CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) CLASSROOM IN INDONESIA: IMPLEMENTATION AND OBSTACLES

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ABSTRACT--*Character education emphasizes the development of students' behavior as a response to issues in the society. In implementation stages, however, education practitioners need to adapt to the changes and obstacles they face daily. The present, qualitative study aimed at exploring the implementation and obstacles encountered by English teachers towards the implementation of character education in Indonesia. Data were collected from interview sessions in which ten English teachers in South Jakarta participated. Interview sessions were held either in English or Bahasa, depending on teachers' English level of confidence. Data were then transcribed in a semi-verbatim format. Notably, data gathered from teachers who selected to be interviewed in Bahasa Indonesia were then translated into English. In analyzing the data, thematic grouping was employed. Results showed three major findings: a) mismatch between day-to-day operation and national examination; b) difficulties in connecting English learning contents and the values, and; c) less information regarding the concept of character education. The results of the study shed light on the raising the importance of students' mastery of English as well as students' good ethical character. This will ultimately contribute to solving the problems of the nation.*

Keywords-- *Character Education, English teaching, teacher*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, character education has been a major concern of education in Indonesia. A significant number of education institutions have demonstrated an inclusion of character building in the curriculum. The explanation for this growth trend is mostly because of the occurring problems of the nation: (1) disorientation and internalization of Pancasila (Nation Principles) values, (2) ethics violations in public life, and (3) fading awareness regarding national and cultural values (Kamaruddin, 2012). In response to national concerns towards diverse, complicated cases leading to moral degradation in Indonesia, the Indonesian government through Law Number 20/2003 which is further emphasized in the 2010 National Policy on Character Education states that the national education must aim at developing students' potential to become Indonesian citizens who are tough, competitive, noble, tolerant, patriotic, dynamic, civilized, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, democratic, responsible, faithful and devout to God the Almighty. In short, the process of education should include education of moral and noble values.

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Some work has contributed to defining the goals of character education; that is to help students be good people as part of their responsibility a) as the citizens of a country (Arthur, 2005; Kaimuddin, 2014) and; b) to create harmonious living with other citizens (Almerico, 2014; Mutaqin, 2014). In other words, over the implementation process of the current changes in the curriculum, it is expected that the education system does not only help students succeed in their academic achievements but also succeed in their real-life as part of the society (Lickona, 1992). Some studies have also reported that learners who have good character tend to excel in academic achievement and daily life (Nurhasanah & Nida, 2016), understand their responsibility as a citizen (Çubukçu, 2012), and strengthen the value of the learners (Abu et al., 2015).

However, as many could have the general picture of the curriculum outcomes, it is undeniable that the implementation stage would far require education practitioners to be more critical as they have a responsibility on a day-to-day basis. For example, this movement indeed demands teachers, lecturers, and educational practitioners not only to teach the subject matters and to develop the students' knowledge academically but also to integrate the character education in their instruction in order to develop the students' manner, behavior and attitude. Further, the Ministry of Education and Culture (2010) has offered the conceptual and operational grand design of character education implementation into classroom instruction. There are 4 (four) ways offered by the grand design for integrating character education:

1. Integrating character education into the subject matters and teaching-learning activities in and out of the classroom;

2. Integrating character education into various school and campus extra-curricular activities;

3. Integrating character education into diverse school and university/college programs for guiding and educating students, and;

4. Integrating character education into school and university/college management.

Of the four ways recommended, this research study highlights the first way, i.e., the integration of character education into the subject matters and teaching-learning activities. More specifically, it will focus on English language education as the subject matter. Despite the wide-ranging volume of research in character education, very few scholars have carried out extensive research on the implementation of character education in English language learning, especially in Indonesia. This research study will examine the readiness of English teachers in responding to the National Policy direction. The study is specifically intended to answer the following questions: "What problems or issues do English teachers encounter regarding the implementation of the policy in the classroom?".

II.   METHODS

The present study employed a qualitative research design. This research design was chosen as a qualitative approach that helps describe and generate detailed data regarding the complex phenomena related to human behavior from the participants' perspective (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Nunan, 1997).

Data collection was primarily based on the interviews with ten English teachers with a minimum of five years teaching experiences in South Jakarta; four of them were junior high school teachers while the others were at a senior high level. During the interview, teachers were offered whether they were confident to have the interview in English or in Bahasa Indonesia. Interview results gathered from teachers who chose Bahasa Indonesia were then

translated in semi-verbatim format. After the translation stage, the data were then arranged by thematic grouping. Major findings were then discussed in the following section.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting interviews, the current study uncovered three major findings related to the implementation of character education; a) mismatch between day-to-day operation and national examination; b) difficulties in connecting English learning contents and the values, and; c) less information regarding the concept of character education.

a)   Mismatch between day-to-day operation and national examination

Based on teachers' responses, the implementation of character education could be regarded as irrelevant to what national examination addresses. For example, teacher 3 reported,

"I [am] confused with government. They want us to develop students' character, but in the end, students must pass a national examination. That is why students and teachers sometimes do not care about character education. Just additional for us. Not a must." (Teacher 3)

Besides, one of the teachers also said that the government does not clarify or provide an example on how to implement the character-based education until classroom level.

"I think ministry people only focus on the general picture, but they never imagine how [it is] exactly in the classroom when last year students are nervous about national examination" (Teacher 4)

Moreover, another teacher also reported that developing students' character is primary teachers' duties even without an emphasis on the curriculum. He suggested that rather than focusing on the name of the curriculum, it is better the government focuses on establishing the relevant measurement for students' character.

"I know education should change the students' bad habit, and we do it every day. Even without a curriculum, we still practice it because it is our responsibility. But for me, maybe our ministry should consider how to measure the changes in students' character because sometimes teacher in twelfth grade like me just focus on how to help my students to succeed in their UN (national examination)" (Teacher 1)

b)   Difficulties in connecting English learning contents and the values

Teacher responses showed that connecting English learning contents and character-based education is quite challenging. One of them reported that it would be additional work for them.

"I mean, I can teach the English materials, but to insert Indonesian moral values from the text? I think that is a different story" (Teacher 3)

Another teacher also said that some students still struggle for the learning materials, so the teacher could not have adequate time to insert the character-based education in the classroom.

"My students are still struggling with the materials, such as simple present and present continuous, and I take my time only to explain that. However, I teach about the character, such as asking students to throw garbage to the litter bin by using English." (Teacher 8)

Moreover, another teacher also addressed that combining English teaching materials and the character-based education depends on the teachers themselves. Even the textbooks have been labeled for character-based education, and teachers are the primary actor in implementing the changes in the curriculum.

"I can insert values in my teaching practices but look at our textbooks. Most of textbooks just focus on the contents. Even it has a label like "for character-based education", but in practice, it depends on the teachers." (Teacher 2)

c) Less information regarding the concept of character education

Another major finding of this study was also teachers' commentary that they have less information about the concept of character-based education itself, primarily due to a vast differences of cultures in Indonesia.

"I have questions like, which character is best? Whose character is best? How to measure the characters? If I am from Aceh and my students are from Java, how to find agreed norms for good character?" (Teacher 10)

Besides culture, another teacher also addressed how religious practices also affect their perspective regarding character-based education. As an addition, he also demanded the government to provide any authorized examples to illustrate how to best implement the curriculum.

"For me, a character is too broad, and you cannot simply justify which one is good. The values in my religion may be different if my students have a different religion. How about different culture? Even if it is based on Pancasila, can the government show people like us, the English teachers, how to implement it? May be articles, illustration, video, pictures." (Teacher 7)

Another English teacher also argued that the government often does not give enough time for teachers to explore the new curriculum so that they have adequate information about how best to implement the curriculum. "The government likes to change the curriculum, but it is hard for the teachers to change from one curriculum to another. Even to understand the new curriculum, we still need to take time for training for evaluating, but sometimes there will be a new curriculum." (Teacher 9)

While having good character has been proved to be in line with excellent achievement (Nurhasanah & Nida, 2016), school practices that only focus on national examination, indeed, has eliminated the importance of character education itself. Nevertheless, if the success of the education practices is just seen based on its graduation rates, it is apparent that teachers' practices focusing on helping students succeed in national examination grow significantly. Besides, teachers often need to deal with various kinds of students who come from a different level of proficiency, making the practices seem tolerable for them to primarily focus on their teaching contents rather than providing additional values. Also, the needs of English textbooks that can support teachers in teaching and learning are necessary as textbooks can be a potential means to imbue the good character to the students (Syahbana & Pratama, 2017; Wardani et al., 2019).

Besides that, as the government has enacted through specific regulations, it seems tolerable that the participants demanded the government to clarify how exactly the implementation of character education is measured. Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1997) also argued that the impacts of character education could not be seen in a matter of one year; it is a lifelong process that involves continuous evaluation. This means that situation and other external factors should be taken as a consideration. Following participants' responses regarding the fast-changing curriculum, indeed, the present study would also argue that the government should do a continuous evaluation of how the changes in the education system may bring impact on the society behavior. One to consider is that as students might come from different backgrounds, teachers at the forefront individuals might find it challenging to accommodate all the differences (Santosa, 2014), not to mention that not all teachers have understood the character education concept (Julia & Supriyadi, 2018) comprehensively.

IV. CONCLUSION

The current study had uncovered some major findings, as seen in the preceding section. Most English teachers reported confusion over the implementation of the character education itself, especially regarding the national examination, which drives language teaching for successful completion of the test. As a snowball effect, participants found it difficult to match between what they had to do in daily practice (promoting character education) and what they had to achieve (national examination success); Having students struggling for learning content was indeed a challenge. Lastly, the government's "habit" to make a sudden move in curriculum changes also regarded as a contributing factor to the ineffectiveness of the curriculum changes themselves. While character education requires a longitudinal process, the implementation of character education should be well-developed rather than introducing a new curriculum.

The present study had, to some extent, contributed to understanding the implementation of character education in language learning in Indonesia. It is crucial in terms of how schools and English teachers respond to the National Policy on Character Education. It is hoped that the dissemination of the results arising from this study could fill the vacancy of expertise in this area, English education. The study was also expected to bring the potential of considerable significance to Indonesia in light of building students' who are not only capable of the mastery of English but also the ones who possess a good ethical character, which in turn will assist in solving the problems of the nation.

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