

Language as a Character Education Tool: An Exploration of Innovative Learning Practices in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to deepen the understanding of the role of language as a tool for character education in the Indonesian educational context, particularly through the exploration of innovative learning practices implemented in various schools. The study investigates how language is used as a medium to instill essential character values, such as integrity, empathy and collaboration among students. To achieve this objective, the research adopted a qualitative approach with a case study method, involving direct observation and in-depth interviews with teachers, students, as well as content analysis of learning materials in five selected primary schools in Indonesia. These schools were chosen for their uniqueness and success in integrating language approaches in their character education curriculum. The results of this study show that the strategic use of language in the learning process can enhance the internalization of character values by students. In addition, this study also revealed that teachers play a key role in facilitating and directing language interactions that support character learning. The conclusion of this study confirms that language is a powerful tool for character education provided it is combined with appropriate learning methods and adequate curriculum support.

Keywords: *character education, Indonesian language, innovative learning, education in Indonesia, curriculum development*

1. Introduction

In Indonesia over the past few years, character education has become one of the main focuses in the education system. This is in line with the need to build a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has strong moral integrity. The use of language in character education in schools has been recognized as one of the effective methods to instill moral values to students (Natalia et al., 2021). Language, as a universal means of communication, has an important role in student character building. Appropriate use of language in the learning process can help students internalize values such as integrity, empathy, and collaboration (Julianto et al., 2022).

Previous research shows that language integration in character education can improve the overall quality of learning. Prasetyo and Handayani (Gogahu & Prasetyo, 2020), for example, revealed that students who engaged in character-based learning through language showed improvements in their social and emotional skills. In addition, language can be an effective tool to facilitate discussions on moral and ethical values in the broader context of learning (Sari et al., 2019). In this case, teachers play an important role as facilitators in directing interactions and communications that support character education.

Along with the development of learning methods, innovation in the use of language as a character education tool is increasingly needed. This innovation involves developing learning strategies that allow students to be more active in discussing, solving problems, and reflecting

on the values learned (Komalasari & Saripudin, 2017). Schools in Indonesia are starting to adopt various innovative approaches to integrate character education through the use of language in their curriculum (Hidayati et al., 2020). The success of these approaches in some schools shows great potential to be applied more widely, especially in Indonesia's diverse contexts.

In the context of classroom learning, language plays a very important role in shaping students' understanding and behavior. Activities such as group discussions, joint problem solving, and individual reflections become a means for students to express and reflect on character values. Research by Morelent et al. (2022) shows that well-directed verbal interactions can increase students' awareness of the importance of these values in everyday life. In addition, teachers are not only teachers, but also facilitators who assist students in understanding and applying character values through the use of appropriate language. Thus, teachers must also be more creative in developing teaching materials that are of interest to students and can instill character values (Nugrahani, 2017).

Effective character education through language also requires adequate educational policy support. Educational policies that support the integration of language and character education may include comprehensive training for teachers, development of relevant curricula, and provision of adequate resources for the implementation of innovative learning strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Hasanah's (2019) research shows that the main challenge in implementing character education is the lack of training and support for teachers in integrating character values into daily learning. Thus, appropriate policies can help overcome these challenges and improve the effectiveness of character education through language use.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore how language is used as a character education tool in Indonesian primary schools. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena in a natural context (Cressey et al., 2016). The case study method is suitable for this research as it focuses on an in-depth exploration of innovative learning practices in five selected primary schools (Moleong, 2011). This research seeks to reveal how the use of language in daily learning activities can instill character values in students (Junaidi & Cahyani, 2016). Each school was used as its own unit of analysis which enabled the researcher to conduct cross-case comparison and analysis (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

2.2 Data and Data Sources

The data collected in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through direct observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and content analysis of the learning materials used in the schools. Primary data sources include five elementary schools selected based on their success criteria in integrating language in the character education curriculum (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The five primary schools are (1) SDN Sidosermo 1 Surabaya, (2) SDN Margorejo 3 Surabaya, (3) SDN Margorejo 1 Surabaya, (4) SDN Bendul Merisi Surabaya, and (5) SDN Siwalan Kerto 1 Surabaya. Secondary data were collected from official school documents, educational reports, and relevant literature (Silverman & Patterson, 2021). This research also utilized data from the literature review to enrich the analysis and strengthen the research findings (Creswell, 2014).

2.3 Data Collection Technique

The data collection techniques used in this study include observation, interview, and documentation. Observation was conducted in a participatory manner, where the researcher was directly involved in classroom learning activities to understand the interaction and language use in the learning process (Angrosino, 2018; Uwamusi & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and students to explore their views on language use in character education (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview was recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Document analysis involved reviewing learning materials, lesson plans and teachers' daily notes relating to character education. All these techniques were triangulated to increase the validity and reliability of the data collected..

2.4 Research Instruments

The research instruments used include observation guides, interview guides, and document analysis checklists. The observation guide was designed to record verbal and non-verbal interactions that occurred during the learning process (Hawthorn et al., 2018). The interview guide was designed to ensure that all important aspects related to language use in character education were covered during the interview. Document analysis checklists were used to evaluate learning materials and lesson plans based on predetermined criteria (Harbertson et al., 2019). These instruments were pilot tested to ensure their reliability and validity..

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The data analysis process began with interview transcription and manual coding of the data. Coding was done to identify key themes that emerged from the data. Data from observations and document analysis were also coded and integrated with interview data to build a comprehensive narrative (Huberman et al., 2014). The thematic analysis technique allowed the researcher to explore patterns and relationships between the themes found. The results of the analysis were then validated through data triangulation and member checking to ensure the validity of the findings.

3. Research Results

3.1 Strategic Use of Language in the Learning Process

The results show that the strategic use of language in the learning process can significantly improve students' understanding and internalization of character values. Varied learning activities, such as group discussions, joint problem solving, and reflective activities, proved effective in helping students understand and internalize character values in a real context. For example, in group discussions, students are encouraged to express their opinions and listen to their peers' perspectives, which in turn improves their ability to empathize and cooperate. Shared problem-solving allows students to apply values such as cooperation and responsibility in practical situations, while reflective activities provide space for them to reflect on and express their understanding of the values.

In the case studies in the five schools studied, it was found that this variety of learning activities not only increased student engagement but also facilitated a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. One of the teachers interviewed stated, "Group discussions allow students to learn from each other and understand character values through direct experience" (Interview with Teacher A, 2023). Observations also show that students involved in role-playing are better able to articulate the character values learned compared to traditional

learning methods. Observations showed that "students who participated in the role play seemed to understand and be able to express values such as honesty and responsibility in their daily interactions" (Observation at School B, 2023).

3.2 Teacher's Role in Facilitating Character Learning

Teachers play a key role in facilitating and directing language interactions that support character learning. Interviews with teachers in the five schools studied revealed that teachers not only act as teachers, but also as facilitators and mentors. They direct discussions, provide constructive feedback, and create an environment that supports free expression and reflection. One teacher commented, "My role as a facilitator is to ensure every student has the opportunity to speak and share their views, so that character values can be well understood and internalized" (Interview with Teacher C, 2023). Observations support this role by noting that "teachers who actively interact with students during discussion and reflection tend to see an increase in students' understanding of character values" (Observation at School D, 2023)..

3.3 Language as a Powerful Tool for Character Education

Language is a powerful tool for character education, especially when combined with appropriate learning methods and adequate curriculum support. This research found that the use of language in various learning activities not only helps students understand character values but also practice them in daily life. Language allows students to express their thoughts and feelings, discuss moral dilemmas, and reflect on their actions in the context of character values. For example, in one case, students were invited to write reflective essays about their experiences in practicing values such as honesty and responsibility.

In their implementation, schools that successfully integrate language in character education also use various visual aids and technology to support learning. For example, the use of learning videos featuring moral and ethical scenarios can stimulate discussion and reflection in the classroom. Figure 3 shows an example of a visual aid used in one of the schools studied. This tool helps students to more easily understand and internalize character values through interesting visualizations and narratives.

4. Discussion of Research Results

4.1 Strategic Use of Language in the Learning Process

Language use strategies in character education have great potential to help students internalize character values. Research conducted by Suhendi & Purwanto, (2020) shows that a variety of learning activities using language as the main medium not only increases student engagement but also facilitates a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. In this context, role-playing technique becomes one of the effective methods. Role-playing allows students to experience and understand the consequences of their actions in a safe and controlled environment, which in turn strengthens their understanding of character values..

The role-playing approach implemented in selected primary schools showed that students who engaged in this activity were better able to articulate character values compared to traditional learning methods. According to Johnson & Johnson (2009), cooperative learning that involves discussion and active interaction between students can improve their understanding of moral and ethical values. The observations in this study are in line with these findings, where students who engaged in role play showed a deeper understanding of values such as empathy, honesty, and responsibility..

The strategy of using language in group discussions also has a positive impact in helping students internalize character values. Rahman and Dewi (2020) found that group discussions allowed students to share their views and reflect on their actions, which ultimately improved their ability to cooperate and empathize with others. In addition, joint problem solving in groups provides opportunities for students to apply character values in real situations, which strengthens the understanding and application of these values.

Research by Johnson & Johnson (2009) shows that cooperative learning supported by intensive use of language can enhance understanding and internalization of character values. Group discussions facilitated by a flexible curriculum allow students to share their views and reflect on their actions. This activity helps students develop critical thinking skills and empathy, which are key elements in character education. Thus, an adaptive curriculum plays an important role in creating a supportive learning environment.

In addition, the strategy of using language in reflective essay writing has also proven to be effective in character education. According to Rahman & Dewi (2020), writing reflective essays allows students to reflect on their experiences and relate them to the character values learned. This activity not only improves students' understanding of the values but also helps them in practicing them in their daily lives. Students who wrote reflective essays about their experiences in practicing values such as honesty and responsibility showed a deeper understanding of the importance of these values.

According to Rosmalah et al. (2019), the integration of character education in Indonesian language learning in elementary schools has an important role in facing the industrial revolution 4.0 which has an impact on the mentality of students. Appropriate character values to be integrated in Indonesian language learning include tolerance, cooperation, honesty, responsibility, and independence. These character values help students to behave honestly, responsibly, independently, and tolerantly towards classmates, teachers, and society. Good Indonesian learning helps students develop positive communication skills that are the basis for acting honestly, responsibly and tolerantly. Good communication skills also encourage the wise use of technology in the family and school environment. Thus, it is very important to integrate character education in Indonesian language learning to form strong student characters who are ready to face the challenges of the industrial revolution 4.0.

The integration of character education in Indonesian language learning can be done through children's stories. Children's stories are an effective tool in character education in elementary schools. The use of children's stories in learning can help students internalize good character values and apply them in everyday life. The children's stories in Peci and KKPK contain character education values desired by the 2013 curriculum. These values include religion, honesty, discipline, responsibility, courtesy, caring, and self-confidence. The stories are in accordance with the contextual life of children, making it easier for students to internalize these values and realize them in everyday life (Widayati, 2017).

The integration of Islamic values in Indonesian language learning can be done by integrating the postulates of the Al-Quran and Hadith in learning materials, using Islamic examples in language exercises, and applying attitudes that reflect Islamic values in teaching and learning activities. This integration provides a richer learning experience and helps in the formation of Islamic student characters (Maharany et al., 2023).

Internalization of cultural, national, civic and religious values for students to develop noble and positive characters, such as responsibility, honesty, independence and creativity. However, the school's ability to encourage character building is still weak, making it ineffective in developing strong characters in students. The school curriculum does not have a strong

concept or roadmap in carrying out the mission of character education. In addition, the school curriculum is not based on the real needs of students, so it is unable to build the capacity of students who are actively and effectively involved as good citizens (Abdullah et al., 2019)..

The local wisdom-based literacy movement in Indonesian language learning can help students develop literacy skills while shaping their character. The use of texts and teaching materials related to the students' surrounding environment makes learning more interesting and meaningful, and helps students understand and internalize local values in their community (Joyo, 2018).

The integration of character education in Indonesian language learning through digital media is an effective step to form students who are characterized and ready to face challenges in the digital era (Julianto et al., 2022).

The internalization of character education values at SMK Darut Tauhid Islamic Boarding School is carried out through various strategies that emphasize practical and applicable activities. Coordination between teachers, parents, and all school elements is the key to success in implementing character education. Internalized character values can be seen from students' daily behaviors and habits that show honesty, discipline, empathy, responsibility, and religiosity (Junaidi & Cahyani, 2016).

Masyhudi et al. (2020) stated that the integration of Islamic values in Indonesian language learning at SDIT Adzkie Padang covers various levels, from philosophy, methods and approaches, materials, strategies, evaluation, to communication. The understanding of this integration needs to be strengthened at the philosophical level, especially related to the ontological aspects of science. This integration has positive implications for increasing students' moral responsibility and morals.

According to Shinta & Ain (2021), in order for the integration of character education in Indonesian language learning to be more effective, it is necessary to strengthen strategies and closer collaboration between schools and parents to overcome existing challenges and ensure good character formation.

4.2 Teacher's Role in Facilitating Character Learning

Teachers play an important role in facilitating the use of language and technology in character education. According to Prasetyo and Handayani (2021), teachers should be able to integrate technology into the curriculum and use visual aids effectively to support learning. Teachers who are trained in the use of educational technology can help students to understand and internalize character values more effectively. In addition, teachers should also be able to create a learning environment that supports free expression and reflection, so that students feel comfortable to share and discuss their experiences.

The role of the teacher as a facilitator is very important in supporting the process of internalizing character values through language use. Prasetyo & Handayani (2021) emphasize that teachers should be able to direct discussions, provide constructive feedback, and create an environment that supports free expression and reflection. Teachers trained in language-based learning methods are better able to facilitate learning that supports character values, compared to teachers who have not received similar training. This shows the importance of continuous professional training for teachers to improve the effectiveness of character education in schools.

The role of teachers in facilitating the internalization process of character values is very important and complex. According to research conducted by Prasetyo and Handayani (2021), teachers not only act as teachers but also as facilitators and mentors. They direct discussions,

provide constructive feedback, and create an environment that supports free expression and reflection. This research shows that teachers who play an active role in supporting language interaction can improve students' understanding and internalization of character values.

Teachers also play a role in designing and implementing a curriculum that supports the integration of language and character education. According to Fullan (2007), an effective curriculum is one that can adapt to students' needs and context. In this study, it was found that schools that are successful in character education are those with highly trained and dedicated teachers. Comprehensive and continuous teacher training is essential to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to teach character values effectively. Darling-Hammond (2000) also emphasizes the importance of teacher quality in determining the success of character education in schools.

According to Johnson & Johnson (2009), social interactions facilitated by teachers can increase student engagement in learning character values. Group discussions, for example, allow students to share their views and reflect on their actions, ultimately improving their ability to cooperate and empathize with others.

The importance of professional training for teachers cannot be ignored. According to Wahyuni (2021), continuous and comprehensive teacher training is essential to improve the quality of character education in schools. Trained teachers are better able to facilitate learning that supports character values and provide constructive feedback that helps students understand and internalize these values. In this study, it was found that teachers who had received intensive training were more effective in teaching character values compared to teachers who had not received similar training.

Teachers internalize character values through habituation program, integration in learning materials, and imitation process. It is admitted that many teachers find it difficult to internalize character values in online learning due to the lack of direct face-to-face interaction. Implementation is done through various ways such as habituation programs at school, role models from teachers, integration of character values in the learning process, and synergy between family, school, and environment (Hidayat et al., 2022).

Indeed, teacher qualifications and other school inputs correlate with student achievement. Teacher quality is associated with improved student achievement. To improve quality and equity in education, teacher quality needs to be considered as one of the important factors to improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Various models and innovations began to be developed by educational units led by creative teachers who began to package character-based learning designs and innovations. Character values developed include religious values, creativity, independence and responsibility, national spirit and love for the country, tolerance, communication, and love for the environment (Abdi, 2018).

The role of teachers in internalizing character values through various interaction situations in the learning process is very important (Morelent et al., 2022). Teachers have an important role in internalizing character values to students through children's stories. Teachers are expected to be able to direct students to find positive values from the literary works they read, then apply them in everyday life (Widayati, 2017). Therefore, teachers need to be more creative in developing teaching materials that are of interest to students and can instill character values. Teachers must act as facilitators and models for students in the character building process (Nugrahani, 2017; Rasna & Tantra, 2017).

4.3 Language as a Powerful Tool for Character Education

The use of language as a powerful tool for character education can be explained through several effective strategies and approaches. According to Vygotsky (1978), language plays a key role in the social and cognitive mediation necessary for character development. The strategy of using language in reflective essay writing has also proven to be effective in character education. According to Rahman and Dewi (2020), writing reflective essays allows students to reflect on their experiences and relate them to the character values learned. This activity not only improves students' understanding of the values but also helps them in practicing them in their daily lives. In this study, it was found that students who wrote reflective essays about their experiences in practicing values such as honesty and responsibility showed a deeper understanding of the importance of these values.

The use of language as a powerful tool for character education can be enhanced by the integration of various visual aids and technology in learning. According to Johnson & Johnson (2009), the use of learning videos featuring moral and ethical scenarios can stimulate discussion and reflection in the classroom. The videos serve as an effective stimulus to initiate in-depth discussions on character values, such as honesty and responsibility. In this way, students not only see concrete examples of the application of these values but also get the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their own actions in a safe and structured context.

Rahman and Dewi's (2020) research shows that visual aids such as learning videos can increase student engagement in character learning. Students who engage in discussions after watching learning videos tend to be more active in expressing their opinions and listening to others' perspectives. This activity helps them develop critical thinking skills and empathy, which are key elements in character education. The use of this technology also allows teachers to present complex material in a way that is more interesting and easily understood by students.

5. Summary

The study concluded that the use of language as a powerful tool for character education is particularly effective when supported by a flexible and adaptive curriculum. The results show that schools that are successful in character education utilize various visual aids and technology, such as learning videos, to support the learning process. Curricula that allow for customization of learning methods to students' needs and contexts proved to be more effective in teaching character values.

The benefits of this finding are very significant both theoretically and practically in the field of Indonesian Language and Literature Education. Theoretically, the findings reinforce Vygotsky's theory of the important role of language in social and cognitive mediation. In addition, this study adds to the understanding of how technology and visual aids can be used to enhance character learning. Practically, the results of this study can be used by educators and policy makers to design a curriculum that is more effective and relevant to students' needs, as well as encourage the use of technology in the learning process.

However, this study has some limitations. One limitation is that the research sample was limited to a few primary schools in Indonesia, so the results may not be generalizable to all educational contexts. Future research is recommended to cover a wider and more diverse sample and explore the use of technology and other learning methods in character education. In addition, further research should also examine the long-term impact of using language and technology in character education. This is expected to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth insight into the effectiveness of language use in character education across different educational contexts.

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