

Private Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of Character Education Practice in Indonesia

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Abstract

Character education considered one of the ways to overcome character and morality problems. Though character education has been taught for decades, character and the moral problem still happened in our society. Lots of people agree that we need to reinforce character education to improve the performance of character education. Some institutions invented some programs to help the implementation of character education. Aware of this condition, the Indonesian government also strived to improve character education by released a program called Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK), which stands for character education reinforcement. This program expected to give schools an idea of how character education should be taught in a holistic approach, thus it can help schools implied a better character education. Long before the government releases the program, some schools, mostly private schools, already planned and implemented their own character education program. This paper elaborates private school teachers' perspectives on character education practice in their schools. This qualitative research was conducted through interviews involving three private school teachers. The teachers teach different private schools located in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Lampung. Teachers' perspectives expected to help us understand the relevant practice of character education and development needs to adjust the student in this era.

Keywords:

elementary school, private school, character education



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INTRODUCTION

School violence and bullying have caught global attention in the past few years. With the number of victims increasing throughout the year, serious actions must be taken immediately. UNESCO stated, in their newest report, globally, almost 1 to 3 students have been bullied in any other form by their peers at school (2019). As for Indonesia, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) revealed the data released by *Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia* (KPAI), which stands for the Indonesian Child Protection Commission that about

84% of children in Indonesia have experienced violence at school (Mukhtar, 2017). These data reflected by the massive amount of cases that being told to the public almost every day.

In the 21st century, not only violence and bullying, negative social events occur which stem from the crisis of values or character and cultural degeneration in all over the world (ÇUBUKÇUa, 2012). Some people agree that the education system nowadays puts less attention to moral awareness and character development, so these harmful social phenomena were increasingly

prevalent (Samho, 2013). Considered as one of the effective ways to overcome character and moral damage, the action that we could take to fix the situation was to reinforce character education (Sudrajat, 2011; Saptono, 2011).

Aware of the need to reinforce character education, Indonesia's government released a presidential decree in 2017. The decree encourages schools and teachers to do character education reinforcement. This decree declares that every school should reinforce character education with a holistic approach that involving everyone on the surroundings who interact with the student to achieve a better result (Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia No. 87 Tahun 2017 tentang Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter, 2017). Along with the release of the decree, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia also develop a program which also called *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (PPK), which stands for reinforcement of character education. This program expected to help schools to design their programs that appropriate for Indonesian society.

Long ago, before the government released the program, some schools, especially private schools, have implemented character education. Some of the schools implemented character education program developed by several private institutions. Character education varies from a limited set of stand-alone and homegrown lessons to fully integrated, comprehensive school-reform models (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). They provide all curriculum from the lesson plan to the assessment with certain values

that each institution carries. These programs might help, but not all programs match the school's image and suitable for society's belief (Ball Jr., 2017). In this multicultural environment, schools need to redesign and develop their character education programs to fulfill all the needs. That's why some of the schools have developed their own character education program.

This research conducted to understand the character education practice in some private schools. Private schools were chosen because they usually developed their own program of character education that consists of values that they want to imprint in each student. We also would like to know how's the practice of character education that teachers already taught in their classes and the obstacles while they are implementing it. The teachers also asked if the character education practice that happened currently in their school is enough to overcome the problem of character that occurs in their classes. They also asked about their perspective on the importance of the government's new decree about character education reinforcement. Overall, this paper elaborates three private school teachers' perspectives on character education practice. Interviews were done to collect data about the implementation of character education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emphasis on the development of moral and performance character aligns with current educational policies including the Common Core,

21st-century skills, safe and supportive schools, and college and career readiness; it also supports the twin goals of academic achievement and whole-person development that have long been the foundation of education (Davidson, 2014). The foundation of this ideal education has rooted in the teachers from generation to generation, so it is reflected in how character education inherent in every learning in the class, whether the teacher is aware of it or not (Williams, 2000). This happens because everyone knows that the older generation has to shape the character of the younger generation through some experiences that will affect their attitudes, knowledge, and behavior (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006).

Lickona (2012) presented the concept of character as ownership of "good things." This means that when you say someone has a good character, they own a lot of 'good things' on them. On the other hand, Merriam Webster dictionary (2019) defines character into some meanings. Two of them are "one of the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual," and "the complex of mental and ethical traits marking and often individualizing a person, group or nation" (Merriam Webster online dictionary, 2019). Character is a complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Each individual has their own beliefs and attributes that affect their behavior, which makes the character become a complex thing. The complexity of character also represented by the process of character-forming itself. This whole

process begins from such an early age, and it starts from behavior; then it develops to what we called character (Lickona, 2012). If parents and teachers modeled and taught good character effectively, they can bring huge change for the better in children's behavior in the future (Dimerman, 2009). That makes the process of engraving character education will be more effective if done as early as possible (Lickona, 2012).

In point of fact, in those early years of their life, this generation has experienced moral and character problems. One of the proofs stated by UNESCO (2019), which in their latest report brought up data states that, globally, 43% of 4th graders have experienced bullying. This is an important task and the responsibility for schools in dealing with these negative situations because schools are beyond being the places of education, but also a social environment for students (ÇUBUKÇUa, 2011).

Concerning that environment will greatly affect children's process of engraving character and morals, we have to prepare our children to developed moral reasoning and a solid foundation of character (Lickona, 2012). The children will be easier to resist the bad habits they find to do along the way because they have their own perspectives to make them stand up for what they believe (Dimerman, 2009). One of the ways to prepare the children is with direct character and moral teaching that helps to shape the child's conscience and behavior habits (Lickona, 2012).

The idea of character education is not a new thing, and it has existed and developed as an

ongoing and never-ending process along with the times (Lickona, 2012). Long-standing character education considered to be one way to overcome moral decay (Saptono, 2011). Lately, the character education movement is growing more rapidly and encouraging people to re-examine personal values, social interactions, and civic responsibilities faced by children and adolescents during school (Williams, 2000). Character education reinforcement movement is a picture of hope and optimism in realizing a better society in the future (Saptono, 2011).

The central goal of character education is the development of character in students (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Character education is important to make students realize that all of us are morally responsible, roughly, when we do what we resolve to do and not when we act as we do because of constraint (Ekstrom, 2000). Necessary character education is precisely that it enables students to examine and discuss virtues such as kindness and honesty, including how they relate to democratic life more generally (Peterson, 2019).

The Indonesian government was aware of the importance of not only character education but an ideal implementation of character education so they launched the Character Education Reinforcement movement through the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 87 of 2017. This education movement supposed to encourage the character of students through harmonization of the process of heart, sense, thought, and sports with involvement and cooperation between education,

family and community units as part of the National Movement for Mental Revolution (GNRM) (Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia No. 87 Tahun 2017 tentang Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter, 2017). This decree affirms that every school should do a character education, whether it is implied in the classroom activities or has its own special lesson hours. The government entrusts the implementation in class to each school.

Character education policy is usually a reflection of the prevalent values of a particular political context or jurisdiction (Arthur, 2016). The relationship between the moral and the political involves continual exploration on the part of the individual of how moral virtues (such as kindness, gratitude, and compassion) connect to the wider communities in which citizens—including young citizens—exist and interact (Peterson, 2019). Even though the government has designed policies in the end, schools are tasked with developing their own approaches to implementing and assessing their values education initiatives, which makes us need to collect some data as evidence of how schools influence diversity and subjective interpretations (Lovat & Dally, 2018).

Implementation of effective character education programs is effective if the learning strategy is carried by the conditions in the school (Samsuri, 2011). That's why we need to know how character education practices in schools that happened nowadays. These perspectives further can help us to understand what practice relevant and need development to adjust the student in this era.

METHOD

In this research, the qualitative method used to describe the practice of character education in private schools. Data was collected through interviews with teachers who were participants. The interviews were conducted in the middle of July 2019.

Three private elementary school teachers interviewed to obtain their perspective about the character education practice. These three teachers were chosen to represent private schools in different cities. The characteristics of the three different schools are expected to provide a different perspective that enriches the research data.□

All teachers who participated in this study are graduated from the same university in the same year. They've become a teacher for about a year. The similarity of their educational background is expected to be a clear boundary for their rationale and practice.

The first teacher called Regina, she teaches 3rd graders at a school in Yogyakarta. The second teacher called Nunik, which teaches 5th graders at a school in Jakarta. The last one called Melati, a teacher of 2nd graders at a school in Lampung. These three cities are major cities in Indonesia and can be a starting point for the development of education in Indonesia.

In the interview session, they shared their experiences and thoughts about character education. The interview developed under three main questions:

1. What are the values that your school wants to teach through character education?
2. How's the practice of character education in your school, especially your class?
3. What are the obstacles that you face while implementing character education?
4. What do you suggest to make character education more efficient in schools?
5. Do you think it's necessary to release a decree about character education reinforcement?

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

All of the teachers who participated in this research first contacted via telephone. After explaining the purpose of the research, all three teachers agreed to be interviewed. Interviews with two teachers, Melati and Nunik, conducted via telephone because of distance limitations. Interview with Regina conducted face to face because she lives in the same neighborhood with the researcher. Came from different schools, teachers participated in this research have different thoughts about character education practice. This happened because each school expected to have their perspective on character education. Their perspective reflected on how each school designed its character education program. That's why the first two questions of the interview asked about the value of each school and how they implemented the value through character education practice in the class.

The School where Regina teaches implemented a theory introduced by the school founder. This

theory focuses on enhancing every student's potency. The theory believes that there's a special potency embedded in every human being. One of the potencies is a character, and we need to pay close attention on the character to do the best practice in their education.

Nunik teaches a school founded by a congregation. The values from the congregation's spirituality were implemented in the character education practice. These values are compassion, celebration, competence, conviction, community, and creativity. The school believes that these values could give each student a good character that will help them become an excellent generation.

Melati teaches at a school where they got an idiom that represents their values. She didn't mention what the idiom called, but she explained the values of this school are humanity, smart, honest, discipline, and service. Melati said that the idiom about school values always shouted every Monday when they have a flag ceremony, but there was no further elaboration about that. Melati also stated that her school doesn't have any special lesson hours dedicated to character education. This made her mostly implemented character education while teaching civic and religious subjects. She then explained that those two subjects have already contained some character development material, so that easier for her to initiate the discussion to the good character practice on those subjects.

When she asked whether she could implement character education in other subjects, she said that she doesn't have enough time to deliver it. She

doesn't even have much time to deliver every subject matter in class. She stated that:

"[I got] Too many things to be taught and so little time. Sometimes, what I have designed in the lesson plan must change because of unexpected things that happened in the class. This makes me harder to implement character education, knowing I have limited time to catch up on subject materials."

Even though the time was so tight, she stated that she still tried her best to educate her students to have good character. She doesn't have character education written in the lesson plan, but, she practically teaches character education practice when she got some time. In her class, she uses reward and punishment method. For example, she rebuked her students who behave badly in class and gave them punishment. She also disciplined her students who disturb their friends while praying or students that not stand with a perfect attitude while singing the national anthem. On the other hand, if the students behave nicely, then they would get a reward. She sometimes connected the lesson with some value and character lesson with some discussion that leads to student's self-reflection.

The school where Regina teaches has a similar situation with where Melati teaches, but, not entirely the same. Their schools don't dedicate a special lesson hour to implement character education. What makes this school different is the development of some special subjects. These special subjects are 'reading the good book', 'interfaith communication', and 'emotional literacy'. Teachers expected to teach values and character through these special

subjects. For example, in the 'reading good book' lesson, Regina encouraged her students to read books that contain good value on it. After reading the book, they discussed the values of the story with the class. The discussion then led to a self-reflection. Each student expected to reflect on themselves and found out a case in their life that related to the story of the book.

Regina's school also developed a special lesson called emotional literacy. This special lesson shares time with the creative art lesson. Regina said that she hasn't implemented the emotional literacy yet because the art project that her class has worked for some time not finished yet. In her school, every teacher has their right to manage and customized the lesson plan as the class needed. That's why Regina could decide to hold the implementation of emotional literacy. Regina explained that emotional literacy supposed to introduce students about human emotions and how to regulate them. Although she hasn't implemented it, Regina made customization in her class as the introduction stage of emotional literacy. The customization she did was a placement of a special table. She used this table to facilitate some students who need more time to manage themselves who's not ready yet for the classroom activities. They could scream, cry, or do whatever on that table until they ready to come back to their original seat and to keep up with the lesson. □

The school where Regina teaches also encourages teachers to do a home visit. Basically, a home visit is a program where the homeroom

teacher visits the residence of each student in their class. This program expected to help teachers get to know each student's personal character. In the student's home, teachers will have a conversation with parents about student's behavior, student's activities at home and other things. The teacher also asks parents about their character education or even informal education practice at home so that students wouldn't be confused because similar practice used both at home and at school. This conversation purposed to help teachers manage their classes better because they understand the condition of each student. This is also one of the ways for schools to build good communication with parents. Teachers and parents then make an agreement. Regina stated that:

"at the end of the home visit, we make an agreement between me [the teacher], parent, and student. We agreed about what the student should do at school, what the teacher should do, what parents should do, and the consequences if one of us breaks the agreement."

When the interview was conducted, she had visited one student in her class. Regina said that after one visit, she saw a significant change in the student's attitude. The student that she visited used to dozed off at class or played by himself, but now he tends to be more focused in class. □

The school where Nunik teaches is the only one among three schools that has their special lesson hours dedicated to character education. The school developed its character education curriculum to embed school values in a student's life. Every week

she got two lesson hours to deliver a lesson about values that the school hold. There's no lesson plan for this subject, but the school provided the teacher and students with a guidebook. The teacher has their right to choose which lesson to be implemented each week. Teachers supposed to choose a value that suits the current situation of the class. The guidebook helps teachers to deliver value in various ways. Teachers can implement the values while they watch movies, read books, or just hold a discussion. All the movies, books, and the topics of the discussion have provided on the guidebook.

At the beginning of the semester, all teachers had to attend a character education implementation training. Nunik explained that what they got from the training just basic implementation. Each teacher should improve their ability to develop a character education lesson that provided all the needs of the class. Nunik stated that most of the teachers follow the steps school has provided in the guidebook because it was easier for them.

When asked if she also implemented character education on other subjects, she said that she always tried to. If she has time, she would like to encourage their students to practice good character. But, mostly, the discussion of character education happened in the special lesson that has provided. □ Knowing the implementation practice of character education in each school, another question appeared: Is this practice enough to make students have good character? With a well-organized lesson that her school had provided, Nunik said that the practice of character education in her class could

not solve all students' problems, which concerns moral and character issues. Nunik said:

"I'll say 50 50. Some needs that have fulfilled, but, not all of the need. Some student becomes more independent because of character education they got. Some [students] does not change yet. Even some [students] got worse. It depends on the students themselves. But, still, most students got better character because of the character education implementation. At least they change little by little."

Not very different than Nunik's statement, Regina also not sure if the character in her class has provided all the needs of the students. She said it depends on how the student process the matter. Regina explained that:

"There are some students who have received what the teacher said, but only said yes in front of us [the teacher] and not implemented it in their lives. [the character education] Still need development, because it is not ideal yet."

Also agreed with that, Melati also stated that she didn't think what she had been doing in class could provide the need of all students. She added that student's behavior, not only affected by what the teacher had taught at school but also affected by their parent and family. She stated that:

"Sometimes, we [teachers] already give our best effort to teach the student to practice good character at school, but the problem is what happened at their home. Their parents don't prioritize character education. Abandoning character education at home makes everything we have taught in school useless."

According to that statement, we know that the obstacles that Melati face to implement character education may come from the parent's side. If parents do not teach the students the same values that they learned at school, students will not develop their good character well. The home environment can be a serious factor that affects a student's behavior and character. What we have taught not to do could conflict the values adopted at their home, that makes students could do that again because of his home environment allows it.

What Melati has faced different than Nunik's obstacles. For Nunik, the obstacles come from the limited time given to implement character education. Two lesson hours per week was not enough to teach values to all the students in her class. The thing that often happened in the class was the students easily forget the value they just learned. Nunik explained that it took less than 10 minutes for one or two students in her class to do the things that not represent the value that they just learned. Nunik realized shaping students' character was a long process, and as a teacher, we need to be persistent. Regina also faced different obstacles than Nunik's and Melati's. She said that she didn't find any obstacle in the character education practice. Her school has lots of programs to develop students' character. She said the implementation of the program is easy, but its sustainability was questionable. She said that she could easily deliver it, students can easily accept it, but in the future, the students tend to forget easily.

Discussion among the teachers helped these teachers to solve the problem in the classroom, including obstacles that happened in the character education implementation. All three teachers agreed that sharing with other teachers, especially the elder teacher, helped them picture what should they do to handle the class. In Regina's case, there's a lab officer who worked in Regina's school that helped teachers to plan the classroom activities. Sometimes, teachers could consult their obstacles on implementing character education to lab officer, and then they discuss together how to solve the problem.

When the teachers asked about character problems that occur in their class, they got, once again, varied answers. Regina said that some student in her class can't control their emotion. They sometimes explode and cry if something happened that makes them angry. Regina said that the value that her class needs to learn how to manage their emotions and be patient.

The problem in Nunik's class is the students that their dependency and lack of persistence. Nunik said that students in her class, most have difficulty to manage themselves. They have no intention of regulating their own problem. If there was a problem (disturb by a friend, nosy class), they always reported their problem to the teacher and had no intention to solve it themselves. Their dependency also reflected in their work. If the teacher gave them homework, some students easily searched the answer on the internet without reading the content carefully and thought about the elaboration of the

content. That also happened to students who took additional lessons at home. Most students just copied the answers given to them without really understanding the answer. Later in class, they could not explain where the answer came from. Nunik explained:

"Some students don't prepare enough if there are no tests. [they] Do nothing if the teacher doesn't instruct them... In class, if any hard question is given, [, they easily] give up. They said: "It's too hard, miss, I can't do it. I don't know the answer." If they try enough, they can do it, but they just too lazy to read questions and understand what it means."

Nunik also said that her students always give many comments and complains if she gives them a difficult question. When it comes to Nunik's case, she said that her students would face lots of trouble if they have a lack of persistence in this millennial era. The more they grow up, life becomes harder. This was why they need to learn how to be independent and persistent.

Melati said that one problematic thing in her class was students' words. The student in Melati's class tends to speak without thinking, and it often causes a fight. From one hurtful statement, it could lead to a debate, and then further, it can cause a physical fight. Melati thinks her students must learn about a mutual respect. How they know other peoples' feelings and thoughts so that they tend to consider the others when they say or do something.□

We know from all the conversation above that the need for every school, especially every class is

different. Every teacher has their perspective of the best value that should be taught to their students according to their class situation. Then, they asked what they think would be effective to teach character education. Various answers were expected because of the previous conversation we have.

Regina said that every student in the class needs different things, and we couldn't have generalized their needs. Regina further explained that character education expected to fulfill each student's needs. Sometimes, it can be delivered classically, sometimes teachers supposed to have a personal chat with the student.

Nunik said that Ideal character education doesn't need special lesson time. She said that it's useless. Character education is a process, more effectively built during the process of togetherness with the teacher for one year. It is the teacher's task to help each student's character development. The development of Character depends on the student. if a student is given a special subject, he could just forget. The teacher should instill the practice of good character from small things, and there is habituation. It would make a better character education.□

Contradict Nunik's statement, Melati chose to have character education on its own lesson time, such as literacy. She imagined a short lesson about 15 or 20 minutes. The teacher can teach character education with games or movies. She said that she needs some examples that can be applied in the class, which she thinks she can have got from training.

When asked about the character education reinforcement decree that the government released, Regina said that she heard about the decree but not think that it is important. She explained that every school should have an awareness to implement character education without government decree. Regina said that the government's standards can't be generalized and applied to all schools all around Indonesia. Each class has its needs, so every school, even every class, should modify their own practice to suit their needs. Regina stated the government needs to make guidelines about how should schools and teachers developed it includes the indicators. Different than what Regina said, Melati said that she didn't know about the character education reinforcement decree. She stated that this decree might be important because the government's rules and decrees should be a guide for teachers to implement the education. The problem was the decree was not applicable, and the government seem didn't take it seriously to socialize this decree. She also highlighted how the government waited so long before publishing the decree. She hopes that the government would socialize the decree better and give some real examples of the practice so that it can have a positive impact on the class.

Similar to Melati's condition, Nunik also didn't know anything about the character education reinforcement decree. She said decree might be important because the government's rules and decrees should be a guide for teachers to implement the education. She said that so far, the decree didn't bring any impact to her class.

All the explanations above clarify that teachers have various perspectives on character education practice. This is undeniable that every teacher's perspective relies on their experience in the class they teach. The varying perspective gives us an outlook on what best practices in one school are not always be successful in other schools. Once again, it depends on each student's needs.

CONCLUSION

As we know, the results of qualitative research can't be generalized. This research presented to describe the perspective of character education in some private schools, especially the private schools where these three teachers teach. The result we found from the interview indicates that character education practice at each school was different and couldn't be compared. From the statements of these teachers, we can conclude that each school has its own values that affected in their practice of character education in their classes. There are some schools that have special lessons dedicated to character education, like where Nunik teaches, but most schools don't have time for character education. Some schools, like where Regina teaches, compensated the time with other lessons like emotional literacy and a home visit.

The obstacles that the three teachers face also varied. The differences in place, student characteristics, and student age certainly affect students' needs for character development. That is why every teacher should develop its character education practice due to the diversity of students'

needs. The character education program effective in one school is not always successful in other schools simply because it is not relevant to the student's needs.

The three teacher's suggestions about what is effective in character education also vary. The different needs of students and their situation in school make their perspective on character education different. This different perspective also affects their thought about government decree. Some agree that our education system requires decrees for character education, but there was a teacher who thinks that decrees don't help much.

The further elaboration of these results offers a development of the lesson plan or guideline of the character education itself. All teachers agree that what they need right now is a guideline to teach effective character education. They agree that the government should participate with not just releasing the decree or reinforce teachers to do character education practice, but, provide the tools and guidance that support character education practice in schools.

The shortcomings of this study are inadequate data on the perspectives of various teachers in teaching character education. Future studies are expected to provide more data regarding teacher views on character education. Quantitative data is also needed to measure the effectiveness of character education that has been running so far.

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