Literature Learning as A Medium for The Character Building of Students

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Abstract

Literature learning has a crucial role in building students' characters as there are values in literary works that are useful for developing students' personality. Through literary works, students can learn from the experiences of the characters and reflect on them when facing real-life problems. Literature learning is extremely important to be given in elementary school or Madrasah Ibtidaiyah since it has an impact on the development of students' reading habits which can ultimately increase their understanding of humans and humanity, help them recognize values and produce new ideas, and broaden their knowledge. This article aims to describe literature learning as a medium for building students' characters. The discussion focuses on the selection of literary teaching materials and the management of literature learning as a medium for the character building of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember. Meanwhile, the analysis applied a qualitative approach. The results showed that the selection of literary teaching materials as a medium for the character building of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember is based on the following considerations: (a) being in accordance with core competencies and basic competencies, (b) containing educational themes, (c) having a simple storyline/plot, (d) using settings that are familiar to children, (e) involving characters whose characterizations show good examples, (f) having language style that is easy to understand, and (g) giving moral messages appropriate to child development level. In addition, it is also known that in managing literature learning as a medium for character building, the learning process is carried out interactively in an inspiring and fun manner as to challenge and motivate students to participate actively and sufficient space is provided for initiative, creativity, and independence in accordance with the talents, interests, and physical and psychological developments of students.

Keywords: Literature learning, medium, and character of students.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is currently experiencing a moral crisis; a crisis that attacks the younger generation, especially school-age children. The moral crisis experienced by Indonesia's young generation is currently at an alarming level. Moral crisis issue is widely spread through various print and electronic media, but it is not uncommon to witness it directly since it often occurs in the midst of society in everyday life. One example of such moral crisis can be seen from a news reported by BBC News on December 30, 2021, namely the event of a brawl between students in Sukabumi, West Java which resulted in the death of a student. Other issues that are rife lately are drug abuse, free sex, theft, indifferent attitude, loss of manners, and many others. Such cases illustrate the moral condition of our young generation who is experiencing an acute moral crisis.

Various efforts have been made by the government in order to overcome the moral crisis. One of the steps taken by the government for this matter is by issuing Regulation of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education. This has the aim of building students' characters and equipping them as the golden generation of Indonesia in 2045 with the spirit of Pancasila and good character education to face the dynamics of change in the future.

This Presidential Regulation is the initial basis for putting character education back as the main soul in the implementation of education in Indonesia.

UNESCO has set four pillars of education that are expected to be implemented in the world, namely learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. These four pillars are basically the implementation of character education. Character education is now increasingly vital and urgent due to various situations faced by the country, e.g., the development of bad values, such as consumerism, hedonism, free sex, drug use, violence, rape, and behavior that no longer recognizes the limits of humanity. Meanwhile, people are losing their social sensitivity, whereas individualism is growing and exemplary conduct is getting harder to find.

The 2013 curriculum as a reference for the learning process in educational units needs to integrate Strengthening Character Education. Such integration is not in the form of an additional program or an insert, but rather in a way of educating and learning for all education actors in each education unit. The decline in moral quality in Indonesian human life today, especially among students, demands the implementation of character education in schools. Schools are required to play their roles and responsibilities to instill and develop good values and help students shape and build their character with good values. Character education is directed to apply the values of Pancasila, especially to include religious values, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democratic attitude, curiosity, spirit of nationalism, patriotism, respect for achievements, communicative, love peace, love to read, care for the environment, care for social, and responsible.

One of the efforts to build the character of students is by utilizing children's literature. Children's literature has a significant function in shaping character and helping children's development. Tarigan (2011:6-8) argued that there are six benefits of literature for children, namely: (1) literature gives fun, joy, and enjoyment to children; (2) literature can develop children's imagination and help them to consider and think about nature, people, experiences, or ideas in various ways; (3) literature can provide experiences that seem to be experienced directly by children; (4) literature can develop children's insight into human behavior; (5) literature can present and introduce the universality of experience to children; and (6) literature is the main source for the successor of inheritance from one generation to the next. Meanwhile, according to Endraswara (2021:5), children's literature has several functions, namely: (1) recreational function, meaning that literature offers entertainment for readers and listeners (enjoyers); (2) aesthetic function, meaning that literature is a work that is able to give beauty to the enjoyers; (3) didactic function, meaning that literature provides insight into the intricacies of human life; (4) religious function, for literary works that contain religious teachings; and (5) morality function, meaning that literature shares knowledge and learning about morals for readers and listeners.

In addition, Surayaman (2010:115) stated that literature can function as a medium for understanding the culture of a nation in which there is also character education. Through novels, for example, the life of the characters becomes a representation of the culture of the community. The characters are people who have certain personality, attitude, and character. We can learn and understand about various aspects of life through the roles of the characters, including the various motivations behind their socio-cultural circumstances. Through literature, students not only learn conceptual and intellectual culture, but also observe concrete models of life. Ningsih (2015:66) also declared that literature and character education are two inseparable things. This is because literature covers various values related to life, especially human life.

The results of the preliminary study show that teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember use literature as a medium to build the character of students. However, there are several obstacles in its implementation, including problems in the selection of teaching materials and learning management. This is as expressed by Sri Lestari as a teacher at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember:

"The obstacles often experienced in literature learning include the

difficulty of the teacher in choosing teaching materials to link literary values with the character building of students, lack of available media for literature learning, time allocation in literature learning which is integrated with Indonesian lesson, and no separate time allocation for literature learning so that teachers find it difficult to manage the lessons. On the other hand, it is difficult to arouse and grow students' reading interest in literary works, which becomes another problem that affects the process of literature learning." (Interview on December 20, 2021).

Based on the description above, discussion about literature learning as a medium to build the character of students is necessary in order to broaden the insight of teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in utilizing literary works as a tool for the character building of students. The discussion in this study focused on (1) the selection of literary teaching materials as a medium for the character building of students, and (2) the management of literature learning as a medium for the character building of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to describe literature learning as a medium for the character building of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember. The analysis used a qualitative descriptive approach which prioritizes description of data through words (Endraswara, 2013: 176). In other words, qualitative descriptive method is used to describe the state of the object under study in accordance with the research focus. As a qualitative study, the analysis did not test the formulated hypotheses, but rather focused on the development and discovery of new knowledge through observation, interviews, and document study that are directly related to the problem of literature learning as a medium for the character building of students.

The study was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember. This location was chosen based on preliminary observation that Madarasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember has used literature as a medium for the character building of students.

The data in this study consisted of primary data and secondary data. The primary data is in the form of literature learning as a medium for character building of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember. Meanwhile, the secondary data is in the form of descriptive and reflective field notes related to the ongoing process of learning activities and the character building of the students.

Data collection in this study was acquired through (a) observation, (b) interviews, and (c) document study. Observation is done by observing directly the phenomena that occur related to the research problem. Non-participant observations were carried out, meaning that the researcher was not directly involved in the activities, but was only present as an observer. During the research period, the researcher observed directly the activities of literature learning as a medium for character building of students which took place at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember.

In-depth interviews were also conducted to explore data in this study. Technically, this was done by combining two types of interviews, namely structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews were carried out using interview guidelines, while unstructured interviews were not bound by interview guidelines. The data obtained through interviews include: (1) the selection of literary teaching materials as a medium for the character building of students, (2) the management of literature learning as a medium for the character building of students.

Document study was performed to obtain data in the form of documents related to literature as a medium for the character building of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember, in the form of books, articles, journals, papers, and other official documents.

The data analysis used the spiral analysis model proposed by Cresswel (2015). In the early stages, data about the selection of literary teaching materials and the management of literature learning as a medium for the character building at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember were organized into file folders and index card. This process included: moving

from the circle of reading and note-taking to the circle of description, classification, and interpretation. In this circle, the formation of codes or categories was carried out. The researcher described in detail, developed a theme or dimension through several classification systems, and made interpretations. Furthermore, the researcher established codes or categories and sorted texts or visual images into these categories. In the final stage of the analysis, the data in the form of text/descriptions, tables, or charts were presented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Selection of Literary Teaching Materials as a Medium for the Character Building of Students

Literature learning in the 2013 curriculum is part of language lesson. Literature learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is carried out in various types and forms through listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities.

In the implementation, language and literature learning is carried out in an integrated manner. Language learning is directed at improving students' ability to communicate, while literature learning is aimed at increasing students' ability to enjoy, appreciate, and understand literary works. Knowledge about literature is only shared as a support in appreciating. The main purpose of literature learning is appreciation activities, while the tools of literary knowledge are needed to support the realization of appreciation and language learning in general (Sumayana, 2017:25). In line with this statement, Julianda (2019) explained that the specific objectives of learning literature are, among others, to help arouse passion for reading, to improve [the understanding of] literary works to enhance personality, to sharpen sensitivity and feelings, and to broaden horizons.

Thus, there must be literary appreciate con activities in literature learning, not simply sharing knowledge or studying literary theory. Huck et al. (1987) emphasized that learning literature at the elementary level must provide students with experiences that will contribute to four goals, namely: (1) cultivating passion for books; (2) interpreting literary readings; (3) developing literary awareness; and (4) growing appreciation.

Based on the annex to the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 24 of 2016 on Core Competencies and Basic Competencies of Lessons in the 2013 Curriculum in Primary and Secondary Education, the basic competencies and learning materials for literature learning at the Elementary School or Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level can be identified as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Basic Competencies and Literature Materials in the 2013 Curriculum

No	Basic Competencies	Grade						Material
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	3.11 Observing children's poems/song lyrics (containing expressions of admiration, pride, respect for parents, affection, or friendship) which are played with the aim of having fun	√						Children's poems /song lyrics
2	4.11 Presenting children's poems or song lyrics (containing expressions of admiration, pride, respect for parents, affection, or friendship) as a form of self-expression	√						Children's poems or song lyrics
3	3.5 Observing children's poems in Indonesian or local languages through written and spoken texts		√					Children's poems
4	4.5 Reading children's poems about nature and the environment in Indonesian with proper pronunciation, intonation, and expression as a form		√					Children's poems

	of self-expression						
5	3.8 Collecting information from animal tales (fables) about the attitude of living in harmony from spoken and written texts with the aim of having fun	√					Fables
6	4.8 Retelling the texts of animal tales (fables) that describe the attitude of living in harmony which has been read aloud as a form of self-expression	√					Fables
7	3.9 Defining greetings in fairy tales orally and in writing	√					Greetings in fairy tales
8	4.9 Imitating greetings in fairy tales orally and in writing	√					Greetings in fairy tales
9	3.8 Outlining messages in fairy tales that are presented orally, in writing, and visually with the aim of having fun		√				Messages in fairy tales
10	4.8 Demonstrating messages in fairy tales as a form of self-expression using standard vocabulary and effective sentences		√				Messages in fairy tales
11	3.5 Elaborating personal opinion about the contents of literary fiction books (stories, fairy tales, etc.)			√			Contents of literary fiction books (stories, fairy tales, etc.)
12	4.5 Communicating personal opinion about the contents of the selected literary fiction book and read it orally and in writing supported by reasons			√			Contents of literary fiction books (stories, fairy tales, etc.)
13	3.6 Exploring the contents and messages of poems that is presented orally and in writing with the aim of having fun			√			Content and message of poems
14	4.6 Presenting personally-created poems with proper pronunciation, intonation, and expression as a form of self-expression			√			Content and message of poem
15	3.9 Observing the characters in fiction texts			√			Characters in fiction text
16	4.9 Delivering the results of the identification of the characters in the fiction text orally, in writing, and visually			√			Characters in fiction text
17	3.10 Comparing the characteristics of each character in fiction text			√			Characteristics of each character in fiction text
18	4.10 Presenting the results of the comparison of the characteristics of each character in a fiction text orally, in writing, and visually			√			Characteristics of each character in fiction text
19	3.6 Exploring the contents and messages of *pantun* which is presented orally and in writing with the aim of having fun				√		Content and message of *pantun*
20	4.6 Presenting personally-created *pantun* with proper pronunciation, intonation, and expression as a form of self-expression				√		Personally-created *pantun*
21	3.5 Comparing the characteristics of poetry and prose texts					√	Characteristics of poetry and prose texts
22	4.5 Converting poetry text into prose text while					√	Convert poetry text

	paying attention to the meaning of the poetry text						into prose text
23	3.9 Tracing the utterances and actions of characters as well as the author's narrative in fiction texts					√	Characters' utterances and actions and the author's narrative
24	4.9 Delivering an explanation of the utterances and actions of the characters as well as the author's narrative in fiction texts orally, in writing, and visually					√	Characters' utterances and actions and the author's narrative
25	3.10 Relating events experienced by characters in fiction with personal experiences					√	Characters' experience in fiction with personal experiences
26	4.10 Presenting the results of relating events experienced by characters in fiction with personal experiences orally, in writing, and visually					√	Characters' experience in fiction with personal experiences

The basic competencies of literature learning contained in the 2013 curriculum above can be used by teachers as a reference to determine literary teaching materials. In the implementation, teachers have a vital role in selecting and developing teaching materials. In order to build students' character, teachers are expected to be able to select and develop literary teaching materials that contain character values. Muchlas Samani (2011:43) argued that character can be interpreted as a basic value that builds one's personality due to the influences of heredity and environment, which distinguishes that person from others, manifested in attitudes and behavior in everyday life.

In choosing literary teaching materials as a medium for character building, there are several things to consider.

Ina Restiani, teacher of the 3rd grade stated:

> "In choosing literary teaching materials, in addition to paying attention to the core competencies and basic competencies in the curriculum, I also take note of the suitability between the teaching materials and the level of students' psychological development. In addition, I also consider character values that can be understood and implemented by students in their behavior. A good literary work is the one that contains ethical and aesthetic values, meaning that it has good literary structure and character

> values that can lead students to become perfect human beings." (Interview on January 3, 2022)

In line with Ina Restiana's statement, Syaiful stated that in choosing literary reading materials, especially fairy tales, as teaching materials, he considers their suitability with the basic competencies and indicators to be achieved. The chosen literary works should contain educational themes, have simple storyline/plot, use settings that are familiar to children, and introduce characters who provide good examples in their characterizations. (Interview on January 10, 2022)

Sri Lestari added that in choosing literary works as a medium for the character building of students, it is important to pay attention to the language style that is easy to understand and in accordance with children's language development, choose the literary works whose themes are about everyday life such as: adventure, sports, and family, whose settings are familiar to children, and whose characters provide good examples in their characterizations. On the other hand, the selection of teaching materials also considers the psychological, socio-cultural, and intellectual aspects of children. (Interview on January 17, 2022)

From the interviews, it is known that the selection of literary teaching materials as a medium for the character building of students at

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember is based on the following considerations: (a) being in accordance with core competencies and basic competencies, (b) containing educational themes, (c) having a simple storyline/plot, (d) using settings that are familiar to children, (e) involving characters whose characterizations show good examples, (f) having language style that is easy to understand, and (g) giving moral messages appropriate to child development level.

The findings above are in accordance with the statement of Puryanto (2008:7) that children's literature has the characteristics as follows: (a) containing an educational theme, (b) having straightforward and uncomplicated storyline/plot, (c) using settings that are familiar to children, (c) involving characters whose characterizations show good examples, (e) having language style that is easy to understand, (f) taking the point of view of the right person, (g) stimulating imagination which is still within the reach of children, and (h) containing information that can broaden children's knowledge.

This also aligns with the opinion of Nurgiantoro (2019:107) who asserted that in the context of selecting storybooks for children's reading activities, it must consider the content of the story, in the sense that the problems and conflicts must be within the reach of children's reasoning, intellectual, and emotional level. Furthermore, Nurgiantoro (2019:122) argued that the language used in children's storybooks must be simple, both in terms of lexical, structure, discourse, as well as the intended meaning. The diction uses vocabulary that is easy for children of their age to understand. Therefore, it must be understood that the simplicity of language is in line with the simplicity of children's cognitive skills.

Kurniawan (2013:4-5) also revealed that the language used in children's literature is the one that is easily understood by children, namely language that is true to the development and understanding of children, and the conveyed messages are in the form of virtues, moral values, and education adapted to child development level.

In relation to the selection of teaching materials, Saryono (2009:52) suggested that literature genres that can be used as a means to shape the nation's character are the ones that contain values or aspects of (a) literary-aesthetic, (b) humanistic, (c) ethical and moral, and (d) religious-sufistic-prophetic.

All of those above-mentioned opinions indicate that several aspects must be considered in choosing literary teaching materials as a medium for character building, both concerning the structure of literary works and the psychological development of children. Literary works that can be used as teaching materials should meet the criteria according to the needs of students.

Management of Literature Learning as a Medium for the Character Building of Students

In managing the learning process, teachers must supervise students in the process of reading literary works to be able to find positive values from the literary works they read. Expressive literature learning can be done by directing the ability of students to reveal the meaning or values that exist in literary works. On the other hand, teachers must be able to teach the lesson in an interesting and effective manner.

Literature learning in the context of building students' character is also influenced by the use of learning resources and learning media. In addition, learning environment becomes another important factor that affects the character building; character will grow optimally in a conducive environment.

Literature learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember was carried out interactively in an inspiring and fun manner as to challenge and motivate students to participate actively and sufficient space was provided for initiative, creativity, and independence in accordance with the talents, interests, and physical and psychological developments of students. This is in line with Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 that the learning process in educational units is carried out interactively an inspiring and fun manner as to challenge and motivate students to participate actively as well as provides sufficient space for initiative, creativity, and independence

according to students' talents, interests, physical development, and psychological development.

At Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember, the literature learning as a medium for the character building of students was conducted interactively. This can be seen in the learning process in Grade 4, where the teacher facilitated the students to interact with each other. Interactions occurred among students, between the teacher and the students, and between the students and the learning resources and environment. This is in accordance with the statement of Sanjaya (2012) that the learning experience must be able to encourage students to interact with the teacher, other students, and their environment.

The literature learning also took place inspiringly. In this case, teachers facilitated students to find out on their own or with their groups to acquire new knowledge and discover new things.

The applied strategies also varied so that students did not feel bored during the lessons, thus taking them to a fun learning process. The chosen strategy was adjusted to the characteristics of the teaching materials and the students. In learning Basic Competencies 3.6 (Exploring the contents and messages of *pantun* that is presented orally and in writing with the aim of having fun) and 4.6 (Presenting personally-created *pantun* with proper pronunciation, intonation, and expression as a form of self-expression), for example, the teacher divided the class into small groups and each group was given the opportunity to exchange *pantun* with proper pronunciation and intonation.

In the next activity, the teacher asked the students to read *pantun* about perseverance, after which they were asked to sit in groups and discuss in order to find the contents and messages of the *pantun*. Furthermore, students were asked to learn the characteristics of *pantun*. The students were then asked to write their own *pantun* according to the theme by following the characteristics of *pantun* they have studied. Lastly, the students read the *pantun* that they have made.

In the learning process, the teacher provided opportunities for critical and creative thinking, as well as freedom of expression and opinion. Thus, the character building of students can be achieved. The teacher also generated motivation and enthusiasm for healthy competition. This is in line with the opinion of Asmuni (2011:136) who stated that teachers must encourage the creativity of students so that they can develop quickly. Without creativity, one will at any time be bounced off the intense competition.

In the management of literature learning as a medium for character building, teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember also implemented active, innovative, creative, effective, and interesting learning strategies. This can be seen when the teacher conducted literature learning in Grade 1 for Basic Competencies 3.11 (Observing children's poems/song lyrics (containing expressions of admiration, pride, respect for parents, affection, or friendship) which are played with the aim of having fun) and 4.11 (Presenting children's poems or song lyrics (containing expressions of admiration, pride, respect for parents, affection, or friendship) as a form of self-expression). The teacher began the learning activity by asking questions about poetry. Then, the teacher gave a printout of a poem with the theme "I am a Healthy Kid" to each student. Students were asked to copy the poem distributed to them. After that, the teacher asked the students to read the poem in turn. The teacher also asked the students to increase their sensitivity of feelings and their knowledge about the contents of the poem. Further, the teacher explained the content and the moral message conveyed in the poem "I am a Healthy Kid" in simple words. At the end of the lesson, the teacher guided the students to apply the positive values obtained from learning poetry in everyday life.

Such strategies are in line with the statement of Mohamad (2011:10-16) who argued that in the learning process, teachers can apply active, innovative, creative, and interesting learning strategies as well as use the environment. A lesson is said to be active if the teacher positions him/herself as a person who creates a conducive learning atmosphere or as a facilitator in learning, while the students as learning participants must be active. In innovative lessons, teachers do not only depend on the existing learning materials in the book,

but can implement new things that they consider as suitable and relevant to the problems being studied. Lessons that use the environment apply the concept of contextual learning by emphasizing that the things needed to be learned first by students are those exist in their environment. Creative lesson is a diverse learning activity so that it meets the various levels of students' abilities. Effective lesson is the one that is structured based on the ability of students, the selection of materials, the arrangement of methods that are in accordance with the characteristics of students, and the use of media according to the objectives to be achieved. Meanwhile, interesting lesson is the one that can arouse students' interest in learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The selection of literary teaching materials as a medium for the character building of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Jember is based on the following considerations: (a) being in accordance with core competencies and basic competencies, (b) containing educational themes, (c) having a simple storyline/plot, (d) using settings that are familiar to children, (e) involving characters whose characterizations show good examples, (f) having language style that is easy to understand, and (g) giving moral messages appropriate to child development level.

As a medium for character building, the literature learning is carried out interactively in an inspiring and fun manner as to challenge and motivate students to participate actively, and sufficient space is provided for initiative, creativity, and independence in accordance with the talents, interests, and physical and psychological developments of students. Therefore, teacher's creativity is highly needed in utilizing literary values as a medium for building the character of students.

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