

Strengthening Digital Literacy-Based Character Building in Arabic Teaching and Learning

A Case Study at an Elementary School in Bandung

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening character building is an educational movement to strengthen the students' character in schools. This study aimed to explore the stages of strengthening digital literacy-based character building carried out by teachers in Arabic teaching and learning processes in an elementary school. A case study design was applied in this study, and data were collected using interviews, observation, and documentation, then validated using triangulation. The findings showed the urgency of strengthening digital literacy-based character building in Arabic teaching and learning processes. Three stages of strengthening digital literacy-based character building carried out by Arabic teachers included teaching and learning planning including teacher's vision and mission, curriculum, syllabus, lesson plans, and textbooks used; the implementation of teaching and learning processes consisting of opening activities, core activities, and closing activities; and learning evaluation including formative and summative assessments. The findings are expected to be an alternative effort and solution for teachers to strengthen students' character in teaching and learning processes at school.

Keywords: Arabic language, character building, digital literacy, elementary school students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Character building has been defined as the power or effort to develop mind, body, and character to be in harmony with the surrounding environment and nature (Dalimunthe, 2015). In Indonesia, strengthening of character building is the main path to improve national education as the basic function of education is to develop students' potential to be better human beings (Sauri, 2018). Education has the objectives of creating intelligent people and developing good human beings. This is in accordance with Article 3 of Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System which states that "National Education functions to develop capabilities and build character and civilization to be a dignified nation in context of educating the nation's life, aiming to develop the students' potential to be human beings who believe in God Almighty, possess noble characters, healthy, intelligent, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens.

In order to prepare the 2045 Golden Generation, the government strengthens young generation characters so that they possess advances in the global competition of

the 21st century. In addition to improving basic literacy, critical thinking, creative, communicative competence, and collaboration of the young generation, the government encourages character building through Strengthening Character Building which consists of five elements: religious, nationalist, independent, cooperation, and integrity (Siswanto, 2017). Thus, it is a concern that strengthening character building must be applied in various life environments.

One of the essences of main character building is starting from family level (Hasanah, 2016). Besides, strengthening character building can also be applied at schools and social environments because strengthening character building is a very important key in improving children's personalities. School is a place where students can construct and develop their knowledge through teachers as a mediator. Because the teachers are the spearhead of the nation's progress (Sulthon, 2015), they create the next generation who will carry on the national development in the future.

School institutions have been currently focusing on strengthening character building through various strategies, including the curriculum, discipline enforcement, classroom management, both through

school programs that have been launched (Isbadriantingtyas, Hasanah, & Mudiono, 2016). According to Andiarini and Nurabadi (2018), schools can provide programs that promote and strengthen the students' characters. Teachers have responsibilities for building human resources oriented to the student knowledge aspects. Teachers are also required to build a strong attitude and personality in order to make them more responsible, independent, honest, tolerant, and cooperative. In other words, good character building must involve not only aspects of "good knowledge" (moral knowing), but also "feeling well (moral feeling)", and "good behavior (moral action)" (Abdullah, 2020).

Lickona (2009) proposes ten signs of a nation's deterioration that must be considered, including violence and vandalism, stealing, cheating, disrespect for authority, peer cruelty, bigotry, bad language, sexual precocity and abuse, increasing self-centeredness and declining civic responsibility, and self-destructive behavior. If the signs already exist, the nation is heading for destruction. To overcome this destruction, it is necessary to build spiritual, moral, and ethical values at elementary school as basic education is the foundation of life values in a child's growth and development process (Prastowo, 2018). Jumarudin, Gafur, and Suardiman (2014) said that basic education is the basis for the next level of education. Students in elementary schools are not contaminated by bad traits so that character building at elementary school age will provide greater opportunities for internalization of positive character values in students. Thus, at the elementary school level is a golden opportunity that must be realized collectively to build positive attitudes and characters in students.

However, with the era and technology development, today's learning both at the basic to the high level is all based on digital literacy. Digital literacy is one of the six basic literacies that students must possess. Digital literacy applied in elementary schools is closely related to the implementation of the School Literacy Movement (GLS) promoted by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2021). According to Thang and Chaw (2016) digital literacy involves mastering ideas, and not only about using the technology itself. This clearly illustrates the condition of the technology used in education not only from its use but also its use in supporting education. In practice, the teachers do not only get used to involving themselves in solving students' problems for training thinking skills and teaching problem solving. However, the most essential and substantial goal is that the teacher internalizes the five values that are embedded in strengthening character building. Arabic language in Madrasas is provided for achieving basic language competencies including four language skills that are taught integrally, namely listening skills (*maharatu al-istima'*), speaking skills (*maharatu al-kalam*), reading skills (*maharatu al-qira*

ah), and writing skills (*maharatu al-kitabah*) (Saleh, 2020).

Similar research was conducted by Sujatmiko (2019) regarding the strategy and implementation of strengthening character building in elementary schools that could be carried out on a class basis and school culture. The results of a research by Widodo (2019) discussed several kinds of character building strengthening that had been implemented by Muhammadiyah Macanan Elementary School Sleman in the form of strengthening religious character building, nationalism character building, independent character building, cooperation character building, and integrity character building. Research by Abdullah and Wicaksono (2020) regarding the application of digital literacy-based character education conducted by strengthening the understanding of character values, implementing education-based digital literacy in elementary schools, good classroom management, and explaining self-concept to students.

It is undeniable that the development of this modern era requires school institutions to be able to adapt their development in digital literacy. The discussion in a study by Khasanah and Herina's (2019) interprets that so that children are not eroded in the negative impacts of digital literacy culture, it is necessary to strengthen supportive character building. Referring to these studies, efforts to strengthen digital literacy-based character building in elementary schools do not possess a national consensus yet, especially in learning Arabic during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, there is no research that discusses strengthening digital literacy-based character education in Arabic learning in a boarding school environment. This research is considered unique and new because previous research was more focused on being carried out in a public-school environment.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted at SD Daarut Tauhid (hereafter called the School), a private elementary school Bandung that provides Arabic learning and prioritizes character education in it. In addition, there is a willingness from the School toward the research to be carried out such as openness in interviews, observations, and data collection.

The researchers used a case study design to understand how the School implemented strategies to strengthen character building among students. Data were collected using observation, interviews, and documentation. The observations were conducted to explore strengthening digital literacy-based character building in Arabic teaching and learning in the elementary school amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. There were several parties interviewed by the researchers including the deputy principal of the curriculum and

Arabic teachers. The documentation in this study was in the form of photos during the process of strengthening digital literacy-based character building in Arabic teaching and learning processes.

The data analysis technique used by the researchers to analyze the data obtained consists of four stages so that an accurate analysis could be produced in accordance with the existing data and facts. First, the researchers examined all available data from various sources, namely observations, interviews, and official documents consisting of photographs, and so on. Second, the data were read, studied, and examined by the researchers. Next, the researchers carried out data reduction by making abstractions. Abstraction is an attempt to make a summary of the core, processes and statements that need to be maintained so that they remain in it. Then, the researchers performed data analysis and discussion.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The five main values of strengthening the character building at schools are religious, nationalism, independence, cooperation, and integrity (Kemendikbud, 2016). The five values are reinforcement of the previous character values. Each school is the most appropriate place to carry out continuous guidance. Principals, teachers, school supervisors, and other school officials become pioneers, and role models in everyday life at school and outside of school. Children will always see, hear, and follow what they feel at school such as what the teachers say and do.

According to the interview results with school principals, the implementation of strengthening character building in the School is significant because it sees the School's vision of educating generations with good morals, achievement, creativity, independence, environmental insight based on faith in God unity. Not only the character that is prioritized at the school, but also the ability to use digital media well is also forged in learning. This makes the School officials must be active in thinking and acting regarding collaboration in strengthening the students' character building based on digital literacy.

Digital literacy in elementary schools includes the ability to use digital media properly, correctly, and responsibly to obtain learning information, find problem solutions, complete learning assignments, and communicate various learning activities with other learning people. Therefore, digital literacy mastering will make students adapt to the rapid development in information technology. Especially during this pandemic, all educational officials are required to be active in digital literacy activities.

In this regard, based on the interview result with Arabic teachers, he emphasized that understanding and mastering digital literacy at the School is aimed to train

and habituate students to think critically, creatively and innovatively, to be active in communicating and collaborating, especially in learning Arabic. However, any efforts in making students in accordance with the objectives mentioned above, will not be achieved properly without the maximum role of the teacher. The research result conducted by Sanusi, Sauri, and Nurbayan (2020) also emphasizes the factors of learning Arabic success at schools. Therefore, in this case, teachers are required to be capable of managing digital literacy-based learning, which is realized in lesson planning, learning implementation, and learning evaluation.

3.1 Digital Literacy-Based Arabic Teaching and Learning Planning

Teaching and learning planning is a complete document made based on the results of a search on the development of students with the aim of making the teaching and learning process more effective and efficient based on the demands of the students' needs and the community (Nursobah, 2019). Teaching and learning planning include the teacher's vision and mission, curriculum, syllabus, lesson plans, and textbooks used. The School's vision is to educate generations with good morals, achievement, creativity, independence, environmental insight based on monotheism. The mission of this school is 1) organizing an educational curriculum based on the development of spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical intelligence in one unit, 2) realizing the achievement of teacher and employee competency standards, 3) growing character and getting used to the practice of the *sunnah* to students, 4) strengthening the personality (character) of the teachers and employees by increasing faith and piety, and 5) establishing friendship and cooperation with students' parents, school committees, communities, and government. Based on the vision and mission, every teacher tried to make his students have excellent character.

The curriculum is a set of subjects and educational programs given to students in one period of education level (Fujiawati, 2016). One of the teachings and learning methods used is "thematic". Thematic is teaching and learning using a theme to provide a meaningful experience for the students. There was a special curriculum used at every school level, called *Kurikulum Khas (Kurkhas)* or special curriculum.

Based on the results of the interview with the Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Student Affairs, he said, "to link the special curriculum, the School takes big themes to integrate between the curriculum and the national curriculum." For example, in July, the School had a big theme, namely Brave. In its application, when *Mataba (Masa Ta'aruf Siswa Baru 'students' orientation')* was online, the School took the theme called *Berani Mengenalmu dari Jauh 'dare to know you from afar'*.

3.3 The Evaluation of Digital Literacy-Based Arabic Teaching and Learning

In general, the purpose of teaching and learning evaluation is to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching and learning system in general (Asrul, Ananda, & Rosnita, 2014). Evaluation is an important part of an education and teaching and learning system (Suarga, 2019). The teaching and learning system here include objectives, materials, methods, media, learning resources, environment and the assessment system itself. In addition, teaching and learning evaluation is also aimed at assessing the effectiveness of learning strategies, assessing and improving the effectiveness of curriculum programs, assessing and improving teaching and learning effectiveness, helping the students learn, identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as providing data that helps in making decisions (Aqmarani, Magdalena, & Ayudhiya, 2021). In this regard, based on the interview result with Arabic teachers, he found that a systematic evaluation of Arabic learning at the School is very significant so that all the learning activities result carried out by students can be well coordinated.

The benefits that can be taken from the evaluation of education and teaching and learning activities in schools have the functions such as 1) opening the possibility for evaluators to obtain information about the results that have been achieved in the context of implementing education and teaching and learning programs, 2) to find out which students are the smartest and the least in their class, 3) to encourage healthy competition between fellow students, 5) to know the students' progress and development after experiencing education and teaching, 5) to find out whether the teacher chooses the appropriate materials, methods, and various adjustments in the classroom, 6) as a report to the students' parents in the form of report cards, diplomas, charters and so on (Sudijono, 2009).

In the evaluation stage, there is an evaluation process including formative and output evaluation which includes summative (Mardiah & Syarifuddin, 2019). Formative assessment, commonly known as assessment for learning, is the process of collecting data/information/evidence regarding the extent (how well) of students' progress in mastering competencies, interpreting the data/information, and deciding on the most effective learning activities for the students so that they can master the material/competence optimally. Formative assessment is part of the teaching and learning steps carried out during teaching and learning activities that are part of the daily practice of educators and students in teaching and learning processes in the classroom (Kemendikbud, 2019).

In this regard with the statement above, the formative assessment at the School was carried out through the



Figure 3 Form of the school daily activity report.

preparation of daily activity reports. This is aimed so that teachers can always observe or monitor the students' progress after delivering material in learning activities. The form of the daily activity report for the School is shown in Figure 3.

In teaching and learning activities during the pandemic, the role of parents is also very necessary. All materials and assignments that have been given by the teacher must be ascertained whether they could be understood by the students or not. Starting from the task of getting used to the *Duha* prayer, memorizing the Qur'an, reciting the Qur'an, and so on, it must be ascertained whether it has been done well by the students or not. Thus, the School has routine activities for the parents to be able to report every activity carried out by the children in the teaching and learning process for a day. This is needed as one of the supporting instruments in evaluating student learning. Each student activity report documentation would be put together in a predetermined class or group daily activity report sheet.

Summative assessment is an assessment activity resulting in scores or numbers which are then used as decisions on student performance (Irons, 2008). In knowing student learning achievement from teaching and learning processes, this assessment was carried out using Google classroom or Google form. During the pandemic, the role of parents is very important for character building in students. Thus, the School provided the *Mutaba'ah Yaumiyyah* application which must be filled out every day by the students. This *Mutaba'ah Yaumiyyah* application provides several activities that must be carried out by the students and will be reported to their homeroom teacher at *maghrib* time/dusk. Those activities in the application are such as praying 5 times, reading the Koran, praying *Duha*, *infaq*, fasting, *dhikr*, reading books, and so on. *Mutaba'ah yaumiyyah* is also very helpful in strengthening student character building. The purpose of this evaluation is to strengthen the



Figure 4. The implementation of digital literacy through *Mutaba'ah Yaumiyyah*.

students' character, to find out the students' understanding and mastery of the competencies they have, to determine the method to be used, and to evaluate in the next lesson. This is illustrated in Figure 4.

4. CONCLUSION

Strengthening digital literacy-based character building in teaching and learning Arabic is very urgent to do in elementary schools. This was marked by three stages of strengthening digital literacy-based character building carried out by Arabic teachers including (1) teaching and learning planning covering teachers' vision and mission, curriculum, syllabus, lesson plans, and textbooks used, (2) the implementation of teaching and learning processes consisting of opening activities, core activities, and closing activities, and (3) learning evaluation including formative and summative assessments.

The researchers hope that the results of this study can provide insight and also solutions to various problems encountered by teachers in strengthening students' character through online Arabic teaching and learning in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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