

THE USE OF LITERARY TEXTS IN EFL CLASSROOMS TO PROMOTE CHARACTER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the use of literature in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms to promote character education. It reviews briefly theoretical issues on character education and teaching English through literature. Guidelines are given for the use of literature in the language classroom. Finally, this paper presents the technical application of teaching and learning through literary texts to promote character education.

Key words: character education, literature, literary text, teaching resource.

Introduction

Historically, the father of Indonesian national education Ki Hajar Dewantara argued that education is not only intended to develop students' intellect and physical fitness, but most importantly it is mainly aimed to instill good characters on students. The statement is later supported by the constitution of Indonesian national educational system 2003 article 1 that confirm the objective of education is to enhance students' intellect, personality and behavior.

More recently, Indonesia's long term national development plan (2005-2025) stipulated that education should achieve its ultimate goal, namely the development of strong national characters, national competitiveness, highly valued behavior, and morality in accordance with the values inherently contained within Pancasila (The five principles). The values include: believing in the Almighty one God, acting in highly valued behaviors, being tolerant, applying cooperativeness, being patriotic, being dynamic, and having scientific and technological awareness (Winatapura, 2010). Meanwhile worldwide research suggests that children and adults with good moral

character will live and learn better. Besides, moral integrity may bring good impacts on performance in schools, professions, and workplaces.

For those context and considerations, character education should be fostered, instilled, developed and strengthened within the whole system of national education from the primary to the high levels.

The intentional teaching of good character is extremely important as our youth face globalization era leaving opportunities and challenges that could endanger their future. They are bombarded with negative influences of media and other resources. Highly technological changes bring more challenges for educators in fostering good characters of the students. Like two sides of a coin, technology brings great benefits in one side and negative influences in another. Technology makes life easier and draw world closer that ease all people including students having easily accessed information. Such information, however, provides both positive and negative effects simultaneously.

The wide spread of electronic mass media such as television and internet connection have automatically made them a medium of education for students. Unfortunately, the content of the media is not always consistent with the spirit of character education. Many programs or contents in those media do not consider the educational values such as integrity, honesty, accountability, for their viewers. Consequently, many viewers (most of them are students) pick the 'wrong character' as their role models which contribute to their own character.

Another problem in our education refers to the resources. Specifically for state schools, material resources and learning facilities are still very limited. Some school libraries do not provide adequate supporting materials for teaching. Even many schools do not have a standardized library. Most of teachers teach students based on the textbooks given from the schools. Unfortunately, they also lack of initiatives to search for other resources for teaching.

To tackle with those problems of our education will need great concern from the related stake holders and policy makers. Therefore, this paper only concern with the problems of method and resource in learning specifically learning English. Literary works is best choice to impose character education. The idea of using literature in English classroom has been recommended by researchers, teachers and language

practitioners. Literary works provide rich and qualified content and can be applied by using various methods to enhance students' linguistic proficiency and improve their good character.

Discussion

The Need for Character Education

The eleven principles of effective character education define character education as the purposed efforts to enhance good ethical values which are widely recognized in all cultures. It covers wide range of conducts like positive school culture, moral education, just communities, caring school communities, social-emotional learning, positive youth development, civic education, and service learning.

Aynur Pala (2011:24) highlights that character education is a national movement to construct educational institution that cultivate well-behaved young generation by demonstrating good characters through emphasis on universal values. It's school's proactive and intentional effort to disseminate basic ethical values such as caring, truthfulness, fairness, accountability and respect for self and others.

Meanwhile, Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin (1999:6) stated that people with good character are those who know, love and do the good. Knowing the good means understand good and evil. It covers the ability to recognize the situation, deliberate and take the right action, and decide to carry out the action. Loving the good means adhere the good and refuse the evil by developing a wide range of moral feelings and emotions. Doing the good means that after careful consideration of all the circumstances and relevant facts, they initiate the will to act.

Of above explanations, it could be inferred that character education refers to the teaching of children or students in a manner that will help them to be qualified individuals who embrace high moral values – well behaved, well-mannered and socially acceptable being – to respond various situations and conditions in life including desires, feels, angers, challenges, opportunities, failure and success.

The Definition of Character education

Character education is not something new. Tracing back to the concept of education developed by western philosophers like Plato and Aristotle that education is to help students to become smart and good.

The English word 'character' came from the Greek word 'character' which is originally addressed to a mark impressed upon a coin (Pala, 2011:24). Later Homiak (2007 as cited in Pala 2011_24) argued that 'character' reflects a distinctive mark that distinguishes one from others, and then basically to mean the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another.

Philosophically, the concept of good character is stated by Aristotle as right behavior in relation to others and to oneself (Lickona 1992:50). Lickona confirmed that the character is "a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way." Then he added, "so conceived Character has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior" (Lickona,1991: 51). Substantively character consists of three operational values or value in action, namely moral knowing, moral feeling and moral behavior. Furthermore Lickona elaborated that good character is psychological process of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good – habit of the mind, habit of the heart and habit of the action.

Literary Texts Deliver Moral values

Literature as one of humans' sophisticated work brings ethic and aesthetic values which give great benefits to the readers in many ways. Firstly, it amuses the readers with its tempting and beautifully designed story. Secondly, literature reflects the surrounding of community life that possibly encourages social and political changes within the society. Not less important role of literature is it becomes a medium to deliver moral values to the readers through its morals which are implied in the story flowing.

There are at least two evidences that literature has lessons for life which deliver great moral values to the readers. They are the characterization and the plot. The characters in literature describe the human nature which usually consists of protagonist (good-behaved) and antagonist (ill-behaved). The protagonist character is the ideal

model who represent the good characters. In contrast the antagonist is the ill-behaved one that portray the bad character. Obviously, characterization becomes readers' focus of attention. Character is 'imaginary figures' created by the author who unintentionally live in readers' mind. When the readers have been 'touched' by the text or story, they will be easy to 'fall in love' to the character they like. Thus the character will linger in their heart and provoke their will to model it. In literature, the writers usually create good role models for the readers from the characters – the well-behaved ones.

The second part is the plot. In literary works like novels, dramas, films and short stories, the plot is the heart of the work. The plot is the flow of the story which consists of some processes namely exposition, conflict, raising conflict (climax), falling conflict and denouement (solution). In the plot, the process of something – which often describing a life event – is elaborated from the beginning to the end. It vividly describes essential emotional battles experienced by the characters such as making decision, fighting for justice, struggling for life, achieving the dream, defending the truth and so on. It simply and indirectly teach the readers how good characters finally find its noble ways to solve the problems that will inspire them to have good conducts.

Distinctive qualities of Literature in ELT

Authentic material

Literature is an authentic material for language teaching (Ghosn, 2002; Shrestha, 2008). Its authenticity builds emotional connection between the readers and the story. Maley (1989a) stated that literature presents non-trivial things which are personally relevant to the readers. It usually exposes the newest themes and uses real-life language. This quality make literature appropriate for teaching in various contexts and cultures.

Language Enrichment

Compared to the language samples used in the textbooks, the language in literature is obviously richer and more varied. It often employs plenty of genuine feature of written language such as sentence formations, the variety of sentence structures, and

the distinguished ways in connecting ideas which are presented at many levels of difficulty (Collie and Slater, 1994:5). Exploring the literary language encourage students to think about the rules of the language use (Widdowson, 1975, cited in Lazar, 1993:18). The exposure to the language variety is absolutely important for students' language development.

Cultural Enrichment

Literature reflects social life and culture surround them. Students can enrich their cultural insight by discovering people's thoughts, feeling and customs. Using literature in teaching will help students "to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows" (Carter and Long, 1991:2).

Personal Involvement

Literature provides universal themes which are relevant to students' experience. It involves creative imagination to attract reader's attention and interest. By its unique and interesting nature, literature build personal involvement which makes the reading more meaningful both for the process of learning and the joyful of emotional feeling.

Imposing Good Characters through Literature

There are some good characters which could be promoted through literature, such as responsibility, honesty, integrity, respect, trustworthiness, politeness, mercy and so on. Below are the brief explanation and a model of literary text which promote those character traits.

Responsibility

Responsibility refers to the basic belief that each of us has a mutual agreement with, those around us to do our part, to, carry our fair share of the load and to accept the

consequences of our actions (*Parent Talk*, 2001). There are many literature that will be good sources to teach responsibility, for example a short story entitled 'Mother Holly'. It tells about a stepdaughter who was treated badly by her family. In fact she was always responsible for her job - *Everyday she had to sit by a well near to the road and spin till her finger so sore that they often bled*. Finally she met Holly Mother who asked her to be a maid. Her faithful services pleased the holly Mother that make her deserves for great rewards. She was treated very kindly and given a shower of gold by the Holly mother. In contrast her step sister who was irresponsible was given a shower of pitch. This story has good lessons how good conducts get reward and bad conduct find its punishment.

Following are phrases which show how a responsible person is highly appreciated and deserves for rewards.

She did her best to please the old lady. So she led a very easy life, was never scolded and lived on the fat land. "your desire to go home pleases me" said Holly mother, "and because you have served me so faithfully I will show you the way back into your world myself. As the girl passed through it, a heavy shower of gold fell over her, till she was covered with it from head to toe "that's a reward for being such little maid"

In contrast, bellow are phrases expressed how irresponsible one get punishment.

She didn't make Mother Holly's bed as she ought to have done and never shook it enough to make the feather fly. So her mistress soon grew weary of her, and dismissed her, much to the lazy creature's delight. Mother holly led the girl to the same door she had led her sister too, but when she passed through it, instead of the gold rain a kettle full of pitch came showering over her. "That's a reward of your service" said Mother Holly.

Honesty

Honesty means telling the truth. Honesty is a crucial character for everyone especially students. Lessons about honesty may lead them to the good present and

future life. There are many good stories tell about honesty. One of examples is a short story entitle ‘Strong Wind’. This story tells about a gentle, kind, beautiful and honest girl who treated badly by her sisters because of their jealousy. There was a great warrior named Strong Wind who looked for a wife. He was able to make himself invisible. He would marry the first woman who could see him. By this way, actually he would find an honest woman to be his wife. All women came to her and said they could see the warrior that actually they couldn’t see. Finally, came the girl who said honestly if she couldn’t see the Strong wind. Strong wind’s sister was impressed by her honesty and chose the girl as Strong wind’s wife. Following are phrases that imply that an honest person deserve for her best.

Strong Wind’s sister was surprised the girl had told the truth. Then, the Strong Wind’s sister knew that the girl could really see him. He had let her see him because she had told the truth.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthy is a character when one is reliable, worthy of trust or able to keep her/his promises. Trustworthy person will not break their promise. Trustworthy is also important character must be implanted on students character. Below is one of many stories which tell about trustworthy entitled ‘the Four Question’. The story tells about a young man who lived with his elderly mother. He always worked hard but was still always poor. Finally, he decided to find the wise man who lived on top of the mountain. On his way, he met a dragon and some people who had helped him and asked him to ask their question to the wise man. He collected three questions from them. When he reached the mountain, the wise man allowed him to have only three questions. The young man was troubled because if he kept his promise to convey all questions, he would have no chance to ask his own question. After he thought, he realized that he couldn’t break his word. At last, he got very good rewards for his trustworthiness from those three questions, that made his life better. He was never poor again. The phrases which imply the character as follows:

The young man was troubled, he had promise the old woman and the town people that he would ask their question, and he had agreed to ask dragon’s questions in exchange for a ride, and he already taken the ride. Yet his own question was the

whole reason for his journey. He though, and thought, but at last he realized he could not break his word.

The rest of the story tells the readers how young man's trustworthiness made himself deserve for big rewards - a beautiful wife and wealth.

Politeness or Courtesy

Courtesy is one of described topics in character education. Courtesy means polite behavior, good manner. Below is an example of courteous character described in a story entitle 'Princess's Suitors'. This story tells about a very kind and beautiful princess. Many princes wanted to marry her. Before decided to pick one of them as her husband the princess put on disguise and go to the castle of the three of princes in order to test them. So, the princess went to the three princes asked for a job and stable taking care of horses. The first two princes treat her rudely when he made mistakes. While the third prince was her best choice because of his courteous character, even though he was the poorest among other princes. Some phrases that expressed courteous manner in the story are as follow:

When it was time for supper, the princess took a bowl of soup to the dining room. When she got near the prince, she stumbled, dumping soup on the floor and spattering the prince. The prince looked at his clothes with a frown, then look at the princess.

"I'm so sorry....so very sorry" said the princess bowing awkwardly and spilling more soup.

"It's all right, but stop being so sorry and bring us some more soup so we can eat it. And get something to mop up the floor. The prince reminded as polite and courteous as always.

Mercy

Mercy is a kind or forgiving attitude toward somebody. The following is a story about unmerciful man who already got mercy from the king and finally he got the consequence of being punished. It tells about a man who owed the king millions of dollars, he could not pay the debt so the king ordered to sell the man and his family and

all his property to pay the debt. The man begged the king to spare him and his family and promise that he would pay everything in time. The king decided to have mercy and cancelled the debt and let the man go. In contrast the man could not give spare to someone who owed him a few thousand dollars even, he had him thrown to prison until he could pay. When the king heard this, the king got very angry and threw the man into the prison until he could pay all of his debt. The phrase bellow implied that we should give mercy to other:

In anger, the king sent for the man. *"you wicked man! I cancelled all of your debt because you begged for mercy. Shouldn't you have had mercy on someone else who only owed you a little, just as I showed you mercy? Then, in anger the king had the man thrown into prison, saying that he would not come until he had paid the last penny.*

Technical application

The question is how to use literary works as a model to build up students' good character? It does not suggest that literature will leads directly to character development. As literature are not directly purposed only for such purpose. In many cases, people often found books that help them to grow, to reset their views even brought about a change in their standard. In other words, book influenced character and helped them to be who they are today.

Literary works can be explored through various activities in teaching. The main activities of teacher is adopting, adapting, and even performing the literary works in classroom. The followings are some recommendations:

1. Focus

It is better to focus on described topic in character education, such a responsibility, honesty, integrity, respect, caring, etc. the teacher can select variety of stories that emphasis on one or two described topic in a meeting, and change the topic in another meeting. This is purposed to have enough time to explore, responds and reflect those literature. For example in a meeting the teacher focus to give lessons about integrity, then he should expose to a wide variety of literature that illustrates character

qualities that helps children identify what qualities to emulate and how to overcome adversity to be successful.

2. Discussions

Teachers lead the students in discussions, the theme of moral values must be integrated in the discussion, firstly the teachers may discuss the definition of specific characters in the story, and stimulate student to be interested on that topic. for example when the story tells about honesty, teacher may ask students what is honesty, why should we be honest, how do we face dishonest people, etc. the teachers also can discuss the consequences of good and bad behaviors in the story. Teachers should allow the students to express, discuss and explore the variety of motivational for good behaviors. It is expected that the students obtain clear reasons why good characters are important for them, or why they should have good characters. That discussion will eventually establish a model of good trait in the students' minds. A way of thinking that says 'I must have good character'.

Teachers could aid in this process by creating a community of inquiry in the classroom that allows the discussion of deeper philosophical and religious issues that relate to ethics. In this way, students may discuss reasons to be virtuous and choose those that are more convincing than political or cultural pressure (Kirkwood 2001:693).

3. Handout / Work sheets

Handout or worksheet is purposed for deeper understanding and reflection of the related topics. The handout lead the student reflecting themselves about the specific topic discussed. When discussing about integrity, teachers may give students a handout about setting goal. Give some questions related to students' goal, e.g. picture your goal- what do you want to be in the future, give the reasons of your choice, list the skill and knowledge should you prepare, etc. by this way, the student will reflect themselves on the worksheet. When talking about responsibility, the questions may about 'what is your responsibility of being a student?'

4. Role-play

Role-play is a good idea to make the students deeply in touch with literature. Through role-play the students will engage with the character they present. It's possible to give the students clearest descriptions, understanding and impression about the characters in the story.

Role-play also will effectively work for episodic memory. Episodic memory refers to memories of specific episode in one's life and is what most people think of as memory. When information has been stored up in episodic memory, it will be easier to be retrieved and lasts longer in one's memory. Generally episodic memory is important in teaching method and specifically, it will be a benefit for character education. Information about moral values should be stored up in episodic memory to make it something that always be remembered and easily accessed when one faces real related situation.

Conclusion

This paper has presented some underlying issues and ideas of using literature in EFL classroom as a model of character education. This paper does not suggest the study of literature in the aspects of literariness of the text, instead it concerns on the use of literature as a mean of language teaching to promote character education.

Literature provides good values or moral messages that will be useful lessons for students' life. It also presents authentic material, variety of language styles, cultural knowledge that will be highly qualified content for the students in English language learning. In short, integrating literature in EFL classroom will be beneficial for both linguistics and character education aspects.

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