

PROMOTING CHARACTER VALUES FOR EFL STUDENTS THROUGH DIGITAL LEARNING MATERIALS

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ABSTRACT

Incorporating character education through digital learning materials is one of the attempts to establish conducive circumstances for learners to study English while being familiar with the concepts of character that can often be perceived through Islamic learning materials. Clearly, the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, and they require educational materials that reflect their Muslim lifestyle. These learning experiences help students understand the information more easily, allowing them to improve their English skills. For these purposes, this study aims to observe how the students' responses reflect their understandings of the integrated principles of character values in the English learning materials. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a survey method, the research was conducted at the English Education program in one of the Islamic University in Bogor. Two classes each consisting of 20 students, were treated to Islamic learning materials in the form of digital books. To get the data, 10 students were addressed with a set of interviews. As a result of the study, it was found that the students' understandings of integrated character values are largely concerned with six dimensions: religiosity, honesty, independence, curiosity, friendliness, and responsibility. The students not only comprehended the character qualities, but they were also able to apply them in real life. Furthermore, the use of digital books as learning resources attracted the students' curiosity, and they seemed to appreciate it. Students believed that learning content through a digital book was efficient and could contribute to the improvement of their language skills.

Keywords: Character values, EFL Students, Digital learning materials

INTRODUCTION

To improve their cognitive, physical, social-emotional, creative, and spiritual elements, Indonesian youth require integrated character education (Islami, 2016; Nadhif, 2016). Abnormal actions by teenagers such as fights and anarchist demonstrations can erode character and drag the nation backwards. This is certainly not in accordance with the main task of teenagers as students (Supeni, 2014). Especially in the pandemic era where all schools are temporarily closed, so students should be at home since the beginning of 2020, learning activities are

being conducted online (Almaida & Djamdjuri, 2021; Djamdjuri et al., 2021). The cultivation of character value becomes challenging (Kendiani, 2020). Among the strategies that can be implemented is through the selection of appropriate teaching materials and can lead them to get used to their lives of behavior and good character (Djamdjuri, 2020). Learning materials that can inspire will encourage them and make it easier for them to understand teaching materials and can be directly applied in everyday life (Cahyo et al., 2019; Rohmah, 2012).

Some research on character education in Indonesia has been widely completed (Darmayenti et al., 2021; Juharyanto, 2017), but only limited to finding factors that affect character education and its impact and the integration of character values with various disciplines. While research on promoting character education in adolescents especially EFL students through digital story books in this pandemic era and new habits, are still limited (Sakulprasertsri, 2020; Wu, 2020). The research is designed to find out students' responses to learning models and products that integrate character education for EFL students through digital storybooks.

Character Education

Etymologically, the word 'Character' comes from the Latin words 'karakter', 'kharassein', and 'kharax' meaning 'tool to make', 'carve', and 'pointed pole'. The word was widely used in 14th century France, known as 'caractere', then spread into English to 'character', eventually becoming a 'character' in Indonesian. Increasing "ethics" philosophically is an important aspect of the Islamic faith. The idea of integrating character education into English learning, especially in pandemic and new normal era (post-pandemic), is based on the idea that this is one effective way to support national education goals in Indonesia. The national education agreement in Law 20 2013 article 3 (Basic, Functional, and National Education Objective) regarding the National Education System (SISDIKNAS) is: National education aims to develop the capacity of learners to become human beings who believe and fear God, as well as to shape the character and culture of a dignified nation, in order to educate the nation's life. Almighty, noble, healthy, smart, talented, creative, independent,

democratic, and responsible citizen (Thabroni, 2020).

The two major aims of education, according to Thomas Lickona, are to help young people become smart and to help individuals become good. The terms "smart" and "good" are not interchangeable (Lickona, 1991). Especially when it comes to the identity of the majority of Indonesians as Muslims, which accounts for 87.18 percent of the population (Hakim, 2020), then character-based education becomes an absolute thing to be applied and improved, so that the values of religious tolerance are stronger. Religious teachings are thought to be the primary source for cultivating character values that are harmonious with the supreme God's identity (Zahroh, 2017). So, it is considered the urgency of this study such as: the character values among students or teenagers must be nurtured and developed.

Among the important theories and aspects of concern in this study are the theory of Behaviorism and Constructivism. Behaviorism focuses on the importance of striving for a variety of conducive conditions or environments as well as positive treatment and response in learning. This is verified by Winn who mentioned that maintaining a good environment followed by strengthening will be an interesting study material in the future (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Although the influence of students' personalities and environment is considered significant by behaviorists, environmental factors get the greatest emphasis where the most important is in the initial regulatory phase as well as stimulus in an environment (Ertmer & Newby, 2013)

If behaviorists focus on the importance of the content or material to be studied and the influence of the environment on learning, then the constructivists will be more concerned in

knowing how students try to build meaning influenced by various experiences that have been obtained before (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010) as well stated by (Weegar & Pacis, 2012). In this study, these two theories meet in terms of background involvement and learning of learners combined with maintaining a good environment through the provision of teaching materials selected that will affect the cognitive learners and will eventually form their experiences (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Instilling characters by using the stories of characters and heroes is one of the efforts to create an environment and stimulus conducive for learners to familiarize character values that they can absorb from the content of the reading materials presented.

In the holy Qur'an of Muslims mentioned that those who know and do not know are not the same (QS. Az-Zumar: 9). As it is mentioned that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, the person of knowledge is the heir of the Prophets. The Prophets did not bequeath dinars and dirhams, but bequeathed knowledge (Islami, 2016). Learning, researching, conveying the truth, practicing and setting a good example, are among the obligations of Allah SWT, The Almighty God, and could lead people to taqwa which is in Arabic means sticking to the teachings of religion.

The purpose of the Prophets was to teach and set a good example of character and morals. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said that among the noble purposes he was sent into the world was to teach and improve human morals or morals (Mwwatamu, 2012). This shows the importance of the role of schools/institutions in facilitating religious education (Djamdjuri & Rohmah, 2014). The development of the next generation's character is a responsibility that must be

performed and reinforced at all stages and institutions. According to a number of studies, character education in Indonesia has become an unavoidable necessity that can no longer be avoided. As a result of various examples of criminality and moral perversion, it is clear that the character of the majority of people has already reached a point of concern (Juharyanto, 2017). Since its inception, as in a SISDIKNAS Law no. 20 article 3 mentions that among the purposes of national education is to be a godly person (Thabroni, 2020). From the law we recognize that the national education was not only intended to produce intelligent and skilled human beings, but also noble practice. To overcome the problem of moral and ethical degradation, it is undeniable that educational institutions have a big role in changing the future face of this nation (Sukardi, 2016) as well as stated in (Iplih, 2017). To facilitate aspects of religion and science in education, some institutions use integrated curricula. They teach science in a religious context and they incorporate some of the most recent modernist ways of teaching religious science (Djamdjuri & Rohmah, 2014).

Among the characters exhibited by Islamic behavior is the awareness of God's (Elmubarok, 2008) supervision (muraqabatullah), and to realize that He pays attention to individual activities (ma'iyatullah). These teachings show that Islam came to improve people's lives with the light of virtue and good behavior. According to Al-Attas the main purpose of education is to direct humans to know and recognize their Creator. This is manifested in submission and devotion to His commandments. In other words, the main purpose of education (Al-Attas, 1980) in Islam is to produce good beings, who by displaying all their abilities are as precise as possible (Al-Hafiz & Salleh, 2015).

The basic source of knowledge of Islam is revelation but never neglects the role of reason and the function of the five senses. Famous Islamic philosophers such as Al-Ghazali remarked in (Tahir, 2013) that education is important for the formation of characters such as obedience, simplicity, humility, and a positive attitude such as complete devotion to God the Creator, in addition to strengthening moral and ethical values (Al-Hafiz & Salleh, 2015). Adian Husaini appealed for the connectedness of science and 'adab' in Islam to be one of the important issues that are integrated like two sides of an inseparable currency. Allah the Almighty commanded the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to always ask for useful knowledge (QS. Taha: 114). Many Islamic scholars in history (Husaini, 2013) concerned with character, such as Imam Bukhary (194-256 H.) as in his famous book discussing character entitled *Adab al-Mufrad*. Ibn Sahnun (202-256 H) authored *Risalah Adab al-Mu'allimin*, Al Qabisi (324-403 H) wrote *Risalah al-Mufaasilah li Ahwal al-Mu'ta'allimin wa Ahkam al-Mu'allimin wa Muta'allimin*, and Al Mawardi (w. 450 H.) published *Adab al-Dal-Dunya wa al-Diin* and *Adab al-Wazir*, etc. (Husaini, 2013). Good Islamic behavior, character, or morals plays a crucial role in education as one of Islam's most significant teachings. The present generation is facing moral degradation, indicating that education has become less reliant on the development of student character (Muhibah, 2014).

Character Values for EFL Students

Due to its prominence as the world's communication language, both in commerce and academia, For years, English has been the most preferred language to learn as a foreign/second language (Rehman & Perveen, 2021).

Language has a crucial role in students' cognitive, social, and emotional growth, as well as being a crucial component of academic accomplishment in all courses, according to Indonesia's Ministry of National Education (Apriani et al., 2019). Students should be able to learn about themselves, their culture, and the cultures of others through language acquisition, as well as find and use their logical and creative abilities. Students must study English so that they may communicate with respect and courtesy both orally and in writing for a variety of purposes (e.g. in building social bonds, increasing knowledge through data exchange) (Pohan & Malik, 2018). The principle of civility, which exists in cultured civilization, is the foundation of interaction that must be upheld. Tolerance, respect for others, collaboration skills, confidence, perseverance, inventiveness, tenacity, and the ability to adapt to kindness and honesty are just a few examples (Pike et al., 2020).

Teaching and disciplining learners to have good morals and personalities should be able to convert high moral standards (Nuriman, 2017). This aim can be completed by integrating character education in the teaching of any discipline including in English language teaching (Djamdjuri, 2016, 2020; Djamdjuri et al., 2021). Lubis stated that the meaning of integration is the merger between science and non-science subjects (Lubis, 2015). Similarly, the importance of integrated religious values in learning has been proven by many researchers (Salleh, 2012). According to Islam, in addition to connecting intellectually based thoughts such as concepts, beliefs and thoughts, language is used to convert norms, morals and feelings. Therefore, it is important to integrate character principles into teaching and learning activities especially for EFL students. Among the example research is

that the analyzes of English textbooks equipped with eleven Islamic characters such as maintaining good interpersonal relationships, success and success, development of good behavior and talent, concern for friends or friends (empathy), fear, insight, good cooperation, mutual support, mutual praise, environmental care such as for animals and plants, Even informing the right news (Elmy, 2016).

According to the Ministry of Education (2011:2), teaching materials include all types of materials used to aid teachers in performing out the educational experience (Apriani et al., 2019; Ratih & Taufina, 2019). A collection of items that are placed systematically to cultivate an atmosphere or environment that permits pupils to study is also known as material. Printed and interactive instructional materials are included (Sarip et al., 2018). The success of each fundamental competency declared will be determined by the teaching materials employed in the educational process. Similarly, educational materials can be an excellent tool for instilling moral principles or character (Boeriswati, 2013). The use of teaching materials that meet certain requirements can result in more effective learning process (Ratih & Taufina, 2019). If, on the other hand, the instructional materials do not meet the criteria, there will be a variety of consequences in the educational sector. However, the teaching aids used should look at the total attainment of basic competencies as indicated in the 2013 Curriculum, not just the education process. Indeed, there have begun to emerge a number of schools and universities that integrate character and Islamic values into religious and general sciences (Djamdjuri, 2020; Djamdjuri & Maeleni, 2021; Djamdjuri & Wulandari, 2018).

Digital Learning Materials

As per current conditions, technology continues to play an important role in English classrooms today to encourage language development (Hussein & Barzani, 2021). Even though the use of technology in the curriculum is currently limited, it is influenced by Technology Literacy, which is significantly integrated in assessments, instructional media, and/or learning techniques (Purnawati & Iskandar, 2019). Since 2002, e-learning has been known by a variety of names, but it is the art and science of combining a variety of engaging learning activities and resources into an environment where students can collaborate and share ideas. (Chaeruman et al., 2018).

E-learning is a type of pedagogic technology that promotes students to study in a more personalized, active, and collaborative manner. Learning is no longer obtained from authority but is instead created in an open, evolving, and dialogical context, allowing collective intelligence to evolve (Fandio & Velandia, 2020). E-learning focuses on creating and preserving people's networks in their particular environment through the use of media and technology tools, as well as ongoing and dialogical conversations. The rise of educational media such as YouTube and Telegram, for example, is expected to supply solutions. YouTube, Telegram, and other social media platforms can be utilized for learning as well as pleasure and news (Abu-Ayfah, 2019; Lestari & Wardhono, 2020). Sosmed is a multimodal medium for learning English that is more flexible, interesting, and participative than traditional classroom learning. Students who wish to enhance their English or prepare for an English exam, on the other hand, discover that this common learning strategy is ineffective (Wang & Chen, 2020). As in the e-learning media, which

includes all visual effects, art, film, video, and graphic organizers, and is a multimodal platform consisting of text-to-speech synthesizers, different forms of singing and musical instruments, guides, and the spoken language games, the more interactive the learning media will be more appealing to students (Alakrash et al., 2020).

From the previous studies, it is clear that 21st-century learning has expanded significantly. One of the most successful learning approaches is to use a technology-based and internet-based multimodal approach. Life in the twenty-first century necessitates a number of skills that must be mastered by someone, according to (Chaeruman et al., 2020; Zubaidah, 2019), and it is believed that education can equip learners to master such talents in order to become successful individuals in life. The four elements of life in the twenty-first century remain relevant: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. Each of the four principles contains specific skills that need to be encouraged in literacy learning activities, such as critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, metacognition, communication skills, collaboration, innovation and creation, information literacy, and a variety of other skills aligned with character values principles.

METHOD

This research was a descriptive qualitative approach with survey method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at English Education program in the Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, at one of Islamic University in

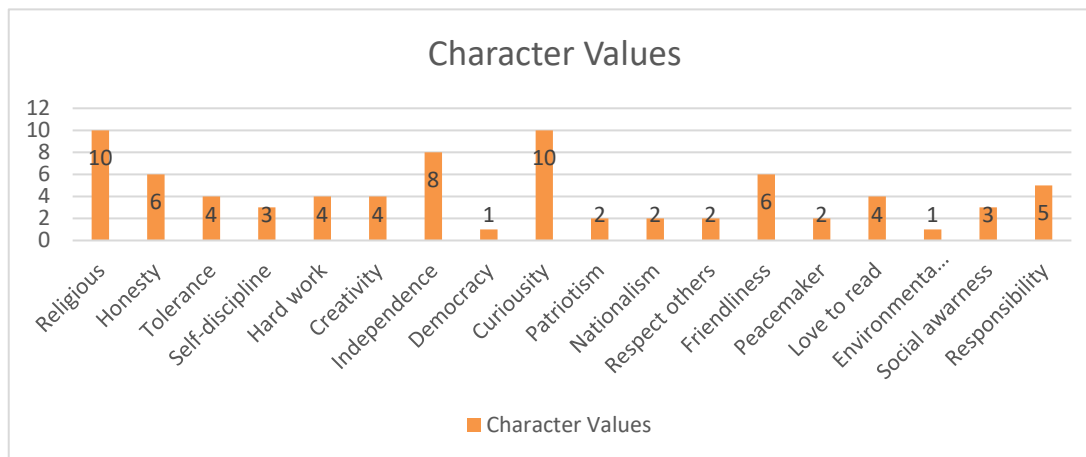
Bogor. Two Reading classes consist of about 20 students for each class were treated with Islamic reading materials in a form of Digital Book. To get the data, 10 students were addressed with a set of interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher addressed a set of questions in the form of an interview to which the students had to respond in order to obtain a grasp of the character or moral value of each of the learning materials. According to Pusat Kurikulum, the students were assigned 18 character values (2010) as cited in (Sutjipto, 2016). The characters are: religiosity, honesty, tolerance, self-discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, patriotism, nationalism, respect for others, friendliness, peace-making, love to read, environmental sensitivity, social awareness, and responsibility. Ten participants involved in this section.

The first question is: What character values do you gain from studying English with Islamic materials? From this question, the students mentioned the character values that they acquired (see figure 1). This finding demonstrates that religion governs all areas of the lives of its adherents as individuals, members of society, and those in their immediate environment (Darmayenti et al., 2021; Djamdjuri et al., 2021; Juharyanto, 2017; Kendiani, 2020). Figure 1 shows the respondents' identification on the character values. It shows that mostly participants mentioned religious and curiosity as the main characters they got, followed by independence, honesty, friendliness and responsibility.

Figure 1. Character values that the students noticed from learning English through Islamic materials



The second question is: Is there any effect of the character values in to your daily life? Describes them, give some statements of your activities that involved the character values!

For the question number 2 the researchers chose the statements from three out of ten respondents to be presented in this paper. The first respondent (R1) stated that there are some effects of the character in his/her life as he/she identified. Some of the characters are: (1) religiosity: "I read Quran every day in the morning and night", (2) honesty: "I try to not tell lies", (3) tolerance: "I try to respect others opinion", (6) creativity: "I create soothing as interesting as possible" (9) curiosity: "I try to learn more and more about anything", (13) friendliness: "I make friend with others", (15) love to read: "I read more English and other cultures", (18) responsibility: "I try to do my assignment on time".

The second respondent (R2) stated that: there are also some effects of the characters into his/ her life, as he stated: "Yes there is, some of the characters are": (1) Religiosity: "I know more about Islam. Such as in Ramadan we have to Fast,

taraweh, pay zakat and pray Ied-al-fitr. I will keep my duty as Muslim", (9) curiosity: "I can get more knowledge about Islam and universe", (13) friendliness: "I can make friend with anyone", (18) Responsibility: "I will tidy up my house".

The third respondent (R3) stated: "There is an effect of character in my life". Some of the characters are: (1) Religiosity: "I pray on time, I read Quran twice a day, I always study every night", (4) Discipline: "I collect my assignment on time", (6) creativity: "I search a different way to explain the materials", (9) curiosity: "I search the meaning from dictionary", (15) fond of reading: "I read all the text that would be discussed", (18) Responsibility: "I do my assignment well, I do team work well".

For question number 3; what character values that you can apply directly in daily life? Mention them as many as possible. There are only 5 respondents to be presented in this part. The first respondent (R1) stated: "religiosity, hard work, creativity, independence, curiosity and love to read". The second (R2) respondent noted: "religiosity, curiosity, friendliness and Responsibility". The third

respondent (R3) notified: “religiosity, Discipline, creativity, curiosity, fond of reading and responsibility”. The fourth respondent (R4) stated: “religiosity, honesty, tolerance, creativity, curiosity, friendliness, love to read and responsibility”. The fifth respondent (R5) stated: “religiosity, honesty, hard work, independence, curiosity, respect for others, friendliness and environment sensitivity”. The data shows that 5 persons noted religiosity and curiosity, 3 persons noted friendliness, fond of reading and responsibility, 2 persons noted honesty, hard work, creativity and independence, 2 persons noted independence, and 1 person noted tolerance, discipline, respect others and environment sensitivity. From the two upper classification, we see five characters are dominant; religiosity, curiosity, friendliness, fond of reading and responsibility.

For the question number 4: “What are the students’ motivation or reason due to the use of Islamic materials in ELT? they mention such as: (R1): “I want to know about Islamic materials. I am curiosity to the materials”, (R2): “I want to know more about Islam because it is a good religion and Islam can bring me to Jannah (paradise)”, (R3): “Learning English through Islamic material is important because by studying through Islamic materials will improve our vocabularies, reading ability, grammar and translation. We also know about scientific of Islam, the benefit of Islamic rules, etc.”. (R4): “We know our religion deeply; understand the materials and know how to apply in our daily life”, (R5): “There is some knowledge that I don’t know yet about my own religion. I need to know it to face this world. Islamic materials also give me many character values to be applied in daily life and I want to know

more clearly about Islamic matters and want to strive to apply it.”

For the question number 5: “What do you think about learning English through digital books?” The students answered; (R1): “This way is a way to be more able to strengthen our language and can also improve the quality of language by listening, seeing, and writing”. (R2): “Very interesting and innovative in learning”. (R3): “It helps me, it's not as boring as reading a journal or video meeting”. (R4): “Interesting breakthrough, it's just that I need a little translating to understand better.” (R5): “In my opinion, this is a good lesson because in today's era learning like this is more effective.”

Positive statements were also made by all of the students in their responses. Ibn Uyainah said that Prophet Muhammad had always asked for beneficial knowledge and positive characters until the end of his life (Cahyo et al., 2019; Kendiani, 2020; Rohmah, 2012) (Husaini, 2013). In relation to the use of Islamic materials in English language teaching, the earlier statement stated that education is primarily concerned with the formation of personality, body, mind, and character as well as the acquisition of knowledge (Darmayenti et al., 2021; Juharyanto, 2017; Kendiani, 2020) as had been stated by (Al-Hafiz & Salleh, 2015). According to the students' responses, the use of Islamic materials as training resources in English language teaching has a beneficial impact on the students. It also supports the idea that character values should be embedded into the teaching and learning of English (Elmy, 2016). This study discovered that the five most common characters chosen by students are religiosity, honesty, curiosity, friendliness, and responsibility. Additionally, all students are aware of the existing character values in English learning materials.

Moreover, from this research it is also proved that the students were interested in and enjoyed on the use of digital book as learning materials. Students also stated that learning materials through digital book is effective and could improve the quality of their language. These findings are in line with some previous research conducted by (Djamdjuri et al., 2021; Prasada et al., 2018; Sakulprasertsri, 2020; Wu, 2020) which stated that learning English through multimodal digital books are effective and made students learning in fun with English.

CONCLUSION

Students' responses suggest that the utilization of Islamic resources as pedagogical resources in English language teaching has a good impact on students. Students' perceptions of ELT-integrated character values derived from Islamic teaching materials are frequently centered on five characters: religion, honesty, curiosity, friendliness, and responsibility. Furthermore, all students comprehended character values existing in the texts. They stated that they not only comprehended the materials but also put the character values into practice in their daily lives. Additionally, the findings of this study show that the students were interested in and enjoyed using digital books as learning materials. Students thought that learning materials through digital book is efficient and can help them enhance their language skills.

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