READING ALOUD ACTIVITIES IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' READING LITERACY SKILLS IN YOUNG LEARNERS' ONLINE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia was placed in the 72nd of 78 in the students' reading literacy surveyed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018. There should be numerous efforts made by related parties in education to make the students' reading literacy much better. Teachers as the agents of change can facilitate students by promoting some activities related to the reading skills in their classrooms. One of them is the reading aloud activities that can explore the students' reading literacy skills. Thus, this study is aimed to investigate the reading aloud activities that were done in one of the elementary schools in Kabupaten Bandung Barat. It used a qualitative research design that involves 35 students and their parents from Grade 1 to Grade 3. The instruments that had been applied in collecting the data included participant observation in the WhatsApp group and the questionnaires administered to the students' parents who had guided their children in following the learning. The results show that the students could do the reading aloud activities well, and the parents gave positive responses toward the activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that reading aloud activities can be one of the alternative ways in facilitating young learners to enhance their reading literacy skills.

Keywords: *reading aloud, literacy skill, literacy, young learners, online learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is one of the literacy skills that need to be mastered by students since it can enlarge their knowledge and sharpen their critical thinking. Additionally, it is a cognitive ability that can be used when interacting with written texts (Urquhart & Weir in Liu, 2010). Nevertheless, Indonesia was placed in the 72nd of 78 in the students' reading literacy surveyed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018 (OECD, 2018). Therefore, the students' reading literacy skills should be improved and facilitated even from early age.

As a matter of fact, the Indonesian government has made continuous efforts to increase the students' literacy skills in all levels of educations by establishing Gerakan Literasi Nasional (National Literacy Movement) since 2016 (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2016). It includes the school literacy movement, the family literacy movement, and the society literacy movement. However, the reading literacy skills of the students, in general, still need to be improved. There should be numerous efforts made by related parties in education to make the students' reading literacy much better.

Teachers as the agents of change can facilitate students by promoting some activities related to the reading skills in their classrooms. Many strategies can be applied by the teachers in exploring the students' reading literacy skills. One of the alternatives is reading aloud. Reading aloud can offer children access to content that they might not be able to access on their own (Peterson, 2020), especially for young learners.

Most previous studies show that reading aloud can improve students' reading literacy skills (Marchessault & Larwin, 2013; Nurlaelawati & Dzulqodah, 2014; Oueini et al., 2008; Senawati et al., 2021; Sofyan et al., 2021). It is also an excellent strategy for teaching a language to young learners (Senawati et al., 2021). It can increase students' vocabulary and comprehension (Oueini et al., 2008). Moreover, reading aloud is a research-based, proven technique to encourage students to read on their own (Oczkus, 2012).

Nowadays, teachers are challenged to use technology since most teaching and learning process modes are shifted from offline to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, teachers may use technology as a practical teaching and learning toolkit to help students learn more effectively in the classroom (Eady & Lockyer, 2013). So that, students were able to study more effectively and easily as a result of the integration of technology into the learning process. Similar to Scott (2015), who stated that students will be able to operate in a modern environment with the necessary information and abilities, as well as use media and informal ways to deepen their learning and enhance basic literacy skills. Furthermore, technology in education, on the other hand, should not only focus on increasing students' technological abilities, but also on using technology as a teaching tool to increase students' capacity to cooperate with others, synthesize multiple sources of data, and set up essential tasks (Dewi, 2019). Therefore, technology should be used in the teaching and learning process to facilitate students' online learning.

Derived from the above explanations, this study is focused on two research objectives. First, it is purposed to describe the teaching and learning process when the students conducted the given reading aloud activities. Second, the study is aimed at investigating the participants' perceptions of the learning process.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research strategy to achieve the above-mentioned research aims. Two arguments for the use of qualitative research are mentioned. First, Hamied (2017) pointed out that qualitative research is not meant to generalize to other geographic locations or people, but rather to get a deep and thorough knowledge of a specific social context or issue. The study, therefore, attempts to obtain a deeper knowledge of reading aloud activities in enhancing students' literacy skills in young learners' online learning. Furthermore, the specific setting or phenomena being examined is within the context of a specific classroom, and the use of qualitative study design is regarded as helpful in this context (Creswell, 2014). Second, the qualitative approach helps researchers to detect issues from the perspective of participants, as well as to comprehend the meanings and interpretations that they attribute to behavior, events, or artifacts (Hamied, 2017). The voices and perceptions of the participants collected from the questionnaires were also reflected by the use of verbatim quotations in this study while examining the reading aloud activities in the research site.

In addition, this study has characteristics that are similar to those of a case study. Yin (2018: 15) noted that a case study is "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident." Hence, a case study is an attempt to comprehend a real-life situation with significant contextual factors that are pertinent to the studied case. (Yin, 2018). Through the use of a case study, this research aims to illustrate, define, and examine how teachers and students perceived teaching and learning when reading aloud activities were undertaken in connection with their own context.

This study was conducted in one of the private elementary schools in Kabupaten Bandung Barat, West Java, Indonesia. It involves 35 students and their parents from Grade 1 to 3. In the research site, the reading aloud activities were conducted once a week. Every week the students were given a link to a YouTube video consisting of a read-aloud story. They were assigned to watch the video and afterward they were given some related questions that should be answered in the form of a voice note. They sent their works to the WhatsApp Group so their friends and teacher could hear their voices. The research was conducted for six weeks; therefore, there are six reading aloud tasks that the students submitted.

The instruments that had been applied in collecting the data included participant observation and questionnaires. The participant observation was conducted in the WhatsApp Group, where the students' parents submitted the given tasks since the teaching and learning were conducted online. The students' works were assessed based on their performance in answering the given questions. Furthermore, the questionnaires were administered to the students' parents who had guided their children in following the learning. Ten questions included two types of questionnaires: closed- ended questions, in which participants were given a list of current answers to choose from, and open-ended questionnaires, in which they may respond by writing their answers in the provided space, were administered to the participants. The aim of administering the questionnaires to the students' parents was to figure out their perceptions and to understand all the responses towards the reading aloud activities given to their children. Several aspects were included in the questionnaires including their general perceptions of the activities, the improvement on the students' literacy skills, the difficulties found during the teaching and learning process, their recommendations for future reading aloud activities. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using several procedures, including collecting data from instruments, reducing and coding the data, analyzing the data, drawing conclusions, and offering recommendations.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and interpretation of the results obtained from participant observation and questionnaires will be presented in this section. The explanation will be delivered in two parts, as well as the objectives of the research: (1) the reading aloud activities in the young learners' online learning and (2) the students' parents' perceptions of the activities.

a. The Reading Aloud Activities in the Young Learners' Online Learning

In this study, the students were assigned to watch the reading aloud videos on YouTube that had been uploaded by the teachers. The research was conducted for six weeks and included six storybooks. The following table is the titles of the story of reading aloud videos that the students needed to watch.

Table 1.

The story titles of reading aloud videos.

Week	Story Titles
1	*Gurita yang Suka Menggelitik (Written by Ruth Galloway, Published by Erlangga for Kids)*
2	*Seribu Sahabat Selamanya (Written by Clara Ng, Published by)*
3	*Ashabul Kahfi (Written by Ana P. Dewiyana & Indrayani Mallo, Published by Pelangi Mizan)*
4	*Nabi Yunus dan Paus (Written by Risma Dewi, Published by Pelangi Mizan)*
5	*Qarun (Written by Iwan Yuswandi, Published by Pelangi Mizan)*
6	*Baarakallaahu Fiik (Written by Aan Wulandari U., Published by Tiga Ananda)*

All books were read and videotaped and could be accessed by the students from the YouTube links that had been shared by the teachers in their group. Every week, for six weeks, the students needed to watch one video and answer the given questions related to the story. After that, they recorded their answers by using a voice note or a voice memo and sent it to the WhatsApp group for each class. All activities were guided by their parents since they did the activities at home (online learning). Almost all students could submit the tasks on time. Some of them needed to be motivated to submit the voice memo, though.

Based on the observations made in the WhatsApp group and the work submitted by the students, it can be concluded that most of the students performed well in the activities. Moreover, the quality of their work indicated that their reading skills were improving week by week. Thus, it shows a similar result with the previous studies which claimed that reading aloud can improve students' reading literacy skills (Marchessault & Larwin, 2013; Nurlaelawati & Dzulqodah, 2014; Oczkus, 2012; Oueini et al., 2008; Senawati et al., 2021; Sofyan et al., 2021). It is also an excellent strategy for teaching a language to young learners (Senawati et al., 2021). Moreover, it can increase students' vocabulary and comprehension (Oueini et al., 2008).

b. The Students

Concerning the participants' parents' responses to the implementation of reading aloud activities in their children's classrooms, the data from questionnaires were analyzed. The responses will be delivered in some categories: general perceptions on the activities, the improvement on the students' literacy skills, the difficulties found during the teaching and learning process, their recommendations for future reading aloud activities.

In responding to the close-ended questionnaire Item Number 2, 3, and 5 regarding the participants' general perceptions on the reading aloud activities, the participants' responses can be observed in the following table.

Table 2.

The participants' general perceptions on the reading aloud activities.

Item No.	Statement	Like	Dislike
2	Students' parents' perceptions of the activities	35 (100%)	0 (0%)
3	Students were engaged in the learning activities	32 (91.4%)	3 (8.6%)
5	Students' perceptions of the activities	34 (97.1%)	1 (2.9%)

From the table above, it can be concluded that all students' parents claimed that they like to have reading aloud activities for their children. The followings are the excerpts of the open-ended questionnaires of the same number item.

- *Menjadikan anak antusias* (Motivate children to be enthusiastic in learning) (Participant 7)
- *Karena meningkatkan kreatifitas dan daya ingat dalam berfikir* (It can increase students' creativity and memorization) (Participant 8)
- *Karena lebih menarik untuk anak belajar* (It is interesting for students) (Participant 17)
- *Supaya anak bertambah wawasannya* (My children's knowledge is increased) (Participant 19)

From the excerpts above it can be noted that the students' parents responded to the given reading aloud activities positively. Moreover, six of the participants stated that the learning activities helped their children to be more motivated when the teaching and learning had to be done from home. However, from Table 2, in answering question item 3, three participants (8.6%) stated that their children were not enthusiastic about following the learning. Two of them stated that their children were getting bored and one of them claimed that the story was too long. Moreover, from question item 5, one student did not like to have the activities in her/his class. No reason was stated by the participant.

Nevertheless, from the results of the questionnaires, it can be concluded that almost all participants agreed that they like to have reading aloud activities for their children.

Concerning the improvement of the students' literacy skills, question item 6 (Is your children's interest in reading increase after following the reading aloud activities?) was given to the participants. In responding to the question, 32 participants (91,4%) claimed that their children's interest in writing was increased, as they pointed in the questionnaires.

- *Karena setelah adanya pelajaran menyimak cerita, anak senang membaca cerita, membaca buku* (after the reading aloud activities, my child likes to read story, read book) (Participant 8)

- *Sangat meningkat, baca anak saya jadi lancar* (significantly increased, my child's reading is getting better) (Participant 10)

- *Jadi mereka tau dan memahami isi ceitanya* (They become know and understand the gist of the story) (Participant 23)

From the excerpts above, it can be stated that the students' parents agreed that their children's interest in reading was increased.

Regarding difficulties found during the teaching and learning process, from the administered questionnaire, Item 7 (*Did you find any difficulties in guiding your children in performing the reading aloud activities?*), 24 of the participants (68.6%) claimed that they found some difficulties in guiding their children in preforming the reading aloud activities. The difficulties found among others their children were reluctant to do the activities, they preferred to play; were not focused so they need to watch for several times to understand the stories; and did not have much time, since their parents had to go to work. Nevertheless, 11 participants (31.4%) stated that they did not find any difficulties.

In addressing the last part of the questionnaire about the possibility of future reading aloud activities implementation, almost all participants (32 participants or 91,4% of them), responded that they agreed if the reading aloud activities are continuously implemented in their children's class. Additionally, they wish to have a more varying story to be read, so that, their children can be more engaged with reading and their children's knowledge can be enlarged.

To sum up, most of the students performed well in the activities. They and their parents gave positive responses toward the reading aloud activities. It then shows a similar result with some previous studies which agreed that reading aloud can improve students' reading literacy skills (Marchessault & Larwin, 2013; Nurlaelawati & Dzulqodah, 2014; Oczkus, 2012; Oueini et al., 2008; Senawati et al., 2021; Sofyan et al., 2021).

A number of reasons have led to this conclusion. First, the students were exposed to new experiences that stimulated their interest. Reading aloud was new for the participants in the research site, it was one of the reasons why they were so enthusiastic in following the given activities. The students' parents have also recognized the importance of reading aloud for their children. Therefore, they like to have more reading aloud activities from their children, as is reflected from their responses in the questionnaires.

Second, input and exposure the students got from storybooks. Reading aloud is a research-based, proven technique to encourage students to read on their own (Oczkus, 2012); so that, by having the input and exposure to books, the students' reading literacy skills can be increased.

Third, the students' experiences with technology. In completing their works, the students were getting in touch with technology. They use applications (*WhatsApp, YouTube*, and voice note applications) that they accessed from their gadgets. Students were able to study more effectively and easily as a result of the use of technology in online learning (Eady & Lockyer, 2013). Similar to Scott (2015), who stated that students will be able to operate in a modern environment with the necessary information and abilities, as well as use media and informal ways to deepen their learning and enhance basic literacy skills.

4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to examine the reading aloud activities conducted in one of Kabupaten Bandung Barat's elementary schools. The results suggest that the children were capable of performing well in the reading aloud activities and that the activities were well appreciated by the parents. As a result, reading aloud activities might be one of the alternate strategies for encouraging young learners in improving their reading literacy skills in their online learning.

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