

The Implementation of Character Education for Children at Semarang Kindergarten, Indonesia

Marini¹, Masrukhi²

¹*Universitas Ivet Semarang, Indonesia*

²*Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia*

*Corresponding author. Email: marini5980@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Character education needs to be developed since children at an early age. Kindergarten as an educational institution should give a priority to develop children's character. Character education in kindergarten requires an appropriate strategy. The purpose of this research is to describe the character education strategies at kindergarten in Semarang, Indonesia. This research was held by a combination of survey and qualitative methods. Data analysis techniques in this study go through 4 stages, which are data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The results showed that character education at kindergarten in Semarang is aimed to shape attitudes and behaviors based on morals and religion, as well as the prevailing rules. The development of children's character was generally divided into four global categories; those are attitudes towards themselves, attitudes towards God, attitudes towards other people, and attitudes towards the environment. Children learned the attitudes by doing various activities that are related to the development of the child. The strengthening of character education was done by conditioning the environment. The environment was prepared by the teacher through the arrangement of facilities at school. Teachers cooperated with parents to build children's knowledge, understanding, and role model for children.

Keywords: *Education, Character, Children, Environment, Kindergarten*

1. INTRODUCTION

Character is one's morality, truth, kindness, strength, and attitude which are shown to others through action. Good or bad character of a person is depicted in morality possessed. [1]

The word of characters, behavior, and personalities are often exchanged in its use. This is because the terms have the same meaning, which is something original in person and tends to settle permanently. Character, behavior, or personality is a basic attitude in an individual, it is abstract and sometimes people say it as a habit. [2]

One of the objectives of Indonesian national education is to develop the potential of students to be good people, good behavior, healthy, friendly, independent, democratic and become responsible citizens. In other words, education in Indonesia does not only build smart people but also to develop people with a positive character.

Good characters are needed, even in daily activities or in career development. Someone who has good character will live better. Good character makes a comfortable, peaceful, and harmonious life. That's why character education is important to do since early childhood.

Kindergarten is a formal preschool educational service in Indonesia. Kindergarten gives education for children aged

4 to 6 years old. The objective of education is to develop various aspects in children's self, include character. The education of character should appropriate for child development.

The age of 4 to 6 is a valuable time to gain a foundation of development. This age is an essential time to get a character education. The earlier the child gets stimulation of character education, the better the character of the child will grow up. A character which developed from an early age will be more strongly integrated into the child.

There are still many teachers in kindergarten who have not seen the importance of character education in pre-school children. Teachers generally provide education only on the aspects of knowledge and memory. Teachers are busy pursuing academic values without paying serious attention to the child's character education

Another condition that occurs is that many teachers do not realize that the figure of the teacher is a model for building up the children's character. A character of teacher seen by children will be just imitated, whether it is good or not. This can happen because children do not have sufficient ability to judge good or bad behaviour.

Character education in kindergarten requires a systematic program. In fact, many kindergartens in central Java do not have a systematic program yet in building up the character of the children. Teachers only follow the materials in books or worksheets purchased in the bookstore. This condition makes the practice of character education in

kindergarten was not suitable with children's needs and conditions. Many preschool teachers still need a view of how character education practices should be implemented. Based on the condition, the problem in this research is: "How is the implementation of character education at Semarang kindergarten?" The objective of this research is to describe the implementation of character education at kindergarten in Semarang.

2. METHOD

This research was held by a combination of survey and qualitative methods. The population is the entire kindergarten in Semarang. Random sampling was applied in which we solicited. We intended to seek the wide and the deepest understanding of the process of the implementation of character education at kindergarten. Data collection focused on the implementation strategy to build children's character at kindergarten in Semarang.

The research was conducted from March 2019 to March 2020. Data collection was through questionnaires, interviews, observation, and documentation. First, we gathered data through questionnaires. We shared questionnaires to fill with 33 kindergarten teachers. The responses we got were 30 filled questionnaires. After that, 10 teachers, 3 principals, and two parents we interviewed by using open questions to solicit respondents' views, experience, and knowledge. We observed three Kindergartens to get the deepest understanding of the process of children's character building.

Data analysis was through the stage of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusions.

The data collection was extracted from the answer of the questionnaire, observations written in field notes, transcribed from interviews, and the study of documents. We analyzed and categorized data according to themes and synthesized data through our descriptions, interpretations, and conclusions.

The study used triangulation techniques to get data validity. We used multiple sources, comparing one source of data to the other to understand the phenomenon as it is differently situated and interpreted across different sources.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Existence of character building program in Semarang Kindergarten

Character education is a deliberate attempt to help a person so that he or she can understand, pay attention to, and perform ethical values [3]. In other words, character education is through the process of understanding, so that

children can truly realize the ethics and values that society expects.

All respondents stated that there had been a character-building program for children at kindergartens in Semarang. However, teachers in different kindergarten had different views on the purpose of character education for students in the kindergarten they work in.

Some teachers simply said that the purpose of character education in kindergarten was to educate characters early on and build personality. Others have conveyed in detail a clear overview of the purpose of character education. The clarity of the purpose of the character's education was conveyed through the details of character objective. The purpose of character education was to shape moral and religious, discipline, self-reliance, manners, honesty, the value of compassion, tolerance, cooperation, caring environment, praying before and after meals, washing hands before meals, and willing to wait for the turn (queue).

The content of character education for children in Semarang kindergarten was quite varied. Each kindergarten could have the same or different materials in shaping children's character. There were several characters developed generally for pre-school in Semarang. Generally, the education of self-reliance characters, responsible characters, and confident characters had been developed in Semarang Kindergarten.

Kindergartens in Semarang also built children characters by: working together, discipline, loving Indonesia, honest, manners, the value of compassion, healthy living behavior, religious, creative, critical, tolerance, never give up, willing to wait the turn (queue), courage, comply with the rules, leadership, pray before and after meals, friendly attitude (which was shown in the behavior of smiling, and greetings to the person they encountered with), speak a good word (such as saying the word "please" when asking for help, saying "thank you" when getting help, and saying "sorry" when doing something wrong). There was a kindergarten teacher in Semarang who revealed that character to God was also taught to the child.

It was suitable with Brewer, who revealed that character-education in children is to develop various social skills needed in group life. The various social abilities in question are as follows [4]:

1. Language skills, to convey to others what the children feel and need
2. Social knowledge of how to read other people's behavior
3. Ability to interact positively with peers and adults.
4. Sharing capabilities
5. The ability to analyze situations, for example seeing the body language of the teacher that the child is welcome to tell the story in front of the class, the ability to read situations while playing, for example when a child wants a toy owned by another child, the teacher can advise the child to observe the child who has the toy, when the child

who has the toy appears to have started to be bored then the child who wants the toy can borrowing the toy.

6. Teachers can also teach the children to negotiate in borrowing toys, for example by saying "I will help drive this wagon if you lend me the truck".

7. Teachers also should help the child to overcome uncomfortable conditions when the children's wishes are not fulfilled, for example by saying "You can still play with that truck tomorrow".

8. Another thing that needs to be taught to the child is verbal ability, for example when a child picks up a boat toy whereas another child is playing and is not finished. The teacher can tell the child who played first to say "I have not finished playing with the boat, please return the boat". The verbal ability helps the child to be more assertive without being aggressive. That ability is urgently needed in children's life.

9. Sometimes children are difficult to convey what he wants or what is perceived due to lack of words. Teachers can help children by modeling conversations by talking between two children who are interacting and appear to have not been able to express their feelings and desires.

3.2. The Strategy of Character Education in Semarang Kindergarten

Character education is an ethical education that covers aspects of knowledge, feelings, and actions. Character education is a system of building up character values that include components of knowledge, awareness or will, and action to carry out good values, both towards God, himself, to others, and the environment. [3]

Character education is going through several on-going processes in achieving its goals. Character education starts with the effort of providing knowledge and understanding to the children about good values. The next step is to practice in real terms the expected values.

In developing character understanding for children, there are several things to emphasize. First, it is done based on the child's previous knowledge; the second is children practice the behavior; third, children can see how the implementation of the behavior in their real-life [9]. Thus, to build character in the child through the process of understanding which is followed by direct practicing which is suitable for the child's development and life.

Based on the opinion, character education in children is carried out with some strategies. First, introduce to the children about the expected behavior. The second was started from what the child has known before. In other words, the knowledge that the child has needs to be used as a starting point for further enhancement in children's knowledge. Third, improve understanding and social skills in children through a real environmental approach. Fourth, the children get the opportunity to practice directly good behavior.

Kindergarten teachers in Semarang had some strategies to achieve the goals of character building. The forms of activities carried out in character education at Semarang kindergarten could be divided into four stages: first giving knowledge, second step is developing understanding, and the third step is skill developing, and the fourth step is habituation.

Teachers told a story, watched an educational movie, played a game, sang with children to introduce good behavior. Some teachers introduce hadith to children to tell about good character. By doing the activities, children will know various characters they should belong to. The teacher had prepared the story, movie, song, or hadith which appropriate with the objective of character building. In strengthening the knowledge and developing understanding to children, the teacher made activities such as question and answer, role-playing, outing class program. Through the activities, children would understand why they should have good characters.

Teachers hold an art performance, visiting social foundation, demonstrated how to do, and practiced the good characters with children. The teacher visited a sick friend's house, practiced tooth brushing with children, and hold cooperative learning. Through the activities, children would more understand how to do and were able to practice the characters directly.

Teacher hold routine habituation for several characters, such as praying, saying greeting, exercising, washing hands before meals, throwing garbage into the trash, and tidy back the play tools that have been used. The habituation would integrate the good character into children's self.

Kindergartens in Semarang had various strategies in the technical implementation of character building. Generally, kindergartens in Semarang carry out the process of building behavior every day. Nevertheless, some kindergartens carry out the process of behavior building only at the end of the theme or only at the time of report retrieval. Some kindergartens carry out the building of behavior once a week.

In its implementation, the character education strategy in Semarang Kindergarten could be seen from the classroom atmosphere. The installation of words on walls, floors, or classroom was done to help introduce and strengthen the character that the child wants to form. The teacher gave a real example or model and habituation of the desired. The practice of real action of multiple characters was carried out through daily habituation in the class.

The behavior was not only practiced but followed by practicing repeatedly through habituation. Through practice and habituation in daily life, children would more easily realize behaviors that conform to the values in society.

Teachers and parents set an example in realizing expected behavior. Real examples of adults, especially parents and teachers as role models could give the children an

understanding that those values or characters need not only be done by the children, but also the adults. In other words, the children would understand that the behavior needs to be realized until they are adult.

It is suitable with Meindl, Quirk, & Graham, who said that character education for children would be effective if the teacher considers two things. First, that moral character education is not only written but also done. The point is that various good behaviors are not just used as academic knowledge. These behaviors need to be implemented in everyday life even in unplanned conditions. The second thing to note is that the implementation of character education needs to be based on the mastery of the value of kindness, which is humility and self-control. It means that to suitable for the prevailing norms sometimes the children need to control emotions. [5]

Kindergarten teacher in Semarang held parenting to encourage children’s knowledge, understanding, skill, and habituation in daily life. Teachers cooperated with parents to develop children’s good character.

This is in line with Jamaris, which reveals that character education in children is to establish social and individual responsibility both inside and outside the school. According to Jamaris, to achieve the objectives of character education need to pay attention to the following: [6]

1. Teachers as model or examples who implement good behavior
2. Create a pleasant classroom climate for both teachers and students
3. Develop mutual respect and tolerance between others
4. Encourage students to achieve maximum learning outcomes, so that it can be beneficial for themselves as well as for the community.

Situation and condition which are directly seen by the children from the teacher’s behavior and classroom atmosphere will provide the understanding and motivate them to participate in realizing various behaviors that are following the expectations of the community. With the real conditions experienced, children will understand that tolerance and mutual respect will realize a comfortable life for all.

In general, here is a chart of the implementation of character education for children in Semarang Kindergarten:

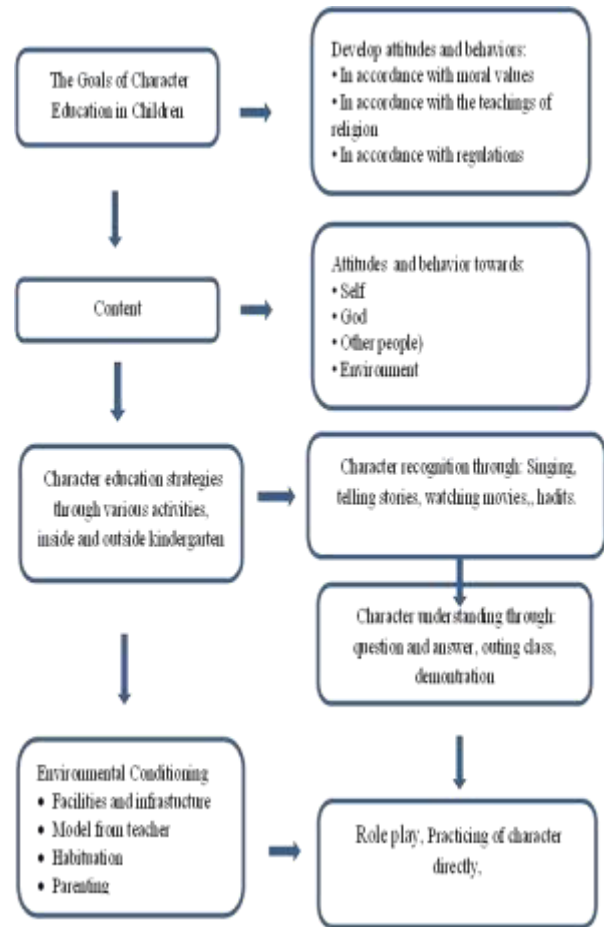


Figure 1
Implementation of Character Education at Kindergarten in Semarang

Role-playing, singing, storytelling, watching movies, and field trip were fun activities. Character building in children was very effective if it was carried out through fun activities and based on the development of children. [7] [8]

Strengthening the understanding was done through various hands-on practice activities, such as cleaning the class together, sharing food, tooth brushing practices, group work, visiting sick friends, and prayer practice. Strengthening the behaviors which are expected to be carried out through various forms of habituation, such as habituation to say greetings when meeting others, saying the word “please” when asking for help, saying “thank you” when receiving help from others, washing your hands before meals, praying before and after meals, habituation of praying before and after learning

This is in line with Vigotsky's view of the learning process in children. Vigotsky argues that children will learn to behave as expected if they observe, understand, and experience in real terms how such behaviors appear and are applied in social life. [9]

Environmental conditioning was getting attention in character education in children in Semarang kindergarten. Teachers provide an environment that supports the education of building positive characters in children. Teachers become examples of good behavior and reinforce good behavior which children have done.

The environment was important in children's development. Therefore, teachers need to be a model. Teachers need to create a classroom environment that respects each other, obeys the rules, and strengthens positive behavior. [10]

Another thing that kindergarten teachers had done in Semarang, organized parenting activities. The activity was to communicate and cooperate with parents.

The school and family must have the same perceptions about the purpose and strategy of children's character education. The harmony between school and family reinforces the character that is expected to build in children. [11]

Families have a strong influence in shaping children's behavior [12]. Therefore, communication between school and family needs to be done. Parenting activities can be used to convey the purpose of the children's character education, convey class rules, educational strategies of the child's character, as well as to get information from parents about the character of the children at home.

4. CONCLUSION

Character education for pre-school children in Semarang had diverse strategies. Commonly, the character building was carried out based on moral and religious values. This is following the curriculum applied to children at kindergartens in Indonesia. The development of moral and religious capabilities is one of the things that need to be implemented in the kindergarten activities program.

Based on the study, we concluded that to build character, the teacher held various activities with the children. The teacher built knowledge, understanding, skill, and integrated good character in children's self.

The implementation of character building for children in Semarang kindergarten was through a process based on several principles. The principles are: according to the development of the children, based on moral and religious values, teacher and parents as a model, providing an environment that supports the growth of positive characters, and strengthening the positive characters in children. Teachers prepared the supporting environment which supports good character both physically and non-physically. Physically, the teacher had prepared means and facilities were needed to encourage good character.

Psychologically, teachers cooperated with parents to build knowledge, understanding, practicing, and integrating various good characters to children.

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