A Freirean Analysis of Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture's School Literacy Movement

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Abstract

Since joining The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Indonesia has been actively shaping its education policy following the recommendations derived from the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). In response to the consistently low PISA reading scores, in 2015 the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture launched a literacy program called the School Literacy Movement. However, PISA results in 2018 indicated that the literacy score of Indonesian students was lower than their score before the SLM program. This paper will analyze the conceptual problems behind the failure of the SLM. Using Paulo Freire's concept of critical literacy as an analytical framework, this paper will investigate the basic assumptions of the SLM concerning the concept of human and his/her relations to the world and its implications on the program's appreciation of students' agency as learners. This article explores how a literacy practice with problematic concepts of human fails to become a humanization movement, instead the literacy practice only becomes a tool for the state to pursue economic targets under the pressure of global neoliberalism. In doing so, this paper seeks to explore how the neoliberal framework inherent in PISA has shaped a literacy program in one of its participating countries.

Introduction

Indonesia had its own indigenous education system that existed before colonialism. However, the country's education system had gradually converged with the Western model after the enactment of Dutch colonial policy of Ethical Politics in 1901 (Brock and Symaco, 2011). After its independence, Indonesia then joined various international networks where policy makers and think tanks shared a current body of knowledge. However, global inequality makes countries in the periphery like Indonesia prone to receiving uncritically information and models from the core countries they believe would solve their educational problems (Mappiasse, 2014). One such international network in which Indonesia participates is The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Since joining this organization, Indonesia has been actively shaping its education policy following the recommendations derived from the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Argina *et al.*, 2017; Nugrahanto and Zuchdi, 2019; Patria, 2019). This is despite the criticisms leveled at PISA as the instrument by which the OECD has acquired enormous political power to shape the education policies of various countries according to its neoliberal framings (Meyer and Benavot, 2013; Araujo, Saltelli and Schnepf, 2017; Volante, 2017; Zhao, 2020). In the neoliberal framework, instead of emancipation and humanization, the goal of education becomes merely the preparing of youth for gainful employment (Meyer and Zahedi, 2014). This trend is especially problematic for a developing country like Indonesia which places its future hopes on the quality of its human resources. In an education system whose ~~sole~~ primary purpose is to train them to compete in the job market, they are at risk of losing qualities such as genuine curiosity, compassion, tolerance and more importantly political awareness that

would enable them to uncover the systematic problems behind the country's underdevelopment.

PISA measures three skill areas of students, namely reading, science and mathematics. Indonesia's score in these three aspects, especially reading, have been consistently low (Suprapto, 2016; Argina *et al.*, 2017). The Indonesian government considers this as evidence of the low interest in reading among Indonesian students. In response, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture launched a nation-wide literacy campaign called School Literacy Movement (henceforth SLM). This program has been initiated by the government since 2015. According to the guidelines which are published by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the movement is not only supported by the Ministry officials but also by other stakeholders, such as literacy activists, academics, professional organizations, businesses, and other ministries/institutions. Furthermore, this program is claimed to involve the entire educational ecosystem and is expected to reach every family, school and community from urban areas to the farthest areas of the country (Tim GLN, 2017a).[1]

The effectiveness of this literacy movement can be seen from the PISA results released after this program was launched; based on the 2018 PISA results, Indonesia's score has decreased. Ironically, the aspect that decreased the most was reading; from 390 in 2016 to 371 in 2018. SLM has not been very effective in fulfilling its duties to increase the literacy score of Indonesian students. There have been various studies conducted to shed light on the implementation of SLM in Indonesian schools. Unfortunately, these studies do not analyze more deeply the conceptual aspects let alone the political economy context of this policy. Although intended as evaluative research, most of the research conducted so far has focused on investigating how well Indonesian schools

implement the SLM guidelines. These studies, however, can reveal how this policy translates into practice in Indonesian schools. One of the key findings from these studies is most school leaders take for granted the governments' concept of literacy (Istiqomah, H. N., Susilana, R., & Johan, 2017; Lastiningsih, N., Mutohir, T. C., Riyanto, Y., & Siswono, 2017; Iwayantari, 2019; Aini, 2021; Sutriyanti, N. K., & Dharmawan, 2021).

Furthermore, previous studies reveal that creative efforts made by schools in implementing SLM are only instrumental rather than substantive innovations that address the needs of their students. The measure of success or failure of SLM implementation relies on the indicators that have been made previously in the SLM guidelines. Examples of such indicators are the implementation of compulsory reading for 15 minutes before learning or the availability of the so called "literacy corner" in schools. These evaluative studies will conclude that a school has successfully implemented SLM if it has implemented the compulsory 15 minutes of reading or provided a "literacy corner". Meanwhile, when schools could not achieve the indicators, it was usually attributed to the poor condition of school facilities and the lack of students' willingness to participate (Suhardiyanto and Tijan, 2018); (Pantiwati, Y., Permana, F. H., Kusniarti, T., & Miharja, 2020); (Sihaloho, F. A. S., Martono, T., & Daerobi, 2019).

Previous studies on SLM do not take into account the conceptual assumptions that may contribute to the ineffectiveness of the SLM in improving the literacy quality of Indonesian students. Let alone critically examine those assumptions in relation to the neoliberal motives of the program. Therefore, the present study will explore the conceptual problems of this movement from a Freirean concept of critical literacy. As a critical theory, a Freirean analysis will allow us to reveal how an educational policy implemented in schools might reproduce

inequality and injustice (Beck, 2005). In the context of a literacy practice, a critical perspective will enable us to identify how a literacy program becomes an instrument for the political and economic interests of the state at the expense of the interests and well-being of the students.

It is important to situate SLM in the context of neoliberal intervention in Indonesian educational policies. Indeed, SLM is just one of the latest manifestations of neoliberal dictates in Indonesia. Critical researchers have documented the process of neoliberalization of Indonesian educational system. Tilaar (2009: 39) notes that the process was initiated by Soeharto's New Order regime in the 70s. Replacing the socialist-leaning Soekarno regime, Soeharto adopted develomentalism and paved the way for a free market economy in Indonesia. To emphasize Indonesia's turnaround from socialism, Soeharto sent Indonesian scholars from various fields to study in the United States. Rosser (2016) points out that among these scholars is a group known as the "Berkeley Mafia" which played an important role in overseeing neoliberal policies in Indonesia. In the educational sector, Tilaar argues that they had been involved in driving the orientation of Indonesian educational policy closer to neoliberalism (Tilaar, Paat, & Paat, 2011: 46). For example, in the 90s, Minister of Education and Culture Wardiman Djojonegoro introduced the "link and match" policy which means the programs and outputs of educational institutions must be in line with the demands of the market and industry (Rachman, 2017). Djojonegoro admitted that he adopted the concept from Karl Willenbrock of Harvard University (Djojonegoro, 2016). Since then, the link and match doctrine has had a major influence on the formulation of educational policy in Indonesia (Precalya, 2021).

The fall of the New Order in 1998 did not end the process. On the contrary, the Reformation period - the term used to refer to the post-New Order period in

Indonesia - was marked by the further encroachment of neoliberalism on education in Indonesia (Darmaningtyas and Panimbang, 2014). Moreover, the Reformation period was also marked by the further depoliticization of educational research and rampant corruption in the Ministry of Education and Culture (Darmaningtyas, 2005). In general, the trend of educational policy during the Reformation period led to a reduction in the role of the government in funding education, especially higher education; public universities are encouraged to have profitable partnerships with industries or raise their tuition fee as an alternative source of funds. For primary and secondary education, these policies encourage "internationalization" which reflects the Indonesian government's ambition to be part of developed countries or OECD members. They also open up opportunities for foreign capital investment in education (Tilaar, 2003). Thus, SLM is only the latest form of neoliberal educational policies in Indonesia. However, unlike the previous policies that have been reviewed by several scholars, so far the SLM has not been examined with a critical approach.

Conceptual Assumptions of SLM in light of the Freirean Concept of Critical Literacy

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921–1997), or more familiarly known as Paulo Freire was a critical education thinker from Brazil whose impactful literacy movement in Latin American countries has inspired many movements in various parts of the world (Kirkendall, 2010). Freire was born on 19 September 1921 in the city of Recife, Pernambuco state, Brazil. In his collection of reflective letters, Freire remembers his family as a middle-class family but the collapse of the world economy during the *Great Depression* affected the financial situation of his family. This situation made Freire familiar with poverty and hunger since his childhood (Freire, 1996). As a child, Freire was not a bright student. In his memoir, Freire recalls that at that time, he was not

uninterested in studying hard nor he was stupid, but rather his social conditions at that time hindered his ability to learn (Gadotti, 1994). Nonetheless, Freire admits that the bitter experiences of his childhood did not make him a vengeful or a pessimistic person. On the contrary, the experience fosters his curiosity and an open attitude towards the world (Freire, 1996).

When he grew up, Freire's family's economic condition improved so he was able to study law at Recife University. However, he soon left his career in law and began to teach at Recife University. While on campus, he ran a literacy program for the poor (Freire, 1996). This activity attracted the attention of the Brazilian government at that time so that he was appointed as the president of the National Commission on Popular Culture in 1963. Through this institution, Freire's literacy program became Brazil's national agenda (Darder, 2018). Unfortunately, a military coup in April 1964 ended Freire's activities. The military junta government even imprisoned and exiled him because he was considered subversive. It was during this period of exile that Freire completed important works on his theory of critical education (Darder, 2018).

Exiled from Brazil, Freire chose to work in Chile. The country at that time was controlled by the Christian Democratic Party whose ideas were in line with Freire's thinking. In Chile, Freire was given the opportunity to run his literacy program again. Freire's work in Chile was considered the most successful literacy activity at that time. From 1964 to 1970, Freire managed to run his critical literacy program which not only served to eliminate illiteracy, but also raised critical consciousness among the participants. The success of Freire's literacy program in Chile was the inaugural moment of the critical literacy theory. This success made the world begin to pay attention to Freire. He was also invited to become a visiting professor at Harvard University in the United

States (Kirkendall, 2004) It was during his time at Harvard that Freire completed his monumental work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. After 15 years in exile, in 1980 the Brazilian government allowed Freire to return to his country. In Brazil, Freire returned to running a literacy program, becoming an educator and activist until his death in 1997 in Sao Paolo.

Freire left many texts on critical literacy movement, one of which is his article entitled *the Adult Literacy Process as Cultural Action for Freedom*. In this paper, Freire fiercely criticizes the literacy programs carried out in the Third World, especially in Latin American countries. The ineffectiveness of these literacy programs according to Freire was a direct resut of a fundamental conceptual fallacy. Freire argues that the literacy programs failed to see participants as human beings with creative agency. This attitude is manifested in the form of a digestive model of learning which further alienates the participants and perpetuates the culture of silence among them (Freire, 1970). We argue that SLM suffers from the same conceptual problems. Furthermore, we would attempt to demonstrate that these conceptual problems are a consequence of the neoliberal orientation that shapes the motivation and main goal of the literacy movement.

According to a guideline published by the Ministry of Education and Culture, SLM is implemented in three stages. The first stage is the habituation stage in which students are given certain tasks intended to foster their interest in reading. One of the main activities in this stage is compulsory reading for 15 minutes before class starts. The second stage is called literacy skills development stage. At this stage schools are required to incorporate literacy activities into extracurricular programs and organise compulsory visits to the library. The third stage is intracurricular, meaning that literacy activities are made an integral part of the curriculum. Literacy activities in this phase aim to develop reading

comprehension skills and relate them to personal experiences. The output of this last stage, according to the SLM guidelines, is the ability to think critically and cultivate creative communication skills (Tim GLN, 2017a, 2020).

The above-mentioned stages are based on certain assumptions about the nature and potentials of human being and how they interact with the world in which they live. Such assumptions have a major impact in shaping all educational or literacy activities. As stated by Freire, every practice of education implies a conception of human and the world (Freire, 1970). The critical pedagogy inspired by Freire's thought is rooted in a distinctive view of the relationship between human being and his world. In Freire's philosophy, humans are creatures with an ontological vocation, a natural call within themselves to realize their full potential of their humanity. The Freirean view of man is an optimistic and respectful one; each individual poses the capacity to critically evaluate the condition of themselves and their environment through a process of interaction and dialogue with his fellow human being (Nuryatno, 2011). This capacity can be realized when humans maximize the gift of though-language, that is the ability to think and know through a praxis (Freire, 1970).

For Freire, the true illiteracy is when the human's noble potential is abused, when one is in the condition of dehumanization. A process of dehumanization occurs when a person lost his sense of project. According to Freire, the sense of project is what differentiate humans and animals. Animals can only adapt to their environment, while human would 'humanize' it by transforming the environment. Vital to this humanizing proses is human's sense of purpose. With their sense of purpose, humans always have specific purposes and objectives in their action. Meanwhile, animal's actions are only routine without awareness of the goal, let alone the method of achieving that goal (Freire, 1970). In

the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire further explore this concept and its important relation with literacy.

> Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection (Freire, 2005).

In Freire's concept of literacy, reading is not merely a process of comprehending words but also a process of opening the mind to read the world. Freire famously describe his literary movement is an act of "reading the word and the world" (P. Freire, 1985; Freire and Macedo, 2005). Likewise writing is an act of naming the world.

A literacy program based on problematic conceptions of human and the world will fail to achieve its goal. For example, Freire points out that the primers used for literacy programs in many Latin American countries had failed because texts were composed based on a simplistic vision of men, of their world of the relationship between the two, and of the literacy process which unfolds in that world (Freire, 1970). A simplistic view of humans and their relations with the world, and what role literacy plays in these relations makes a literacy movement inhuman. The manifestation of the correct view of humans in literacy activities is the appreciation of the agencies of those who participate in the literacy program. The agency here means that literacy program must facilitate them through a dialogical process to determine where the literacy activities are going, including what kind of reading material is appropriate to develop the human potential of the participants.

Given the centrality of the concept of man and the world in the context of literacy, it is important to analyze the concept of man behind the SLM program. According to the Grand Design of the National Literacy Movement published by the ministry, the purpose of this literacy program is to improve the quality of life of Indonesian people, increase productivity and competitiveness, revolutionize the nation's character, preserve diversity and accelerate Indonesia's social restoration (Tim GLN, 2017). It seems that the Indonesian government believes that their students are not competitive and productive enough so that a "character revolution" is necessary. The question is, less competitive and productive compared to whom? The Grand Design of the SLM makes it clear that the government measures the competitiveness and productivity of Indonesian students by referring to various international scores, but especially the PISA results. Thus, this literacy program was created in the context of competing with other OECD members. Since joining the OECD and taking the PISA test in 2000, Indonesia has consistently had low scores, including in reading skills (Mappiasse, 2014).

Despite the various criticisms that have been leveled at PISA, Indonesia is one of the countries that consistently shapes their education policies according to the results of the PISA test (Sjøberg, 2015). Seeing PISA as an instrument of neoliberalism global hegemony, Mappaiasse places these reforms as a form of neoliberal education reform in Indonesia (Mappiasse, 2014; El Bouhali, 2015). In neoliberalism, students are seen as a maximizer, a product, a worker; parents as consumers; teachers as producers; a school as a shop and a firm (Carl, 1994). In Indonesian context, neoliberal education policies have been proven to undermine the well-being of students in order to boost competitiveness and productivity (Mulya *et al.*, 2021). In the context of SLM, the Indonesian government takes the PISA results for granted as an indicator that Indonesian students are still lazy to read. According to Araujo, Saltelli and Schnepf (2017),

PISA results alone do not justify a PISA-based education policy, further social research is needed to corroborate it. However, the Indonesian government did not conduct such research to uncover the causes of the low interest in reading among Indonesian students. In fact, data on the literacy rate in Indonesia strongly indicate the link between social conditions and low interest in reading, where the three provinces with the lowest literacy rates are in Eastern Indonesia, the parts of the country that have long been victims of the New Order' centralized developmentalism (Dinisar, M, 2020).

Instead of placing the problem of low interest in reading in the relevant socio-economic context, the Indonesian government uses an essentialist perspective which sees this problem as a result of the character deficiencies of the students. This is reflected in the "character revolution" rhetoric used in the Grand Design. The idea that the mentality of a nation must be "revolutionized" in order to be on par with a more advanced Western society is an idea that has been put forward by post-independence leaders in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, this view was first conveyed by the First President, Soekarno, who coined the term "mental revolution". Mahatir Muhammad of Malaysia later used the term in his book entitled The Malay Dillema (1970). According to the prominent Malaysian sociologist, Syed Hussein Alatas, this view is a remnant of the "lazy native" discourse that was once used to justify colonialism in Southeast Asia (Alatas, 1991). Alatas points out that with this idea, instead of considering the material conditions of the people, these leaders attribute their backwardness to their innate traits. Therefore, instead of addressing the real problem, they launched programs to fix the "mentality" of their people.

In the context of SLM, Indonesia's backwardness is considered as a result of children's laziness to read. Therefore, this program is specifically designed to foster an interest in reading, starting with requiring every student to read 15

minutes every day at school. This assumption of laziness in reading was criticized by Nirwan Ahmad Arsuka, a literacy activist who run his own literacy project in Indonesian rural areas. According to Arsuka, children's interest in reading is quite high, as long as the appropriate books and treatments are given (Damarjati, 2019). Furthermore, Asniar and Silondae (2020)'s study reveals that some Indonesian students may lack interest in reading because of the psychological burden due to socio-economic problems they face on a daily basis.

SLM, which is designed as a supplementary program in schools, actually has the potential to really have a positive effect on students' lives and improve their wellbeing. Unfortunately, several studies evaluating the implementation of SLM show that school stakeholders only focus on implementing each of the activities listed in the SLM guidebook (Istiqomah, H. N., Susilana, R., & Johan, 2017; Maryani and Maryam, 2017; Iwayantari, 2019). In other words, they assess the success of SLM from the implementation of these activities without any creative efforts to contextualize the literacy program according to the needs and interests of their students. Therefore, they assume that they have successfully run a literacy program when what they consider "literacy activities" have been carried out. Whether students' involvement in those activities has been meaningful is not their main concern. In contrast to this approach, in the Freirean literacy framework, literacy activities should be made meaningful to those who participate. If the participants are children, then in a critical literacy program, every effort must be made to preserve, nurture, and revitalize one of the best potentials of childhood, namely the ability to dream, to hope for possibilities.

In his "philosophical biography" of Freire, Kohan describes Freire's way of being as a childlike way of being. The way of being that allows him to be

fearless in his dreams, to want to grow, create, and transform the world (Maisuria *et al.*, 2021). A literacy program from a Freirean perspective, therefore, should first of all serve to foster hope for a better day. As Freire asserts, one of the fundamental knowledges of educators is that changing is difficult, but it is possible (Freire, 2015). These hopes will have a positive impact on their wellbeing which in turn makes them more enthusiastic to engage in the program as part of their journey to read the world and discover possible alternatives of their current condition**.** Thus, there is no need for behavioristic habituation activities such as compulsory reading for 15 minutes every day. However more than just a 'trick' to get students to actively participate in literacy activities, as Mayo points out in his review of Kohan's work, nurturing children in Freirean education is nurturing the inquisitive nature that makes them dare to challenge the social system in which they find themselves; the social system which has been presented as a given in the anti-utopian narrative of 'Capitalist realism'(Mayo, 2021).

The tendency to overlook student agency and interests is also evident in an Implementation Report published by the Policy Research Center of the Ministry of and Culture. This report is based on a survey of schools in five provinces in Indonesia conducted in 2020. One of the main findings of this report is that many schools are struggling to implement the habituation stage (Hasanah and Silitonga, 2020). The report states that based on the results of their survey, students still find it difficult to learn independently and have a low interest in reading. In that report, there is no indication that the research team had a dialog with the students. Although during the survey they had the opportunity to interact directly with the students, they chose to rely on the questionnaire. They did not engage in genuine conversation with the students to explore the causes of their supposedly low interest in reading.

Thus, one of the most striking features of the SLM policy is the absence of a genuine interest in knowing students' perspectives. Besides betraying the principle of student-centered learning, this fact can also be interpreted as a form of silencing in the Freirean perspective. As Freire warned us, in an opressed-opressor contradiction, it is not only the oppressed who are dehumanized but also the oppressors (Freire, 2005). In particular, the culture of silence will reinforce the sense of hopelessness and despair. In the context of SLM, the Policy Research Center Report states that teachers and principals who are considered unsuccessful in increasing students' interest in reading feel confused about implementing SLM policies (Hasanah and Silitonga, 2020). Freire also emphasized that a culture of silence can lead to the intensification of oppression on the part of the oppressor. In this case, the Policy Research Center Report recommends that schools be more disciplined in the way they implement the SLM policy. It recommends that principals, teachers, and parents be more responsible for ensuring that students are participating in the SLM "literacy activities" (Hasanah and Silitonga, 2020). The report was only interested in students who were considered successful in participating in the literacy movement and could be role models for other students. These are students who have won various "literacy competitions" such as writing competitions (Hasanah and Silitonga, 2020). The condition of students in the SLM ecosystem, from planning, implementation, and evaluation confirms what Ira Shor suggests, that the opportunity for dialogue is a priviledge in itself (Shor and Freire, 1987).

The tendency to ignore students' voices in educational policy, according to Giroux, is a symptom of schools turning into dead zones under the neoliberal onslaught (Giroux, 2016). Neoliberal interventions in education devalue students' aspirations as corrective and evaluative feedback. Instead of engaging in dialogue with students to uncover the difficulties and problems they face,

neoliberal actors choose to develop various technologies that can 'measure' student engagement (Anderson, 2018). One striking example in this case is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's support for educational technology researchers to experiment on students with biometric wristbands or facial recognition algorithms to measure their tentativeness and monitor their movements in the classroom (Giroux, 2016; Anderson, 2018). Ford (2021) points out that these technologies operate with a business sense where censor is used to measure customer response to advertisements or products and to calculate workers' productivity in order to reinforce domination over them. As a result, students are deprived of the core of their humanity in the Freirean perspective, which is the potential to express their condition. This culture of silence is the fundamental part of the oppression Freire was seeking to resist (Vittoria, 2014).

Unfortunately, this culture of silence is reinforced by research conducted by a number of scholars on the implementation of the SLM. Since the movement was launched, many studies have been conducted on the implementation of SLM and its effects on students' interest in reading. Many of these studies attribute the failure of the implementation of the school literacy movement to students who are easily bored and unfocused, and have no interest in reading (Maryani and Maryam, 2017; Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan Pendidikan, 2018; Sutriyanti, N. K., & Dharmawan, 2021). The researchers did not explore the causes of the students' presumed boredom and laziness. The researchers conducted interviews with teachers or principals, but rarely with students. Students were only asked to fill in a "reading interest" questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire were then presented in quantitative data to demonstrate the increase or decrease in students' interest in reading after and before the SLM implementation.

The lack of initiative from schools to contextualize reading habituation activities with more attention to students' interests might have been the result of the evaluation system of the SLM. The Grand Design of SLM requires the provincial government and every school to evaluate the implementation of SLM in their respective schools. However, the indicators of the success of the literacy movement in the evaluation guidelines do not pay attention to the effects of the literacy movement on students' wellbeing and personal development (Wiedarti, Laksono and Pratiwi, 2016). Consider for example, the monitoring and evaluation sheet of SLM in primary school lists several indicators that schools need to do to be considered successful in conducting SLM. The indicators include "the books read in the 15-minute reading program are not textbooks" or "the school establishes a School Literacy Team" and "the school has a school library in accordance with national education standards with a multimodal collection" (Setiawan *et al.*, 2019). Of all these indicators the only item that shows attention to students' needs is the indicator that states, "I (the teacher) help students to understand the reading through various literacy strategies" (Setiawan *et al.*, 2019). However, this indicator clearly only focusses on the cognitive needs of the students. In other words, the main concern of the school literacy team is to ensure that students understand the content of their mandatory reading materials.

Freire has shown that the shortcomings of many educational practices lie in the problematic concept of evaluation. He distinguishes true evaluation from mere inspection. In the latter, educators are positioned as objects of scrutiny by the central organization. In contrast, in evaluation, all those involved are a subject along with the central organization in the act of criticism Freire, 1985). In this process, all parties involved, including the central organization, establish a distance from the educational project. Therefore, all parties involved jointly evaluate the experience, its progress and the obstacles encountered. Thus,

evaluation has a dialectical character; rather than being a fiscal tool, evaluation is the presentation of action as problem posing (Paulo Freire, 1985). Looking from this perspective, SLM evaluation still seems to have an inspection characteristic. This can be seen, for example, in the evaluation report published by the ministry which instead of evaluating the policy, the report blame either the school principals and teachers' lack of understanding of the SLM policy or the students' lack of initiative to follow what they call SLM's self-directed learning approach (Hasanah and Silitonga, 2020).

We would argue that SLM needs to follow the Freirean approach of cultivating students' interest in reading. From a Freirean perspective, a literacy program should start by giving participants a sense of project. The sense of project would foster their enthusiasm to participate in the literacy program as a mean to transform their situation. Thus, interest in reading is the result of students' own consciousness (del Pilar O'Cadiz and Torres, 1994; Kirkendall, 2004). Guided by this consciousness, students can find relevant texts and then in turn produce their own texts as part of the transformation process. The SLM program is actually designed so that after getting into the habit of reading 15 minutes a day, students can start writing their own journals (Tim GLN, 2020). However, the neoliberal motive of this program does not provide opportunities for students and teachers as facilitators to critically read and write about their world. Despite progressive slogans in SLM guidebooks such as a description of student agency in determining the course of literacy activities, SLM has been implemented with a behavioristic approach. The program is not designed to give students the opportunity to critically discover their reasons for reading. All SLM guidelines mention Indonesia's low literacy position in international surveys and the government's developmental ambitions. These reasons are considered sufficient to encourage students to start reading diligently. This program is not designed to develop the more personal and critical motives of students. The SLM guidebook

even states that in the early stages, students are at the level of "don't know that they don't know". In this stage, according to the guideline, students can act as "mr. know it all" and interrupt the class (Tim GLN, 2020).

Furthermore, the facilitators are not directed to facilitate students to understand their socio-historical condition through reading and writing. Instead, their function is simply to make sure students sit reading for 15 minutes and produce a multimodal text. The SLM manual places great emphasis on the form of text that students must produce, namely multimodal text, but does not speak at all about the function of the text as a medium for students' self-actualization. Again, this is still consistent with SLM's neoliberal motives. In the SLM guidebook it is stated that multimodal texts must be mastered because they are essential skills in the 21st century (Tim GLN, 2020). Several scholars have identified the discourse of 21st century skills in global education policy as neoliberal and corporate narrative that might diminish a humanized educational practice (Mehta, Creely and Henriksen, 2020). Thus, far from the goal of humanization, reading and writing activities of SLM place the students as instruments in increasing state global competitiveness.

SLM justifies the economic motives behind this program with the argument that improving their literacy skills is the only way for Indonesian students to able to compete globally (Tim GLN, 2017a) Indonesian students are still considered marginalized because they do not master the skills needed for global competition in the 21st century. According to Freire, this perspective of instrumental and pragmatic literacy is based on a false view of illiterates as marginal people. The government's conclusion that Indonesian students are lagging behind and must master 21st century skills is a consequence of this view. As Freire explains,

> Those who consider them marginal must, nevertheless, recognize the existence of a reality to which they are marginal—not only physical space, but historical, social, cultural, and economic realities—i.e., the structural dimension of reality. In this way, illiterates have to be recognized as beings "outside of," "marginal to" something, since it is impossible to be marginal to nothing (Freire, 1970).

In other words, the policy makers behind the SLM believe that Indonesia is still outside of the global education system and marginal from the center of global economic and industrial competition. Therefore, Indonesian students must improve their literacy skills to move to the center. As a consequence, students are considered to know nothing about the center from which they are marginalized, because they are indeed outside of it. This then justifies the literacy model shaped by what Freire calls the nutritionist view of knowledge. In this model, students are seen as hungry for words and teachers are benevolent mentors who feed them. In addition, these teachers also play a role in guiding these students so that they can be incorporated into the system from which they have been marginalized. The main aim of this literacy program is, of course, not a critical consciousness about the structure of power relations that shape the socio-economic conditions of students. Instead, students are expected to be encouraged to participate blindly in the structure. In Freire's view, such literacy practices will only perpetuate students' dependence on structures that have been oppressing them. These students will be increasingly alienated, because they will not overcome their dependency by "incorporation" into the very structure responsible for their dependency" (Freire, 1970).

In this regard, SLM belongs to what Macedo calls the utilitarian approach to literacy. The utilitarian approach's main purpose is to generate readers who meet the basic reading requirements of contemporary society. Macedo points out that despite its progressive promise, the utilitarian approach prioritizes mechanical

reading abilities while ignoring critical analysis of the social and political system that creates the necessity for reading in the first place (Freire and Macedo, 2005). As an illustration, in the SLM program guidebook, global and regional economic cooperation projects such as the ASEAN Economic Community are often mentioned as something that should encourage Indonesian students to improve their skills and competencies by participating in the literacy movement. Indeed, SLM's concept of literacy emphasizes the importance of the ability to acquire and use information to improve competitiveness (Tim GLN, 2017a). Literacy is thus promoted as a necessity for survival in an increasingly competitive world. However, they are not encouraged to question the socio-political structures that force them to survive. Giroux (2001) characterizes this conception of literacy as functional literacy which reduces literacy movements to mere training to be suited to the pragmatic requirements of capital. At the same time, this kind of literacy program instills optimism in students, that by becoming "literate" they can actively participate to improve their conditions in the existing neoliberal system. This type of optimism, which Lauren Berlant (2011) calls cruel optimism, is instilled by neoliberal apparatuses to direct individual hopes towards economic goals that benefit the system, instead of being the goal of collective political transformation (Tiainen, Leiviskä and Brunila, 2019).

Conclusion

The Indonesian government has stated that the School Literacy Movement is a sustainable policy. This means that cabinet and regime change will not affect this program, and it is obligatory for them to carry out this program (Tim GLN, 2017b). The launching of the SLM campaign was motivated by a desire to improve the quality of Indonesian human resources, especially their literacy skill. However, after being carried out for three years, Indonesia's PISA score actually showed a decline. Nevertheless, we argue that the stakeholders behind

the SLM program should not be discouraged by the PISA result. On contrary, this is a good opportunity to redirect the orientation of the literacy campaign. We argue that adopting Freire's critical literacy concept is the way forward.

The lowest level of literacy in Indonesia is in the eastern region of the country makes it even more appropriate to adopt there a critical literacy paradigm. This part of Indonesia has been the victim of economic inequality and human rights violations for decades. For students in these areas, a genuine
and dignified dialogue process is a much-needed endeavor. They should not be seen as the cause of Indonesia's low literacy score in international surveys, and therefore we must send them lot of books. Even though these books do not necessarily fit their context. It could be that the texts have alienated them. In the face of this situation, according to Freire, literacy program facilitators need to be aware that illiteracy or low score of literacy might be a manifestation of the culture of silence (Freire, 1970). Literacy programs that fail are literacy programs that only teach ~~people~~ students how to read and write but fail to make them "read" the "culture of silence" and fail to lead them to "write" their voices. A literacy program shaped by neoliberal interest will not achieve that goal.

Notes

[1] Tim Gerakan Literasi Nasional (Tim GLN) literally means Team of National Literacy Movement, this team consists of ministry officials and experts appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to prepare various guidelines and official documents related to the National Literacy Movement and the School Literacy Movement.

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