BUILDING STUDENTS' CHARACTER BY ENGAGING SOCIAL STUDIES ISSUES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

by Esti Setiawati

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Victor Novianto
Venny Eka Meidasari

University of Yogyakarta; Indraprasta PGRI University
victornovianto@gmail.com; venny_xiaofen@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on analyzing the importance of character building in language teaching, and finding ways how to take advantages from engaging social studies issues within a pedagogical framework. Using social studies issues as topics in teaching English not only enable students to effectively acquire a foreign language with the knowledge and skills but also raise their awareness and critical thinking of our society problems. The globalization with its positive and negative affects has made our generation carried away by the currents of change of being a stranger in their own backyard and forget our own cultural identities. Many of the scenes and themes shown on the television, Internet and other media channels often run down the values and ideas of our national positive characters traits. In this point of view, teaching language by engaging social studies issues to build students' character and national identity can enhance students understanding toward the importance of its moral values as their inspiration to be a better person, and improve their English as well. This paper will describe how an engagement of social studies issues can be an alternative learning tool utilized in language teaching to develop students' character and national identity. Also, to provide the benefit from this approach students can get in learning English.

Keywords: character building, social studies, language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia National Qualification Framework (NQF) (in Indonesian it is called *"Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia"* classifies character into two parts, namely, general description (character, personality, attitude, ethical, and moral) and specific description i.e. knowledge, skills, and competence (President Regulation Republic of Indonesia, 2012: 6). According to general description, character carries out in order to get the right social changes that defines the concept of self-determination of a nation.

Religion, Pancasila, and UUD 1945 are the references in which all motion activity measures in the country of Indonesia in any form must rely to it. The three basic references guidelines that can be synergistically to create order in a variety of dynamics of life in this country, including the problems of education. Religion showed the highest values by putting education as a basis of struggle, while Pancasila ideology keeps the spirit and doctrine to all children of the nation to always love their homeland. The UUD 1945 Constitution is a constitution that regulates various matters concerning of the education implementation which then must be the guide for all stakeholders, especially the government as executor.

Character education is not the same as behavior control, discipline, training, or indoctrination, it is much broader in scope and has much more ambitious goals. As Arthur (2008: 91) stated, "'Character' is an inclusive term for the individual as a whole." In the long run, it means that the education must cultivate a sense of inspiration that sustains good traits in individual as a human being.

There are three compelling reasons why we should develop a national character education in every level. Firstly, we need a good character to be a fully human. Then, we need the mind, heart and good will such as honesty, empathy, caring, persistence, self-discipline, and moral encouragement. Character building is hoped can fix misbehaves or wrong deeds done by most of

young generations nowadays. Moreover, because the success ones is not only determined by having great intelligent quotient, but also both emotional and spiritual quotient. Secondly, the school is a better place to teach, spread the values of and the nations' character. Thirdly, character education is very important to build a moral society (Lickona, 1996: 93-100). Therefore, educators play a role as agent of change to prepare young generations to face a bright future. Schools should develop children's character, not just their ability to pass exams.

Internet and other media channels often run down the values and ideas of our national character. Globalization has been the buzz word since the early nineties so much that the term has become somewhat like a cliché to explain everything that is new and manifesting in this iron age of rapid communication and technological progress. It is fair to say that the impact of globalization in the character and culture spheres have, most generally, been viewed in a pessimistic light. Typically, it has been associated with the destruction of character, victims of the accelerating encroachment of a homogenized, westernized, consumer culture.

Low rate of literacy, poverty, education, mall-nutrition, corruptions, or even citizens who lack of tolerance and do not have the same sense of devotion and belongingness to their country are examples of Indonesia social study issues nowadays (based on https://data.unicef.org/country/idn/#). As the purpose of the this paper, integrating English learning with such social study issues as topics in teaching English not only enable students to effectively acquire a foreign language with the knowledge and skills but also raise their awareness of our society problems. If we want our students to work for a better future of our nation, they must know the nature of our society problems, their causes, and viable solutions. Engaging social study issues as materials in teaching English can shape their ability of critical and creative thinking, cooperative problem-solving, nonviolent conflict resolution, and the ability to see issues from multiple perspectives.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach and using a case study in the classroom activity of speaking classes, R3H (Undergraduate English of Education class, the third year students) at University of Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta. The number of students in the class was 40 and they were grouped into 10 so every 4 person has to do a project of optional given list of social study issues. The instrument to be worked on is a table consist of items that students must find the data through interviewing, reporting the findings, and discussing with their peers about their team work

According to Creswell (2009: 173), qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions; strategies of inquiry and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. In other words, this method can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. In this case, information about the social study issues analyzed. Qualitative method can be used to develop an informative narrative, such as an interview record, student essay, or report sample. In this research, the writers applied the case study through the classroom activities of reporting and discussing their projects.

Along the class, the students are asked to be more active in delivering all ideas found relating to the social study issues nowadays. The students' participation in classroom is a key to the encouragement of autonomous learning and the lecturers should be more creative in collaborating the methods for developing the students understanding. As the lecturer, our roles as follows: 1) Organizer. Organizing students to do various activities by giving information, put them into groups, and get the students involve; 2) Prompter; 3) Resource; 4) Moderator; and 5) Assessor.

In detail, the teaching-learning methods for the task is sequenced as follows:
1) Lecturer introduces social study issues happening nowadays. Exposing students with some videos provided relating to social issues and explaining how to grab the issues. For examples, the conflict of online and conventional transportations penetrated into the regions of this country, political conflicts incline religious tolerance, or borrowing

the term from Thornborrow (2006: 616-623), "linguistic conflicts," viral in social media provoking resentment toward certain group of societies.

2) Lecturer gives the lists of the good traits of character.
3) Lecturer groups the students.
4) Lecturer asks students to choose their own topic of social study issue to be explored from the values and virtues.
5) Students choose their own topic project and work on it (visiting the object location, interviewing, collecting data, writing report). Lecturer gives a chance for the students to do data interpretation step by step along the time schedule given until they finish all the interpretation fully.
6) Reporting findings. Lecturer asks each of group discussion to present their result in front of the class.
7) Discussing the findings. Lecturer asks students to correlate the social study issues they got and the checklist of virtues they make with the real life so that they can grab the best things to be their inspirations in developing their morality standards.
8) Lecturer gives review of all discussion since the first meeting of the class until the final project covering both table analysis/checklist of virtues and the speaking indicators.

The assessment is scored mostly from the speaking, their critical thinking and their development though virtues they found from interpreting the whole task they have done. Speaking is used for many different purposes, each purpose involves different skills, such as to seek or express opinion, to persuade someone about something, or clarify information. In this project, the most important things are the level of student comprehension of how to be an individual to act ethically in line with our national character identity, and how to be good in speaking which needs more and more practice.

Below are the indicators that the writers use as the assessment:
1) Accent: it is concerned on the pronunciation that produced by the students whether it is like foreign accent or not. On the other hand, students' pronunciation is like native pronunciation or not.
2) Grammar: it is concerned on the students' error of using grammar or pattern that causes misunderstanding.
3) Vocabulary: Students ability in selecting a word and applying the accurate form in the accurate situation will be valued.
4) Fluency: it indicates students' speed in speaking, slow, incomplete sentence, smooth, or speaks is like native speaker.
5) Comprehension: it is concerned on the students' understanding about the purpose of the task, the topic of the project, and how they incorporate the findings with the virtues they are expected to possess.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Character building shapes students' qualities into communicative, having good critical thinking, honest, respect, initiative, cooperation, and others moral standards and virtues. Suyanto (2010) states there are nine pillars of character that comes from noble universal values, namely: (1) the character of the love of God and all his creatures; (2) self-reliance and responsibility; (3) honesty/trustworthy, diplomatically; (4) respectful and polite; (5) benefactors, like mutual help and mutual cooperation/collaboration; (6) confident and hardworking; (7) leadership and justice; (8) kind and humble, and; (9) the character of tolerance, peace and unity.

By doing the task, students not only learn about grammar, linguistic aspects such as the language acquisitions, or other linguistic levels, but also learn about how to be whole-self Indonesians that possess spiritual, intellectual, social/interpersonal-emotional/intrapersonal

intelligences, and passion for learning. All of these concepts are inserted into the task of teaching devices. Mostly, these students tend to keep silent along the teaching process, but when they are grouped, they have more spirit to discuss all the things with the one that they feel quite familiar and closer so they will not feel shame if then they commit an error along their speaking.

After doing this approach, the writers find that this activity has encouraged students to do an autonomous learning of developing their English skills through interpretation; having more vocabularies and linguistic development through language acquisition; and gaining more knowledge and understanding a story through the experiences of characters in the real life situation that enables them to feel what it could have been like and helps them consider the impact of events significant or otherwise on ordinary people. The interpretation of their projects has given them a broad view of social issues in society through the eyes of another, fosters understanding, tolerance and empathy and the value of these capacities cannot be underestimated in today's world.

There are five general aspects of character education found in students' finding reports which were compatible and relevant to NQF and nine pillars of character proposed by Suyanto (2010) above. It is the core values of cultural and character education in Indonesia, i.e. characters, personality, attitude, ethical, and moral. These character education aspects are including religiousness, honesty, tolerance, discipline, perseverance, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, citizenship, patriotism, achievement respect, friendship, peacefulness, environmental care, compassion and responsibility.

Meanwhile, there are some challenges faced in the process of integrating social study issues in language teaching using the method the writers use: (1) the difficulty of matching the character education values toward the materials available. In other words, not all materials contain character values. Therefore, the writers in this case, must be creative to connect character values in the materials available, (2) the diverse characteristics of the students. It is a common thing in a group of students that they have different character one another, including the level of their competence. In this situation, the writers must be able to manage the class well without ignoring some certain students. As a result, the writers' competence as a lecturer must always be upgraded in order to comprehend and able to find realistic authentic material to be practiced, especially in pedagogical competence.

CONCLUSION

Character building should be shaped by moral development, beliefs, and values. For an individual to act ethically, they need to understand possible consequences for themselves, for others in their community, and for society. Such abstract thinking requires certain cognitive and moral skills, including the ability to take different perspectives, think critically about possibilities, hypothesize about the future, and make connections between actions and consequences.

In preparing a better generation for Indonesia, educators have to pay attention to the three components of the main characters, namely moral knowledge, moral sense, and moral conduct. As the government regulation states that the goal of national education is to develop educated people with life skill and good character building, character education values should be involved in designing and composing the material used in instructional activities in the classroom.

Integrating social study issues in language arts curriculum can be one of the tools to enhance students understanding toward the importance of its moral values as their inspiration to be a better person, and improve their English as well at the same time. Listening to their peers reporting such a real social issue provides opportunities for honing listening skills, and discussing allows students to express their thoughts, feelings, and reactions relating to the issues. When students doing their project as example above, they are practicing their comprehension strategies in meaningful situations.

Being exposed to a real situation of social issues leads students to judge, believe, and feel emotions in various ways. The project therefore offers a sentimental education, teaching them

about emotional scripts and structures of feeling. By building students' character and enhancing their English skills through engaging social study issues in language teaching, not only they will learn more about the language, but also they will be pleasurably rewarded by the moral and evaluative emotions they experience.

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