A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Elementary School Students' Perceptions of Criteria of Bilingual Children Storybook

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Abstract: Indonesian poet and activist, Taufiq Ismail has dubbed the recent literacy development in Indonesian for having Tragedi Nol Buku (the null book tragedy). This refers to the fact that mostly Indonesian students might not read any single book for a year. For this reason, the current curriculum has started to promote the National Literacy Movement at schools. Regarding the phenomenon, the study aims to describe 1) the perceptions of elementary school students of the interest and usefulness of English story reading and 2) comparison between rural and urban elementary students' perceptions about character values and criteria of the bilingual storybook for literary reading activity. The research design involved a mixed method design of qualitative data and quantitative data. Validated Likert-scale questionnaires were administered to 146 elementary EFL (English as Foreign Language) students in an urban area and a rural area of West Java, Indonesia. Qualitative data from the guided interview were transcribed through coding sheet. The questionnaire and interview were developed based on the criteria in the previous study by Dewi et al. (2016) and adapted from several scholars, Smallwood (1988) Whiteside (2007) and Steinbeck (2008). The frequency counts and percentages were constructed through descriptive statistics. The findings revealed valuable information about elementary students' interest in the English story reading and criteria of a bilingual storybook for literary activity. Both elementary students from the urban and rural area had positive perceptions on the integration of character values into the bilingual children storybook.

1 INTRODUCTION

Students born in the early years of the 21ˢᵗ century are expected to be ready for challenges concerning to the importance of using media and multimodality in embracing literacy. Not only cognitive, the students are considered to possess an understanding of visual imagery (Mart, 2012). In fact, the development of literacy in Indonesia has been rolling like a roller coaster ride. In 2005, Indonesian poet and activist, Taufiq Ismail has dubbed the education system suffered from *Tragedi nol buku (*the null book tragedy) after conducting a research to Indonesian students in several area (Irsyad, 2015). As a matter of fact, School Literacy Movement has been triggered by Indonesian government to address the issue. The presence of English language as a local content subject in the curriculum also adds local cultural values into the lesson. To respond this responsibility, English language now has partial duty to integrate local cultural values and character building for children literacy development. In contrast, in the past few years, most of Indonesian English teachers tend to rely on the commercial printed textbook as a source of teaching (Lengkanawati et al., 2015). Therefore, Taufiq Ismail wrote many poems evoking how students might never experience having the responsibility of reading a book until they graduate.

Regarding the School Literacy Movement in Indonesia, several problems still occur in the implementation. Based on a research by Andi (2017), the program needs a serious method because most of students tend to show low interest, meanwhile most of library still lack of literacy program. He also highlights how mostly teachers need to practice conducting literacy program. Moreover, the absence of non-course book such as storybook and literature in the library does not support the school to hold the program. In this case, this research focuses on the problem of student s' perceptions and the absence of storybook at school library. Young learners require more exposure of books and reading material, in particular a storybook. There have been several studies about the importance of using storybook as a

mean of promoting literacy in the young age. A study by Dewi et al. (2016) developed a picture storybook for elementary students in a rural area. Based on their survey, the students have a potential interest toward the reading activity using bilingual storybook despite the fact that they have low English proficiency. A research says that when native language and target language share the same parameter setting and principle, there might be a positive transfer during the language learning (Saville-Troike, 2012). Regarding the obstacles of promoting literacy in bilingual storybook, Parmon (2011) believes bilingual education might not hinder the process of enhancing cognitive thinking skills. At the same time, reading books or storytelling can reinforce children's imagination and improve literacy skills (Nava and Avila, 2013). It is clear that stated that promoting storybook in the school library need to be developed in order to create a linguistic influence and steady environment of literacy learning.

Considering the phenomenon, literature and multimodalities in a form of reading media require advanced development to enrich more exposure for readers. In terms of effectiveness, the purpose of this study is describing a comparative picture of young learners' perception (elementary school students) towards criteria of bilingual storybook for English learning based in urban area and rural area. The underlying reasons behind this study are there seem to be few researches on developing bilingual storybook for young learners, especially in Indonesia. As past studies dominantly concerned on the perception of English teaching strategy and approach, this study intend to explore criteria for developing bilingual storybook by reflecting on the perception of young learners in two different areas. To achieve such purposes, the discussion is written based on the following objectives;

1. To examine elementary students' perceptions about the usefulness of character values in the criteria of bilingual storybook.
2. To investigate comparison between rural and urban elementary students' perceptions about character values and criteria of bilingual story book for literacy reading activity.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several scholars have defined the meaning of perception, children's literature and bilingual language learning. This study constitutes several theoretical frameworks in defining central themes such as perception, children's storybook and bilingual language learning.

2.1 The Concept of Perception

Several scholars have defined the meaning of perception. In general, perception is defined as 'the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment' (Schacter, 2011). Furthermore, there are two aspects of perception, namely cognitive and psychology aspect (Harnad, 1987). In a further explanation, he explains that cognitive aspect emphasizes on understanding and making sense of thing. It can be related to psychological aspect as how emotion, experience, and intelligence contribute to the responses. In other words, through a perceptual process, perception is developed as people gain experience to what they feel, think, and acquire in their environment.

2.2 Children's Storybook Criteria

There are several criteria of storybooks and multimodality integration developed by several experts. First, Smallwood (1988) identify whether the storybooks help to fulfil learning objectives according to the school curriculum. The second one is whether it uses equivalent language for children or above the level of the learners. In this case, vocabularies are considered to enable children refine their language development. The last one, Smallwood points on the importance of illustration as the visual representation of words. When text is equipped with picture, it helps children to imagine the story and to tell the same story when they want to retell it to other people.

In particular, Salas et al. (2002) describe more specific criteria in terms of characterization and values added in the storybook. To begin with, characters should own authenticity without being stereotyped. They have to be equivalent to physical, social and emotional attributes. In term of setting, a consistency is required either a historical setting or contemporary. Whiteside (2007) reveals that this characters need to be integrated with consistent themes and values with the particular culture mentioned in the story. Related to culture, the illustrations, gender roles, and information should be accurate and reliable. It has to be rich of details because can be a new thing for young learners. The selection should also incorporate authentic interaction between characters with a cultural group or between two or more cultural groups. It goes

without saying that an objective for including members of a "minority" group is deliberately done. Finally, she concludes that the selection should invite reflection, critical analysis, and response.

Another criterion from Steinbeck (2008) are taken into account to add the possible themes and cultural values of storybook. Steinbeck (2008) suggests stories to be action oriented. As mentioned before, it should be personal by using familiar characters; meanwhile the personalization technique should be optimized in the pre- and post- activities. They do not need to be too detailed, both in terms of visuals and verbal. For context extension, they have to use comprehensible input (the language that is at the right cognitive and linguistic level) so that the output is more structured. As a result, language, content, visual and moral lesson of the stories should be rich of details because can be a new thing for young learners.

2.3 Bilingual Language Learning

In selecting bilingual book criteria, translation needs to be addressed carefully. For instance, the non-English text should be at the same reading level as the English text (Salas et al., 2002). In a study of bilingual storybook (Chinese-English storybook), Huang and Chen (2016) found that there seems to be common issue that both languages tend to be in equivalent in terms of translation quality. Meanwhile, it is claimed that children's literature should provide students exposure to new, illustrated vocabulary in context, and provide repetition of key words and phrases that students can master and to provide a sense of accomplishment.

3 METHODS

A validated Likert scale questionnaire is constructed and distributed to gather data from 146 elementary students from urban and rural area in West Java, Indonesia. The questionnaire consisted of two components: the first component was concerned with the usefulness of English Language story reading activity and the second component dealt with character values and criteria of bilingual story book for literacy reading activity. The results of the Likert scale questionnaires were analyzed in two central themes; perceptions on the practice of English learning and storybook reading in the classroom and perceptions on the criteria of the bilingual storybook for language learning. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the frequency counts and percentages of the results. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from interview result were preceded and transcribed through a coding sheet.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire showed respondents' perception toward the criteria of bilingual storybook for learning. The data was presented in 10 items using two point-likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=disagree and 4=strongly disagree. The language in this questionnaire had been simplified due to the consideration of children level in acquiring written form of language. RS refers to rural area students and US refers to urban area students.

Table 1: Perception on the character values and criteria of bilingual storybook for learning.

No	Statements	Mean		Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
		RS	US				
1	A storybook used in the classroom is written in bilingual language, such as English and Bahasa Indonesia.	1.72	1.84	31.51	60.27	6.16	2.05
2	The characters in the bilingual storybook are real familiar character like a farmer, a grandfather, a school student, etc.	1.56	1.93	36.99	52.05	8.22	2.74
3	The characters in the bilingual storybook are original, not a manipulated characters taken from commercial TV series or cartoon movies.	2.48	2.51	32.88	32.88	26.03	8.22
4	The bilingual storybook is written in brief stories.	1.88	2.27	16.44	24.66	51.37	7.53
5	The bilingual storybook covers a story about local culture.	1.41	1.76	51.37	39.73	6.16	2.74
6	The bilingual storybook should be able to make students learn about how to make friends everywhere.	1.58	1.66	47.95	43.84	6.16	2.05
7	The characters in the story are not gender biased, in which female character is not only portrayed for sweeping, washing dishes, doing laundry, etc.	1.95	2.02	29.45	50.68	10.96	8.90

8	The bilingual storybook should be able to make students learn about the importance of keeping the environment.	1.33	1.63	58.22	36.99	1.37	3.42
9	The bilingual storybook should be able to make students learn about introspection and self-reflection.	1.98	1.91	34.25	44.52	13.70	7.53
10	The bilingual storybook should be able to make students learn about responsibility.	1.38	1.50	60.27	34.93	4.79	0.00

With the mean value of 1.79, the Likert-scale tended to range to scale 2, thereby the item 1 demonstrated that majority of respondents (60.27%) agreed to the possible use of bilingual storybook in the classroom with the focus on English and Indonesian language. In terms of their interest in using bilingual storybook in the classroom, there likely to be similar preference between students of rural area (1.72) and urban area (1.84). The results showed how both groups tend to agree in several items.

Around half of the population (52.05%) also agreed when the storybook include real familiar figures like a farmer, a grandfather, and a school student. Both groups showed positive perceptions toward this criterion as rural area students (1.56) tend to agree and urban area students also agree on this item (1.93). Regarding the result, the choice of the character is closely related to the promotion of multiculturalism awareness. It is also related to the third item in which both groups agreed to the development of original character in the story. With approximately 26.03% students disagreed and 8.22% strongly disagreed on having original characters, there seemed to be a little preference of commercial TV series. Based on a student who preferred having popular TV series character, she admitted enjoying popular TV series character into school lesson because they were familiar for her. It is very contrast to what Whiteside (2007) defines as subject culture should be authentic and original.

"I can read half.. or I read only one chapter. I usually choose it randomly, so I just read the chapter that I love. There is no reading log [in the classroom]. We usually summarize the story in the book. The teacher usually asks us to summarize [the reading] for ten minutes." *(Translated interview with a female student of an urban area school, April 15th, 2017).*

From the whole items, the fourth criterion received slightly different results. In this case, students from rural area (1.88) prefer to the short length of the storybook and urban area students also tend to agree for the storybooks to be short (2.27). The results in Table 1 proved that half of the total respondents (51.37%) disagreed to the short length of the stories in the bilingual storybook. In fact, a student from urban area revealed how she intended to randomly read stories in storybooks without following the order of the content. In fact, the teacher at the classroom tended to ask the students to summarize the content as they read for ten minutes in the morning. By considering the limited time, the teacher expected that the student made it efficiently for reading books instead of doing unnecessary thing. The respondent also admitted that they also read their textbook during the literacy time. As a result, there was a possibility of the respondents being hardly acquainted with the time consuming of reading the books, hence they preferred to randomly read books without considering whether they could finish reading the book or the chapter in ten minutes.

"If the story is interesting, I will not get bored. Just like the story of Anak Soleha. It teaches us to be tough, and to help friend." *(Translated interview with a female student of an rural area school, April 18th, 2017).*

Regarding character-based story, 44.52% of the respondents agreed on the statement about "the bilingual storybook should be able to make students learn about introspection and self-reflection" and 34.25% strongly agreed on the point. It was revealed in the interview that the respondent would be attached to the story if it was interesting. For example, the story of *Anak Soleha* (A Good Child) could help them to learn to be a tough and helping person. So, they found an attachment toward the continuation of the story. Similarly, the respondent mentioned the character of the story would give the reader a lesson. The respondent admitted learning to realize personal mistake from the story.

It was also strengthened by the items about character values and cultural integration from the sixth item to the tenth item. With 51.37% of them strongly agreed on combining local culture aspects into the stories, the range of the mean values 1.60 revealed that most of the students of the both groups tend to agree to read any local culture theme in the story. As shown in the table, there were 47.95% positive responses who agreed on the value of social interaction meanwhile, both of the groups also agreed on the statement about learning self-introspection and

self-reflection. As a result, providing culture and character values are related to the themes of the story and the design of the visual.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the overview, it is revealed that there is no any significant difference between the perceptions of rural area students and urban area students towards the criteria of bilingual storybook. If compared mean score between the two groups in each item, most of the results showed similar preferences. Regarding the finding that was based on the result of data analysis and interpretation of the data gained from questionnaire and semi-structured interview, this result increases our general understanding of quality storybook for learning at school. Teachers should give chances for literacy development in order to help students become self-regulated.

Other criteria varied from visual and efficiency of the bilingual storybook. The languages featured in the story have to be equivalent in terms of portion and translation. Being able to demonstrate the meaning of target language into the native language or vice versa is one of the interests of having bilingual storybook for improving literacy. Based on the finding, student believes that the bilingual languages will help them to seek for vocabulary meaning; meanwhile illustration gives hints to understand the plot. Besides, literacy activity usually occurs for ten minutes in the morning, the bilingual storybook have to provide adequate story that students can read in the limited time. It can be in the form of short story but the present finding shows that students prefer to have a long story which they can pick randomly. It will be great if several episodic stories are compiled in one book, so they can read one chapter efficiently and continue the story when they have more free time. By considering the limited time, the teachers also expected to guide students effectively.

Regarding the finding that was based on the result of data analysis and interpretation of the data gained from questionnaire and semi-structured interview, this result increases our general understanding of quality storybook for learning at school. Teachers should be more considerate in providing media for the language learning and give chances for literacy in order to help students become self-regulated. Implications from this study enlighten the criteria on how to select children's books and to develop good quality bilingual storybook in the future. In addition, another study needs to be applied in a considerably large context, in order to see thoroughly dynamic

integration of themes such as values of multicultural awareness, gender equality, self-reflection inclusion, social interaction example and responsibility engagement. For those reasons, a thorough investigation of the teacher's perception, expert's perception and bilingual storybook model need to be conducted to find out the orientation of meaningful bilingual storybook production.

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