EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON CHARACTER EDUCATION IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRAK

Salah satu aspek terpenting dalam pendidikan karakter adalah mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap pendidikan karakter. Karena siswa adalah target dari proses belajar mengajar, termasuk dalam pembelajaran mata pelajaran bahasa Inggris, maka meneliti persepsi mereka terhadap pendidikan karakter dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris menjadi menarik. Studi penelitian ini melaporkan sebuah studi wawancara kualitatif yang mengeksplorasi bagaimana siswa mendefinisikan, menginterpretasikan, dan merefleksikan nilai-nilai karakter dalam kehidupan akademis dan sosial mereka. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah siswa dari sekolah menengah atas, madrasah aliyah, dan sekolah menengah kejuruan yang memiliki pandangan dunia dan perspektif yang berbeda. Instrumen untuk penelitian ini diadopsi dari Suzanne S. Hudd (2010) mengenai persepsi terhadap pendidikan karakter. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat berbagai sudut pandang tentang pendidikan karakter sesuai dengan pengalaman dan latar belakang sekolah partisipan. Selain itu, para partisipan menganggap bahwa nilai-nilai pendidikan karakter yang tertanam dalam pelajaran bahasa Inggris memiliki dampak positif.

Kata kunci : Pendidikan Karakter, kelas Bahasa Inggris, persepsi siswa

ABSTRACT

One of the most important areas of character education is exploring students' perceptions on it. Since students are the target of teaching and learning process, including in learning English subject, examined their perceptions on character education in English language teaching is interesting. This research study reported on a qualitative interview study that exploring how students define, interpret, and reflect the character values in their academic and social live. The participants were students from senior high school, Islamic senior high school, and vocational high school which hold different worldviews and informative perspectives. The instrument for this study was adopted from Suzanne S. Hudd (2010) about perception on character education. The findings show there are the various point of views of character education according to participants' experience and school background. Additionally, the participants presume character education values which embedded in English lesson have a positive impact.

Keywords: Character education, English classrooms, students' perception

INTRODUCTION

The term character education has been receiving significant attention in recent times. This reform was implemented in response to societal concerns regarding internal conflicts, such as student bullying, physical fights among students, drug abuse, sexual harassment, and dishonest behavior aimed at hiding mistakes. Despite the presence of well-designed educational programs in schools, such occurrences persist in society. Therefore, character development has become increasingly necessary in education to address these issues.

These days one of the primary goals in life is to strengthen personal and social morality. Moral education is a crucial component of education that focuses on this objective. Berkowitz & Hoppe, (2014) noted character education embraces purposeful initiatives aimed at fostering the moral and ethical growth of students in educational settings and other organizations that concentrate to youths. Additionally, (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004) pointed out that an effective character education

program must be suitable to the social and personal requirements of the children it aims to assist. Students will develop into ethical human beings when they receive assistance from various aspects of their surroundings or institution, including religious facilities, ideal educational settings, supportive families, and accountable authorities.

According to Lickona (1991), character is defined as understanding what is morally right, having an intense passion for what is ethically right, and taking actions that align with what is morally right. Character should serve as the fundamental basis of every individual's existence. In addition to incorporating specific values into schools' vision, mission, and activities, teachers were obligated to include a specific set of values in their teaching curriculum and courses. The 18 values presented by the Ministry of Education and Culture were taken from Pancasila (Five Principles), Indonesian culture, religions, and the purposes of Indonesian education (Panduan Pendidikan Karakter, 2011). The values given include "religiosity", "honesty", "tolerance", "discipline", "hard working", "creative", "independence", "democratic", "curiosity", "patriotism", "nationalism", "appreciative", "being friendly", "peace maker", "love to read", "environment awareness", "social awareness" and "responsibility". Through "religiosity", the character education policy attempted to encourage and value students' obedience to religious principles and piety according to one's religion and God. Schools and teachers were given the authority to determine the order of importance among the specified values, and also had the authority to include other values as considered suitable.

Incorporating character education into language acquisition is crucial for fostering social balance, accountability, and emotional well-being in students. One of the objectives of character education is to cultivate students' sense of responsibility and compassion towards civilization. In addition, one important characteristic of effective language acquisition is the ability of students to embrace responsibility for their own language acquisition process. Adams (2011) noted that character education can begin at any grade level. As part of the character education reform, the educational authority mandated that teachers apply this curricular approach in all classes, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. In this circumstance, students are anticipated to not only grasp the subject matter, but

also figure out the moral principles embedded in English lessons and apply them in their daily lives. Although several studies on character education, there is a lack of study on students' perspectives on character education, particularly in the context of English language teaching. Hence, this research project intends to investigate how students perceive and apply the moral principles of character education in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

Character education is interpreted by experts in a variety of perspectives, such as the psychological dimension of character education is derived from the phases of character formation (Lickona, 1991), moral judgement (Piaget, 1971), and pedagogical approaches (Berkowitz, 2011). Martens (2012) emphasized that in character education, there are three vital components that need to be achieved: the identification of values, the acquisition of values through learning, and the provision of an opportunity to apply those values. Moral reasoning, moral feeling, and moral behavior are all aspects of psychological character education (Lickona, 1991), or in the sense of morality, which encompasses both prohibition-oriented and pro-social morality as moral judgement and moral behavior (Piaget, 2001). Pedagogically, character education should be developed by applying a holistic approach, with the understanding that "Effective character education is not adding a program or set of programs. Rather it is a transformation of the culture and life of the school (Berkowitz, 2011). Meanwhile, according to Lickona (2012) character education is an undertaking made with sincerity, care and action based on essential ethical values.

How Language Related to Character Education

Character education programs that emphasize values like respect, fairness, honesty, and fairness help students achieve their full potential by implementing security, comfortable, and predictable learning settings (Jeynes, 2019). Additionally, educational theory and empirical evidence (e.g. Brown 2019; Drake 2012; Sokatch, 2017) suggest that academic standards implementation is successful when it is supported with planned and continuous school-wide efforts in all subject areas to focus on character development.

An essential framework that necessitates the deliberate instruction of character traits, along with the attributes and attitudes necessary for

cultivating academic resilience, would be highly advantageous for young adolescents (Aningsih et al., 2022). In order to effectively cope with these more demanding expectations and to successfully complete high school with the qualities necessary for success in higher education, job, and the community, adolescents will require endurance in cultivating their moral development (Brown et al., 2019). Character education has emerged as a significant component of school in Indonesia since the early years of the implementation of Curriculum 2013, including English subject. Character development was a means of creating safe schools, reducing student violence, and improving social environment, likewise facilitating the growth of students' qualities and social skills necessary for personal success in school, such as good attitudes and academic achievement, as well as for the broader societal objective of a productive workforce (Lavy, 2020).

Character qualities might improve proficiency in academic disciplines, such as Language. This demand could be reached for example by reading literature with characters which exhibit value such as patience that strengthen character (Almerico, 2014). In United Stated, the Department of Education Office of Communication and Outreach (2005) recommends including character-themed literature into student reading practices, promoting independent reading among older students, and facilitating peer discussions to enhance students' understanding and cultivation of strong moral principles. When teaching in Indonesia according to the Curriculum 2013, it is necessary to integrate character education into the learning process. This is undertaken to achieve a balance between students' cognitive and psychomotor skills (hard skills) and their affective skills (soft skills).

Teachers are required to determine values that align with their lesson plans and the fundamental and essential skills they teach. The integration of character aspects inside the English subject matter is expected to improve the growth and advancement of both students and the whole country. A lesson plan is an essential element that functions as a guide, tool, and archival record that mirrors the pedagogical approach, student demographics, instructional materials, and mostly the learning goals of the students (Ratih, 2017). Character values can be included into the teaching and learning process by adding or changing learning activities, indicators, as assessment techniques (Kemendiknas, 2010). To do so, teacher can integrate character education in the teaching and learning process with the following ways:

a. Inserting the character values through lesson plan

Teacher might develop a lesson plan that incorporates the values of religiousness, confidence, responsibility, creativity, logical thinking, politeness, carefulness, communicativeness, curiosity, honesty, hard work, and discipline. Then, the teacher has the ability to incorporate character values such as love, peace, tolerance, politeness, confidence, honesty, discipline, responsibility, and communicativeness into the indicator. Within the learning materials, such as those focused on oral and written communication for giving and responding to directions and invitations, the teacher may incorporate character values such as social concern, communicativeness/friendliness, honesty, and respect.

b. Inserting the character values during teaching and learning process

During teaching and learning process, there are three activities can be done by the teacher, involving pre–activity, while–activity, and post–activities which can be implemented through giving a polite instruction to students. As stated by Kemdikbud (2019), the teacher must instill in the students an awareness of their ongoing development of a strong moral character. One successful way of instilling in children an awareness of their ongoing character development is through the explicit instruction of character values utilizing direct statements.

c. Providing character value throughout evaluation

The teacher can accomplish this by creating a scoring rubric that evaluates the cognitive aspects and the students' character aspects. According to Lickona (2019), he points out that schools aim to shape students' character through a complete approach in the classroom. Among comprehensive approach, there were nine things that the teacher has done, namely act as tutor the role model and tutor, create moral community, practice moral discipline, create democratic class environment, teach values through

curriculum, use cooperative learning, build "conscience in working", encourage moral reflection, and teach conflict resolution.

How teachers and students undertake Character Education.

To address the need for greater inquiry into the relationship between characters and academic issues Davidson (2020) and Lickona (2019) Outlined are four crucial functions that character plays in academic life. The roles are as follows: (1) Students require performance character traits such as work ethic, self-discipline, perseverance, initiative, and teamwork to strive academically; (2) Students cultivate their performance character by engaging in their schoolwork, which helps them develop the ability to work hard, overcome obstacles, and find satisfaction in a job well done; (3) Students need moral character traits such as respect, fairness, kindness, and honesty to foster positive classroom relationships that contribute to a conducive learning environment; and (4) Students develop moral character through their schoolwork, for example, by assisting their peers in achieving their best work through a "culture of critique" that provides constructive feedback, by studying ethical issues in the curriculum, and by applying their academic learning to helping others.

Considering these four aspects of character in academic life increases our understanding of the importance of possessing character in all teaching and learning endeavors. EFL teachers must prioritize ensuring the growth of students with strong moral principles while engaging them to demonstrate ethical behavior in their coursework and attempt for excellence in their academic pursuits.

METHOD

This research study examines the implementation of character education in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The aim is to nourish students' understanding, emotional connection, and behavior about moral goodness both within and beyond the classroom. The researcher elucidated the students' perception of character education in English lessons with a specific objective. Thus, this research study utilized a qualitative interview study. The focus of this research study is on a qualitative interview study that was conducted using the phenomenological framework. The goal of phenomenological research is to describe

"common meaning of numerous individuals' lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon" (Cohen et al., 2018). A depth interview with a group of people who have experienced the event are commonly used in phenomenological studies to acquire the data (Cohen et al., 2018).

Each student who took part in this study conducted a separate interview lasting roughly 40 minutes. The students were from senior high school, vocational high school, and Islamic senior high school. Two of the students were in the eleventh grade, while one was in the tenth grade. All of the participants were female. Each interview was conducted through online meetings utilizing Google Meet. Every outcome of the interview was documented and transcribed. The pupils who were questioned in this study have undergone formal character education through Curriculum 2013, which is integrated into every subject in school, including English lessons. Table 1 contains all entire details regarding the research participants.

Table 1. The details of the research participants

Participant	School	Grader
Student 1	Senior high school	Eleven
Student 2	Vocational high school	Eleven
Student 3	Islamic senior high school	Ten

The interviews followed a semi-structured setting, with open-ended questions that prompted participants to contemplate the significance they believed in the concepts of character and their personal experiences related to it (Seidman, 2006). In a concise introduction, the students were informed that one objective of the interview process was to get insight into their distinct perspectives on character. The students were encouraged to openly express the interpretations they attributed to the term "character". Furthermore, the researcher adopted interview questions from Hudd (2010) regarding the topic of character education. At the end of the research process, the data gathered were further analyzed using thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Character: Definitions and experiences of the students

The initial participants tended to provide their own interpretation of character in their own words. For instance, the prior knowledge and conceptual understanding that learners possess on the importance of character value.

Interviewer: "… what do you think about character education?"

Student 1: "Character education is a lesson which caring every student's characteristic (cultivating caring value)".

Student 2: "Character education is the value that builds our personality. Further, as the name implies, character education forms my character".

Student 3: "Character education builds students' character to be better".

Participants agreed that character education is very beneficial for them. Participants from different worldviews stated that they have opportunities to engage with various forms in character education definitions, providing opportunities to develop their virtue perception

Interviewer: "…could you give me an example of 'good' character and 'bad' character?"

Student 1: "I think one of the examples of good character is when there was an election for class leader, my elected friend really carried out his duties as class leader, coordinated his friends, which is this is reflect his responsible. Then, the example of bad character is truancy. Another example during an online class, I found a friend of mine who was sleeping during class. So, my teacher obliged the class to on the camera during class to control what activities the students were doing.

Student 2: "A good example that I see reflected in my environment is the polite attitude that we have towards teachers (respect). The example of bad character is sometimes there are friends who don't pay attention when the teacher explains the lesson and one another rarely collect assignments".

Student 3: "I have no example for a good character in this time. But, when I was in Tsanawiyah (junior high school), my friends made a group to share answer keys for the exam. But there is one friend of mine who is not affected, he was keep honest and determined not to cheat. For a bad character, I have a friend who getting grumpy easily, even though he asked for help but is angry with anger. And I also have

friends who make joke too much which is disrespectful for me".

Participants reported that character education contribute to their school and social live. This is proven by their standpoints from the examples of the 'good' and 'bad' character. Further, one of the participants can reflect the character value to her daily life experience.

Character: The relevance of character education in English subject student's academic and social live

The second category of respondents tended to offer their opinions of character on their academic and social live. For example, the relationship of character education for students lives.

Interviewer:"…what the relevance of character education that embedded in English lesson for you"

Student 1: "The relevance that I felt after knowing and applying character education value is I became a more honest and more independent as a human being (honest and independent). At first, I felt forced, but because I got used to it, I got used to it. Before pandemic, every Monday when flag ceremony there is three students who become master of ceremony at the same time. First student delivers the agenda by Bahasa Indonesia, second student using English, and the last student using Arabic. I think this policy is very good to improve not only student's confidence but also the speaking skill.

Student 2: "The value that I feel most embedded in English is the value of honesty. I always do assignments by myself. The benefit that I feel the most is the value of discipline and being aware of my responsibilities as a student for example when submitting assignments on time. The thing that is most emphasized in my school is attitude which also makes me respect each other anytime and anywhere. Another thing I feel is hard work, especially when I am given group assignments. There is a spirit that comes from within to do it as best as I can in my group. By mastering English lesson in speaking, I also feel more confidence to deliver my speech

in front of the school during the flag ceremony every Monday (when my turn comes).

Student 3: "I become more responsible with the assignments. In addition, through English lessons, I know more about the cultures that exist in Indonesia which increase my love to the homeland.

From the responses of participant, they felt English lesson is one of the effective ways to instill character education. Moreover, they felt they are not just taking a language course, but also learn soft skills. Further character education can shape themselves to be more honest, independent, and responsible as a human being.

Interviewer:"… do you think by learning character education in English subject build you to be morally good?

Student 1: "Yes, I become morally good. Not only knowing and understanding what character education is, but I can also apply it in my daily life".

Student 2: "I am increasingly my skill to manage the time which is makes myself discipline and my life more meaningful".

Student 3: "To be honest, yes. Day by day I became better than myself before".

Participants reported by understanding character value, they learn how to be morally good. After that, when they are absorbing the character value, it is will reflected automatically in their daily life

How English lesson related to character education

The last category of respondents tended to offer students' thought about relation of English lesson to Character Education. For example, the value that students get during learning English.

Student 1: "My teacher never taught character education values explicitly. Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, my teacher only gave assignments and very rarely gave explanations related to learning materials. My teacher often says "I know which students do it by themselves and which students

work together on tests" these words encourage me to be honest with myself even though I am not supervised.

Student 2: "I know character education from English subjects vaguely (implicitly). Usually, my English teacher gives me the task for finding and reading texts about heroism or folklore from Indonesia, which I think includes the value of love homeland and increases my nationalism. My teacher also often tells me to do assignments by myself, which is to instill the honest value in me.

Student 3: "I think there is character value in the lesson, but I didn't realize that character education values had been inserted in English. My teacher once asked me to look for texts about legends in Indonesia, which further fostered a sense of love for my homeland".

From the interview, the participant agreed that inserting character value through English lesson is very beneficial because the character values contained in English subject is relevance in their daily life. However, one of participant didn't realize that she is learning character education in English lesson.

Interviewer:"… Do you see English brings a positive impact or a negative impact to your surrounding or to yourself?

Student 1: "It depends on the learners. If they are learning English to wild their friendship and to gain the knowledge, it can be very positive. Then, if they are learning English to show their strength or in other words "arrogant" it can be negative impact. English brings a positive impact because by learning and using English we can be connected to people around the world. And it made me more confidence.

Student 2: "In my opinion, English brings a positive and negative impact. The positive impact is I can take a lesson from Western culture that say "Time is money" which make more appreciate time and make me discipline.

However, sometimes my environment, usually my friends consider me "showing off my English skill" if I speak English with them. Even though my intension is to improve my speaking but then I become bullied. That's make me down.

Student 3: *"The impact that is felt is also positive. For example, when my teacher gave me the task of looking for folk stories from Indonesia and then asked to find the moral values in the text. By learning English, I can meet new people around the world.*

Regarding to the interview, the participants noted that character education brings a positive impact to their live, relationship with friend, and their environment. Also, by learning character education in English lesson, they are not only gaining the knowledge about language, but also expanding their friendship because they are able to speak English and have good moral.

There are some research that have been done in the area of perspective on character education, for example Hudd (2010) reports on the ways in which a group of middle school students who received character education in elementary school define and experience character. The result demonstrates that the elementary school character lessons are carried forward. Students are able to recall the formal meaning of many of the character traits that they studied. As they graduate to middle school, however, peer culture assumes an increasingly important role and their lived experience of character become more complex. Thus, the preteens studied here are actively working to reconcile the differences between character as a "learned" and then a "live" experience.

The other studies by Obaje (2016) examine students' perception of character education and social values for greater productivity in social studies education. The findings show that a significant relationship exists between character education and the promotion of greater productivity in social studies education, a significant relationship exist between receiving character education in rural and urban schools and a significant relationship exists between character education and social values in social studies.

While Metcalfe & Moulin-Stożek (2021) describe the information about the extent Religious Education (RE) contributes to character education. The present study focuses on teachers' perspectives on virtue literacy, a theme identified across participants in response to open–ended prompt about RE, religion, and character. The participants in the sample hold different world–views and work across a range of school, providing a variety of informative perspectives.

In Indonesia, Fahmy et al. (2015) develop of 21–item instrument which represented six distinct factors or dimensions to measure the perception of students toward their personal character building. As a result, this instrument could be used by Indonesian Minister Secondary, Elementary Education and Culture, especially for secondary schools to assess their character education program to their student personal character building.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined the partial results of three interviews undertaken with participants across senior high school in Banjarmasin. All the participants in the interview responded positively whether they perspective to character education contribution to their academic or social live. Character education and social values implementation would maintain a conscious and transparent commitment to students' character formation, thus character implications are necessary to the essentials. Self-integrity will be determined by whether or not one is self-consistent to conduct or possesses a moral identity to the extent that character traits such as goodness, justice, and compassion are considered or just, is deemed crucial, necessary, and important to self-understanding. Based on this research finding, further research related to the impact of character education on the process of English teaching and learning is necessary. Hence, the description of the crucial role of character education in English language teaching will be clearer and more observable.

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