ideal life (in this case an ideal friend) they will meet and they will be. The concept of a true friend is too abstract for the children to understand and as the consequence, the expressions are not natural if not too artificial. When the children are finally successful in reading the text, they actually do not

comprehend what they read. It is because, the background experience about perceiving friends - as limited to someone you play with and many times quarrel and fight with - is not very much in line with the concept.

Secondly, the reading materials do not empower the linguistic competence that the students already achieved in their mother tongue. The text ignores the students' competence in their mother tongue.

The grammar of the sentences is quite different from the grammar of the students' mother tongue. The expression for 'Siti senang sekali' (Siti is very happy: S V O) in the students' mother tongue is 'Lolo kalon atena' (happy very heart her: V O2 O1). Another example is the sentence 'Siti siap pergi ke sekolah' (Siti is ready to go to school: S V Adv) which is traditionally in the local language expressed as 'Naing laos ia mi sikkola' (will go she to school: V S Adv).

The process of teaching is not promising in terms of future enjoyment of independent reading. Words are forced and imposed to the children to help them produce an appropriate sound for each letter in the alphabets and the sound of letter combination. Seven (19%) of the students in the classroom were not competent in recognizing words and reading them aloud until the the end of the year. The majority, 24 students (65%) were competent in reading but not competent in retelling what they have read. This implies low comprehension of the text; Only 6 students (16%) showed good performance in reading in terms of reading aloud and limited comprehension which was tested by asking them to retell the text in their own words.

In terms of attitude, the students did not show any involvement and empathy to the characters in the text. They enjoyed reading aloud the words, the bright color of the picture, the beautiful faces, and the clean environment surrounded the characters. However, they did not see them as part of the people around, people they know and respect, people they have sympathy on. They were all strangers so they showed very minimum response and involvement on what they were reading.

B. Reading Materials Design and Development

Reading in the students' mother tongue is believed to be more meaningful and enjoyable for the children. In the first year of schooling, they need to be surprised by realizing that all utterances they have heard before have their written form. Students will be more enthusiastic to read if they find the materials: a) are about the life they know very well; and b) are written in their mother tongue.

In this study, the reading materials developed for the students are written in the language they have heard before. The content is as follows,

Mer Sikkola (Schooling)

1. *Nina Inang aku nggo mbelgah* (My mother said I am now a big kid), see Fig. 2.
2. *Nggo boi aku mersikkola* (I can go to school now), see Fig. 3.
3. *Nina Inang i sikkola i ajari menjaka* (My mother said I will be taught to read), see Fig. 4.
4. *Itaruhken Bapa aku mi sikkola* (My father took me to school), see Fig. 5
5. *Mbiar aku itadingken i sikkola* (I was worried when he

wanted to leave me there), see Fig. 6.

6. Piga-piga dengnan sekelasku i enggo kutandai (I have known some of my classmates), see Fig. 7.

7. Kalaki dengganku mermeam sedekah nen (They are friends I used to play with), see Fig. 8.

The text was designed and developed in a big book version. The title of the text is written in the cover and every sentence is distributed in different page: each sentence on a page. Every page contains of a big picture as an illustration and the text was put below the picture, as follows,



Nina Inang aku enggo mbelgah

Fig. 2. The first page of teacher-made text.



enggo boi aku mersikkola

Fig. 3. The second page of teacher-made text.



Nina inang i sikko iajari menjaka

Fig. 4. The third page of teacher-made text.



I taruhkan bapa aku mi sikkola

Fig. 5. The fourth page of the teacher-made text.



mbiar aku I tadingken I sikkola

Fig. 6. The fifth page of teacher-made text.



piga-piga dengnan sekelasku i enggo kutandai

Fig. 7. The sixth page of teacher-made text.



kalak i dengganku mermeam sedekkah en

Fig. 8. The seventh page of teacher-made text.

C. The Implementation

From the observation, it was found out that the way the students respond to the text written in Indonesian language was different from the way they responded to the reading text written in their mother tongue. The students repeated after the teacher to read aloud the text in Indonesian; however they did not show any enthusiasm to what they were reading. In

contrast, their response to the reading text written in their mother tongue was very significantly positive. They repeated after the teacher enthusiastically. They smiled at each other while reading, sometimes clapped their hands, and some girls touched the shoulder of her classmate to share her enthusiasm and joy. The teacher continued to read aloud the text three times followed by her students.

Still using the same big book, the teacher circled every familiar words in the page such as *Inang* (mother) *sikkola* (schooling), *menjaka* (to read), *Bapa* (father), *mbiar* (worried), *denganku* (my friend), *mermeam* (play). She then asked them to repeat after her reading aloud every words three times. After that, she showed the students pieces of paper on which she already wrote the words, one word on a piece of paper, big enough to see from the back seat. She asked them to repeat after her reading the words. To test the students recognition of each word, she put the pieces of paper separated on the table, asked some volunteers to pick up the suitable paper she read aloud. Three volunteers (all girls) came voluntarily to the front although showing a bit nervous. One of the girls were succeed in recognizing all the words while the other two failed in recognizing respectively *menjaka*, *mbiar*, and *denganku*. The word they easily recognized were *Inang*, *Bapa*, and *sikkola*. The teacher then stucked all pieces of paper on the wall for the students to have enough time to observe and practice. She let the students come closer to the text and asked each other about how to read a particular word. By the end of the 30 minute-class, she tested the students success in word recognition. She distributed small version of the big book to the students and asked them to circle the world she was reading aloud, the same word she highlighted for the day. Three students (8%) were succeed in recognizing all words; 17 students (46%) made mistakes in the range of 1-2; 12 students (32%) made mistakes in the range of 3-4; and the rest 5 students (14%) made 4 mistakes. No students were failed to recognize words *Inang*, *Bapa*, and *sikkola*.

When the next day the teacher picked and read the same book, more students mentally involved. As the worries to the school environment decreases, the students gained more and more self confidence. After a series of similar reading experiences, the number of students who succeed in acquiring the words decreases significantly. Only two students (5%) left behind. The majority of the students (95%) were in the 0-2 mistakes range. The number of the words they failed to recognize decreases significantly to *mbiar* (worry). It seems that this adjective is not very easy to keep in the memory perhaps as it was not part of the school experience they have as the result of reading material familiarity.

Teacher-made text is only for the first week. In the weeks that follow, texts were composed together by the teacher and her students. Everyday they created new text, read them together, and stucked on the wall. The text was also documented in a big book and small books for the students use. The example of the text created together is as follows,

Sikkola (At school), see Fig. 9.

Kami mersikkola (We go to school), see Fig.10.

Kami mersiajar menjaka (We learn to read), see Figure 11.

Kami mersiajar menurut (We learn to write), see Fig. 12.
Kami mersiajar meretong (We learn to count), see Fig. 13.



sikkola

Fig. 9. The first page of teacher and students-made text.



kami mersikola

Fig. 10. The second page of teacher and students-made text.



kami mersiajar menjaka

Fig. 11. The third page of teacher and students-made text.



kami mersiajar menurut

Fig. 12. The fourth page of teacher and students-made text.



kami mersiajar maretong

Fig. 13. The fifth page of teacher and students-made text.

The teacher also told students stories and asked the kids the words they would like to know the writing form. One day the teacher taught the students the folklore titled Sitagendera. At the end of a story telling, for example, the words they decided to stick on the wall are: Sitagendera (the title of the folklore), kuta (village), pertua (parents), dukak (child), daholi (male), daberru (female). The teacher drilled the students to read all words on the wall, provided fill-in the blank exercise which focused on a letter of the day. Everyday the words would be drilled before introducing the new ones.

The teacher taught the students 'Umpama', that is the four lines poem containing illustration in the first two lines and the moral teaching in the second two line. The example is as follows,

Ndepur angin i delleng (The wind blows in the hills),
Kettang rame rameen (rattan piled up)
Ndor mo daging mu mbellen (Grow fast)
Asa ndor ko no mersikkola (So you can go to school) [11].

Then she asked them to focus on the words *delleng* and *mersikkola*.

The attitude toward the text were also positive. They talked about the text in their table, pointed and enjoyed the picture, read repeatedly, showed their competence off to the classmates, smiled and laughed, and showed their appreciation and fond to the teacher. They visited the pieces of paper hung on the wall in the previous day and tested each other's competence in recognizing the words. When one of the boy wanted to take the piece of paper from the wall, his class mate did not allow him to do so. They protected the text as they treated the small book carefully. It implies that the familiarity of reading material and joyful process also affects students' attitude toward the text

Various reading materials introduced/produced by the teacher or produced together by the teacher and students have made the classroom alive everyday. Students were amazed by many new words everyday and they were excited every morning when the teacher asked the same question such as 'Nggeut ko menjaka bagendari? (Do you want to read now?) which they would answer in a chorus 'Nggeuuut' (Yes we want to read).

D. Evaluation

Mother tongue-based materials are proved to be more effective for students' cognitive and affective development in

reading how to read. The sentences read aloud by the teacher amazed the children because they thought that the language they use in daily life was not for school use when the fact shows that it was not true. Students recognition of the words was found to be faster when they were exposed to the utterances and words of their mother tongue. It is proved by the data that in 30 minutes of their first day of schooling, 50% of the students have acquired a number of words introduced to them joyfully, gradually increases to the 90% only up to the second day.

It is a contrast to the situation when they were directly exposed to the text in Indonesian language. Most of the students chose to memorize the sentences since they have very low comprehension on what they were exposed to.

It is surprising to know that parents were also very happy to know the children at the present could talk much about their lesson. They could talk about the content of the reading materials in their mother tongue. Previously they were not competent in talking about the lesson which was written in Indonesian. The students showed their parents proudly the fill-in-the-blank exercise given by the teacher in which they successfully did by filling in letter 'a' to *In_ang*, *Bap_*, and *sikkol_*. They were asked by the teacher to show their parents the exercise and stick the paper on the wall to create learning environment at home.

Students also show more positive attitude toward learning. They treated the text as valuable things representing themselves and wanted to keep them as long as possible in the classroom and home environment.

IV. DISCUSSION

The result of the study shows that mother tongue-based and local culture-based reading materials improve reading comprehension. The present reading practices in which students are imposed with Indonesian words and unfamiliar contents have caused the students able to read but not able to comprehend what they read. By mother tongue approach and local content, students comprehend what they are reading even before they recognize the sound represented by each letter. They can observe the association of picture and sound and pronounce it at the same time with comprehension. This is one of the benefit if as they suggest that the theme in students' textbook should be in line with Indonesian culture. This is proved to be successful in promoting students' literacy competence [10].

Reference [2] suggests that there are three cognitive processes that work simultaneously in different levels when someone is reading, they are (a) perceptual, (b) cognitive, and (c) metacognitive, reading in this first and early stage of course still memory-dependent. However, reading text in students' mother tongue involve the three levels at the same time: they start recognizing the association of pictures and text (perceptual), understand the meaning (cognitive), and comprehend them very well (metacognitive) since the texts are all about the life experience they have in memory as a schemata. That is why, in terms of comprehension, this is much better than pronunciation without comprehension. The Students read the text through memorizing, but what they memorize is something they comprehend. Reading then is

expressive. In addition, by showing texts accompanied by pictures, teachers help improve the students' brain performance. At the same time, it improves students' capacity in learning.

This literacy event is a good foundation for the construction of language and knowledge. Reference [7] suggests that one of the ways in promoting students literacy is to include cultural content in the books they read. The language of the book is of their mother tongue and the knowledge content is of the local culture. By implementing this strategy, teachers help students master the knowledge through language. This is what we call as literacy. This strategy or literacy competence will be used through the years of schooling and after, i.e. getting knowledge through language. Language leads the way for students to get knowledge through comprehending what they are reading. When the time for reading in Indonesian language comes, they already have the system in mind that the language brings knowledge and they will get the knowledge through text. This is the foundation of reading comprehension. As he suggests that intercultural communicative competence is far better than a single cultural competence. If the students are directly imposed to the reading text in Indonesian language, they will be uprooted from their native language and culture. Moving from one culture to another will leave the local culture behind, and with very limited knowledge about the new culture, the success is more difficult to get [9].

In terms of affective development, students interact with pictures and texts they are reading. They are enthusiastic as pictures (representing things in the memory) find their new meaning in the text. In the time when the picture is not there anymore and only text left, students are able to read the text with comprehension by the help of the picture saved in the memory. This makes the student perform as an 'expert reader', the feeling that will increase their self-confidence. Everytime the teacher exposes a text, the children will spontaneously read it out loud to show that they know how to read it. They comprehend the text even before they know all the alphabets. It implies that students also interact with the content (the knowledge) of the text and simultaneously their comprehension of the text will improve their productive language competence. For the future, the problem of copy pasting as found in is assumed to be decreasing significantly [5]-[6].

V. CONCLUSION

The goal of reading for young learners is to help them recognize symbols of sounds as presented in letters and words. So letters and words chosen for them to read should represent familiar sounds. The study shows that the students are very excited when they are exposed to written symbols of sounds they were familiar with which is the sounds of their native language. As the result, reading comprehension is proved to be easier to achieve. As their mastery of Indonesian language improve, text in Indonesian language can be introduced. By helping students first read in their mother tongue, school has given its effective contribution in helping students' comprehension and excitement improved. This is an important foundation for being independent readers in

their future.

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