



IMPROVING UNDER-RESOURCED SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' LITERACY INSTRUCTION: AN INTERVENTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The study is a part of the government-sponsored literacy program to improve the Indonesian secondary students' literacy performance. Particularly, this study focuses on the examination of the program as the attempt to improve the secondary teachers' literacy instruction at the under-resourced schools. The program implemented in the Bahasa Indonesia subject by employing Reading to Learn pedagogy (Rose, 2016) in teaching the explanatory text. Using an interventional ethnographic study design, which involves three main phases i.e. Reading to Learn pedagogy workshop, the R2L implementation with mentoring, and evaluation, the current study investigates the experience of two female eighth graders' contract-based teachers, in their early thirties, at two under-resourced secondary schools in, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The data collected in this three-month study were observation, interviews with the teachers, principal, and students, recorded teaching sessions, recorded reflections sessions, and lesson plans and teaching materials. The findings of the study reveal that the teachers' literacy instruction in utilizing stages in the R2L pedagogy indicated significant improvement from their previous practice. The intensive mentoring provided during the workshop and school implementation of the R2L implementation have equipped the teachers with more solid pedagogical foundation in internalizing and implementing the R2L pedagogy. In addition, the program has promoted the teachers' professional development and assisted the school to gain larger access to literacy pedagogy for better literacy participation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Quality literacy education is still a major challenge in the Indonesian education system. The necessary and concerted efforts to be made to improve the literacy education cannot be divorced from the larger societal and economic conditions. According to the World Bank report in 2019, only about 52 millions of Indonesians are economically secured, or one in every five persons. As explained by Kidwell, T. in the book entitled *Research on Teaching and Learning English in Under-Resourced Contexts in 2021*, Indonesia is classified as a lower-middle-income country by the World Bank and resources are limited at the majority of Indonesian schools. In other words, with the majority of the vast and diverse population is under the category aspiring middle class, The World Bank recommends that one of the ways to expand the nation's middle class is to improve the secondary (literacy) education. Thus, literacy education has been linked to the upward social changes and transformations in the era of globalization, as explained by Street in the book entitled *Encyclopedia of language and education in 2008*. However, the compounded and multifaceted issues involved in enhancing literacy education have been proven to slow down the desired progress. One of the major stumbling blocks in the literacy education is the inadequate resources available to implement quality literacy program. It is undeniable that schools as the smallest functional educational unit need to possess and sustain the required resources to run the literacy program. Human capitals, policy and regulations, financial resources, ICT supports, regular teacher and staff training, and networking are some of the means by which the implementation of literacy program can be measured.

With these concerns in mind, this study looks at the implementation of a government-sponsored literacy program at under-resourced secondary schools in one major city in Indonesia. Specifically, this study was motivated by the disparity of resources available, particularly that of the human capital, i.e., the teachers, that could hinder the successful implementation of literacy instruction. As the front liners in the literacy program, teachers need to be equipped with sufficient content, pedagogical, and social competencies and skills to properly deliver the lessons effectively to make significant changes in the students' literacy performance. Further, this study seeks to make a contribution to provide a pedagogy instruction, Reading to Learn (R2L), developed from the Systemic Functional Linguistics which provide explicit literacy instruction. Historically, it was used mainly and initially for students from the aboriginal communities in Australia (Millin, et al., 2020; Rose & Avecedo, 2006; Yulianeta, et al., 2022). Due to the high efficacy of R2L in improving literacy in under-resourced schools with minimum literate environment (e.g. Huang, et al., 2019; Lucas, et al., 2014; Shum & Shi, 2021), this study seeks to implement R2L in the Indonesia secondary school contexts with similar situations. This is particularly important because the disparity in the educational standards for literacy in the public and private schools alike in Indonesia is deemed to be immense (World Bank, 2019).

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs exploratory interventional ethnographic design (Clair & Phipps, 2008) in attempting to describe activities and what people do in them within the situatedness of the events. In this particular study, a literacy program which is based on Reading to Learn pedagogy is designed for the teachers and the students at a particular educational unit specifically selected to improve the literacy practice. This research design goes along with the agenda of the program at large in which several steps of phases are required to be implemented, which are elaborated below. The exploratory nature of the study comes in as the study is a part of the larger national-wide literacy program involving several teacher education higher education institutions.

2.2 Research context

The study was conducted at two secondary schools categorized as under-resourced educational institutions whose students come mainly from the low socio-economic status (SES). Based on the interview with the school principal and the teacher, the two schools have 180 students, around 80% of whose households are categorized as having low SES. The selection of this school is part of the program's target schools which aims at under-resourced schools toward equal educational opportunity as explained by Ladson-Billings in the book entitled *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Education* in 2009 that might also have been outside the outreach of the regular government interventions and programs. With this particular mission, it is expected that the literacy intervention programs can be more distributed to provide opportunities for these schools to enhance their literacy teaching and students' performance.

2.3 The Hots Literacy Program at a Glance

The Hots Literacy Program is sponsored by the Indonesia Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology and is implemented by the Directorate of Higher Education involving seven teacher education higher education institutions in the nation in 2021. To put briefly, the program focuses on language learning as literacy practice in Bahasa Indonesia school subject as explained by Street, B.V. in the book entitled *The Cambridge handbook of literacy in 2001*. The program comprises of 3 main phases: (1) intensive Reading to Learn pedagogy instruction training and workshop for the teachers from select partner schools, (2) the implementation of Reading to Learn pedagogy at the partner schools with supervision and mentoring, and (3) evaluation. Different stakeholders are involved to ensure the successful implementation of the Hots Literacy program, such as university academic staff, fifth-semester university students, school teachers, school supervisors, and the 8th grade students. Alongside these main phases, the program is also in collaboration with the National Agency for Learning and Assessment to oversee the students' PISA-like literacy performance, which, in the interest of space, is outside the scope of the study.

The first phase involving the teachers is the training and workshop held intensively for one week where the teachers learned about the principles, stages, and implementation of Reading to Learn pedagogy through presentation, modeling, and discussion. During the training, each of the teachers was paired with one university student who assisted them to develop lesson plan, teaching materials, assessment items, and instructional media. The teacher-university student collaboration was intended to expose both parties to new experience of working as a team. Moreover, during the training and workshop, the teacher-university students' teams were coached to develop to create proper literacy instruction in accordance with reading to Learn pedagogy.

The second phase is the implementation of the Reading to learn pedagogy at partners schools under the supervision and mentoring of the university lecturers. At this phase, the teachers implement what they have learned and prepared during the training and workshop in the real classroom setting. After schedule arrangements were made with the schools and students, the implementation of literacy instruction in Bahasa Indonesia based on the Reading to Learn Pedagogy was conducted in eight sessions for teaching explanation text. It is important to note that since this program was implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic times, some adjustments had to be made particularly with regard to the scheduling and the number of students participated in the study. During this phase, the teachers, lecturers, and university students were involved in consultation, discussion, and reflection sessions to ensure that teachers' concerns were facilitated and the lessons were well-prepared.

The last phase is the evaluation where the teachers and the lecturers sit together and reflect on the implementation and lessons learned from the teacher's perspectives. The evaluation of the program can be done continuously including with the reflection and discussion with the teachers and the university students to ensure the optimization of the program

2.4 Participants

As a part of a larger project, this study involved different parties with their designated roles in the program as a whole. As for the research reported in this article, the participants involved are two teachers from two schools, (are assigned pseudonyms as Ani and Santi), twenty 8th graders, and a school principal. The two teachers, both are female aged 25-30 years old, are contract-based, entry-level teachers whose teaching experiences in this school are 2 and 1 year, respectively. Ani graduated from English language education whereas Santi graduated from Islamic education. In this program, both taught Bahasa Indonesia subject. One might wonder about the teachers' educational background, i.e., graduates of Indonesian language education. As found in many school contexts in Indonesia, especially those at private schools with limited resources, some teachers teach the subject that are not in line with their educational background. This has been reported in the World Bank (2010) citing that Indonesia still has major challenges in providing highly competent teachers. A part of the researcher team serves as the mentor in the literacy program.

2.5 Data collection

The data collected in this study were taken from several stages of the program and are from various sources. During the teacher workshop session held intensively for one week, the teachers were observed and; interviews with the teachers, school principal, and students; video recorded sessions; teacher's lesson plans and teaching materials; and students' work.

The data were collected in the span of a three-month period with different kind of program and research activities: intensive training sessions, school visits and observation, video recorded teaching and learning sessions, online meeting sessions, as well as personal and group chats using a popular social media application.

2.6 Data analysis

The data in this study were rigorously analyzed and triangulated to demonstrate the teachers' literacy instructional competencies in teaching explanation text in the Bahasa Indonesia subject for the 8th graders. The observation data with the filed notes were carefully read, coded, and categorized based on the stages of the literacy instruction, interview transcripts with the teachers, students and principal were analyzed to figure out their perspectives on the program, transcription of the video recorded sessions were coded to provide information about the details of the workshop and implementation of the R2L pedagogy. The teaching and learning materials and students' work are carefully evaluated to support the literacy instruction.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion presented in this study are based on the investigation on the intervention of the R2L pedagogy provided to the 8th grade teachers and its implementation as an attempt to enhance the under-resourced school eighth grade teachers to improve their literacy instruction in teaching of Bahasa Indonesia subject. The themes that came out based on the in-depth interview, observation, and reflection reported here include in the subsections below. The analysis reported here is based on the three themes emerged around the scope of the study to improve the under-resourced teachers' literacy instruction with regard to (1) R2L implementation, (2) mentoring and collaboration between university-based lecturer and the teachers, and (3) enhancing professional development opportunities.

3.1 R2L Implementation in Improving Teachers' Literacy Instruction

The introduction of R2L to the teachers during the five days intensive workshop followed by its implementation at the two schools for 8 sessions with the mentoring and supervising by the faculty members evidently has positively impacted the teachers' literacy instruction competencies, particularly in teaching explanation text. The improvement can be seen most notably in two major aspects: the pedagogical knowledge of literacy instruction and the practice of literacy instruction. Fig. 1 presents the writing process.

When asked during the interview how the R2L pedagogy differed from their previous teaching practice, the teachers stated as follows:

Excerpt 1

Ani: [in my previous] teaching, I asked the students to read, just let them read by themselves and then answer the questions. I realized now, that way the students did not really comprehend the text. With Reading to Learn pedagogy, the teacher and the students read the text out loud together, highlighted important words, constructed sentences with their own words, and finally create their own text.

Excerpt 2

Santi: I used to ask the students to just read and answer the questions, I did not ask them to read sentence by sentence or highlight the important words. ... with Reading to Learn, the students really understand the text because they read and re-read every sentence and highlighted the important words, constructed the text together and finally able to write their own.



Fig. 1 - A Student is highlighting the text guided by the teacher's questions.

The teachers' articulation of the implementation of R2L pedagogy shown in excerpt 1 and 2 above indicates their explicit pedagogical knowledge in which they expressed the know-what and know-how of the R2L pedagogy in articulated and structured manner to facilitate actions (Panahi, et al., 2012). The explicit staged instruction in the R2L require teachers to be well-versed and clear in giving the instruction to guide students in processing, deconstructing, and creating the explanation text. It is of great significance that teachers involved in this study to be able to articulate the R2L stages explicitly particularly because at this stage, the teachers were internalizing the R2L pedagogy in their literacy instruction. The pedagogic metalanguage the teachers demonstrated in the stages of literacy instruction, as explained by Rose, D. & Martin, J. R in the book entitled *Learning to write, reading to learn: Genre, knowledge and pedagogy in the Sydney School in 2012* argue, is important to use in the classroom to facilitate meaning-making of the text. In so doing, the implementation of R2L has supported the Indonesian language curriculum framework (Kartika-Ningsih & Gunawan, 2019; Lestari, et al., 2022; Nurlaelawati & Novianti, 2017).

3.2 Mentoring to improve the teachers' literacy instruction

In this study, the collaboration and mentoring serve as part of the intervention to enhance the teacher's literacy instruction. Since the beginning of the program, the teachers were informed of the phases of the literacy enhancement project. The 5 days-intensive workshops provided them with modelling and the guided practice of the R2L instruction to be implemented at their classrooms. When discussing how to develop the teaching material on detailed reading where the students highlight the words on text, the teachers shared that typically they only focused on a few words on the text which are new to the students. Following R2L pedagogy, in the detailed reading stage, the content words are highlighted to bring consciousness to the text and help them with detailed information of the text.

Below is the dialogue between the university-based serves as the mentor and the teacher as the mentee when discussing highlighting the text.

Excerpt 3

Mentor: The words we should guide the students to highlight are all the content and lexical words which will help them understand the text thoroughly, not only new words.

Teacher: Oh I see, so we should highlight more words in the text.

Mentor: Yes, that way, the students will pay closer attention to the details information in the text which facilitates better understanding of the text.

The excerpt above shows the dialogue where the mentor provides the pedagogical counsel to transform the teacher's previous practice of only focusing on new or difficult words to guiding students to highlight all the content and lexical words to expose learner's capacity for a higher level of understanding (Rose, 2011). The dialogue shows that the mentor is using the specialist discourse (Adnan, 2018; Dikilitas & Wyatt, 2018; Kemmis, et al., 2014) and guiding the teacher to a new teaching practice as explained by Goltsev & Bredthauer in Handbook of research on cultivating literacy in diverse and multilingual classrooms in 2020, based on the R2L pedagogy – that is, on what and why teachers should highlight content and lexical words in the text. This indicates the process in which the mentor perform the co-planning and verbal reflecting on the plan with the mentee by showing examples on a particular teaching technique (Hudson, 2013; Windschitl, 2021)

Following the dialogue as shown in excerpt 3 and the subsequence discussions, the teacher prepared the teaching materials to be implemented in the classroom during the literacy program implementation stage at the school. Based on the observation and the analysis of the teaching materials, the teacher has adequately internalize the R2L's detailed reading concept in her teaching of the explanation text. Below (see Fig. 2) is one of the slides used by the teacher in the detailed reading stage of the explanation text on sun eclipse.

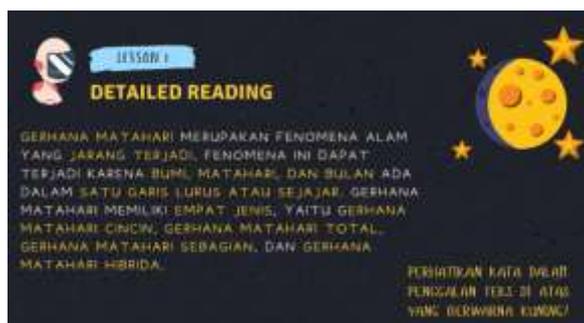


Fig. 2 - A Slide from the lesson on explanation text with highlighted words.

As can be seen in the figure 2, almost all content and lexical words are highlighted to reading is facilitated to get students familiarized with discourse, topic and language features which indicate overt instruction (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Rose & Avededo, 2006). On the bottom right corner of the slide shows the explicit instruction for the students to pay closer attention to the highlighted words. The slide also utilized other modalities with the insertion of pictures and color dimensions (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). The text (or the portions of the text) was then read and re-read together as a class with the guiding questions from the teacher. During the classroom observation and reflection session with the teacher, it was revealed that the shared and detailed reading stages have increased the student's participation and fuller meaning making of the text. In the teacher's own words: "practically all students participate and know the answers to the questions as they have fuller comprehension of the text", which indicated enhanced students' participation and engagement. At the later classroom sessions, as a result of the shared and detailed reading, the students were able to deconstruct the text in their own words because it was closely modelled on the text they have learnt to read, as explained by Rose in the book entitled *Literacy and social responsibility: Multiple perspectives* in 2011. Overall, the R2L also facilitated better flow of the lessons.

3.3 Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities

The literacy program in the study in which the teachers participated is framed within the equity and access in education paradigm (Ainscow, 2020) where various supports are provided for the under-resourced schools. As mentioned in the program highlight above, the selection of the school was one of the important decisions made that the program sought to provide access for professional development for teachers in under-resourced schools whose characterized as having too little initial teacher training and on-going teacher development (Bietenbeck, et al., 2018; Marcenaro-Gutierrez & Lopez-Agudo, 2020; Rohmah, 2018).

As stated by the school principal in the excerpts below (see excerpt 4), the teachers were often overlooked and dismissed from having proper professional development due to their status as the contract teachers teaching at private schools. It is important to note that this school is located in a major city; however, due to unequal distribution of resources across the regions, the school is considered to be poorly educationally resourced, as explained by Curtin in the book entitled *Advances in online chemistry education* in 2021.

Excerpt 4

We are grateful for the [literacy] program at our school because our teachers are in need of such mentoring and guidance from the [university-based] lecturers. ... as a private school affiliated with an (socio-religious) organization to provide better education for the socio-economically disadvantaged students, we feel that this program could really make a change.

As shared by the principal in the excerpt 4 above, the collaboration embedded in the intervention of the literacy program, as argued by Ainscow (2016) serves as a starting point for more equal access to education involving the experimentation with new practices, in this case, the R2L pedagogy. In this context, the literacy program functions within the limited socioeconomic sphere that aimed at increasing literacy participation, for the schools, teachers and students, as the members of the community, as explained by Gee in the book entitled *The new literacy studies* in 2015. This is particularly powerful as the schools involved in the study is one of the many schools as explained by Kidwell, T. in the book entitled *Research on teaching and learning English in under-resourced contexts* in 2021

observation belongs to the schools with limited resources. At the same time, the program helps to close the gaps and disparity in the educational standards for literacy in Indonesia which is deemed to be immense (World Bank, 2019). Furthermore, the literacy program also serves the literacy sponsor for the school community with limited resources to gain better access to current and more effective literacy instruction (Franzak, et al., 2019). By engaging the teachers, students, and larger school community in the literacy program with R2L provided with the stages elaborated above has transformed the teachers' practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) and improve the students' literacy performance.

The study's findings have demonstrated the efficacy of R2L pedagogy which provided clear instructional stages as explained by Rose in the book entitled *Reading to Learn: Accelerating learning and closing the gap* in 2016, that enabled the teachers to provide better scaffolding for the students' literacy skills in understanding and composing explanatory text. The studies on the implementation of R2L in the Indonesian context also corroborate our findings (Damayanti, 2017; Nurlaelawati, 2022; Suryati, et al., 2021) which generally reported on the improvement of the students' understanding, skills and competence in meaning-making and producing a particular genre in question. In terms of students' participation and engagement, our findings confirmed similar findings by Nurlaelawati et al. (2022) for instance, which showed that R2L the phases facilitated better classroom interaction, student participation and engagement, and flow of the teaching and learning activities. The stronger scaffolding provided by the R2L instructional phases ensures that the students stayed focused during the lessons. This enhancement in the students' engagement of great significance, as many teachers sometimes are frustrated by lack of students' engagement. In addition, as the program was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic times where the students had not inhibited in their interaction with peers and teachers, the R2L detailed phases had facilitated interaction which helped create and maintain better engagement.

The program has also facilitated mentoring and collaboration between the schools and university which was beneficial for all parties involved (Bernay, et al., 2020; Oates & Bignel, 2022; Rasmitadila, et al., 2022; Sim, 2010; Teitel, 2008). Bernay et al. (2020) particularly highlighted the essential feature of school and university partnership in that the teacher practice improved through apprenticeship model as implemented in this study. Teachers, school administrators and university faculty valued working together to see the improvement in the teaching learning process, students' attainment, teacher professional development and joint research. On the teacher development front, especially, the mentoring was even more important given the contract-based status of the teachers which might not receive sufficient training programs for enhancement of their professional identity (Beijaard, et al., 2004; Engeness, 2022; Jones & Kessler, 2020; Keiler, 2018; Richter, et al., 2021). As such, the learning community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) can be broadened and enhanced. This inclusion of schools in the university collaboration network projects broader dissemination of knowledge and rejects the notion of university as the ivory tower (Bacons & Williams, 2022). Moreover, this kinds of collaboration and dissemination need to be encouraged in the Indonesian context which potentially promote local interpretation of knowledge production within the diverse multicultural and multilingual Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated that the literacy instruction employing R2L pedagogy has improved the teachers' literacy instruction competencies coupled with intensive mentoring and university-school collaboration to provide better access to professional development for the under-resourced schools. The implementation of R2L has shown to be efficacious to improve the students' understanding of the explanatory text, students' participation and engagement, as well as their performance. R2L pedagogy too has the efficacy to improve the teachers' literacy instruction and promote professional development. In addition, the school-university collaboration facilitated in the program has helped the schools navigate on ways to maximize resources and larger and more productive community building. This study, therefore, contributes to closing the gap found in the immense disparity in quality and resources of literacy practices in teaching and learning especially with regard to the equal access to literacy participation and teacher professional development. Some recommendations made include the replication of similar support for more under-resources schools, strengthening the university and school partnership and creating more space for mentoring the novice teachers for sustained teachers professional development.

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