INTEGRATING CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING AT PRIMARY LEVEL

Ida Ayu Mela Tustiawati and **Ida Bagus Gde Nova Winarta**
Mahasaraswati Denpasar University, Denpasar
mela.tustiawati@unmas.ac.id; idabagusnova@unmas.ac.id

Abstract: Character education is one of the main focuses in the national development program in Indonesia. Through character education students are expected to not only excel academically but also have good character which represents the national culture of Indonesia. This research is designed as qualitative research that describes the teachers' efforts in integrating character education into the language teaching and learning at primary level. It uses a descriptive qualitative method as the main way to describe the findings of the study. Data for the study is examined from document analysis, class observation, and semi-structured interviews. All data are analysed using a five-phased cycle of data analysis procedures introduced by Yin (2011) which consists of compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting and concluding. The results of this study indicate that introduction of character values is done implicitly by teachers both at the level of planning and its realisation in teaching and learning in the classroom. Five issues related to its application in the classroom are also identified. These findings can be used as one of the considerations for teachers in designing a learning model and strategies in integrating character education into online learning and/or certain subjects at primary level.

Keywords: Character Education, Online Learning, Primary Education

INTRODUCTION

Character education is a conscious effort to develop desirable character values in students. It is used to develop "intellectual, social, emotional, and ethical development" among the younger generation so they will become good citizens (Singh, 2019). Nowadays, the aim of education is no longer to develop the ability of students to succeed academically but also socially. It is believed that how students preserve and behave in society is greatly influenced by their understanding of character values (Intania & Sutama, 2020). Through character education, students learn to know and identify good values and use them as a foundation for their life (Raharjo, 2010). The students need to be aware of the values, instil the ideas and base their actions on it (Licona,1991). It means that understanding character values is as important as acquiring academic knowledge and skills.

In the Indonesian context this idea is aligned with the goal of the Indonesia National Education System which is to prepare educated people with good knowledge and life skills and good character based on the national ideology, Pancasila (Pusat, 2010). To realise these goals, the current education curriculum applied in Indonesia, the 2013 curriculum, emphasises on the need to build the national characters by integrating character education in teaching and learning at school. Based on the current character education reinforcement in Indonesia, from the total of 18 values described in the curriculum there are five priority values that students should develop to promote the national character namely religious, nationalist, independence, collaboration, and integrity (Muttaqin, Raharjo, & Masturi, 2018). The introduction of these values should be undertaken in four aspects at school: the integration of character education

in the classroom, intra-curricular activities, extra-curricular activities and in the development of the school culture (Pusat Kurikulum 2010).

It means that a school has an important role in the development of the student's character. The school is used as an agent to provide a teaching and learning environment where the student will be able to develop his or her characters (Rindrayani, 2020). This identifies the role of primary level education as the first formal education that the students will get as crucial. It is important to make sure that the understanding of values is properly developed among the students at this level. Teachers in the classroom are not only fostering academic knowledge understanding but also providing activities for characters development (Rahmi & Erlinda, 2014). Character education is also not limited to the traditional school setting. With the current shift of teaching and learning and the development of information and technology, character education should also be employed in teaching and learning online. The flexibility and easy access to information provided by the online learning does not always provide positive experiences for students, especially for primary students. With a lack of supervision by teachers and parents, students will be able to get access to something that may not be relevant to their age and learning purposes. Therefore, knowing what they should and should not do is important. Without doubt, online teaching and learning at primary level poses difficulties for teachers and students. Yet, due to the necessity for students to develop good character, it is important to have character education integrated in the lessons, even though they are online. This study aims to describe how teachers integrate character education into their planning and their practice in the classroom. Furthermore, the study also tries to present issues that teachers face during their effort to integrate character values into their online lessons.

METHOD

This research was conducted to identify the teaching of values by the language teachers at primary level online. There were two focuses for this research: First, to describe how the language teachers integrate the character education into their online teaching, and second, to identify issues that the teachers face in their effort to include the values in their lessons. The study was designed as qualitative research in which all data was collected in their natural setting without any interference by the researchers (Cresswell, 2009).

The study was carried out at one of the private primary schools in Indonesia during their final term of the academic year, 2020 – 2021. This study used three main data sources namely lesson plans, classroom observations, and interview. This data was analysed using five-phased cycle of data analysis procedures which consists of compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting and concluding (Yin, 2011).

At first, data was collected from the weekly lesson plans and classroom observations. Data gathered from these two procedures were used to determine how teachers integrated character values into their planning and their real practice in the online classroom. Separate data analysis procedures were conducted for these two data sources. Then an interview was conducted to see the response to the findings gathered from the document analysis and online classroom observations. Finally, the relationship between the weekly findings and interview results was analysed for a conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Information on the result of data analysis from documents analysis and virtual classroom observations is presented here. From these findings, how teachers integrate character education into their teaching and issues faced by teachers are also described.

1. **Findings from documents analysis**

From the analysis of the lesson guides given by the teachers, it can be concluded that values were not stated explicitly in the documents. Even though the guidelines were used as lesson plans for the teachers, they were designed in a simpler way which focused on the teaching steps. The lesson guides consisted of the school identity, the name of the subject, time allocation, the aim of the lesson, procedures (focused on the whilst activities), resources needed by students, and mode of studying (virtual class or offline). These guidelines appeared to be different from general lesson plans which have three activities (pre-activity, whilst activity and post-activity).

Expected character values were not written in any parts of the lesson guides. However, from the planned activities some values can be identified implicitly. The teachers focused on three different activities in their whilst activities: students' presentation to promote confidence, tolerance, respect, creativity; group work in breakout room to encourage collaboration, tolerance; and individual work for independence, honesty, and hard work.

2. **Findings from virtual class observations**

The results of the virtual classroom observations showed that the teachers both explicitly and implicitly employed character education throughout their teaching and learning activities in the virtual classes. Every teacher conducted different activities and applied different approaches, but a standardisation in their teaching delivery can be seen clearly. All the teachers in the study included character education in their activities. Below is the summary of the character values inserted by the teachers in different stages of their teaching and learning activities in the virtual classes.

Table 1. Character values implemented in the virtual classroom

Pre-activity		Whilst-activity		Post-activity
Religious	Respect	Politeness	Hard work	Religious
Discipline	Confidence	Tolerance	Confidence	Respect
Politeness	Tolerance	Respect	Collaboration	Appreciation
Responsibilities	Independence	Independence	Creativity	
Appreciation				

There were additional values introduced in the virtual classes which were different from the analysis of activities in the planning documents. These different values were mostly introduced at the beginning and end of the classes. This was expected as the plans focused more on the whilst-activities stage in the virtual classes.

Integration of character education in the online setting

One aspect of the 2013 curriculum is that the teaching of values should be included in all subjects at school not limited to religion and civic subjects. It is also suggested that value should be integrated at the planning stage of the teaching and learning activities.

From the findings above, the integration of character education in the teachers' plans are not always written in the document but may be drawn from the planned activities provided by the teachers. Even though the result is the same, in the earlier study conducted by Dyudiarto (2013) the teachers do not include values in their teaching plans because they prefer to introduce the values directly in their teaching (as cited in Ratih, 2017). In this study the teachers purposely exclude the values from their plans and provide more detailed steps due to the online setting. The teachers believe that with the current setting, parents' assistance is necessary.

Therefore, clear guidelines for the parents are needed. This is supported by the statements from the teachers during the interview as follows:

"To expect grade 1 students to be able to adjust and follow online learning fully without parents' supervision may not be possible. To help in this situation, we make sure to inform the parents about our activities. Thus, if the students cannot join their virtual class, the parents will still be able to help at home by following the steps we provided."

"With the online setting, what we can do to help the students virtually is limited. The students will mostly spend their time with their parents. Thus, we hope that the parents will be able to help them based on the guidelines given".

Another point that can be drawn from the findings is that all the teachers in this study implement character education in every stage of their teaching and learning procedures. However, due to the online setting of the classroom, most teachers put more emphasis on character education at the beginning and at the end of the lesson. The whilst-activities are focussed on material delivery. Even though, teachers can still insert some of the values, it is dependent on the characteristics of the material. One teacher from the interview expressed that she could not introduce values in all of her lessons due the difficulties of the material, instead she focused more on material delivery.

The beginning of the lesson is considered ideal for teachers to introduce character values because at this time the teachers can explicitly explain and model the intended character values. How teachers act in the classroom is also believed to contribute to the development of the students' character (Harmer, 2007). One teacher described her experience in integrating character values as follows, "…, but when I have the time, I prefer to do it at the beginning. At this time, I will prepare some activities which I believe will foster the understanding of character values, such as activities to get the students settled in the virtual class, appreciating their tardiness, checking on their readiness to follow the lessons and/or playing games." Another teacher mentioned that "Instead of saying you have to do this, you cannot do that, I model the activity that I want the students to do. I believe by showing them, they will understand it better and finally will do it."

Another interesting approach used by the teachers in their effort to introduce character education is the appreciation approach. The teachers focus more on the students who show good attitude and appreciate them instead of focusing on one student who is lacking. "I think having more good students in the spotlight will create a sense of understanding that those students have done good things; thus, if I want to be on the spotlight, I should do good things." During the closing activity, the teachers purposely limit the type of values inserted in their teaching because it is the time that the teachers use for students to reflect on their previous learning experience. The students are encouraged to express their appreciation for themselves and others.

In relation to language teaching, the integration of character education depends on the type of material to be discussed. Some values can be introduced implicitly, and the others explicitly. These findings are like the earlier study conducted by Latifah, Islahiyah, & Furaidah (2018). Even though both ways are acceptable, the teachers prefer to explain character values explicitly. Most teachers stated that when students learn the values implicitly, their awareness of the values is not as strong as when the teachers deliberately discuss the values. In contrast with the finding from a previous study which considers that online teaching is not suitable for character education (Wardani, Suparmi, & Aminah, 2019), the current study shows that the teachers are aware of the situation and focus more on providing different types of material and activity in different stages of their teaching and learning.

Issues in the integration of character values in the online setting

Integrating character education in teaching and learning procedures is mandatory in the education system of Indonesia, but it does not mean that there are no issues in its application especially when the teaching and learning is conducted online. Based on the findings in this study, there are some issues faced by the teachers in their effort to integrate character education into their virtual classrooms.

Time constraint appears to be the most difficult issue faced by the teachers. Here are some concerns shared by the teachers during the interview: "I have to manage my teaching time well in order to be able to insert character activities in my lesson"; "One period of online teaching is different from one period of face-to-face teaching. In online teaching, you need to allocate some of the time to help the students settle before studying. Thus, you never have one full period for your teaching". It means that what may be possible to apply in face-to-face learning may be quite difficult to apply in the online setting.

The online setting also puts restrictions on teacher-student interaction and the types of activities undertaken virtually. The teachers will have limited opportunity to individually assist students. "I feel frustrated when there are some students who do not understand the material and I cannot help them directly"; "I can feel that the students are bored with the lesson. I have many activities that I want to conduct but to have them done virtually is not possible. In the end, I will rely on videos and virtual group discussions". Parent involvement in the virtual class is necessary for primary students but at the same time, when they start to interfere with the lesson it becomes one of the issues that the teachers have to face. "I understand that not all parents have knowledge of the materials learnt by the students, but their interference in the teaching and learning procedure takes so much of my time that I can actually use to have different activities done with my students". Finally is the stability of the internet connection. All teachers mentioned that both the teachers and the students have to face instability with their internet connection which makes teaching and learning more difficult.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Drawing from the study above, it can be concluded that how teachers integrate character education into their teaching plan and practice is done implicitly. Character values are not explicitly stated in the lesson plans of the teachers, they are implicitly stated in their learning activities. During virtual classes, the teachers put more emphasis on character education at the beginning of their lessons. They may insert character education in their main activity, but it depends on the difficulty of the lesson. The end of their teaching period is used more for students' reflection. Even though many values are applied during teaching and learning practice, they are also not explained explicitly by the teachers. Due to the online setting, the teachers face several issues compared with normal teaching and learning. These issues are time constraints; limited interaction and activities; parent involvement in the classroom and finally the stability of the internet. Even with these issues, integrating character education into the online classroom is not impossible. The teachers may need to design their learning plans in a different way but with effort, it can be achieved well.

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