

Choral Speaking and Students' Character Building in Indonesia

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Abstract— Choral speaking is generally defined as a learning strategy in the classroom by reciting a text by a group. This case study aims to investigate the effect of using choral speaking for building students' positive characters. It was conducted in a speaking class in the English Education Department at one of the universities in Indonesia. The data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, and face to face semi-structured interviews with 50-second semester students who had experienced the choral speaking project in their speaking class. The results of this study indicated that the students had positive attitudes towards the use of choral speaking strategy in their speaking class. They claimed that the use of a choral speaking strategy could lead them to build better interpersonal and leadership skills since they had interacted most of the time inside and outside the classroom with one another starting from preparing for the script, practicing, recording, until performing the choral speaking show. Choral speaking is assumed to be effective for building the students' positive characters, mostly cooperation, responsibility, self-discipline, and respect

Keywords: *choral speaking, students' character building*

I. INTRODUCTION

English is considered a foreign language in Indonesia, so many students face difficulties, especially in English speaking skills. One of them is students' anxiety, which leads to some consequences, such as uncertainty of one's abilities, difficulty in speaking in public, minimal participation in conversations, failure to initiate conversation, and becoming self-conscious and inhibited speakers [1]. Specifically in the Indonesian speaking learning context, (1) language barriers (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency); (2) psychological factors (anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation); and (3) learning environment (teachers, peers, and topics) are also believed as problems occurred in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms [2]. These consequences are believed to arise because of the lack of an effective learning strategy that attracts the attention and/or students' enthusiasm during the teaching and learning process, and at the same time can minimize their anxiety level. However, the common activities in Speaking classes emphasize oral communication,

where students must be able to ask questions and respond to all conversations using English in a very natural context.

On the other hand, one of the most controversial issues in all schools today is the topic of character education and values learning. The purpose of national education in Indonesia is the development of potential students to become human beings who believe in God the Almighty, have noble character, knowledge, skill, creativity, independence, and responsibility [3]. Higher education is an academic institution with the main task of carrying out education and development of science, technology, and art. Organizing education in higher education includes efforts to establish students' personalities so that the students become smart persons with good characters. In other words, the programs in universities need to integrate character education programs to improve student positive characters.

Character education is a deliberate and focused effort to help students understand, care, and act according to ethical values [4]. Character is the values of human behavior that relate to God the Almighty, self, fellow human beings, environment, and nationality, which is manifested in thoughts, attitudes, feelings, words, and actions based on religious norms, laws, manners, culture, and customs. Character is one's personality, which is formed from the results of internalizing various virtues that are believed and used as a basis for perspective, thinking, acting, and acting.

The following is a list of the ten characteristics of important Character Education, which were included in the Character Education Toolkit by the South Carolina Department of Education since 2009: (1) Respect: to show high appreciation for authority, other people, yourself, and the country, (2) Honesty: always be fair and straight forward in behaving, (3) Cooperation: play together or work well with other people to achieve common goals, (4) Good Citizenship: to be actively involved in showing pride and responsibility in self, school, society, and the country, (5) Responsibility: Responsible for one's own actions, (6) Self-discipline: to show the ability to control yourself in all situations, (7) Caring: to show concern through kindness and acceptance while fulfilling the needs of self and others, (8) Kindness: attention, courtesy, help, and understanding the feelings and beliefs of others, (9) Fairness:

playing according to regulations, being open to other people's perspectives, and (10) Dependability: reliable or trusted

Character education programs are also mentioned to have a positive effect on the development of character and academic abilities [5]. Character education can improve test scores, emotional skills, behavior towards oneself, and others, as well as positive social habits [6]. Therefore, Speaking class in universities is expected to be a place for appropriately growing students' positive characters. Character education should be formulated in the curriculum, applied in educational methods, and practiced in learning. The skills to apply positive character values need to be used in classroom learning activities, such as group work and discussion. The positive characters can be built through the process of student interaction.

One alternative to develop positive characters is to implement a Choral Speaking strategy. It is a learning strategy in the classroom by reading a text by a group. It involves students reading aloud by assigning parts to each group member. It enables groups to present oral presentations of texts such as rhymes, poetry, and picture books. The literature is interpreted orally by an ensemble of students frequently using various voice combinations and contrasts. They can experiment with voice, sound gestures, and movement. It takes a great concentration of both individual and group's interpretative skills and focused teamwork on creating the desired result.

Choral Speaking is one of the methods for teaching drama, in which the advantages of learning concepts in the form of drama are as follows: (1) Students learn content that is meaningful better than other content, (2) Learning occurs as a result of student interaction with the environment, (3) The more sensory tools students use when learning, the greater the retention of the lesson, (4) Students learn well by doing and experiencing directly, (5) Effective participation is important in studying emotional behavior, and (6) Learning becomes easier and more permanent in the educational environment with more than one stimulus [7]. In addition to providing context and improving student fluency, drama can also help students understand the range and meaning that accompanies the words spoken. Moreover, a skilled language speaker will be able to identify the needs of listeners in a particular context, then use words, facial expressions, intonations and gestures to communicate their thoughts and ideas appropriately [8]. Drama is believed to be one of the most effective teaching approaches that can help students become effective communicators.

Based on the preliminary observation of the previous Choral speaking project, this strategy is believed to be beneficial for some reasons. First, in presenting moral speaking, students must imitate the atmosphere in written texts and produce correct pronunciation. This is where choral speaking enhances learning English. Second, choral speaking requires very good memory support. For this reason, the repetition of lines in a text helps students better improve their pronunciation as well as the use of language in context. Third, choral speaking acts as a means of socialization. This encourages weak student confidence through socialization activities in the upcoming choral speaking process. When students are in a choral speaking group, they must carefully listen to the words of one student to another; this is when

collaborative learning works. Fourth, choral speaking can also be used to teach reading, grammar, and vocabulary. For example, to teach the verb 'work', students will learn and say the text with verbs, at the same time displaying activities such as moving the head, moving the body rhythmically, and repeating words that actually improve the learning of words. Finally, choral speaking helps students develop vocabulary and indirectly enrich the use of language by students.

Choral speaking is believed to be able to make students practice to speak in English because it offers the opportunity for students to be actively involved, so they will understand the concept more and remember longer. Throughout the process of learning a choral speaking piece, the students acquire and strengthen life-long literacy skills necessary for strong and effective communication such as articulation, inflection, rhythm, listening, volume, rate, pronunciation, pitch, and poise. The goal of learning a choral speaking piece for performance is to please an audience. During the rehearsal or practice process, the ensemble works together until the piece is polished and refined.

Choral speaking is also believed to be able to build students' positive characters because of the intensity of interaction among the students in their Choral speaking project. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of using choral speaking for building the English Education study program students' positive characters.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This is a case study that involved undergraduate English education juniors from a university in Indonesian who had taken a Speaking course in their study program curriculum. The course was specifically designed to prepare pre-service teachers to gain natural informal and formal English speaking skills. There were 50 students taking the course in 2018. They participated in the specific choral speaking project.

The choral speaking project in this study included the following steps. First, the lecturer first planned a short project where all students in the class tried to practice using the prepared script and performed it in the class to get the input (feedback and comments) from the lecturers. After that, students must adopt the script by adding some parts that they made by themselves. Second, students were asked to prepare themselves and practiced outside the class hour. Then, three weeks before the final performance, students were given special time during the face-to-face meeting in the class to practice and prepare all the necessities to appear on the day of the performance. On this occasion, the lecturer also gave feedback and final input. Finally, students performed their choral speaking, and their performance was recorded. After finishing the performance, the lecturers and students evaluated the activity through a class discussion forum while watching the results of the recorded video performances.

Classroom observation, questionnaire distribution, and face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the primary data in the form of student perceptions and dominant characters. The classroom observations were conducted four times when (1) the lecturer showed choral speaking videos and discussed the project with the students in

class, (2) students performed some pieces of their appearance in class as a result of their practice outside the class hours, (3) students performed the complete results of their choral speaking project, but they still get input and comments from lecturers, and (4) students presented their final choral speaking project. While, the questionnaire and the interview questions were adapted from "Students' perceptions of learning English through drama" (Lee, 2007) and compiled with the aspects related to the character education from the Character Education Toolkit by the South Carolina Department of Education.

There were two professors in the English Education field served as the internal review board for this study who approved the validity and reliability of the instruments for this study by seeing the triangulation of the multiple data sources (classroom observations, questionnaire, and interview).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1) Classroom Observation Results

The classroom observation revealed the students' perception by seeing the students' enthusiasm and emotions. In the first classroom observation, while watching the choral speaking video, the students from both groups seemed enthusiastic and excited because choral speaking was a new, unfamiliar strategy for them. They were also looked challenged after being told that they would perform a real choral speaking as their final class project. However, comparing the first to the fourth classroom observation, the students did not show increased-enthusiasm gradually, and they showed various emotions.

In the second classroom observation, the students still looked enthusiastic and happy while performing some parts of the script. They had their role clearly, and they were actively involved in the short performance, which was repeated three times. There was discussion following the performance, and the students actively shared and expressed their opinions. The conductors in for the performance were first decided by the willingness of the students herself (T5). However, after evaluating her performance, she was willingly being replaced by her other friend (T18). Comparing the male and female students, the female was more active and serious in doing the practice. From the discussion, it was found out that the male students were a bit reluctant with the gesture they had to do, which they claimed was too feminine for them. Because of the discussion, this matter was managed to be solved, so they decided that the male would perform some different gestures from the female.

The third classroom observation showed that the students' emotions were unstable and different from the previous observations. The students seemed reluctant to perform the performance. It seemed that they encountered problems that were not solved at that time. However, they claimed they would do their performance well. The fourth observation showed that the students looked happy with the final results of their choral speaking performance. They managed to perform their choral speaking successfully, in which they were specifically very proud because they performed it as an

opening performance before their senior drama show, which was watched by many audiences.

2) Questionnaire Results

Table 1 shows the percentage on how the students' perception toward the use of choral speaking projects to build their positive characters based on the ten characters. The data showed that the most well-built character was cooperation, followed respectively by self-discipline, and responsibility.

TABLE I. PERCENTAGE OF THE CHARACTERS BUILT

Characters	Percentage
Respect	91
Honesty	81
Cooperation	97
Good citizenship	79
Responsibility	89
Self-discipline	93
Caring	87
Kindness	85
Fairness	81
Dependability	71

3) Interview Results

The data from the interview supported the finding from the classroom observation and questionnaire. They revealed the proof that the students had a positive perception of using choral speaking to improve their speaking ability and positive characters. They enjoyed the fun and exciting choral speaking project. Moreover, they followed each of the choral speaking project activities, including the grouping, preparing the script, practicing/rehearsal, and performing process seriously because it was part of the speaking class syllabus.

Although some students claim that this project had some disadvantages, in which it was very time consuming and conflict often occurred among them because there were students who were selfish and not seriously taken part in the project, the majority of the students claim that it provided them advantages more than the disadvantages. The advantages included improving their speaking skills (practicing their pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation as well as enriching their vocabulary) and building their positive characters.

Besides improving the ten characters, the data from the interview showed that the students' self-confidence and leadership skills are the other two positive characters that can be built by involving in the choral speaking project. Moreover, they believed they had to increase their respect with one another in order to be able to cooperate in a team.

B. Discussions

The results of this study indicate that students had positive attitudes towards the choral speaking project from their speaking class. They claimed that it could lead them to have better communication, interpersonal skills, and management development since they had to interact most of the time with

one another intensely. Students' positive perception usually correlates positively with other positive variables such as motivation and academic achievement [9] to support their learning success [10].

Working together in a big team for the project put the students in an engaging as well as a challenging situation, especially during the activities outside the class hour. They need to learn to manage themselves for the sake of their individual and group needs. The cooperation in a group can lead an individual to learn faster than learning alone, the processing of information exchange makes group members act faster, and quick response in a team develops to solve problems faced by the individual as well as a group [11].

The students came originally with their own positive and negative characters/personalities. The intense interaction at the same time built their characters because they worked as a big team, and each student's role supports the result of the performance. Cooperation is the most well-built character besides self-discipline and responsibility. Respect is also the character they managed to build in order to overcome the conflict that occurred among them. Positive results seem only to occur when a whole school community agrees to proactively teach, resource, and model a greater sense of respect and responsibility [12].

Therefore, apart from being time-consuming, the choral speaking project in the class is assumed to influence the students' characters successfully. The intense interaction among the students inside and outside the classroom starting from preparing for the script, discussing, practicing, recording, until performing the choral speaking show decreasing their negative characters and build their positive characters as the character education in schools may offer the best hope to meet challenges with students' disruptive behaviors [12].

IV. CONCLUSION

In this study, the choral speaking project is believed as an engaging strategy to nurture values and develop positive characters and skills in teams as well as the individual. It provides a conducive learning atmosphere for students. Using choral speaking as a project results in real intense interaction, which involves ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness, and adaptability naturally among the students. Apart from being a time-consuming, choral speaking project conducted in an

English classroom context results in observable positive character education for the students.

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