

The Myth of non-literate Culture: The Case of Indonesian Children

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The claim by the local media

- ▶ Indonesia: the highest illiteracy rates.
- ▶ In 1995–2005: adult illiteracy rates 90 per cent.
- ▶ The most recent claim: children illiteracy rates increases every year.
- ▶ The present government's efforts to combat illiteracy:
 - ▶ Reading habit campaign (the establishment of community libraries and mobile libraries).
 - ▶ It remains controversial whether illiteracy rates plummet.

My observation

- ▶ Illiteracy rates are still high especially in both big cities and remote areas in Indonesia.
- ▶ The problem: not a cultural issue, but rather:
 - a. A scarcity of access to books (libraries).
 - b. National educational program less supportive in enhancing literacy development.

The myth of non-literate culture

- ▶ Stoltz (2006): attributed her writing improvement to reading.
- ▶ Sugiharto (2010a, 2010c): Indonesian children are voracious readers, spend their time reading outside of schools.

FVR: A plausible alternative

- ▶ Research on literacy demonstrates a robust result of FVR:
- ▶ Krashen (2003; 2004)
- ▶ Wang and Lee (2007)
- ▶ Rosita (2011)

Access to Libraries

- ▶ A rich–print environment is the first absolute condition to reducing illiteracy rates.
- ▶ Better access to books at home and at schools results in more reading (Krashen, 2004), and the more one reads, the better one’s literacy development. Also easy access to public libraries not only increases enthusiasm for reading, but also affects how much children read.

- ▶ As I have argued elsewhere (Sugiharto, 2008 b), the most pressing need the government should take to prevent children and youth illiteracy is to build more community libraries in remote regions with high illiteracy rates.
- ▶ While the government–sponsored program of exhorting children to read should be lauded, it has not yet been enjoyed by children living poor regions.

- ▶ The latest data from the Indonesian Ministry of Education Report for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life showed that only 5 percent of some 70,000 villages in Indonesia have community libraries with no available reports on the number of books available.

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Conclusion

- ▶ The most realistic and viable strategic plan the Indonesian government should make to fight illiteracy is:
- ▶ to enrich the print environment by providing access to community libraries equipped with compelling reading materials and with trained librarians. With the Indonesian government commitment to improving the quality of national education, such a plan is certainly feasible.