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Management of balanced literacy approach as an effort to strengthen early literacy proficiency: a case study in early children's education units in kota bandung

Anna Farida Kurniasari

annafaridakurniasari@uninus.ac.id

Ade Tutty R Rosa

adetuttyrosa@uninus.ac.id

Muhammad Andriana Gaffar

andriana.gaffar@uninus.ac.id

Rianti Cahyani

cahyanirianti@uninus.ac.id

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Abstract

Literacy skills must be mastered by children as early as possible for the purposes of learning at school and their life in society. Therefore, a well designed literacy learning process is needed to strengthen early childhood literacy skills. This study analyzes the experience of PAUD (Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini or Early Childhood Education) teachers in managing a balanced literacy approach in the classroom as an effort to strengthen early literacy. This research refers to the literacy processing theory by Marie Clay (Ronning, 2020: 17) about the acquisition of literacy skills in early childhood. The methodology used is the qualitative case study involving two PAUD units in the city of Bandung. Analysis is held to the process of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the balanced literacy. The result of this study is the management stages carried out by teachers starting from planning balanced literacy activities, coordinating with fellow teachers and parents, carrying out literacy activities in class according to the components of balanced literacy approach, and conducting evaluations.

Keywords

early literacy, balanced literacy approach, strengthening literacy skills, early childhood education

Introduction

In general, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write, the ability to process information in a particular field and use it in life. In the context of schools in the digital era, students are specifically required to be able to sort out, process information from text, draw conclusions, evaluate them critically, then use them to make decisions in everyday life (Dewayani, 2019: 1). UNESCO defines literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, communicate, and think using printed and written materials in various contexts. (Montoya: 2018). For the purposes of learning at school and life in society today and in the future, these skills must be mastered by children from as early as possible. In this context, early literacy is a learning process to understand and use language for communication purposes. Usually, children master spoken language first, namely listening and speaking, then begin to explore and apply their understanding to master reading and writing skills. However, many children face significant obstacles in building literacy skills in school, partly because they do not receive proper exposure and support when they are at an early age. Most children who experience literacy problems in elementary are children who fail to develop early literacy skills when they are at the early education. Related to the learning obstacles experienced by children in general, a balanced literacy approach is one of the right approaches to address the problem of early childhood basic literacy skills. This study analyzes the management of a balanced literacy approach in the early childhood education unit class as an effort to strengthen early literacy.

Theoretical background

Early literacy is a learning process to understand and use language in functional communication.

Functional communication is the basis for a child's literacy skills (Robinson: 2014: 11). Children first learn to use spoken language, consisting of listening and speaking, then begin to explore written language, namely reading and writing. Balanced literacy is a learning approach to develop skills in understanding and producing information. The term balanced refers to the view that students learn to be readers that require different opportunities and different ways. Balance is obtained through a combination of various learning strategies with the aim of producing competent and literate learners (Retnaningdyah, 2019: 1). This approach was promoted by Mary Clay, Irene Fountas, and Gay Su Pinnel (2010: 246). In short, a balanced literacy strategy gives equal attention to reading and writing activities. Teachers can use various types of text after students' reading skills are

grouped according to the appropriate level. The characteristics of a balanced literacy approach are developing the competence of all students by utilizing various teaching materials, tools and strategies; emphasizing the development of spoken language, thinking skills, and collaboration as a basis for literacy learning; use formative assessments to guide learning and to determine the level of support to be provided to students; provide explicit instruction for problem solving and strategic thinking skills; provide special time without interruption for literacy learning; and meet individual learning and literacy needs. Spoken language is the main component in this approach because spoken language lays the foundation for students' reading and writing skills. Strengthening early literacy with a balanced literacy approach is carried out by paying attention to management functions starting from planning, organizing, activating, and monitoring or evaluating carried out in order to achieve the goals that have been set, and carried out through a process of collaboration with various related parties. George R Terry (in Suprpto, 2009: 122) states that management is a distinct process. This activity consists of the following actions: planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising which are carried out to determine and achieve the goals that have been set through the utilization of human resources and other sources. Learning management can be interpreted broadly as the whole activity of how to teach students starting from lesson planning, organizing learning, implementing learning, to learning assessment. Daulay (2012: 194) states that "Learning management is how an educator manages learning well from preparation (before teaching), teaching (learning process), and post-learning (evaluation)." Hadi (2007: 29) states that "In general, Indonesian education has National Education Standards which are the minimum criteria for the education system in all jurisdictions of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia."

Method

The method of this study is the qualitative-case study which is used to explore contextual events that occur in certain objects or individuals or groups of people, in certain locations, city of Bandung, through detailed and in-depth data collection through interviews, observation, and documentation studies which was conducted for a limited period of time, February to June 2022. This research focuses on the management of a balanced literacy approach. Thus, there are parameters that become limitations, i.e. place, time, and the choice of learning approach studied. The early education units that became the sample of this study were Az Zahra PAUD and PGRI Harapan Bangsa 1 Kindergarten in Kota Bandung.

Discussion

The teachers carried out a series of stages in managing a balanced literacy approach starting from planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation. While planning the learning activities, especially the application of balanced literacy

at schools, teachers determine the material and methods, then plan the time and duration of literacy activities to suit the learning achievement targets, considering the interests of the children, the availability of materials, the supports from the environment, and the teacher's resources at school. Teachers understand that literacy has a broad scope to exercise students' skills to understand information, communicate well and politely, as well as express opinions confidently. With this understanding, literacy skills are not taught separately or made into separate activities with a particular schedule. Literacy are integrated as part of the continuous playing, learning and singing activities from the beginning until the end of school hours. When the lesson begins, teacher make initial observations to determine the range of students' abilities so that they get appropriate services considering the different stages of growth and development of each student. This initial observation of students provides information to teachers so that they can serve students according to the appropriate developmental stage. The initial observation session was conducted during the first week of school. During this time, teachers invite students to play and talk informally in order to observe students' interests and abilities. This initial observation is also useful to get the information whether students have particularities related to study habits at home, including things that make students excited about learning or distracted. These will be useful for teachers to encourage students' interest in learning and avoid an uncomfortable atmosphere that makes students stop or refuse learning activities. Coordination is usually carried out by teachers on a weekly basis, for example at the end of the current week, or daily, after the completion of learning activities. Coordination is also carried out when the teachers make lesson plans, so that they adjust the materials and materials to be used, including when students can do activities together. This cooperation must be agreed from the beginning between teachers, so that learning takes place effectively. The implementation of the balanced literacy approach includes activities to facilitate reading activities including the teacher's efforts to introduce various types of texts, build reading habits, and motivate students to practice reading. The teachers choose media to practice reading, train students' reading comprehension, carry on modelled reading and guided reading, accompany students to read independently, and build vocabulary. While facilitating writing activities, teachers guide students to practice writing, carry on modelled writing and guided writing, motivating students to practice writing, choosing media to practice writing, and motivate students to write independently. In terms of classes with many students in one class and a limited number of teachers, story telling become an option for implementing literacy activities. The teachers choose interesting stories and present them in attractive and interactive ways so that students enjoy the learning process. Teachers also pay particular attention to students with special needs. These students are given special assignments according to the obstacles they experience, for example, students who experience learning difficulties are given simple assignments in terms of material and quantity. Teachers motivate and support parents to be involved in the learning of students

with special needs by setting appropriate targets. Teachers involve students with special needs in groups for a short duration so that they build social ties with their friends, and other students gain experience and awareness about inclusive friendships. The target for students with special needs is at least open a book, or hold a book without damaging it. Teachers also provide books made from cloth, thick books or board books for students with special needs. Teachers stated that the role of parents as the child's first teacher, and the family as the closest environment and the first learning environment is very crucial. It was found that students who are not interested in books are generally caused by a lack of reading culture at home. Teachers optimize cooperation between families and schools by collaborating with parents through parenting programs. Through this program parents are educated that children do not always learn to read from books and that parents can also participate as teachers at home. In terms of evaluation, the teachers choose the evaluation type according to conditions and needs of students and parents. Instead of waiting until the end of the period or the end of the semester, evaluation is primarily carried out daily, so that the teacher can immediately make improvements if needed. The responses are given right away so that the child immediately gets the right stimulus. Evaluations carried out monthly or at the end of the semester are an accumulated record of progress in student achievement from time to time. The form of evaluation is adapted to the conditions of the students, carried out quickly and simply while still making students comfortable, not feeling they are being judged. The teacher usually does a recall game at the end of the lesson. In special conditions, for example if the student's parents are illiterate, report or evaluation is done directly in conversation. Report cards containing notes on student learning progress and achievements are offered, but the contents are explained directly to parents. Evaluation is delivered directly at each parent meeting per month. The teachers stated that the evaluation or assessment that is really needed by early childhood students is an assessment that is carried out day to day because the learning of the students varies greatly. Evaluations carried out on a daily basis will make it easier for teachers to communicate with parents and provide information regarding enrichment that can be given to students. According to teachers, correct evaluation will provide good information for improvement in student learning.

Conclusion

The management or management of a balanced literacy approach in early education is carried out by teachers includes the planning, coordination, implementation and evaluation stages. At each stage of management, the teacher always refers to the principle of balanced literacy approach, namely prioritizing the active role of students, providing students with various types of reading materials or texts and literacy activities, balancing between independent and guided activities, also involving parents in each stage.

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