

Evaluation of Reading materials for students in schools

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Abstract

This article aims to compare the content of reading material for students in Indonesia and other countries, for example, reading material containing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues. This objective is based on selecting reading material for learning in schools in Indonesia, which is undoubtedly different from that in other countries, for example, the United States. The choice of reading material is chosen by the teacher and is based on its suitability with students' needs and characteristics. This article uses a comparative study with the literature method. Data are collected from documents in journals, proceedings, books, and articles on the internet related to the topics in this article. The data analysis technique was carried out using content analysis techniques. The collected data were then analysed and compared to determine what students in Indonesia and the United States read. The results show that in the United States, LGBT material has been incorporated into the school curriculum. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, LGBT material is quite challenging to include in the school curriculum because it is considered contrary to the prevailing norms in Indonesia regarding LGBT, even though it can support learning about tolerance.

Keywords: Reading material content, comparative study, LGBT issues.

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1. Introduction

Currently, the world has experienced changes that are very sudden, terrible and revolutionary in various aspects of human life (Martin, 2006). Martin's statement shows the tendency of community development towards increasingly complex situations due to many reasons, such as the rapid development of science and technology, people's mindset and other effects that are planned or appear to be. The nations of the world obtain this progress after attaining prosperity. Change is also visible in the field of education.

Education is a basic need that must be met, mainly formal educational institutions organised or accredited by the state. Parents often ignore state interventions in formal school education. In democratic countries, awareness to monitor and limit government intervention in education is marked by selecting the decentralisation of education policymaking. Education has a vital role, especially in shaping human character. Education is one of the elements inherent in humans as a right that must be accepted, and education will lead society itself to progress and change. There have been many examples where education can bring about changes in various aspects, including economic, social, political, cultural and mastery of scientific insights. The progress that the community hopes for is also related to peace, harmony and avoidance of various forms of conflict.

The decline in education is not only seen from the implementation of education policies in a country to its people, but also in the scope of primary education to higher education. However, the most influential thing is public awareness of the importance of the meaning of education. In general, educational policies made in a country tend to be used for state intervention. The form of intervention can justify special knowledge, school institutional arrangements, length of education and degree and educational qualifications related to position. Among the existing levels of school education (from elementary to higher education level), the state generally prefers to concentrate its power on intervening in school education for children and adolescents. Almost no country pays sufficient attention to adult education.

One of the problems currently in the spotlight is related to the reading material for students at school. This reading material problem will be directly related to language and literature learning because this research uses much reading material, especially storybooks. This reading material is also related to the curriculum used, especially for learning purposes. Reading material is an essential factor in supporting learning activities, especially language and literature learning—the better the reading material, the better the students' understanding of the material. Variations in the presentation of reading material also affect student interest in following lessons (Adipta, Maryaeni, & Hasanah, 2016).

The choice of reading material that is tailored to students as readers are essential. Selection of the appropriate reading material will determine the process of understanding reading text information. The selection of proper reading text makes teaching and learning activities worthwhile and creates an efficient, effective and meaningful classroom environment. Conversely, if the reading text does not fit the student's context, is uninteresting and complicated, the teaching and learning process becomes boring and monotonous. To avoid this, teachers need to choose proper reading text (Shofiah, 2017).

The problem of reading materials for students in Indonesia has been happening for a very long time. There are restrictions on reading material that can and cannot be given to students through textbooks. It is based on the aspects of the norms of decency and moral, considering that Indonesia

highly upholds the ethics of eastern customs. Limiting references to reading materials will hamper students' thinking patterns and open-mindedness to social problems.

An example is minority issues such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). Indonesia, which is very anti-LGBT, prohibits the inclusion of this issue in student textbooks. In general, however, including the minor group's issues in the textbook will not lead students to join that group. Students can take other lessons, such as tolerance for differences, gender equality, mutual respect and others, because it cannot be denied that the existence of these groups is all around us.

Based on the description above, this article aims to compare reading material choices for students in Indonesia with other countries, such as the United States. This objective is based on the use of the reading material selected by the teacher. The selection of reading materials is based on conformity to the needs and characteristics of students, which the teacher will, of course, carry out. The selection of reading material for learning in schools in Indonesia is undoubtedly different from that in other countries, for example, the United States. The choice of the United States as a comparison is none other than because this country already has advanced education in higher education, which is very well known globally, and in primary and secondary education.

Comparative studies in education are carried out as scientific studies to examine various theories and practices of education in various regions, both within one country and in different countries. However, there are differences in personal backgrounds, natural conditions, customs, sociopolitics and others. By carrying out a comparative study, broad insight and knowledge will be obtained, especially about educational activities according to a region or country.

Reading can be understood easily or not, depending on two main things: (1) the language used and (2) what is discussed or the content of the reading. Choosing a reading text not only pays attention to students' proficiency in a second language but also to the level of difficulty in reading (Nugiyantoro, 2005). The content and scope of the reading affect the difficulty level of the text. Suppose the content and scope of reading are by the reader's interests and needs (regarding psychological development) or according to the field being studied. In that case, it will be easier to understand the text being read. Also, reading difficulties are closely related to the reader's ability. If an individual has difficulty understanding reading material, it means that the individual does not have a schema in the reading material (Shofiah, 2017).

A schema is a data structure that contains general concepts and is stored in human memory. These schemes represent general concepts in nature and form the basis of our understanding of objects, situations, events, sequence of events, actions and steps in action. A schema consists of a series of ideas or concepts that are structured to make sense of new information. Various information that come directly can be arranged, understood and stored in the memory for reuse when needed. Schemas are structures of knowledge obtained from observing objects and experiences of certain situations or events, arranged and stored in the memory (Rumelhart, 1980; Tonjes & Zintz, 1987). Schemes can be understood as a series of mental representations that contain general concepts and become the basis for understanding objects, situations, sequences of events and actions, which are then arranged and stored in the memory and can help understand new information.

Apart from being related to schematics, the choice of the correct reading can also affect the character. It can be interpreted that reading material is also related to the formation of a student's character as stated by Achسانی (2018) that education does not only aim to form the cognitive domain of students but also aims to shape a student's character. The values of character education in reading

materials (e.g., literary works) can be used as a medium for internalising character education for students.

Reading materials in learning can also foster tolerance and respect for others. The purpose of education is to create a person of quality and character, to have a broad view of the future, to achieve the expected goals and to adapt quickly and appropriately in various environments. Therefore, reading material in learning is also used to develop one's mental, mindset and quality.

2. Methodology

This article uses a comparative study with the literature method. Research data are documents in journal articles, proceedings, books and articles on the internet related to this article's topics. The collected data are then analysed to determine what students read in Indonesia and other countries, such as the United States. The data analysis stage is organising data, sorting data, synthesising and finding patterns using interpretation (Hudiyono, Rokhmansyah, & Elyana, 2021; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018; Sugiyono, 2014). Also, content analysis methods and in-depth reading were used in this study to obtain maximum comparative study results. This research is expected to provide information related to reading material for students, especially those related to LGBT issues used as a source of reading material.

3. Result and Findings

In this article, the comparative study focuses on comparing reading material used in Indonesian schools and US schools. The reading material compared is reading material related to language learning (and literature), especially on minor group problems, such as LGBT issues. As is well known, LGBT is a sensitive issue and is even discussed in both the general public and the world of education. This is not only happening in Indonesia but in the United States also. However, in the United States, there is a discourse to include literature related to LGBT issues for reading material in schools.

In the United States, lessons related to LGBT issues began to be discussed in 2016. This discourse emerged after US education officials conducted an opinion poll. Learning related to LGBT issues and problems also includes community contributions to history and social science. LGBT content will be part of the inclusive material taught in several elementary, junior high and high schools in California, making California the first United States state to teach the history of society in education (Katumiri, 2016; Tucker, 2016).

The California State Board of Education adopt ten new socially inclusive textbooks and history textbooks for grades K–8. The council also rejected two books that failed to acknowledge the contribution of LGBT groups. It is based on the 2011 United States Education Act, which officially added LGBT people and people with disabilities to the list of groups included in the history curriculum. After a heated debate, it was finally implemented with a new textbook (Katumiri, 2017).

Apart from material discourse with LGBT content, the United States also plans to have a particular class for LGBT students in grade 12. The purpose of establishing this particular class is as a safe zone for LGBT students who are repeatedly persecuted (bullying) at schools that do not understand LGBT in the United States. The plans for this particular class are in Dalton. The school will also employ LGBT teachers. It will be an alternative for LGBT students because schools are starting to open up and provide moral support to take lessons for students who lack confidence because of their status as LGBT (Widiadi, 2016).

Since the beginning of the emergence of the discourse related to including history subject matter with LGBT content, education in the United States has also begun to apply reading materials that contain LGBT elements. Many research articles discuss LGBT material in US schools (Covering LGBT Issues in the Classroom, 2018). According to Blackburn and Buckley (2005), reading these texts is thought to reduce homophobia because it provides students with opportunities to engage through reading and discussion with various customs and values that reveal various genders and sexual identities that makeup everyone's world. Homophobia, according to Rahardjo (2007), is the fear of closeness, interacting with and relating to homosexuals because it is considered to have a bad influence because homosexuality is very detrimental. It can also be interpreted as the existence of heterosexual supremacy based on differences in sexual orientation.

Teaching literature from LGBT-themed texts or readings can significantly reduce homophobia in adolescents. With the results of this study, schools need to implement teacher preparation programmes to identify the inclusion of texts that represent various sexual orientations and gender identities as learning priorities. According to Malo-Juvera (2016), schools and teacher education programmes should make serious efforts to include LGBT-themed texts in the curriculum as part of a concerted effort to reduce the culture of homophobic violence that has been institutionalised in many schools.

Other researches provide the basis for understanding that the United States has begun to utilise LGBT-laden literature, for example, the research conducted by Lewis (2015). In his research, Lewis (2015) shows that reading material with LGBT content makes it possible to understand the ideology and textuality of queer literature when the text is read in schools. Educators are better equipped to use them as language models and other literary tools to criticise and counter-beliefs and ideologies, especially heterosexism, misogyny and homophobia. Reading materials with LGBT content also support the concept that every literary work has goodness. It means that reading materials with LGBT content can provide lessons that there are various groups around us. The use of LGBT material literature also reduces homophobia in schools.

Apart from the United States, other countries have also designed the integration of LGBT issues in the primary school curriculum, namely England. The integration is designed in the curriculum— together with learning mental health and the importance of exercise. It comes amid growing concerns about mental health problems among young people in the UK ('Primary School Pupils Will Learn about Gay Relationships, Mental Health and Exercise under New Government Guidelines', 2018).

The freedom to read reading materials like in the United States is not felt in Indonesia. Reading material with LGBT content for school students is strictly prohibited. Indonesia still upholds moral and values, so issues such as LGBT are very taboo to discuss, especially in the realm of education (Salim, 2018). Blackburn and Buckley (2005) explained that reading materials that contain LGBT for school students could reduce homophobia and respect gender differences.

Indonesia needs a stock of non-textbook reading packages in schools. Based on a survey conducted by the Tanoto Foundation¹, of the 298 schools partnering with the PINTAR Programme², only 9% took the initiative to provide non-book text packages (Seftiawan, 2019). Simultaneously, the provision of quality non-textbook reading material in schools is important to encourage students' reading interest and ability. The survey results show that there are no much quality, non-packaged reading books available for students to use as reading material.

The lack of non-text reading books in schools is one of the causes of low reading interest among Indonesian students. Opening access for the public to read is critical. UNESCO states that Indonesia is

in second place underworld literacy, meaning that the reading interest of the Indonesian people is still shallow. The reading interest of the Indonesian people is relatively shallow compared to other countries. According to UNESCO data, the reading interest of the Indonesian people is only 0.001%. It means that out of 1,000 Indonesians, only one person is an avid reader. It is disappointing because it means that the reading culture of the Indonesian people is still tiny (Asniar, Muharam, & Silondae, 2020; Tan, 2020).

School students' reading books which are classified as literary works, generally, still contain social life. The stories that have developed are various, many of which are taken from folk tales from several regions in Indonesia. Literary works that are used as reading material generally contain social problems. It is possible to apply a model, such as in the United States, to include literature with LGBT content in one of the students' reading materials—as non-textbook reading material. Indeed, a deeper study is needed to realise this discourse, but there is nothing wrong with trying to present the diversity of life through student reading materials.

Reading materials with LGBT content can teach social tolerance to fellow humans who have differences in gender and sexuality. It cannot be denied because minority groups, such as LGBT, already exist and live in society. Various sexual attitudes and gender identities have been known in the archipelago in the early days, but they have been exposed only since the early 20th century. In the late 1960s, the LGBT movement began to develop through organising activities carried out by waria groups or what became known as shemale (Dacholfany & Khoirurrijal, 2016; Siahaan, 2009).

Knowledge about the existence of LGBT groups needs to be taught from an early age, not to educate students to be like this group, but more to respond to their existence. Therefore, students must understand LGBT groups. Tolerance towards LGBT people is a form of respect for human rights. It is related to one of the essential competencies in the subject 'Pancasila and Civic Education' class XI SMA, namely 'Respecting human rights based on the perspective of Pancasila as a gift from God Almighty'. Reading materials that contain LGBT content can also be used as reading material for these basic competencies.

However, in language and literature subjects, reading materials containing LGBT content can be used as reading material for reading material or prose material (novels or short stories). Reading material used in language and literature is not vulgar, does not contain pornography and violence, but is limited to reading that contains information and tells the life of LGBT perpetrators.

The integration of material containing LGBT issues has been carried out by the Education, Youth and Sports Office, Yogyakarta Special Region Province. Although not in the form of particular subjects, material for introducing LGBT questions already exists in some subjects, for example, health, religion and citizenship education. The material discusses how values and norms need to be carried out in society and advances in science that ultimately make transgender surgery known (Febriarni, 2016). It is undeniable that in the Province of Yogyakarta Special Region, there are also Islamic boarding schools that contain transgender women. It shows that the Province of Yogyakarta Special Region has accepted and has an open mind towards the existence of this minority group.

Many parents do not care about the lessons their children receive at school. It results in disconnected materials and explanations, which should be continued from school to the family. This needs to be considered when incorporating LGBT issues into learning materials. Teachers are expected to be able to discuss LGBT issues in schools and adapt to children's abilities. Meanwhile, parents are also asked to have sufficient knowledge about this issue and not to misunderstand.

However, considering that the Indonesian people are a society that respects and upholds religious values, morals and customs, the life of the Indonesian people will not be separated from the influence of religion and culture (customs). In principle, religions will find it difficult to accept its followers who are part of that group. Likewise, in traditional territories, indigenous peoples in the archipelago do not provide space for the three sexes, let alone same-sex marriages.

With reading materials that contain LGBT content, students will be more familiar with tolerance towards other people, even differences and variations in gender and sexual orientation. However, it is still needed within the scope of moral and social values, only limited to knowledge and respect for human rights. Also, to realise social justice and not oppress minority groups and develop a culture of tolerance can be pursued through education. Education is a process of awareness critical to human dignity, enlightening and liberating humans from all forms of oppression. To become a liberating social unit, educational practice must refer to human existence and offer a multi-episteme of sexuality. Therefore, the community must be given socialisation and increased knowledge about LGBT people and the human rights they deserve. Whatever happens, LGBT people are also human beings who deserve respect.

They see this phenomenon that is quite thick in Indonesia will challenge applying reading materials that contain LGBT to students. However, teachers should be neutral, fair and wise so that understanding students is more straightforward. People who claim to be LGBT are also Indonesian citizens who cannot be treated arbitrarily, cannot be intimidated and are entitled to protection from all forms of violence. As citizens, their existence is equal to those of us who are not LGBT people, so are their rights and obligations.

Indonesia also has local wisdom related to LGBT groups, such as *bissu* and *gemblak*. *Bissu* is a form of LGBT in Indonesian local wisdom, namely from the Bugis culture in South Sulawesi. *Bissu* is considered a group that is not considered male or female. *Bissu* is in existence without gender and is not attached to the physical alone but the balance of the souls of men and women. Therefore, *bissu* is a combination of the two sexes (Rokhmansyah, Hanum, & Dahlan, 2018). In comparison, *gemblak* is a boy with a handsome facelift and contracted by a *warok* when carrying out a fasting ritual for women. *Gemblak* and *warok* are *reog* traditions in Ponorogo, East Java. *Gemblak* is prepared as a *jathil* dancer in the *reog* tradition (Wiranata & Nurcahyo, 2018).

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4. Conclusion

Reading material is a problem that requires special attention and resolution, including in Indonesia as a developing country. Indonesia is in the second place from the bottom of world literacy, meaning that the reading interest of Indonesian people is still shallow. Therefore, there is a need for a literacy movement to foster interest in reading, especially in students. The growth of reading interest

through the literacy movement cannot be separated from reading material, both reading material at school and outside of school. Reading material for students in schools in Indonesia tends to be limited by norms. Information disclosure to students is not like what students in developed countries experience, for example, the United States. From the results of this comparative study, it was found that in the United States, school students are being introduced to literature containing LGBT issues. It is used as a step to introduce tolerance and human rights. However, this is not the case in Indonesia. Reading material in Indonesia is prohibited from containing things related to LGBT issues because it is not part of the Eastern culture of the Indonesian people. Therefore, through a comparative study, it is hoped that it can open up insights for stakeholders in the Indonesian education sector. The introduction of LGBT issues is not to teach students to follow the deviant behaviour of the group but to introduce differences, tolerance, gender equality and *bhinneka tunggal ika* (a sense of diversity—Indonesia's motto). Reading material on these issues does not have to be conveyed clearly and straightforwardly. However, it is integrated into language and literature, social science or civic education.

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