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Alam, Naufal Ahmad Rijalul, "The Importance of Parent's Literacy Understanding Towards Children Reading Habits" (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4687.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/4687>

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENT'S LITERACY UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS CHILDREN READING HABITS

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## ABSTRACT

This study reveals the importance of parent's literacy understanding towards children reading habits. By using a qualitative phenomenology approach and taking five Indonesian respondents who have children aged 6 to 12 years who are attending the Dutch basis school. this study concludes that the understanding of literacy which is owned by parents is very important as a mediator for the development and formation of children's reading habits. Indeed, parents able to choose good reading books, provide appropriate reading time, to use reading sources, whether printed books or using digital sources such as laptops or computers. In addition, by getting used to reading, children are able to get information appropriately, and master other languages quickly.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Reading Habits, Reading Sources, Information, Digital Platform

## INTRODUCTION

The reading habit of the Indonesian people is still very low when compared to other countries in the world. Based on the study "Most Littered Nation in the World 2016", Indonesia has ranked 60 out of 61 countries regarding book reading habits. In fact, when those viewed from other perspective likes infrastructure assessment, education system and library availability, Indonesia's ranking is still above European countries (Miller & McKenna, 2016). In addition, UNESCO has also provided data on the ability to read books, especially children in one year. Children in Europe can read 25-27 books in one year, children in Japan can read 15-18 books per year, meanwhile, children in Indonesia are only able to read 0 books in one year. The lack of reading habits in children will certainly affect the quality of human resources.

The low reading habit of Indonesian society, especially children, is caused by several factors. The main factor is the family environment (McGeown, Duncan, Griffiths, & Stothard, 2015; Shahriza Abdul Karim & Hasan, 2007). It is impossible for a child to have a passion for reading if in his family environment he has never used the culture of reading. Therefore, the role of parents is very important in guiding their children to read diligently. Another factor is the development of increasingly sophisticated technology (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Shimray, Keerti, & Ramaiah, 2015; Tanjung, Ridwan, & Gultom, 2017). Although it has a positive impact in facilitating work, technological advances can also have a negative impact if it is not properly supervised and controlled. Nowadays, children play games with smartphones more often than reading books.

The next factor comes from the school environment which does not stimulate students to like reading and extracting information from books (Erdem, 2015; Méndez, 2018). The education system in Indonesia still tends to use a one-way learning model. The teacher explains something, and the students just listen. Therefore, children become so passive that there is no desire to find out more from books. Based on these factors, there are only three stages to creating a reading culture in children. At the beginning, children taught reading by parents, then they able to read, and finally, the habit of reading becomes a culture. Parents, as the first teachers for children, have an important role in fostering a culture of reading habits.

Reading activities must be instilled in children from an early age. Through reading, cognitive abilities, emotions and movements will be balanced. Children who like to read have an advantage over children who do not like to read. They find it easier to develop oral concentration because they often receive oral information input from the books they read. In addition, through reading, children gain extensive knowledge and experience, so that they can follow the discourse development of a discussion compared to their peers who don't like reading. They are easier to process new information, have a lot of additional ideas, and more quickly see existing problems. Children who love to read will be able to overcome personal problems and have a better chance of achieving a successful life (Leonhardt, 1997)

According to Paul Jennings (2008) in his book, practically invites parents to transmit the 'virus' of reading and how from an early age children can be engrossed, passionate and in love with book. Jennings distinguishes between being able to read and being fond of reading. He emphasized that parental examples are important in making children love reading. If parents want their children to love reading, then parents must instill in them a love for books. To create superior human beings, it is necessary to change attitudes and cultural behavior from not reading to a reading society. Glenn Doman (2006) states that reading is one of the paramount functions in life. All learning processes are started on reading skills. Furthermore, through the culture of the reading community we will move towards a learning society. There are connection between reading interest, reading habits and reading skill. The low reading interest of the group contributes to low reading habits, and this low reading habit makes reading skills weak (Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2009).

Another perspective comes from Covey by his argument about the study that has shown the main reasons why children do not want to read. The answer is because they do not see their father reading. This shows that habits and example are of utmost importance (Covey, 1997). However, this does not apply to Indonesian children who are currently studying in developed countries. Differences in culture, society, and the environment in which they live affect their patterns and habits. In addition, schools, which are the main source of education, really encourage children to get used to reading. Like what happened to Indonesian children who follow their parents for studying in the higher education in the University of Groningen, the Netherlands.

In a systemized culture, they can position themselves the same as their friends who come from that country. Reading habits have been designed and taught since they enrolled

in school. This article will discuss the role of parents in fostering the reading habit of their children in one of the countries with an advanced education system, namely the Netherlands.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Reading Habits Description**

Children's habits, including their education, are greatly influenced by the extent to which parents can contribute to the educational process, because the family environment is the first process of children's education. According to Hurlock (1992), there are four very important things why reading habits need to be done as early as possible. First, learning outcomes from early experiences have a dominant role in children's development and age and good initial guidance will be the foundation for children. Second, the initial foundation will develop into a habit. Third, attitudes and behavior patterns that are formed from the beginning tend to persist. Fourth, quick and wise changes by parents who are close to children will make children willing to cooperate by making changes. There is a link between the family environment and reading habits or growing interest in reading in children. Family environment has important role. One of them is parental attention concentration of all indicated individual activities to something or a group of objects (Prawira, 2014).

Reading is a physical and mental activity. Through reading information and knowledge that is useful for life can be obtained. Thing this is the main motivation that encourages the growth of interest read. If interest has grown and developed, in that sense the person concerned has started to like reading, so the habit of reading will develop (Iskandarwassid & Suhendar, 2015).

### **Process of Reading Interests and Habits**

Interest and habit of reading cannot grow suddenly. The emergence of interest and reading habits is obtained because of the process which makes this interest exist. Habit is a way individual act automatically for a certain period. Behavior which has become a habit is a high mindset because it is relatively fixed. As a spontaneous activity, a habit generally it is automatic and with little or no awareness. Characteristic second after spontaneity, that is, these activities are carried out repeatedly. In other words, the process of repeating the behavior will form habit. The third characteristic is interest. Interests are the basis for habit formation. From this explanation, habit is behavior done automatically, characterized by spontaneity, and supported with interest (Ahmed, 2016; Clark & Foster, 2005).

Habits can be formed in two ways, namely through repetition of an activity in the same way and done in a planned and more deliberate manner. The second way shows that individuals deliberately do actions in certain ways thus forming a kind of automatic greeting pattern. Based on this description, habits are individual behavior performed automatically, characterized by spontaneity, repetition, and accompanied by encouragement or interest (Lamont, 2011; Nazir, Ben-Boutayab, Decoppet, Deutsch, & Frost, 2004; Shahriza Abdul Karim & Hasan, 2007). Community culture that still prioritizes oral culture significantly affects the low reading habits. Learning factor in more schools are said to be a negative factor because there are less teachers creating reading exercises. The scientific nature of

speaking will be a positive variable for the formation of reading habits because of them should always update his insight, which can be done through read. The enormous influence of the electronic media can no longer be prevented. Without careful anticipation, this factor will become a habit barrier read. The final factor is the massive supply of will reading materials. Without the fulfillment of this tool, it becomes difficult to read in Indonesian society can be realized (Chokron & De Agostini, 2000; Shimray et al., 2015).

Reading is an important task that any student can do. Reading is a dynamic and complicated process that includes a variety of variables that influence each other. Chettri (2013) claimed that reading is a complex process of thinking in terms of assigning meaning to printed content, which includes most of the reader's intellectual activities, such as pronunciation, in order to obtain ideas or knowledge expanded by the text. It can be shown that reading not only looks at words in the form of graphic symbols, but also gets context from the word to know what we have been reading.

Habit is a reacting to a certain circumstance that people often did every day and they are never bored to repeatedly. As cited in Oxford Learners Pocket Dictionary (Bull, 2008), defines a habit as something that a person does often and almost without thought, particularly something that is hard to stop doing. In addition, the Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary often describes the habit is something you do daily or typically do, sometimes without thinking about it because you did it so many times before.

## **METHODS**

This study investigates the parent's role in adjusting children reading habits and how they practice formulating reading activity in daily life. Beside using a qualitative method, this research is also applied the phenomenology approach, where I intentionally tried to interpret the perspective of Indonesian residents who are lived in Groningen, the Netherlands. There are five respondents totally as informants, who have children between 6-12 years old, they are: J, E, B, A, I. The in-depth interview was used into data collecting method and I prepare the form of guidelines to facilitate the informants in answering the questions. To obtain measured data, thus I used test of data credibility by research extension and source triangulation by interviews. Data analysis employed the theory of Miles and Huberman (2014), where I collected data from respondent's interview. Later, data was reduced into several categories. After obtaining data suitable with an instrument having been designated, then I present data of research's finding descriptively, focusing on interpretation parent's role in implementing children religiosity through reading habits. Following step provided the conclusion of research's finding and some recommendations.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Parent's Literacy Understanding**

The parents I interviewed have children who studying in Dutch schools with a curriculum and using Dutch language as a medium of instruction. These parents are also having duties as doctoral student or researcher at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, who

certainly have their own characteristics and characteristics to guide their children when studying in a different environment and culture.

At the beginning of the research, I tried to find information on the extent to which the reading ability of Indonesian children attending Dutch basis schools, from the criteria of books read, the duration of reading time, to the role of parents in regulating and directing their children's reading habits. Furthermore, the role of parents in this case is not limited to telling what books are suitable and appropriate to read, but also the habits of parents accompanying children when they read books. The habits carried out by parents are certainly in line with their understanding of the importance of literacy for children's cognitive development, so that the core and content of the book must also be mastered to be able to explain every detail in the book.

In this case, my first question to parents is, do they always have time to accompany their children to read books, whether in a daily, weekly, or monthly basis? Their answers are varied. Because of the busyness of those who are also studying Doctoral degree, the time they spend with the children also varies. Since the hours of work and research on campus finish at night, "J" and "I", for example, accompanies their children to read books when they get home.

*Our working hours at the office as a PhD researcher are sometimes 10 to 12 hours. we go to campus after taking our children to school at 8.30 am and returning home at 9 pm. Even though we felt tired, we always take the time to accompany our children to study or just read books, so that their motivation to read is always maintained.*

This shows that the role of parents is very strategic in spurring children's motivation to read. If in everyday life, parents are willing and take the time, then the children's reading habits will automatically emerge by themselves. Furthermore, J conveyed that there was one main thing that made him proud, when his first child was able to master Dutch quickly because of his habit of always accompanying children to study. The same situation comes from "E" and "A" when their children able to speak another language. Both said the education that children get at school is not enough to get them reading the books properly. By this case, the role of parents is very important to become a mediator for children and schools, so that the repetition of material obtained at school can be absorbed by children more quickly at home.

*My first children are able to master Dutch like a native in only 6 months, because he is used to reading story books and converse in Dutch. In fact, sometimes I learned new vocabularies from my children (E).*

*In my view, mastering English is very important to broaden the knowledge. By this, my children have interest to speak English in their school that Dutch, and he learns fast beyond my assumption (A).*

Those responses are similar with some researcher that ascertained when kids read for pleasure, they unwillingly and unknowingly rising their language skills (Reyhene, 1998), their habit of reading strengthened (Bignold, 2003), and the topic of reading whether it is for studying or leisure is therefore significant as it helps to expand them understanding and awareness (Green, 2002).

### **Introducing Children to the Important of Literacy**

Early literacy skills are skills necessary for formal literacy needs, including the expansion of vocabulary and language, understanding the concept of print, awareness phoneme, indicating phonological awareness, knowledge of letters and understanding stories (Martini & Monique, 2012). Those skills are instilled during the child's pre-school age and can be increased through parental involvement. Home literacy environment (activities literacy done at home), including reading activities together and affect children's reading and language development. Talking about the role of family, parents are a model for their children. Parents have a very strong influence when it comes to modelling for the child, both positive or negative aspects. They are also the first and foremost set an example by the child and becomes the pattern of forming way of life for children. The way children think and act is shaped by how they think and act his parents (Covey, 1997). This circumstance appears on "B" family:

*I started getting my child to read books from the age of 5. Now, at the age of 7, she is able to recount what she has read to me or sometimes to her brother.*

Reading skills usually develop well in late childhood and the reading that is read is usually influenced by the parents. After nine years of age, most children are self-motivated. They compete with themselves and enjoy planning ahead. At 12 years of age, they are motivated by an internal drive, not because of competition with their peers. From these readings, they become happy to talk, discussing various subjects and debating (Berman & Snyder, 2011).

### **Effective Time for Accustom Reading**

The reading habits together in the family is the most important thing for children's literacy understanding flies well. "E" told about how he spent his time by giving a portion to read books together at night. For her, story books, writing or drawing are effective tools so that her children's reading habits are well preserved. When parents are willing to read books with their children, their progress in absorbing information will be faster. "E" also said that he always involves children in literacy activities that he does so that children can indirectly do these activities without being asked. The picture book is a favorite of "E" children, because they can directly enjoy the storyline by looking at the related pictures, so the children do not get bored.

*I apply face-to-face learning methods at night after Isya prayer on a regular basis. This aims to familiarize children with reading and improve their literacy skills mainly in introducing new vocabularies. The materials I used are not limited to textbooks at school, but also illustrated story books.*

Vocabulary mastery plays an important role in understanding some topic on books or literatures. Rubin (1982) says that reading is the bringing and the getting of meaning from the printed page unless children do not know the meaning of words, they will have difficulty in understanding what is read. The more children read, the more words they will add to their vocabulary. Zwiers (2004) stated that reading habits more clearly explains the automatic and unconscious processes that are contributing in constructing meaning from text. Thus, by this activity, the readers or the students can improve their vocabulary. Many explanations have been mentioned above about the importance of reading habit towards the success of students' vocabulary use. There are a lot of researchers conducted to find this reading habit's role. Therefore, this research helps find whether reading habit and vocabulary have a connection to each other.

### **Between Traditional and Modern Reading Habits**

The Internet has an influence on many aspects of life, including reading habits. Children tend to watch YouTube, Instagram, or reading twitter, WhatsApp, on laptops, tablets, and so on; and browse the web and social networks rather than read (Akanda, Hoq, & Hasan, 2013). With the advent of computers and digital information sources to the academic world, researchers have examined whether children prefer to read on screen or on paper and have reported a strong preference for reading on paper. However, considering this preference, it is fair to presume that students would be reading scholarly literature on computer (Vandenhoeck, 2013). One study showed that students indicated that their lack of time was the biggest issue with reading (Leff & Harper, 2006). To address these issues, students may prefer to read information is readily accessible rather than engage in a lengthy search for academic texts in a library. Five respondents I interviewed agreed that their children using both, traditional sources like printed book, and modern sources like laptop or computer. But, in some condition, their children prefer to use digital platform to read that printed book.

### **CONCLUSION**

The result of the study indicates that children reading habits can be reach through parents understanding on literacy which suit and match to the age of children. It also reveals all elements support the habits and sources interested to push the limited of children in understanding the content of book they read. Parents must be aware with the time they spent to accompanying children including goals of reading, evaluation, and zone comfort when children read the book. This fact points a challenge for the parents, specifically teaching reading and research skills while addressing research literature and the innovations of

previous research. Nonetheless, the findings of this study point to upgrades in digital reading and children changing their reading habits using smartphone or computer than printed book. Parents must know and understand that reading quality of children can be seen from how they inspired them and how to deal with broaden information which sometimes asked by children when they faced the difficult news. The disciplinary reading habit might improve their skills from passive to be a critical reader. From this, writing skills of children can be constructed by their well strength in evaluating and judging the information.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This article is one of the outputs from the Internal Grants funded by Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta in 2019. I thank to all respondents who have helped in the implementation of this research.

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