Gorontalo Literacy Project: A Sustainable Project to Increase Gorontalo Language Literacy that Meets Children's Needs as Digital Natives

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Abtsract

Since local language literacy has been a huge problem faced by many countries around the globe, many scholars have profoundly dedicated their attention to the effort of finding the best solution to tackle this problem. One of the best ways is combining digital technology in the program of increasing literacy. Considering the importance of this matter, this paper explores "Gorontalo Literacy Project" an existing project in Gorontalo in which the aims do not only to increase the level of children's literacy but also to increase children's mastery level of Gorontalo language. This project encourages children to learn Gorontalo language by themselves through digital technology and to lead them in inquiring new horizon through appropriate strategies and tools that inevitably meet their needs as digital natives. The project has been conducted for three years by involving stake holders in Gorontalo. This is also beneficial to assist children to acquire Gorontalo language and government of Gorontalo to increase number of speakers of Gorontalo language in which its active speakers have decreased over these five decades.

Keywords: Gorontalo Language Literacy, Digital Natives

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Since language has developed as well as society, local languages have tended to decrease in terms of their users and use. This global phenomenon has occurred as Krauss (1992) predicts that as many as 95% of the world's estimated 6000 languages will be lost in this century. This problem will be even worse when there is no action from society and the government does not codify the language plan and language policy which meet the local condition. The extinction of languages does not only cause the extinction of cultural heritage of a country, but most importantly it is the loss of culture, value system, even civilization of a society. Austin and McGill (2012) insist that "because every last word means another lost world – a death of a language, local language in particular will cause a devastation of human kind because local languages are tools to preserve world civilization (see Cavallaro, 2005; Fought, 2006; Hale 1992, p. 36).

Some experts, practitioners and observers of Gorontalo language have argued that the language of Gorontalo has tended to decrease particularly the number of its active speakers. Collins (2012) in the International Conference on Language and Literature at the State University of Gorontalo found that Gorontalo language currently is in danger. He claimed that it is caused by several factors such as language Gorontalo is no longer upheld by its speakers. Gorontalo people tend not to symbolize themselves through the language of Gorontalo. This corresponds with the independence of Gorontalo from North Sulawesi province. In fact, from his observations in

social networks, such as Facebook, young people do not use Gorontalo language, they use Malay Gorontalo. He also claimed that since Gorontalo people only have oral tradition, it is difficult to have written materials of Gorontalo language that consequently causes the lack of local language literacy in Gorontalo.

Another factor that plays important role is that families in Gorontalo tend to use Malay Gorontalo in daily communication. As a result, the young generation in Gorontalo are rarely exposed to Gorontalo language. As a consequence, the level of Gorontalo language acquisition of the younger generation is low. This phenomenon also occurs in educational institutions, either formal or non-formal. Malay language used as the language of instruction in educational institutions so that Gorontalo language cannot be mastered by the students. Moreover, the design of local curriculum for elementary schools more focused on the English subjects. More recently, teachers and parents are not able to access learning materials of Gorontalo language that meet children's need. Consequently, they find difficulties in increasing children's exposure of Gorontalo language. Considering the importance of creating such a great learning atmosphere for children to acquire Gorontalo language, it is inevitable to create a sustainable project that can increase children' exposure of Gorontalo language as well as to make them "literate" in Gorontalo language. This idea is the core of creating *Gorontalo Literacy Project*, a project that assists children to become literate of Gorontalo language through digital applications and government to preserve Gorontalo language.

1.2 Problem Statement
Considering the importance of Gorontalo language preservation and the effort to increase level of Gorontalo language literacy, this research is focusing on the problem statement; what is the most appropriate way to increase children's Gorontalo language literacy?

1.3 Research Objective
Based on problem statement, this research is to find the most appropriate way to increase children's Gorontalo language literacy.

1.4 Research Significance
Since this research has been a sustainable project, a project to increase children's Gorontalo language literacy as well as to preserve Gorontalo language, this project has been expected to contribute to both scientific point of view and humanity. This project, a long life project, assists children to increase their Gorontalo language literacy as well as helps government to preserve Gorontalo language and to prevent this language from an extreme extinction. Gorontalo literacy project is also beneficial for people in Gorontalo to preserve their localization and civilization for generations to come.

1.5 Literature Review
There has been a huge debate on the concept of literacy and the question of *what is literacy*?. Some people argue that literacy is simple but some claim that it is more technical than we think. Even more, this interrogative sentence looks easy to answer, emerges simplicity, but instead it opens up a hugely wide range of discussion in terms of its conceptual and practical points of view. It is surprising how often the literature discusses research, conceptual frameworks, and approaches to teaching literacy (often characterized as reading and/or writing) without explicitly defining what is meant by these terms (see. Keefe and Copeland, 2011, p. 92). As consequences, the concept of literacy is still developing with its various definition.

Over the years, for most of history in English, the word 'literate' meant to be 'familiar with literature' or, more generally, 'well educated, learned'. Only since the late nineteenth century

has it also come to refer to the abilities to read and write text, while maintaining its broader meaning of being 'knowledgeable or educated in a particular field or fields' (see. UNESCO, 2006, p. 146-147). 'Literacy' would seem to be a term that everyone understands. But at the same time, literacy as a concept has proved to be both complex and dynamic, continuing to be interpreted and defined in multiple ways. People's notions of what it means to be literate or illiterate are influenced by academic research, institutional agendas, national context, cultural values and personal experiences.

In the academic community, theories of literacy have evolved from those who focused solely on changes in individuals to more complex views encompassing the broader social contexts (the 'literate environment' and the 'literate society') that encourage and enable literacy activities and practices to occur. As a result of these and other developments, understandings in the international policy community have expanded too: from viewing literacy as a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills, to using these skills in ways that contribute to socio-economic development, to developing the capacity for social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change. The evolution of these different understandings of being (and becoming) 'literate' shows how variants of these ideas have been integrated into policy discourse. Thus, the original meaning of the English word 'literacy' is different from its translations in several other languages (UNESCO, 2006, p.147).

Moreover, in practical extent, education in particular, some experts claim that literacy is not only a concept of being well-educated, but much broader than this, literacy is defined as a basic need of human beings, a human right (Keefe and Copeland 2011, p. 92). Lumsford, Moglen, and Slevin (1990) in Keefe and Copeland (2011, p. 92) claim that literacy is a right and not a privilege. As a human right, in the area of education, children should have been literate since they have had the access to education. They should have the access to education as well as become literate due to their right as human beings. As a result, classroom instruction, community services, and the literacy opportunities should be offered to students, children in particular, with full support of their needs.

2.   RESEARCH METHOD

In order to undertake this research and based on research topic, the most appropriate research method is the qualitative one. It is suitable with the character of this study, which is to find the appropriate way to increase local language literacy, Gorontalo language in particular, through a sustainable project that meets children's need as digital natives. In addition, this research relies on five instruments for gathering information: (a) participating in the setting, (b) observing directly, (c) interviewing in depth, (d) analyzing documents and material, and (5) designing tools of language literacy.

This research selects Gorontalo Province as the site of research and some eligible participants as the source of data. Research site is selected based on reasoned considerations. Since the main problem of this research is to increase the local language literacy, this research collects the data from 6 regions in Gorontalo, city and districts to find out the current situation of Gorontalo language literacy. Data of current situation of Gorontalo language literacy are used to design appropriate applications of language literacy. Finally, research result is displayed to discover the ideas in creating the best way to increase children's Gorontalo language literacy.

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of languages that increasingly shifts and tends to decrease in terms of the number of speakers and the use is the Gorontalo language. Gorontalo language is one of heritage and local culture elements and even a local culture storage device which should be preserved in various social changes today. Social change is accompanied by an increasingly rapid global development

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which has various implications on the existence of the decreasing of Gorontalo language. This phenomenon can be seen from the decline in the number of active speakers of the language Gorontalo and definitely followed by a decrease in the use of Gorontalo language especially by the younger generation in Gorontalo.

3.1 Degradation of Gorontalo Language Use

Research data show that the significant decreasing of speakers is at the age of 0 – 20. Compared to the speakers at the age of 21 – 40, most of these youths can only understand Gorontalo language but they are not capable enough of speaking the language actively. This following table indicates the dramatic phenomenon regarding the descent of speakers of Gorontalo language particularly the young generation.

Table 1. The use of Gorontalo Language
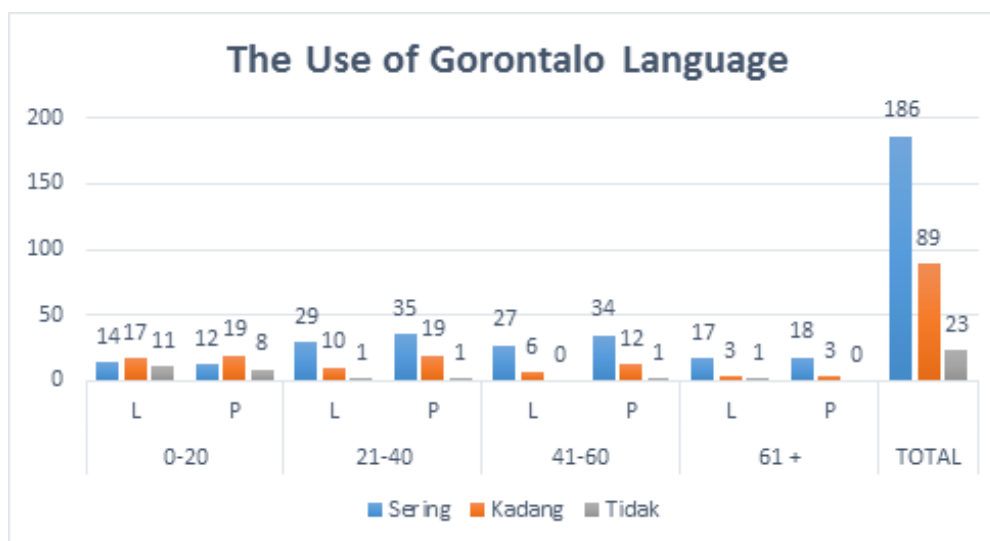
Note: L   : Male   Kadang : Sometimes
       P   : Female   Tidak   : Never
      Sering   : Often

Data on table show that the young people at the age of 0 – 20 speak Gorontalo language not as often as them on the age of 21 – 40. The percentage of youths who only speak Gorontalo language rarely is higher than the percentage of them who speak very often. This data lead us to the phenomenon that Gorontalo language is now only used by older people.

3.2 Gorontalo Literacy Project

In terms of preserving and developing the Gorontalo language, Collins (2012) suggested that educational institutions should increase the exposure of Gorontalo language in oral literature and then display it in electronic media such as websites. However, there is another thing to do regarding the language maintenance along-side the documentation of manuscript. In some extents the young speakers should increase their effort to use Gorontalo language. The stakeholders need to encourage young people to use the language through various means, such as Facebook, SMS, email, or even through Youtube channel. The government of Gorontalo should utilize technology particularly digital technology that is used by younger generation on daily basis. It is necessary

to apply a comprehensive approach to formulate the design of Gorontalo language preservation. The steps of this effort should be done with a scientific approach that is measurable and well-planned so that this effort can make Gorontalo language to be the lingua franca for the people of Gorontalo.

In terms of language preservation in Gorontalo, there is only one way to prevent the degradation of Gorontalo language speakers which is *Gorontalo Literacy Project*. This project has been conducted for three years in order to increase the level of children's Gorontalo language literacy. This project is actually designed to create the most appropriate tool to increase the quality of children's Gorontalo language mastery, including cultural aspects of Gorontalo language, as well as to boost their exposure of technology due to their needs as digital natives. Since children in recent days are really familiar with technology and utilize it as their need, this project used technology as the fundamental aspect – the main tool of this project is that the technology is not only as a medium for applying this project but also as a tool to preserve Gorontalo language.

Gorontalo literacy project is a sustainable project that provides various programs of Gorontalo language which has been implemented through teaching and learning process in formal educational institutions particularly in elementary schools. Elementary schools are selected based on several considerations; 1) teaching language as early as possible is the best way to increase people's language skills and language awareness, 2) elementary schools are institutions which have much more opportunities to teach local language for students through local content subject, and 3) teachers in elementary schools would be able to codify the design of teaching and learning process by involving inter-cultural aspects of language. These factors are taking into account because they are crucial in terms of giving opportunity to students to be more "literate" through a comfortable teaching and learning process, a process that put them as subjects of it.

As students learn, they become more literate, literate with everything they learn. This fundamental thought of literacy has been the basic consideration in implementing this project. The more students are taught Gorontalo language as well as use Gorontalo language as their *lingua franca*, the more literate they are in terms of linguistic aspects and cultural aspects of Gorontalo language. Due to the importance of making children become "more literate" with Gorontalo language, more recently, this project provides various technological based learning materials where students are given opportunities to access some apps to learn Gorontalo language by themselves. These apps, free access digital books and some other digital materials, are created for children to learn Gorontalo language easily and for teachers and parents to choose appropriate learning materials, technology based materials in particular, that fulfill children's needs.

4.　CONCLUSION

Speakers of Gorontalo language have decreased for few decades, consequently preservation of Gorontalo language is inevitable. It is definitely crucial and one of appropriate ways to preserve this local language is "Gorontalo Literacy Project", an existing project to increase the level of children's literacy in Gorontalo and children's mastery level of Gorontalo language. This project encourages children to learn Gorontalo language by themselves through digital material, apps, and to lead them in inquiring new horizon through appropriate strategies and tools that inevitably meet their needs as digital natives. This is also beneficial to assist both children to acquire Gorontalo language and government of Gorontalo to increase the number of speakers of Gorontalo language.

5.　REFERENCES

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