

## AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM TO SUPPORT PRIMARY TEACHERS IN LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to argue that there should be integrated literacy programs in Indonesia to support K-12 literacy educators, in this case, ESL/EFL educators, to promote their students' literacy in the English language. With its emphasis on getting back to the foundation of literacy – connections between reading and writing – the programs provide multimodal resources and various ways of organizing literacy instruction inside and outside the classrooms. A balanced approach to literacy instruction will be the main framework that will be employed in literacy instruction programs.

**Keywords:** a balanced approach to literacy instruction, integrated literacy programs, K-12 literacy educators, multimodal resources, reading-writing connections,

### Introduction

Recently, many research findings require education systems to transform their curricula to meet the challenges in the IR 4.0 era. The transformation focuses on certain skills and contents to equip our students with the 6 Cs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century of education to become global citizens. To foster those skills, literacy becomes an essential factor that all education systems must instill to make students become better members of a global society. In the context of language education, literacy has shifted from traditional literacy – being able to read and write – to multiliteracies, which refer to a “new basic” of literacy learning in the socio-cultural and multimodal communication world (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, in Kulju, et.al, 2018). It was the New London Group that first proposed the framework of multiliteracies in 1996 to acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity as well as multimodal communication. Kulju, et. al (2018) add that multiliteracies pedagogy has been implemented in primary classrooms to cater to the diversity of learners and provide the opportunity for them to employ multimodality of meaning-making in their everyday lives. Likewise, Lim (2018 in Lim 2021) claims that there should be a transformation in the literacy curriculum in which the use of multimodal resources and distinctive activities should be integrated into teaching and learning

reading, writing, and speaking. Henceforward, multiliteracies are critical to be included in the curriculum and schools adopt this literacy pedagogy to help learners gain the 6Cs of 21st-century education – skills needed in this globalization era.

Despite the rapidly changing paradigms of literacy pedagogy, current literacy practices in Indonesia are confronted by a lot of challenges that as the students' literacy performance being considered low based on PISA and PIRLS results. A similar finding was found in English education which shows that Indonesian falls under the low English proficiency category measured by the EF English proficiency index. To overcome this challenge the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), initiated to launch of *Gerakan Literasi Sekolah* (GLS - School Literacy Initiative) in 2015 integrated with the national curriculum (the 2013 Curriculum), and is implemented nationwide. The program emphasizes literacy development and pedagogy through oral and written language activities and is carried out across curricular areas and schools (Wiedarti & Laksono, 2016 in Widiati, et. al., 2021). The 2013 Curriculum has also promoted the application of literacy pedagogy, moving from overt instruction of literacy instruction to the altered practice of literacy pedagogy (Siregar & Ramadhan, 2018) which has been stated in the 2013 Curriculum as follows:

“The learning process is developed on the principle of active students learning through activities observing (to see, to read, to listen, to scrutinize), asking (orally and in written form), analyzing (to connect, to determine the relevancy, to build a story/concept), communicating (orally in written form, through images, graphics, tables, etc)” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013, in Siregar & Ramadhan, p. 23)

This indicates that the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, has considered moving literacy pedagogy to a broader area which is multiliteracies using multimodal resources. The pilot project of GLS has been carried out across the provinces and the results showed that the students' literacy skills have increased to 61% (Seftiawan, 2019). This high achievement may be derived from various local supports with diverse and structured-program school activities to make literacy becomes a culture (Widiati, et. al., 2021) such as developing literacy habits for teachers (Pradana et al, 2017) and enforcing different strategies in organizing the GLS program (Munimah, 2017) cited in Widiarti, et al (2021). Additionally, Wulandary (2017) found there is empirical evidence of GLS practices at the elementary school level. Furthermore, other GLS research supports Seftiani's outcome by revealing the positive benefits of GLS for students.

Regardless of the increased performance of students' literacy, there have been some barriers in doing literacy practice in English language teaching. One of which is the practice of literacy pedagogy has not been satisfied as to the teaching and learning processes in the classrooms merely focus on grammar (Musthafa, 2001; Siregar & Ramadhan, 2018). One of the challenges that make literacy pedagogy not applied is that there is not sufficient support for teachers in doing literacy instruction (Siregar & Ramadhan, 2018) and they are not equipped with theories and practices of literacy development (Widiawati, et. al., 2021). Thus, it is critical to figure out a solution to this

challenge. There should be a breakthrough in the form of combining reading and writing as the foundation of literacy due to the poor English proficiency performance of Indonesian students. Hence, this paper proposes an integrated reading-writing program to support EFL/ESL teachers as literacy educators to help them carry through literacy instruction in their classrooms. This program is expected to provide strategies for literacy educators to strengthen the reading and writing skills of their students. A balanced approach to literacy instruction harmonizing authentic reading and writing experiences (Tompkins, 2006), can be a framework for the integrated reading-writing program. This framework provides guidelines for literacy educators in facilitating students to understand ways to employ literacy skills in their academic and daily lives. In this paper, I will start my discussion with definitions of literacy and its role in education. Next, I will provide a review of reading-writing connections from scholars and researchers. After that, I will propose an integrated program for primary school teachers using a balanced approach to literacy instruction as the framework.

### ***Literacy and Its Roles in Education***

The essence of education is a medium for learning and whereby an individual gains knowledge, skills, and habits through instruction, training, sharing, and communication (Dkhar, 2013). In addition, education drives an individual to become a lifelong learner. The enthusiasm for learning is derived from the love of reading (Dewayani, 2017). Reading becomes an important skill in learning since it helps learners build vocabulary and understand the information they read. This skill also supports students in writing various forms of texts and doing presentations (Dewayani, 2017). To make meaning of a text, a reader needs to have “pre-existent knowledge of the world” (Cook 1989, in Harmer, 2001), known as schema (plural schemata) that he/she has in mind as mental representations of a certain situation he/she comes across (Harmer, 2001). Hence, reading is not a one-way interaction process but is a two-way transaction between a reader and a text (Rosenblatt, 1988, in Musthafa, 1996). It means that when a reader comprehends a text, he/she creates meaning and brings prior knowledge, sociolinguistic background, intention, expectation, the purpose of reading, values, and beliefs about the topic (Musthafa, 1994, in Musthafa, 1996). Like reading, writing is also a transaction as a writer brings his/her personal, social, and cultural background in his/her writing (Rosenblatt, 1988, in Musthafa, 1996). It is also believed that writing ability is essential for learning, which enhances students' thinking and reasoning ability in academic subjects (McGinley & Tierney, 1988).

Mc. Ginley and Tierney (1988) claimed that reading and writing as strategies of obtaining knowledge, and along with current thinking, they become the main functional approaches to literacy. Generally, literacy is viewed as being able to read and write (Goh & Silver, 2004; Rintaningrum, 2009; Nabhan & Hidayat, 2018). It often includes spelling, punctuation, and a comprehension of written conventions, such as paraphrasing. In other words, literacy has been discreetly defined as “formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language.” (New London Group, 1996, P. 64). However, we cannot simply claim that a person is fully literate or not since there is no precise measurement to identify who is literate who is not (OECD, 2003, in Rintaningrum, 2009). Goh and Silver (2004) illustrated the challenge of how

to decide whether a child is fully literate. For instance, if a child can copy the alphabet but does not know how to write how to make a list of food; or if a child can read a few sentences but does not know the meaning of the sentences, we could not say that the child is completely literate.

Moreover, Katz (1982) cited in Mc. Ginley and Tierney highlight that literacy is not merely about the ability to read and write. It is for educators to facilitate students to develop critical literacy – the skill to employ reading and writing in order to excel at the minimum competency. Critical literacy moves beyond the ability to include knowledge of vocabulary and syntax. It is more to activate students' reasoning, critical thinking, and analytic ability. Consequently, having good proficiency in reading and writing is not easy as it needs vast self-control of flexible, goal-oriented, problem-solving actions that require certain knowledge and appropriate strategies. (Harris, Graham, Brindle, & Sandmel, 2009 in International Reading Association & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, n.d., p.2). This is in line with UNESCO's definition of literacy which states, "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts" (UNESCO, 2005). The arguments from the mentioned scholars and researchers uphold the importance of literacy in everyday and academic lives.

The definition of literacy has been shifted to a wider area due to the advancement of technologies, taking into account socio-cultural, and economic background, linguistic diversity, and multimodal communication. The New London Group (1996) established multiliteracies as a literacy pedagogy to attempt a broader paradigm of literacy teaching and learning that includes negotiating a multiplicity of discourses associated with contemporary social-cultural and linguistic diversity. It implies that literacy educators create learning conditions, particularly in diverse classrooms, where all students can take part in the learning process.

Gee (2003) came up with the concept of New Literacy Studies (NLS) utilizing new technologies that have transformed and redefined the meaning of being literate. He employed an approach called "situated-sociocultural". meaning a combining theme between an effort of specific comprehension coping with mind and learning and an attempt of including sociocultural approaches to language, literacy, and technology.

Kress (2009) in Kulju (2018) proposed multimodality which is the process of meaning-making through various modes. Texts in multimodality not only include written, but also spoken visual, aural, and interactive aspects. This concept has changed the scope of multiliteracies initiated by NLG. Kalantzis & Cope (2021) have integrated multimodality with multiliteracies covering two "multis" of multiliteracies: multi-situational and multi-form to deal with the complexities of lifeworld diversity.

### ***Reading-Writing Connections***

It has been found that reading is connected to writing (and vice versa), and they are related in important ways and have been developed since early childhood that is linked to daily and classroom activities at the level of K-12 and beyond. To see the connection between reading and writing, reading is defined as "the ability to decode written text quickly and accurately and to comprehend what is read". On the other hand, writing is defined as "the ability to produce connected text (sentences, paragraphs, and

documents), either by handwriting or keyboarding, that communicates an idea or information” (International Reading Association & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, n.d., p.1). Both reading and writing involve cognitive processes in constructing “a textual world during the process of making meaning” (Kucer, 1985; Langer, 1986a; 1986b, in McGinley & Tierney, 1988, p.3). Blake and Snyder (1988) in Shanahan & Tierney (1990) added that reading comprehension is a requirement to successful writing in the workplace. Although reading and writing have only partial communality in shared knowledge and shared process, they are not separable. Writers forecast the needs of potential readers while readers activate their thinking about authors to intensify reading comprehension. In the real world, reading and writing are used interactively rather than separately to accomplish various types of tasks (Shanahan & Tierney, 1990). For instance, writing a biography or an argumentative essay, writers need to read various resources to help them compose the essay. They also need to activate their thinking and reasoning to think about what kind of information the audience wants to know. Learning to think about the audience during writing will make one a better reader (Shanahan & Tierney, 1990). Hence, reading activity and instruction can enhance writing ability, and writing instruction influences reading ability (Eckhoff, 1983; Felland, 1980; Mc. Connell, 1983 in Shanahan & Tierney, 1990).

Research on reading-writing connections revealed the benefits of these activities in promoting students’ literacy. Graham and Hebert (2011 cited in Graham 2020) carried out a meta-analysis involving 95 true and quasi-experiments to find out the impact of writing and writing instruction on the reading performance of students in grades 1-12. The treatment group was asked to write about the text they read, spend extra time on text writing, or receive guidance on writing. On the other hand, the control group was not asked to write after they read or receive writing instructions. The results from 65 of the 95 studies revealed that writing about the text they read could improve their reading comprehension. The writing for reading comprehension varied from answering the question in writing, note-taking, writing a summary or writing as a follow-up activity for the material they read. The research also found that writing about the text they read was more effective for middle school students, while high school students performed better in writing as a follow-up activity such as a story or opinion about the text. Nine studies investigated whether spending extra time for students to write their own text could influence their reading comprehension. There were various writing activities provided for students, such as journal entries, self-selected topics, personal experience, and writing an email. These studies were conducted on grades 1-6 students. One of the nine research contained students who experienced challenges in literacy. The results showed a positive impact, meaning the students’ ability in comprehending the text read increased when they were provided extra time. Twenty-one investigations examine the effect of writing instructions toward the aspects of reading performance to grades 1 to 12. Fifteen studies assessed if writing instruction increase students’ ability in comprehending. The treatments in these investigations were varied and included a process approach to writing. All twenty-one studies showed writing instruction showed positive effects on students’ reading comprehension. Another five studies grades 1 to 7 examined the effect of sentence or spelling instruction on reading fluency, while six studies investigated whether spelling instruction promoted word reading of grades 1-5.

Three of these studies included difficulties that students face during literacy instruction. All studies demonstrated positive effects, meaning sentence/spelling instruction could promote reading fluency, and spelling instruction increased word reading. The conclusion of this meta-analysis study was that writing about text could improve comprehension. The findings provide evidence for the functional theory of reading and writing connections, i.e., reading and writing can be used in constructive ways.

Another study done by Lee & Schallert (2015) tried to discover the impact of reading-writing connections in developing students' literacy in a new language. The investigation was carried out on 300 middle school students in South Korea during their learning of English as an additional language. The researchers aimed at assessing whether the development of reading could improve writing, and vice versa. The students were put into two groups, one group did extensive reading and writing, while the other group (treated as a control group) received regular instruction. These activities served as part of their regular school English curriculum which was done once a week for the whole academic year. The results of this study showed that reading comprehension for all groups improved over time although they did not show statistical differences. Extensive reading and extensive writing groups showed significant improvement in writing performance. As for reading comprehension, students demonstrated positive effects despite their English proficiency levels. In terms of writing performance, only students with higher English competence showed a significant gain from those treatments.

The two studies mentioned in this part have confirmed the claim that reading-writing connections can be used to improve students' literacy, especially if they are applied together in the classrooms.

### ***A Balanced Approach to Literacy Instruction***

A balanced approach to literacy instruction will be the main framework that will be employed in literacy instruction programs. This approach was introduced by Pressley (1998) who attempted to balance skills instruction (e.g. teaching phonics, and comprehension strategies) and holistic literacy chances (e.g. reading authentic literature, composing in response to text) (Pressley, et.al, 2002). This perspective requires knowledge of bottom-up and top-down models (Goodman, 1970 in 2007, Farrel, 2002; Mondesir & Griffin, 2020). In implementing the balanced approach, literacy educators are encouraged to consider their students' language development to make the program suitable for their age.

Tompkins (2006, p.1) mentions that there are 10 components of a balanced approach to literacy instruction, namely:

- |                             |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1) Reading                  | 6) Literature        |
| 2) Phonics and Other Skills | 7) Content-Are Study |
| 3) Strategies               | 8) Oral Language     |
| 4) Vocabulary               | 9) Writing           |
| 5) Comprehension            | 10) Spelling         |

She proposes to effective teachers include eight principles of an effective reading program to carry out excellent literacy instructions (p.11) as follows:

1. Familiar with the ways children learn: teachers should know how children learn,

particularly how they learn to read and write. Hence, they should comprehend learning theories related to literacy instruction. They are behaviorism, constructivism, interactive, sociolinguistics, reader response, and critical literacy.

2. Provide support for children in using four cueing systems: teachers should understand that language is a complex system for creating meaning through socially shared conventions

(Halliday, 1978, in Tompkins, 2006, p. 16). Likewise English shared four cueing systems to make communication possible, namely: the phonological or sound system, the syntactic or structural system, the semantic or meaning system, and the pragmatic or social and cultural use system. Hence teachers should help children use four cueing systems when they apply all language skills activities.

3. Initiate a community of learners: teachers should be aware that classrooms are social settings in which students read, discuss, and write about a text. Therefore, teachers, together with their students are encouraged to create a classroom community to initiate strong influences in learning. Classroom communities have certain characteristics that are conducive to learning and support students' interactions with literature. The characteristics are responsibility, opportunities, engagement, demonstration, risk-taking, instruction, response, choice, time, and assessment.
4. Utilize a balanced approach to literacy instruction: teachers should embed the characteristics of a balanced approach. For instance, literacy is viewed thoroughly which includes reading and writing; literature is at the heart of the program; skills and strategies are taught both implicitly and explicitly; the goal is to promote lifelong readers and writers.
5. Provide step-by-step guidance for reading and writing activities: teachers should support children's reading and writing by demonstrating and providing guidance. Teachers can use five levels of support for reading and writing: modelled, shared, interactive, guided, and independent.
6. Construct literacy instruction in four ways: teachers should utilize literature in their instructional programs using four instructional approaches: basal reading programs, literature focus units, literature circles, and reading and writing workshops. These four approaches can be applied at all grades, and levels, from kindergarten to eighth grade. Teachers may combine the approaches in their classrooms.
7. Bring instruction and assessment together in literacy instruction: teachers may be aware that students learn to read and write through direct and indirect instruction on implementing strategies and skills in authentic activities. Hence, the way teachers assess is no longer in a form of multiple-choice comprehension questions. Instead, they can create pre-assessment activities, such as a K-W-L chart and quick writing about a topic; monitoring activities where they can assess students through listening to students read aloud, reading students' reading response/log entries; assessment activities, such as observing students' presentation, checking all drafts of students' writing, and analyzing students' spelling using their composition.
8. Collaborate with parents for promoting literacy: teachers should involve parents in promoting children's literacy. They can work together with parents to develop

children's literacy by providing literacy information to parents such as newsletters, and conferences with parents; inviting parents to become volunteers in literacy classes; promoting family literacy.

These principles can be a guideline for EFL/ESL teachers in Indonesia to support their students' literacy development and/or enhancement.

### ***Integrated Programs for Literacy Educators***

This paper tries to provide a support program for literacy educators to help their students to improve their literacy (reading and writing) skills. This program focus on elementary teachers who teach literacy in EFL/ESL classrooms. With its emphasis on getting back to basics – connections between reading and writing – the programs provide multimodal resources and various ways of organizing literacy instruction inside and outside the classrooms. To explore the possibility of implementing a balanced approach to literacy instruction, this section provides relevant examples of how this framework can be adopted in EFL/ESL classrooms. These integrated programs are aimed to promote the 21st-century skills of Indonesian elementary students. However, considering their poor English proficiency, the programs should be carefully applied in our context.

#### ***Theme 1. Basal reading programs to promote vocabulary and reading comprehension.***

Basal reading is a literacy instruction program that is suitable to be applied in a literacy class where students are still struggling with vocabulary knowledge. This program has been widely used in ELT national curriculum (Sajidin, Mulyadi, and Robiasih, 2021) since this program allow teachers to use graded books to help their students to be motivated in reading and gradually improve their reading and writing skills. Thus, all students can read the texts based on their level. This program is in line with the behaviorism theory mentioned by Tompkins (2006) where teachers motivate students and control their behavior. This program can also enhance self-regulated learning among the students. Basal readers are structured in terms of vocabulary selections and syntactical structure. This can be evidence of how this program enables students to master the language elements through exposure to extensive reading. Teachers can ask students to write a reading log to express their opinion about the content of the story. Some research also found that students learn a new culture by reading the stories of their selection, as a result, this can promote their cultural competence (Sajidin, Mulyadi, and Robiasih, 2021).

Tompkins (2006) describes the advantages of implementing the basal reading program, namely, the textbooks are aligned with grade-level standards, students can read books according to their level, teachers can guide students with detailed instructions, teachers can reteach the strategies, and assessment can be included in the program.

Nonetheless, this program has some limitations in which book selections may be too difficult for some students, the book may lack the authenticity of good literature, programs contain many worksheets, and most instruction is presented to all students (Tompkins, 2006)



*Theme 2. Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) to promote critical thinking*

The Directed Reading-Thinking Activity is a reading program that provides guidance for students in making predictions and reading to confirm their predictions. The activity comprises three steps: Direct, Reading, and Thinking (Reading Rockets, 2019 in Puspitasari et al. (2020)). In the Direct step, teachers give directions to students to develop their knowledge about the text by asking questions related to five senses, such as “How does it taste?”, “What does it look like?”. Then teachers can introduce the students to the text they are about to read by showing the title and illustrations in the text. In the reading stage, teachers ask the students to read each segment of the story in turn. Then teachers will ask questions related to the content of each segment. The last step is the Thinking phase, in which teachers ask the students to think about their predictions and verify if their predictions were closely relevant to the story. Then teachers revisit the story and ask the students to retell about the story. This DRTA is similar to Literature Focus Units from Tompkins (2006), where teachers and students read and discuss the text together as a class. They can choose texts that have good quality in terms of content and are appropriate to the level of the students. The additional activity which can be applied in this program is the opportunity for students to explore the text and apply their learning by creating a project. In the DRTA program, teachers can use literature as the reading material.

Having this program, students can apply their critical literacy through their exploration of the texts and the project they do after the reading programs. They can write a letter to the editor or particular parties regarding the issue they have found in their reading. (Tompkins, 2006).

However, this program also has some limitations where all students read the same books whether they like it, or whether it is appropriate for their reading level. Most of the time, teachers directed the instruction (Tompkins, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

The importance of literacy has been discussed in many studies and forums, particularly in the education field. As a result of the advancement of technologies, the focus of literacy pedagogy is not only on being able to read and write, but it goes beyond it. Therefore, scholars and researchers of literacy have proposed new perspectives of literacy, such as multiliteracies, new literacy studies, and multimodality. These concepts are encouraged to be implemented in this 21<sup>st</sup>-century education. However, in the context of Indonesia, the literacy level of the students is placed at the second rank from the bottom, based on PISA results. In addition, the English proficiency level of the students is also low. Hence, it is urgent for EFL/ESL teachers as literacy educators to support students to improve their reading and writing skills. Integrated programs become a solution to guide teachers to perform literacy instruction in their classrooms, such as basal reading and DRTA.

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