

THE STRENGTHENING OF CHARACTER EDUCATION AT THE LEVEL OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

The Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 87 of 2017 concerning strengthening character education is a policy that must be implemented at all levels of education as part of the National Mental Revolution Action. This qualitative research is aimed to review the implementation of strengthening character education at the level of early childhood education in Banda Aceh. The research was conducted in five early childhood education institutions in Banda Aceh City. Principals and teachers of those institutions have been selected as the main respondents in this research. Observation, interview, and document analysis were techniques used in data collection. The data collected in this study were analyzed using the descriptive qualitative model of Miles and Huberman. The results of the study indicate that strengthening character education in early childhood education institutions is carried out by means of habituation, repetition, teachers' role model, structured and integrated programs. The results of data analysis also found that strengthening character education programs in early childhood education institutions was designed routinely in the form of daily, weekly, monthly and annual activities. The involvement of parents in administering education is also an important aspect of the success of character education in early childhood education units.

Keywords: Strengthening, Character Education, Early Childhood Education

INTRODUCTION

The success of a country can only be achieved by moral citizens who can maintain a democratic government as stated by Bellah (Mengawangi, 2004, p. 1). Many experts argue that character is the main factor that must be built first to build a safe, peaceful and prosperous society. The character is one of the most important aspects of the life of society, nation and state. A civilization will experience the deterioration quickly when there is a moral crisis in its society.

The implementation of education needs to be supported by various parties, especially the parents, educators, and the communities. This support is a learning concept to achieve all children's educational goals. The involvement of all parties is very important, especially in early childhood education. Therefore, cooperation between parents, educational institutions and the community is an absolute thing to optimize the development of children as a whole. So that children become intelligent, resilient and superior characters.

Building the character of children from an early age is very important for parents and educators. Hopes that children will have a good character from an early age. The attention of parents and the government towards early childhood education is very important that they will become superior and resilient children in the face of various

challenges in the future. It needs to be realized that such a superior generation will not grow on its own.

The theory of *Tabularasa* considers children as a white paper. At the time of birth, the child is helpless and has nothing. Children live in an environment that greatly influences their growth and development (Yus, 2011, pp. 2-3). The environment influences and shapes the character of children. Children will follow the character that develops around them that included in their families, schools, and communities. This happens because the child is a great copycat. A child who is accustomed to living in an environment that likes to talk and behave rudely, it affected the child to talk and behave rudely also with other people around him. This happens because these words and actions are constantly being heard and seen by a child that tend to follow these habits.

In this regard, an effort to realize national education goals and build a character of Indonesian people, the government launched an early childhood development program through early childhood education institutions. The presence of early childhood education institutions does not reduce the role of parents towards their children, but on the contrary, the presence of early childhood education institutions actually becomes a driving force for children's education to be directed and maximized. However, early childhood education institutions cannot walk alone without the support of parents and the communities.

Early childhood education has a role in developing children's character. Relations between children and teachers or the relationship between children and children in early childhood education institutions can affect children's character. Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning National Education System Chapter 1 Article 1 Item 14 states that early childhood education is an effort aimed at early childhood from birth to six years of age through educational stimulation to help physical growth and spiritual development that children have the readiness to learn in entering further education.

Responding to the importance of character development to the community, the Indonesian government issued a policy in the form of Republic of Indonesia Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017 concerning strengthening character education which is a policy that must be implemented at all levels of education as part of the National Mental Revolution Movement. This policy is very important to be published considering the condition of Indonesia which is in the stage of a moral crisis. Policies issued by the government need to be implemented maximally and sustainably. The implementation of policies related to character strengthening needs to be followed by periodic monitoring and evaluation to measure the extent of the effectiveness of policies issued. In this case, a study needs to be carried out to assess the implementation of programs to strengthen character education in educational institutions including early childhood education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human character is an interesting topic to discuss because it relates to humans as social beings who live side by side and interact with other people. Many things can be discussed related to the character starting from the definition of the character, how the

character, the importance of character and so on. In Indonesian, "character" is defined as psychological traits, morals or characters that distinguish someone from others. Kusuma (2010, p. 104) argues that character is the dynamics of the development of a continuous ability in human beings to internalize values to produce active and stable dispositions in individuals. This dynamic makes individual growth more intact. These elements become dimensions that animate the formation process of each individual.

The character is the same as the personality that is considered as "style, or characteristic of a person that comes from the formations received from the environment. The character is the overall experience of a person within the family, school, and society including all forms of education received and will ultimately affect moral awareness and the overall development of the person's personality. Character building is an educational movement to strengthen individual' character through harmonization of heart, taste, thought, and sports with involvement and collaboration between educational units, families, and communities as part of the national mental revolution movement.

After the family, educational institutions have a very strategic role in shaping character (Zubaedi, 2011). Character education is believed to be an important aspect in improving human resources. It also determines the progress of a nation. Quality characters need to be formed and nurtured from an early age. It is the age of "gold" but "critical" for the formation of one's character (Gunawan, 2012). Parents must realize that the responsibility of educating children is not solely the task of managers and teachers in early childhood education institutions, but it is a shared responsibility (Wibowo, 2012). All related parties are responsible for achieving overall education goals. The duties and functions of each party are adjusted to the ability and capacity possessed.

Behavior is something that is obtained and learned from outside that influence the development of character. Gunarsa (2003, pp. 39-45) describes the factors that influence and shape moral values in children are: 1) Family environment; 2) School environment; 3) Peer environment; 4) Religious aspects, and 5) Recreational activities. Character development in a child does not occur due to one factor but is influenced by various factors that are interrelated with one another. This is what distinguishes humans from other creatures on this earth. Child character development can be done through various strategies including training and habituation, playing, and learning.

Training and habituation are carried out continuously at home, educational institutions and the community. Habit can be done through routine activities, spontaneous activities, role models, and programmed activities (Samsudin, 2008, p. 28). Routine activities are carried out through training and habituation to the child to say hello, shake hands with parents when going to the school and returning as well. Spontaneous activities are carried out by training and familiarizing children with receiving and giving something to other people using their right hand, thanking others, accustoming children to speak politely and not shouting when talking to other people. Exemplary giving is done by giving a good example to the child as polite in speaking, doing worship regularly and on time. Programmed activities can be planned through daily, weekly, monthly and yearly activities.

METHOD

This qualitative research (Lebar, 2009) is aimed to review the implementation of strengthening character education at the level of early childhood education in Banda Aceh. The research was conducted in five early childhood education institutions in Banda Aceh City. Principals and teachers of those institutions have been selected as the main respondents of the research. Observation, interview, and document analysis were techniques used in data collection.

Depth interview was done directly by the researcher to the participants of this study. The interview protocol was prepared in general and further developed by the researcher to obtain depth information to support the objectives of this study. The data collected in this study were analyzed using the descriptive qualitative model of Miles and Huberman (Luthfiah & Fitrah, 2017, p. 85). The findings of the study explained descriptively to include passage retrieval of interview results supporting the given information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the study indicates that strengthening character education in early childhood education institutions is carried out by means of habituation, repetition, teachers' role model, structured and integrated programs. The result of data analysis also found that strengthening character education programs in early childhood education institutions was designed routinely in the form of daily, weekly, monthly and yearly activities. The involvement of parents in administering education is also an important aspect of the success of character education in early childhood education units. There are 18 values of characters stated by the Education Ministry of Indonesia which must be implemented at all educational level. Those values are religious, honest, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creative, independent, democratic, curiosity, national spirit, love for the country/nationalism, respect for achievement, friendship/communicative, love of peace, love to read, care for the environment, social care, and responsibility.

Religious is an attitude and behavior that is obedient in carrying out the teachings of the religion it adheres to, tolerant of the implementation of worship of other religions and living in harmony with followers of other religions. The implementation of the value of the religious character is to routinely repeat the short Al-Quran Surah, reading dua, recognize the Hijayah letters and read different hadiths. Familiarize each week on Friday by carrying out the prayer procedures in the congregation and reciting prayers, on how to perform ablution, and reciting *Adzhan* and *Iqamah*, holding simulation of *Hajj* rituals, visiting mosques to introduce Muslim places of worship and celebrating Islamic New Year parade and pray.

Honest is a behavior based on efforts to make himself a person who can always be trusted in words, actions, and work. Strengthening honest values in early childhood is done through building honest attitudes such as teachers asking a child who performing morning prayers, morning bathing, breakfast, and helping parents at home. The teacher also encourages students not to bring pocket money in their pockets, because the school only allows students to bring supplies or food prepared by their parents. Tolerance is an attitude and action that respects differences in religion, ethnicity, ethnicity, opinions, attitudes, and actions of others that are different from theirs.

Shaping the value of the tolerance character is carried out through participation in the celebration of childhood friend's birthday at school, expressing an opinion by waiting for a turn after another friend is finished and appreciating a friend whose profession of the father from different circles.

Discipline is an action that shows orderly behavior and complies with various provisions and regulations. Formation of disciplinary character is done by cultivating the attitude of queuing when washing hands and rows when entering the class and going out of class and exercise every morning. Hard work is a behavior that shows genuine effort in overcoming various learning obstacles and tasks, and completing tasks as well as possible. The attitude of hard work can be formed by completing independent tasks such as thickening letters, attaching collages, sewing, and tracing, arranging puzzles, and arranging blocks.

Creative is described as an attitude of thinking and doing something to produce new ways or results from something that has been owned. The development of the creative character of children is carried out through various daily activities such as shaping by using play dough, coloring with crayon, food coloring by using pipettes and participating in kindergarten level art performances. Independent is an attitude and behavior that is not easily dependent on others in carrying out tasks. The value of independence is instilled by the habit of putting shoes and bags on a shelf independently, eating alone and cleaning up food by putting it in each bag after eating, and washing own hands.

Democratic is a way of thinking, behaving, and acting that evaluates the rights and obligations of self and others. The democratic value of young children is formed by training children to give freedom to friends to choose their own toys. Curiosity character is an attitude and action that always strives to know more deeply and extends from something that is learned, seen and heard. Curiosity character in children can be developed by giving children the opportunity to ask questions and communicate what children get through and experience. The character of the national spirit is a way of thinking, acting, and understanding that places the interests of the nation and the state above the interests of themselves and their groups. This character value can be grown in children by celebrating the birthday of the Republic of Indonesia's independence through participation in several types of competitions such as eating crackers, removing flags, and carrying marbles.

The nationalism character is described as a way of thinking, behaving, and acting that shows loyalty, caring, and high appreciation for the language, physical, social, cultural, economic and political environment of the nation. The nationalism in early childhood can be grown with a variety of regional activities such as singing the regional song "Aceh Lon Sayang" after morning exercise, using the Acehnese language when mentioning the letters of Hijayyah, names of days and visiting the base of the Indonesian Military Air Force Sultan Iskandar Muda in commemoration of the anniversary of the Indonesian National Army Air Force.

Character values appreciate achievements are attitudes and actions that encourage themselves to produce something that is useful for the community, recognize and respect the success of others. This value can be cultivated in children through giving

awards to children who have achievements in extracurricular activities, giving rewards to children who can answer questions from the teacher during class activity, giving feedback, cheering to friends as a form of support. The friendly/communicative character is described as an act that shows the pleasure of talking, associating, and cooperating with other people. This character can be built by getting children to help friends who ask for opinions in completing tasks and provide direction to friends who are not familiar with the task.

Love for peace is a character value in the form of attitudes, words, and actions that cause others to feel happy and safe in their presence. Peace-loving characters can be trained by respecting friends when playing and helping one another. The value of reading fondness is defined as the habit of providing time to read various passages that give him virtue. The fondness of reading in early childhood can be done by familiarizing children to improve their reading habits and giving children the opportunity to see a fairy tale magazine or storybook.

The character of environmental care is an attitude and action that always strives to prevent damage to the surrounding natural environment and develop efforts to repair the damage to nature that has occurred. A sense of environmental care in early childhood can be developed through a visit to the city to introduce plants that have benefits and must be maintained, preserved and cultivate the habit of disposing of garbage in its place. Social caring characters are described as attitudes and actions that always want to help others and the people in need. This attitude can be built from an early age through collaboration and mutual assistance in completing joint games and sharing food with friends and teachers. The last character is responsibility. This character is described as the attitude and behavior of a person to carry out their duties and obligations, which should be done on oneself, society, environment (nature, society, and culture), country, and God Almighty. The value of the character of responsibility can be trained by the habit of clearing the playground, cleaning up the food and putting it in the bag after eating.

Character strengthening can be done early with a variety of simple and fun activities for children. Good habits should be built as early as possible to become a big habit when children are adults. A good character in a person will create a peaceful and dignified society. Adults need to show exemplary in acts of kindness to be imitated by children. Appreciation for every good action by children needs to be demonstrated by adults as a form of support and hope. Conversely, advice and learning always need to be done when the child makes a mistake either intentionally or unintentionally.

CONCLUSIONS

The supports on education needs to be given by the parents, the educators, and the communities. This support is a learning concept to achieve all children's educational goals. The involvement of all parties is very important, especially in early childhood education. Therefore, cooperation between parents, educational institutions and the community is an absolute thing to optimize the development of children as a whole. So that children become intelligent, resilient and superior characters. Children character development can be done through various strategies including training and habituation, playing, and learning. Training and habituation are carried out continuously at home, educational institutions and the community. Habit can be done

through routine activities, spontaneous activities, role models, and programmed activities.

The strengthening character education in early childhood education institutions is carried out by means of habituation, repetition, teachers' role model, structured and integrated programs. The strengthening character education programs in early childhood education institutions was designed routinely in the form of daily, weekly, monthly and yearly activities. The involvement of parents in administering education is also an important aspect of the success of character education in early childhood education.

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