The Implementation of Character Education in Teaching English for Young Learners (A Literature Review)

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ABSTRACT

Character education is one of the aspects of the Indonesian educational system, which is essential for the students before they face real-world society. The strengthening of Character education has been designed in the 2013 Curriculum as one of the Indonesian government's efforts to create good quality human resources. This effort can be implemented in every subject, including English as the students' foreign language. Children as young learners are an excellent start to be empowered not only through the knowledge of the language itself but also through inserting character values in the process of language learning. This study aims at sharing some theoretical concepts of implementing character education for young learners in the EFL class. By then, the teachers are expected to help young learners in building their positive characters.

Keywords: *Character Education, English Language Teaching, Young Learners*

INTRODUCTION

The essence of education emphasizes the effort to humanize humans to become human. It means that character building in education plays a significant role to create a student with a good attitude. This is in line with the Mandate of the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, as stated below.

> "*National education serves to develop the ability and character development and civilization of the nation's dignity in the context of educating the nation aimed at developing students' potentials to become a man of faith and fear of God Almighty, noble, capable, creative, independent, and become citizens democratic and accountable*" (Depdiknas, 2003)

This mandate emphasizes the importance of national character values in the Indonesian educational system. Character education is an effort to create an environment in which the students can develop ethics, responsibility through models, and character education learning through universal values (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Character education is a fundamental process for students in developing and enhancing attitudes, morals, and accepted actions in society (Indartono, 2011). Government policies through the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic Indonesia about character education set the 2013 Curriculum to become a reference for the implementation of character education in the Indonesian educational system (Indriani, 2017).

Character education does not include as the main subject in schools. However, students learn character education through how they act in school based on school rules and how they interact with other people, such as their friends, their teachers, even their parents. Teachers do not teach character education as to how they teach math or other subjects; it is more like practice (Pala, 2011). However, according to Haryati (2017), character education can be integrated into the teaching and learning process in every subject. Further, she also states that learning materials related to norms or values in each subject need to be developed, explicated, and linked to the context of everyday life. From this statement, English, as one of the compulsory subjects in the Indonesian educational system, can also be a platform to implement character education in a classroom for EFL learners.

English is being taught as formal ELT education since the early nineties, and it was started from the fourth grade of elementary school (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Nowadays, English is still being taught for elementary school students. Therefore, many elementary schools in Indonesia teach English for the students as the local content subject (Istiqomah, 2016). However, English is still considered as an essential subject to be taught for elementary school students, and it is one of the subjects in the national exam.

Since English is being taught from elementary school, therefore the term of teaching English for young learners (TEYL) is widely used in ELT context because elementary school students are categorized as young learners. Nowadays, teaching English for young learners is considered only to help the students to know about the language and to develop their academic skills. This statement is in line with the study of Nasuha (2017) in which she states that nowadays, the teachers' role in language teaching is only teaching, they are not educating. It means that the teachers only emphasize on teaching materials and character building might be one thing that tends to be absent in language teaching, especially for young learners. Character education is important to avoid negative behavior. Hidayati et al. (as cited in Artini et al., 2020) state that cheating in examination, bullying, fighting with other, consuming prohibited things are the examples of negative behaviors that usually happen among the students because character education might be not implemented well.

Putri et al. (2017) state the inculcation of character building is considered to be the most effective in early ages and children because it is believed that whatever the children are in the future has a significant link with the characters embedded in them. Therefore, the inserting of character education in the English language learning and teaching for young learners can be the best way to avoid negative behaviors for learners of the early ages. Due to this reason, it is essential to develop good characters through practical ways in English teaching and learning process. Thus, it can be assumed that the implementation of character education plays a significant role in teaching English for young learners and the teachers have a big responsibility, not only teaching but also educating.

Some researchers conducted similar studies. The first study was conducted by Anggraini & Kusniarti (2016). The aim of the study was to construct a character education model through the empowerment of theatre extracurricular implemented in primary school. This study applied the qualitative method, and the research involved MIM Primary School students in Malang regency, who participated in theatre extracurricular. The finding of this study revealed that the

result of the character education model implementation at MIM Primary school Malang showed that their environment influenced students' characters, especially the school environment. After the implementation of character education based on theatre of empowerment, the result showed that there were some characters developed on the students who participated in the theatre. These characters were religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hardworking trait, creativity, being independent, being democratic, curiosity, the spirit of nationalism, patriotism, achievement appreciation, friendliness/communication, peace-loving, reading loving, environmental care, social care, and responsibility.

Gunawan (2017), in his study, investigated the role of character education for children in early childhood education. The data were obtained from the survey and interview of the parents and the teachers at Early Childhood School in Happy Kids Indonesia, Bogor regency. This study revealed that both parents and teachers understand the importance of character building in early childhood education. The result also obtained most parents with the teachers realize that early childhood education has a relationship with the development of children's character through the development of affective, psychomotor, and spiritual aspects. Thoyyibah et al. (2019) conducted a study about the implementation of character education in ELT. T

his study was aimed to describe how the teachers implement character education in the English teaching and learning process. The data were collected by conducting a document study, observations, and interviews. The subject of this research was two English teachers in SMP N 1 Kebonagung, Demak regency. The result of the study revealed that teachers had integrated some character values in the syllabus and lesson plan and then the teachers implemented the character values within the teaching and learning process in every topic being learned. The most frequent character values which were inserted in teaching and learning activity were religiousness, honesty, discipline, perseverance or hard work, independence, democracy, curiosity, achievement respect, responsibility, and communication skill.

Regarding those three studies above, it can be assumed that character education is very crucial to be implemented in the educational system. Education is not only about gaining knowledge and developing academic skill. However, by integrating character education in the teaching and learning process or another activity at school, the learners, unconsciously, can build their character values to be a better person. Therefore, this study aims to explain the concept of character education and its implementation in teaching English for young learners to develop students' character values.

METHOD

The method used in collecting data was literature study. There were four steps conducted in this study. The first step was collecting the data from the primary and secondary resources. Primary resources mean the data collected from studying the research papers related to the implementation of character education in TEYL. Meanwhile, secondary resources mean the data were collected from some related articles and books to support this study. The second step was classifying the data which are related to character education, particularly focusing on its implementation in teaching English for young learners. The third step was analyzing the data. The results of the literature review were analyzed to

identify the concept of character education and its implementation in teaching English for young learners. Based on the analysis, the conclusion was drawn which is the last step of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

TEYL is regarded as Teaching English for Young Learners. It means that English is being taught for young learners who learn English as a foreign language. In the context of English language teaching, these young learners are considered to study at the beginning level; it is like the students of elementary school. According to Ummah (2017), young learners are students from 9-10 years old and state English as a foreign language. English is included in the curriculum for young learners in some countries which state English as their foreign language. Therefore, Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) is widely used to describe this. Bland (2019) states that Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) is designed to introduce the theory and pedagogical practices of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to young learners. An English teacher for young learners plays an important role in teaching English for young learners as stated by Cao (2019). He states that teaching English for young learners gives the teachers a situation in which it is a chance for them to play an important role in helping the young learners in finding their direction in life and their place in the international world. Furthermore, Cao (2019) also states the teachers have a great responsibility on how their performance in teaching can have a profound influence on the students' future. Thus, focusing on the teaching of the English language topics only is not enough for young learners because the teachers also have to help them in building their positive attitudes and characters.

Character can be defined as a way of thinking and behaving that characterizes each individual to live and work together, both within the sphere of family, community, and country (Suyono as cited in Saifurrohman, 2014). Character education is a fundamental process that includes the development of a substance, atmosphere, or environment that has a positive impact in encouraging and making it easier for someone to develop good habits in everyday life (Zubaedi, 2011). In the Indonesian educational system, the term character education is promoted in the 2013 Curriculum in which it is considered very important because it is an effort that can be made to influence students' character. According to Kaimuddin (2014), character education is a deliberate attempt to help the students so that they can understand, pay attention to, and practice core ethical values.

According to Bones (2010) in the character education programs, there are a wide variety of specific character traits chosen to be emphasized for students. Further, he reveals universal characters, it is six pillars of values that can be inserted in the teaching and learning process (Bones, 2010, p. 13-14), namely:

1. Trustworthy.
   Trustworthy means that someone who over time, reliably shows that he or she is worthy of trust.
2. Respect.
   Respect means that someone has to be tolerant of others and accept differences with good manners.
3. Responsibility

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Responsibility is doing what is supposed to do. Someone with high responsibility is accountable for their choices and does not blame for people's mistakes.

4. Fairness

Fairness is giving some people more than others, based on their needs and also treating all people fairly.

5. Caring

Caring is feeling and exhibiting concern and empathy for others.

6. Citizenship

Citizenship means doing your share to help your family and make your community a better place.

Those are the universal characters in the six pillars of values that can be implemented not only in society but also in a classroom environment where the teaching and learning process takes place.

The Implementation of Character Education in TEYL

According to Pohan & Malik (2018), the integration of character education in teaching English as a foreign language, especially young learners, can be through instilling character values in every learning activity. It means that character values can be inserted along with the activities given by the teachers.

1. The integration of character values in teaching and learning process

According to Nasuha (2017), the characters values can be inserted in the three main stages of the teaching and learning process, namely pre-activity, main activity, and also post-activity. In the pre-activity, the teachers usually ask young learners to pray together before starting the lesson. In this stage, young learners are encouraged to develop their religiosity. It is also a common thing to do greeting at the beginning of the class, it means that the teachers encourage young learners to possess their courtesy. In the main activity, young learners usually focus on language skills activity, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, there is a moment when teachers ask them to work in a group, the value here is cooperativeness through team work activity. Further, when teachers ask them to work individually, such as drawing or matching as the instruction, then there is a value of independence which is strengthened through these activities. Meanwhile, in the post-activity, the teacher might give them homework and tell them directly to be responsible and diligent in doing homework.

2. The integration of characters values through activity

Several activities can be done in teaching English for young learners, and the most common activities are learning through playing games and singing songs. These activities are very suitable for young learners because each of them contains fun activities. According to Hodhod et al. (2010), games can be used to build young learners' positive characters. Further, Hodhod et al. (2010) state that the teachers often ask young learners to play the game in a group, so it can motivate children to get involved in the class activities and develop their social skills well, such as responsibility and collaboration. Another activity is singing songs. In the

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context of integrating character building, teachers need to choose English songs with the proper content. The appropriate songs to be used in teaching English will accompany students' routines because the songs contain good messages for young learners (Dzanic & Pejic, 2016)

CONCLUSIONS

From the research results, it can be concluded that character education is very crucial for students, especially for young learners. It is because developing character values will be more effective in early ages like children. By having a good character, they can improve many things in their life, including academic and non-academic fields. Character education can be included in subjects at school, including English. Therefore, character values can be inserted into the teaching English for young learners. In the three main stages of teaching and learning process (pre-activity, main activity, post-activity), the teachers can insert character values like religiosity, independence, and responsibility. Inserting character education can also be done by the teachers through many activities like playing games and singing songs to develop students' honesty, responsibility, cooperativeness, and many other character values.

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